



# “An Extraordinary Girl”

*Some Episodes in Her Life*

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## *Foreword*

Esha, the late Dilip Kumar Roy's niece, was a little girl visiting the Ashram when I came to know her through my niece Jyotirmoyee with whom she had become very friendly. She wanted to settle in the Ashram, but her mother did not want it as she was still a minor. When after many years she came to the Ashram again and stayed with Sahana Devi, I became more closely acquainted with her. By that time she had already married and obtained her divorce and had decided to settle here. I came to her help and made all possible arrangements for the purpose. Since then I have come to know her well and listened to her narration of the incidents of her life. As I found them interesting I began to note them down and was thinking of publishing them in *Mother India* when somehow she got wind of it and strongly objected to it. As I felt I had Sri Aurobindo's sanction for it, I did not listen to her. In spite of my disregarding her objection, luckily she did not stop recounting her saga. Of course she narrated it in Bengali and later I put it down in English as faithfully as I could. When the story began to appear in *Mother India*, she insisted more than once that I should stop it. My answer was that I believed it could be helpful to many readers and that Sri Aurobindo seemed to support me.

We find that many *bhaktas* are indeed appreciating the story, particularly because they realise through it that Sri Aurobindo is still very much with us and our faith has been strengthened, helping us through the difficult moments of our life.

NIRODBARAN

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## My Birth

I was born into an old and noble family. Both my grandfathers were well known in Bengal. My paternal grandfather, Surendranath Banerji, was a celebrated political leader and later a high-ranking government official during the Reform Scheme. My maternal grandfather Dwijendralal Roy was known for his literary genius.

One day, Surendranath paid an unexpected visit to Dwijendralal.

“Surendrababu,” Dwijendralal said, “what an honour for me that you should call upon me. Welcome. I had not expected to see you here even in my dreams.”

“How true,” Surendranath answered. “Our paths would not normally cross, as it appears we have little in common. But sometimes the unexpected comes to pass, as you well know. I have come on urgent business.”

“Business?” Dwijendralal exclaimed. “Of what kind?”

“I would like your daughter’s hand for my son,” replied Surendranath.

Dwijendralal was struck dumb. He looked intently at Surendranath and asked gravely, “Have you seen my daughter or heard anything about her?”

“No.”

“Then how can you make such a proposal? I’m puzzled how you could show interest in such an alliance.”

“I am interested because of the father, not the daughter,” Surendranath answered. “I would like to establish an enduring blood-relationship between our two distinguished families.” Dwijendralal paused for a moment. “With my apologies, I must refuse your offer,” he said.

Now it was Surendranath’s turn to be amazed. The proposed marriage was in every way most desirable, even enviable. Heredity, fame, wealth, culture – nothing better could have been hoped for by either party. Coming to himself, he asked, “May I know why? Is there anything that you find amiss in my son?”

“Nothing. Your son may be good, but to tell the truth, a great man’s son does not usually become great himself. Such a marriage may not be happy and I would not like my only daughter to suffer such a fate and consider me responsible for it. Besides, I am not a rich man myself as you are. Such unequal unions end in grief.”

“Is that your final decision?” Surendranath asked. “If so, I cannot force the marriage. Let it be as you wish.” He started to go, but on second thoughts turned round and said in a determined tone, “Listen, Dwijendralal, this person Surendranath, who has come to your door, has never met with failure in his life. Here too he will not fail. The marriage shall take place.”

“Perhaps, but I will not be a party to it,” Dwijendralal replied calmly.

Only one other person was present during this exchange, my maternal uncle, Dilip Kumar Roy.

As things turned out, my grandfather Dwijendralal died the following year. Now Surendranath revived the proposal, this time to my uncle who had become my guardian. Embarrassed by this fresh overture, my uncle gave it much thought, and finally decided to accept. My mother, overcome with surprise, asked her brother, “Dada, how is it that you have given your consent, when you were aware of our father’s objections to the match?”

“I feel we have no choice, Maya,” Uncle replied. “Besides, so long as you remain single, I cannot pursue any career of my own. If you are without a protector, I cannot, for example, go to England if I want to.”

I can imagine the happiness of my grandfather, Surendranath, when his prophecy thus came true. It made him forget his former humiliation. The marriage took place with great pomp. However, it did

not turn out to be as happy as everyone had hoped, not due to any incompatibility between my mother and father but because of disagreements and quarrels which my father's sisters who had come away from their in-laws' houses created.

How often such situations arise in joint families all over India!

My grandfather, Surendranath, lived ten years more. He knew of the disharmony between his daughters and my mother, and told them, "I have brought this girl into my house. I can't drive her away as you well know. If you cannot get on with her and with each other, you had better go back to your fathers-in-law." So it was that the sisters left the house.

For ten years my parents had no children. At one time they even thought of adopting a child. However, relatives suggested that they go to Tarakeshwar, a holy place where the deity was renowned for his supernatural powers, and might be implored for the boon of a child.

Neither my grandfather nor my father had any faith in these supposed superstitions. But my mother approached grandfather and said, "Father, as everybody is urging me to go to Tarakeshwar, should I go?"

"You may go," he replied. "At least there can be no harm in going. But I won't allow you to go without special arrangements. I know the head priest there and shall ask him to look after you."

When they arrived at Tarakeshwar, the priest did indeed show himself to be overzealous in his concern for them, not only because my grandfather was a well-known political figure but also because he had once saved him from the gallows after he had been sentenced for a grave crime. He had never forgotten this favour. He took my parents to the *math* (temple) and seated them in front of the Lingam of Lord Shiva. There were two pits, one on either side of the Lingam. Devotees had to put a white flower and a red one into the pits. Mother did as she was told and waited with Father by her side. Suddenly the white flower seemed to spring up and fall into my mother's lap. The priest was overjoyed.

"Ma, the Thakur has heard your prayer," he said with a smile. "You will have a daughter."

Thus the prediction was fulfilled. This must be the way Shiva answers prayers.

But Lord Shiva seems to have graced them with a sickly baby. Nevertheless, from my birth, we used to visit the temple at Tarakeshwar every year. And until his death, my father would distribute blankets to the poor, about two thousand on each occasion, his earnest wish being that I should have a long life.

I continued all the while to suffer from delicate health, falling prey to one ailment after another. My poor father used to run to various astrologers asking, "Will my daughter survive?" And they always assured him that I would. "We don't see premature death in her horoscope."

My uncle would taunt my father with the suggestion that he was spoiling me with his excessive fondness. "Send her to a boarding-school, and you'll see that she will be all right."

To this my father would retort, "Excessive fondness can never spoil a child; it is excessive neglect that does it. I have no respect for boarding-school education. Let her grow up and have sound health first." It was my father's final verdict in the matter.

A famous Calcutta physician used to attend to me during my illnesses. In later years, however, I discontinued his services as we failed to get along with each other.

Meanwhile, once when my father fell ill, he engaged a young man of the neighbourhood to look after him. The boy did not have a good reputation, and when my father asked him to attend on me as well, my mother was shocked, and remonstrated, "How dare you do such a thing when you know what kind of a character he is?"

"Because I know my daughter even better," he replied. "I would rather cut off my hand than believe my daughter is capable of going astray." That was the kind of faith he had in me, and in others

as well.

Sri Aurobindo observed about him at one time, “He is a fine man, but has no turn towards God.”



## Grandfather's Death

My grandfather died just a few months before my birth, as did C.R. Das and quite a few other great men, curiously enough, at about the same time. My grandfather had very much wanted to see his grandchild before he died, but his wish remained unfulfilled. However, he blessed my mother so that she might have a daughter and not a son, which seemed very strange indeed, for everywhere in India sons are always preferred to daughters.

There was a reason for this odd preference, or perhaps it could be called a superstitious fear. It was said, though it had never been put to the test, that in his family, sons would not survive or live long because of a curse pronounced by a Tantric sannyasi. Once, this sannyasi had come to settle in a corner of the huge garden of the house of my grandfather's father-in-law, who was a very rich man with large properties. My grandfather was, in fact, his adopted son to whom, following a common practice, he had given his daughter in marriage and, consequently, my grandfather was living in the same house. Now, when his father-in-law saw this sannyasi settled in the garden and engaged in puja and meditation, he became incensed as he had no faith in sannyasis and took them to be charlatans. Forthwith he ordered the sannyasi to leave. Naturally, the sannyasi was highly offended and left, but only after flinging a curse at him: "I tell you, you will have no male issue to carry on your family line."

That is why my grandfather wanted a daughter. My father himself died quite young and his death occurred under similar circumstances. About a week before his death a Tantric came to our garden and was seen performing his mystic rites. People suspected that he was the cause of my father's death, though overtly he had done nothing to deserve this suspicion. My mother referred the matter to Sri Aurobindo through my uncle who was a resident of the Ashram at the time. Sri Aurobindo is said to have replied that death is not caused by anyone's wrong doing; death creates its own reasons to occur, independent of anybody's mala fide rituals and incantations.

Before his death, my grandfather stipulated in his will that his grandchild, male or female, would be heir to all his property and my father would act as my guardian. If my father died and my mother did not remarry, she would get Rs. 200/- per month by way of allowance. My father was given a sum of one lakh of rupees to use as he wished. When my father died, I was still a minor, so my uncle came from Pondicherry and made my mother my guardian till I came of age and this arrangement continued even after I had become a major. My mother did not change it; I also let it remain as it was, but later on it involved me in many difficulties.

## Childhood

Sri Aurobindo is reported to have said about me that I was an extraordinary girl. On hearing of it, my son used to remark, “I don’t know about that, but she certainly is abnormal!”

When, however, I look back I find that I was in many ways unusual, which might have been due to various factors. First of all, I was the only child of my wealthy parents, living in a villa on the banks of the Ganga, surrounded by gardens and a lawn, cut off from the neighbourhood of “common people”. So I had a lonely childhood and, being of delicate health from birth, my movements were restricted. To add to this, by nature and temperament, I was different from others. I did not like sports or playing with ordinary dolls. Clay idols of gods and goddesses were my playmates. Among them one of Sri Krishna was my favourite. It seems I used even to sleep with my hands folded in the attitude of *pranam*, seeing which my father would tell my mother, “Why does the child always sleep like that? It would be better to separate her hands.”

One day we went to a fair. In one stall there were beautiful dolls and an exhibit of an almost life-size tableau of Sri Krishna as a boy (*Bala-Gopal*) standing with his right hand outstretched controlling a raging fire while his cowherd playmates cowered behind him, overcome by fear. I was so enthralled by it and so much wanted it that Father took me to Calcutta and we ordered a smaller replica of it with the famous firm of N. C. Pal.

Father constructed a small chamber called ‘Thakur Ghar’ (House of the Deity) and I installed this idol of Sri Krishna there. In the Thakur Ghar, I spent hours talking, dancing and playing with it. My mother taunted Father, saying, “You go all out to satisfy the whims of your daughter while you yourself don’t believe in gods.” But when at times I was too absorbed in my games in the Thakur Ghar, Father would cry out, “My little *ma*<sup>1</sup> you shouldn’t spend so much time with your gods. In our family it is an anomaly. It is not done.”

I was not fond of studies. Once, when I was sent to a local school, the teacher said, “Today, you will be given tests.” Tests? The very word made me miserable and I burst into tears and sobbed aloud. That was the end of my school-going; I never went back, but studied privately at home. As I had no friends, my father, overcome with pity for my loneliness, looked for some suitable companion for me from among our relatives.

Another unusual feature of my childhood was that I came into contact with sadhus and sannyasis almost from my birth. When I was about two years old my parents used to take me with them across the Ganga on their visits to Bharat Maharaj, then Joint Manager of Belur Math. My father had great respect for sadhus though he himself had no faith in God. While my parents were talking to Maharaj, I would fall asleep on his bed. At the end of the meeting, he would carry me, still asleep, and lay me in the boat nearby.

Whenever my uncle visited Calcutta from Pondicherry, Bharat Maharaj would come to hear my uncle sing. But the first thing he would ask him was, “Where is Esha?” Once my uncle, quite annoyed, retorted, “Why do you always enquire about her?”

Bharat Maharaj replied calmly, “You know, my ties with her go back to her babyhood. She would come with her parents and sleep soundly on my bed as if it were her parents’ bed.”

Bharat Maharaj is still alive<sup>2</sup>, now almost a hundred years old. He was Nolini-da’s college friend whom he met again when he visited the Ashram. A few years ago when I went to see him, he made a strange remark: “Esha, my dear, if you had not married, you would have reached a very high level in

<sup>1</sup> ‘Ma’ is Bengali for ‘mother’, the way a female child is often fondly addressed.

<sup>2</sup> In the mid-eighties.

your spiritual attainment.”

Earlier, while on a visit to Sri Aurobindo Ashram at the age of ten or so, the Divine Mother had cautioned me, “Don’t marry.”

