

*Accidental Daughters
Mother India-III*



**SISTER NIVEDITA
AND
MOTHER PONDICHERRY**



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Amruta Rao

the love, trust and respect of this once land of the seers and sages.

The set is specially addressed to our younger generation of today—more so the generation which came in after the country's independence, who seem to be ignorant of the glory of dedication to a cause, dedication to uphold what is right and reject outright what is wrong. We are fortunate enough to have Mother Teresa still amongst us—she is the symbol of dedication with a will of steel which refuses to give up a cherished cause. Sister Nivedita, how dedicated she was to the cause of India's women and children and their upliftment through education. Annie Besant, the 'fire brand' who fought tooth and nail for India's 'Home Rule'. How can anyone forget 'MOTHER' of the Pondicherry Ashram—her dedication and struggle to establish the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. Each name brings in flashes of hard work, opposition, tears and triumphs, bouquets and brickbats, which were all but passing phases: but one thing remained as their cherished goal—dedication to the cause they believed in. All these are presented in a narration which is simple and free, as much as possible, from an undertone of religion—which perhaps is an anathema to the lad and lass of today.

While there are number of publications regarding these noble ladies individually, their lofty ideals and love for India, it is felt there was a gap, a dearth of literature bringing them all together under one banner—LOVE FOR HUMANITY. There is no question of comparing their ideals, their work and achievements—each one is unique and irreplaceable in their own fields of action. Mother India invited these occidental daughters of hers to come and enrich still more the land of their adoption and they did respond magnificiently and how they responded is what the pages in these volumes will unfold gradually.

Mrs. Amruta Rao born in erstwhile Mysore State was influenced early in life by her Irish teacher who came from Dublin to India and dedicated her life to the cause of education.

While in Maharani College for Women in Bangalore she came under the able guidance of Professor Nikkam—the well known

Continued in back inside cover



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**Sister Nivedita
AND
Pondicherry Mother**

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Occidental Daughters of Mother India-3

Sister Nivedita

AND

Pondicherry Mother

by

Amruta Rao

West View : Building No. 3

Flat No. 20 : 4th Floor

S.V. Road : Santacruz (West)

Bombay : 400 054



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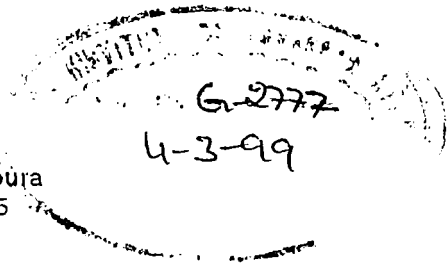
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THE MOTHER OF SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM, PONDICHERRY

The illustrious son of Mother India — Swami Vivekananda while addressing a large gathering in the city of Kumbakonam, well known for its orthodoxy in deep South declared: "For good or evil, the religious ideal has been flowing into India for thousands of years: for good or for evil, the Indian atmosphere has been filled with ideals of religion for shining scores of centuries: for good or evil, we have been born and brought up in the very midst of these ideas of religion, till it has entered into our very blood and tingled with every drop in our veins and has become the very vitality of our lives... Renunciation, that is the flag, the banner of India, floating over the world, the one undying thought which India sends again and again as a warning to dying races, as a warning to all tyranny, as a warning to wickedness in the world... We have no quarrel with any religion in the world, whether it teaches men to worship Christ, Buddha, or Mohammed, or any other prophet... (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume III).

No wonder then that highly educated, cultured and financially well-off ladies from the West, specially Europe—Sister Nivedita, Dr. Annie Besant, Mother Teresa and Mirra—The MOTHER of Sri Aurobindo Ashram to name only a few flocked to Mother India to seek spiritual solace and busied themselves in mingling as well as identifying themselves as Indians through their selfless social, spiritual and to a certain extent political activities in the land of their adoption.

Each one shone in her own specialised field but there is no doubt that Mother India and her people welcomed these ladies and made them their own.

The life story of MOTHER of the Aurobindo Ashram is a unique one from all aspects. The unequalled and remarkable qualities and traits and the life of other great men and women-saints, patriots, warriors, kings and queens, Godmen etc. etc. are described and eulogized by others whereas in the case of the MOTHER, she herself describes and confirms her unique experiences and beliefs from as early as her 3rd year. She herself says: "I was born in France because some special education was necessary.... It is France that can connect Europe with India. There are great spiritual possibilities, for France. She will play a big part in spite of her present bad condition. It is through France that the spiritual message will reach Europe. That is way I chose France for my birth, although I am not French." (Mother India, Feb. 1977).

The Mother was born on February 21st, 1878 in Paris; she was the second child of Maurice Alfassa, a Turkish banker of Adrianople and his Egyptian wife, Mathilde Ismaloun of Cairo—said to be a descendent of the Pharaohs. Her parents and an elder brother moved permanently from Egypt to France just a year before Mother was born. She was given the name of Mirra by the fond parents and an English lady by name Miss Gatliffe taught her English and French.

Later in her life when she was in the Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry Mother while reminiscencing about her childhood used to narrate that; "....when I was five, even three years old, I was CONSCIOUS. The beginning was made in the womb....From the age of five I was conscious that I did not belong

to this world, that I did not have a human consciousness. My sadhana began at that age.I started contemplating or doing my Yoga from the age of 4. There was a small chair for me on which I used to sit still, engrossed in my meditation. A very brilliant light would then descend over my head and produce some turmoil inside my brain. Ofcourse I understood nothing. It was not the age for understanding. But gradually I began to feel: "I shall have to do some tremendously great work that nobody yet knows." (On the Mother Divine, Pasupati, 1975).

May be because she was conscious of the direction her life will take, things which a five or six years old child will consider enjoyable seemed trifle to her and she narrates an incident when she was a mere child. "I was five or six or seven years old and I had a father who loved the circus, and he came and told me: "Come with me. I am going to the circus on Sunday." I said: 'No, I am doing something much more interesting than going to the circus!' Or again young friends invited me to attend a meeting where we were to play together, enjoy together: 'No, I enjoy here much more....' And it was quite sincere. It was not a pose: for me, it was like this, it was true. There was nothing in the world more enjoyable than that." (Questions and Answers).

It looks as if joys of childhood were not for Mother for she herself tells: "I did not want to learn how to read. At seven I still did not know how to read and my brother who was eighteen months older came home one day with a picture book, you know those books in which there are small pictures and something written below. He began reading and laughing all alone and I told

him, 'Why are you laughing? Tell me what is amusing' Then he answered, 'Here you are, you have only to read!' — 'But you know a very well I can't read!' — 'Well, then learn!' And I told him, 'Show me how to' I took the book, he showed me the letters and how to form words and a week later... I knew how to read. Ofcourse, at seven it is easier, but I learnt in this way."

Any child's heart will leap with joy at the prospect of being photographed but not for our serious Mirra; "I was serious! I remember when I was being dressed to go and have my photograph taken. The dress was arranged, the hat and I was told how to pose for the photo. I would look at the older people and tell myself 'But how childish all this is!'"

From childhood Mirra nursed a hatred for falsehood and lies: she says: "They had never explained to me what a lie was but the psychic was there and that knew." One small incident which anybody would forget in course of time knawed at her heart for years to come. It happened like this: "...there was a small wall-cupboard, very small where medicines were kept, and one day my brother told me; 'climb up on the stool and take a packet' It was a packet containing marshmallows or something like that. I was very docile. I used to do everything my brother asked me. So I climbed up on the stool and took the packet. When I gave it to him he told me, 'You won't say anything, you mustn't say anything. I looked at him and I felt her (Mother points at her heart) I felt a terrible uneasiness. I said nothing. When my mother came back she asked where the packet was. I said nothing, but for years I felt that uneasiness and I used to tell myself, 'This must be it—falsehood!' Neither

could she tolerate my lies: "I remember the first time I heard my mother tell a lie! Oh, it was indeed a let down! I looked at her.... I found it ridiculous. She had just told the servant, 'Say that I am not here' It was ridiculous. I couldn't understand, for she was there!" (Glimpses of Mother's Life).

So also Mother possessed the uncanny quality of keeping silent for long durations but at the same time observing everything around her which got registered in her mind vividly. This sense of deep observation has helped her from early days to understand people and their feelings of joy, sorrow and guilt. She remarks "I have seen a great number of people. I began attending to people when I was very young, I have seen many countries, done what I recommend to others: in every country I have lived the life of that country in order to understand it well, and there is nothing which interested me in my, outer being so much as learning. As an illustration she tells how she felt sad and her eyes brimmed with tears when she visited the house of a person who was dead; she was not particularly fond of that person or was she affected in any way by his demise; still she felt sad and this she attributes to "....the vibrations which have entered you, nothing else.it is their sorrow which has come inside me."

Such experiences seems to be common among spiritually inclined people: it is said that once when Sri Ramakrishna, the saint of Dakshineswar was sitting on the banks of the Ganges, he saw two boatmen arguing and gesticulating wildly which led the two men coming to blows. Sri Ramakrishna who was sitting so far still felt the pain of the blows these two fishermen exchanged amongst themselves. It is also reported that at certain stage

of his life. Sri Ramakrishna refrained himself from plucking any flowers or walking on grass in due consideration to the pain they may suffer due to his actions.

Parental influence and guidance seems to have played a key role in the lives of Sister Nivedita, Mother Teresa, Dr. Annie Besant and Mother of Aurobindo Ashram in their achieving the great goals. We have already seen this influence working on the first three ladies abovementioned and with regard to Mother of Aurobindo Ashram she herself remarks: "When as a child, I used to complain to my mother about food or any such small matter she would always tell me to go and do my work or pursue my studies instead of bothering about trifles. She would ask me if I had the complacent idea that I was born for comfort. 'You are born to realise the highest ideal' she would say and send me packing off..... My mother, who loved us—my brother and myself—very much, never allowed us to be bad—tempered or dissatisfied or lazy. If we went and complained to her about something or other and told her that we were not satisfied, she would laugh at us and scold us and say to us: 'What is this foolishness? Don't be ridiculous, off you go and work, and don't take any notice of your good or bad moods! That is not interesting at all..... My mother was perfectly right and I have always been very grateful to her for having taught me discipline and the necessity of self-forgetfulness in concentration on what is one doing.'" (Bulletin November, 1974).

Even at the tender age of twelve years Mother seems to have developed a close affinity with nature. We find her narrating to her audience once: "When I was about 12, I frequently went to the famous

forest of Faontainebleau near Paris for a solitary walk. It was a very old forest, where there were trees that were even 2000 years old. I would sit quietly under a tree going deep into meditation. At that time I often felt a close intimacy with those trees that gave me great joys. My consciousness came into communion with those trees, and even the birds and squirrels from them would come down, very close to me and fearlessly run across my body in a playful mood."

Similarly Ramana Maharshi, who is also known as 'The Sage of Arunachala' whose original contribution to yogic philosophy is the technique of 'self-enquiry' (ATMA-VICHARA), that is knowing oneself (one's true nature) through the enquiry 'who am I' could also merge himself with nature and all kinds of animals and birds and his ashram's extensive grounds was the happy home of many types of animals who use to roam about without showing any animosity towards each other.

From all standards, Mother started practising occultism at a very early age. She was a fearless child and so practising such feats as going out of one's body and then seeing and experiencing the world from that plane held no fear for her. So she said after one such experience: "Naturally, if you do not flinch, if you can look upon all that with a healthy curiosity, you perceive that it is not at all so terrifying. It may not be pretty, but it is not terrifying!"

Although with such a background and mentality, it is not difficult to imagine how Mother passed on into her destined role. By her own accounts: "When and how did I become conscious of a mission which I was to fulfil on earth? It is difficult to say when it came to me. It is as though I were

born with it, and following the growth of the mind and brain, the precision and completeness of this consciousness grew also. Between the ages of 11 and 13 a series of psychic and spiritual experiences revealed to me not only the existence of God, but man's possibility of uniting with HIM, of realising HIM integrally in consciousness and action, of manifesting HIM upon earth in a life divine." (Bulletin, Feb. 1976).

This her leaning towards a philosophical and spiritual life showed itself in many ways. While she was studying, drawing and painting in her 16th year she had become so quiet and an introvert that her classmates who were all senior to her in age nicknamed her as the 'SPHINX'. Even at home she was very serious—neither laughing or joining in the family celebrations. She looked always worried and her mother naturally worried about her daughter's strange behaviour once rebuked her for her aloofness to which Mirra replied that she was worried since she had to carry all the sorrows of the world. Neither could anybody ask her to do a thing which she disliked, she was firm in her thoughts and outlook and feared none.

Married at the age of nineteen and becoming a mother a year later she confesses that "...until the age of about twentyfive all I knew was the God of Religions, God as men have created Him and I did not want Him at any price. I denied His existence but with the certitude that if such a God did exist, I detested Him" Dr. Annie Besant also at one stage of her life confronted with a religion which had neither love nor sympathy for the poor and downtrodden became an aetheist and worked against the Christian church and its authoritarian rule. Sister Nivedita was fortunate to have Swami

Vivekananda as her perceptor who guided her on the principle that everything in the universe is that ONE appearing in various forms!

Mirra's tryst with the study of occultism started sometime in the year 1906 in association with the well known Polish occultist Max Theon in Paris. Although she attained considerable success in occultism based on a 'Dynamic Spirituality' it goes to her credit that she never practised it as a performance of miracles; on the other hand she utilised it as a means of service to the Divine. She has again claimed that she acquired the power to leave her body for considerable time and again re-enter the same after her study of occultism under Theon and his wife. For this purpose she had to go to Algeria and later she travelled all over Europe with Theon. While she was living with the Theon couple in Algeria and watching Madame Theon who herself was an occultist of great powers and a remarkable clairvoyant, Mirra realised that what seemed to be impossible things and acts can be achieved through concentrated will-power. She also realised that it was possible to materialise and dematerialise things through magic but "it demands a very rare and difficult concentration of forces or else an occult process with vital beings behind it....."

Although being an ideal mother at the age of twenty, motherhood and its responsibilities did not come in the way of her pursuing the spiritual ministry. Mirra's house in Paris became the centre of attractions to a number of young spiritual seekers who indulged in serious discussions on "a life of purposive action and philoso-phical contemplation" as Prema Nandakumar states in her book 'THE MOTHER'. With the passing of time the group

enlarged as well as its activities: with people from other countries including a Russian revolutionary.

By the year 1910 Mirra had divorced her husband M. Morisset and had married Paul Richard himself a spiritual seeker. She had also grown more mature and now she led a peaceful life seeking spiritual enlighten-ment.

At this stage it looks as if fate took over: Mirra's husband Paul Richard had come to India to do some electioneering work in connection with his contesting one of the seats from French India to the French Legislature. At the same time he was also interested in finding out from some spiritual man in India the meaning of the 'STAR OF DAVID' symbol. Somebody had suggested the name of Aurobindo of Pondicherry as an authority on the same. Sri Aurobindo at that time was in self-exile from British India. He was a patriot, poet and yogi all combined into one. He was an Anglophile product of St. Paul's School and Kings College in England and an I.C.S. He worked as a professor, later as Vice-Principal at Baroda and was a prolific writer—poetry, dramas, politics and nationalism were his favourite subjects. Although well versed in politics he preferred to retire to the quietude of Pondicherry to pursue yoga and realise the possibilities of a growth in consciousness. After his return to Paris, Richards spoke to his wife Mirra about Sri Aurobindo in glowing terms. Impressed by Richards description, Mirra was anxious to meet this great man and in preparation she sold some of her property in France to meet the travel expenses to India. It is said that the feeling of Mirra as she approached the shores of India was one of 'home-coming'. Even while on the board of the ship which brought them to India from Japan, Mirra was drawn more and

more towards India, her people and her culture; she began to drift away from Christianity, and once when asked by a clergyman on board as to why she had stopped attending Christian ceremonies her bold reply was: "I don't feel you are sincere, neither you nor your flock. You all went there to fulfil a social duty and a social custom, not at all because you really wanted to enter into communion with God."

At this precise moment, Aurobindo was practising 'silent Yoga' along with few disciples. Like the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who were orphaned literally by the paucity of financial wherewithalls, after the Samadhi of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo and his disciples were not only persecuted by the British police but also by the lack of finance and the orthodox Hindus as well as the Christians. In fact the news that two Westerners that too from the sophisticated city of Paris were coming to meet Aurobindo was like a shot in the arm. Mirra herself wrote after meeting Aurobindo: "It matters not if there are hundreds 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, when Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.... It seems to me that I am being born into a new life and that all the methods and habits of the past can no longer be of any use. It seems to me that what was once a result is not only a preparation. It is as if I was stripped of all my past, of my errors as well as my conquests, as if all that had disappeared to give place to one new-born whose whole existence has yet to take shape. As immense gratitude rises from my heart, I seem to have at

last arrived at the threshold which I have so long sought...." (PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS).

Fortunately or unfortunately, Richards failed to get into the French Assembly and so he decided to stay on in Pondicherry and help Aurobindo in his work. He was instrumental in disseminating Vedantic Yoga to Europe and Far Eastern countries. They also started a publication titled 'ARYA' in English and another in French called *Revue de la Grande Synthese*. After sometime Mirra had to go back to Paris to enable her son to continue his studies. She continued to keep in touch with Aurobindo through correspondence. After a year in Paris the family shifted to Japan. Mirra was all praise for the people of Japan and she took this opportunity to visit many places of pilgrimage and Richards and Mirra developed a deep friendship with Dr. O. Okhawa and his wife. Mirra and Paul developed friendship with many Japanese intellectuals as well as spiritual luminaries to whom they related all about Sri Aurobindo. It was at this time when Mirra came close to Dr. and Madame Kobayashi and their friendship was of lifelong duration. It is said that Mirra and Madame Kobayashi found great peace in the teachings of Aurobindo and used to practise meditation for hours in a small room. Here Mirra met Miss Dorothy Hodgeson who was destined to become her companion during her sojourn in India. Tolstoy's son as well as Rabindranath Tagore were also constant visitors to the Richards household and were very much impressed by them.

The once blissful married life of two seekers of truth—Mirra and Richards started showing streaks of discontent: Mirra had made up her mind to follow Aurobindo and assist in his work in establishing

a spiritual brotherhood to propagate and spread Sri Aurobindo's 'LIFE DIVINE' Richards was hesitant for he felt that the time was not yet ripe for such an undertaking although he very much revered and was certain of Aurobindo's capabilities. However they decided to return to Pondicherry; this time they were accompanied by Miss Hodgeson. They rented a house very near to Aurobindo's and there was much coming and going between the two residences. The drift that had appeared in the married life of Mirra and Richards deepened and since Richards neither could persuade Mirra to follow him nor he himself decide to stay on in Pondicherry against his own will he decided to migrate to America and start life anew. It was said that he tried to organize a Centre for Asian Studies in New York. However it was obvious even after many years that he was not happy leaving Mirra and that he found little consolation in what he described as the 'spiritual desert that is America'! While Mirra and Miss Hodgeson opted for the mystical India and so a new daughter was born to Mother India!

With the arrival of Mirra at the residence of Aurobindo we can say that the famous Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry came into being. Being a hard worker with lot of aesthetic out-look, in no time the drab place was converted into a lively institution with rows and rows of books on all subjects neatly arranged and a colourful garden enhanced the beauty of the place. Here Mirra with her enchanting personality and with the blessings of Aurobindo talked, guided and meditated along with the disciples.

MOTHER OF THE ASHRAM Vis-a-Vis Mother of Life

When one goes through the life-history of two great personalities—Sri Sri Saradamani Devi popularly known as HOLY MOTHER, the consort of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Mother of the Aurobindo Ashram one finds great similarities with regard to their attitude towards devotees. Holy Mother when asked by her ailing husband whether he alone has to do everything and that she won't do anything to lessen the miserable conditions of the people of Calcutta who were living and dying like worms in a gutter she had coyly replied what she being an ordinary woman can do. But her husband knew the great potentialities that lay dormant within her had assured her that what he had done was nothing when compared to what lay in store for her to achieve! And he proved to be cent per cent correct. It was she who saw the plight of the young disciples of her husband struggling against poverty with no roof over their heads and not knowing from where their next meal would come, if at all it came. They often shared a set of clothing amongst themselves. They had made a dilapidated abandoned house much feared as being haunted, their abode and found joy and peace in taking the name of their Master and guide Sri Ramakrishna. Mind you, most of these youngmen were well educated and came from affluent families who knew not what poverty was before they came in response to the call of the Saint of Dakshineswar! Holy Mother prayed for them and in fact she was responsible for the establishment of the present Ramakrishna Math and Mission at Belur which now has gained worldwide acclaim. When Calcutta was ravaged by the killer plague epidemic, an emotionally charged

Narendranath Datta (later came to be known as Swami Vivekananda) found that he could do little to help the teeming millions affected by the disease with his devoted band of young volunteers since the coffer was empty; declared boldly that he was even prepared to sell off the site on which the proposed Math was to come up to help the stricken. Holy Mother put down her foot firmly and told him that he had no right to do such a thing. Naren whom none dared to oppose humbly accepted Holy Mother's words; such was the power-packed personality of this fragile lady in white. The same Swami Vivekananda after a long time wrote to his brother-monk Swami Shivananda from the United States of America about the greatness of Holy Mother: "You have not understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life—none of you. But gradually you will know. Without Shakti (Power) there is no regeneration for the world. Why is it that our country is the weakest and the most backward of all countries? — Because Shakti is held in dishonour there. Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India; and making her the nucleus, once more will Gargis and Maitreya be born into the world. Dear brother, you understand little now, but by degrees you will come to know it all. Hence it is her Math that I want first....." (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 7, page 484).

Mother of Aurobindo Ashram born in a liberal Western society, well educated and widely travelled and having gone through much of trials and tribulations of married and family life can in a sense be considered as the architect of the famous Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry where today people from all over the world come to seek spiritual

and order which the Mother has been able to establish and maintain in spite of all that. That organisation and order is necessary for all collective work; it has been an object of admiration and surprise for all from outside who have observed the Ashram: it is the reason why the Ashram has been able to survive and outlive the malignant attacks of many people who would otherwise have got it dissolved long ago. The Mother knew very well what she was doing and what was necessary for the work she has to do... Since no work can be done successfully without these things—even the individual worker, the artist for instance has to go through a severe self-discipline in order to become efficient—why should the Mother be held to blame if she insists on discipline in the exceedingly difficult work she has put in her charge?”.

There is no doubt that discipline has to be there for everybody, particularly in an institution. Sister Nivedita who was familiar with both Eastern and Western spiritualism and the institutions connected with it said in her book 'RELIGION AND DHARMA': "In monasticism, the ideal monk of the East is a wanderer who goes free, from place to place, working out the personal ideal derived from his Guru. He is often the embodiment of great and sometimes of supreme individual illumination. But he never has the discipline of the member of a close-knit organization, in which obedience is practised as a mortification, and punctuality, order and business habits are rigorously imposed. Yet so completely has the monastic formation been assimilated by the West as a social institution, that such words as abbot, prior, novice, refectory, cloister, bands, vespers, and others are now part

of the common language, each with its precise meaning expressed and understood by all members of society alike.....The distinguishing characteristic of European monasticism is its system, its organisation, its clear and well-defined division of responsibilities.....India is essentially a democratic country. Her monarchies and aristocracies are quite extraneous to her social system and it is this which she has to thank for her stability and solidarity under experiences that have shattered the unity of any less coherent organization. The only point in which India fails to stand in comparison with the West is in the complexity of her social organisation." (Page 119 and 120).

Nivedita must be speaking from her experience of the discipline demanded by the Ramakrishna Order founded by her Guru, Swami Vivekananda. It is one of the few institutions where discipline is the criteria in all its activities whether they be spiritual, social, cultural or educational.

Mother Teresa also considers discipline as a vital quality for the successful working of any institution. Once in reply to the question 'Does your Order expect total obedience?' She emphatically replied: "Yes, total obedience, wholehearted service, complete poverty and undivided love for Christ. Since the Sisters are going to bind themselves by their vows, they must know what these are going to mean. The vow of obedience means that we live to do God's will in everything. The vow of poverty is very strict in our congregation. We take the vow of chastity, our hearts entirely dedicated to Christ. Finally we take a unique fourth vow—that of giving wholehearted free service to the poor. We cannot work for the rich, nor can we accept any money for our work." (MOTHER TERESA by Navin Chawla.)

It is really astonishing that Mother of Aurobindo Ashram, highly educated, married and the mother of a strapping young boy was drawn towards the spiritual land of India and that too by an Indian Civil Service officer who had opted to retire to the sylvan atmosphere of Pondicherry to pursue Yoga. Although she found the perfect Master in Aurobindo later she had to shoulder the entire responsibility of running the Ashram when in the year 1926 Sri Aurobindo decided to do his own sadhana and retired to a life of seclusion although he kept in touch with Mother and a few selected disciples on rare occasions.

Mirra, now come to be known as the MOTHER rose to the occasion and started the work of building up the now famous Aurobindo Ashram of Pondicherry. She started this gigantic work with the firm belief that "There is only one thing of which I am absolutely sure and that is WHO I AM. Sri Aurobindo also knew it and declared it. Even the doubts of the whole of humanity would change nothing to this fact. But another fact is not so certain—it is the usefulness of my being here in a body doing the work I am doing. It is not out of any personal urge that I am doing it. Sri Aurobindo told me to do it and that is why I do it as a sacred duty, in obedience to the dictates of the Supreme. Time will reveal how far earth has benefited through it. I am here because my body has been given for the first attempts of transformation. Sri Aurobindo said it to me. Well, I am doing it." (MOTHER INDIA).

She started the work with the prayer: "Since I love only You, O Lord, it is You alone whom I have in all and in each one; and by dint of loving You in them, I shall end up by making them a

little conscious of You. For them, the real thing is to know how to let themselves be loved without any preference and obstruction. But, not only do they not want to be loved except in their own way, they do not want also to be upon themselves to love unless it comes to them through the intermediary of their choice....and what could be done in a few hours, a few months or a few years takes centuries to be accomplished!" (Champaklal's Treasures). Judging by the achievements of the Ashram one can honestly declare that her prayer has been granted!

