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Towards

HUMAN UNITY

Understanding the essence of one's own culture allows one to understand and to embrace the essential unity of all.

In *The Ideal of Human Unity*, first published in 1919, Sri Aurobindo states that "the unity of mankind is evidently a part of Nature's eventual scheme and must come about". The question is, how? Sri Aurobindo notes that mechanistic attempts to create unity through forcing individuals and nations to come together are ultimately doomed to failure as such methods snuff out the force of life itself. True unity can only be achieved by respecting the diversity and uniqueness of the constituent parts while awakening mankind to the true meaning of brotherhood. For "brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul; it can exist by nothing else". How to hasten this? Sri Aurobindo suggests it can happen through the realisation of a genuine "religion of humanity". "A religion of humanity means the growing realisation that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here".

In 1952 Mother also addressed the challenge of human unity in two talks entitled "An International University Centre". Noting that collective progress and individual progress are interdependent—for "Before the individual can take a leap forward, at least a little of the preceding progress must have been realised in the collectivity"—she said that a way must be found for the two types of progress to proceed together. It was in answer to this urgent need, she continued, that Sri Aurobindo conceived the scheme of his international university, "in order to prepare the human elite who will be able to work for the progressive unification of mankind and be ready at the same time to embody the new force which is descending to transform the earth".

The most important underlying idea of this university centre is that "the unity of the human race can be achieved neither by uniformity nor by domination and subjection. Only a synthetic organisation of all nations, each one occupying its true place in the whole, can bring about a compre-

hensive and progressive unification which has any chance of enduring. And if this synthesis is to be a living one, the grouping should be effectuated around a central idea that is as wide and as high as possible, in which all tendencies, even the most contradictory, may find their respective places. This higher idea is to give men the conditions of life they need in order to be able to prepare themselves

Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities.

The purpose of Auroville is to realize human unity.

(Mother's first public message about Auroville, 8.9.1965)

selves to manifest the new force that will create the race of tomorrow."

The first aim, she continued, would be to help students become aware "of the fundamental genius of the nation to which they belong and at the same time to bring them into contact with the way of life of other nations, so that they learn to know and respect equally the true spirit of all countries of the world." One practical way of doing this, she suggested, would be through a permanent world-exhibition in which all countries would be represented. "The ideal would be for every nation with a well-defined culture to have a pavilion representing that culture, built in a style most expressive of the customs of the country; it will exhibit the nation's most representative products, natural as well as manufact-



ured, and also the best expressions of its intellectual and artistic genius and its spiritual tendencies."

Later she elaborated on the latter point. "Just as each individual has a psychic being which is his true self and which governs his destiny more or less overtly, so too each nation has a psychic being which is its true being and moulds its destiny from behind the veil: it is the soul of the country, the national genius, the spirit of the people, the centre of national aspiration, the fountain-head of all that is beautiful, noble, great and generous in the life of the country."

In 1968 the experiment in human unity entered a new phase with the founding of Auroville, "a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an

actual Human Unity" which welcomed men and women of goodwill from all nations. In global terms it was a critical period. A few years earlier the Cuban missile crisis had almost precipitated a Third World War and relations between Russia and the West were at an all-time low. It's important to note, therefore, that Mother saw Auroville not only as a field of experimentation for its inhabitants but also as an opportunity for the nations to come together and so avoid another catastrophic war:

"And it's just what I want, that those two countries (*America and Russia—eds.*) which are on a collision course come here, and that both of them have a pavilion of culture and their ideal, and that they are there, face to face, and shake hands."

"If the nations collaborate, even to a very small extent in the work of Auroville, it will do them a lot of good—it can do them a lot of good, a good which may be quite out of proportion to the apparent action."

Mother saw Auroville assisting the unification of humanity in various ways. It is a place where the individual is encouraged to realise his or her own unity by contacting the central being within, and where the different nationalities represented here could learn to break down barriers between them. But she also pointed out that Auroville was a force for unity within the world because, in an occult sense, Auroville represents a "Truth" which could offset the suicidal tendencies of the global arms race:

"And so, the clear vision that Auroville was a centre of force and creation with... (how to say?) a seed of truth, and that if it could blossom and develop, the very movement of its growth would be a reaction against the catastrophic consequences of the error of armament."

Later Mother was to define the "spirit of Auroville" as "Basically, the art of creating a unity with complexity. Without uniformity, you see: unity through the harmony of complexity, each thing in its place..."

However, she added that this was very difficult to achieve, noting that (in 1967) "there is not a single formation of the 'spirit of Auroville' in the earth's atmosphere..."

So how well is Auroville doing today? On the global scale, it's impossible for us to

(continued on page 2)

The Soul of India

IN THE WORDS OF SRI AUROBINDO

"For what is a nation? What is our mother-country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation... (1904)

♦

"It is God's will that we should be ourselves and not Europe. We have sought to regain life by following the law of another being than our own. We must return and seek the sources of life and strength within ourselves. We must know our past and recover it for the purpose of the future. Our business is to realise ourselves first and to mould everything to the law of India's eternal life and nature... (1909)

♦

"In India alone there is self-contained, dormant, the energy and the invincible spiritual individuality which can yet arise and break her own and the world's fetters." (ca.1910-1912)

♦

"Spirituality is India's only politics, the fulfilment of the Sanatana Dharma its only Swaraj." (June, 1913)

♦

"I seek not science, nor religion, nor Theosophy, but Veda—the truth about Brahman, not only about His essentiality, but about His manifestation. I believe the future of India and the world to depend on its discovery and on its application, not to the renunciation of life, but to life in the world and among men." (c.1910-14)

♦

"Either India will be rationalised and industrialised out of all recognition and she will be no longer India or else she will be the leader in a new world-phase." (December, 1918)

♦

"India of the ages is not dead nor has she spoken her last creative word; she lives and has still something to do for herself and the human peoples. And that which must seek now to awake is not an anglicised oriental people, docile pupil of the west and doomed to repeat the cycle of the occident's success and failure, but still the ancient immemorable Shakti recovering her deepest self, lifting her head higher towards the supreme source of light and strength and turning to discover the complete meaning and a vaster form of her Dharma." (January, 1921)