## Childhood and Father's Teaching

During my childhood, I used to model dolls, particularly of gods and goddesses, out of mud and clay. One day I distinctly heard a voice telling me, "Don't play so much with water; you may catch cold and fall ill."

I was taken aback and wondered whose voice it could be. I asked my mother but she couldn't answer my question. She merely said, "Whoever has said it, it is true; so often you catch cold because of your playing with water and wet clay."

I understood later that it was an inner voice; I was hearing it for the first time, and it was after my first visit to Pondicherry.

At about the same time, when I was four years old or so, a severe earthquake shook Calcutta. Our entire building began to shake. I was sitting on a stool when it happened, and fell down on the floor. All the residents of the house ran out and assembled in the courtyard. My mother took me in her arms and joined them.

"What is an earthquake, Mummy?" I asked her. "And what happens?"

She replied, "Houses fall down, trees crash, people and animals die."

Hearing this, I knelt on the ground, put my hands together and began to pray, "Oh God, I don't want to die, I want to live!"

People all around were looking at me and, hearing my earnest prayer, began to laugh and enjoy the spectacle.

As I have previously mentioned, I had a lonely childhood. But I was my father's pet. One day, Father's spectacles were found broken. He asked all the servants whether they knew anything about it, but they replied that they knew nothing. Then he asked me, and I answered that I didn't know either. But I wasn't a clever liar, and he quickly caught me out.

Afterwards he asked me, "Why did you tell a lie, my love? You know I never scold you or punish you. I love you so much, and still you told me a lie. Why? What were you afraid of?"

Later, however, on another occasion, he was not so gentle. It happened like this: My father was constantly in search of a companion for me. He wanted a girl of my age who would live with us; she would grow up with me and my father would bear all her expenses. But for a long time no family could be found who was willing to part with a suitable child. Finally, a girl, Manu, was found whose parents happened to be our distant relatives and who were dependent upon my father. Both Manu and I were about five years old. She, however, had good health whereas I did not. We became good friends right from the start.

Then one day, a curious thought caught hold of me. I began to think that Manu was eager to please me in order to gain something from me. This baseless suspicion made me very ill-tempered, and for about a month I would often make her stand in a corner and beat her with a stick. She bore this treatment quietly, certain that there was no point in complaining, as I was the darling of my parents.

At the end of a month, she must have had enough; she went to my father. He was sitting in the verandah reading a newspaper and, looking up, asked her, "What's the matter? Do you want to tell me something?"

Very hesitantly, she replied, "Y-y-e-s."

"Say it, then!" Father encouraged.

Still hesitantly, she said, "Your daughter beats me."

"Beats you?" he asked, surprised. "You're such a big girl and so much stronger than she is. How is it that she beats you?"

“Because I don’t resist. I just bear it.”

“How long has this been going on?”

“About a month.”

“And you kept quiet for such a long time?”

“Yes, I was scared. I want to go back home.”

“No, no, wait. Do one thing. Tomorrow, when she beats you, hit her back as hard as you can. Don’t spare her, do you understand?”

Manu looked at him incredulously. “I mean it,” he insisted. “Don’t be afraid. I won’t punish you.”

The next day, when I started beating her as usual, she turned around and gave me such a slap on my face that I fell down and blood started to come out of my mouth. I began to howl, and my parents ran to me. My mother was furious when she saw what had happened, but my father calmly told her, “She’s got what she deserves. Take her away and don’t give her any food all day.”

Mother tried to argue, but Father was adamant, and I starved the whole day.

When I grew older, I realised that in everybody there lurks a seed of inhumanity. It may come from our animal origins, or from inherited tendencies, but it can surface and cause harm even when we are children. My father’s method of teaching may have been harsh but it was effective.

Now observe the other side of his nature. He always wanted me to be brave, and especially, not to be afraid of ghosts.

One day he told me, “My little *ma*, you see that pond over there where you go to play during the daytime? Can you go there alone at night?”

“Yes, I can,” I replied.

“Very well; to-night, go there and come back,” he said.

I was ten years old and all the more alone because Mother was in the hospital. Trying not to mind, I set out towards the pond. It was quite far and in the dark I was nervous in spite of myself. Suddenly I felt that someone was following me. I could hear footsteps in the bushes. As I stopped, so did the footfalls. I got even more nervous. Then suddenly Father’s voice called out, “Are you scared, my child?”

He really did take good care of me, whatever may be the lesson he wanted to teach me.

One day, sitting in a rocking chair, I was singing to myself. It was a bright moonlit night and I was singing my grandfather D.L. Roy’s beautiful song: “In the blue sky of the Infinite, how wonderfully the moonlight spreads....”

I stopped abruptly, and heard a voice, “Why did you stop? Go on!” Greatly frightened, I ran to my father and told him what had happened. Father asked, “Did you really hear a voice?”

“Yes, Father,” I answered. “I heard it very clearly asking me to continue.”

The next day, Father enquired about it from the neighbours and came to know that nearby there was a lady living all alone. They said she had lost her young daughter and, since then, had taken to sitting sad and forlorn by her window. It must have been she who had spoken.

Telling me about it, Father said, “See? We become afraid for nothing, and take to imagining ghosts. There are no such things. Do remember that from now on.”

I had learned dancing from the famous dancing master Shambhu Maharaj, and at the age of ten I could dance quite well. Once, it was decided that my uncle who was a brilliant singer would sing, and I would dance in accompaniment.

My father, being ill, could not attend the performance. It was, however, a great success, and at the end there was tremendous applause. People rushed to my uncle, asking, “Who is this girl?”

In a proud and elated voice he replied, “Why, she’s my daughter!”

Immediately I burst out, "I am nothing of the kind, I am my father's daughter!"

Of course, Uncle felt very small, and I shouldn't have put him to shame like that. But I did it because I knew that he did not get on well with my father. When we reached home, my mother went to my father and said, "Do you know what your daughter did tonight?" Then she told him, and Father was so moved he hugged me.

But on another occasion I did not spare my father, either. When my mother and I were coming to Pondicherry for the second time, Father came to the station to see us off. I was standing by the window of our compartment when he asked me, "My love, won't you miss me?" I shook my head because I knew I wouldn't.

Talking about dancing, two other incidents come to my mind. My mother used to visit Santiniketan where she would meet Tagore. Once she took me with her. In the course of their conversation, he told her, "I hear your daughter dances well. I would like to see her dance."

"I would prefer not," Mother replied. As he insisted, she explained politely, "I am afraid to let her dance before you for two reasons. If you don't like her performance, her career may be marred for good and, if you do, she will get a swollen head."

Then Tagore said to me that on a certain day he would pass by our riverside garden in his boat. "Stand there on the bank of the Ganga and, when you see my boat glide by flying a flag, start dancing. That way, I will be able to see you dance."

I was ready on the appointed day. But, although I waited long, his boat never came.

The next incident occurred before Mahatma Gandhi. My uncle had gone to sing for him and taken me along. I was duly introduced to the Mahatma and, after my uncle's singing, Mahatmaji asked me to dance before him. But for some reason I refused, in spite of my uncle's pleading.

Later, I took part in a dance performance in the Ashram, at the Mother's bidding, during one of the annual functions.

## Black Magic with Poles

Now I would like to narrate the story of how black magic was employed in detecting a thief. It was an incident I witnessed with my own eyes.

Once, some extremely valuable gold and silver utensils were stolen from our house. They were treasured heirlooms of our family, and Father was particularly disturbed at their disappearance because such a loss was a matter of shame to the family. He resolved to catch the thief by any means possible. He was sure that the theft was the work of one of the servants, for no one from outside would dare to enter a house when so many inmates were there, open the almirahs and steal such a large number of things — unless a servant was in league with him.

Father questioned all of the servants, but all of them denied any knowledge of the theft. Now he became more anxious, and informed the police. At the same time he called in a Muslim fakir who had a considerable reputation. It was said he could call forth spirits by his occult power. If a culprit was to be found, the fakir would summon a spirit, and invoke its power into a stick or a rod. He would then put that stick or rod in someone's hands, who would be led by it to the wanted man.

On the day the fakir had been called to our house, all the servants were made to gather on the lawn. Many people had gathered to watch. Two long, sturdy poles were procured. When the fakir arrived, he selected two of our most trusted servants, and instructed them to hold the ends of the poles, one man in front and the other behind. They were to go wherever the poles took them. My father seated himself nearby with a whip in his hand. It was his intention to whip the thief the moment he was caught. I was standing on the first-floor verandah with my mother. I was about nine or ten years old.

The stage was set. The fakir began to mutter an incantation and sprinkled water on the poles. Suddenly, they began to move, even though the servants were holding them firmly. Imagine the excitement of the spectators! Now the poles began to pull the two servants along, making them stop before one servant after another. In this way they passed by all the servants, and were then impelled by the poles to climb the stairs to the first floor. There the poles led them to the almirah where the stolen goods had been kept, then sought to return to the ground floor. Here the servants found themselves in trouble, for the poles, rather than descending by the stairs, tried to jump down by leaping over the railing. The servants who were doing their best to hold on to the poles barely escaped a bad fall. The poles led them back to the ring of servants waiting on the lawn, and again made them stop in front of each, one after another, until they came to an old servant.

Now something happened which I would not have believed possible if I had not seen it with my own eyes. The two sturdy bamboo poles bent by themselves in the middle so that they encircled the old man's neck like the hands of someone trying to strangle him.

Upon seeing this, my father jumped up and started lashing him with his whip. He was certain that the thief had been found. The old man fell to the ground, but still my father went on whipping him mercilessly.

Watching from the verandah upstairs, I was unable to bear this brutality, and fainted. Now my mother shouted to Father, "Do you want to kill my daughter as well as that old man? Stop it at once!"

By now the servant's entire body was lacerated and he was groaning pathetically. He confessed his guilt and said he had sold all the utensils. My father was wild with rage, not only for the loss of the stolen goods, but because he had believed for years that this particular servant was his most faithful. He had been the custodian of my father's money, but had never lost a pie. Father couldn't understand what had possessed him now, what greed or dire temptation, to break open the almirah and steal such



a quantity of the family's valuables.

My mother, however, gave no thought to the old man's crime, and nursed him day and night till he was cured. She did this despite constant friction with my father. Her viewpoint was clear "I can't see a man die before my eyes," she told him, "even if he is a thief. You can drive me out of the house for it if you like. But this man has paid heavily for what he did, and I can't bear to see him in this condition or hear his cries of pain. Think how many years he has served us faithfully — surely that has some value. It must be reckoned with."

After he recovered the servant left us. In spite of all he had suffered, he returned after some years to beg pardon of my father, but Father was unrelenting. "Beware," he told the old man. "Never come before me again. If you do, I won't spare you. I haven't forgotten your treachery and I doubt if I ever will."

I recall the story of another servant. While my mother was awaiting my birth, a man approached my grandfather. He had a number of recommendation letters which he showed, saying that he would like nothing better than to serve in my grandfather's house as a servant. Grandfather was pleased with his certificates and told him, "Very well, when my daughter-in-law's child is born, you can help to look after it."

The man was extremely happy with this appointment, and spared no pains to make me happy. He came to love me dearly, and I too reciprocated his affection.

Even when I grew to marriageable age, he would still follow me like a shadow. He would watch over me to such an extent that he would hang about even while I was with my friends, especially when my mother was not about. This would often annoy me, but he would not be concerned whether I minded or not.

Aside from his devotion to me, he was so trustworthy that we gave him the freedom of the house. He knew where we kept our money and our valuables, but, unlike the servant who had been unmasked by the fakir, he never touched or stole anything. When I was married, he accompanied me to my father-in-law's house. But unfortunately I had to dismiss him later when my life took a different turn.

In modern times, the stories of such servants will be looked upon as utter make-believe, but, if one reads writers such as Rabindranath Tagore, one will realise that such incidents were far from rare fifty to a hundred years ago.



## Childhood Contact with the Ashram

My uncle had come to stay in the Ashram for good. In 1930, my parents wanted to visit the Ashram, probably to see my uncle rather than for any deeper reason. Upon receiving their letter, he wrote back to say that we could come if my father had devotion for the Mother.

We made the journey along with Manu, my girl-companion and my little Pekingese dog. I was five years old. An old spacious house on the seafront was rented for us, possibly the house which is now the Beach Office of the Sri Aurobindo Society. The Mother paid us a visit on the afternoon of our arrival. As soon as she had taken her seat my dog went running to her and, jumping into her lap, began showering her with affection. The Mother embraced it and said lovingly, "How sweet!"

Then I was asked to do pranam to her. I did it in the Bengali way, touching her feet with my hands. She patted me on my head. My parents followed me, my father doing his pranam with devotion. Afterwards, they talked to the Mother. She was very much at ease and my father was gratified by her intimate manner. After their discussion, they sat for meditation, but I was not allowed to join them. Of course, I was curious to know what they were doing, so I went on tiptoe to find out. I saw everyone sitting with eyes closed, but the Mother seemed to have noticed me and mentioned it to my parents.