Mirra before she became the Mother of Aurobindo Ashram was a widely travelled lady having many friends in Europe, Japan and the United States of America. She was well versed in the arts of music, painting and writing. She had married Henri Morisset, a reputed painter and so was acquainted with leading painters, musicians and academicians and if she so desired she could have lived a life of luxury and ease! But she preferred to come to the land of hoary culture and religion and dedicate her whole life for the establishment of a new Order, a new Discipline, propagating the old Vedic ideals to suit the new generations both in India and abroad. The task was not easy since it meant solemnly devoting all her love and energy to the institution Sri Aurobindo proposed to establish. She entirely put herself at the service of the Ashram that was her sole instrument, the only means so to say through which she played her tremendous role. In her capable hands the Ashram grew stage by stage like a child in the hands of a loving and doting mother. She planned, nourished and caressed every part of the magnificent

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edifice she built up under the loving directions of her Guru—Aurobindo.

In this task Mother had to play several parts—she had to look after Sri Aurobindo himself, since he at the fag end of the year 1926 retired into complete seclusion and she was declared as the 'MOTHER' of the Ashram and the whole responsibility of running the institution fell on her fragile shoulders. She had to take care of the publication of the literary works of Sri Aurobindo and also attend to the administrative work of the Aurobindo Movement maintaining the highest spiritual welfare of everything connected with the life and work of Sri Aurobindo as well as the Ashram. Such a combination of a capable administrator, an efficient editor and publisher, a spiritual guide to the international congregation which flocked to the Ashram in search of spiritual enlightenment and above all a loving mother of an evolution if one can say so, is rare to find taking into consideration the fact that she was a foreigner. In this connection she herself once said: "Since the beginning of the earth, wherever and whenever there was the possibility of manifesting a ray of Consciousness I was there!" (*Glimpses of the Mother's Life*, page 1).

Sri Aurobindo almost considered her as of divine origin, specially regarding her relations with the disciples and said: "In her deep and great love for her children she has consented to put on herself the cloak of the obscurity, condescended to bear the attacks and torturing influences of the powers of the Darkness and the Falsehood, born to pass through the portals of the birth that is a death, taken upon herself the pangs and sorrows and sufferings of the creation, since it seemed that thus

alone could it be lifted to the Light and Joy and Truth and eternal Life."

When some of the disciples indirectly complained to Sri Aurobindo that Mother showed favour to some more than to others, he was quick to retort: "Mother has taken the body because a work of a physical nature (including a change in the physical world) has to be done, she has not come to establish a 'physical relation' with people. Some have come with her to share in the work, others she had called, others have come seeking for the light. With each she has a personal relation or a possibility of a personal relation but each of its own kind and no one can say that she must be equally the same thing with each person....She acts in each case for different reasons suitable to that case."

Sri Aurobindo was so certain of the ability of the Mother to carry out the work for which he had started the Ashram and the movement he openly declared: "Whatever one gets from the Mother, comes from myself also—there is no difference. So too, if I give anything, it is by the Mother's Force that it goes to the Sadhak.....in any case, I have no intention of altering the arrangement I have made for all the disciples without exception that they should receive the light and force from her and not directly from me and be guided by her in their spiritual progress."

Indians have always placed the role of a mother as the highest in any society; commenting on this Swami Nirvedananda in his book 'THE HOLY MOTHER' writes: "...a yearning love that can never refuse us: a benediction that for ever abides with us: a presence from which we cannot grow away: a heart in which we are always safe: sweetness unfathomed, bond unbreakable, holiness without

a shadow—all these indeed, and more, is motherhood. Thus portraying the Indian mother, Sister Nivedita, a highly erudite and devout Irish lady, exclaims, 'For what thought is it that speaks supremely to India in the great word 'MOTHER'? Is it not the vision of a love that never seeks to possess, that is content simply to be—a giving that could not wish return: a radiance that we do not even dream of grasping, but in which we are content to bask, letting a eternal sunshine play around and through us?' Most probably this is what Sri Aurobindo wanted the disciples to do.

Sri Ramakrishna, the latest representative of all the seers and prophets of the world by declaring that he and his consort Sri Sarada Devi were not different but two faces of the same coin had made it possible for the "The age-old spiritual ideal of Indian woman-hood has begun to glow over again with a fresh lustre before it could be snuffed out by the blast of modern materialism. By worshipping and realizing the goddess Kali, by accepting a highly gifted, devout woman as a spiritual guide, by offering ritualistic homage at the feet of his own wife, and by regarding all women, high or low, as the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna raised this ideal to an unprecedented height of glory. To crown all, he left, for the world to visualize this splendid ideal, a perfect model in the person of his immaculated spiritual consort, Sri Sarada Devi, known to the devotees as the Holy Mother..... The Holy Mother's life is an enigma. On the surface, it appears to be just the homely life of a Bengalee Brahmin lady, mostly in a rural setting. Yet her deportment discloses unmistakable marks of dignity and love of an order that may easily be called superhuman. These seem to well out from a source within the

immeasurable depth of her personality, reaching, perhaps, the very core of the universe." (THE HOLY MOTHER, by Swami Nirvedananda, page 7). No wonder Sri Ramakrishna once pulled up his nephew Hriday when the latter complained about Holy Mother: he told him that he being his nephew can take liberties with him but under no circumstances should he offend Holy Mother: 'she is Durga in the garb of a human and if she is roused in anger, none of us will be able to appease her!' he seems to have told him.

According to Sri Aurobindo, "The Divine puts on an appearance of humanity, assumes the outward human nature in order to tread the path and show it to human beings, but does not cease to be the Divine" True! The lives of great personalities confirm this: but the vital question is how each one of them chose the media through which to make themselves available to humanity. Mother Teresa chose to work among the poor, the destitute and the dying; although she is intensely spiritual she preferred to work outside—reaching to the people who were in need, who were starving and those who were dying all alone in the world. Her service was not confined by any barriers, walls of religion, caste or creed. She wanted her Sisters to go out and work: As such she once told Eileen Egan, authoress of 'SUCH A VISION OF THE STREETS': "Our Sisters must go out on the street; they must take the tram like our people or walk to where they are going. That is why we must not start institutions and stay inside. We must not stay behind walls and have our people come to us.....our work is outside, outside the walls where the other congregations do not go. Our people cannot come to us from Dhappa or Howrah, so we must go

to them." Commenting further Eileen Egan says about Mother Teresa: "One of the qualities that marked Mother Teresa was the absolute equality with which she treated everyone with whom she came in contact. There was an unself-conscious openness to the person, whether that person was of the highest or lowest estate, whether in authority or helpless and powerless, whether belonging to the rich of the city or to its most destitute." (Page 90 and 100 respectively).

Another institution which has nicely combined spirituality and service to the humanity is the RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION, founded by Swami Vivekananda with the active participation of Sister Nivedita, another illustrious occidental daughter of Mother India. Impressed by the work done by this institution Eileen Egan says: "An Indian enterprise rivalling Christian social service was the network established by the Ramakrishna Mission. The centers for social uplift were conducted by a monastic order founded by Swami Vivekananda, a follower of the Bengali mystic known as Ramakrishna Paramahansa. As monks, those who conduct the centers of the Ramakrishna Mission ground their work for the needy in a life of contemplation. Many find it a strange providence that Mother Teresa's simple work of rescuing the dying attracted attention when it was housed near Kali's temple, and that Ramakrishna's work arose out of his devotion to the goddess Kali. He lived out his life in the temple of Kali at Dakshineswar, near Calcutta and opened his spiritual consciousness also to Jesus, the Mother of Jesus and to the teachings of Mohammed. Swami Vivekananda gained great number of adherents preaching that the highest form of devotion to the Great Mother Kali was social

service." (Ibid, page 91).

If the major conduits for reaching the people for Mother Teresa and Mother of Aurobindo Ashram was spirituality based on love and care, for Sister Nivedita it was universal education. She laid great importance on the education of the Indian girl; this is clear when she says: "The great question of the day is that of women's education. In time to come, it will be said that this generation was the turning point in the history of woman. As always, it is the ideals of the new movement, rather than its form, that are all important. Forms create themselves. Ideals give birth, they do not receive it. Education is above all things, a moral function, and concerned with man, primarily as a moral being. This is sometimes forgotten, as if its business were with the intellect. It is rather with the will. We have to think truly in order to will efficiently. We have to feel nobly, in order to will high. What is it we would teach our girls? What do we want them to be? What do we want them to avoid? First and foremost, we must root them in their own past. Not in blind adhesion, not in vain repetition. It is a noble past that makes a noble future. We must fearlessly give them the discriminating eye, the testing heart. They must see the blank spaces of need. But they must recognise the noble intention. They must feel the pride that says, 'It was MY forefathers, who did this.'" (Sister Nivedita's writings and lectures, page 28).

The case of Dr. Annie Besant, it was of country's independence; she had seen and experienced enough to realise how religion alone can corrupt and lead to stagnation and this she wanted to avoid at any cost in her work in India. It was she who introduced the 'Home Rule' act and pleaded with the British

Government, the then rulers of India to grant India her independence. Her Irish blood boiled at the atrocities committed by the British Government on the helpless populace of India in the name of higher education. It was she who started the Benaras Hindu University with an Indian oriented syllabus. She was the architect of the Theosophical Society of India which introduced many new ideas and exposed many fallacies of the Western society and culture. Till the end she was a fighter, a fitting daughter to Mahakali, the much feared but still adored goddess of teeming millions of Indians!

Sri Aurobindo being a mystic, people found it difficult to understand his philosophy and appreciate the same; in this respect Mother played the vital role of bringing down the high philosophy to the understanding level of the ordinary disciple in general. In this connection what Sri Nalini Kanta Gupta says is very appropriate: "The real purpose of coming in contact with the words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is to become conscious, increase more and more the consciousness. To understand that is to seize by the mind, to grasp intellectually the writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is rather difficult. The easier, the more right way would be to enter into the atmosphere of the world that they have created with their words to feel the vibration that the words emanate." It is an acknowledged fact that for such a purpose, to feel the atmosphere more personally of the mystic aspect of any such great personality's life such a media is very essential.

The same was the case with Sri Ramakrishna; to him from the blade of grass that grew on the sidewalks to the magnificent limitless sky was permeated with the presence of Divine Mother Kali.

He himself describes one such experience: "...it was as if the houses, doors, temples and all other things vanished altogether: as if there was nothing anywhere! And what I saw was a boundless infinite Conscious Sea of Light! However far and in whatever direction I looked, I found a continuous succession of Effulgent Waves coming forward, raging and storming from all sides with a great speed. Very soon they fell on me and made me sink to the Abysmal Depths of Infinity..." (Sri Ramakrishna: the Great Master, page 163.) If there existed a person who could share this experience and tone it down for use in everyday life it was his wife Sarada Devi. It has been rightly said that unless one was familiar with Sarada Devi and developed a close relationship with her it was very difficult to understand Sri Ramakrishna and his philosophy, although it looked very simple on the surface. Swami Vivekananda went further and declared boldly that none had understood fully Sarada Devi and her greatness. He called her the Shakti behind Sri Ramakrishna and nothing is possible without her grace. He admitted that it was very difficult to know her—who is so simple externally but deep and mysterious beyond compare. Yet only through such persons and their life only the messages of the great Masters are to be studied and understood generally.

Justifying this Sri Gupta continues: "For the words that they have uttered are not mere words taken or found in the dictionaries, they are not mere sounds, dead syllables, they are living entities, symbols of Consciousness, the Consciousness of which I have just spoken. These symbols, being symbols of consciousness are luminous, they shed light all along, they are full of power and extend

power all along, they have life and they are full of delight. It is this inner world that is behind the outer world of words that one has to be in touch with, be aware of, in the first instance, before one can have a mental understanding: in other words, you must cultivate the right attitude, a turn of your Consciousness in tune with the consciousness that has worked out the words of the Mother and Aurobindo."

How to achieve this right attitude? Sri Gupta suggests: "...you have to take a plunge, as it were, deep into the waters, and be soaked in the caress of that element, to come in the living touch of the substance of words, go behind the meaning, if necessary avoiding it even. You must contract the living sap, the *rasa*, that has poured itself out in the creation. If you have tasted, of that then—it has its own light—that will suffuse you automatically with its radiance: the delight of bathing in the living spring will formulate itself in the rhythms of knowledge and true understanding." (Complete Works of Sri Gupta, Vol. IV).

Many are those who have tasted such ecstasies; amongst them was Swami Vivekananda who was not only fortunate enough to be guided by an English professor to go and meet the saint of Dakshineswar to get the answer to his persistent question: 'Have you seen God': he not only got answer but became the favourite disciple of the Master who propagated the philosophy of the saint not only in India but all over the world specially in the Americas and Europe. Sister Nivedita was another fortunate one who not only was the chosen disciple of Swami Vivekananda who deputed her to the spread of education; she was doubly fortunate since Swamiji brought her into contact with Sarada Devi, consort

of Sri Ramakrishna who treated Nivedita as a daughter and addressed her with love as 'Khooki' (beloved daughter).

So also was Dr. Annie Besant who came under the influence of free thinkers like Charles Bradlaugh and Madame Balvatsky, the founder of Theosophist Movement. Married to a clergyman at an early age, becoming mother of two children who were snatched away by her husband with the plea that since she did not believe in Christianity and defied the Church she could not be a good mother, Annie's life was most volatile, being persecuted not only by the Church but also by the Government for her pro-labour leanings: but she stood her ground, fought for what she believed to be true and travelled to a far away country like India when she found that her own country could not provide her with spiritual succour; even in India she faced much opposition both from the orthodox section of the society as well as the British Government, then ruling over India.

VIEWS ON RENUNCIATION AND DEFLATION OF THE EGO

During one of her conversations with people who used to flock in the Pondicherry Ashram Mother declared: "If you want to be a true doer of divine works, your first aim must be to be totally free from all desire and self-regarding ego. All your life must be an offering and a sacrifice to the Supreme: your only object in action shall be to serve, to receive, to fulfil, to become a manifesting instrument of the Divine Shakti in her works. You must grow in the divine consciousness till there is no difference between your will and hers, no motive except her impulsion in you, no action that is not her conscious action in you and through you." According to her:

"The real Sadhaka in this kind is one who if required to live poorly can so live and no sense of want will affect him or interfere with the full inner play of the divine consciousness and if he is required to live richly, can so live and never for a moment fall into desire or attachment to his wealth or to the things that he uses or servitude to self-indulgence or a weak bondage to the habits that the possession of riches creates. The divine WILL is all for him and the divine Ananda." (THE MOTHER, page 15).

Swami Vivekananda, the beloved Master of Sister Nivedita placed great stress on these qualities by saying: "....our philosophers have from the very first declared that every manifestation, what you call evolution is vain, a vain attempt of the unmanifested to manifest itself. Ay, you the mighty cause the this universe, trying to reflect yourself in little muddle puddles! But after making the attempt for a time you find out it was all in vain and beat a retreat to the place from whence you came. This is Vairagya, or renunciation and the very beginning of religion. How can religion or morality begin without renunciation itself? 'GIVE UP' says the Veda: 'give up' That is the one way. 'GIVE UP'. The Alpha and Omega is renunciation. Neither through wealth, nor through progeny, but by giving up alone that immortality is to be reached." (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 3, Page 343).

Sister Nivedita who was noted poet expressed herself feelingly on the subject thus:

"These are the days that must happen to you;
You shall not heap up what is called riches
You shall scatter with lavish hand all that you
earn or achieve,

You but arrive at the city to which you are destined,

You hardly settle yourself to satisfaction, before you are called by an irresistible call to depart.

You shall be treated to the ironical smiles and mockings of those who remain behind you

What beckonings of love you receive you shall answer with passionate kiss of parting,

You shall not allow the hold of those who spread their reached hand towards you."

One can palpably feel the agonising pain in the heart of Sister Nivedita when she composed this poem, specially the lines:

"You but arrive at the city to which you are destined" and "You hardly settle yourself to satisfaction, before you are called, by an irresistible call, to 'depart'.

Yes! Nivedita had come at the call of her Guru: her Guru was no ordinary Guru, he had tested her several times, made her go through fire of suspense, discouragement and even disagreement before he was satisfied about her sincerity and love to the country of her adoption. She had come out with flying colours through every test and became Swamiji's trusted disciple and co-worker. She had worked with him shoulder to shoulder in the appalling unhygienic conditions when the killer plague devastated the city of Calcutta and she spent sleepless nights nursing the sick and the dying relentlessly for days together. However after Swamiji, she was made to leave her beloved Ramakrishna Math and Mission which she had helped to build along with Swamiji and his band of loyal associates. Thus Sister Nivedita, who spent most of her life, though short it was, at Calcutta

but had to remain outside the Order of Ramakrishna, almost all alone. She could not work from within the institution, could not be an insider to carry out the work so trustingly placed in her hands by the main architect of the institution itself. No doubt she continued to work for Mother India but surely her energy was now directed towards politics.

Fortunately Mother of Aurobindo's Ashram was spared of all this heartache, mainly because all her energy as well as work was more or less centered around spirituality. The Ashram which she built brick by brick was her own creation and with Sri Aurobindo's blessings none could dare to oppose her in her undertaking. She was like the biological mother to the Ashram; she was Mother Supreme and the institution she built up was to her like a great instrument through which she worked from the beginning till it became internationally famous. One can say that she was real Mother whereas Nivedita was a mere Sister. She was the daughter of Mother India and in Indian terms a daughter is a guest in her parental abode! When Swamiji sent her to meet Holy Mother, the latter readily accepted her as her darling daughter. And Nivedita reciprocated Holy Mother's affection, in no time she transformed herself into a daughter of India who participated in all that concerned Mother India. She dedicated herself completely to India and her people and thereby justified the name given to her by Swamiji—Nivedita—the dedicated one. The passing away of Swamiji at such an early age was a great blow to her—the ground under her feet which all these days seemed so firm and dependable suddenly gave away; the only anchor now for her was Sri Sri Sarada Devi of whom her Guru, Swamiji was so very fond of and to serve Mother India

in the manner desired by Vivekananda. She rolled herself as it were at the feet of Mother India and at the feet of Sri Sarada Devi with all her emotions and feelings. She got herself so mixed up in her psychological state that it looked as if she was melting away within herself. She expressed her agony so poignantly when she wrote:

"Mother! Far away, one whom I love is very sad today. His heart calls to mine for help, but though I tell him how I love him, I leave him still uncheered. How is it? I know he thinks towards me, I know I talk with him. Yet I long to see him, and hear him and comfort him, face to face!" (KALI THE MOTHER).

One has only to go through her writings to know how much she personally suffered at the demise of Swamiji: unable to communicate her sorrow and helplessness to anyone in a foreign land she could find some solace only by writing and she wrote:

"My child, if this were not so, the sense-life would not be yours, or would not hold you. When you have reached that place where the communion is enough, you will find it is more than the knowledge of the senses, faith will already be swallowed up in sight-.....

Cease my child, from inordinate affection, give me your heart, and let me garb it. Be the witness of earth's joys and sorrows, sharing them not.

Thus only you keep yourself from entanglement, and attain to peace."

A note of despair and dejection overcomes her when she writes :

"But peace for myself, dear Mother, why should I seek ? How can I turn a deaf ear to his voice that calls me, adding another pang to the heartache of a life and go away myself to be at peace? Give him inner peace! Let me win it for him, if thou wilt be kind! But I cannot will to fail him in his need and loneliness even gain Thy blessing!" What loyalty and love Nivedita had for her Guru! Willing to give up the much coveted blessing of Divine Mother even!

Eventually it is her complete submission to Divine Mother which tugs at the heart strings of the reader when she says :

"Ah! Foolish me! Every thought of love that you send out to answer his, becomes a fetter of iron to hold him in life's anguish. I hide you yourself in my heart My Child and he too will come home to me. For your love's sake let your voice cease to be one with the voices of the world. Let it come to him only in Mine, when that is borne on the south wind at the time of sunset, calling him gently, to worship at My feet. Let it be one with transcendent love with infinite freedom. Only thus can you satisfy him. Only by withdrawing yourself you can bring him peace. Mother! I yield. Take me and pray Thee into thine own heart. Let me not look back. If thou wilt call me I shall find my way there surely, though my eyes now are blind with tears." (Kali the Mother).

If these are not the magic and miracles and personal touch of life—if these are not infinite mysteries of life, then what life is then? Again, if these are the unreal suffused feelings that are

some-time effusive in life and profused is the life then, beyond its small ken of suffering!

Sister Nivedita had it: to her "Swami Vivekananda was 'SHIVA GURU'. At the time of Swamiji's passing away, she was 'drawn irresistibly in that evening hour, to the place of meditation, found the soul face to face with an infinite radiance and fell prostrate before it, crying out 'SHIVA GURU, SHIVA GURU'" (The Master As I Saw Him). Dr. Annie Besant was also sheltered by Madame Blavatsky when Annie was passing through a physical as well as spiritual storm single handed. Trials and tribulations are nothing new to Mother Teresa. "...when Mother Teresa reached her seventieth birthday in August 1980, her face appeared on millions of Indian postage stamps, an unheard of honour for a nun and for someone born outside India. A special ceremony marked the issuance of the stamp, a ceremony televised and broadcast all over India. It took place in Loreto House, Calcutta" (Such a Vision of the Street, page 359). Yet "...the day did not come when people said 'Crucify' regarding Mother Teresa, but there were days when she met rejection, and judgements were harsh, with words sharp as knives. That day, in 1949 when completely alone on the streets of Calcutta, she was asked to take her meagre meal on the back steps like a beggar, was the forerunner of other rejections." (Ibid, page 362) But what sustained her, what was that alchemy which turned those who were hostile to her into ardent supporters, admirers and co-workers? It is her love of Christ and a conviction in her work. This her conviction is amply illustrated in her open letter to the then Prime Minister of India, Sri Morarji Desai: "I spend hours and hours in serving the sick and the dying,

the unwanted, the unloved, the lepers, the mental—because I love God and I believe HIS word 'You did it to ME' This is the only reason and joy of my life to love and serve Him in the distressing disguise of the poor, the unwanted, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the homeless and naturally, in doing so, I proclaim HIS love and compassion for each one of my suffering brothers and sisters....."

So was Mirra Richard (MOTHER) who came and found solace and peace of mind under Sri Aurobindo, the saint of Savitri, the poet of the Upanishads and the Yogi of the human mind who was nothing but a combination of 'Mother' herself in a Cosmic sense almost in the same manner as Sri Ramakrishna was! However while Sri Ramakrishna was naturally a mother figure and a mystic, Sri Aurobindo was mainly a supernatural imposition of the Mother. Mother Teresa was transformed into a Mother in the typical climate of India. Only Sister Nivedita perhaps remained a 'Sister' fully charged with 'agni' or fire of service and dedicated to the cause of India, as desired by her sannyasi-Guru Swami Vivekananda. But she too was not completely deprived of India's motherly affection—specially as the darling daughter of Sri Sarada Devi.

From the lives of these ladies it can be seen how the reality—the personal and the impersonal character of all life getting mixed up in an harmonious manner which is the hall-mark of motherhood in India. So it is through life and life alone—the true meaning of it can be discovered and not through mere words, dry words and the so-called intellectual meaning of these characters. The contents of their lives are much richer and fuller

than mere empty forms of life made available to us through letters and words which are nothing but lifeless shadows, ghostly in nature of our rich Indian culture.

The same thoughts are reflected in what Sri Gupta has to say: "Atleast such should be the basis of approach to the work of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. You may have possessed a rich intellectual apparatus, you may have all the information that sciences and philosophies have gathered, you may have persued the whole story of the evolution of human knowledge upto the present time, all these are lesser lights, they do not illuminate the light before which you stand. That light is shown and recognised by its own reflection or emanation in you, the little light that is in you, your soul."

Stressing the point that no amount of intellectualism or sophistication can help unless the seeker dives deep into matter Sri Ramakrishna decried any kind of superficiality; to illustrate he used to quote freely from the songs composed by such sadhakas like Ramaprasad and Kamalakanta. One of his favourite songs which he used to sing often ran thus:

"Dive Deep, O mind, dive deep, in the ocean
of God's beauty,

If you descend to the uttermost depths

There you will find the gems of Love.

Go seek, O mind, go seek Vrindavan in your
heart

Where with His loving devotees

Sri Krishna sports eternally

Light up, O mind, light up true wisdom's
Shining lamp

And let it burn with steady stame
Unceasingly within your heart.

Who is it that steers your boat across the
solid earth?

It is your Guru, says Kabir,
Meditate on his holy feet !"

That is to say, as Sri Gupta puts it : "You must start by living it, approaching it not merely through your mind, in fact not even through your heart, but possessing it in the very body."

Again we have Sister Nivedita pleading with Divine Mother :

"Yet if at the last they seem to stumble, if the slip, or Thy voice fail them by the way, promise, dear Mother, once more to wake me from the dream of bliss. Cast me out from Thy heart, I beg of Thee and let those who so need Thee, go in before to peace!" That is one more reason to quote Nivedita once again as saying "My child if this were not so, the sense life would not be yours or would not hold you" Such a communion of the soul "is more than the knowledge of the senses, faith will already be swallowed up in sight....."

"Indeed" observes Sri Gupta, "there have been instances where great intellectuals, famed savants, found themselves bewildered.....on the otherhand, simpler minds with no burden of learning, nor pride of pedantry, with their purest streak of light in the depth of their consciousness were able to seize and unveil the secret sense." How true indeed and it would not be inappropriate to mention here that it was Sister Nivedita who helped Sri Aurobindo (then ofcourse Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, the revolutionary) to escape from the British

Government's clutches to the French territory of Chandanagore.

Mother of Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry was the incarnation of humility: Sri Dilip Kumar Roy in his book 'SRI AUROBINDO CAME TO ME' narrates an instance which proves the same: "....it happened about twenty years ago. The Mother used to come to my room every Sunday and answer our questions which were taken down by an American Sadhaka who was an expert stenographer. Oneday somebody asked her a question about the value of humility, whereupon I said ironically that it was a rare virtue. Mother smiled and nodded. 'Yes' she said, "and even rare than one believes. I have known only one person who can be called perfectly humble." And were we not intrigued? 'Who can it be' was the unspoken question which visited each of us who hoped against hope..... like the holder of a Derby ticket, but alas, she disappointed us all with an impeccable impartiality when she revealed that it was no other than Sri Aurobindo himself.