The Hindu goddess Saraswati. Hoysaleswari Temple, Halebid

PHOTO: OLIVIER

"I have become confirmed in a perception which I had always... that the true basis of work and life is the spiritual,—that is to say a new consciousness to be developed only by Yoga. I see more and more manifestly that man can never get out of the futile circle the race is always treading until he has raised himself on to the new foundation. I believe also it is the mission of India to make this great victory for the world." (November, 1922)

♦

"The Truth is not confined to India, it is not India's property. But there is very little chance of its succeeding elsewhere if it fails in India." (August, 1926)

♦

"Mother India is not a piece of earth; she is a Power, a Godhead, for all nations have such a Devi supporting their separate existence and keeping it in being. Such Beings are as real and more permanently real than the men they influence but they belong to a higher plane, are part of the cosmic consciousness and being and act here on earth by shaping the human consciousness on

which they exercise their influence." (December, 1946)

♦

IN THE WORDS OF THE MOTHER

"India must be saved for the good of the world since India alone can lead the world to peace and a new world order." (February, 1954)

♦

"True spirituality is not to renounce life, but to make life perfect with the Divine Perfection. This is what India must show to the world now." (January, 1963)

♦

"India's true destiny is to be the Guru of the world." (January, 1964)

♦

"India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of modern mankind. India will be the land of its resurrection—the resurrection to a higher and truer life. And the clear vision: the same thing which in the history of the universe has made the earth the symbolic representation of the universe so as to be able to

concentrate the work at one point, the same phenomenon is recurring now: India is the representation of all human difficulties on earth, and it is in India that there will be the... cure. And it is for that—it is FOR THAT that I had to create Auroville." (February, 1968)

♦

"India ought to be the spiritual leader of the world. Inside she has the capacity, but outside... for the moment there is still much to do for her to become actually the spiritual leader of the world." (June, 1967)

♦

"O India, land of light and spiritual knowledge! Wake up to your true mission in the world, show the way to union and harmony." (September, 1967)

♦

"India is the country where the psychic law can and must rule and the time has come for that here. Besides, it is the only possible salvation for this country..." (August, 1970)

♦

"India will take her true place in the world only when she will become integrally the messenger of the Divine Life." (April, 1972)

Human Unity (continued from page 1)

say, but within Auroville itself there are some indications. It is significant, for example, that the Auroville of today comprises individuals from more than 30 nations, and that most of them think of themselves and each other as 'Aurovilians' rather than as citizens of a particular country. Chauvinism is almost entirely absent and the Auroville culture which is slowly emerging draws upon yet somehow transcends the many different cultural influences represented here.

Yet in the International Zone of the city, which Mother clearly intended to be a focus for accelerating understanding and unity between nations, very little has happened in the past 29 years. Why? One reason is that there remains unclarity among Aurovilians about what should be happening there. Should we begin by providing simple spaces for cultural exchanges or

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visiting researchers who wish to explore human unity? Should we be directing our efforts towards creating a university which Mother arrestingly said would be "la clef de la raison d'être d'Auroville"? Should we press on with planning the pavilions? If so, pavilions of what? Nations? cultures? continents? Of trans-national or global trends? And should we try to embrace all cultures or merely include those which have made an important contribution to global culture and evolution?

Then again, what will these pavilions look like? How do we make them living rather than merely musea? If they are to represent not only the customary manifesta-

tions ("moeurs") of a culture but also something pertaining to its essence, to the soul of a nation, how do we go about discovering this? Have we, in fact, the consciousness at present to ascertain such things?

Perhaps the fundamental reason the energy is blocked in this area, however, is that many Aurovilians have denied or have attempted to cut their connections with their native culture, either because they are unable to relate to it or because they believe that such connections hinder progress towards human unity. "Auroville", their argument runs, "is the embryo of a new culture which transcends national differences. Hence it should not harbour or encourage

any of the nationalistic forces which, the world over, are blocking the emergence of a planetary culture". Clearly this argument is valid in relationship to narrow chauvinism. But Sri Aurobindo in *The Human Cycle* emphasised that a nation or culture must discover its soul as a first step on the road to what he described as a "free world-union". And Mother made it clear that you should not cut yourself off from the soul quality of your culture (of the Hymn to Durga which celebrates Mother India she wrote, "One would like to see in all countries the same veneration for the national soul, the same aspiration to become fit instruments for the manifestation of its highest ideal") because—and this seems to be crucial—understanding the essence of one's own culture allows one to understand and to embrace the essential unity of all.

Alan

America the Beautiful?

How can I speak about the soul of America? Where is it? Is it in "America the Beautiful", the other patriotic song we learned to sing as children (the first one being "The Star Spangled Banner", but that was always very difficult—nearly impossible).

"America, America, God shed His Grace on Thee/And crown Thy Good with Brotherhood, from Sea to shining Sea."

Ahhh, a new Life in the New World.

We are naive. We are too trusting. We are hung up on Morality. We are brutes. Ugly Americans. Perverted by a too easy lifestyle that leaves us inured to the sufferings of others. We are generous to a fault, but always divide our restaurant bills with a calculator. We love our mountains and our rivers and our plains, but disfigure the highways with tacky billboards and sell our forest downstream. We are a nation of immigrants that makes fun of funny accents and despises people of colour. Does this make us schizophrenic? Yes and no.

America is change. America is movement. America is too big and too loud and too rich. America lets its poor die on the cold streets, puts away its elderly and neglects its young people; on the other hand, we are a nation that worships youth and has a welfare system that sometimes seems out of control.

The Declaration of Independence says, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with these inalienable rights—Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness." We kinda got hung up on the Pursuit of Happiness, forsaking sanity to pursue something we felt we had "a right" to. Did we leave our soul behind in this pursuit? And what of America is still beautiful? Is there anything from America that you would like to see in Auroville?

Isha, an American woman who came to live in Auroville five years ago, answers my question. "Trustfulness. Innocence. Faith in the future. The premise that all men are cre-

ated equal. A lack of belief in the solidity of social barriers, i.e., not accepting social stratification. And... oh yes... Mexican food."

In a letter to an American devotee, Sri Aurobindo says the one great advantage of America is "a great eagerness and openness of mind to new things; whether it will be sufficient to open it eventually also to the deep and true things is the experiment we have to make. Nothing can be said definitely about the spiritual future of America. A great possibility is opening to it, but it depends on the Americans themselves whether they will receive and realize it."