We stayed at the Ashram for one or two months. My parents had the darshan of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, but once again I was not allowed to join them. When Manu asked me why, I answered peevishly, "You see, the Mother is Bhagavati, the Divine. She disappears into the air, while Sri Aurobindo, being human, doesn't." I thought it was he who would not permit us to have the Darshan, hence my remark.

Be that as it may, our life at the Ashram was happy. Manu and I could go wherever we wanted or stroll on the seaside, provided we were always accompanied by a servant.

After a prolonged stay, we returned to Calcutta where a near-disaster took place. My father had planned that we should leave the train at Howrah rather than going on to Calcutta. We could then cross the Ganga by country boat to reach our house which was situated on the opposite bank. On the way, Father intended to buy some fish from the fishermen on the river. He was expecting that they had caught some Ilsha, a delicacy much prized by Bengalis, and was hoping to take it home with him. He hired two boats, one for the servants and the other for us. As we moved out into the river, he seated himself on the prow so that he might spot the fisherman with a catch of Ilsha. Soon a boat came gliding by with the much-sought-after fish, and Father leaned forward to bargain with the fisherman. As he was engaged in haggling over the price, he suddenly lost his balance and fell into the choppy water. There was panic in the boat. My father did not know how to swim. As he began to sink, my distraught mother jumped after him. Needless to say, she did not know how to swim either and, with one hand raised, also began to be engulfed by the water. A relative was holding me firmly in case I too decided to jump after my parents.

It was the servants who came to their rescue. Being more capable than any of us, they plunged into the river, and with tremendous effort recovered the two unconscious bodies and pushed them into the boat. As soon as we reached our house on the opposite bank, the doctor was called and my mother and father were revived. The doctor later explained that as my father had high blood pressure, his leaning out of the boat might have made him giddy and so caused him to fall overboard. My father, however, was unimpressed by this explanation. Instead, he lost whatever faith he had in the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and never visited the Ashram again. He did, nevertheless, allow my mother and myself to come on a number of occasions, in 1932, 1934, 1936 and 1938.

In 1932, we stayed in my uncle's house. I had brought Manu again, and once more we were

considered too young for the Darshan. Instead, I was left to play in the open space behind the Service tree, and amused myself by throwing stones into a nearby tank while accompanied by the same elderly relative who had taken care of me in the boat-accident and was now an Ashram inmate.

All of a sudden one day, I looked up and saw someone standing at the window observing me intently, his face all smiles, I stood there agape with wonder. My relative who was with me, looked too, but said nothing. "Is it Champaklal?" I asked myself, perplexed. Then the Mother came and stood at the window as well. Both of them enveloped me with their smiles and the Mother waved to me with her hand. I folded my hands and did pranam to them both. Then the window closed. When I asked, my relative told me I had not seen Champaklal, but Sri Aurobindo himself with the Mother by his side.

Once I plucked a flower from the garden. The gardener rebuked me for this and I ran home crying all the way. The Mother had heard me crying and asked what was the matter. When she was told, she instructed the gardener to let me do whatever I liked.

I wrote some letters to the Mother in Bengali, which she answered. Sri Aurobindo must have translated them to her. Sri Aurobindo replied to a few of them in English. I reproduce here two of those letters.

My own Mother,

I was very happy to receive your letter. Mother, can I take the two castors from M? For, plenty of ants come to the place where I offer flowers before your photo and Sri Aurobindo's. If I can have those two castors then I can fill them with water and place the table on them. The flowers will thus be safe from the ants.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, you can take them.

Mother, yesterday I received a book from Nolini-da. Its name is *The Ashram and the Teachings of Sri Aurobindo*. In that book there are pictures of you and Sri Aurobindo as well as of the Ashram. I shall get the pictures of both of you framed. To whom shall I give them? I will do as you advise. Please reply to my letter.

Sri Aurobindo: You can get them framed by Biren.

Mamma,

I was very happy to receive Sri Aurobindo's letter. Can I come to see you upstairs? I hope you have received my mother's letter. Can Manu come to the music? I like music very much. My pranams to both of you.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, you can come. Manu will come with Nolina.

\*

More than a year prior to this, I had started corresponding with the Mother from Calcutta. Below are some of her answers:

10-10-31

To Esha with our  
blessings and love.

The Mother

Pondicherry

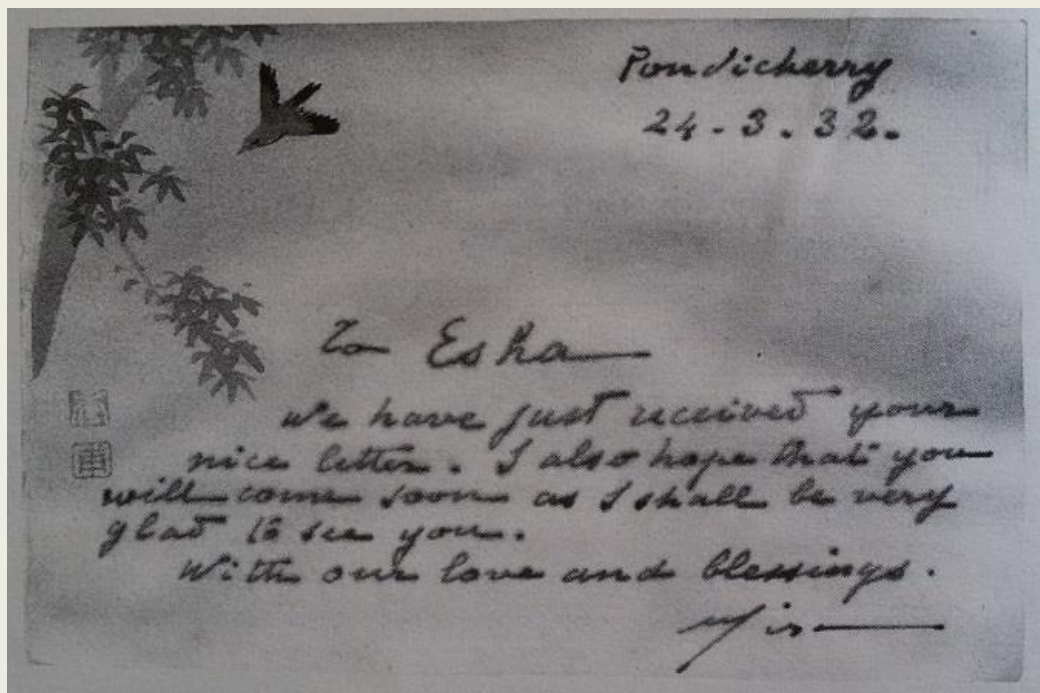
24.3.32

To Esha

We have just received your nice letter. I also hope that you will come down soon as I shall be very glad to see you.

With our love and blessings.

The Mother



Pondicherry 29.5.32

My dear little Esha,

I am not at all angry.

If I was not writing to you, it is because I was expecting you to come soon.

With our blessings and love.

The Mother

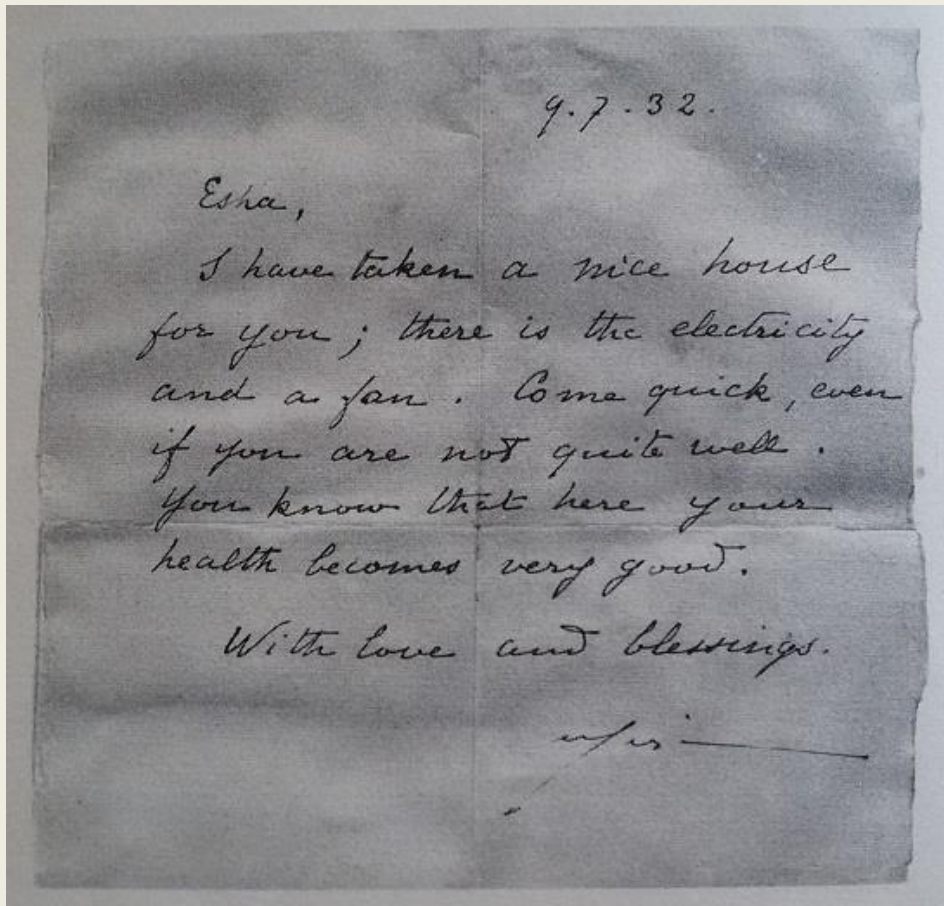
9.7.32

Esha,

I have taken a nice house for you. There is electricity and a fan. Come quickly, even if you are not quite well.

You know that here your health becomes very good.

With love and blessings.



12.8.32

To Esha with our blessings.

I am so sorry to hear that you have been ill. I hope you are quite well now.

This is to send you strength and our love.

We never forget you and your dear mother.

\*

The following letters are among those written to me after our visit to Pondicherry in 1932:

Pondicherry 12-5-33.

Esha

We have received your two letters.

Yes, you can always see us within yourself.

With our blessings and love.

6.9.33

To Esha with our blessings

About your coming here, *my* will is that you should come with your dear mother at once.

But....

Our love and protection are with you always.

11.11.33

To Esha, our blessings.

So many times I have answered your letters with my heart, but could find no time to write the answer on a sheet of paper.

Hoping that your dear mother and yourself are quite well.

Our love and protection are with you always.

\*

During our visit in 1934, my mother and I stayed with my uncle. We had again brought my friend Manu, who had accompanied us the previous time; the two of us were about nine years old. This time we were given permission to appear for Darshan. My mother dressed me in a sari and put a tiara on my head. When Manu saw it she was taken with a fit of jealousy and insisted on having the tiara for herself. My mother gave it to her and I had to relinquish the precious ornament. Uncle did not help matters by coming and remarking that I looked most untidy in my sari, or perhaps he meant that I suffered in comparison to my friend who was now wearing the tiara. Whatever it was, I burst into tears and went to Darshan with swollen eyes.

Sri Aurobindo noticed this and later wrote to my uncle asking him what had made me cry. After Uncle had explained, Sri Aurobindo wrote back that though I wore no tiara, he thought I still looked very pretty. This made me so happy that my heart melted towards Sri Aurobindo at once. I began to write letters to him in which I addressed him as "My Sri Aurobindo," even though my uncle was extremely displeased with this familiarity. He would rebuke me, saying, "How do you dare address him as 'My Sri Aurobindo'?"

My uncle's attitude made me sad and unhappy. At last, the other uncle of mine in the Ashram told him, "Look here, Dilip, why do you come between her and Sri Aurobindo? If anything was amiss, he would correct her himself." At this, my uncle was compelled to stop his interference. But he continued to read Sri Aurobindo's answers to me. This prompted me to write to Sri Aurobindo, "Please write two letters to me, one private and the other the kind that my uncle could read." And he did indeed do so.

The Mother used to see me every day after coming back at five in the evening from a drive in her car. She would wait for me at the foot of the staircase opposite what is now the Samadhi with Nolini-da and Pavitra-da. One day I came about fifteen minutes late because I had been chatting with some friends. I found the Mother standing there, and running up to her I knelt at her feet. Without further ado she caught hold of my hair and pulled me up. Then looking at me sternly in the eyes she said, "Come in time."

The other occasion when I would be with the Mother regularly was when she was working in her room. Later, I would go up to the terrace with her and walk by her side. It was a wonderful and memorable time.

My next visit came in 1936, when we stayed for quite a few months. In 1934, I had become

friendly with a young sadhika, Jyotirmayee, whom I came to call “Auntie”. My uncle knew her well, and she became extremely fond of me. We spent a good deal of time together, and the Mother seems to have put me in her charge. So it was only natural that in 1936 too I should renew my friendship with my “Auntie”. She added much to the pleasure of my stay in Pondicherry, for as there were no other children in the Ashram and my uncle and mother were too busy to pay attention to me, she gave me the companionship I needed. Whenever I could, I would run to her and while away the time talking to her. She, on her part, was happy to accept me as her own little child.