Just a chance remark, but it wrought an important change in my outlook on qualities like modesty and humility, for it helped me realise how far removed was the common brand of modesty from authentic humility when I contrasted the genteel veneer of the former with the pure white but essentially soothing glow of the latter....."

Mother was so humble that she would put herself in the place of a new devotee and convince him/her; on one such instance when she found that a person was unduly shy and hesitant thinking that since he had not been able to overcome some of the animal instincts in him Mother and others would ridicule him. However reassuring him she

said: ".....and indeed, for the ordinary elementary life of man all the qualities belonging to the animal nature, especially those of the body, were indispensable, otherwise man would not have existed. But when man has become a conscious, mental being, everything that binds him to his animal origin necessarily becomes a hindrance to progress and to the liberation of the being.....So, for everyone-except for those who are born free, and this is obviously rare, —for everyone this state of reason, of effort, desire, individualisation and solid physical balance in accordance with the ordinary mode of living is indispensable to begin with, until the time one becomes a conscious being, when one must give up all these things in order to become a spiritual being....." (THE MOTHER, Questions and Answers, page 368).

Yet on another occasion she told a big audience assembled there: "If you want to be a true doer of divine works, your first aim must be to be totally free from all desire and self-regarding ego. All your life must be an offering and a sacrifice to the Supreme; your only object in action shall be to serve, to receive, to fulfil, to become a manifesting instrument of the Divine Shakti in Her works. You must grow in the divine consciousness till there is no difference between you will and hers, no motive except her impulsion in you, no action that is not her conscious action in you and through you. Until you are capable of this complete dynamic identification, you have to regard yourself as a soul and body created for her service, one who does all for her sake." (Sri Aurobindo—THE MOTHER, page 7).

Similarly once Mother Teresa spoke in New York in somewhat a similar vein: "If it is not for God's

tender love, every moment of the day, we would be nothing..... We are nothing from the point of view of the world. The humility of God is to use you and me for His great work. So that we will share in the great vocation of belonging to Jesus. Christ came to bring the Good News that the Father loves each one of us with a parental love....." (Such a Vision of the Street, page 259)

MOTHER'S COMING TO THE ASHRAM

Was Mother's coming to India and later becoming a part of the AUROBINDO ASHRAM predestined? How was a young girl in far off France got interested in Indian philosophy and spiritualism? We have Mother herself telling: "When and how did I become conscious of a mission which I was to fulfil on earth?.....It is difficult to say when it came to me. It is as though I were born with it and following the growth of the mind and brain, the precision and completeness of this consciousness grew also. Between the ages of 11 and 13, a series of psychic and spiritual experiences revealed to me not only the existence of God, but man's possibility of uniting with HIM, of realising HIM, integrally in consciousness and action, of manifesting HIM upon earth in a life divine. This along with a practical discipline for its fulfilment, was given to me during my body's sleep by several teachers, some of whom I met afterwards on the physical plane. Later on, as the interior and exterior development proceeded, the spiritual and psychic relation with one of these Beings became more and more clear and frequent; and although I knew little of the Indian philosophies and religions at that time I was led to call him KRISHNA, and henceforth I was aware that it was with him (whom I knew

I should meet on earth one day) that the divine work was to be done" (Bulletin of the Sri Aurobindo Inter-national Centre of Education).

Her state of mind when she first departed from Paris in the month of March in the year 1914 to meet Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry may be like that described in the poem SAVITRI :

'THE strong Inhabitant turned to watch her field

A lovelier light assumed her spirit brow
 And sweet and solemn grew her musing gaze
 Celestial-human deep warm slumbrous fires
 Woke in the long fringed glory of her eyes.
 A little figure in infinity
 Yet stood and seemed the Eternal's very house
 As if the world's centre was her very soul
 And all wide space was but its outer robe.
 Her spirit saw the world as living God
 It saw the ONE and knew that all was HE
 She knew him as the Absolute's self-space
 One with herself and ground of all things here.
 (SAVITRI)

Even before coming to Aurobindo's Ashram Mother was active in the spiritual field in Europe and Japan. She herself narrates: "When I was in Paris, I used to go to many places where there were gatherings of all kinds, people making all sorts of researches, spiritual (so-called spiritual) occult, researches." True she learnt through real experiences many truths like that "there is a way (to get rid of stupidity). It is not easy, but there is a way. I have known people who were extremely stupid, truly stupid; well, these people succeeded through aspiration—an aspiration which was not formulated, had not even the power to express itself

in words—succeeded in coming into contact with their psychic being. It was not a constant contact, it was momentary, at times very fugitive. But while they were in constant contact with their psychic being, they became remarkably intelligent, they said wonderful things.....To some it is a difficult cure, that is, one must establish the contact with one's psychic being and keep it always."

In the year 1907, shortly after the failure of the revolutionary movement in Russia, Mirra and her friends came face to face with a representative from a radical group which having been hounded out of Russia had centered itself in Paris and wanted help from her and her colleagues: "to develop our intelligence, to understand better the deeper laws of Nature and to learn better how to act in an orderly way, to co-ordinate our efforts. We must teach the people around us, we must train them to think for themselves and to reflect so that they can become aware of the precise aim we want to attain and thus become an effective help to us, instead of being the hindrance they most often are at the moment." Mirra was able to convince him that "Violence is never a good way to bring victory to a cause such as yours. How can you hope to win justice with injustice, harmony with hatred?" His parting words were to her: "I am happy Madame, to see a woman concerned with such matters. Women can do so much to hasten the coming of better days. There in Russia, their services have been invaluable to us. Without them we would never have had so much courage, energy and endurance." Mirra had invited him to come and visit them again and again, bring the plans of his group but he never returned to her which left her very sad indeed!

While in Paris she was able to meet people from all strata of life and from nations specially from the mystic East from whom she loved to hear the words of wisdom. This exposed her to opposite views particularly in mythology: hence she was left wondering as to the two versions regarding the disappearance of Sita into the Mother Earth as depicted in Ramayana: the orthodox view was that since she was not considered pure after staying in the land of her abductor—Ravana and the other was that Sita herself chose to be swallowed up to prove her innocence. Although the versions were contradictory they enabled her to recognise that “.....one must have a universal consciousness in order to see recognise (things), if your consciousness is limited to one place, that is, it is a national consciousness (the consciousness of any one country), what is beautiful for one country is not beautiful for another.....it is very difficult, one must go right down, right down within oneself, into the subconsciousness —and even farther—to discover the root of these things.....” (*Glimpses of the Mothers Life*, page 100).

While in Paris, even before her meeting with Sri Aurobindo, Mother used to talk to various groups on spiritual topics carefully selected to suit the particular groups; she spoke on thought, dreams, etc. Once addressing a group interested in the philosophy of Abdul Baha she said: “All the prophets, all the instructors who have come to bring the divine word to men. have, on one point at least, given an identical teaching. All of them have taught us that the greatest truths are sterile unless they are transformed through us into useful actions. All have proclaimed the necessity of living their revelation in daily life. All have declared that they

show us the path but that we must tread it ourselves: no being however great, can do our work in our stead. It is indeed very necessary that each one of us should be an example to the world. For it is only by showing to men how an inner commerce with the eternal truths transforms disorder into harmony and suffering into peace, that we shall induce them to follow the way which will lead them towards liberation.....”

During this time she also founded an institution entirely devoted to women called ‘L’ Union de Pensee Feminine and once she told the audience of this group: “Women, by their very nature, are more capable of taking the spiritual or in the deepest sense of the word, moral standpoint. We are essentially realistic and formative in this spiritual domain: we want to know how to live well, and for this we must learn how to think well. So let us watch over our thoughts, let us strive to create for ourselves an atmosphere of beautiful and noble thoughts and we shall have done much to hasten the advent of terrestrial harmony.”

It is reported that during the year 1912 Mother who was then living in Paris started to keep a diary in which she used to note down ‘something of her meditation each day’ These jottings were later published in a book form and is said to be a good guide to those seekers who have undertaken to achieve self-mastery, those who want to find the path that leads to the Divine and those who aspire to consecrate themselves more and more completely to the Divine Work.

Then came the month of march of the year 1914 when Mother accompanied by Richards left for Pondicherry. It was not easy to leave old and

faithful— may it be men or material and we find Mother writing sentimentally in her diary: "As the day of departure draws near, I enter into a kind of self-communion, I turn with a fond solemnity towards all those thousand little nothings around us which have silently, for so many years, played their role of faithful friends: I thank them gratefully for all the charm they were able to give to the outer side of our life, I wish that if they are destined to pass into other hands than ours for any length of time, these hands may be gentle to them and know all the respect that is due to what Thy divine Love, O Lord, has brought out from the dark inconscience of chaos." Little later she seems to cheer up and says: "...then I turn towards the future and my gaze becomes more solemn still. What it holds in store for us I do not know nor care to know: outer circumstances have no importance at all: my only wish is that this may be for us the beginning of a new inner period in which, more detached from material things, we could be more conscious of Thy law and more one-pointedly consecrated to its manifestation: that is may be for a period of greater light, greater love, of a more perfect dedication to Thy cause. In a silent adoration I contemplate Thee.....Lord, grant that everything in us may adore and serve Thee! MAY PEACE BE WITH ALL" (PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS, March 3, 1914).

After a lengthy travel of almost fifteen days on the board of the ship 'KAGA MARU', the days which were spent in introspection, prayers and great expectations. they reached Pondicherry on the 29th of March 1914. She met Sri Aurobindo in the 'OLD GUEST HOUSES', 8,41 rue Francois martin on the first floor, that same day at 3.30 in the afternoon.

What was the very first impression Mother had on this significant afternoon: let her narrate it herself: "When I saw Sri Aurobindo for the first time, at once I knew that here was he, the DIVINE. It was a revelation. And once you know that here is the Divine, how can there be any more doubt, any questioning? I unburdened myself before him and became so happy, joyful, free! Whatever he said I at once accepted it as the truth, there was absolutely no room for doubts. When he said that my mental constructions were illusions, they at once broke down, though I had lived on them for 14 years !"

The meeting of these two great powers was something unique and great and we are told by Nilima Das the compiler of the book titled 'GLIMPSES OF THE MOTHER'S LIFE' that: ".....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 linking of complementaries.....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 withinShe and Sri Aurobindo complete by their combination the entire circle of the high human activities and are supremely fitted to bring the East and the West together and blending them, lead to a common all-consummating goal" (page 131-132).

And according to Mother herself in her own words: "As soon as I saw Sri Aurobindo I recognised in him the well-known being whom I used to call KRISHNA.....And this is enough to explain why I am fully convinced that my place and my work are near him in India." (How I Became Conscious of my Mission by Mother).

Sri Aurobindo concedes to Anilbaran Roy that: "...When I came to Pondicherry a programme was dictated to me from within for my Sadhana. I followed it and progressed for myself but could not do much by way of helping others. Then came the Mother and with her help I found the necessary method" No wonder Mother was more absolute when she remarked ".....without him I exist not, without me he would be unmanifest!"

Their rapport was so intense and complete that at a later day Mother could venture to state: "It was very easy to ask him what was to be done and guide oneself accordingly. Now my relation with him as such was that I can know directly what he would require me to do. When anybody asks me any questions of some importance, I concentrate and receive the answer from Sri Aurobindo, I come into touch with his centre of expression. Afterwards when I meet him, he gives the answer almost in the same words. This happens in most cases." (Ibid, page 133).

Life in India to a foreigner used to modern conveniences was not easy: Mother whenever she had to visit other places found them unsuitable. Nilima Das narrates: "The Mother had to pay a visit to Karaikal once. This was her first direct experience of the actual India, that is, what it is in its crude outward aspect. She gave us an amusing

description of the room where she was put up, an old dilapidated room as dark as it was dirty and a paradise for white ants." Similarly Sister Nivedita who had come to India at the bidding of Swami Vivekananda had to face many such situations. Swamiji had already warned her about them. Nivedita narrates one such incident in good humour: "There were, however, certain practical difficulties in the life. It had taken sometime, in the first place, to discover a house that could be let to an English woman: and when this was done, it was still a few weeks before a Hindu caste-woman could be found who would be my servant. She turned up at last, however, in the person of an old, old woman, who called me 'Mother' and whom I, at half her age, had to address as 'daughter' or 'Jhee'. This aged servitor was capable enough of the wholesale floodings of the rooms which constituted house-cleaning, as well of producing boiling water at stated times for the table and the bath. For some reason or other she had determined in my case to perform these acts on condition that I never entered her kitchen or touched her fire or water supply. Yet hot water was not immediately procurable. And the reason? We possessed no cooking-stove. I asked the price of the necessary article, and was told six farthings. Armed with which sum, sure enough, my truly trusty retainer brought home a tile, a lump of clay, and a few thin iron bars, and constructed from these, with the greatest skill, the stove we needed. It took some days to set and harden but at last the work was complete. Afternoon tea, prepared under my own roof, was set triumphantly before me and my ancient 'daughter' squatted on the verandah facing me, with the hot kettle on the stone floor beside her, to

see what strange thing might come to pass. I poured out a cup of tea and held out the pot to Jhee for more hot water. To my amazement she only gave a sort of grunt and disappeared into the inner courtyard. When she came back, a second later, she was dripping with cold water from head to foot. Before touching what I was about to drink, she had considered a complete immersion necessary! (Web of Indian Life, page 16/17).

Neither life was a bed of roses to Agnes Gonxha, later who came to be known as Mother Teresa either. Eileen Egan relates in her book 'SUCH A VISION OF THE STREET': "Sister Teresa now went down to Calcutta to take up the work of her order. She went down from crystal mountain air, fresh with the scent of flower-filled meadows, to a steaming city, where all the problems of Asia had already met, problems which in the coming decades would become so agonising that the world would be forced to turn a horrified eye upon them. Descending to Calcutta, Sister Teresa came to a city bearing the inescapable signs of an imperial past, but where great riches coexisted with squalor and destitution of almost incredible proportions.... Sister Teresa was teaching in Calcutta when the streets of Mother Kali's city were filled with the starving who flocked to the city's soup kitchens. They perished in such numbers that the smoke from the burning ghats was continuous..... With Japanese armies in nearby Burma, Calcutta became a city on a war footing. There were occasional bombing raids also." Later there was the blood bath after the partition of the country; ".....accounts of those apocalyptic days describe how violence shook the city to its foundations. Shops were set afire with kerosene bombs while the owners were inside. Sewers were

flooded with the crush of bodies tossed into them. In the open streets men and women, pierced with metal-tipped lathis, or with any variety of lethal blade were left to bleed to death. Entrails spilled onto the sidewalks and half dismembered bodies sprawled across gutters..... Vultures gathered to feast on exposed bodies" Such sights must have surely sent shivers through the gentle girl from the mountains—Mother Teresa. She came into contact with the abject poverty, inhuman indifference to the terminally ill and dying when she came to work with the Holy Family Hospital at Calcutta. Sister Elise Wynen, M.D. of the same hospital narrates: "...Whenever there was a new admission, an emergency or an operation or delivery, Mother Teresa was called at the same time as the nurse called the doctor. She would come flying across the lawn and stay with the patient. She often needed help from the nurses for Hindi terms since she was more fluent in Bengali. In that way, she became acquainted with fatal accidents, mothers dying on the delivery room table, children sick from being abandoned by hopelessly torn and desperate families. She also attended cholera and smallpox patients. As I remember, nothing ever fazed her. She just wanted to know what was going on and what she could do to help. Soon, I would count on her to hold the patient's hand during painful procedures, to comfort a crying child and to help the nurses whenever she could..... In her months in Patna, she did get to know the poor, especially the sick poor."

This darling daughter of doting parents when she came to India to serve her teeming millions: "...she stepped into the abyss of her new life, carrying her midday meal in a little packet as she

left in the morning to visit the bustees.....When it came time to take her midday meal, she would find a quiet place to eat it, a place where she could find drinking water. Once, she told me, she knocked at the door of a convent to ask if she could come inside to take her meal. She was told to go around to the back and was left to eat her sparse food under the back stairs like a beggar. She never mentioned the name of the convent." She never complains and takes everything that comes her way as a lesson. Once she told: "God wants me to be a lonely nun, laden with the poverty of the cross. Today I learned a great lesson. The poverty of the poor is so hard. When I was going and going till my legs and arms were paining I was thinking how they have to suffer to get food and shelter. Then the comfort of Loreto came to tempt me, but of my own free choice, my God, and out of love to you, I desire to remain and do whatever is your holy will in my regard. Give me courage now, this moment." (Ibid, page 38).

From Sri Nalini Kanta's book the "Complete Works" we get some more details about Mother's early days in the Ashram. He writes: "The first time I heard about Mother was shortly after our arrival here. It was Sri Aurobindo himself who told us about a French lady from Paris who was a great initiate. She was desirous of establishing personal contact with Sri Aurobindo." Although she had accompanied her husband who was on a mission to canvass votes for his entry into the French Parliament from Pondicherry, then under French rule, the occasion provided her the opportunity to meet Sri Aurobindo and gather a few trusted friends and devotees. On this occasion she visited Karaikal and Sri Gupta narrates how embarrassed

and unjustifiably angry they were at the dirty surroundings in which Mother had to live there: "...for we had been accustomed to a bohemian sort of life, we dressed and talked, slept and ate and moved about in a free unfettered style, in a manner that would not quite pass in a civilised society." At the same time defending to this old style of living and the hardship of it. Sri Gupta questions : "Why should we permit our freedom and ease to be compromised or lost?" Little later he understands the cause for his outburst and hurt and admits: "This indeed is the way in which the arrogance and ignorance of man assert the glory of their indivi-duality." Yet it can be truly said that hardships are the beginning of everything which is amply illustrated when one recalls as to what happened to Sister Nivedita and Mother Teresa's fate in connection with their living in Calcutta.

Anyway, Mother arrived in Pondicherry and it is reported that she spoke very little then. "She finally arrived in Pondicherry on 24th April 1920. Of this significant date, she wrote to a disciple on April 24th, 1937: 'The anniversary of my return to Pondicherry, which was the tangible sign of the sure victory over the adverse forces.' One can even dare to say that new life dawned to the Ashram also on her arrival. The activities had increased what with the publication of 'ARYA' and the number of people visiting and seeking guidance from Sri Aurobindo had increased manifold. Sri Aurobindo himself says: "The work of the ARYA has fallen into arrears and I have to spend just now the greater part of my energy in catching up, and the rest of my time, the evening is taken up with the daily visit of the Richards. There is now the beginning

of a pressure from many sides inviting my spiritual attention to the future KARMA and this means the need of a greater outflowing of energy than when I had nothing to do but support a concentrated nucleus of the Shakti."

Sri Aurobindo need not have worried: since Mother atonce took a good look at all the confusion and tension prevailing and knew what to do and how to do the same. First thing was to take charge of the publication 'ARYA' Patrika; she became the Chief Executive of the Journal published on behalf of the Ashram from the groundfloor of the Dupleix House. Most of the publication work was done by her personally. About this let Nalini Kanta narrate: "The Mother had.....arrived for the second time, this time for good. She was at the Bayoud House.....We were at the Guest House and I remember well how Sri Aurobindo used to call on her every Sunday and dine with her. We too would go along and have a share of the dinner. I need not add that the menu was arranged by the Mother herself and she supervised the cooking in person, she also prepared some of the dishes with her own hands. After dinner, we used to go up on the terrace overlooking the sea front, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother stood aside for a talk and we stood by ourselves..... Well, during the Mother's stay in this house, there came a heavy storm and rain one day. The house was old and looked as if it was going to melt away. Sri Aurobindo said: 'The Mother cannot be allowed to stay there any longer. She must move into our place.' That is how the Mother came into our midst and stayed on for good, as our Mother. But she did not yet assume the name" (Glimpses of the Mother's Life, page 211).

If the house of Mother of Pondicherry threatened to collapse during monsoons Holy Mother, consort of Sri Ramakrishna lived under trying conditions when the Master was undergoing austerities and later: she herself tells: "When I was at the Nahabat for serving the Master, in what discomfort I had to live in that small room, and what a lot of things lay huddled together there! Extremely small though the room was, yet in it were carried on cooking, sleeping, eating — why, everything. Cooking was done for the Master, for often enough, he suffered from poor digestion, and the prasada of Kali did not suit him. There was cooking for the devotees too..... In the beginning my head would strike frequently against the door-frame as I entered the room; one day I even suffered a bad cut. But gradually I got used to it, and my head would bend as I approached the door. Fat women from Calcutta used to come to visit me, and standing at the doorway and holding the door-frame on either side with both hands, they would say, 'Alas! In what a room our dear good lady is living—it's like living in banishment' There was only one room on the ground floor of the Nahabat, and that was stacked with goods. Overhead were slings on which were hung potfuls of domestic titbits. The worst source of inconvenience was inadequacy of the facilities for bathing and personal cleanliness...." (HOLY MOTHER SRI SARADA DEVI, page 76).

A closer and deeper look into the running of the Ashram at Pondicherry revealed to the Mother the necessity of bringing about some changes in her office at Bayoud House and shortly afterwards she formed a small group to help her in the third-line i.e. a business line to fetch some finances to put the organisation on a sound financial footing.

From this time there was no looking back as Sri Aurobindo himself states: "There was no Ashram at first, only a few people came to live near Sri Aurobindo and practise Yoga. It was only some time after the Mother came from Japan that it took the form of the Ashram, more from the wish of the Sadhaks who desired to entrust their whole inner and outer life to the Mother than from any intention or plan of herself or of Sri Aurobindo."

Under the sub-title as to what happened on and after 24th November, 1926 it is stated in the publication titled 'GLIMPSES OF THE MOTHER'S LIFE' "Nalini reminiscences: Even before that date for some time past, Sri Aurobindo had been more and more withdrawing into himself and retiring within..... Then the great day arrived. In the afternoon, it was in fact already getting dark, all of us had gone out as usual: I was on the sea-front. Suddenly someone came running at full speed and said to me. "Go, get back at once, the Mother is calling everybody' I had not the least idea as to what might be the reason, I came back running and went straight up, to the verandah facing the Prosperity room. Sri Aurobindo used to take his seat there in the evening for his talks with us, or rather for answering our questions. As I came up, a strange scene met my eyes. Sri Aurobindo was seated in his chair, the Mother sat at his feet, both of them with their faces turned towards us.....We took our seats before Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, both of whom were facing us. The whole scene and atmosphere had a heavenly halo. Sri Aurobindo held his left hand above the Mother's head and his right hand was extended to us in benediction. Everything was silent and still, grave and expectant. We stood up one by

one and went and bowed at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. After a while, both of them went inside.....From this time onwards, Sri Aurobindo went into retirement: that is to say, did not come out any more for his evening talks. The Mother made her appearance and it was with the Mother that started our contacts! (page 11/12).

According to Mother this day was of great importance since: "It is not that Lord Krishna was not there: on the 24th. He manifested in the most material consciousness and Sri Aurobindo said that he knew that now the time had come to take up the work of the new creation. Speaking of those days Mother said that the atmosphere was intense because it was a psychic atmosphere. The Overmind, the plane of the Gods, was brought in touch with the physical plane: this touch was necessary, otherwise the supra-mental transformation would not be possible. Now the work is going on in another field, because it is necessary." (Ibid, page 15).

How did Mother, although a foreigner was able to run the Ashram so efficiently: how did she start when Sri Aurobindo chose to withdraw himself and let Mother shoulder all the responsibility—both spiritual as well as organisational? Nalini reminiscences: "The mother would now sit down daily for her meditation with all of us together: in the evening after nightfall. That was the beginning of collective meditation.....The Mother's endeavour at that time was for a new creation, the creation here of a new inner world of the Divine Consciousness. She had brought down the Higher forces, the Gods, into the earth atmosphere, into our inner being and consciousness. A central feature of that endeavour was that she had placed each of us in touch with his inner godhead." After 1926

there came a perceptible change in the inner and outer atmosphere of the Ashram..... Instead, there reigned a silence, pregnant with Power, emanating divinity. Peace became the basis of our Aadhana and of our activities—an inner calm upbearing all outer movements. It was from such creative silence that the Ashram began to emerge and grow" (Ibid, page 19).

Mother's success in all that she undertakes—mind you, it is not cake-walk to guide sadhakas in spirituality who come already with pre-conceived ideas and great expectations, is her strict adherence to a well laid out plan and guide-lines with equal importance given to discipline. Sri Gupta tells us: "Today, I live aside the Mother's role as our guide on the Path of Sadhana, or Yogic discipline. Let me speak in a very general way of an aspect of her teaching that concerns the first principles of the art of living.... the first and most important need is to put each thing in its place....We do not always notice how very disorderly we are: our belongings and household effects are in a mess, our actions are haphazard and in our inner life we are as disorderly as in our outer life or even more....." This orderly inner and outer life is to be found in every great soul—whether in the field of spirituality, business or even in ordinary everyday-life.

Incidentally we are told by Swami Saradananda, the author of the famous book 'SRI RAMAKRISHNA, THE GREAT MASTER' how meticulous and orderly Sri Ramakrishna was in every respect when he says: "The Master paid attention to the performance of another great duty when he came this time to Kamarpukur. At first the Master had been indifferent to his wife's coming to Kamarpukur but now he

was intent on giving her education and training for her well-being.....The Master could never neglect or leave half-finished anything he considered to be a duty. The same held good here also. He did not stop at partially educating his girl-wife who depended entirely on him regarding everything connected with her worldly and spiritual welfare. He was from now on, especially mindful that she should learn household duties, know people's character, put money to good use and above all, surrender her all to God and be an expert in behaving correctly according to place, time and circumstances." If the Master was so responsible about his wife's role in society what about his disciples? Once again the same Swami narrates: "The Master's method of teaching did not consist in merely giving instructions to a disciple. He would keep the disciple with him, make him in all respects his own through love and affection, and then give him instructions. Even at that, the Master would not stop. He would keep a keen eye on how far the disciple carried the instructions into practice: and if the disciple inadvertently went contrary to his instructions he would correct him by pointing out the deviations on his part."