America: Love It or Leave It, we were told, and many of us did.

"If you don't like my gate, why did you swing on it, why didja swing on it anyhow—"

We are caught between naughty and nice and the ambiguity leaves us breathless. The boys in the backroom keep sucking on their cigars and—who's really in charge? Where is the center and why doesn't it hold?

It's a country of great potential if it does not fall through a black hole of greed—can one be naively greedy? A little bit pregnant?

And what of the psychic being of America, vast as the blue sky, deep as the ocean, wide as the prairie; the child who plays and plays and still wakes up every morning joyous and free?

Kathryn, living in Auroville but still relatively fresh from the USA, speaks about

more you pursue it, the further it seems.

Roger, a much-travelled American and one of our Auroville Today writers, muses on America. "One of the things that strikes a resonant chord for me when I think of America and the ideals it represents is the cause of freedom and the rights of man. Coupled with this is the willingness to uphold and physically defend these rights against tyranny of any sort—that defined the thinking of the protagonists and pamphleteers of that wonderfully unbridled 20-year period of public debate that led up to the American Revolution. The plain-speaking bottom line delivered from the pulpits of New England 'when tyranny is abroad submission is a crime,' has not lost any of its resounding relevance in our world today. This tradition of uncompromising religious radicalism and dissent found its most recent and inspired exponent in the figure of Martin Luther King whose words still reverberate 30 years later.

The commitment to individual freedom had, as its natural physical extension, the call and adventure of the frontier, the capacity to take risks, and courageously to embrace contradictions. As Walt Whitman, the bard of that era, intoned: 'I am large—I contain multitudes'. O pioneers indeed, but the greed and violent idealism of the young Republic's Westward surge almost exterminated the voices of the spirits of the land that many native Indians, such as Chief Seattle, honoured with noble eloquence: 'How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to

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this America.

"Oh yes, there's a lot to love about America. I would like to see here this American optimism, this feeling of expansiveness, this sense of ingenuity, this—yesness—to life and all its possibilities. Sometimes I feel really frustrated in India and in Auroville when people don't see what's really possible."

Meanwhile, back in the good ol' US of A, the Protestant tradition of hard work and nose to the grindstone gives way to a rainbow of religions and California dreamin'. "I Have a Dream," said Martin Luther King, but he was shot down for his dreaming. The American pie was sliced up and served as another national anthem by John McLaine to sum up the feelings of a generation of disillusioned and disengaged youth, who lost faith in a system and the promises of the past that were never kept. They died with Kennedy and if the truth be known it was not pleasant, forcing people to be good and do the right thing—let my people go: to school, to work, to pray, to play, to sit and eat at the same lunch counter. Life. Liberty. The Pursuit of Happiness? Oh God. Where are you in all this rhetoric? Maybe we could have simply

**San Francisco,
Golden Gate
bridge under
construction**

had faith that Happiness would come if we opened our hearts and let it drop in, softly. Drop by drop. When you pursue something often it just recedes. And the

us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them? Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of man... This we know: the earth does not belong to man: man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like blood which unites one family. Man did not weave the web of life: he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web he does to himself. Perhaps only when the ideal of liberty and the pursuit of happiness is grounded and tempered by this vision of interdependence with the natural realm will a marriage of America with its true destiny occur."

"The Cause of America is in great measure the Cause of all Mankind," wrote Tom Paine. Quite a responsibility. "But to live outside the law you must be honest." (That's Bob Dylan.) Or, as Huckleberry Finn says when he decides not to sell "nigger Jim" back into slavery, "You can't pray a lie." And in praying insincerely, we got ourselves into trouble. So maybe it's life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as long as you stay honest. Because...

"To have great freedom you must have great courage." I said that.

Jill



The Bulldog and the Gentleman

What makes the English English?

A few weeks ago, a small group of English Aurovilians met to explore what they felt was the essence of their culture. While acknowledging the crucial contributions of the Welsh, the Scots and the Irish to both English and British culture, the conversation inevitably focused upon the achievements, the foibles and particular characteristics of the English people. Here Alan summarises their findings as well as using them as a spring-board for further speculations.

What is the essence of Englishness or English culture? Sri Aurobindo gave some valuable clues in *The Future*

Poetry. He notes, for example, that while England has thrown up great individuals in the arts and sciences, she lacks an established artistic, philosophical or scientific tradition. And while there are "lacunae" in her cultural achievements—he cites sculpture, architecture and, much more debatably, music—in "the business of practical life there is an unqualified preeminence".

In fact, individualism and practicality or pragmatic ingenuity can be seen as two of the leitmotifs of English culture. Often they complement each other. For example, in the two great periods of English civilization—the Elizabethan Age and the late 18th and 19th centuries—England asserted her independence from continental influences in areas like literature while embarking on a vigorous expansion of trade and commerce based upon practical ingenuity and (in the latter period) a ruthlessly successful enlargement of her Empire. The English tradition of individualism, which Elias Canetti ascribed to her island status and special relationship with the sea ("The Englishman sees himself as a captain on board a ship with a small group of people, the sea around and beneath him. He is almost alone..."), is displayed in various forms: it is the Magna Carta—the first charter of liberty and individual rights—it is the English eccentric, wandering the countryside in his tweeds and battered deerstalker as he seeks a new species of butterfly, it is her strong Nonconformist tradition in religion, it is her rough-cut heroes who scorn convention (and sometimes the law)—the pirate Drake who routed the Spanish Armada, Robin Hood, Nelson putting his blind eye to the telescope so that he was unable to see his commander's order to retreat, 'Bulldog' Churchill refusing to admit defeat in 1940—it is her continuing ambiguous relationship to European union. For as Andre Malraux put it, "England is never as great as when she is alone".