Apart from arranging companionship for me, the Mother also concerned herself with my education. She appointed Nolini-da to tutor me, and I was to go to him every morning. As I had no love for studies, I was often absent. In the beginning, Nolini-da tried to be indulgent, but later he resorted to firmness, feeling perhaps that he was failing in his duty. Finally he said to me, “I shall complain to Sri Aurobindo that you don’t want to study.” When even this threat had no effect on me, the attempt to ‘educate’ me was given up.

In the letters of this period it will be seen that my concern was more with writing letters to Sri Aurobindo and getting his answers than anything else. I would write to him mostly about sadhana. I need not dilate upon how much time he devoted to me and how much affection he poured into his replies.

After some months, I returned to Calcutta where he continued to send replies to my letters. I quote here some of them. They appeared in *Mother India* in 1975.



## Letters from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

7.5.1935

To Esha with our blessings.

I am not sending you away from here. I know that here only you can be really happy. I would have liked very much to keep you with me. But you are too young to be able to do as you yourself would like. You depend on your parents. Your mother is returning to Barrackpore and has to take you with her. So I have to let you go. When you are older you will be able to choose for yourself, then you can come here. Meanwhile remember me always as I will remember you always. I will always be with you there and I will try to make you see me. Be happy and become strong and wait till things are changed and you can come back to me.

With love.

The Mother

7.5.1935

Esha

Mother said she would try to make you see her because it is not always easy for people to see her even when she is near them. It is also easier to see with eyes shut than with eyes open — though this too is possible — because it is a sight within you that has to open in order to see her. It is not necessary to call her for any fixed number of hours. It is enough if you love her always, remember her often, sit every day a little time before her photograph and call her.

You must never doubt that the Mother loves you and you need never weep for that, for her feelings towards you cannot and will not change.

Of course you can take the photographs given to you by the Mother and keep them with you there.

Sri Aurobindo

8.5.1935

Esha

It is not that because the Mother loves you she can show herself to your physical eyes at a distance. The physical eyes of men are not made so as to see in that way. It becomes possible only after long sadhana. First one sees with the eyes closed, because that is easier. When one is accustomed to see with the eyes closed, then afterwards it becomes more possible to see with the eyes open. So you should not be too eager to see at once in the more difficult way. It will come in the end, if you want it, but it does not come at once. Don't mind if it takes time. You must grow first more and more able to feel the Mother near you; that you can do by thinking of her and calling her often. Then seeing will become more easy.

Sri Aurobindo

9.5.1935

Esha

Do not mind about the time that it will take — one can't fix the time of these things beforehand.

When you feel the Mother's presence more and more, when you begin to see her with the inner sight, then it can come.

It is better not to speak of the Mother to your friends — they do not know her, therefore they can take no interest in her. The more you live close to the Mother in yourself, the less you will need to speak of her to others.

P.S. You can of course take your temples with you.

We shall certainly write to you when you are over there.

Sri Aurobindo

17.5.35

Our blessings to Esha, our love and protection with her always.

Sri Aurobindo  
The Mother

17.5.35

Esha,

Always remember me as I will always remember you.

My love and blessings will always be with you.

The Mother

Dear little Esha

I have received all the nice things you sent me; the sari and the cloth for the blouse, the slippers and the frame — they are all so very pretty.

Hoping you are quite in good health and happy.

Our love and blessings are always with you.

The Mother

(Letters in Bengali from Sri Aurobindo)

10.5.1935

It is not necessary that one should leave home in order to call the Mother. One can do it remaining at home. Besides, the Mother doesn't like what you want to do in this connection. Because you are very young, you'll not be able to do it but you'll only suffer. And the Mother doesn't want you to suffer in any way.

No, it's much better that you remember the Mother within you, call her, in all circumstances, whether happy or unhappy, pray for her nearness, her help, her protection.

If you do that, then everything will be achieved.

13.5.1935

I don't know when you'll be able to come again — perhaps your father won't let you return so soon, don't be sad about it. Remember the Mother always, she will be always with you. Let this firm faith be awake in you that she is always with you and protecting you. You will try for three months,



and if there are no results after that you will give up: that's not right. The main thing is: remember her and call her, however long it may take; as you go on doing it you will become conscious, feel that she is with you, and also see her.

14.5.1935

I am replying to your letter in Bengali. From now on I will do so. It is difficult to say what will happen in the future, but I hope that circumstances will be such that you will be able to come back to have darshan before long. Till then remember us and wait. The closer our inner relation becomes, the greater will be the possibility of your life being fulfilled.

17.5.1935

It is better for you not to go to a house where no one calls the Divine. But if you are sent there, even then call the Mother. If you can't do it any other way, do as you do now, silently in your mind — in such a way that nobody will understand or know. Then you will get the result of your calling the Mother.

28.5.1935

I have got three letters from you, but as I was busy with many things I couldn't answer them — today I am answering all the three together. It was known that it wouldn't be possible for you to come for darshan this time, it can't be easy to come twice within this short time. Don't be sorry, remain calm and remember the Mother, gather faith and strength within. You are a child of the Divine Mother, be tranquil, calm and full of force. There is no special procedure. To take the name of the Mother, to remember her within, to pray to her, all this may be described as calling the Mother. As it comes from within you, you have to call her accordingly. You can do also this — shutting your eyes you can imagine that the Mother is in front of you or you can sketch a picture of her in your mind and offer her your pranam, that obeisance will reach her. When you've time, you can meditate on her with the thinking attitude that she is with you, she's sitting in front of you. Doing these things people at last get to see her. Accept my blessings, I send the Mother's blessings also at the same time. From time to time Jyotirmoyee will take blessing flowers during pranam and send them to you.

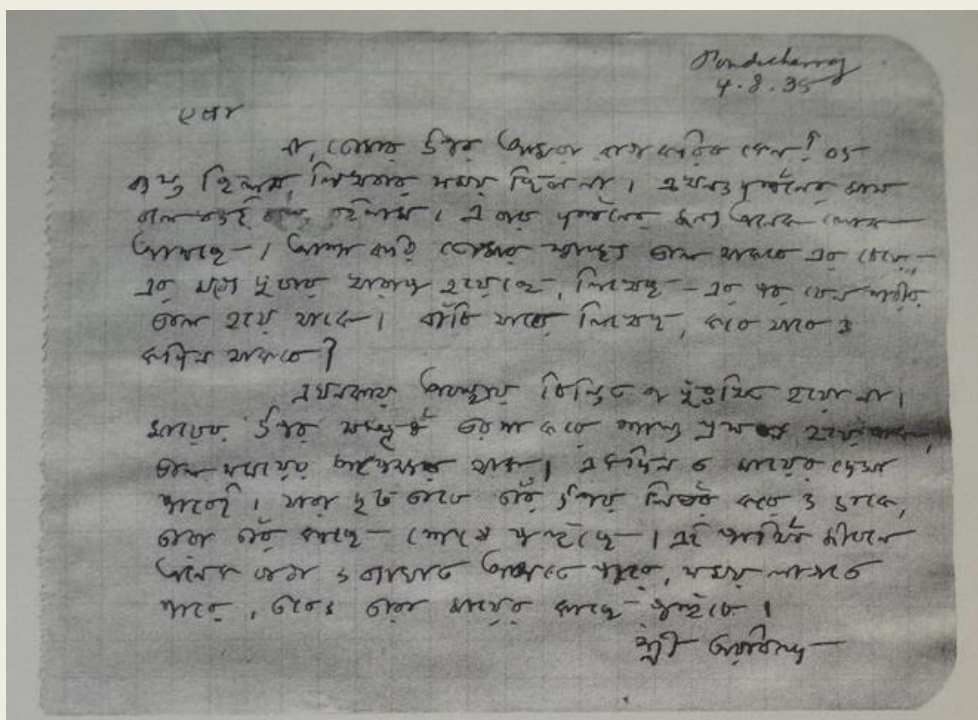
16.6.1935

I've got your two letters. Remember what I wrote to you when you were here and remember the Mother with a calm mind, call her. At the beginning one sees the Mother by shutting one's eyes, can hear her words within oneself, but even that does not happen easily. Man sees the external form, hears external words and sounds — only what he sees and hears with his outer senses, that alone he sees and hears. To see or hear anything else is difficult for him, but the capacity for inner vision and hearing has to be opened, one has to try for it, it takes time. If it doesn't happen in the beginning, don't be sad. The Mother will always love you and remember you, one day you will have her vision and hear her voice. Don't be sorry, invoke the Mother's peace and force within you, you will feel her nearness by that.

4.8.1935

No, why should we be angry with you? I was very busy, there was no time to write. Even now I am indeed very busy because it is a darshan month. This time many people are coming for darshan. I hope your health will be better than it is now. You have written that you were ill twice recently — see to it that you keep good health. You have written that you will go to Ranchi. When will you go and for how long will you stay there?

Don't be anxious or sad because of the present condition. Remain calm and content, relying entirely on the Mother, wait for better times. One day you will certainly see her. Those who rely on her firmly and call her, they reach her at the end. There may be many obstacles and many upsets in life in this world, it may take time, but even then they will achieve nearness to the Mother.



\*

Sri Aurobindo wrote the following letter when I was suffering from typhoid at Calcutta. Typhoid was at that time a very serious disease and had practically no effective treatment. Father was much worried. He consulted a famous astrologer who said after much deliberation, “I don't see any premature death of your daughter. Be consoled.” But he was not to be consoled. My uncle, it seems, informed the Mother and Sri Aurobindo about my condition. But there was no improvement. One day I am reported to have said, “Why is there so much darkness in the room? Open all the windows.” Father cried like a child, for it was bright daylight. Fearing that my end had come, he could not control himself. The doctor also gave up hope and left me in my delirium. My mother told my father: “Go to our Thakur's room and pray to him.” He obeyed though he had no faith in God. I recovered after all and received this letter from Sri Aurobindo. It seems he said to someone that with much difficulty he had saved me.

26.12.1935

I haven't been able to write to you though I wanted to. Work doesn't become less, in fact there is always more of it, — if there is less work of one kind, other kinds pile up. While I'm trying to finish all this the night is already over; after that there is no time left to write letters outside the Ashram. It's the same today also, still I'm writing.

I see that both you and your mother have been very ill. I hope this won't happen again and all that has come to an end. This has happened in many places, here and also in the case of many sadhaks in Bengal. It hasn't been easy to control the situation and bring it to an end.

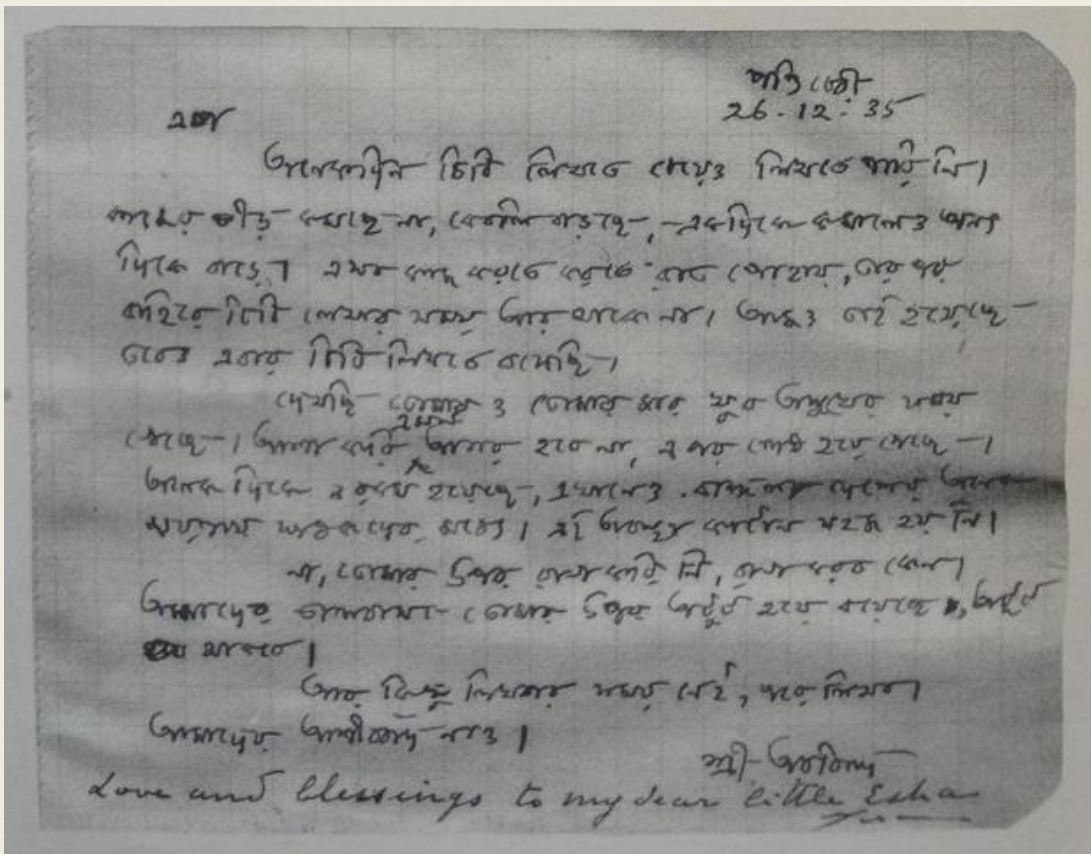
No, I am not angry with you, why should I be? Our love for you is undiminished, it will always remain so.