Holy Mother, the Consort of Sri Ramakrishna was also very particular about her own behaviour as well as that of others: this trait she attributed to the intense training she received from her husband Sri Ramakrishna. It is recorded in the book 'THE GOSPEL OF THE HOLY MOTHER SRI SARADA DEVI' that: "it may be stated that the training that the Master imparted to her did not exclude secular matters, especially the way of conducting oneself in everyday life. He (even) instructed her that in arranging articles of domestic

use, one must think out beforehand where particular things were to be kept. Those that were frequently required must be kept near at hand and the others at a distance. When a thing was temporarily removed from a place, particular care should be taken to see that it was put back exactly in the same place, so that one might not fail to locate it even in darkness. He taught her also the way of rolling wicks, dressing vegetables, making betel rolls, cooking and doing other items of domestic work. He instructed her that while travelling in a boat or a carriage she should always be the first to get in and the last to get out: for then only one could properly check whether all the luggage had been taken in or taken out.....Physically every one was made of flesh and bones, but the mind within was constituted in entirely different ways. So one should be very careful in selecting one's friends and associates. With some, one might mix freely, with others only a nodding acquaintance was advisable, and with still others it was better not to talk at all. Thus the Master took pains to make the Holy Mother efficient in both spiritual and secular matters, and prepared her for the great mission that he was to entrust to her at the close of his life." (page XIV).

Again Swami Budhananda relates how important and significant everything was for Holy Mother: "....Sri Sarada Devi gave honour to every vessel we use in our kitchen. She said that even the broom deserved our respect. She pointed out that even our domestic cat had the seat of God on its head: our pet parrot had but the name Lord within its heart. She granted prestige even to the basket we threw away. She emphasised the inalienable right of the cow over the peelings of vegetables and said

that it was our duty to hold them before the cow. Her consideration for the lowliest, her Shradha for even the most insignificant of the world was a significant exemplification of the truths solemnly declared in our scriptures....." (Ibid, page 419). Holy Mother Sarada Devi's view-point was that everything has a place in the pattern of one's life and it is one's sacred duty to keep things in their allotted place thereby developing discipline and respect within ourselves. According to her disrespectfulness comes from disorderly attitude only. Although she was a simple village girl, almost uneducated according to modern standards and without any exposure to Western notions of science and technology, at least till she came into contact with Sister Nivedita yet her ideas and teachings were very practical, deep and meaningful indeed!

Referring to the wise words of Mother, Sri Gupta narrates: "She often used to say: 'If the brain is a market place, the heart is no better than a madhouse'. One of the things the Mother has been trying to teach us both by her words and example is this, namely, that to keep our outer life and its material in proper order and neat and today it is a very necessary element in our life upon this earth....The Mother taught us to use our things with care, but there was more to it than this. She uses things not merely with care but with love and affection. For to her, material things are not simply inanimate objects, not mere lifeless implements. They are endowed with a life of their own, even a consciousness of their own, and each thing has its own individuality and character."

To bring home this very truth Sri Gupta narrates a very simple incident but which Sri Aurobindo used as illustration with great effect. It seems once

one of the inmates of the Ashram was hurt quite severely in the foot since he kicked at a jammed door with more force than necessary in order to open it immediately with the result that the door bounced back and hit the man hard. On hearing about this incident Sri Aurobindo commented humrously enough: "If you kick at the door, the door will naturally kick back at you!"

MOTHER—AS THE SPIRITUAL FOUNTAIN-HEAD OF THE ASHRAM

Peter Heehs in his book 'SRI AUROBINDO—A Brief Biography' says: "Realizing that most sadhakas would have difficulty following the path that he himself had taken, Sri Aurobindo began in the twenties to reformulate his sadhana in terms appropriate to neophytes.....In November 1926 Sri Aurobindo ceased to meet his disciples. Henceforth he told them, the Mother would look after their development.....After his retirement the community of sadhakas, who now numbered some two dozen, began to be known as Sri Aurobindo's Ashram..... During the years of Sri Aurobindo's retirement the Mother came forward as the active director of the Ashram's inner and outer life. The disciples came to her for guidance in work—she was a born organizer under whose direction the Ashram's activities expanded in every direction—and also for help in sadhana and in life." (page 136).

It is found that all great personalities; may they be in the social, political or spiritual fields possess the great quality of self surrender. Once Sri Aurobindo commented that he had never come across such self-surrender, as absolute and unreserved as in Mother. Commenting further he added: "It was only women who were capable of

giving themselves so entirely and with such a sovereign ease." Mother proved this to be true in her case when she demonstrated again and again that "the surest means of discernment is a conscious and willing surrender, as complete as possible, to the Divine will and Guidance. Then there is no risk of making a mistake and of taking false lights for true ones." (Questions and Answers, page 3). Mother laid great importance on how an individual must think deep and act before surrendering completely: in this connection she advised: "Ofcourse, if one is in a state of complete surrender and gives oneself entirely, if one simply offers oneself to the Grace and let it do what it likes, that is very good. But after that one must not question what it does! One must not say to it 'Oh, I did that with the idea of having this', for if one really has the idea of obtaining something, it is better to formulate it in all sincerity, simply, just as one sees it. Afterwards, it is for the Grace to choose if it will do it or not: but in any case, one will have formulated clearly what one wanted."

According to Mother self-surrender is not that easy as it seems to be since there is sure to be contradictions in the process like: "wanting to surrender completely to the Divine, to give oneself up totally to His will and His Guidance and the same time, when the experience comes—a common experience on the path when one sincerely tries to give oneself up to the divine—the feeling that one is nothing, that one doesn't even exist outside the Divine: that is to say, if He were not there one would not exist and could not do anything. one would not be anything at all.....This experience naturally comes as a help on the path to total self-giving, but there is a part of the being which

when the experience comes, rises up in a terrible revolt and says, 'But, excuse me, I insist on existing. I insist on being something, I insist on doing things myself, I want to have a personality.' And naturally, the second one undoes all that the first had done." (Ibid, page 285).

Sister Nivedita who was so versatile in the Hindu philosophy had similar attitude towards self-surrender. In a most touching manner she describes how when she witnessed the suffering of her mother just before her passing away surrendered herself to the Will of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda: "Oh, it has been most blessed. Oh, most beautiful and blessed. One can never give thanks enough. The last evening, when I saw the terror of the last weakness, I prayed to Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji—to take her out—swiftly and mercifully—by midnight, I said. Then I saw that having prayed, I must not ask again, either of them or any other, but must 'confidently expect' that They would do what could be done, best, for her. I also saw that, having asked, I must accept whatever They decided as the best."

Mother Teresa, another epitome of self-surrender in the year 1976 on her way to Chicago to address a congregation humbly said: "....you, must really pray very fervently that I let Jesus use me to the full during the days I am in the U.S. For I am so small, so empty, so nothing—only Jesus can stoop so low as to use one such as me. Pray much for me and for our people.If it is not for God's tender love, every moment of the day, we would be nothing. We are nothing from the point of view of the world. The humility of God is to use you and me for His great work. So that we will share in the great vocation of belonging to Jesus Christ

who came to bring the good news that the Father loves each one of us with a personal love."

This sterling quality of self-surrender in women is, most unfortunately, perhaps dwindling, if not has altogether disappeared. However without such complete surrender to something higher, to some higher power how can the world go together, how can the future generations be brought up in the right manner at all! Sister Nivedita had such a sense of surrender befitting her very name. Sri Sarada Devi, consort of Sri Ramakrishna is a standing example of such self-surrender and complete effacement that visitors who came to Dakshineswar where Sarada Devi lived with her husband said that they have heard that she lives with her husband but none of them had seen her during their many visits! She was like the legendary Sita, a wife of Lord Sri Rama as described by Swami Vivekananda: "SITA— to say that she was pure is a blasphemy. She was purity itself embodied—the most beautiful character that ever lived on earth. A Bhakta should be like Sita before Rama. He might be thrown into all kinds of difficulties. Sita did not mind her sufferings, she centred herself in Rama" (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. VI, page 119).

What fascinates one about the life of Mother is her multi-faceted interest in life itself: no doubt her main interest lay in spirituality specially after she came to know Sri Aurobindo. She was good at painting. In the book 'GLIMPSES OF THE MOTHER'S LIFE' we are told: "In her sixteenth year the Mother joined a studio to learn drawing and painting. It was one of the biggest studios in Paris. She happened to be the youngest there. All the other people used to talk and quarrel among

themselves but she never took part in those things: she was always grave and busy with her work. They called her the Sphinx." One can even dare to say that she was a traditional painter—happy to paint nature, man and his life and as such she was little critical of modern art which the common man cannot understand and so cannot appreciate. In a lighter vein she once narrated a true story of one of her painter-friends who although a good painter by any standard could not sell any of his paintings since his work was not 'modern art'. Only paintings of those who not being very versatile: "...daubed anything and every colour haphazardly; then everybody cried out 'admirable', 'marvellous', 'it is the expression of your soul', 'how well this reveals the truth of things' etc. were in great demand and were sold at high price. This was the fashion and people who knew nothing were very successful. The poor men who had worked, who knew their art well, were not asked for their pictures any longer: people said 'Oh, this is old fashioned, you will never find customers for such things.' But after all, they were hungry, you see, they had to pay their rent and buy their colours and all the rest, and that is costly..... One day, a friend intending to help him, sent a picture-dealer to see him. When the merchant entered his studio, this poor man told himself, 'At last! Here is my chance' and he showed him all the best works he had done. The art dealer made a face, looked around, turned over things and began rummaging in all the corners: and suddenly he found.....'Ah! I must explain this to you, you are not familiar with these things: a painter after his day's work, has at times some mixed colours left on his palette: he cannot keep them, they dry up in a day, so he always has with him some pieces

of canvas which are not well prepared and on which he daubs with what are called "the scrappings of palettes" (with supple knives he scrapes all the colours from the palette and applies them on the canvasses) and as there are many mixed colours, this makes unexpected designs. There was in a corner a canvas like that on which he used to put his palette-scrappings. The merchant suddenly falls upon that and exclaims, "Here you are my friend, you are a genius, this is a miracle, it is this you should show! Look at this richness of tones, this variety of forms and what an imagination." And this poor man who was starving said shyly, "But, sir, these are my palette-scrappings!" And the art dealer caught hold of him: "Silly, fool, this is not to be told!" Then he said, "Give me this, I undertake to sell it. Give me as many of these as you like, ten, twenty, thirty, a month, I shall sell them all for your and I shall make you famous." And he supplied this to his art-dealer. He never made a name for himself with his real painting, which was truly very fine but he won a world reputation with those horrors! And this was just at the beginning of modern painting, this goes back to the Universal Exhibition of 1900. After tracing the history of painting from the origin to her life time which she considers the most beautiful period she ends with a note of optimism when she says: "....recently I saw some pictures which truly showed something other than ugliness and indecency. It is not yet art, it is very far from being beautiful, but there are signs that we are going up again. You will see, fifty years hence we shall perhaps have beautiful things to see." (Ibid, page 41).

Defending painters, writers and creative artists against the accusation that they are mostly irregular in their conduct and loose in character she convincingly explained: "Why they are so, it is because they live usually in the vital plane, and the vital part in them is extremely sensitive to the forces of that world and receives from it all kinds of impressions and impulsions over which they have no controlling power. And often too they are very free in their minds and do not believe in the petty social conventions and moralities that govern the life of ordinary people. They do not feel bound by the customary rules of conduct and have not yet found an inner law that would replace them. As there is nothing to check the movements of their desire-being, they lead easily a life of liberty or license....."

Sister Nivedita, herself a good hand at painting had very strict ideas and standards as how a painting should be; according to her the artist has no right to take liberties in what he creates. She was also of the opinion that any art, may it be painting, writing, music, dance and even architecture must reflect the people and the country of its origin; as such she said: "....an Indian painting, if it is to be really Indian and really great, must appeal to the Indian heart in an Indian way, must convey some feeling or idea that is either familiar or immediately comprehensible: and must further, to be of the very highest work, arouse in the spectator a certain sense of a revelation for which he is the nobler.The highest art is always charged with spiritual intensity, with intellectual and emotional revelation. It follows that it requires the deepest the finest kind of education." And talking about the artist and his responsibility she clearly

declared: "Art is not science. The pursuit of the beautiful— not necessarily the sensuously beautiful, but always the beautiful, is her true function. The artist has a right to refuse, as not suitable to his purpose, all that to his particular temperament appears as unbeautiful. Indeed we instinctively assume him to have done this and believe that we may praise or condemn his taste and judgement accordingly. It is through the heart that the artist must do all his seeing" (VOICE OF INDIA by Sister Nivedita, page 44).

MOTHER of Pondicherry Ashram was a subtle personality and as such many could not discern her Divinity; may be Rajani Palit, one of the staunchest disciples was also troubled a little by some such doubt so we find him writing to Sri Aurobindo: "There are many who hold that the Mother was human once upon a time—to judge from her 'PRAYERS'—but has outgrown her humanity through her sadhana. But to my psychic feeling, she is the Mother Divine herself, putting on the cloak of obscurity and suffering in order that we, humans may be delivered out our ignorance into knowledge and out of our suffering into bliss." To which Sri Aurobindo replies candidly: "The Divine puts on an appearance of humanity, assumes the outward human nature in order to tread the path and show it to human beings, but does not cease to be the 'DIVINE'. It is a manifestation that takes place, a manifestation of a growing Divine consciousness, *not human turning into divine*. The Mother was inwardly above the human even in childhood. So the view held by many is erroneous."

At the same time one is wonder struck at the capacity of Mother to obliterate everything she did before she came to India and met Sri Aurobindo.

We have Sri Gupta narrating: ".....this implies a complete obliteration of the past, erasing it with its virtues and faults.....She had read and studied enormously, had been engaged in intellectual pursuits even as the learned do. I was still more surprised to find that while in France she had already studied and translated a good number of Indian texts, like the Gita, the Upanishads, the Yoga-Sutras, the Bhakti Sutras of Narada etc." May be personally, it took sometime perhaps for Sri Gupta to learn the depth of her spirituality. Since he knew that she was a French lady beautiful in appearance and impeccably dressed, versatile writer and conversationalist, a good painter and richly endowed, it was difficult for him to accept her as Mother. Time seems to have changed his attitude for we find him a little later writing: "I mention all this merely to tell you that Mother's capacity of making her mind a complete blank was as extraordinary as her enormous mental acquisitions. This was something unique. In the early days, when she had just taken charge of our spiritual life, she told me one day in private, perhaps seeing that I might have a pride in being an intellectual—'At one time I used to take an interest in philosophy and other intellectual pursuits. All that is now gone below the surface, but I can bring it up again at will.' So, I need not have any fears on that score! It was as if the Mother was trying to apologise for her deficiencies in scholarship. This was how she taught me the meaning of humility, what we call divine Humility."

The Saint of Dakshineswar—Sri Ramakrishna was also very critical of vanity in a scholar: "With regard to men who pride in their book knowledge, the Master was particularly harsh. Knowledge of

God, comes not he says, to a person who is proud of his learning or wealth. You may say to such a person, 'There is a holy man at a certain place. Do you like to go and see him?' He is sure to put forward excuses and say that he cannot come. He thinks he is too big a person to pay a visit to such a holy man. This kind of pride is born of ignorance. It is a sign of bondage. Speaking of a man who was puffed up with this kind of pride, he said: 'I had a conversation on God with a certain person.' The man told 'Oh, I know all these.' I said to him, 'Does one who had been to Delhi go about boasting of it? Does a gentleman ever tell us that he is a gentleman?'

It is the conceit of this type of book-learned men that the Master criticizes when he says that Grantha (book) does not always mean scriptures; often it comes to mean a Granthi (a bond). For his idea is this. If a man does not read sacred literature with an intense desire to know the truth, renouncing all vanity, the mere reading of it only gives rise to pedantry, presumption and egotism, which would be an encumbrance on his mind like so many knots. Like water poured into ashes, prayer and contemplation produce no effect on minds that are thus puffed up with vanity'' (SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S THOUGHTS IN A VEDANTIC PERSPECTIVE, page 61).

Sister Nivedita inspite of her memorable innings in the literary field was extremely humble and non-assuming. When in the year 1904, Swami Brahmananda asked her to write the biography of Swami Vivekananda in English she doubted her capability in undertaking the task as such we find her telling: "It is after long thought and many questions that I at last take up my pen to write.

Should I tell the story of your life, beloved Master? Alas, I cannot. You satisfied so many, widely diverse, in such widely diverse ways. Who am I, that I should understand it all? In what form do you appeal most deeply to the heart of India? To the orthodox? To the modern? Is it when, in your babyhood, you sit playing at the meditation of the Shiva-Yogi or become intoxicated at the call of the begging from door to door? Or is it again, when you stand on a platform in a distant land, opening the treasures of your race to aliens, and through your utterance India hears the bell-note of her own name? Or in what form does your Western world most love you? How did the Americans see you? How did you show yourself to the Englishman? Only one whose own hands ranged over as wide a keyboard, could interpret adequately the music that you made..... Therefore, I have given up the idea of attempting to write your life, and am content to record the story of my own vision and understanding only. How it began, how it grew, what memories I gathered: my tale will be a record of fragments and no more. Yet I do pray that through this broken utterance some word of yours may here and there be heard—some glimpse caught of the greatness of your heart" Even when she started on the project, doubts and a feeling that she would not be able to do justice to the subject plagued her constantly for she admits that the task was difficult: "Oh, to have written the life of Swamiji!..... To be properly written, Swamiji's should be *all* Swamiji. He should move through it, like Jesus through the Gospels, alone, unfettered, unshadowed. But I feel incapable of this, and capable only of telling what I have seen in him..... Of course, I know that, if I succeed, it will be the work of

my life, the one thing, in fact, that I have to give.....I am trusting, trusting, trusting that He will guide my hand, line by line, that I might write down those aspects of him that are eternal and be enabled to discard remorselessly all the rest....."

Similarly it is reported that when one of the girls from Mother Teresa's Homes came out with flying colours as a doctor and showed Mother Teresa the gold medal she had won Mother while appreciating her efforts asked her what use a gold medal would be for her when she had chosen to work among the poorest of the poor and advised her to go and give the gold medal to another person who stood next to her in the merit to whom it would be much more useful. It is said that Sri Ramakrishna refused to go to a school which gave only 'bread-winning education'.

Even in ZEN Buddhism any such practice of intellectualism is completely forbidden. D. T. Suzuki in his book 'AN INTRODUCTION TO ZEN BUDDHISM' says: ".....personal experience, therefore is everything in ZEN. No ideas are intelligible to those who have no backing of experience. This is a platitude.....ZEN therefore most strongly and persistently insists on an inner spiritual experience. It does not attach any importance to the sacred sutras or to their exegeses by the wise and learned. Personal experience is strongly set against authority and objective revelation, and as the most practical method of attaining spiritual enlightenment the followers of ZEN propose the practice of Dhyana, known as 'Zazen' in Japanese." (page 34).

LOVE FOR NATURE, ANIMALS AND BIRDS

Nature has always played a great role in the

lives of saints and seers. They see the greatness of God in the things and acts of Nature so bountifully given to man although man in his selfish pride wantonly destroys these gifts of nature. Nikos Kazantzakis in his famous book 'SAINT FRANCIS' makes the saint tell us: ".....in the clouds rolled along and fled as though pursued by the breath of God. On every leaf there hung a glistening drop of water and displayed within the drop was the entire rainbow.How nice it would be if some one can teach all the birds, animals, plants and trees to say: 'GLORY TO GOD'. First let us teach man to say these two words. I don't see why they should learn these for they do not sin: it is of all living beings man is the only one that sins.....What miracles does God performs: wings in the mud. God in the air. As soon as the caterpillars think of Thee, they are transformed into lovely butter—flies! Sister Mud, Brother Wind!"

A Hindu devout standing knee-deep in the waters of a holy river with folded hands invokes Mother-earth on Makar Sankranti day thus: "Thou art the vessel, the Mother of the people, the fulfiller of wishes, far extending, whatever is wanting in thee is filled by Prajapati, first born of Eternal Order.....Peaceful! Sweet smelling gracious, filled with milk and bearing nectar in her breast, may Earth give with the milk her blessings to me.....Earth, my Mother set me securely with bliss in fully accord with Heaven. Wise One, uphold me in grace and splendour." (ATHARVA VEDA 12).

In ZEN Buddhism, a monk says: "Before a man studies ZEN, mountains are mountains to him and waters are waters. But when he obtains a glimpse into the truth of ZEN, through the instructions of a good master, mountains are no longer

mountains, nor waters waters: later, however, when he has really reached the place of Rest (i.e. has attained SATORI), mountains are again mountains, and waters waters." (Essays I, by Suzuki, page 12). Mechthild of Magdeburg warns: "The fish looks eagerly at the red fly, with which the fisherman will take him, but it does not see the hook. So it is with the poison of the world, its danger is not realized." Very recently we have Sri Ramakrishna narrating as to how when he was a small boy, an incident affected him: "In that part of the country (meaning Kamarpukur, birth place of Sri Ramakrishna) the boys are given puffed rice for luncheon. This they carry in small wicker baskets, or if they are too poor, in a corner of their cloth. Then they go out for play on the roads or in the fields. One day, in June or July, when I was six or seven years old, I was walking along a narrow path separating the paddy fields, eating some of the puffed rice which I was carrying in a basket. Looking up at the sky I saw a beautiful sombre thundercloud. As it spread rapidly enveloping the whole sky, a flight of snow-white cranes flew overhead in front of it. It presented such a beautiful contrast that my mind wandered to far off regions. Lost to outward sense, I fell down, and the puffed rice was scattered in all directions. Some people found me in that plight and carried me home in their arms. That was the first time I completely lost consciousness in ecstasy." (Life of Ramakrishna, page 17).

It is also said that Holy Mother—Sarada Devi, consort of Sri Ramakrishna was very fond of flowers, fruits and animals. She used to prepare fresh flower garlands for the worshipping of the Master and she was an expert in cutting and arranging various

fruits for offering to the Lord. It is said that she had a pet cat with her in Kamarpukur after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna of which she was very fond. So when she had to leave the village to go to Calcutta permanently she made proper arrangements for its food and asked somebody to look after it in her absence. She used to inquire about its welfare from people who came to Calcutta from the village.

Once Sri Aurobindo said: "Music, painting, poetry and many other activities which are of the mind and vital can be used as part of spiritual development or of the work and for a spiritual purpose: it depends on the spirit in which they are done." The Mother of Pondicherry extended the orbit of this principle to include love of nature. So from the 'GLIMPSES OF THE MOTHER'S LIFE' (II) we gather that "The Mother was known for her love of animals and her deep understanding of their nature. It was a delight to hear her speaking to a cat in a musical tone full of affection, a tenderly modulated baby-talk. She dealt with the Ashram cats as if they had been 'persons' with rights. The man who was in charge of the Prosperity Room in the thirties was given strict orders not to interfere with the movements of the beautiful female cat Bite-Bite which had made this place its home. If a cupboard was left open by him and Bite-Bite got on to any shelf of it, he had to respect its right to be there: not only was he forbidden to shoo it off but he had also to let it commit nuisance there if it wanted. His job was to develop his own consciousness and remember always to shut the cupboards. Else he should bear with equanimity the catty consequences of his own oversight."

Some of the Mother's talks to the children of the Ashram illuminate the nature of her insight into the relationship with animals specially cats. She says: "I knew animals which aspired to become human beings, but they, were living with human beings. Cats and dogs, for example, which lived in a close intimacy with human beings, had truly an aspiration. I had a cat which was very very unhappy for being a cat, it wanted to be a man. It had an untimely death. It used to meditate, it certainly did a kind of Sadhana of its own, and when it left, even a portion of its vital being reincarnated in a human being. The little psyche element that was at the centre of the being went directly into a man, but even what was conscious in the vital of the cat went into a human being. But these are rather exceptional cases.In animals there is sometimes a very intense psychic truth. Naturally, I believe that the psychic being is a little more formed, a little more conscious in a child than in an animal. But I have experimented with animals, just to know, well, I assure you that in human beings I have rarely come across of the virtues which I have seen in animals, very simple, unpretentious virtues. As in cats, for example. I have studied cats a lot: if one knows them well they are marvellous creatures. I have known mother cats which have sacrificed themselves entirely for their babies—people speak of maternal love with such admiration, as though it were purely a human privilege, but I have seen this love manifested by mother-cats to a degree far surpassing ordinary humanity. I have seen a mother-cat which would never touch her food until her babies had taken all they needed..... And why is this? Because there was no mental intervention. It was altogether

spontaneous instinct. But what is instinct? — it is the presence of the Divine in the genius of the species, and that, that is the psychic of animals: a collective, not an individual psychic. I have seen in animals all the reactions, emotional, affective, sentimental, all the feelings of which men are so proud. The only difference is that animals cannot speak of them and write about them, so we consider them inferior beings because they cannot flood us with books on what they have felt!" (Ibid). No wonder Sister Nivedita was very fond of her pet dog and one day when Holy Mother Sarada Devi came to visit her in her house, this dog came running waggings its tail and Nivedita expected Holy Mother to pet the dog and take it in her lap and when Holy Mother did not even touch it let alone fondle it, she felt disappointed and hurt. Here it has to be noted that amongst the orthodox Hindus touching a dog is considered as sacrilegious and of which many foreigners are ignorant of.

Giving a rational opinion Mother said: "Animals have much more perfect senses than those of men. I challenge you to track a man as a dog does, for instance! This means that in the curve or rather the spiral of evolution, animals (and more so those we call 'higher' animals because they resemble us more closely) are governed by the spirit of the species which is of quite a special quality. And what is called 'instinct' in animals is simply obedience to the spirit of the species which always knows what ought and ought not to be done. There are so many examples, you know. You put a cow in a meadow, it roams around, sniffs, and suddenly puts out its tongue and snatches a blade of grass. Then it wanders about again, sniffs and gets another tuft of grass and so it goes on. Has anyone ever

known a cow under these conditions eating poisonous grass? But shut this poor animal up in a cow-shed, gather and put some grass before it, and the poor creature which has lost its instinct because it now obeys man, eats the poisonous grass along with the rest of it. And these unfortunate animals, like all animals, have a kind of respect (which I could call unjustifiable) for the superiority of man—if he puts poisonous grass before the cow and tells it to eat, it eats it! But left to itself, that is, without anything interfering between it and the spirit of the species, it would never do so! (Ibid).