That strand in her make-up of rugged individualism, of that stubborn almost anarchic Anglo-Saxon vein which resists easy acquiescence to imposed authority, also powered many working-class movements like the Luddites and the Chartists last century, and continues to be reflected in modern phenomena like Punk or the Travellers with their tents, collectivism, direct action and celebration of spontaneity. Yet English

culture, paradoxically, is also preeminently a culture of convention and tradition. This is reflected in the pride she takes in preserving her national monuments and institutions, in the continuing (though damaged) popularity of the monarchy, and in her class system which, in certain areas of British life (the higher echelons of the Diplomatic Service and banking world), still continues to exert its influence. In this context, it's worth remembering that the English have evolved a type of the ideal man (and, by implication, woman) which Andre Malraux described as one of the very few examples in world history of "une grande creation de l'homme". He is, of course, the English gentleman. Writing in the mid 19th century, Cardinal Newman enumerated some of his qualities:

"The true gentleman carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or jolt in the minds of those with whom he is cast ... his great concern is to make everyone at their ease ... he is never mean in his disputes, he never takes advantage. From a long-sighted prudence he follows the maxim of the ancient sage that we should ever conduct ourselves towards our enemy as if he were one day to be our friend. He is too well-employed to remember injuries, too indolent to bear malice ... he submits to pain because it is inevitable, to bereavement because it is irreparable and to death because it is his destiny."

Whether or not the English gentleman according to Newman's description ever really existed outside popular literature is less important than the influence the idea exerted upon the nation, an influence, it should be said, both for good and bad. On the positive side, it emphasised the qualities of generosity and modesty, of good manners, of fortitude, above all of fairness and decency. These qualities are reflected in something as prosaic as the English emphasis upon waiting one's turn, queueing—which the English have raised to an art form—and in something as influential as the British system of parliamentary democracy which, with varying degrees of success, has been exported all over the world. These same values underlie the British judicial system in which all individuals are equal before the law (and innocent until proven guilty), in the concept of the Commonwealth, in civil liberties, in tolerance of religious and political minorities, in 'playing the game' or good sportsmanship in all aspects of life, and in the extraordinary tradition that "an Englishman's word is his bond".

There's something very sane, very low-key and understated, about what is considered good-breeding in English culture... and herein lies also the seeds of its deficiencies. Because Newman's gentleman is, above all, a social animal whose most important function is not to challenge or inspire but to put people at their ease. And this, by definition, automatically excludes references to controversial topics like politics and religion, excludes the forceful exposition of ideas or feelings, excludes a certain largeness of scope in favour of the small, the parochial, the safe, the banal.

Good-breeding in England was often associated with a certain affected languor, with an aversion to commerce and 'money-

making', with a refusal to become too enthusiastic about anything, and with the image of the talented amateur. The emphasis was less upon winning than upon playing in the right ("gentlemanly") spirit, exemplified in that very English hero, Scott of the Antarctic, who failed, but failed magnificently (his last words, found on his frozen corpse, were "I have done this to show what an Englishman can do.") English culture remains suspicious of the intellect (which makes Sherlock Holmes something of an anomaly) and of the avant-garde in the Arts. 'Good' taste tends to favour the safer products of English and European culture—English and Dutch landscape painters, popular novelists, Strauss—over, say, the German expressionists, Beckett and Stockhausen. In fact, English culture has probably only been saved from total *embourgeoisement* by its capacity for self-criticism ("They possess a capacity for self-criticism unequalled in any other nation", wrote Laurens Van Der Post), by its ability to poke fun at its more ridiculous propensities and by its 'underclass' movements which have reacted against the stultifying influence of the dominant culture. In modern times this counter-reaction has thrown up some of the most interesting achievements in the Arts including the plays of Osborne, the music of The Rolling Stones, and independent films of life on the fringe like 'Performance' and 'Trainspotting'. Just as the Celtic influence in the British character has served to lighten the dominant Teutonic strain, so this raw yet creative energy is challenging the influence of the stiff upper-lip and of comfortable conformism and powering the revival of London as one of the most stimulating capitals of Europe.

One other fundamental quality of

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"Robert Andrews and his wife"
Thomas Gainsborough (c. 1750)

SPAIN: Unity and Diversity

It is no easy thing to identify oneself with a nation which for four centuries had been one of the most reactionary powers of Europe, a country that for decades in the 20th century remained entrenched in its ancestral religion and values, satisfied with its limitations, its gaze turned backwards to the imperial glories of an irrecoverable past. It could almost be said that none of us in AVI Spain believed in Spain. For some of us, universalists or internationalists, the concept of Spain seemed an unnecessary fragmentation of the European or Western or global reality; for others, "nationalists" who had a strong sense of emotional and cultural identification with their region or people, Spain represented an arbitrary conglomerate of the diverse and deeply individualised subnations that constitute it. The positions were as extreme as they could be, and had already given rise to much fervent polemic.

However, the deeper we went into Spanish historical reality, the less we were convinced that Spain was totally irrelevant to the health and entirety of European culture—as some of us had argued earlier in the heat of our debates. On the contrary, for us, Spaniards and Aurobindonians, it became the most interesting focus for study and experience the West had to offer.

Our first conclusion is that Spain essentially can best be defined as "Force at the service of a Transcendent Ideal". Our second conclusion, more interesting perhaps from the point of view of human unity, is that Spain is a unique and significant historical laboratory where for centuries experiments have been made in how to reconcile the factor of diversity with the apparently contradictory factor of unity.

If for the moment we leave aside consideration of its Empire, Spain, as an historical experiment of diversity in unity, has not had to face the kind of large-scale problems which afflicted and still afflict vast countries such as Russia and India. Its scale is quite different, smaller, more intense, more concentrated, but brutally marked by what one of our historians has called "the absolute individualism" of the Spanish character. The westernmost point of Europe, Spain has been a meeting point of East and West, first with the early arrival of the Phoenicians and later with the Muslim invasion. With the inrush of Islam at the beginning of the 8th century, its original racial diversity—of which the four major lines of Iberians, Celts, Goths and Latins were already distinct at that time—was not only increased by the incorporation of new racial elements—Arabs, Berbers, Jews, as well as others from the vast Muslim Empire—but further complicated by three new dimensions of diversity: a spiritual one, represented by the confluence of the three great monotheistic religions on Spanish soil; a national one, resulting from fragmentation of the earlier Visigoth entity by the energetic Muslim drive; and another resulting from the coexistence of Eastern and Western



"Fray Felix Hortensio Paravicino", EL GRECO (c.1605)

The Islamic principle of Force, the Christian principle of Love, and the Jewish principle of Knowledge, fusing together, could have given birth to a mysticism, ethics and worship emulating in depth the Bhagavad Gita, the first synthesis of Hinduism.

elements in one limited geographic area over eight uninterrupted centuries.