There is no time to write anything more, I shall do so later. Accept our blessings.

Sri Aurobindo

Love and blessings to my dear little Esha. *(Added in English)*

The Mother



\*

Here I include the last three letters written to me by Sri Aurobindo in 1936 during my stay in Pondicherry, and one more after I had returned to Calcutta. These complete all the correspondence I had with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. There was another beautiful letter written in Bengali touched with sweet humour; it is missing.

17.5.1936

Why have you written that we are annoyed with you? We never were nor are we now angry with you, there is no reason for annoyance, you haven't done anything wrong.

Did you not get my letter yesterday morning? I certainly wrote to you, about our love, also that you would attain union with us. Anyway, I am writing the same thing again, we love you very much and that love will always remain unimpaired. Don't be sad or give any quarter to hopelessness in your mind. Foster this firm faith always in the mind — "I shall certainly attain union with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, shall have their vision even though I stay far from them." Remember us always, look towards us always. Those who do so achieve unity with us, you will also do the same. And if you do this, it is very likely that there will be such a combination of circumstances that you will be able to come here and have our darshan. Come tomorrow definitely and see the Mother.

I could not reply to your letters because till now I had work all day every day. It is the same even now, but there is a little respite today, it being a Sunday; that is why I am writing a few lines.

Why do you feel sad if you think of us or see us in dreams? It should be a matter of joy that the Mother came to you in a dream. Don't allow yourself to be sad because you will not see us now. Remain calm, believing that the Mother is remembering you, loving you, is near you always; wait for the right moment; what obstacles are there now will not be there always.

Remember the Mother at all times, rely on her. If there is constant remembrance, one day you will see her, see her within yourself too.

Look, if I see you, will anybody else spare me? Won't they say, "You have seen Esha and you can't see us? What is this arrangement? Why this injustice? Aren't we also human beings?" And then when one hundred and fifty people will come crowding onto me, what will be my fate? Just think about it and tell me.

I have to write a long letter in Bengali? Have I got that capacity or the time? I am at the end of my tether trying to write this small one, the night also is over. All right, this time I have somehow written in Bengali, but I warn you that I shall not be able to do such an exercise again.

I haven't been able to write to you for a long time — I wanted to but couldn't manage. This time more than seven hundred people have come for darshan — many came long before the 15th, many have stayed on even after that date till today, now they are departing. That is why there was a great deal of additional work. The Ashram work also increased a lot. It could not be finished in spite of working all day and night. That is why I couldn't write to anyone outside. Now it has eased a bit, I can therefore write this letter. But the decrease in work is very little. I still have a good deal of necessary work, can't finish it, can't find the time yet.

I can't understand why you haven't received Jyotirmoyee's letter and the flower sent by her — but you may have perhaps received the letter sent meanwhile, she must have given her own explanation.

I hope you are well. Even if you can't get fixed times to call the Mother, call her always and try to offer all your life and all your work to her.

\*

There is another short letter written to Jyotirmoyee (in English) in 1931 asking her to forward it to my Calcutta address:

You can tell Esha that we have never been angry with her at all. If I don't write, it is because it has been practically impossible for me to write letters outside. Even the most necessary and urgent correspondence has been left unreplied for months together — this is due to a pressure I cannot avoid.

As for their coming here the Mother said that it was impossible to provide them with rooms in the Ashram. They would have to arrange outside. This is first because there were many difficulties last time, neither Maya nor Esha being accustomed to live as sadhaks here do and yet it is too difficult to ask special arrangements, but also because Dilip's rooms cannot be used this time and there is no other place that we can spare.



## Fatal Accident

My father had the habit of going for a car ride in the evening. One day he said to me, "Darling, would you like to come too?" This invitation needed no answer. I made myself ready in no time. As he was coming out of his room, he tripped, knocked his head against a wall and received a cut on the forehead. It began to bleed. My mother, on seeing the cut, told him, "It would be better not to go out today. This accident is a bad omen."

Father, typically, laughed away her "superstitious" fear. Then, while both of us were coming downstairs with Father holding my hand, my foot slipped and I rolled down to the bottom of the stairs. Father picked me up. Again Mother repeated her warning, "I told you it is a bad day. Here is a second mishap. These are clear indications. Don't go out today."

But what wilful man has ever paid heed to a woman's "baseless intuitions"?

Father started the car; I sat by his side. A little beyond our house at a turn in the road stood the house of an old doctor. He had a very long beard upon which his habitual benign smile seemed to cast a glow. He had a son about ten years of age who had an extremely sweet face, like a fresh flower. My father would often joke with the doctor saying, "I will give my girl in marriage to your handsome boy." The humble doctor would shyly protest: "How can you say such a thing, sir? We are poor people and you are rich beyond words. How can I cherish such a hope even in my dreams?"

Sweet though he was, the boy had a peculiar bad habit. He would stand at the turning of the road and, whenever he saw a car coming, would either pelt stones at its rear wheels or try to hit one with a stick. That day too he was ready to play this mischievous game. When he saw our car coming, he took his position at the turn. However, just as he was about to swing his stick, he lost his balance and slipped on the street made muddy by a recent shower. The car ran over him. As it was evening, Father had not seen the boy. But he felt as if the car had bumped over a rubber cushion. People rushed out from all sides. Father stopped the car and discovered to his horror that he had run over the young boy. He picked up the blood-smeared body of the dead child and carried him into his house to his mother. The old father was away from home.

Father arranged immediately for the funeral of the boy, took him to the cremation ground accompanied by his elder brother, had the body cremated and returned home. He broke down completely and, almost like a madman, began to sob and weep aloud. He cried out, "A heavy load is pressing upon my chest. Relieve me. I'm dying of pain and suffering." In this way he passed hours in anguish and lamentation.

The boy's old father returned after a day or two. On learning the dreadful news he came to see my father. Father at once clasped him and began to mutter a thousand things as in a delirium. The doctor, strangely enough, was as calm as a god and consoled him saying, "You have no hand in it, you are free of any guilt. It is my son's fate that has overtaken him. It is God's Will. Don't grieve."

But Father would not be consoled. He cried, "No, no, these are all empty words for me. You have faith in God. I have none. I am a born atheist. So I can't find any comfort in such sentiments. Take me to the police, let me be hanged. That will be my only atonement and deliverance. There is no other way out for me."

Earlier, Father had sent my mother to the child's mother to console her in her bereavement. The visit had, however, the opposite effect. The child's mother burst into rage and heaped abuses and curses upon her. She ended with these words: "Listen, your daughter will die in the same way as you

have caused my son's death. This is my curse. Go away." My mother remained calm throughout the tragic scene and came away.

Many days passed before Father came back to his normal mood and temper. By way of atonement for his crime, Father took up the maintenance of the doctor's family. He arranged and bore the expense for their daughter's marriage and the older son's education. Later, even though the boy turned out to be a bad character, Father did not stop his help. When neighbours protested that the family did not deserve further assistance, he replied, "This is my duty, my atonement and the fulfilment of my promise, my lifelong debt. I have got to keep it. Whether they deserve it or not is not my concern."

Luckily there was no police case; for my father was an influential man and had a good reputation.

At times, when I think of the people who have trust in God and those who have none, the scene that looms before me is the striking difference between my father's reaction and the doctor's. Father used to say, "You people believe in God. So you get peace. I don't. What then will be my fate? Is there no salvation for me?" My reply to him would now be: "If in such heart-rending circumstances the doctor could remain calm and unmoved to tears because he had trust in God, is it not worth having the faith?"

## Father – Last Memories

I remember the last scene of my father's life He had fallen ill He must have known he would not recover A few days before he left his body I saw him sitting with folded hands before our Ishta Devata in the Thakur Ghar (Pooja room). It surprised and moved me greatly. A few days later he passed away peacefully.

Let me relate one last story in his life and finish my ties with him in this world. Once a widow came to him carrying a child in her arms. She said, "I am indeed very poor, I seek your help for this fatherless child." Those few words were enough to melt Father's heart. After he had helped her for a year, an unbelievable thing happened. Father received a letter signed by an advocate on behalf of this woman. She alleged that he was the father of her child. Hence, she claimed half the share of his property. If her legitimate demand was rejected, she would file a suit. My parents fell from the skies, as we say in Bengali. Could anyone be so ungrateful as to fabricate such a lie? Mother got a chance again to admonish Father and said, "How many times have I told you not to be so generous? There is no end to people's evil designs and no limit to their lies. They are extremely clever in duping their benefactors. But when have you listened to me?" Father heard her quietly. It was unthinkable to him that people could be so deceitful and ungrateful. However, he said, "Let her do as she pleases. I shall see this through to the end." Father's friends were all on his side and promised to stand by him. "We won't tolerate this calumny. We will drive away this woman from our locality," they assured him.

I do not know the details of how the matter ended. But the woman did leave the place and was never seen there again. Such people make me wonder how greed can drive one to such folly. But what I want to say by relating this incident is that Father was a simple-hearted man, candid and always ready to help others in distress. He made a rule in the house that once a month he would feed the poor and the destitute. This he observed till the end of his days. Besides, before his midday meal, he would send a servant to enquire if in the neighbourhood anyone remained unfed. If any was found, he would have food sent to him and only then would he sit down to whatever was there for his meal. And yet he professed he did not believe in God. But to my mind it mattered little. For there was a lot of godliness in him.



## “...Because I Love Sri Aurobindo”

My father died in 1938 at Calcutta when I was thirteen years old. Hearing the news, my uncle hurried there from Pondicherry. After a few weeks, my uncle, my mother and I left for Kashmir. I accompanied my uncle to Pondicherry for the November Darshan, while my mother went back to Calcutta.

It turned out, however, that there was no Darshan, for it was the month Sri Aurobindo met with an accident to his right leg. I quickly made up my mind not to return to Calcutta. I decided that if the Mother permitted, I would stay in the Ashram for good. I told my uncle of my decision, and it was perhaps he who spoke to the Mother about it. One day during my usual visit to her, she broached the question of my desire to stay and said, “If you knew that as a result your mother might commit suicide, what would you do?” I answered that I was ready even for that. Then she said, “All right, but don’t write about it to your mother just now. You can have Jyotirmoyee as your companion — she will look after you.”

I was extremely happy not only for her permission to stay, but for having been given Jyotirmoyee as my guardian. I had already struck a deep friendship with her during my earlier visit. We had grown very fond of each other even though she was almost my mother’s age. She called me “Ma Moni” (jewel of a daughter), and I called her “Jyoti Masi” (Aunty). When she heard that I was to remain in the Ashram, and of the Mother’s instruction not to inform my mother of it, she thought the matter over, and then told me I had better inform my mother all the same. Young as I was, I listened to her, forgetting the Mother’s advice. This disastrous mistake brought about the greatest tragedy of my life.

As soon as my mother received my letter, she set out for Pondicherry with the intention of taking me back. She stayed with us for only one night and the next day shifted to a hotel. She did her best to persuade me to leave, but I remained adamant. The situation was reported to the Mother. Meanwhile, the dilemma intensified. My uncle did not know what to do, but seemed to favour my mother’s point of view. In the midst of the commotion and turmoil, Nolini-da came to our house and in front of my uncle said that he had come at the instance of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo because they had wished to know why exactly I wanted to stay in the Ashram. At this, my uncle asked me, “Do you know anything about yoga? Can you practise Sri Aurobindo’s yoga?”

“No,” I answered.

“Then why do you want to stay?”

“Because I love Sri Aurobindo.”

My uncle seemed taken aback. Nolini-da simply replied, “It is enough; I will tell Mother about it.” The Mother finally said, “Let her stay.”

What happened next was such a perfidy and sacrilege as to be almost unthinkable. My mother, after every persuasion of her had failed, took the last drastic step: she filed a lawsuit in the French court against my uncle. She had been instigated to this course of action by a distant relative who happened to be an influential officer under the French Government in Chandernagar, and who had no love for the Ashram. The charge filed was that I was a minor who was being held back by my uncle so that he might take possession of my property. My uncle was shocked beyond belief. Though I do not remember clearly, I think he had to appear in court, but in the end, inevitably, lost the case. So I had to go. The only saving grace of the whole affair was that the Ashram had not been involved.