It is said that 'FAITH MOVES MOUNTAINS' and the Mother was in full agreement with this and as an illustration she narrated the following incident in one of her discourses: "I had a very sweet little cat, absolutely civilised, a marvellous cat. It was born in the house and it had the habit all cats have, that is to say, if something moved, it played with it. Just then there was in the house a huge scorpion: as was its habit, the cat started playing with the scorpion. And the scorpion stung it. But it was an exceptional cat: It came to me, it was almost dying, but it showed me the paw where it was bitten—it was already swollen and in a terrible state. I took my little cat—it was really sweet—and put it on a table and called Sri Aurobindo. I told him, 'Kiki has been stung by a scorpion, it must be cured.' The cat stretched its neck and looked at Sri Aurobindo, its eyes already a little glassy. Sri Aurobindo sat before it and looked at it also. Then we saw that little cat gradually beginning to recover, to come round, and an hour later it jumped to its feet and went away completely healed....." (Ibid, page 134).

It is well known that the Mother believed in reincarnation: but what is much more interesting is that it applied even to animals. On this she was very sure for once she told a disciple an incident which confirmed her views. As usual the subject was a cat, a special cat indeed." This one was admirable and it died of the cat disease—as there is a disease of the kittens—I don't know how it caught the thing, but it was wonderful during its illness and I was taking care of it as of a child. And it always expressed a kind of aspiration. There was a time before it fell ill..... we used to have in those days meditation in a room of the Library House, in the room there—Sri Aurobindo's own room—we used to sit on the floor. And there was an armchair in a corner, and when we gathered for the meditation this cat came every time and settled in the armchair and literally it entered into a trance, it had movements of trance: it did not sleep, it was not asleep, it was truly in a trance: it gave signs of that and had astonishing movements, as when animals dream: and it didn't want to come out from it, it refused to come out, it remained in it for hours..... Well this cat always had a great aspiration, a kind of aspiration to become a human being and in fact, when it left its body it entered a human body. Only it was a very tiny part of the consciousness, you see, of the human being. But this one was a cat which leaped over many births, so to say, many psychic stages to enter into contact with a human body. It was a simple enough human body, but still all the same there is a difference in the development of a cat and of a human being."

Although Mother had a passion for cats, she equally loved other animals. It is said that the

then Ashram had a number of animals including cows and bullocks. It is said that "at times she herself took the initiative and asked the disciple for information bearing on the welfare of her animals." She was so particular about their welfare and how they were treated that she used to give written instructions signed either by Sri Aurobindo or herself. So aptly it is said: ".....shows a side of her which is not often realised—the Universal Mother to whom the non-human part of the Creation is of no less importance than the human—the Compassionate Care-taker of all beings. However, the Mother never loses her dynamic practical sense and does not keep her animal-children for the sake of mere luxury, either hers or theirs: she has always her eye on fruitful utility in the midst of all her deep feeling for them." She used to love these bullocks so much that she had forbidden the usual custom of boring their noses to put strings through them in order to control them. Her argument was whether these animals were so wild as to be controlled by such a cruel procedure and whether they could not be trained by love and compassion.

The animals on the farm lands of the Ashram were given appropriate Sanskrit names to which they used to respond immediately. This naming of cows and bullocks is also prevalent in the Ramakrishna Ashrams all over: the cows in the Kankhal (Hardwar) Ashram are named after the rivers of the country and their response when called out individually by the monk in charge of them is most astonishing and touching. So also the cows in the Puri Ashram wait for the monk-secretary to come over and pat them before they leave for grazing during the day.

Mother had an uncanny insight in the behaviour of animals: once she told: "I have watched the thing (the trouble the bullocks on the farm were said to be giving) from the roof, and saw with the inner sight also. The bullocks are not mischievous. On the contrary, they are very good and peaceful creatures, but very sensitive-unusually sensitive perhaps. The proposal to frighten them in order to master them is unacceptable. Some kind of submission can thus be obtained perhaps, but of the worst kind. The beasts lose more and more confidence and joy and peace and finally their strength and even their health goes. What is the use of being a sadhak if, as soon as we act like the ignorant ordinary man?" Mother proved how the beasts could be controlled: ".....that from the room I concentrated the power on the bullocks ordering them to yield and obey and I found them quite receptive. To use a quiet, steady, unwavering conscious WILL, that is the way, the only true way really effective and worthy of an aspirant for Divine Life."

Sri Aurobindo used to tell that "man is only a transitional being living in a mental consciousness, but with the possibility of acquiring a new consciousness, the Truth-consciousness and capable of living a life perfectly harmonious, good and beautiful, happy and fully conscious" Mother supported this view and according to her: "There is an ascending evolution in nature which goes from the stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man. Because man is, for the moment, the last rung at the summit of the ascending evolution, he considers himself as the final stage in this ascension and believes there can be nothing on earth superior to him. In that

he is mistaken. In his physical nature he is yet almost wholly an animal, a thinking and speaking animal but still an animal in his material habits and instincts. Unfortunately, nature cannot be satisfied with such an imperfect result, she endeavours to bring out a being who will be to man what man is to the animal, a being who will regain a man in its external form, and yet whose consciousness will rise far above the mental and its slavery to ignorance." (Sri Aurobindo & the Mother on Evolution, page 22).

The Mother had very low opinion of people who thought that by sacrificing a poor innocent animal or bird that they can appease an evil spirit or can obtain a favour from God. In a lighter vein she replied to a disciple as to who will be the greater receipient—the person who sacrificed or the sacrificed victim: "It would be very interesting to see.....Imagine a man who wants to win the Divine's favour, or that of some god or other, some deity, in order to obtain something he desires and finds it hard to get: and so he snatches a chicken from his yard and goes and cuts its throat before the deity, with his prayer, perhaps for a good harvest or the good sale of his harvest, or for a child if he doesn't have one, or that his wife may be cured if she is ill—anything at all. And then imagine that this evolving psychic particle, already like a tiny spark in semi-consciousness—the rudiment of consciousness which is in the chicken, goes straight to the Divine who magnifies it: while the man who has offered the chicken to obtain some benefit or other is not even heard!"

INTEREST IN ARCHITECTURE, SCULPTURE AND FINE ARTS

It is said that Mother was a lofty dreamer and

as such no wonder she dreamt of a place where a person can be completely at peace: "There should be somewhere upon earth a place which no nation could claim as its own where all human beings of goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the supreme Truth: a place of peace, concord and harmony where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his suffering and misery: to surmount his weaknesses and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities: a place where the needs of the spirit and the concern for progress would take precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the search for pleasure and material enjoyment....There work would not be a way to earn one's living but a way to express oneself and to develop one's capacities and possibilities.....The earth is certainly not ready to realise such an ideal... and yet, this dream is in the course of becoming a reality, that is what we are striving for in Sri Aurobindo's Ashram, on a very small scale, in proportion to our limited means...." When one visits the Ashram in Pondicherry today, it is apparent that Mother's dream has become a reality indeed!

If the Mother of Pondicherry was anxious and dreamt of establishing an universal spiritual centre; Sister Nivedita pondered over the question of education for the Indian women for the purpose of which Swami Vivekananda had invited her to come to India and take up the job. "It was clear to her that the school would be only tentative and experimental in the early stages. For she did not want to follow any stereotyped method of work. After studying the world in which she was to work,

she wanted to evolve an educational method that would be 'qualitatively true' and universally applicable to the work of modern education of Indian women.' She had learnt from the Swami that to teach against the aspirations of the taught is to court ill results instead of good and that new ideals have to be approached through the old, the unfamiliar has to be reached through the familiar. So Nivedita made honest efforts to make herself familiar with the aims and aspirations of the people amongst whom she lived." (Sister Nivedita, by Pravrajika Atmapriya, page 68). Like Mother's Ashram, Sister Nivedita's School for Girls which was formally declared open by none other than Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, consort of Sri Ramakrishna, has continued to thrive and progress and today it is one of the leading educational institutions in Calcutta.

Similarly Mother Teresa the beloved daughter from Skopje in Yugoslavia and whose Missonaries of Charity with branches all over the world is famous for its work among the dying, destitute and the poor and the winner of Nobel Award besides many other awards from different countries and organisations also came to India with the simple prayer: "Lord, make me a channel of Your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love, where there is injury, pardon, where there is despair, hope. Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be loved as to love, for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life" and was able to win the love and affection of the Indian people. She dressed in a simple and cheap white satee with a blue border and her band of dedicated Sisters clad similarly

is always welcomed by one and all, rich or poor.

Dr. Annie Besant who also came to India being enamoured of the country's spirituality made herself very popular not only in the spiritual field by conducting most successfully the Theosophical Society of India but also shone in the field of education by establishing Benaras Hindu University and in the political field she was well known for her fight for the 'Home Rule' for India. Each one of these ladies from across the seven seas loved the country of their adoption and served her with love and zeal.

Talking about the Mother's interest in architecture one has only to visit the Ashram at Pondicherry. It is narrated that: "One of the major projects undertaken in the Ashram in the 1930's was the construction of the building which came to be known as 'GOLCONDE'". On this we have Sri Aurobindo himself stating: "In Golconde, Mother has worked out her own idea through Raymon, Sammer and others. First Mother believes in beauty as a part of spirituality and divine living: secondly, she believes that physical things have the Divine Consciousness underlying them as much as living things, and thirdly that they have an individuality of their own and ought to be properly treated, used in the right way, not misused or improperly handled or hurt or neglected so that they perish soon and lose their full beauty or value: she feels the consciousness in them and is so much in sympathy with them that what in other hands may be spoilt or wasted in a short time lasts with her for years or decades. It is on this basis that she planned the Golconde. First, she wanted a high architectural beauty, and in this she succeeded—architects and people with architectural knowledge have admired

it with enthusiasm as a remarkable achievement, with no equal in all Europe or America: and a French architect, pupil of a great master, said it executed superbly the idea which his master had been seeking for but failed to realise, but also she wanted all the objects in it, the rooms, the fittings, the furniture to be individually artistic and to form a harmonious whole. This too, was done with great care. Moreover, each thing was arranged to have its own use, for each thing there was a place and there should be no mixing up or confused or wrong use. But all this had to be kept up and carried out in practice, for it was easy for people living there to create a complete confusion and misuse and to bring everything to disorder and ruination in a short time. That was why the rules were made and for no other purpose....." (*Glimpses of the Mother's Life*, Volume II).

Music and other fine arts played a great role in the life of a sadhaka in his pursuit of the highest according to Mother. So we find her writing to one of her disciples: "To keep yourself occupied with music and writing is always good for your nature finds there its inborn occupation and that helps to maintain the vital energy and keep the balance. About Sadhana I should like to ask you why not do Sadhana through your music surely meditation is not the only way of doing sadhana. Through your music, bhakti and aspiration can grow and prepare the nature for realisation....." According to her "Music follows the rule of all things on earth—unless they are turned to the Divine they cannot be divine."

She considered Indian music as most spiritual: "...I have heard Indian music having a psychic origin, it translates itself almost directly into the

physical. And truly one must then concentrate, and as it is—how to put it?—very tenuous, very subtle, as there are none of those intense vital vibrations, one can easily glide within it and climb back to the psychic origin of the music. It has the effect upon you it is a kind of ecstatic trance, as from an intoxication. It makes you enter a little into trance. And then, if you are ready, it gives you the psychic consciousness, something that makes you withdraw from the external consciousness, which makes you enter elsewhere, enter within," (QUESTIONS & ANSWERS, page 77-78).

How does one really listen to music? According to the MOTHER "If you want to listen to music, you must create an absolute silence in your head, you must not follow or accept a single thought, and must be entirely concentrated, like a sort of screen which receives, without movement or noise, the vibration of the music. That is the only way, there is no other, the only way of hearing music and understanding it. If you admit in the least the movements and fancies of your thought, the whole value of the music escapes you."

Sri Nalini Kanta Gupta tells how the Mother used to infuse something higher, something meaningful and something spiritual whenever she chose to play: "When the Mother used to play on the organ, to entertain us with her music, sometimes one noted that she would sit quiet for a while before the organ, apparently waiting for something before she began to play. And naturally we in our small way of understanding used to say: 'Mother was concentrating or waiting for the inspiration'. Very often it was not that. She herself explained once or twice what it was. She said, here also as at the meditation in the playground, when she sat

with her fingers on the keys of the board, there was a host of invisible musicians assembled there, musicians of course who wanted to hear Mother play, also there were ambitious musicians who sought to play, play through her fingers. That was a great opportunity for them to express themselves, to show their capacity, exhibit their talents through her. Indeed at times there was a clamour and scramble among those unearthly musicians, as to who should come, whom should Mother allow to appear. It was very interesting, Mother used to say, when for some reason or other she allowed some particular musician, the fortunate being used to play his music through her gracious fingers. And when the music passed through her fingers, something of her own quality or inspiration naturally entered into the music played. When you hear Mother's music now, some are of that nature, not absolutely or wholly by herself, but some other great musician from another world has given his version of the Mother's music."

The Mother was also a great believer in 'numbers'—specially the meaning of Four Sevens together for she has remarked: "Manifestation and Realisation. Manifestation means the appearance of the truth, the truth that is hidden behind somewhere, when it comes forward and shows itself, that is manifestation. Realisation means we express this truth that has come forward in our consciousness, make it real on the physical plane, embody it in our external activity: in other words whatever you do you do the truth, whatever you speak you speak the truth: the Truth first appears in your mind, in your mental consciousness, then it realises itself in your physical activity. Number seven has a special meaning. The number seven

gives the scheme of creation: it is the number of the worlds that constitute creation....." (Complete Works of Nalini Kanta Gupta, Vol.7. page 34).

The Mother was also versatile in other fine arts: "From childhood, the Mother had been painting and drawing. Her own portrait and that of Sri Aurobindo, both drawn in pencil are well-known. She also did many pencil sketches of inmates of the Ashram as well as some oil-paintings, and encouraged those who had artistic abilities to cultivate them as part of their integral development."

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

"When and how did I become conscious of a mission which I was to fulfil on earth? And when did I meet Sri Aurobindo? For the knowledge of the mission, it is difficult to say when it came to me. It is as though I was born with it and following the growth of the mind and brain, the precision and completeness of the consciousness grow also..... Between eleven and thirteen, a series of psychic and spiritual experiences revealed to me not only the existence of God but man's possibility of uniting with HIM, of realising HIM integrally in consciousness and action of manifesting HIM upon earth in a life divine. This along with a practical discipline for its fulfilment, was given to me during my body's sleep by several teachers, some of whom I met afterwards on the physical plane..... Later on as the interior and exterior development proceeded, the spiritual and psychic relation with one of these being became more and more clear and frequent: and although I knew little of the Indian philosophies and religions at that time, I was led to call him Krishna, and henceforth I was aware that it was with him, (whom I knew I should

meet on earth one day) that the divine work was to be done.

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. As soon as I saw Sri Aurobindo, I recognised him as the well-known being whom I used to call Krishna..... and this is enough to explain why I am fully convinced that my place and my work are near to him in India" (*Glimpses of The Mothers Life*, page 247/48). With this short and cryptic note Mother reveals the great work done in the Ashram and the universal brotherhood it has brought about!

According to Peter Heehs, the author of 'SRI AUROBINDO—A Brief Biography' the close relationship of a Guru and Sisya developed between Mother and Aurobindo: "Mirra Richard returned to Pondicherry with her husband Paul on 24th April 1920. Paul Richard, the French writer who had helped Sri Aurobindo launch ARYA in 1914, was full of new plans and projects. Mirra was content to sit at the feet of Sri Aurobindo, whom she had inwardly accepted as her spiritual master. In December Paul Richard went on a tour of Northern India, where he stayed for more than a year. Later he went back to Europe, Mirra remained with Aurobindo. At this time there was only a handful of people gathered around him, but now their numbers showed a tendency to increase rather rapidly. Sri Aurobindo attributed this development to Mirra's dynamic nature, which he came to regard as the complement of his own. In a letter of 1926

he wrote that his personal force, representing the 'Purusha element', acted principally in the realm of spiritual knowledge, while Mirra's 'representing the Shakti element' was predominantly practical in its nature. In this letter Sri Aurobindo referred to Mirra as 'Mirra Devi'. Soon afterwards he began calling her 'The Mother', a name that since Vedic times has been used for the creative shakti. Without the Mother, he said, his conception of a divine life on earth could never have been embodied." (page 133).

So also Sri Gupta touches on this point in the seventh volume of his 'Complete Works' when he says: "In the beginning, Sri Aurobindo would refer to the Mother quite distinctly as Mirra. For sometime afterwards (this may have extended over a period of years) we could notice that he stopped at the sound 'M' and uttered the full name Mirra as if after a slight hesitation.To us it looked rather queer at the time, but later we came to know the reason. Sri Aurobindo's lips were on the verge of saying 'MOTHER': but we had yet to get ready, so he ended with Mirra instead of saying MOTHER. No one knows for certain on which particular date and at what auspicious moment, the word 'MOTHER' was uttered by the lips of Sri Aurobindo." In spite of Sri Aurobindo's doubts, Sri Pandit confirms that "Mother had been to us a friend and a companion, a comrade almost at the most an object of reverence and respect."

Sri M. P. Pandit in his book 'SRI AUROBINDO' continues the narrative when he writes: "November 24, 1926 may also be regarded as the day of the founding of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. For the Mother was placed in charge of the community of Sadhakas (about twentyfive of them) that had been growing

steadily around Sri Aurobindo, and this spiritual collectivity was to be the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.Indeed, the change was not sudden at all. Ever since Mirra was called and installed in Sri Aurobindo's house, she had begun to look after his needs and the general arrangements in the house, more and more. This took definite shape by the beginning of the year and the 24th November was natural culmination.....Her emergence as the MOTHER was also nothing sudden. More and more devotees and disciples had begun to seek her out, Sri Aurobindo had been referring to her many cases needing occult help. He, in fact, was in so many ways encouraging those around him to regard Mirra as a spiritual Mother." (page 297).

After sometime Sri Aurobindo chose to withdraw himself completely from the day-to-day activities of the Ashram, meeting of the disciples, discourses, writings etc.etc. However he handed over the complete charge of the Ashram to the Mother. Not that all disciples and admirers of Sri Aurobindo were pleased with this act of his: let M.P. Pandit tell us: "Sri Aurobindo's withdrawal from the daily life of the community was certainly not expected by the members. But what was more difficult to accept at any rate for many—was that the Mother was to be the guide and effective head of the Ashram. All had, indeed, deep regard for her, her capabilities—organisational and occult—spiritual—but it was quite another thing to be asked to entrust themselves to her materially and spiritually. They could have access to Sri Aurobindo only through her. Some adjusted themselves to the new situation, a few could not and left in due course, and a few others emboldened themselves to ask, 'Why?' Why should they accept this 'foreign' lady as the

Mother? These questions—asked and unasked—reached Sri Aurobindo, who then chose to answer. His reply, given in one stretch of writing, is a classic in the English language and the Divine Mother Principle. Entitled, 'THE FOUR POWERS OF THE MOTHER', it forms the main body of the little book, 'THE MOTHER' (Published in 1928) which has been recognised as the key to the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo." (Page 302). This assertion of Sri Aurobindo seems to have yielded results since we find that the Ashram grew from strength to strength under the able guidance of Mother.

"Mother took an active interest in the practical affairs of the community, but before 1926 she remained largely in the background. When in 1926 Sri Aurobindo had the 'overmental descent', he ceased to meet his disciples. Henceforth, he told them, the Mother would look after their development.....During the years of Sri Aurobindo's retirement the Mother came forward as the active director of the Ashram's inner and outer life. The disciples came to her for guidance in work—she was a born organiser under whose direction the Ashram's activities expanded in every direction—and also for help in sadhana and in life. They saw Aurobindo only three times a year, when he gave darshan, but they were still able to communicate with him, at first through the Mother and later by means of letters.

When Mirra came to Sri Aurobindo, she was to a certain extent versatile in spiritual matters: she was a brave and determined lady who could choose her own path: this is evident when she says: "Long before I met Sri Aurobindo, 10 or 12 years before I was doing conscious yoga. I was aware of two dangers: one was the danger of

accepting as the Divine one of the Asuras who masquerade as so, and the other was of mistaking movements of the lower nature as inspirations coming from above. But I surrendered to nobody. I felt the presence of the Divine in my inner being and my exterior life was faithful to it. I was never divided. Then when I saw Sri Aurobindo, I at once knew that it was he, the Divine, and I wholly surrendered myself to him: my whole being gave the consent: if it was a mistake it was a mistake of the whole being and I could not do anything else. Thereafter whatever Sri Aurobindo said, I accepted without the least doubt, questioning or hesitation.

However this complete surrender was not always there: she was capable of opposing those who went against her including Sri Aurobindo himself. It is said that Sri Aurobindo used to get some inspiration at times and during those periods he used to indulge in what he called as 'automatic-writing' which was something like media-culture. Referring to this kind of mystic practices, Sri Gupta narrates one such incident when: "One amongst us asked, 'can you tell us something about the Mother?' Mother immediately intercepted with vehemence, 'No, no nothing about me' Immediately Sri Aurobindo's pencil dropped on the paper and the matter came to a dead stop then and there. All the same what the invisible being was saying was quite threatening, and even could be of some educative value..... Sometimes however higher beings can come and then you get useful instruction or even true knowledge from them. Sri Aurobindo himself has described at length how, when he was in prison, Swami Vivekananda used to come to him and give important indications in Yoga. What he did not

know Vivekananda was explaining to him."

Sister Nivedita was also bold and stuck to what she considered as truth and rational. As a result atleast in the beginning of her life in India she used to come into conflict with Swami Vivekananda on various subjects. Pravrajika Atmaprana tells: ".....Nivedita was not aware of the wrongs that the English as the dominant power had done to India. So when the Swami openly and vigorously attacked the English in his morning talks she stood for their (English) defence. As in the London classes, she was the one who argued and protested, and always tried to protect her own judgements and assert views..... The Swami could not tolerate blindness of half-views and prejudices born out of ignorance. So he pointed out errors of her judgements. For instance, one day while the Swami was praising the Chinese, Nivedita alleged that, as a race they were notoriously untruthful. The Swami would not accept this misrepresentation and said that words like untruthfulness and social rigidity were very relative terms. He revealed a new standpoint, and then left the disciple to form her own view....." (SISTER NIVEDITA, page 46). Again Nivedita did not hesitate to tear herself apart from the Ramakrishna Math and Mission when she came to realise that her political views and that of the Math and Mission did not run parallel to each other. It was not easy to give up an institution which she along with her beloved Master Swami Vivekananda had built up from a scratch and fighting against several odds.

Sri Aurobindo was also in the habit of practising what is known as 'automatic talking' where the person who is to talk, say give a speech, goes on the stage and after wishing and welcoming the

audience keeps quite—makes his mind completely empty, blank and waits. In a short while he finds his lips moving and words coming out although he is not conscious of what he is talking. It is just like the Mother telling that when she wants to play some music on the organ she herself does not play the instrument but some musician play through her fingers. The idea is to instill in our mind that divine help comes—and in this path nobody is all alone. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother perhaps did not emphasise the collective (SAMASTI) aspect exactly—but the idea of the individual (VYAKTI) has been thus connected in their yoga.

Whereas Sister Nivedita followed the collective concept in a different way—in its outer sense. Yoga emphasised the inner. Sri Aurobindo and Mother thus emphasised both and inter mingled both in individual (VYAKTI) and the collective (SAMASTI). However it has to be noted that this was practised and experimented in their Ashram activities. On the other hand Nivedita wished to practise this outer application of Yoga and Vedanta in the vast natural public life, the only laboratory that was available in her lone attempt. It is a pity that she could not get a chance to experiment her concept of Vivekananda and his yoga in and through any order or organisation so to say.

MOTHER'S PLAYGROUND

The Mother believed that “.....all those who want to make their body fit for a Divine Life, I say, do not miss any excellent opportunities of the athletic competitions and never forget that whatever we do we must aspire for perfection. For it is that yearning for perfection which will, in spite of all difficulties lead us to our Goal”

Since according to her: "Physical culture is the best way of developing the consciousness of the body, and the more the body is conscious, the more it is capable of receiving the divine forces that are at work to transform it and give birth to the new race." With this in view Mother gave lot of importance to physical exercise and games and Nalini Kanta Gupta tells in his book: "Thus the principles that guided the organisation of physical education are as you know now: there is to be, first, no difference between boys and girls, all should undergo the same exercises and the same programme." However much this custom of not making any difference in the programme for boys and girls is laudable, it did meet with lot of opposition from her congregation. People questioned why the Ashram should not have separate programmes for men and women, boys and girls? Why the achievements of girls should not be announced separately atleast to encourage them. Mother was prepared for such questionings; her reply was that there could be no difference of age, sex and capacity since: ".....the general principle that lay behind the organisation and on which the Mother insisted was: no difference of age, specially no difference of sex, all human beings are fundamentally of the same nature. Particularly in the competition of physical education that were arranged from time to time, the groups were more or less all mixed up, the green and the red and the blue and all the other colours made a blend as it were." As to why the achievements of girls were not declared separately Mother stressed that "there are no 'women's' and no 'men's' records, there are only group records. There is the green group—the various green group—there is the red

group, the grey group, the blue group and the khaki group, the white group. You may tell me that some of these groups are exclusively men's or women's. I shall answer what I have just said, that unless one comes here very young it is difficult to change one's habits, and that is what has made this separation necessary—but it is not the ideal. And if we made it a habit to announce gloriously—"This very remarkable girl has done what no other girl could do before", oh, la, la, what a fall it would be! Not to mention that this encourages vanity—which is not good—it is also an assertion that this fact is remarkable because it is a girl, now it is not all a remarkable fact that it is a girl: it is remarkable because she has done very well and there are many boys who have not done so well. But if one wants to magnify this fine fact by comparing her with other girls who have not done as well, it becomes deplorable."

As to the query why girls are not treated in a special way as it is customary, Mother's reply was a classic one when she said: ".....then why do we have an Ashram? Why do we have a Centre of Education? If everywhere the same things are done we don't need to repeat them, we won't do them any better than others..... It is done everywhere? That is just the reason for not doing it: for if we do what others do, it is not worth the trouble of doing anything at all. We want precisely to introduce into the world something which is not there, but if we keep all the habits of the world, all the preferences of the world, all the constructions of the world, I don't see how we can get out of the rut and do something new." (THE MOTHER, Questions and Answers 1950).