The racial diversity, when no longer reinforced by religious differences, was resolved to a great extent by the emergence of a race that combined the Iberian, Celtic, Germanic, Semitic and Latin strains. The East-West polarity was resolved through the emergence of an interesting psychological type that brings together, sometimes fused, at other times in a state of conflict and contradiction, fundamental elements of each of the two poles: mysticism and realism, traditionalism and the urge for innovation, "caudillism" and individualism, idealism and pragmatism. But two great challenges to the manifestation of the Spanish soul remained: the aspects of religious and national diversity. The first apparently ended in defeat. The second is still to be resolved but, given the instruments involved, seems to offer a good prospect of permanent solution.

Before the spiritual challenge Spain failed, in effect, because it suppressed the diversity factor—painfully removing the Jewish and Islamic elements in favour of a national Christian unity. To discover what promise was offered by that meeting of the three great religions of the monotheistic revelation cycle, what aspect of our nation soul was concealed there, we have to examine one of the blind alleys of history. We find then that these religious currents encountered each other not only on the battlefield or in the arena of religious dispute. There were also periods of mutual insemination and intense cultural collaboration, of which the most distinctive and

flourishing was the Translators' School of Toledo, created by the Castilian king Alfonso X in the second half of the 13th century. The political philosophy of this monarch, based on an ideal of sophiocentric kingship, made possible for a time the exploitation of excellent intellectual and spiritual energies of the three spiritual communities. If his political attempt, which was relentlessly attacked by the individualism of the nobles and the fundamentalism of the church, had in fact triumphed, it is very possible that the way to a great spiritual synthesis, similar to that symbolically conveyed by the mystique of the Holy Grail, could have been initiated. The Islamic principle of Force, the Christian principle of Love, and the Jewish principle of Knowledge, fusing together, could have given birth to a mysticism, ethics and worship emulating in depth the Bhagavad Gita, the first synthesis of Hinduism.

What conclusion can be drawn from all this, if we try to interpret it as an indication of the Spanish soul? Firstly that this aspiration for spiritual synthesis, in some ways so close to the Aurobindonian one, expresses a fundamental aspect of the soul of Spain. Secondly, that the mingling of mysticism, idealism and realism characteristic of the Spanish character is the immediate psychological translation of it. Thirdly, that this synthesis has already tried to manifest in the past and will therefore try again in times to come. Fourthly, since it did not succeed at that moment because of imperfections in the instruments it had to rely on in facing its historical challenge, Spain canalised the force gushing from that great possibility into misguided ways, becoming

indeed a strongly idealist power which constantly sought divine inspiration, but which in the narrowness of its horizons and limited spiritual realisation betrayed its original ideal of supreme flexibility and wide tolerance.

Now to the second challenge that the problem of diversity has posed to Spain: its national diversity. Spain entered the 20th century with four individualised psychic and cultural poles, defined by the four great national languages: Castilian, Galician, Catalan and Basque. The forty years of Franco's dictatorship did not succeed in abolishing these national differences and failed to create a united and homogeneous Spain. This fact forced the Transition which followed Franco to take as a primary task the creation of an overall framework in which the different subnational entities could find sufficient space for autonomous cultural, political and administrative development. A balance between overall unity and subnational diversity on the one hand and, on the other, counterbalancing the weight of the three historical communities with a non-Castilian language through the creation of fourteen other autonomous communities of fundamentally administrative origin, may be the two most valuable aspects of the almost federalist framework established by Spanish democracy—a framework, moreover, that Spain can now offer as a model for integration of the European Union.

However, politicians have yet to discover the consciousness factor as a base of true culture, have yet to understand that external, political and administrative means are not sufficient, that the spirit of a people does not emerge by the mere fact of stressing 'differential elements' which separate it from others to the superficial view of the observing mind. True culture is the outward expression of the soul of the nation, but true culture and true consciousness are inseparable, for true consciousness is unifying while at the same time diversifying and discriminating. This concept and requirement is one of the great legacies of Sri Aurobindo to the peoples of the world. Spain is still as far from accepting this as any other nation; and probably before it is ready to do so, several more generations of political figures who can see no further than immediate economic realities will come and go.

We have seen that Spain in the course of its development has dealt with the diversity factor in three different ways: in the racial dimension by recasting them; in the spiritual dimension by abolishing those that endangered the envisaged unity; in the national dimension by eventually finding an appropriate framework for integrating them. In the course of this process some important elements were rejected; and, amongst these, nothing can compensate for the loss of an Islamic subnation within the national whole, or for the destruction of the Jewish-Spanish culture. This twofold loss involves our country in a special responsibility towards the two great Semitic peoples. This responsibility, together with those which we Spaniards have on the one hand towards the people of the Americas, and, on the other, towards Europe, reveals Spain, one and diverse, as a crossroads of diversity in unity, and confirms its vocation and mission as an historic crucible.

Bel Atreides

(Edited version of an article written for CIRHU papers)

A work of healing

A report by the Pavilion Group of Auroville International Germany

Through merely attempting to find out more about the German soul, we came across resistance from inside ourselves as well as from the German Aurovilians. We came into contact with our fears of getting stuck in clichés, of slipping into sentimentality (e.g. nostalgia for German "Gemütlichkeit"—being social in a good-natured way), of having to delve deeply into the camphor chests of past centuries while searching for values, or of being accused of arrogance when talking about our virtues. And there we come across our deepest fear, present in our very bones: we might have an encounter with our Nazi past, with this caricature of a proud, self-conscious national state which put itself above all its neighbouring states and, considering itself better than them, claimed the right to subjugate them and even to extinguish "lesser" nations and populations!

The suspicion that this tendency towards such hubris might still slumber in the German soul practically paralyses any attempt to look for something of which we can be proud. Too many of the values that come to mind have been misused by the Nazis, and even a positive identification with our German-ness is difficult for us. Because of this we saw ourselves compelled to first of all tackle our feelings of shame and guilt, which creep up on us when having to face the scrutiny of the world. We spent a whole weekend exchanging our childhood experiences of being German. As the members of our group had been born between 1927 and 1963 this exchange was very interesting, very fruitful, but also very depressing and touching. We concluded by reading and discussing texts by Sri Aurobindo on "The Discovery of the Nation-Soul" and "True and False Subjectivism" (from *The Human Cycle*), which helped us recognize the larger context of this drama and reconcile ourselves to the fact that each of us with his/her own destiny is part of this history and this German national soul.