Now I tried in my childish way to avoid leaving. I cried and cried. I played hide-and-seek with the police, concealing myself here and there, first under Sahana Aunty's bed, then under a staircase of the Ashram building. But I was discovered there, and Sri Aurobindo sent word that I should go. The Mother added that otherwise the police would enter the Ashram main building, so at last I had to yield. My uncle showered affection on me and with many caresses bade me farewell.

Thus I became the unwilling victim of a terrible sacrifice that cut me off from the Ashram for many, many years. Had it not been for the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's loving guidance through many long and unhappy years, I believe I would have succumbed long ago.

What lay before me as a minor of thirteen was a vast unknown world, with none to guide me except my mother, who had understandably adopted a hostile attitude towards me and was, herself, quite inexperienced in worldly affairs.

I must, however, add that she and her ill-advised accomplice paid dearly for their act of perfidy.

I suffered complete banishment from the Ashram for about twelve years. Only Uncle's visits now and then brought a fresh breath of life. When I was able to renew my contact in 1949, I was already a married woman and the mother of a child. And it took me about another 35 years to get a permanent nook in Pondicherry.

## Long Exile from the Light

Thus I was compelled to leave the Ashram, which throughout my childhood represented heaven, and returned to the world which was nothing short of hell as I discovered by and by. Life in Calcutta could not but appear so even to a girl of my age — particularly to someone of my nature — compared to the life I had enjoyed in Pondicherry.

My mother went like a conqueror among her kindred elements in society and in her own household-kingdom of ease and comfort. I withdrew into my shell, but soon found a close friend in one of my young aunts. She was very beautiful indeed and we became very fond of each other and passed our time delightfully talking on endless topics. Being poor, her beauty remained like

A violet by a mossy stone,  
Half hidden from the eye.

One day, however, the violet caught the eye of a suitor, a suitor who held a high position in Government service, and was eligible in every respect, except that he was the ugliest of men. He simply lost his head over her. To the father of my friend ugliness was of little consequence so long as he could dispose of the heavy burden of a daughter without paying any dowry. He declared, “What shall I do with beauty? Is beauty something that can be washed and eaten every day for sustenance?” — as goes the Bengali saying. So the paragon of beauty was sacrificed for the sake of convenience on the altar of ugliness. But the sacrifice was avenged. She made her husband work like a slave and, though she bore him children, gave him not an iota of love. Whenever I protested, she retorted with her stock answer: “I never wanted to marry such an ugly man!” But the devoted husband did everything he could to satisfy a wife who refused to be pleased. In the end Fate exacted from her a terrible price: she died of cancer.

This unhappy story was one of the early experiences I had of life in the world outside the Ashram.

After the marriage of this aunt and friend, I was again lonely and withdrew into my shell, while my mother continued to thrive on social life in which I had to participate. Being well-off, we ourselves often entertained our guests lavishly. In one such tea-party, distinguished persons had been invited. While enjoying the delectable dishes, they regaled themselves with gossip of all kinds, among which came gossip about the Ashram. They could not find a better topic. They vented all their accumulated resentment: each one vied with the other and excelled in the art of calumny, though the Ashram had done nothing to the world or to them to deserve it. But I suppose the story about me and other rumours must have reached them. At that time the Ashram and the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were anathema to Calcutta’s high society, perhaps because Sahana aunty and my uncle, two renowned and much loved figures in Calcutta’s elite music-world, had abandoned Calcutta for the Ashram. As a young girl of thirteen or so in such a high-browed assembly, I was quietly listening to their scurrilous conversation.

A report of all this and what happened next was received in the Ashram. What follows is an account by Nirod-da:

I read out the report to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, while the other attendants were also present:

The topic of the Ashram came up. Comments and criticisms started flying. Even the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were not spared. The child was listening quietly, but when somebody seemed to overstep the limit of decency, she could stand it no longer. In a firm tone she said: 'Look here. If you speak one word more against my Gurus, I'll give you such a slap that you will roll on the floor.' A bolt from the blue! Everybody was stunned. Her mother left the room in shame and anger. An uncle started looking at the ceiling.

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo looked pleased at this report. Then the Mother left.

Sri Aurobindo commented, "What she has done is remarkable for her age. She is an extraordinary girl. Along with strength of character she has developed an extraordinary intelligence. When she used to write to us, she would make reflections about people and the world in general which were beyond even a woman of fifty."

I added, "There are some stories which show her power of judgment as well as of detachment. She had a dancing-master. Her parents wanted to dismiss him because he was found to have a bad character. She stood against it saying that character had nothing to do with teaching. But against all her opposition, he was sent away. And when he left, she was not at all touched, although she had fought so much on his behalf. There is also the incident of the death of her pet dog, whom she had loved intensely. The death made no difference to her. She remained perfectly calm as if nothing serious had happened. This set her mother thinking that she had not really loved the dog and, who knows, she might not love her too. One day she might leave her for the Ashram."

Sri Aurobindo said, "Her parents had found out that it would be difficult to bend her to their will."

I repeated what people were saying, "She is quite happy where she is at present." Sri Aurobindo replied, "How do they make it out? She wrote to us she was very unhappy."

Then I asked him why she had to go away. He answered that there was a part in her vital being which wanted to have experience of the world. I understood then that there was an occult reason for her going away.?

## Tagore's Dilemma

A few days ago, during one of Nirod-da's visits to me, I told him of the following incident:

A visitor came to see me this morning. He had been sent by a dear friend in Calcutta to enquire about my present circumstances. He came at a very inconvenient hour when I was busy mopping the floor. I had to hide my annoyance. He wanted an interview and asked me if he could put any questions to me that he liked.

"I have seen your Calcutta residence," he began. "It is a palatial house. What makes you settle here and live a lonely life in this dirty quarter of the town, in this — this small hole and mopping the floor? You must be suffocating. Are you secure?" "No, I am not. There have been thefts and robberies recently in this building. But I am not quite alone. I have a friend. She looks after me and helps me in my need."

"But if you fall ill, for instance?"

"Well, then I go to our Nursing Home where the Ashram Doctor takes care of us."

"But why all this unnecessary trouble and hardship when you have your own son and his wife at Calcutta ready to take care of you?"

"Why should I be a burden to them? They have their own way of life and I have mine. They will certainly consider me a bore and a hanger-on after some time. Both of them have their own duties, office work, pleasures, etc. How can they tolerate me for long even though they are fond of me? Besides — " "Yes?"

"You don't know why I have come to Pondicherry. I have come to do sadhana. Sri Aurobindo, my Guru, has brought me here. It is he who looks after me. In his security I am secure, not in anyone else's. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I think I do."

He kept quiet for a while, then resumed: "May I ask you a very sensitive question? We have heard that a strained relation grew up between Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. Is it true?"

"Not that I know of. How can it be? You know Tagore had great respect for Sri Aurobindo. Remember the exquisite poem he composed on him? Remember also his interview with Sri Aurobindo in later years and what he said? Don't you know all that?"

"Yes, I do. But the disagreement occurred over a matter concerning a very sad and painful incident — "

"Let me hear it!"

"You know it was about Sahana Devi's sister who had come away like you, for sadhana, leaving her husband and family, and has never gone back."

"Well?"

"When her husband, who was very fond of her, was on his death-bed, he wanted to see her for the last time. But it seems she was not given permission to leave the Ashram and the poor man died with her name on his lips, so to speak. That shocked and aggrieved Tagore very much. He was baffled and bewildered. How could the path to god be so cruel, he wondered." "Yes, yes, I remember it all. You, however, don't seem to know the sequel. Let me tell you. I heard about it and, I think, it came out in some newspaper. It was my uncle who had it published. You see, one day my mother received a call from Tagore to see him. She had often visited Santiniketan, for Tagore enjoyed her company. So when she went to see him he unburdened his perplexity to her and asked for an

explanation. She replied, 'I can't give you the answer. But I can write to my brother at Pondicherry and ask him to get a reply from Sri Aurobindo.' Her brother did get a reply. Sri Aurobindo wrote — I give you the purport — 'When people can leave their families and give their lives for a noble cause like, for example, the Swadeshi Movement — so many youths have done it — and their sacrifice is spoken of in golden terms, while here, when it is done for the sake of the Divine, why does one get a sullied name and have the path of God labelled as cruel? What better sacrifice can there be than for the Divine?' That was the answer. Tagore read it and said, it seems, 'I can't argue with that' Moreover, you must not forget that Sahana's sister came away with the consent of her husband.

"And as for the path being cruel, what about Buddha and Sri Chaitanya? You know their life-stories. Even if they seemed to be cruel to their families, did they not bring peace, love and compassion to millions?

"Now, since you bring in Tagore, let me narrate to you another episode. You know my uncle Dilip Roy used to have regular correspondence with him. They loved each other, and they quarrelled too. That's the nature of love! However, once Tagore wrote to him, 'I received your letter. I am glad to find that when in these days so many Avatars are springing up, you simply wrote 'my Guru' and did not claim him as an Avatar. Instead you have called him *Mahapurusha*<sup>3</sup>. In that case, Sri Krishna, Rama, Christ, Sri Ramakrishna, etc., etc. are, we should say, all *Mahapurushas* in order not to offend the people.' "You know, with all due respect to Tagore, he was not a Hindu but a Brahma Samajist, so he didn't believe in Avatarhood. I shall now ask you one question: why do all of you call him Gurudev? In what sense is he a Guru? What has he taught you? You are not even a poet or a writer!"

"But he is a great man, a *Mahapurusha*. Don't you agree?" "Certainly, I do. He is known and respected all over the world. He can be a *Mahapurusha* but that doesn't make him a Guru, does it? Gurudev has a deeper overtone; it has a spiritual sense. Hence if Tagore objects to Avatarhood, one can object to his being called Gurudev. Sri Aurobindo explains what is meant by Avatar. He doesn't claim it himself. He says he doesn't care a damn if he is an Avatar or not. But we Hindus find that Rama, Krishna and others including Sri Aurobindo do possess the qualities that can be ascribed to an Avatar."

The meeting ended and I felt relieved.

<sup>3</sup> A great soul.

## Attempt on My Life

I have spoken about the very beautiful relative of mine who had been forced to marry a most ugly man for the sake of money and was never happy.

Before her marriage she was living with me and my mother. My mother had a servant whom I did not like at all. On any excuse he would pop into my room, and at any time, in spite of my severely scolding him about it and forbidding him to enter. My mother would be very much displeased at my behaviour. My relative also used to say that I should not use such strong language. I would plead with my mother to dismiss him, but she would sing the same refrain each time: the man works well; it is very difficult to get servants nowadays, etc. etc. Eventually, she gave in and dismissed him. But it was not the last we heard from him.

After a few days something happened. My relative and I slept in the same room. At the foot of my bed was an almirah where our letters, ornaments etc. were stored and the key used to remain in the keyhole. The almirah always opened with a harsh sound. One night I woke up to a noise and whispered to my relative to wake up and told her that somebody was there in the room. Then again a harsh sound. "It is the sound of the opening of my almirah," I said. When finally we found the courage to get up, we discovered that the almirah was open and one drawer was missing. We looked for it up and down and at last located it downstairs, the papers scattered on the floor, the jewellery gone, and an initial scrawled there. We understood at once it was the dismissed servant's mischief, for his name began with that initial.

A few days later another kind of mischief started. We began missing foodstuffs from the kitchen. I had a faithful servant of my own. He decided to keep watch at night with a thick stick in his hand. As soon as he saw the man stretching his hand through the window, he struck it a heavy blow. The thief ran away through the garden. We found traces of blood on the ground as we followed his tracks that seemed to vanish into the darkness. Next day our driver did not turn up for work. Naturally we suspected him and wondered if he could be the thief. After some days he turned up with a bandaged hand. There was no doubt now. We informed the police. They thrashed him mercilessly and he admitted that a man had put him up to the job and had promised him an attractive reward for a more difficult assignment later on. He did not, however, disclose the man's name or the nature of the assignment to come. But we had no doubts who he was and suspected that he might be planning to kill me. We conveyed our fears to the police. A guard was posted to keep watch. After quite some days, again I heard a sound during my sleep and woke up. I saw a shadowy figure reflected in the mirror with a dagger in his hand. I shouted at once and jumped to the other side of the bed. The policeman on guard rushed in, people came running, but the man had escaped. We observed that he had come up climbing the drain pipe.

We were in a panic and decided that we must leave the place and move elsewhere.

There have been other attempts too; but each time, I am certain, a divine intervention saved me.



## A Famous Astrologer Predicts My Marriage

A famous Bengali astrologer lived in Calcutta who could read people's past, present and future. A relative told my mother about him, saying, "Let's go and see this man. I have something to ask him."

Mother's blunt answer was, "I don't believe in such charlatans. Besides, what's the use of knowing the future when whatever God has written on my forehead is going to happen? I see no point in learning about it from any other source."

In spite of these objections, she finally agreed to go, insisting that she would ask no questions of her own.