Another interesting feat that was introduced by Mother was the custom of addressing each other by their christian names and not by their surnames irrespective of age, sex and religion. This practice also brought in much criticism alleging that no respect and consideration was shown to women and elders. However according to Gupta: ".....thus when someone in the Ashram called me by my name or an elderly woman by hers, evidently the feeling behind was full of respect and consideration even love. Only the form of address was like that, bare and without qualification. Even someone from outside saw the thing and judged it correctly. He wrote an article on the Ashram and mentioned this custom in the Ashram: it is very strange that youngsters called old people by their mere names but it sounds so nice and appropriate when the thing comes from their lips."

This type of freedom of mingling and mixing of sexes and various age groups was frowned upon by many, including the inmates of the Ashram; they argued that such type of freedom was novel to Indians and so there is every chance of its being misused. Unfortunately they failed to realise and appreciate the risk Mother took in introducing such a system. According to Sri Gupta: "But the Mother took the risk, for that was the only one towards a radical solution, not merely a halfway compromise. Only when you are free, when you are completely, absolutely free, you choose between the good and the bad, and you choose the good of your own will, then the good has a real importance for you, your consciousness and for your development. Otherwise when you accept and follow the good through compulsion, through fear or social decency or for your own sake in order to be good, through

vanity.....then it is not the true way, not the true attitude and consciousness. The true consciousness is that you do the right thing not because it is your duty to do it, not because it is worthy to do it and it is expected of you to do it, but because your nature impels you towards it." (Complete Works, Volume 7, page 16).

The Mother was trying to emphasise and bring in the right attitude, whether it is in the home, on the playground or in spiritual life. She used to say: "You must change your position, your point of view. If you are content to be human beings—just human beings, differences will arise again and again and not only differences but serious differences. Human nature is composed of these differences, and culture and civilization meant nothing more than a reconciliation, a compromise among these differences. A deeper truth is to be found, a higher truth and a more powerful truth. We must rise to a new state. Mother spoke always of the truth—the truth of your soul. To the truth of your soul, in the truth of your soul you are neither man nor woman, neither young nor old—'TVAM KUMARA UTA VA KUMARI, TVAM JIRNA.....you are all that in appearance, for you are something more or something else.'" (Ibid, page 18).

To hammer in this truth she availed of many paths and one of them was her 'PLAY GROUND' where people addressed each other most informally and the various teams participating in different games were identified by the colour of their uniforms and not by their sex or age. The girls were inducted for the first time, in the sports history of India to sports like vaulting and other physical games and exercises. This made a leading sports enthusiast

to remark: "I have travelled all over India, visited various educational institutions, seen women doing gymnastics but it is the first time that I see here in the Ashram girls doing vaulting, specially on parallel bars. I have never seen that anywhere else....."

Sister Nivedita was an educationist at heart always: while she loved her students she considered discipline as of great importance and she agreed with her Master Swami Vivekananda that physical fitness was one of the greatest assests for the welfare of not only the students but also for the nation. Of course the progressive and radical concepts of Mother of Pondicherry would have been considered too modern by her. The times were also responsible since when Mother's ideas were considered too forward by the people what to say about the social conditions prevailing at the time of Nivedita! Nivedita would have considered them as too-modern and Western in outlook for the then Indian traditional bound outlook. Moreover she preferred the hierarchial pattern and respect for age, most probably due to her training first under Swami Vivekananda and later at the Ramakrishna Order from the very beginning.

One should not forget that Nivedita's concepts and work was for the whole nation and so it had to be universal. She desired the participation of all in creating a new India and was not depending on any one single enlightened group or organisation. She was not for any class or particular group or Ashram as such. From the beginning she was like that. Her soul was beyond all the boundaries in this regard. While Mother Teresa, Dr. Annie Besant, the Mother and others had a group or a definite denomination and some kind of boundary line in

their respective fields of work; Nivedita desired to take each and everyone into her embrace.

SPIRITUAL ARENA

Once Swami Vivekananda said: "We want spiritual ideals before us, we want enthusiastically to gather round grand spiritual names. Our heroes must be spiritual..... SPIRITUAL VITALITY CAN BE GIVEN FROM ONE MIND TO ANOTHER. The man who gives is the Guru. The man who receives is the disciple. That is the only way spiritual truth is brought into the world."

How far these ladies from across the seas were successful is a controversial topic to be discussed. Each one shone in their respective fields and one thing which outshone everything else was their sacrifice and love for the country of their adoption. The MOTHER of Pondicherry was most modest when she said: "I am doing something which is not done anywhere else in the world, that is awakening the soul in my children, the soul that only can save and nothing else." When she urged everyone who came to her to "LOOK WHAT IS THERE DEEP WITHIN" she put the essence of Upanishads and Vedanta into a nut-shell. In fact the concepts of 'soul' and 'yoga' are not at all that contradictory—but her emphasis upon the 'soul' is Upanishadic and Vedantic more or less than Yoga. According to Sri Gupta, an ardent follower of the Mother who interprets that: "The soul is neither boy nor girl nor old person, it has not the characteristics of the body natural to man or rather to the animal. But this does not mean that it has no body, it is something airy, nebulous, something flippant. Not at all, the soul has a body, its own concrete and physical body even it has a material body

although the matter is of a different kind. Have not the Western sages begun to speak of immaterial matter, that is to say anti-matter? That soul-body even now you are carrying within this material body of yours.....The Mother is holding it in you, you come in contact with it through your contact with the Mother. Love the Mother, be one with her, you will find and be thus living soul of yours." Truly spoken as an ardent devotee and follower indeed! A true admirer who saw the Divine Mother in this mother!

However we find that Sister Nivedita's writings on 'Yoga' are not much but she has written volumously on Vedanta, specially the practical Vedanta. "In London Margaret (Sister Nivedita) helped Swami Abhedananda to carry on the Vedanta Work and she started a Vedanta Centre in Wimbledon.....Swami Abhedananda conducted classes in different private houses, which were followed by animated discussions. Margaret reported the work done in London from time to time in the BRAHMAVADIN, the then house organ of the Mission.

Nivedita loved the classes conducted by the Vedanta Centre and even when the classes, were closed for the summer, which many considered as unnecessary and interrupting their study of Vedanta; Nivedita jumped in defence and wrote in Brahmavadin: "It does not follow, however, that Vedanta is dead or even asleep amongst us. Some of us regard these breathing periods as the most valuable influence of all, in extending the sphere of conviction. The thoughts that Vedantic teaching brings, to a mind hearing it for the first time are too vast and too new in kind for speedy assimilation. There must be rest and solitude and fate has

ordained that instead of our going away into the wilderness to find these, our interpreters shall go away from us and leave us to fight with our ignorance alone."

Sister Nivedita kept in constant touch with the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in India and insisted on getting the annual reports which she used to read out at the gatherings of the members in London. How appreciative she was of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and its work is borne out when she wrote: "One feature which will be of vast interest to our first gathering is a report of the Math Brotherhood and its work which has been sent to us from Baranagore by Swami Brahmananda. This document will also be printed and distributed amongst all friends known to us in this country and America and anyone else who desires to see it has only to send for a copy. In this interesting and exhaustive statement, all who have read it feel that we take an important step towards true realisation of our solidarity with our Indian brethren. The Ramakrishna Mission is an idea that appeals to us particularly, not only for the honour of the Saint after whom it is named, and many of us in England have learned to love—but also because its aims and methods are congenial to our own. This and the Alambazar Famine Relief are a splendid vindication of the spiritual life from the charge of passivity so often preferred against it by the materialistic West....."

Foreigner though she was, she was much influenced by the practical Vedanta as propagated by Swami Vivekananda. In great appreciation of the philosophy she remarked in her speech at the inaugural meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission: "....Yours is the conservatism of a people who have

through that long period been able to preserve the greatest spiritual treasures for the World, and it is for this that I have come to India, to serve her with our burning passion for service. SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA JAYATI." This statement as it did come from the heart of Margaret led Swamiji to exclaim in a letter to Swami Ramakrishnananda 'Miss Margaret Noble is really an acquisition.'

As if to be true to the tradition of the country of her adoption Sister Nivedita was fascinated with the love and respect Indians had for the mother-figure: from the beginning she was very fond of her mother and later when she came to India, Holy Mother Sarada Devi filled in this position and later as she progressed in the path shown by Swami Vivekananda she began to see in each, mother the Divine Mother—the Symbol of Life. She found in the Aryan home, woman stands supreme. As wife in the West—lady and queen of her husband—as MOTHER in the East—a goddess throned in her son's worship—she is the bringer of sanctity and peace.....Profound depths stir within us, in presence of the intensely Christian conception of God—a child in His mother's arms. This ideal of the heart of a woman—pierced by its seven sorrows, on fire with love, mother beside the cradle, worshipper beneath the cross, and glorified in great humility—has been one of the richest gifts of the Catholic Church in humanity.

The poet in Nivedita comes to life when she wrote her famous 'THE STORY OF KALI' where she addresses a baby, presumably Baby Legget. She says: "Baby Darling, what is the very first thing you remember? Is it not lying on Mother's lap, and looking up into her eyes and laughing?"

Did you ever play hide and seek with Mother? Mother's eyes shut, and baby's was not. She opened them and there was baby! Then baby's eyes shut and where was mother? But they opened again, and—oh!

Baby, some people think God is just like that. A great great Mother—so great that all this big world is Her baby. God is playing with Her world, and She shuts Her eyes. Then all our lives long, baby darling, we try to catch the great Mother peeping.....

There is another game of hide-and-seek that the great Mother plays. This is more like a fairy story. She hides sometimes in other people. She hides in anything..... under all those forms you may find God playing at hide and seek!

Lift the stone and thou shalt find Me. Cleave the wood, and there am I! How beautifully Kali plays! You may find her anywhere! (KALI THE MOTHER/The Story of Kali by Sister Nivedita).

These sentiments so poignantly expressed by Sister Nivedita on many different occasions in different manner show that she was not lost in these realities of the mind and the play enacted in its conscious, subconscious and unconscious depths. Neither was she interested in any kind of occultism. Her whole aim was to serve the country she loved since "I love India as the birthplace of the highest and best of all religions, as the country that has the grandest mountains, the Himalayas. The country where the homes are simple, where domestic happiness is most to be found, and where the women unselfishly, unobtrusively, ungrudgingly serve the dear ones from early morn to dewy eve....."

Times had changed from the days of Nivedita to that of the Mother and materialism had made great strides, the doctrine that mind and not material world is real and that mind may be studied by introspection had gained ground and the Mother was quick to grasp the new development for she says: "When I began to practice occultism.....I found that between the subtle physical level and the most material vital, there was a small religion, very small indeed, that was not developed well enough to serve as a conscious link between the two. So what happened in the most material vital was not being accurately translated into the consciousness of the most subtle physical. Something was lost in the passage which was however not quite empty but was only half conscious not adequately developed." She worked quite hard on this topic for atleast for many months when she was once in Paris; her efforts were to cover this gap. The whole process according to her is like an egg becoming into a chick all by itself, from that which is within itself. She explained: "Suddenly the whole life of this nature, the whole life of the intermediate region, I am speaking of, which is most living in the plant and the physical nature all this domain became all on a sudden, unexpectedly without any transition, absolutely living, intense, conscious, wonderful. This was not the result of the continuous activity of six months that had not given any result till then."

Describing her version of the occult world, Mother said: "Well, the occult world is not one Single region where everything is mixed, which only becomes occult because we can't see it. The occult world is a gradation of regions, one could perhaps say, of more and more etherial and subtle regions, anyway, those farther and farther removed in their

nature from the physical materiality we ordinarily see. And each one of these domains is a world in itself, having its forms and inhabited by beings with a density, one might say, analogous to that of the domain in which they live. Just as in the physical world, we are of the same materiality as the physical world, so in the vital world, in the mental world, in the overmind world and in the super mental world—and in many others, infinite others—there are beings which have a form whose substance is similar to the one of that world. This means that if you are able to enter consciously into that world with the part of your being which corresponds to that domain, you can move there quite objectively, as in the material world. And there, there are as many, and even many more things to see and observe than in our poor little material world, which belongs to only one zone, zone of this infinite gradation." (THE MOTHER, Questions and Answers, page 217).

At the same time Mother warns all those who desire to enter into this domain that ".....it is not very prudent to venture into these domains without a previous initiation and above all, a purification of nature which prevents you from entering there all weighed down and deformed by your desires, your passion, egoism, fears and weaknesses. Before undertaking these activities one needs a complete preparation of self-purification and widening of the consciousness which is absolutely indispensable." Speaking for herself she said that: ".....if one undergoes this occult discipline, one is able to leave one's physical body, go out in the vital and move about quite consciously, acting quite consciously in this vital world: then to leave one's vital being asleep and go out mentally, acting and living in

the mental world quite consciously and with similar relations—for the mental world is in relation with the mental being, as the physical world is in relation with the physical being—and so on, progressively and by a regular discipline.....It is obviously the sign of a great mastery of one's being and the sign of having reached a high degree of conscious development indeed!"

It is not known whether Nivedita did experience any kind of occult happenings of the third world; most probably it did not occur to her and even if it had occurred she does not seem to have taken the opportunity to create something out of it. For, from the beginning she was trained in a different way since the transcendental background of the Vivekananda-Vedanta (ADVAITA) did not encourage her to experiment with such psychological state of yogic practices which even according to the Mother: "the gap is wide between what you know of yourself, what is actively conscious in you and what you are in the truth of your being."

Talking further about this 'gap' Mother explained: "This intermediary region is somewhat difficult for me to be familiar with or comprehend: for it is a cloudy region for me, a domain of falsehood. You must note the distinction between a lie and a falsehood. A lie is that which is altogether unreal, which has not been which is not there. A falsehood is that which is not truth in the sense that it is not the expression of your truth—not at all—and yet, it is that of which you are mostly externally conscious. Very very few are there who have this inner perception of what they want to become, what they want to do, what the truth of their being is! There are not many of that kind." Perhaps it was not for the logical type, or for the

thinking mind—but most probably for the ‘willing type’. And in the way Nivedita was taught Vedanta—there was very little scope of this ‘will’ to get into the depth of the mind. Vedanta transcendental with which Nivedita became familiar, thanks to Swami Vivekananda and other monks in the Ramakrishna Order instead of getting into the depths of this flight of mind inwardly or outwardly—preferred to go beyond and approach the Reality itself. But Vedanta, the imanental kind has all these flights of experiences in between the space. Here transcendental is epistemic, whereas all imanental types are mystique—mystical but which attracts people more than the former.

However, this does not mean that Nivedita lacked imagination and was never lost in the flight of fancy and fantasy. She was very fond of reading, writing and composing poems; she could go deep into spirituality but at the same time express herself in a lucid form the most subtle concepts as she has done in the essay titled: “A VISIT TO DAKSHINESWAR’ wherein she writes:” He was not in the vastness. And the soul, lying on a house-top on the earth, and looking forth into the uttermost of space realised the solitude and trembled. Then came one whose voice spake within the heart, saying very gently, ‘Come thou away into that quiet place and rest awhile. There it may be that thou shalt speak with HIM’. And that soul arose, following after, as it were, the Angel of the Presence—who bore white lilies, and about his feet played flames, and his eyes to look into were like mighty waters—and came by many ways unto the Lord’s own garden, and rested there. And there was in that garden a place where five trees grew together, beneath which often times had the Master sat and prayed

and entered into glory. Thither went the soul, laden with sorrowful queries and needs, and being received into the silence waited. On the left flowed the river, and the great barges went past swiftly, with sails full set. Beneath the dead leaves stirred in the breeze, or rustled under the footsteps of a mouse. And on the branches above fell the flood of moonlight, dropping through and making spaces on the brickwork, all outlined, by quivering leaves and moving stems. The whispers of river and trees and lone night creatures were the only sounds that could be heard. Those with whom I was wont to come, O Master, are absent now. In far distant and separate lands think they upon this place. I would make memorial for them at Thy feet tonight!' And the Lord said— 'It is well. My own are ever Mine. I bear their burdens: I guide their footsteps: and at last I bring them to that haven where they would be. There are three here tonight. My child, not one. Be assured.' What vivid imagination indeed but it is not mystic reality in itself as is evident. In the rest of the writing Nivedita's emotion rises and falls playing between the reality and some shadow of it. The whole thing cannot be called an independent mystique experience—including the 'solitude' and 'quivering' and the 'trembling' and rustling sound of the leaves under the feet of the mouse and the fallen leaves. In the shadow of this experience—of the 'Angle of the Presence—who bore white lilies, and about his feet played flames.....' etc. Here there is creativity, no doubt and plenty of it but it is a separate creation, free from this world and the picture of Dakshineswar that all of us have to some extent.

Nivedita's inner Dakshineswar only got mixed up here and there and rose to lofty heights to

reach the Divine—the inner and outer—the causal and the effectual imagination of the same Reality. This Dakshineswar was perhaps the inner from which Belur Math emerged on the outer, on the other bank of the Holy Ganga so dear to both Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, after some years.

Nalini Kanta Gupta, the faithful follower of the Mother narrates a dream he had about the Ashram which in certain aspects resembled the one at Pondicherry and at the same time differed also. So he narrates "I will tell you of a dream or a vision that I had sometime ago. It was an Ashram, I say an ashram for it was not quite like our Ashram and in other respects somewhat unlike. First of all the whole ashram was in one place, a consolidated organisation, not houses here and there scattered about: there were no buildings or houses belonging to other people or other organisations, also the buildings were beautiful to look at and the general lay-out artistic but all the activities we have here were there. The school was there, the playground was there, the library also, but all in orderly arrangement. The Mother was also there, she was going from place to place observing all and speaking to people.... They were active and handsome youngmen and young women—I remember Sri Aurobindo quoting from the Rig Veda.....A whole herd of cattle all white there was a beautiful picture. Even so there was something in the atmosphere of the Ashram which gave it a special quality, it was clear, pure, limpid and transparent, there was a strange luminosity in it, and it was a very happy atmosphere. While you are there, you feel free and at ease and there were no petty feelings that we have here in the normal life of the world, no anger, no jealousy, no selfishness, no ugliness: there was

a happy co-ordination of all persons and things."

Gupta continues his narration: "My feeling is that this ashram that I saw was in fact the inner reality of our ashram here, that inner-ashram which is within us all: what we see at present is the outer form, the material form which is a good deal deformed and even falsified in many ways. Indeed that inner ashram has an outer worldly atmosphere of its own, an atmosphere of verified heights. I do not know whether you have heard what Mother said more than once, that all children here when they live here for sometime imbibe and carry a new atmosphere." May be an atmosphere where nobody is destined to remain for ever.

Simply adhering to external austerities and rituals without internal purity and renunciation was also frowned upon by Sri Ramakrishna. He used to say that it is just like the Brahmin who was possessed by a ghost. It seems whenever the Brahmin went to take a bath in the Holy Ganga river, the ghost would jump on a tree on the banks of the river and sit there. The Brahmin used to take a bath, utter some mantras, offer oblations and worship many gods and goddesses. Feeling good that he had made good progress in his spiritual life, he would start to return home: as soon as he came under the tree the ghost which was watching and waiting would jump down upon him and repossess him. Once again the poor Brahmin would be burdened with desires, worries and sorrow. What Sri Ramakrishna wanted to stress was that however much we talk of taking a bath in the ganges etc. (i.e. the outer atmosphere)—the ghost within us re-possess us once again because the inner change is not brought about, nourished and taken care of in the way it should have been. Simply

adhering to external rituals and practices which makes up the outer atmosphere was thus mocked at by Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Gupta, follower and admirer of the Mother seems to agree with Sri Ramakrishna when he says: "But we are here, we lead a double life as it were, part of us is here, and part in that other inner ashram, as though one leg this side and the other on that side over the fence..... they run parallel to each other or oftener, intertwined or intermixed, badly dovetailed. They are to be made one single existence: the inner must take up, assimilate into itself the outer, the outer must allow itself to be cleansed and emptied of its dross and be possessed altogether by the inner. They are to form one as it is said, streamlined entity, one being, one life, one body."

Followers of ZEN Buddhism are more strict and demanding. For them : "This state of inner consciousness, about which one cannot make any logical statement, must be realized before one can have any intelligent talk on ZEN. Words are only as index to this state: through them we are enabled to get into its signification, but do not look to words for absolute guidance. Try to see first of all in what mental state the ZEN Masters are so acting. They are not carrying on all those seeming absurdities, or, as some might say, those silly trivialities, just to suit their capricious moods. They have certain firm basis of truth obtained from a deep personal experience. There is in all their seemingly crazy performances a systematic demonstration of the most vital truth. When seen from this truth, even the moving of the whole universe is of no more account than the flying of a mosquito or the waving of a fan. The thing

is to see one spirit working throughout all these. which is an absolute affirmation, with not a particle of nihilism in it." (An Introduction to ZEN Buddhism. by D.T. Suzuki).

.Most probably Nivedita would not have agreed to Sri Gupta's streamlined and organisational pattern of oneness and that is where life in most of the ashramas are very badly struck up also. Ashram life does not mean, rather cannot mean only one mono-type—it is a harmonious life orchestrated rightly, where individuality must have a place with plenty of legitimate freedom. Without individual freedom how can there be any community. And within the community specially, there must be individualities rather units. Only they must be harmoniously held together and geared to achieve some high and great purposes. Usually such community-life as in most of the ashramas, call it inner or outer—continues so long there is a charismatic, dynamic and strong leader, afterwards slowly it slumps down in its spirit of that oneness gradually.

The whole philosophy of Sri Aurobindo as well as that of the Mother revolves round the concept of 'SUPER MIND' which Mother herself explained thus: "Sri Aurobindo's work is a unique earth-transformation. Above the mind there are several levels of conscious being, among which the really divine world is what Sri Aurobindo has called the Supermind, the world of the truth. It is the direct descent of the Supramental Consciousness and Power that alone can utterly re-create life in terms of the Spirit. There is not a shadow of doubt as to the issue of the work we have in hand. It is no more experiment but an inevitable manifestation of the Supramental."

Elaborating further she said: "The Supramental descent will be the successful consummation of our work, a descent of which the full glory has not been yet or else the whole face of life would have been different. By slow degree the supramental is influencing us, now one part of our being and now another feels the distant touch of its divinity: but when it comes down in all its native power a supreme radial change will seize our nature. We are only going through a time of preparation, but once the world conditions are ready the full descent will take place carrying everything before it. Its presence will be unmistakable, its force will brook no resistance, doubts and difficulties will not torture you any longer. For the Divine will stand manifest-unveiled in its total perfection. I do not however, mean to say that the whole world will at once feel its presence or be transformed but I do mean that a part of humanity will know and participate in its descent—say, this little world of ours here. From there the transfiguring Grace will most effectively radiate. And fortunately for the aspirants, that successful future will materialise for them in spite of all the obstacles set in its way by unregenerate human nature! The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality. It is at work here, and a day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognise it.

On Wednesday the 29th February 1956 Mother claimed that "Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon the earth in an uninterrupted flow!" As is recorded in her personal diary and which was publicly announced only after four years.

MOTHER, ASHRAM AND FOLLOWERS

Actually MOTHER was the architect and the power behind the Ashram at Pondicherry and she was known for her love and discipline amongst the devotees. Nalini Kanta Gupta tells us: "The Mother taught by her manner and speech and showed us in actual practice what was the meaning of disciple and master: she has always practiced what she preached. She showed us, by not taking her seat in front of or on the same level as Sri Aurobindo, but by sitting on the ground, what it meant to be respectful to one's Master, what was real courtesy."

During the year 1914, the Mother used to come every day between 4 and 4.30 P.M. to Sri Aurobindo's house and bring sweets prepared from coconut. Mani and Nalini and others used to go to play football at 5 o'clock. The Mother used to prepare cocoa for Sri Aurobindo. Paul Richard would come up and join them. Every Sunday there was a standing invitation to Sri Aurobindo and all the members of the house, for dinner at the Mother's house. Sri Aurobindo used to go to Mother's house (which was very near) at about 4.30 in the afternoon and the other members joined them after coming from the football ground. The talk would be prolonged up to 9 or 10 at night."

"Till 1939 the Ashram was a well-knit community, sadhana oriented. Children were not admitted and there were no families as such. After the outbreak of the War, however, a gradual change came over. Due to insecure conditions created by the threat of Japanese invasion, a few bombings and the general sense of fear in the north-eastern regions of the country, a large number of devotees

sought refuge in the Ashram. The mother would not refuse and the ashram doors were opened. Men, women, children—all came down and found their place of refuge in the ashram at Pondicherry. That was how it became necessary for the Mother to start a school for children in 1943 with a small number of students. This school was to develop in due course into the present Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education where Sri Aurobindo's seminal ideas of right education and the Mother's philosophy of fivefold education with special emphasis on the perfection of the body are being worked out." (SRI AUROBINDO by M.P. Pandit, page 329).

"But the Ashram was made to be a conscious collective centre where these things should and must change from within (inner), not under external compulsion and that is why the Ashram was not given an authority strong enough to dominate or control them. Here the change should be conscious and as I said from within" Further, "And each one of us who are here in the Ashram is in turn an epitome of the Ashram and all the good and bad elements and movements are in one way or other represented in him—even in the best ones, the wrong movements can cast a shadow. So it is the task for everyone especially the so-called 'best' one, that is, those who are more conscious to detect and reject and change all that is wrong and false and develop all that is true and good, and thereby to change or help change the very elements in Ashram atmosphere as well as outside: that is the only solution and the only remedy—to cure the ills individually, personally in one's own consciousness. Then only a conscious collective consciousness can grow and develop in the Ashram with all these

living and conscious units or cells and thereby change into its own condition, as well as the condition of India, also the condition of the world." (Complete Works by Nalini Kanta Gupta, Volume 6).

Swami Vivekananda, the Guru of Nivedita termed it as subjective process of change, individual units of change and a voluntary submission to change but never a change imposed or forced upon from an outside central authority. So naturally Nivedita was an ardent believer in this path of individual approach mainly structured into a collective change—and not at all in a so called collective change brought about by any fiat, law, dictation or coercion.