I find it interesting that it was an Indian lady who, at our next annual meeting when we shared the results of our work, confronted us with the question, "Isn't there actually anything which you love about your country?" This question moved us very much, and we dedicated a whole weekend to it, which ended in a much lighter

Our German identity remains injured and broken for us, even if we are busy pulling out more and more of the still shining and unbroken pieces from the rubble-heap. We find this work of healing on the intellectual and spiritual plane very exciting and important...

and happier mood than the previous one.

In the aforementioned texts, Sri Aurobindo points out that Germany's attempt to live itself, i.e., to become conscious of its soul and to live from its divine Self, is an absolutely necessary step in its development that each nation has to accomplish sooner or later. The lesson that can be drawn from the German failure is one that each spiritual seeker should equally take to heart like any nation struggling to grow within: it is a fatal error to mistake one's vital ego for one's Self! "For Germany had said, like the Asura: 'I am my body, my life, my intellect, my temperament', and become attached with a Titanic force to these; especially she had said, 'I am my life and body', and then that there can be no greater mistake for man or nation. The soul of man or nation is something more and diviner than that; it is greater than its instruments and cannot be shut up in a physical, a vital, a mental or a temperamental formula." However, Sri Aurobindo also says clearly: "The misuse of great powers is no argument against their right use...; we have all to do the same thing which Germany has attempted, but to take care not to do it likewise." (1)

According to Sri Aurobindo, Germany was, at the end of the past century, the most remarkable example of a nation preparing for the subjective⁽²⁾ stage. "Example, because no other nation has so self-consciously, so methodically, so intelligently, and from the external point of view so successfully sought to find, to dynamise, to live itself and make the most of its own power of being." The

source of this subjective force Sri Aurobindo saw on the one hand in that side of the German soul that embodied itself in her great poets, philosophers and musicians, on the other in her efforts at diligence, reliability and honest and painstaking work, as well as her faithfulness to ideas. This side was embodied by her scholars, scien-

tists and organizers, without whom realisation in the world of facts is not possible. However, the transmission from the vision to practical implementation was disturbed. "But still a transmission there was. For more than a half-century Germany turned a deep eye of subjective introspection on herself and things and ideas in search of the truth of her own being and of the world, and for another half-century a patient eye of scientific research on the objective means for organising what she had or thought she had gained. And something was done, something indeed powerful and enormous, but also in certain

directions, not in all, misshapen and disconcerting. Unfortunately, those directions were precisely the very central lines on which to go wrong is to miss the goal. It may be said, indeed, that the last result of the something done—the war, the collapse, the fierce reaction towards the rigid, armoured, aggressive, formidable Nazi State—is not only discouraging enough, but a clear warning to abandon that path and go back to the older and safer ways."

The mistake was that Germany's vision was intellectual rather than illuminated, and that the courage to follow it and put it into action was vital and intellectual rather than spiritual. "That befell her which sometimes befalls the seeker on the path of Yoga, the art of conscious self-finding,—a path exposed to far profounder perils than beset ordinarily the average man,—when he follows a false light to his spiritual ruin."

We in the German pavilion group are still finding out what this actually means for us. We are still sifting through our intellectual and spiritual rubble-heap and putting in order what we find there. Our German identity remains for us an injured and broken one, even if we are busy pulling out more and more of the still shining and unbroken pieces from the rubble-heap. We find this work of healing on the intellectual and spiritual plane very exciting and important, although we are not sure if we are already far enough to make a connection with the level of planners and architects. Nevertheless we are thinking in this direction too and gauge possibilities for a concrete realisation. We feel however that we will still need much time to be able to manifest something more than just a small museum or a cultural pavilion, which the Goethe Institute could do just as well.

Marianne, Bremen,

26.4.97

(Translated from the German)



"Forgetful Angel"
Paul Klee, 1939

Editorial notes

(1) All the quotations in this article are from Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, in the chapter on *The Discovery of the Nation Soul*, p. 49 ff.

(2) Subjective stage (according to Sri Aurobindo): stage in the development of society, following that of individualism and rationalism, when man realizes that the power of critical and analytical reason is an insufficient light by which to fathom the subjective secret of himself and things as well as their

England (contd. from page 5)

English culture that should be mentioned is the special relationship the English have with nature and the countryside. England's greatest painter—Turner—was a landscape painter, Elgar, Delius and Vaughan Williams frequently evoke the countryside in their music, her finest poets—Spencer, Shakespeare, Marvell, Keats, Wordsworth, Shelley, Blake—all celebrated nature, often opposing it to the evils of city or court life or the "dark Satanic mills" of the Industrial Revolution, and the ivy-clad country cottage or the grander country house with its croquet lawn, peacocks and topiary were two of the defining images of "ye olde England". Unlike the French who, as at Versailles, tried to shape nature to their own

conceptions, the English aimed at artfully enhancing nature, combining lawns, winding paths, wild areas and lakes to achieve an always varying but charming perspective. Even today, if an Englishman's home is his castle, his garden remains one of his favourite places of recreation.

It seems fitting then, that if the English (who are, essentially, an ethical nation) can be said to have made any approaches to spirituality, it seems to have been in their relationship with nature. The poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley and Hopkins, for example, attempts at times to pierce the material veil and to invoke subtler regions of experience, Dr. Bach, the discoverer of the flower remedies, often had near-mystical experiences as he searched out flowers, and today the Findhorn Community in

Scotland is world-famous for its pioneering work on communicating with the subtler forces of nature.

Clearly if a British pavilion were ever to take shape in Auroville it should focus not only upon that society's more typical manifestations (rose gardens, a cricket pitch... a pub?) but also upon its glories, upon that which it has contributed to world culture. This, preeminently, would include the English language, that uniquely flexible and subtle vehicle of communication which serves today in many spheres as the unofficial world language, the great achievements of English literature and the best products of its educational and communication cultures—the Open University, the BBC, the Royal Shakespeare Company. But in terms of Auroville itself at present, there

is a very specific area in which a certain quality of English culture is needed. Shraddhavan, an English Aurovillian, puts it like this:

"I don't think that England is one of the great nation souls. Just as Britain itself is a land of modest scale, modest charm, so our strength is more in the middle region of pragmatism and ethics than of idealism and spiritual discovery. But if we look at Auroville at present, we're missing that middle ground. We have the visionaries, we have the grass-roots people, but we lack the social thread-makers and binders, those who ease tensions and maintain a certain quality of social relationship, of harmony, reliability and stability. And this is something that the English have always been good at."