As soon as they arrived at the astrologer's, the relative began asking question after question. When it appeared that there would be no end to it, Mother lost patience and said, "Let's go now. My daughter is all alone." The remark caught the astrologer's attention. "Your daughter?" he asked. "But she is not alone. She is enjoying the company of a friend who is reading to her a letter. But this is a secret she will not divulge to you. Could I once meet her?"

Intrigued, my mother thought to herself, "My daughter keeps a secret from me? I can't believe it!"

She and her relative hurried home, and the first thing Mother asked me was if my friend who was a frequent visitor to our house had been to see me. But when she went on to ask whether this lady had read to me a letter and what the letter contained, I was not only surprised but annoyed. "How do you know?" I shot back, "Who told you?"

"The astrologer — "

"My friend has forbidden me to tell you about it," I replied. Then with rising anger I added, "What business has he to tell you these things? It's very wrong of him."

Undeterred, Mother persisted, "He wants to meet you just once."

"Never!" I exclaimed.

I did not know that the astrologer had also asked my mother for my date and hour of birth, and that she had already given them to him. He had drawn up my horoscope, but had told my mother not to tell me about it. He had even mentioned that after three days I would ask about it myself.

On that very day, a friend of mine came and told me, "I saw your mother reading your horoscope. As soon as she saw me, she tried to hide it."

Enraged, I went to my mother and burst out, "Why did you have my horoscope done without asking me? What right has this man to prepare it behind my back?"

My mother replied that he had said my horoscope was extraordinary. "He has not only asked you to see him," she explained, "but says he will be waiting for you."

I became red with anger, but later, during the afternoon, I changed my mind. "Let me go once," I thought.

When I reached his house and rang the bell, he opened the door himself and welcomed me. "Come, I have been expecting you," he said.

I was still simmering with rage and retorted rudely, "Why have you made my horoscope without my consent?"

"I don't know about the right or the wrong of it," he answered calmly. "But I felt like doing it, and what I divined seems to be true. Very strange, this horoscope of yours! Very rare indeed! On the one hand it is extraordinary in its promise, on the other it is a picture of terrible suffering. It has a



striking resemblance to the horoscope of a great yogi that we all know. Not only that — at this auspicious moment you were fortunate enough to be born, Brihaspati was in the ascendant, which is an excellent sign.”

“How,” I interrupted, getting interested, “if there is so much suffering in store for me?”

He ignored my question. “Listen further,” he went on. “You will have to marry.”

“Marry? I will not!”

“You have got to marry. You are destined to become a mother and you will be one whether you marry or not.”

“You mean to say that if I don’t marry I will have an illegitimate child?”

“Yes, I can even lay a wager on it.”

“But why?”

“That I don’t know. It could be that in your previous birth you had a desire for a child, which remained unfulfilled. However, you will not have a happy marriage.”

“If I won’t have a happy marriage and am doomed to suffer, kindly tell me what good does Brihaspati do to me. These enigmatic predictions are just idle chatter and I can’t take them seriously.”

It was as though the man had not even heard me.

“Brihaspati will serve you in two excellent ways. First, he has set a flame burning in you. This is a symbol of aspiration for God and Brihaspati will keep it burning so that it can lead you to God. Secondly, whoever goes against you and tries to harm you will fare badly. Even if you yourself do something wrong, Brihaspati will protect you. You need not even aspire for God. He will be with you always and stand by you in good times and bad.”

“And in spite of this, I shall suffer all through my life?” “No, in your later years you will be at peace.”

At that moment a very handsome young man entered, and sat apart from us on one side of the room. I glanced at him enquiringly, but the astrologer told him, “Please leave us for the time being. I am having a serious talk with this girl.”

When the man had left, the astrologer turned to me and asked, “How do you find him?”

“Hm...quite good,” I answered noncommittally.

“He is the man you are going to marry.”

“What?” I exclaimed, stunned.

“Listen, I did not call him. His coming was a coincidence, don’t you see?”

“No, I don’t! Nor do I believe you.”

“You will understand afterwards. Meanwhile, I assure you your marriage with him is settled. Your mother and relatives will bring it about. But I must repeat, you must not expect it to be a happy marriage. In fact, you are destined to marry one who will turn out to be a scoundrel.”

“What nonsensical and contradictory stories you are thrusting upon me!”

“I can’t help it. They are all in your horoscope. People in whom a fire is burning cannot have a happy worldly life. Their destiny is to seek a divine existence. Your horoscope has no parallel in my experience. I have truly never seen anything like it.”

Strange indeed! Every word of the astrologer’s predictions has come true.

But how did he acquire this uncanny power?

## The Astrologer

The story goes that after he had lost his young wife whom he had loved very dearly, he travelled to Tibet. There he spent many years learning the science of occultism and prophecy from a Tibetan tantric, Tibet being well known for this knowledge.

Then when he had become an adept, he returned to Bengal and began to use his powers to see into people's lives. At such times, it was observed that he would put one hand on a tiger's skull he had brought with him from Tibet and kept by his side. Simultaneously, his eyes would glow with a strange light. He would not charge his customers or accept any remuneration from them, and was particularly strict in this regard, as he was afraid that if he did, he would lose his power. It goes without saying that if he had taken payment he would have amassed enormous wealth. But ironically, he eventually lost his power for a totally different reason.

The astrologer's prophecy about not only my marriage but an incident concerned with it also turned out to be true. He had predicted that my uncle would come from a distant place to attend my marriage, even though that seemed a remote possibility. But he did in fact arrive, unfortunately not with happy results. During the ceremony he suddenly blurted out, "When my Guru gave me permission to come, I asked him how he was allowing me to go, much against his principles. He replied, 'This is not really a marriage, so I am allowing you.' "

My uncle made this astonishing statement just when, in the course of the ritual, water had been poured into the vessel I was holding. No sooner did I hear him than I dropped the pot and burst into tears. All the assembled guests were as stunned as I was. "What does this mean? And if it has any meaning, is this the time to say it?" someone asked angrily. "Shame! Shame!" others shouted from all sides. But my uncle, true to his nature, could not have remained more nonchalant and unconcerned. He apparently had no inkling of what a grave indiscretion he had committed.

Later, I turned on my mother. "Why have you arranged this marriage?" I demanded. The astrologer, who was present, answered for her, saying that even though it would not be a happy marriage she could not have avoided it. "Remember, I told you you have to be a mother," he added. In despair, I was left wondering whether that was why my uncle had said that it was not a real marriage. But then what was it? I asked myself utterly nonplussed.

On another occasion, the astrologer said that I would never be loved by anyone of my own age, only by a much older man.

Surprised, I replied, "But there is a man such as you describe. He does so much for me, yet he never expects anything in return. Could it be that he is the one who loves me?"

"No, no, he isn't the one," the astrologer protested.

"Are you sure?"

"I am sure. Take my word for it."

Many years passed, but the prophecy remained unfulfilled. Once again I reminded the astrologer of it after he had lost his power. But he would not go back on his prediction, and insisted, "I have spoken the truth — it came to me in a flash. He exists somewhere, and he will come."

In the end, I and my mother did meet such a person, but despite our many meetings he never gave any indication of his love for me.

The astrologer made still another disturbing prediction. He said: "You will fall seriously ill and be in danger of death. Then the Lord will come and ask you, 'Do you want to die?' And you will

reply. ‘No!’ ” This too turned out to be correct. After the birth of my son, I became so ill that my body raged with high fever for days, with no medicine having any effect. The doctor’s verdict was that I had measles, but that for some reason the disease was being prevented from taking its natural course, it was suppressed, and as a result I was indeed close to death.

As my mother sat by my bedside gently caressing me, a voice suddenly whispered in my ear, “Do you want to die?”

I shuddered and replied, “No, no, I don’t!”

After this the measles rash that had been suppressed erupted all over my body, and I gradually recovered.

I have already mentioned that the astrologer had taken particular interest in drawing up my horoscope, finding it most unusual. He reconfirmed this view one day when I showed him my hand saying, “Just look at my palm! How many complicated criss-cross lines there are!”

“That’s why I’m so intrigued by it,” he answered. “It’s a veritable Chinese puzzle! Do you know why? Because you have registered the various vibrations of other people’s minds on your hand, and that’s what makes it rare. I’ve seen so many people’s palms showing the same kind of life — marriage, children, illness, death — like a formula. But your hand is different, and as a consequence your life is full of strange experiences, difficulties, sufferings and dangers. What obstacles and crises you will have to pass through! You must have seen the circus act where the performers have to vault through a flaming wheel without getting burnt. Well, he who is guiding you will see you through the burning wheels of your difficulties in a similar manner.”

Yet mine was not the only unhappy life the astrologer encountered. An extremely beautiful young relative of mine, though married, fell in love with a Muslim boy. She deserted her husband and went to live with him, even after the astrologer had told her, “Beware, give up your lover. Otherwise you will be ruined, I warn you.” She paid no attention.

Soon after, the Hindu-Muslim riots before Partition broke out in Bengal. The Muslim youth was forced by his community to abandon the Hindu girl and flee to East Pakistan. Left unprotected, the poor girl suffered indescribably at the hands of goondas.

Though there are many other stories connected with the astrologer’s predictions, I will end with one that he made when he had almost lost his power. At the time, I was extremely anxious about my impending divorce from my husband. “What will happen? What will be the result of the case?” I asked.

“Have I the power left to see?” he replied sadly. But after a few days, when I met him again, he astounded me with what he had to say. “A westerner will save you,” was his prediction. “He loves you. He may be German, French, or some other nationality.”

“A westerner? Love me?” I cried. “I don’t socialise with foreigners, as you know — far from having a love affair with one!”

He was adamant. “Well, that’s what I saw. There can’t be any mistake.”

Incredibly, once again he turned out to be right. There was no mistake in his vision, and how it came about was beyond imagining. I shall speak about it in the right place.

Meanwhile, I may record that the astrologer lost his power because he had gone astray. The lesson, as the Mother says, is that occult powers are most dangerous and are best left alone, unless one can maintain a state of extreme purity.

## Experiences on the Way

### **Blessed by the Lord**

My birthday falls on October 10th, and in 1991 I was very happy to be able to celebrate it in the Ashram. In the afternoon when Nirod-da came to greet me, he said, “You had the darshan of the Guru, I’m sure. Tell me about it.”

I smiled and replied, “Yes, I was blessed by him. I got up in the early morning as usual, finished all my chores, and had my bath. After I had dressed, I lit a few incense-sticks. Then I stood before his picture and prayed, ‘Won’t you bless me?’ He gave me a broad smile and, stretching out both his arms, put his hands on my head as he used to do during the darshans of my childhood. I was happy beyond description. The whole day his smile and the gentle, almost physical pressure of his hands on my head recalled to me those childhood memories....”

## Birthdays in the Ashram

Two birthdays particularly stand out in my mind — those of 1932 and 1936.

On the first occasion, I was seven years old, and I had come to the Ashram with my mother especially for my birthday. In those days, the Mother used to come down to the Pranam Hall every morning except on Monday, which was her hair-washing day. As luck would have it, my birthday happened to fall on a Monday. Nonetheless, I was called to see the Mother at 10 a.m. Amazingly, she kept me with her for nearly two hours. In that time she played the piano for me while I sat at her feet, then she showed me pictures of animals, told me stories in English — which I could not understand — and gave me chocolates, flowers, and a variety of presents.

On the second occasion, in 1936, too, I had a similar birthday celebration.

My next visit in November 1938 was the year when Sri Aurobindo met with the accident to his right leg. There was therefore no Darshan. Soon after, I had to leave the Ashram for a different reason.

After that, the entire course of my life took an unhappy turn, putting an end to my visits to the Ashram until 1949 November. I stayed on up to February 21, 1950, when I had my last physical darshan of Sri Aurobindo.

A series of bitter experiences frustrated my married life and made me break off all contact with the Ashram.

## A Fatal Utterance

On the 5th December, 1950, an hour or so after midnight, I had a most frightful dream. I dreamt that the entire world was shaken by a violent earthquake. My bed trembled, swayed, rose and fell. Darkness enveloped the earth and everything in it — men, beasts, cities, nations. All were laid waste by a massive destruction. In the midst of the holocaust, I found myself totally alone. Desolately and with a great effort I somehow climbed a tower and heard a voice whispering in my ear, “On this earth you now have no one left to call your own. Beyond, you have.” The shock of this ominous utterance shattered me. My whole body trembled. I woke up dazed from the terrible dream, my head reeling. “What does it mean?” I wondered miserably.

The next morning, I recounted my dream to one of my distant relatives. He was as puzzled by it as I was. Then, later, we heard the radio announcement that Sri Aurobindo had left his body. On hearing the news, I felt completely broken. My mind became a blank unable to accept the brutal truth, and then it dawned on me that the huge convulsion that had overtaken the world in my dream had been due to his departure. “What a tremendous person he must be!” I marvelled. My relative too was stunned by the news, even more so when he later received a letter from my uncle, Dilip Kumar Roy, who was in Benaras at the time, describing a similar dream he had had the same night.