While talking at a public reception at Madras in the year 1902 she emphasised this point: "Just as it has been realised already that in religion you have a great deal to give, and nothing to learn from the West, so also in social matters it will be well to understand that what changes are necessary you are fully competent to make for yourselves and no outsider has the right to advise or interfere. Changes no doubt there will be. Change is probably inseparable from the process of life. But these changes must be original, self-determined, self wrought. WHAT! Does the civilization of three thousand years mean nothing that the young nation of the West should be in a position to lead the people of the East?" How well these her words apply to today's generation who blindly ape the West, specially in the material quest!

The MOTHER felt sorry for such people who refuse to change by giving a very apt illustration: she said: ".....there are people who come to me

and say that they would like to go home, for their health does not permit them to continue here; it is gradually getting worse and they ask for my permission.....these people do not know or see or feel in the least that they are here in the best of condition for cure, nowhere else in the world would they get anything like the opportunity or help that is here.....Being here you continue to live the life of your old self, your ego, if you refuse to change, naturally you do not get the benefit of the help that is given here. And when you refuse to go forward, not only do you halt where you are, you go backward. That is the meaning of one's health getting worse. Ofcourse if you ask my permission to go away, you have it." She was frank enough to admit her limitations for she has remarked: "I may destroy the adverse force that has possessed you. I may repeat the action a thousand times. But each time that a vacuum is created it will be filled up by one of the many other forces that try to rush in. That is why, I say, I wake the Will to conquer!" (Complete Works of Nalini Kanta Gupta, Vol. 4). Mother like Ichhamoyee (The Will Embodied) and Tara (the Goddess of Will) fulfilled many aspirations of the devotees and disciples and was concerned with all aspects of the Ashram life.

One of the admirers of Mother from Japan was Mr. Okhawa who had met Mother in Japan and spent some day with her. He reminisces: "I shall tell you of the Mother and of the great life we lived in the dawn-days of Asia. I drank deep of Indian thought when I was young and I dreamed of a new Asia. I harboured Rash Bihari Bose and Gupta in exile.....It happened one day that Hara Prasad came to Japan, he spoke on Indian

philosophy. I went and listened to him. I was one of the fifty men and women who attended. Among them was a young lady who stirred me to my depths. Something in her drew me to her—call it grace, call it the immutable light of the polar star that makes the magnet point to its own centre. A fragrance was wafted from her to me as from Paradise, sweet with the scent of immemorial days. There was light in her eyes as of the great morning of the world that was about to dawn. The lecturer spoke clearly, even eloquently, I heard him mechanically. But my soul was listening eagerly to the silence in her depths and straining to catch a glimpse of the vastness in her soul. I saw Hara Prasad the next morning. And what was my surprise when he said that this very day the lady had desired to see me! I was THRILLED! I was moved to the very roots of my heart. I met her as a brother and friend and was privileged to be her fellow-worker, not realising what great cause I worked for and with what success beyond my dreams. She and her friends dreamed of a new Asia, a new world. They were living to touch with another who dreamed dreams and saw visions in the ancient land of the Buddha. That was Sri Aurobindo himself.....I was drawn into the magic circle of their light and all unconscious, I lived on the very edge of heaven. We lived together for a year. We sat together in meditation every night for an hour. I practised ZEN and they practised yoga. But these twin paths led us to the same mountain heights..... Mother had a will that moved mountains and an intellect sharp as the edge of a sword. Her thought was clarity itself and her resolve stronger than the roots of the giant oak. Her mystic depths were deeper than the ocean.....

To measure is to be apart and to assess is to be far away. Distance alone can ensure description. How could I, who lived in the very heart of Fujiyama, tell you about the volume of its fire and flame and the dimensions of its light!" Madame Okhawa was also very fond of Mother in her own way. If Indians claimed Mother to be their own, Madame Okhawa swears that though: "She came from the far-off land of France, it was my feeling that she was all along like me, a daughter of Japan. I could swear that she was my very sister whenever she wore a kimono.....I do not know what it is to be a mother. But I probably know more than any other what it is to be a sister." (*Glimpses of Mother's Life*, Vol. I, page 190).

While Mother was in Japan she had another close friend—Madame Kobayashi who says: "She (Mother) came here to learn Japanese and to be one of us. But we had so much to learn from her and her charming and unpredictable ways. She was a sweet friend, she was clever, very clever.....Both of us were young. And both of us were peering to glimpse a lovelier landscape and gaze at a bluer sky. She revered a master from the ancient land of Buddha. And he felt sure that his was the gospel of the morrow: The Veda of the dawning day. Her eyes glistened with a new delight and wonder when she spoke to me about him. But I was a Buddhist, Okhata, my Master, had taught me the mystery of meditation, the still sitting of the lovely statue of Nara. My husband a surgeon, had given up opening the abdomens of men. He counselled them instead to go to Nature for a cure and to sit still in the manner of Okhata, to brood on the navel-lotus that folds or unfolds the health of body and soul. But your MOTHER

said that the land of the spirit was ONE. She meditated with me in her lovely attic. We sat together and explored our inner depths, each in her own way. She made me realise that we thought the same thoughts and beheld the same vision.

While in Japan, Mirra (MOTHER) came to know one person who had great belief in discipline. According to Mother: "He had a theory and it was on this theory that he had founded his group: that one can think in any part of one's being whatsoever, if one concentrate there. That is to say, instead of thinking in your head, you can think in your chest.....He took the stomach as the seat of PRANA, you see, that is, the vital force.....he was full of good-will and he said that most human miseries come from the fact that men think in their heads, that this makes the head ache, tires you and takes away your mental clarity. On the other hand, if you learn how to think here (gesture indicating stomach) it gives you power, strength and calmness. And the most remarkable thing is that he had attained a kind of ability to bring down the mental power, the mental force exactly there: the mental activity was generated there, and no longer in the head. And he had cured considerable number of people, considerable, some hundreds, who used to suffer from terrible headaches, he had cured them in this way."

There were several others like Champaklal who served Mother sincerely and devotedly and was a real asset to the Ashram. He also collected pieces of rare conversations Mother had with people and called it CHAMPAKLAL'S TREASURES. There was Nalini Kanta Gupta but for whom history would have lost lots of information about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He has often referred to Sri

Aurobindo and the Mother in his voluminous 'Complete Works of Nalini Kanta Gupta.' There is Purani who played a role in the early days of the Ashram and Mother had just come from Japan and he saw her for the first time: "This time I saw the Mother for the first time. She was standing near the staircase when Sri Aurobindo was going upstairs after lunch. Such unearthly beauty I had never seen—she appeared to be about 20 years whereas she was more than 37 years old. I found the atmosphere of the Ashram tense. The Mother and Dutta i.e. Miss Hodgson had come to stay in No. 41 rue Francois Martin. The house had undergone a great change. There was a clean garden in the open courtyard, every room had simple and decent furniture—a mat, a chair and a small table. There was an air of tidiness and order. This was no doubt the effect of the Mother's presence. But yet the atmosphere was tense because Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were engaged in fighting with forces of the vital plane" (Ibid, page 212/213).

Sister Nivedita was known for her friendly nature and she made life-long lasting friendships with many Indians. Her friends in the United Kingdom and Americas were legendary. Among the Indians she was very close to Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta, brother of Swami Vivekananda, Dr. & Mrs. Bose, the well known scientist couple, Nandalal Bose—the well known painter, Sri Gokhale, Mr. R.C. Dutt, Mr. Bipin Chandra Pal, Mr. Ananda Coomaraswamy etc.etc. Sri Aurobindo and Nivedita were friends and co-workers for the independence of the country. There are conflicting reports about Nivedita helping Sri Aurobindo to go away to Chandranagore, which was then under the French rule to escape arrest by the British Government. What is clear is that:

"Sri Aurobindo had so much trust in Nivedita that he left the paper (KARMA YOGIN) completely in her hands when he left. Nivedita came forward to take the onerous task upon herself as she had done so before more than once. Though never seen in the front line of action, she had always been a silent, selfless worker behind the scenes. She continued the KARMA YOGIN until its suspension in April 1910, when Sri Aurobindo had already reached Pondicherry. During the three months that it was in her hands, the tone of the paper changed from politics to the Swami's ideologies. The same year the report of the Swami's birthday was also published in it." (SISTER NIVEDITA, by Pravrajika Atmaprana, page 226).

MOTHER AND POLITICS

Once Swami Vivekananda aptly remarked: ".....to the other nations of the world, religion is one among the many occupations of life. There is politics, there are the enjoyments of social life, there is all that wealth can buy or power can bring, there is all that the senses can enjoy; and among all these various occupations of life and all this searching after something which can give yet a little more whetting to the cloyed senses—among all these, there is perhaps a little bit of religion. But here in India, religion is the one and the only occupation of life" (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 3, page 106).

Into such a land Mother had come and succeeded in becoming a true daughter of Mother India and as such there is little wonder that her activities should be tinged with a dash of politics here and there.

It is reported that Mother had told Sri Aurobindo that India would be free; in her own words: "After going to a certain plane, I said to Aurobindo, 'INDIA IS FREE'. I did not say 'She will be free' I said 'She is free'. Well between that moment when it was an accomplished fact and the time when it was translated into the material world on earth, how many years were necessary? It was in 1915, and liberation came in 1947, that is thirty-two years later "to a question whether she saw India free, she replies:" No, I did not see: I KNEW. I meant specially what happened in 1947, that is, the withdrawal of foreign domination, that is all. Nothing but that, not her moral or spiritual freedom. I did not speak of that at all. I simply said she was free from foreign domination, because, even to a question Sri Aurobindo put to me, I answered from the same plane: There will be no violence, this will come about without a revolution, it will be the English who will decide to go away of their own accord, for things will become too hot for them owing to certain world circumstances...." (THE MOTHER, page 30/31).

It is also reported that during the World War II, both Mother and Sri Aurobindo supported the Allies much to the chagrin of their devotees. This is clear when "all over the country, protests, calumnies and insinuations" were heaped upon them for their contribution to the War fund. Mother justified their action by admonishing thus: "It has become necessary to state emphatically and clearly that all who by their thoughts and wishes are supporting and calling for the victory of the Nazis are by that very fact collaborating with the Asura against the Divine and helping to bring about the victory of the Asuras." (TUSA-132-133). In spite of

their support to the Allies: ".....the Ashram inspite of all our help, now suspected of being a nest of spies or enemy agents. Police search was apprehended and even the question of disbanding the Ashram was in the Air."

Nirodbaran recollects the conditions prevailing during the war years: "Our Ashram came in for a good deal of suffering and inconvenience in the wake of the War. Not to speak of incurring the wrath and abuse of our own countrymen, the resentment of a number of our inmates for our support of the War: the Ashram lost some of its valiant sons in the great holocaust and encouraged others to join the War. It had to open its doors to the children of all disciples who were in the danger zone, so we were all of a sudden changed into a large community without sufficient means to maintain ourselves. And due to the general embargoes and restrictions imposed by the Government the most necessary food supply was either cut off or reduced to the minimum. Children had to go without food sometimes specially milk.....Unfortunately, in the Ashram itself there were some who wished for Hitler's victory, not for love of Hitler but out of their hatred of British domination. (Ibid, page 158-59).

The MOTHER had very definite views about the scientific discoveries specially made during the II World War period. Talking about the Atomic Bomb she said: "The Atomic Bomb is in itself the most wonderful achievement and the sign of a growing power of man over the material nature. But what is to be regretted is that this material progress and mastery is not the result of and in keeping with a spiritual progress and mastery which alone has the power to contradict and counteract the

terrible danger coming from these discoveries. We cannot and must not stop progress, but we must achieve it in an equilibrium between the inside and the outside." (Ibid, 103-104).

Like the MOTHER's, Sister Nivedita's stay in India was punctuated by many political events: "It has been said that due to her political leanings, Nivedita preferred to resign from the purely spiritual Order of Sri Ramakrishna rather than violate its rules and regulations. Her letters since 1900 show her growing interest in the political destiny of India." She preferred to follow the words of her beloved Master, Swami Vivekananda: "For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote—this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain Gods disappear for that time from our minds. This is the only God that is awake..... When we have worshipped this, we shall be able to worship all other Gods." So "Nivedita's work during the following ten years show how India and her future became her chief concern..... It cannot be denied that she brought the full force of her intellectual and moral powers to bear upon the national movement."

How much Nivedita cared for the right kind of education to be imparted to Indian men and women is clear from the way she opposed Lord Curzon's Universities Commission and its Universities Act. Blazing with anger against her own country-man—Lord Curzon she thundered: "We have had a Universities Commission lately, which has done its very best to kill all education, and especially all science education. This is THE point in India's wrongs that fires me, the right of India to be India, the right of India to think for herself, the right of India to knowledge. Were this not the great grievance I might be fired by her right to

bread, to justice, to other things, but this outweighs all." (Letters of Sister Nivedita, Vol. II, page 540).

Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta relates in his book 'SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: PATRIOT-PROPHET' that : "It is a truism to say that there is a co-relation between Swami's appeals to his young countrymen and the intensity of revolutionary urge in the minds of the young men of succeeding generations. Since the foundation of the Revolutionary Party of Bengal, in which Swamiji's foreign disciple Sister Nivedita took at first an active interest and was the member of the Executive Committee, his work along with the writings and life of Mazzani as well as life of Garibaldi in Bengali were the mainspring of inspiration to the youths of India." (page 133).

The partition of the country into India and Pakistan hurt the Mother definitely: in anguish she stated: "Clearly this is not a solution; it is a test, an ordeal which if we live it out in all sincerity, will prove to us that it is not by cutting a country into small bits that we shall bring about its unity and its greatness: it is not by opposing interests against each other that we can win for it prosperity: it is not by setting one dogma against another that we can serve the spirit of Truth. In spite of all, India has a single soul and while we have to wait till we can speak of an India one and indivisible our cry must be: LET THE SOUL OF INDIA LIVE FOR EVER!" (Glimpses of Mothers Life. Vol. II, page 170).

Nirodbaran narrates how joyously Mother celebrated the independence of India: "When the news of the final victory came, we celebrated it as such as the people outside, particularly because it coincided with Sri Aurobindo's birthday. It was

on this occasion that for the first time the Mother hoisted her flag over the terrace of Sri Aurobindo's room. The Mother called it the spiritual flag of India. In the afternoon she appeared on the terrace when the members of the Ashram greeted her by singing *Bande Mataram* after which she called out: 'JAI HIND' with such a look and gesture that we still remember the moment. The evening programme included the electric illuminations of the courtyard inside the Ashram compound." (Ibid).

From the very beginning Mother wanted to merge, to become one with Mother-India and she wrote: "I am French by birth and early education. I am Indian by choice and predilection. In my consciousness there is no antagonism between the two, on the contrary, they combine very well and complete one another. I knew also that I can be of service to both equally, for my only aim in life is to give a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo's great teaching and in his teaching he reveals that all the nations are essentially one and meant to express the Divine Unity upon earth through an organised and harmonious diversity..... I want to mark this day (15th August 1954, the day Pondicherry along with other French territories became part of India) by the expression of a long-cherished wish, that of becoming an Indian citizen. From the first time I came to India—1914. I felt that India is my true country, the country of my soul and spirit." This does not mean that she did not love France, on the contrary she pleaded: "To reject one nationality in order to obtain another is not an ideal solution. So I hope I shall be allowed to adopt a double nationality, that is to say, to remain French while I become an Indian." (Ibid, page 263).

SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EDUCATION

On 24th April, 1951, the Mother presided over a convention where it was resolved to establish an 'International University Centre'. This is one of the most recent forms under which Sri Aurobindo conceived the development of his work, was to establish at Pondicherry an International University Centre open to students from all over the world. According to Mother: ".....for years he (Sri Aurobindo) considered as one of the best means of preparing the future humanity to receive the supramental light that will transform the elite of today into a new race manifesting upon earth the new light and force and life." The Centre was declared open by the Mother on 6th January, 1952 under the new name SRI AUROBINDO INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY CENTRE OF EDUCATION.

On the occasion, Mother with great confidence declared: "I am perfectly sure, I am quite confident, there is not the slightest doubt in my mind, that this University, which is being established here, will be the greatest seat of knowledge upon earth..... It may take fifty years, it may take a hundred years, and you may doubt about my being here: I may be there or not, but these children of mine will be there to carry out my work" Her prediction has proved cent per cent true. The institution has been universally acclaimed and you will find people from many nations mingling and living as one family under the benign grace of the Mother.

It is also true that there is a feeling among certain sections of people that the education

imparted in this University is very much same as in other universities and there is nothing special about it! While agreeing to a certain extent with this discordant view, Mother explains that this is due mainly because of lack of professors trained to impart the knowledge as well as the lack of suitable books on the subject. According to Mother: ".....the books which are used should be prepared here, with the extracts chosen here, even with the method of teaching worked out here..... The preparation of the material, for instance, for the true understanding of things, that takes time."

Sister Nivedita whose forte was education and for which very purpose Swami Vivekananda had invited her to come and make India her home had very strong notions about education, specially that of the girls and women. She was of the opinion that: "What India needs today is education, more and deeper than any she has yet attained. In contemplating this we must not unduly exalt our need of others. None is taught by another. True teaching is always self-teaching. Real education is self-education. By our own vision of the ideal, and by our own struggle to reach its height, do we really rise: by no other means whatsoever. It matters nothing in what form the ideal appears to us: it matters not at all whether the upward path is hard or easy. All that matters is our own struggle. By what do we rise. The Samaj is the strength of the family; the home is behind the civic life: and the civic life sustains the nationality. This is the formula of human combination. The essentials of all four elements we have amongst us. We have inherited all that India needs, in our ancient Dharma."

"Both Nivedita and Christine were familiar with the latest methods of education and in a short time they made a success of their experiment. Nivedita took keen interest in every child who attended the school and kept a detailed record of her progress.....The curriculum of the school included Bengali and English, Arithmetic, Geography and History. As the school was founded on the kindergarten system 'in which all knowledge is supposed to receive a foundation in concrete experience and all work to appear to the child as play' drawing from observation, brushwork, clay-modelling, mat-weaving, paper cutting, sewing and games were introduced in the course of studies." (Sister Nivedita by Pravrajika Atmaprana, page 160).

THE MOTHER AND PRAYERS

Sister Nivedita was greatly influenced when she first came to India by the dictum in every Hindu household: "Without praying, no eating; without bathing no praying" and by her beloved Master's (Swami Vivekananda's) every day prayer—"I do not want wealth or beauty: this world or another, but Thee, O God! I have become weary. Oh, take me by the hand Lord, I take shelter with Thee. Make me Thy servant. Be Thou my refuge. Take me by the hand as a father takes his son and leave me not."

It is reported that when the World War I broke out Mother was upset and agitated. To quote: "On August 4th 1914, the First World War broke out. In her 'Prayers' from this time onwards the Mother faced the sanguinary holocaust of the trench warfare in Europe and made an appeal to the Lord as a true representative of suffering humanity in the wartime world. She prayed:

“Or Lord, O eternal Master!

Men driven by the conflict of forces, are performing a sublime sacrifice, they are offering their lives in a bloodstained holocaust.....

O Lord, O eternal Master, grant that all this may not be in vain, grant that the inexhaustible torrents of Thy Divine Force may spread over the earth and penetrate its troubled atmosphere, the struggling energies, all the violent chaos of battling elements: grant that the pure light of Thy Knowledge and the inexhaustible love of Thy Benediction may fill all heart, penetrate all souls, illumine ever consciousness and out of this obscurity out of this sombre, terrible and potent darkness, bring forth the splendour of Thy majestic Presence. Accept this offering, answer our call
COME !!

It is reported that: “It was in 1914 that the identification (of Mother) with the Universal Mother took place, the identification of the physical consciousness with her. Of course I knew before this that I was the Mother but the complete identification took place only in 1914. (Glimpses of Mother's Life, Vol. I, page 154).

This identification with the Universal Mother, she vividly describes in her prayer to Universal Mother:

“O Mother Divine, with what fervour, what ardent love I came to Thee in Thy deepest consciousness, in Thy high status of sublime love and perfect felicity, and I nestled so close into Thy arms and loved Thee with so intense a love that I became altogether Thyself. Then in the silence of our mute ecstasy a voice

from yet profounder depths arose and the voice said: 'Turn towards those who have need of Thy love.' All the grades of consciousness appeared, all the successive worlds...." (Ibid. page 154).

Such identifications are not rare in the life of great lovers of God. Swami Vivekananda once himself narrated his own experience with his Guru Sri Ramakrishna: ".....no sooner did he see me than he called me joyfully to him and made me sit at one end of his bedstead. I sat down but found him in a strange mood. He spoke something indistinctly to himself, looked steadfastly at me and slowly began coming towards me. I thought another scene of lunacy was going to be enacted. Scarcely had I thought so when he came to me and placed his right foot on my body and immediately I had a wonderful experience. I saw with my eyes open that all the things in the room together with the walls were rapidly whirling and receding into an unknown region, and my 'I-sense' together with the whole universe was, as it were going to vanish in an all devouring great void. I was overwhelmed with a terrible fear. I knew that the destruction of the 'I-sense' was death so I thought that death was before me, very near at hand. Unable to control myself, I cried out loudly, saying, 'Ah! what is it you have done to me? I have my parents you know!' Laughing loudly at my words he touched my chest with his hands and said: 'Let it cease now. It need not be done all at once. It will come to pass in course of time' I was amazed to see how that extraordinary experience vanished immediately as quickly as it had come."

Another of Mother's prayers to Divine Mother is very touching and stresses the helplessness of

a mere human:

“O Divine and adorable Mother, with Thy help what is there that is impossible? The hour of realisations is near and Thou has assured us of Thy aid that we may perform integrally the supreme Will. Thou has accepted us as fit intermediaries between the unthinkable realities and the relativities of the physical world and Thy constant presence in our midst is a token of Thy active collaboration.

The Lord has willed and Thou dost execute
A new Light shall break upon the earth
A new world shall be born.
And the things that were promised shall be fulfilled.

Sri Ramakrishna, the saint of Dakshineswar and chosen ideal of Sister Nivedita used to express the same thoughts in his own simple manner:

O Mother, all is done after Thine own sweet Will

Thou art in truth, well-willed, Redeemer of mankind,

Thou workest Thine own work, men only call it theirs

Thou art the Moving Force, and I the mere machine

The house am I, and Thou the Spirit dwelling there

I am the chariot and Thou the Charioteer,

I move alone as Thou, O Mother, movest me.

What impresses one is the mental and spiritual attitude of Mother in accepting everything, good or bad, as the Divine Will. In March 1915, Mother had to leave her beloved Pondicherry and all that

was associated with it for France because of the First World War. Although somewhat depressed at the very thought of leaving Pondicherry she takes consolation in the belief that it is all Divine Will. Describing her mental state she writes:

Solitude, a harsh, intense solitude and always this strong impression of having been flung headlong into an inferno of darkness! I cannot prevent my total submission from taking on a hue of melancholy, and the calm and mute converse with the Master within is transformed for a moment into an invocation that almost supplicates..... O Lord, what have I done that thou hast thrown me thus into the sombre Night?.....I am exiled from every spiritual happiness, and of all ordeals this O Lord, is surely the most painful that Thou canst impose but most of all the withdrawal of Thy Will which seems to be a sign of total disapprobation. Strong is the growing sense of rejection, and it needs all the ardour of an untiring faith to keep the external consciousness thus abandoned to itself from being invaded by an irremediable sorrow.....I will not implore even Thy mercy, for what Thou wilt for me I too will. All my energy is in tension solely to advance, always to advance step by step, despite the depth of the darkness, despite the obstacles of the way, and whatever comes, O Lord, it is with a fervent and unchanging love that Thy decision will be welcomed. Even if Thou findest the instrument unfit to serve Thee, the instrument belongs to itself no more, it is Thine. Thou canst destroy or magnify it, it consists not in itself, it wills nothing, it can do nothing without Thee! (Ibid, page 159).

The Mother's view on faith is also very unique and novel; She tells: "I have been to holy places, I have seen monuments considered as very highly religious....in Japan and elsewhere, they were not always the same kind of temples or churches nor were they the same gods but the impression they left on me, my experiences of them everywhere were almost the same but with slight differences. There is usually a force concentrated at the place, but its character depends entirely upon the faith of the faithful: also there is a difference between the force as it really exists and the form in which it appears to the faithful. For instance, in a most famous and most beautiful place of worship which was, from the standpoint of art, the most magnificent creation one could imagine, I saw within its holy of holies a huge black Spider that had spread its net all around caught within it and absorbed all the energies emanating from the devotion of the people, their prayers and all that. It was not a very pleasant spectacle. But the people who were there and prayed felt divine contact, they received all kinds of benefits from their prayers. And yet the truth of the matter was what I saw. The people had the faith and their faith changed what was bad into something that was good to them. Now if I had gone and told them: 'Do you think it is God you are praying to? It is only a formidable vital Spider that is sucking on your force' surely it would not have been very charitable on my part. But everywhere it is almost the same thing. There is a vital force presiding. And vital beings feed upon the vibrations of human emotions. Very few are they, a microscopic number, who got to the temples and churches, and holy places with the true religious feeling, that is to say, not to

pray or beg something of God. but to offer themselves, to express gratitude. to aspire to surrender. One in a million would be too many. Those, when they are there, get some touch of the Divine, just for the moment....." (Ibid., 199).

REMARKABLE FEATURES OF MOTHER'S ASHRAM

The MOTHER was very fond of sports and missed no opportunity to introduce new games for both the Ashramites as well as students. Being a very good tennis player herself she used to impress upon the importance of a healthy and strong body for the pursuance of spirituality. Her 'PLAYGROUND' which was very famous we have already referred some pages back. It is said that ".....the Mother very much liked games of skill. She told me once that we should play games that demand dexterity. To show us how important it was to develop this faculty she asked each one in turn to raise the lid of a crystal bowl and replace it without making the slightest noise. We all tried but only the Mother could replace the lid without making a sound" (Tara Jauhar in the 'Glimpses of the Mother's Life', page 222).

The Flower Game : This game was intended by the the Mother "to teach us the spiritual significance she gave to the flowers. In the beginning Mother provided us with about twenty cards on which pictures of flowers had been glued or painted. Below, in her own handwriting was written the meaning.....through this game, the Mother taught us to love flowers and understand them:" Besides these there were classes in French and Wednesday classes; in the latter classes Mother used to read a passage from one of her own books or from her translations of Sri Aurobindo's writings.