Alan



Vice-president of India visits Auroville: The Vice-president of India, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, together with his wife, daughter and grand-daughter, visited the Matrimandir on May 9, 1997. This was the second visit of Mr. Narayanan to the Matrimandir.

BRIEF NEWS

Visit and meetings with District Collector

The District Collector of the Villupuram Ramasamy Padayatchiar District visited Auroville, following which a series of meetings have taken place. Various issues regarding roads, land utilisation and infrastructure development were discussed.

Bio-regional Environmental Cell

Auroville is working on a proposal to the Governments of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry that they, together with Auroville, participate in an informal advisory group for bio-regional issues.

International Advisory Council

The Minister of Human Resource Development has not yet (re-)appointed the members of the International Advisory Council. The term of office of the members of the previous Council expired on February 18, due to which no meeting of the IAC could take place in February 1997. It is hoped that the next meeting of the IAC can take place in February 1998.

Visa Issues

There have been no developments in the Leave India Notices and on the question of Gilles being permitted to come back to Auroville. There has also been no response to the request of the community that a special Visa and Residential Permit Policy be created for Auroville.

Exhibition in Delhi

In August, on the occasion of the 125th Birth Anniversary of Sri Aurobindo, an exhibition on Auroville is being organised at the Indian Cultural Centre in New Delhi.

Vérité Hall nears completion

The big 12-sided hall at Vérité is nearing completion. With its height of 11 meters, it is described as "stunningly beautiful" even though not yet completed. The hall is already in use for meditation and chanting, and the first event planned to take

place in the hall will be two 10-day Vipassana courses.

Matrimandir update

On March 5, 1997 the Matrimandir Forum decided to follow a proposal to seek expert advice on how to complete the outer skin of Matrimandir on the basis of Roger's design. A document "Matrimandir 1997 - the outer shell" has been prepared with a view to approaching engineering consultants and other experts for their suggestions. Some contacts have been made and others are in preparation. It is hoped that expert input may provide new insights and give a fresh impetus for completing the Matrimandir quickly, cost-effectively and to a high level of technical perfection, with a minimum of future maintenance and disturbance.

Status of Women

The Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG) recently organised a seminar on the status of women in the villages around and in Auroville. In Tamil Nadu women have clearly defined boundaries and roles, and there are many social pressures that prevent them from crossing these boundaries or stepping out of their roles. The many issues surrounding the status of women in and around Auroville are complex. The changes that have occurred as a result of Auroville being established are many. But Auroville is not the only factor affecting changes to women's status. Changes are occurring in the Indian society as a whole, and the cinema, the political realities, the reservation policies for women also affect this region. (From a report by Auroville's Village Action Group)

Auroville International meeting

It is still possible to sign up for the annual Auroville International meeting which will take place in Kleebach, Alsace, France, from June 24th through 29th. Those interested in attending should contact Peter Clarence-Smith in France. Tel/fax (33) 389.479423. email: 100703.1724@compuserve.com

NATURE'S SPIRIT:

Swimming Upstream in the U.S.A

They came. They saw. They got it—after a year of fermentation. In December of '95, a group of Americans set out to do "cultural synergy" in Auroville (*we wrote about this in AVT #85, Feb. '96-eds*). They came through the California Institute of Integral Studies, though part of the team was from World Share. Their intention was to experiment with the "cultural synergy" consciousness-expanding technique that some of them had already tried out in China and South America. The method uses the intense immersion of the visiting researcher in the unfamiliar culture in order to uncover the perspectives of the people they interview.

When the group returned to the USA, they themselves had changed. They could not so easily accept again the rampant consumerism of their culture and the disparity between their own lifestyle and that of the people they had so recently visited. Some of them met together to discuss their concern, and finally the decision was taken to purchase a large, beautiful piece of rural land in South Carolina to start their new sustainable community. They called it Nature's Spirit.

In their first newsletter published in March '97, they mention the Auroville influence: "In the three weeks we were in Auroville, we were deeply affected by their universal belief that in order to create a world that is sustainable for all we must

expand our consciousness. We were also impressed by their high quality of simple living using alternative technologies and building methods and materials."

Their mission, as they put it, is "to create a community in which we work to expand our consciousness by living the question, 'How does one live sustainably in harmony with nature and spirit?'" Nature's Spirit has already formulated strategies for fulfilling this mission. They plan to reduce waste by not creating it, to use alternative economics and renewable energy systems, to grow food organically and give more resources to the earth than they take. They view their community as an experiment in truth and have opened it to all those "who feel they have a spiritual call to live sustainably in harmony with spirit and nature."

They sum it up like this. "We have come to feel and know that, in order to address the inequity of our culture in relation to the rest of the world, and the great damage that we are causing to the earth which sustains us, we must act in a way that is like salmon swimming upstream in order to spawn and carry on a new generation. The key to creating our community, Nature's Spirit, will be the committed souls of many people who share a dream of a better world for everyone and who are willing to swim upstream to demonstrate its possibility."

Bill

For more information contact: Nature's Spirit, P. O. Box 390, Salem SC 29676, USA

INNER OUTING

Sitting quietly on a soft white shore, my gaze, plunging through some ever-virgin depths, meets a floating treasure. This wonder becomes a gate, slowly opening to reveal yet another treasure: a city of dawning light.

The people of this city know each other for what they truly are: parcels of the One, learning completeness: they can't hide any longer, from themselves or from one another, the spark which is the essence of their being.

The air is charged with a mysterious substance that makes the body's cells buoyant and daring; the joy of the people, too immense to bear confinement, spreads forth creating avenues of lightness along which they move purposefully.

The growth of this city is inherently harmonious, - a perfect synergy of past, present and future. Life unfolds organically with an unseen protective shield, a consequence of the people's sincerity; their aim is nothing else than to become ever fitter channels for the light which illumines their faith and guides their steps.