Dramas in the Ashram: The Mother also encouraged some of the students to take part in dramatic performances and herself wrote several pieces for them to present.

An exhibition on various kinds of flowers and their occult significance and they as corresponding vehicles to the Mother's action when so used by her was a regular event. Many flowers were shown either in themselves, or in pictures and paintings and embroideries and even by suggestion, and their significances and occult values were indicated and later all these information culled into a publication both in French and English languages.

29TH FEBRUARY, THE GOLDEN DAY

"Henceforth 29th February will be the day of the Lord" so declared the Mother. What happened during the meditation on Wednesday, February 29th, 1956 was recorded by the Mother in her diary on the same day but was made public four years later in the following message: "This evening the Divine Presence, concrete and material was there present amongst you. I had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe, and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine. As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that 'the time has come' and lifting with both hands a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces. Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow:.....It is interesting to note that the words—'the time has come'—which express what I simultaneously knew and willed when I found myself in front of the massive door on whose other

side was the world, were heard by me in English and NOT in French. It was as if Sri Aurobindo had spoken them." No wonder the Mother attached so much importance to this particular date.

Sister Nivedita also narrated her experience as a seeker of truth: "I was born and bred as Englishwoman and up to the age of eighteen I was trained and educated as English girls are. Christian religious doctrines were of course early instilled into me.....But after the age of eighteen I began to harbour doubts as to the truth of the Christian doctrines. Many of them began to seem to me false and incompatible with truth. These doubts grew stronger and stronger and at the same time my faith in Christianity tottered more and more.....Just then I happened to get a life of Buddha and in it I found that here also was a child who lived ever so many centuries before as the child Christ, but whose sacrifices were no less self-abnegating than those of the other.....And now came the turning point for my faith. I met the Swami (Swami Vivekananda) who afterwards became my Guru and whose teachings have given the relief that my doubting spirit had been longing for so long.....To not a few of us, the words of Swami Vivekananda came as living water to men perishing of thirst. Many of us had been conscious for years past of that growing uncertainty and despair with regard to religions, which has beset the intellectual life of Europe for half a century. Belief in the dogmas of Christianity had become impossible to us, and we had no means, such as we now hold, by which to separate the doctrinal shell from the kernel of reality in our faith. To these the Vedanta has given intellectual confirmation and philosophical expressions of their own mistrusted intuitions—

the peoples that walked in the darkness have seen a great light" (Lecture delivered at the Hindu Ladies Social Club in Bombay). The day Nivedita met Vivekananda proved to be a red-letter Day for her!

Practice of 'PRANAM' in the Ashram

This was a very solemn occasion when one offered one's respect and love to the Mother: devotees and disciples were allowed to offer their 'PRANAMS' twice in the day. The atmosphere on such occasion is described thus: "The Mother sat cross-legged on a low cushioned seat, her right foot partly left bare. We offered our pranams, one by one, placing our head on the bare part of her right foot and receiving blessings. To each of us she gave a look in the eyes before and after blessings. To some she gave blessings laying both her hands on their heads. A dish of flowers remained at her right side, artistically arranged. After blessings she gave a flower to each" Asked by a devotee about the significance of Mother giving a flower Sri Aurobindo said: "It is meant to help the realisation of the thing the flower stand for. It is when the Mother puts her force into the flower that it becomes more than a symbol. It can then become very effective if there is receptivity in the one who receives!" The Mother was more precise on the same: "There is a mental projection when you give a precise meaning to a flower. It can answer, vibrate to the contact of the projection, accept the meaning.... it is spontaneous movement, a very special vibration. If you are in contact with it, if you feel it, you can get an impression which may be translated as a thought. That is how I give a meaning to flowers and plants. There is a kind of identification with the vibration, a perception of the quality that it represents.....When I give flowers it is always

along with the capacity they represent. Each one receives according to his receptivity. I can transmit a state of consciousness more easily to a flower than to a man, it is very receptive, though it does not know how to formulate its experience to itself because it lacks a mind. But the pure psychic consciousness is instinctive to it. When, therefore, you offer flowers to me, their condition is almost always an index to yours.....If your aspiration is strong your flower-offering will be fresh. And if you are receptive you will be also very easily able to absorb the message I put in the flowers I give you. When I give them, I give you state of consciousness: the flowers are the mediums and it all depends on your receptivity whether they are effective or not."

Sister Nivedita also found the enamourment of an Indian for flowers interesting, for while describing a typical day in the life of a Hindu in her famous book 'THE WEB OF INDIAN LIFE' says: ".....their arrival at home finds already waiting there baskets of fruit and flowers which are to be used in worship; for one of the chief acts of Hindu devotion consists in burying the feet of the adored in flowers. The feet, from their contact with all the dusty and painful ways of the world, have come to be the lowliest and most despised of all parts of the body, while the head is so sacred that only a superior may touch it. To take the dust of the feet of the saints or of an image, therefore, and put it upon one's head, is emblematic of all reverence and sense of unworthiness and eager love will often address itself to the 'lotus-feet' of the beloved." And talking about the reverence in which flowers and fruits were held in the house of Holy Mother Sarada Devi Nivedita continues:

".....half-past nine or ten always found the younger women busy bringing incense and flowers and Ganges water for the mother's Puja, as it is called, and then, while she performed the daily ceremonies, they proceeded to make ready the fruits and sweets which were afterwards to be blessed and distributed." (Page 7).

Close associate of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother must have been influenced by the words of her Guru regarding the act of 'PRANAM': "No one should look upon the Pranam either as a formal routine or an obligatory ceremony or think himself under any compulsion to come there. The object of Pranam is not that the Sadhakas should offer a formal or ritual daily homage to the Mother, but that the Sadhakas may receive along with the Mother's blessings whatever spiritual help or influence they are in a condition to receive or assimilate. It is important to maintain a quiet and collected atmosphere for that purpose." It was also reported that "during the Pranam ceremony the Mother meditated for a few minutes."

THE SOUP DISTRIBUTION

Another occasion on which the devotees offered Pranam to Mother was during the soup distribution ceremony. It is said that all the devotees used to gather in a particular room where the lights were kept dim and complete peace prevailed. The seekers had to gather well before the arrival of the Mother. Mother would come and sit on a high chair and after moments of concentration go deep into meditation but both her hands would be stretched and covering the cauldron of hot soup in front of her. This gave the impression that she was blessing the broth with her palms downwards and

pouring in spiritual power into it. After a few moments still with her eyes half closed, the Mother would stir the soup and each devotee would come with his own cup and kneel before her. Then Mother would pour the hot soup into the cup, take it from the devotee up to her lips and then give it back to the sadhaka. Naturally this gave the devotees an opportunity to ask any questions or tell her something. It was not rare to find her sometimes completely lost in meditation and the outstretched cup will remain empty or half filled till all of a sudden she would get up with a jerk and resume the distribution. Asked once about the significance of this 'soup ceremony' Sri Aurobindo explained that "this soup ceremony was instituted in order to establish a means by which the sadhaka might receive something from the Mother by an interchange in the material consciousness."

PROSPERITY DAY

This was the day, invariably the first of every month when the Mother used to give all the sadhakas their month's requirements like clothes, paper for writing, reading material and other necessities. This was also the occasion when the Mother's sense of humour and playfulness came to the fore. It is said that while walking amongst the devotees all of a sudden Mother would throw up in the air chocolates and toffees and there would be a great scramble amongst the sadhakas to catch the prized possessions and would make Mother break out in laughter seeing their struggle to get them.

DARSHAN DAYS IN THE ASHRAM

With the increase of people seeking spiritual guidance both from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother it became necessary to fix days for Darshan :

formerly there was no such system and anybody could approach them freely and discuss their problems. "After November 1926, three Darshan days were fixed in the Ashram. One was the birthday of the Mother, Feb. 21; another of Sri Aurobindo—August 15 and the third the Siddhi day. Later another day was declared as Darshan Day and it was on 24th April, the day of final arrival of Mother in Pondicherry.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

It is said: ".....though free from outer grandeur, the solemnity and calmness with which the auspicious advent of the year was celebrated was a sight worth seeking. Every New Year's Day gave a fresh impetus to human progress and brought something new."

REASONS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ASHRAM

Very often the question arises in the mind of devotees and general public as to why Sri Aurobindo and the Mother desired to establish an Ashram: would it not been more advantageous for them to do Sadhana by themselves and realise the Truth than getting entangled with the onerous task of running an institution and the problems it created almost everyday. Peter Heehs in his book 'SRI AUROBINDO—A Brief Biography' observes: "Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did not expect the disciples to help actively in this work. The novices were in fact a great drain on their energy and without them they certainly would have been able to advance more quickly. Why then did they accept disciples? Would it not have been better for the two of them to withdraw temporarily from outward contacts and to do intensive sadhana together in order to prepare

a solid foundation for the 'external work'? When they began their collaboration, this possibility presented itself as one of two alternatives. The other was to let the disciples form themselves into a sort of prototype of the proposed divine community. The latter alternative prevailed, but not as a result of a 'mental choice', the Mother explained later. 'It came spontaneously. The circumstances were such that there was no choice, that is, quite naturally, spontaneously, the group was formed in such a way that it became an imperative necessity.'

The community of sadhakas was required as a field of experimentation. If the force that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were 'bringing down' was to extend itself into the environment, as they intended, they needed to know in detail how it acted on ordinary men and women. The only way to obtain such knowledge was to stock their 'laboratory' with voluntary guinea pigs and to see what happened when the force came down. If the metaphor seems brutal, it should be remembered that scores, later hundreds of prospective disciples were turned away, and that those who were accepted considered themselves extremely fortunate. Close to the objects of their devotion, able to surrender responsibility of their sadhana to them, many of the chosen ones made rapid progress." (Page 135).

What does it mean when the Mother says: "Give all you are, give all you have, nothing more is asked of you but also nothing less?"

Mother herself had replied this question in a very logical way: She said, ".....that each one is asked to give what he has, that is, all his possessions whatever they may be, and what he is, that is, all his potentialities--which corresponds to the

consecration of one's life and the giving of all one's possessions—and that nothing more than this is asked. What you have, give that, what you are, give that, and your gift will be perfect, from the spiritual point of view it will be perfect. This does not depend upon the amount of wealth you have or the number of capacities in your nature: it depends upon the perfection of your gift, that is to say, on the totality of your gift.....The rich man, or even people who are quite well-off and have all sorts of things in life and give to the Divine what they have in surplus—for usually this is the gesture: one has a little more money than one needs, one has a few more things than one needs, and so, generously, one gives that to the Divine. It is better than giving nothing. But even if this 'little more' that what they need represents lakhs of rupees, the gift is less perfect than giving what one actually has. For it is not by the quantity or the quality that it is measured, it is by the sincerity of the giving and the absoluteness of the giving." (Questions and Answers—MOTHER, page 15).

Tributes to the MOTHER

Someone while talking about the Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry referred to the respective roles played by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as Purusha and Prakriti for it was the dynamic and scintillating personality and bubbling enthusiasm of the Mother that were responsible for the establishment and growth of the Ashram. Sri Dilip Kumar Roy in his book 'SRI AUROBINDO CAME TO ME' states that ".....without her dominant presence, superhuman patience and genius for organisation (not to mention her ineffable personality of light and grace and courage) Sri Aurobindo's

Synthetic Yoga would never have found the convincing shape it has: in other words, his gospel could not have found adequate medium of expression in the practical field. But even this is by no means the whole story. For none can hope to understand Sri Aurobindo fully without a basic understanding of his estimate of the place of the Mother's divinity in his Yoga."

How well and how many times she saw Divinity in everything that was beautiful is well illustrated when she tells Sri Dilip Kumar Roy: "Anything that makes life exalting, anything that lifts you up above the lowest type of living in a mere animal harmony, anything that is great, noble, self-sacrificing, self-giving, inspiring, beautiful, is a missionary of the Divine. What I mean is: had it not been for the coming down of the Divine and His touching our souls with His higher attributes there could have been no evolution from the lesser to the greater. In other words, life would have stayed utterly drab and dismal if the Divine had not come and touched some part at least of our laden hearts into gold. So I repeat that whenever you see anything truly great, elevating or heart warming you ARE seeing the Divine without knowing it. Only you call it 'human in the noblest sense'—that is the root of confusion. Once you wrote to Sri Aurobindo that you simply love artists like Tagore and atheists like Russell or Sarat Chatterjee, because they depict beautiful things and stand up for noble values. But if and when they do that, they are standing up for the Divine values without knowing it....." (Ibid, page 447).

Similar ran the thoughts of Nivedita when she wrote in her book 'THE WEB OF INDIAN LIFE' that: "....the woman (Indian) pausing in the dying light

to salute the river brings us to another such instance. There is nothing occult in the passion of Hindus for the Ganges. Sheer delight in physical coolness, the joy of the eyes, and the gratitude of the husbandman made independent of rain, are sufficient basis. But when we add to this the power of personification common to naive peoples, and the peculiarly Hindu genius of idealism, the whole gamut of associations is accounted for. Indeed, it would be difficult to live long beside the Ganges and not fall under the spell of her personality. Yellow, leonine, imperious, there is in her something of the caprice, of the almost treachery, of beautiful women who have swayed the wills of the world.... For to the simple, the Ganges is completely mother. Does she not give life and food? To the pious she is the bestower of purity, and as each bather steps into her flood, he stoops tenderly to place a little of the water on his head, craving pardon with words of salutation for the touch of his foot. For the philosopher she is the current of his single life, sweeping irresistibly onward to the universal. To the travelled she tells of Banaras and the mountain snows and legends of Shiva the Great God and Uma Himavati, mother of all womanhood....." (page 5).

It was not essential for some other great souls to love certain things to be beautiful and inspiring: noble spirited people like Mother Teresa loved people who were utterly poor, sick and alone in the world with none to look after them in the twilight of their life. Eileen Egan in her book 'SUCH A VISION OF THE STREET' narrates how she (Mother Teresa) "acted to assert the inviolable and infinite dignity of each human being, even the most repulsive-looking. If she could do no more, she would invest

their last hours with something of that human dignity. And if she could do no more than allow them a human death rather than let them die like animals in the gutter, she would do that. For those cast off by all, she and the Sisters would mirror by their loving care the love of the Creator for all the human creatures who came forth from His hand." Her love for all the children of her Jesus was so intense that when with experience she learnt that no hospital was willing to admit a poor wretched dying person thrown out of the house she decided to open a home for them for she truly believed that "We cannot let a child of God die like an animal in the gutter." (page 64).

The Mother of Pondicherry saw Divinity in everything; once she told Dilip Kumar Roy: "For that the first thing is to recognise the Divine in the best values, to see HIM in everything that exalts, to be conscious—progressively and on every place of your being—of the movements which lead to confusion or the mixture of acquiring the power to discriminate unerringly between what is to be cherished and what is to be abolished. That is why one should once and for all, get rid of the confusion between the human Divine and remember that the Divine cannot fail you if you are utterly sincere and want Him above everything else...."

NECESSITY OF DISCIPLINE IN ORGANISATION

Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother recognised the need for strict discipline in any collective undertakings. Once Sri Aurobindo wrote to Dilip Kuamr Roy: "That organisation and order is necessary for all collective work: it has been an object of admiration and surprise for all from outside who have observed the Ashram: it is the reason

why the Ashram has been able to survive and outlived the malignant attacks of many people in Pondicherry who would otherwise have got it dissolved long ago. The Mother knew very well what she was doing and what was necessary for the work she had to do....Discipline itself is not something Western: in Oriental countries like Japan, China and India it was at one time all-regulating and supported by severe sanctions in a way that Westerners could not tolerate. Socially whatever objections we may make to it, it is a fact that it preserved Hindu religion and Hindu society through the ages and through all vicissitudes. Even in the spiritual life in India has had not only the free wandering ascetic, a law to himself, but has felt impelled to create orders of sannyasins with their rules and governing bodies and there have also been monastic institutions with a strict discipline. Since no work can be done successfully without these things—even the individual worker, the artist for instance, has to go through a severe discipline in order to become efficient....." (SRI AUROBINDO CAME TO ME, page 435).

CONCLUSION

Mother prayed to Sri Aurobindo: "(that), wouldst stay with us all until Thy work is achieved, not only as a Consciousness which guides and illumines but also as dynamic presence in action..... and not leave the earth atmosphere until earth is transformed" So as Sri Nalini Kanta Gupta says: "The new creation that the Mother embodied is not lost, it is not wiped out with the disappearance of the material body." But at the same time he does not fail to note that: "The situation has somewhat changed since then and has become more difficult. On the departure of Sri Aurobindo, some

time after, Mother gave a message, an admonition pointing to us the difficulty: 'To follow Sri Aurobindo in a great adventure of his integral yoga, one needed always to be a warrior, but now that he has physically left us, one needs to be a hero'.....At present, when the Mother too is no more—there, apparently—we seem to be abandoned children. what are we to do or be?..... I suggest to you another alternative. It is to leap into another dimension: To be a child, a child of the Mother.....an ideal child of the Mother."

A very similar poignant situation arose after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna. The house in Cossipore where Sri Ramakrishna spent his last days was a rented one and there was absolutely no money for the young monks who followed their Master like a shadow to live upon. From the publication 'LIFE OF SRI RAMA-KRISHNA' we gather: "There were still a few days left before the expiry of the lease of the Cossipore garden. Of the young disciples of the Master, some had lived there, and others came daily from their homes. The former had already renounced the world, and it was evident that some of the latter were preparing to do the same. What were all these young men to do? The householders who had been defraying the expenses of the Master withdrew their aid and some of them advised the youths to return home and lead the life of pious citizens. But close contact for so long with such burning renunciation and godliness made it impossible for them to return to the world. Surendra Nath Mitra said to them: 'Brothers, where will you go? Let us hire a house where you will live together, and where we householders shall find a temporary refuge from our worldly cares. I used to contribute a trifle towards the expenses of the

Cossipore garden. I shall gladly continue that bit of help and you can at least have a roof over your heads and lead a simple life.' The young monks gratefully accepted the offer. A house was engaged at Baranagore the first monastery of the Sannyasin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.....Thus the Master's dearly cherished ideal of monasticism took a concrete shape after his passing." With such humble beginnings the present Ramakrishna Math and Mission has its Ashramas not only in India but also in foreign countries.

Not only these young Sannyasins helped the perpetuation and spreading of their Master's message all over the world, ".....the Holy Mother, Sarada Devi, consort of Sri Ramakrishna tried to overcome her sense of irreparable loss by undertaking a vigorous course of Sadhana at Vrindaban, Calcutta or her native village. One part of the pre-ordained purpose of her union with Sri Ramakrishna had been fulfilled, viz. the setting up of an ideal for the householders of today to follow according to their respective capacities. There still remained another part to be accomplished viz. the transmission of the Master's spiritual power to thousand of devotees, and sepcially to women. It was for this that her valuable life was spared to humanity for many years. (page 505).

Sister Nivedita, who came to India at the invitation of Swami Vivekananda to work in the field of education specially for Indian women with her noble and loving nature became the ideal child of Sri Sarada Devi who used to address her affectionately as 'her Khooki'. Nivedita was fully satisfied with the role given to her by Swami Vivekananda and never aspired to wear the ochre cloth and become an yogin. Her Master Vivekananda

also wanted to become the child of his Guru Sri Ramakrishna and stay at Dakshineswar, even after becoming one of the greatest yogis of his time. If Sri Ramakrishna was obsessed with Kālī, the Divine Mother, Swami Vivekananda with Sri Ramakrishna, Nivedita with Swamiji, Mother Teresa with Christ, Sri Aurobindo was with the Mother whom he depicted in the Vedic concept of Mother—Savitri etc. No doubt Sri Aurobindo attempted and to a certain extent succeeded in restoring and heightening the glory of Motherhood to the days of Vedas, which was later unfortunately scaled down to an earthly plane through folklore and tradition by great poets, writers and singers like Ramprasad, Kamalakanta etc.

All said and done, one cannot also reject completely that the human tendency is to wrap the concept of a mother in a much more homely form as the incarnation of love and sacrifice. Neither is it easy to comprehend the idea of a mother as anything else than one's own mother!

To such a mother Nivedita: "became like a child of five when she sat by the Mother (Holy Mother). Lovingly and longingly she would look at the Mother and a smile from her was sufficient to gladden her heart. Her devotion and love were expressed in small services rendered to the Mother. Joyfully would she take the Mother's sitting mat, kiss it often and dust it before spreading it for her to sit upon. In the glare of light she would be eager to shade her eyes."

Holy Mother's love for Nivedita was also exemplary: "The Mother (Sarada Devi) made a woolen fan for Nivedita and presented it to her. On receiving it Nivedita was in ecstasy. 'How beautiful! How splendid' she exclaimed, pressing it to her forehead

and heart again and again. On seeing her joy at such a trivial present the Mother said: 'See how glad she is at receiving such a trifle. What faith! What goodness! How devoted she is to Naren.' The Mother's concern for Nivedita's welfare and her keen interest in her work was always a source of strength and inspiration to her. In those days when a Brahmin lady, let alone a widow was strictly confined to the courtyard of the ancient house, Holy Mother along with her companions went to declare open the School of Nivedita, which is still a well known educational centre in Calcutta and where visitors go to pay respect to Nivedita.

If Swami Vivekananda was poor just like his Guru Sri Ramakrishna, Sister Nivedita was poorer than all. It is said that although "she desired to offer gifts and presents to the Holy Mother, Nivedita could never do so because she had no money. When she returned from the West in 1909, she brought a few presents for her and Radhu, her niece. The Mother treasured whatever she received from Nivedita. Once she had given her a small German silver box in which the Mother kept Sri Ramakrishna's hair and said, 'When I worship it, I will remember Nivedita.'" (SISTER NIVEDITA, page 256).

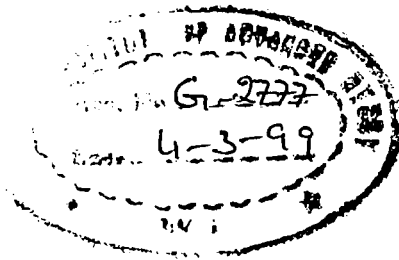
To Mother Teresa, next in love to Christ comes the community of Missionaries of Charity: she is the mother to the novice as well as to the most Senior Sister in the organisation. Talking about the discipline in the order she once remarked: "I must cling to the rule as a child clings to its mother. I must love the rule with my will and reason, with my soul and body.....A bond of love, a thousand times stronger than those of flesh and blood, interest,

or friendship unites the old and the young, the seniors and the juniors in our communities. It covers all—to admire and love and love the work of God's hands, the price of the blood of Christ and the masterpiece of the Holy Spirit....." The greatness of Mother Teresa lies in her tolerance to other religions and creeds for she says: "We keep friendly relations with other religious communities with deep respect for the vocation Christ has called each of them." Just as she lived a simple austere life revolving around her beloved Christ so was her formula for a sincere prayer: "And if we really want to pray we must first learn to listen, for in the silence of the heart God speaks. And to be able to hear that silence, to be able to hear God we need a clean heart, for a clean heart alone can see God, can hear God, can listen to God and then only from the fullness of our heart can we speak to God. But we cannot speak unless we have listened, unless we have made that connection with God in the silence of our heart."

What better conclusion is there than to quote the Invocation made by the Mother of Pondicherry on the first Independence Day of the Country: "Our Mother, O Soul of India, Mother who hast never forsaken Thy children even in the days of darkest depression, even when they turned away from thy voice, served other masters and denied thee, now when they have arisen and the light is on thy face in this dawn of thy liberation, in this great hour we salute Thee. Guide us so that the horizon of freedom opening before us may be also a horizon of true greatness and of thy true life in the community of the nation. Guide us so that we may be always on the side of great ideals and show to men Thy true visage, as a leader in the ways

of the Spirit and a friend and helper of all the peoples."

If Sister Nivedita, Dr. Annie Besant and Mother Teresa were with the Mother of Pondicherry on that day, there is no doubt that they would have joined her in her invocation!!!



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orator and author of many books on Eastern and Western philosophy. Having graduated with distinction in the subject—Philosophy of Religion and English literature, she joined the House of Kirloskars. Aided and encouraged by Sri and Srimati Rajabahu Kirloskar, she took to writing as a free lance journalist to leading English newspapers at Bombay, Bangalore and other cities.

She was married to Sri T.S.N. Rao, who was a special correspondent with Reuters at Hyderabad. After some turbulent years, the couple started publishing their own technical journals in response to the appeal by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru—to bring Western technology to the doorstep of the Indian industry. Their publications were well patronised by the Western world and appreciated at home. Associated with several publications the author was able to travel far and wide and acted as correspondent to several leading English newspapers and journals.

Prominent among her works include 'TWIN MOTHERS'—remembering Gopaler Ma and Gauri Ma, two lady-disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and 'WOMEN THEN' — a short sketch about the life of women during Buddhistic time—specially the lady monastics. Another critique much appreciated and published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan is titled 'GANDHARI, SITA AND DRAUPADI' detailing the lesser known characteristics of these unique and brave women and how they were wronged by the then male-oriented society.

Occidental Daughters of Mother India

by Amruta Rao

Vol. 1 Sister Nivedita and Mother Teresa

Vol. 2 Sister Nivedita and Dr. Annie Besant

Vol. 3 Sister Nivedita and Pondicherry Mother

Occidental Daughters of Mother India is not just another biography, but a sincere attempt to bring into focus the love and affection of these great ladies from far off lands had for India that later blossomed into such unselfish work for India's poor, sick and downtrodden.

When the contemporary Indians dazed by the materialistic opulence of their conquerors would have gladly opted to step into their shoes, these ladies found courage to assert and expose the wrongs done by their own countrymen. Their intentions were neither political nor commercial when they decided to come and serve the people whom their own countrymen had wronged—socially, politically and religiously as well.

They were moved by India's teeming and pulsating millions, her miserable children wallowing in ignorance and superstitions while the treasure trove of knowledge were kept out of their reach. While one section had self-proclaimed themselves as the custodians of religion and the scriptures, another was denied even an entry into the temples. However, this was not the vision of India to these ladies from across the seven seas — instead what they saw was a land glowing, bright, deep and meaningful—a land of a different culture, a land of love and affection and naturally they interacted in a very different manner. They with their sense of justice, fair-play and above all their love for the poor, sick and the 'Unwanted' managed to earn

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