Across the ocean of Her love, I get back to the soft white shore. It is a beautiful city in the making I was shown beyond the crystal gate, and I know which City that is.

Adhara

Subscription Information

Subscription rates for 12 issues of Auroville Today are the following: for India Rs 250; for other countries Rs 1250, Can \$ 51, FF 195, DM 56, It. Lira 61,000, D.Gl. 63, US \$ 38, UK £25. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (add 10% for admin. and bank charges) or directly to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: 'Contribution for Auroville Today'. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please do not send postal money orders or cash. Subscribers will receive a reminder when their subscription is about to expire.

Auroville International (AVI) Centres

♦Canada: AVI Canada, c/o Antoinette Gagné, 847 chemin Perry, Aymer (Quebec), J9H 5C9 Canada. Tel/fax: (1)-819.648. 0328. ♦Germany: AVI Deutschland, c/o Wolfgang J. Schmidt-Reinecke, Mainstrasse 75, 28199 Bremen. Tel.: (49)-421.594220/705289. Fax: (49)-421.594240. ✉wjs@auro.hb.north.de ♦Spain: AVI España, c/o Kitru and Yolanda, Apartado de Correos 36, 31610 Villava, Navarra. Tel. (34)-48.227514 ✉kty@bcn.servi.com.es ♦France: AVI France, 6, rue du Cail, 75010 Paris. Tel. (33)-1. 40364367, fax 44729467. ♦The Netherlands: AVI Nederland, c/o M. Berden, Lobelialaan 51, 2555 PC Den Haag. Tel. (31)-70.3251160 ✉surya@dds.nl ♦Sweden: AVI Sverige, c/o Ulf Carlberg, Borgholm, Broddebö, S-59700 Atvidaberg. Tel/fax (48)-120.22026 ✉ulf.carlberg@atvidaberg.mail.telia.com ♦U.K.: AVI U.K., c/o Martin Littlewood, Canigou, Cot Lane, Chidham, W. Sussex PO18 8SP. Tel/fax (44)-1243.574099 ✉aviuk@compuserve.com ♦U.S.A (1): AVI USA, c/o Megan Thomas, P.O. Box 601, Sausalito CA 94966. Tel. (1)-415.788.AURO ✉aviusa@aol.com ♦U.S.A (2): Auroville Information Office c/o Julian Lines, 1183 Wittenberg Road, Mt. Tremper, NY 12457. Tel:914.679.5358. Fax: 5853. ✉AVInfo@aol.com

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HUMAN UNITY
NATION SOULS

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"You will receive all the help that you need"

Recently, Nirodbaran—the senior Ashramite who was Sri Aurobindo's scribe for Savitri and who has written many books on Sri Aurobindo—revisited Auroville and gave an impromptu talk in Pitanga Hall. Some days later, as a follow-up, members of the Auroville Today team interviewed him in his room in the Ashram. The following is extracted from his talk in Pitanga and the subsequent interview.

"I read about Auroville regularly in 'Auroville Today' but when I read the February issue I came across something very new to me. So far, I have only come into contact with the outer life of Auroville—which is exceedingly beautiful—but in this issue some Aurovilians spoke about their inner life. So I thought I must meet these people.

"I also discovered from this issue that some Aurovilians visit other ashrams and spiritual teachers. Why? It seems because the presence of a living teacher helps them, and they also say that when they return to Auroville they understand and appreciate Sri Aurobindo and The Mother much more deeply. It has also been said that the yoga of Sri Aurobindo is very difficult and that some people need to take some preliminary steps with other masters before they are ready to begin with this yoga.

"This raises some important questions. For example, is Auroville meant only for the practice of Sri Aurobindo's yoga? And do these other paths assist or contradict the path of Sri Aurobindo?

tion of Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's work.

"In Auroville the same danger is there. When Ramdass visited you some years ago he said, 'I have yet to hear your unifying spiritual voice'. If you are not unified, if there are many cross-currents because Aurovilians are following spiritually different paths, the realisation of Auroville will take longer.

"There is no formal initiation into this yoga, so how are you to know if it is your path? Mother said that if you feel deep within that unmistakably this is your path, then it is clear. In fact, everybody who is in Auroville has received an inner call, whether or not they are conscious of it. Now the challenge is to become conscious of it and to put it into practice. This yoga

is not easy (although Mother said there is a sunlit path), and I can understand that some Aurovilians feel the need of a living teacher. But if you understand

Is Auroville meant only for the practice of Sri Aurobindo's yoga?

that it is not you who are doing the yoga but that Sri Aurobindo and The Mother are doing it through you, if you learn to collaborate, to work only for the Divine, you will feel their presence which is so pow-



Girl in Rameswaram

PHOTO: OLIVIER



Nirodbaran at Pitanga Hall

PHOTO: CAREL

"In the Ashram it is clear that we are meant to practice only Sri Aurobindo's yoga. Sri Aurobindo and The Mother made it clear that once you accepted Sri Aurobindo's yoga you should not go to other yogis unless, of course, they sent you there. Why? Because once you have given your allegiance to one master he or she has accepted total spiritual responsibility for you; if you go away from them you do so at your own cost. But also it is because Sri Aurobindo's yoga is quite different from other yogas—it is entirely new—and these other paths do not fit in with and may even contradict his yoga. You may think that no harm can be done by visiting other teachers, you may feel that they are helping you. But many of these other spiritual teachers are so strong in their realisation that if you go to them you are bound to receive their influence, and when you bring it back with you this will cause a mixture, a disharmony at an occult level and delay the realisa-

erful, and you will receive all the help that you need. As Sri Aurobindo put it, 'The Mother is the goal, everything is in her; if she is attained, all is attained. If you dwell in her consciousness, everything unfolds of itself'. This is unquestionable, a matter of experience. Only, you must begin by having faith; knowledge will come later. Mother said, 'Once I have accepted you, I never leave you'. So even if you struggle against it now, one day you are bound to do their yoga—you cannot get away!

"And how are you to know that you are progressing, that your consciousness is evolving? If you live more and more in an atmosphere of peace, of joy and of beauty, all these are signs of something higher. Above all, if more harmony comes into your life it means that the Force is acting more powerfully. So this is why you must ensure that nothing comes in to disturb that harmony."

Edited by Alan