Five days later, while I was putting my child to sleep, I saw a figure standing at my door. At first I could not make out who it was. But when I looked closely, it became clear that it was Sri Aurobindo himself. He appeared exactly as he had been during that last Darshan I had attended. Then he said in a low voice, “I have come to bless you.” But when I stepped forward to do pranam at his feet, I suddenly found there was no one there. It was then that I felt my aloneness most acutely. I had no one left in this wide, strange world to call my own except my child. I was already estranged from my husband, while my mother lived in her own world and, rather than being a support to me, was herself in need of my help due to her constant ill-health. So it was that I found myself surrounded by misfortunes that came not one by one, but all together as they always seem to do.

## My Marriage

I have described how the astrologer's predictions about my life came true almost word for word. About my marriage he had said I would marry the young man I had met briefly in the astrologer's house, though I had never seen him before nor known anything about him.

I was ignorant of exactly how the marriage was arranged. Since I was a girl and little more than a minor, I was neither consulted nor informed. But I believe it was my mother who undertook the responsibility for conducting all the negotiations. I was merely told that I was to be married into a family which was one of the oldest and most aristocratic in Calcutta, and consisted not only of great zamindars and strictly orthodox Brahmins, but also of highly cultured people. My prospective husband, moreover, was considered at once very handsome and brilliant in his studies. But as I have already mentioned, when we first exchanged glances at the astrologer's place, he did not particularly appeal to me.

The day of the wedding arrived. My mother had informed my uncle about it, and he arrived from Pondicherry on the appointed day, though his contribution to the proceedings could not have been more awkward, as I recounted in an earlier episode. But when, after the ceremony, he came to know the kind of family into which I had been married, he reacted still more violently. He raged at my mother, accusing her of condemning me to a life of marital unhappiness. Did she not know that the sons of zamindars were given to every kind of indulgences? Had she never heard that, spoilt by their excessive wealth, they had no higher aim than that of a frivolous life? Everyone knew the history of zamindars and their life-style; so how could she forget it?

I had also heard a voice telling me: "Don't marry." But I did not listen, as I was intent on having the experience.

Actually, quite contrary to my uncle's way of thinking, I believe my mother contracted the marriage precisely because of the family's wealth and aristocratic lineage.

Interestingly enough, when the negotiations were in progress I came to know that my future husband had an elder brother. He was a highly qualified medical man with a foreign degree, and held a senior post in the Indian Army. He was not only known to have a spotless character, but was universally admired. It struck me that I would much rather marry him, and so I asked one of my friends to approach him on my behalf. But Fate was not on my side, for he had left for Europe just before my friend could meet him.

I realised soon after the marriage that my husband's home, where I was taken to live, was no better than a prison. Nothing could have been more incompatible with my former way of life than that of his family. It seemed to me as though guards were watching my every move from morning to night. The position of prison superintendent was filled by the matriarch of the family — the grandmother — whose word was law in all matters pertaining to the household and its members. A woman of few words, with the presence of a queen mother, her ubiquitous influence imposed itself on everyone. She particularly saw to it that the women and girls had no freedom, nor any contact with the outside world. Even our letters were censored. Each one had to be given to the darwans who routinely passed them on to the grandmother for her scrutiny before posting them. Hence, no letter of mine ever reached my family. A day came when in desperation I wrote to my mother begging her to somehow take me away from this penitentiary, for otherwise I was sure I would die. This letter fell into the hands of my father-in-law. One day he was reading the Chandi-Stotra as was his habit, and I



was listening to him from a distance. Suddenly, he called me near him and said, “Little *ma*, Mother Kali has told me you have complained to your mother against us. This is a serious offence of misdemeanour, and we have no choice but to deal with you in an exemplary manner.”

The manner which he had in mind was to starve me for a whole day, denying me even water. As a young girl of twenty, well-bred and well cared-for all my life, I could not look upon this treatment as anything but barbaric. To heap insult upon injury, I was made to break my fast at night by eating with the servants! I submitted myself to this humiliation. As for Mother Kali having told my father-in-law of my ‘transgression’ while he read the Chandi-Stotra, it was nothing more than a hypocritical bluff to impress the gullible members of the household.

Equally demeaning was the occasion on which the grandmother, in her role as queen mother, charged with upholding the family propriety, summoned me and scolded, “It seems you and your husband were sitting together in the open verandah. You were laughing, joking, and shamelessly amusing yourselves in broad daylight. What kind of family have you come from? Haven’t your parents ever taught you manners or decency? Has no one ever told you that behaving in such a frivolous and cheap manner is a sign of low breeding? Understand once and for all that you will not be permitted to carry on like this in my house.” Here too I did not utter a single word in protest.

So this is what my life had been reduced to. In my misery, I concocted plan after plan to escape from this death-trap. Finally Providence in the guise of my husband’s younger cousin brother came to my rescue. I could not hope for any such consideration from my husband, for he, like the rest of his family, cringed like a pygmy before the Amazon grandmother. But the younger cousin-brother who became very fond of me had the courage to stand up for me. He told his family, grandmother included, that if they were intent on persecuting me, he would himself escort me back to my parental home. And that is exactly what he did but he had to resort to much ingenuity and deliberation to carry out his plan. Thus ended my married life in my father-in-law’s house. I lived only for about six months in the family, though subsequently I kept up my relations with my husband.

What is curious, in retrospect, is that some members of my husband’s household, including my mother-in-law, had the objectivity to remark, once I had gone, that I was an altogether different type of girl — too individual and bright — to be moulded into a subservient pattern, though outwardly I kept myself meek and obedient. In fact when after the marriage, my husband and I were presented before a senior kinsman, as was the custom, he had said at once: “This marriage has been a terrible mistake. The girl is too refined for our accustomed way of life.”

## More About Dance and My Uncle

Earlier, I described how I came to Pondicherry for a long stay in 1949-1950, and how I took part in the December 1st dance programme. What I forgot to mention was the following significant incident concerning my husband. During my stay, it occurred to me to ask Sri Aurobindo about him. Perhaps Sri Aurobindo could change his nature and turn him towards the right path, I thought. And so I invited my husband to visit Pondicherry. But when my uncle came to know of it, he asked me whether I had taken the Mother's permission. I answered him somewhat proudly, saying that I did not need any permission. Consequently, my uncle himself reported the matter to the Mother.

I never learned what passed between them, but one day Sri Aurobindo asked Nirod-da to get from me a photograph of my husband. I found a very old one of his taken with me, and sent it to Sri Aurobindo, then waited eagerly to hear his reaction; but no word came. Meanwhile I had also hoped to receive an answer from my husband. But it was only long after that he wrote, "Your Guru doesn't want me to come to Pondicherry. The day I bought the ticket some peculiar eruptions appeared all over my body. My elder brother who, as you know, is an eminent physician, examined me thoroughly but could not diagnose the trouble. I had to cancel my ticket, and as soon as I did, the eruptions began to subside. This made it clear to me that I was not welcome there." Upon reading this, I was overwhelmed with gratitude towards Sri Aurobindo. How considerate he had been in saving my self-respect before others by acting in this indirect way.

Now to return to my dancing. From an early age, I had learned dancing from the famous Shambhu Maharaj. This came about because one day my parents and their friends saw me dancing in my childish way before my idol of Sri Krishna. My father quickly decided to engage a good teacher for me. Later, he made a condition that for any public performance I should dance only in accompaniment to my uncle's singing.

Years later, after I was married, my uncle came to Calcutta with the idea of holding a programme to raise money for the Ashram. The function was to be held at Ranchi where I was staying for a while in a house of mine along with my husband and his parents. Uncle, instead of asking me directly to take part in the performance, began to remark to friends in a taunting and aggrieved tone that while he was working so hard for a noble cause, nobody was coming forward to assist him. When I came to know of this, I felt at once that all these jibes were aimed at me. I took him aside and explained to him that I was not a free person any more. I was married and a mother, and my husband's family were so conservative that surely he knew they would never consent to have me perform in public. Otherwise, I assured him, I would gladly have taken part in his show, particularly as it was meant to help the Ashram. He then asked me if I had even approached them for their permission. I replied that I had not, knowing them as I did. But when the story did reach the ears of my in-laws, they somehow readily gave their consent, much to my amazement. The show turned out to be a great success. Uncle had the power to attract large crowds of cultured people, and my name, added to his, must have had its effect. The audience cheered my performance lustily, and wanted me to make one curtain call after another. Uncle refused to allow more than one. But there was no doubt that he was delighted with the response to my dancing.

On another occasion, my uncle gave a private performance in which Amala Nandy danced in accompaniment to his singing. Uday Shankar was present, as also my guru Shambhu Maharaj and myself. After her dance was over, Uncle asked me to dance to his singing. Hesitantly I looked at my

guru for his permission, but he made a gesture with his head implying his disapproval. I could not disobey him and refused, despite my uncle's repeated entreaties, which naturally irked his vanity. But much later, he did appreciate my position and spoke highly of my obedience to my guru's wishes.

Some days later, at Uncle's suggestion Uday Shankar and Amala came to my house to see me dance. My guru was most flattered to have them. Uday Shankar was very pleased with my dancing and offered me an attractive job as a dance-teacher at his institute in Almora. I needed some diversion at the time as I was feeling quite lonely, and so was inclined to accept. But Uncle intervened and made me change my mind. Similarly, another handsome offer came from one P. N. Talukdar's Centre in Calcutta, but Uncle had me refuse that too.

After the death of my father, Uncle arranged that, in order to give some solace to my mother, we should go on a trip to Kashmir. When we arrived in Lucknow in the course of our journey, we stayed with Uncle's most intimate friend who was a barrister and a fine singer himself. He was delighted to have us and found it an excellent occasion to arrange a private show where Uncle and I would perform. Hashi, a young and talented girl-disciple of Uncle's, also took part and sang a Hindi bhajan to which I danced in accompaniment. Once again, the audience was a knowledgeable one and included a particularly well-known yogi friend of our host.

Here too the show turned out to be a great success. The yogi claimed to have seen Sri Krishna's presence all the time I was dancing, and it is a fact that whenever I danced, I myself was always conscious of it.

We next stopped at Lahore. There again Uncle was the guest of a high-ranking friend. Curiously enough, my guru Shambhu Maharaj happened to be there at the same time. My uncle and his friends decided that a public performance by Shambhu Maharaj would be an excellent idea. Maharaj agreed but stipulated that he be paid a big sum in advance. The money was handed over to him, but before the performance could take place he sent word that he was not well and would not be able to appear. The resentment of the public can be imagined.

The truth was that on receiving the money, Shambhu Maharaj had spent most of it on drink and other bad habits, and was in no condition to perform. Nevertheless, some people went to him and begged him to save the situation. He grudgingly consented to do only one very short dance, and was literally dragged to the stage.

Once there, however, he became a transfigured man. He portrayed a single incident depicting Krishna's visit to Radha, in which Krishna merely appeared, gave Radha his darshan, and then departed. As Krishna approached, marvellously transformed from Shambhu Maharaj into a god, Radha, palpitating with expectation, was weeping with one eye while the other beamed with ecstasy. He was beyond description. Then after that one miraculous moment he withdrew, leaving the audience spellbound. Such was the magic of Shambhu Maharaj. Poor man, his end was miserable as is so often the case with artistes. Impoverished and suffering from cancer, his last days in the hospital were however taken care of by Indira Gandhi.

A number of years later, Uncle undertook once again to raise funds for the Ashram and came to Calcutta from Pondicherry. This time he took the help of a lady belonging to the Tagore family. Their project was to depict Bharat Mata in a dance tableau — Bharat Mata as she was now and as she had been in her pristine glory and splendour. But where to find a suitable dancer to represent her? Uncle suggested that he had a niece who could fill the role admirably. He asked the lady to see

me and form her own opinion without letting me know the reason for her visit. Sure enough, she came on a brief courtesy call, and returned fully satisfied with me, as it turned out.

Soon after, Uncle spoke to me about the performance and the role he wanted me to play, and I agreed to do it. In fact, my part consisted only of standing perfectly still like the statue of a goddess, while another performer danced. There were a number of rehearsals in one of which my eyelids fluttered slightly, and I was told that would not do. After this I took great care not to make even such a minor mistake.

On the day of the performance, the lady dressed and adorned me as a goddess, and none could have done better, for she was a connoisseur in the art of beautiful costuming, belonging as she did to the Tagore family. Then I took my stand to one side of the stage in the posture of a goddess with my right hand raised in a gesture of benediction and protection, and kept the pose for about half an hour until the dance was over. Enthralled, the entire audience watched the show in utter silence. Judging by later comments, it seems that I really had looked like a goddess.

After this, the years slipped by, and the day came when Uncle arrived in Calcutta on his last visit. He had become old and lost most of his sight, hearing and even voice, yet he was scheduled to give a public performance. I heard that he had already sung at the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Calcutta, but that the programme had not gone well. Though a distance had come between us in our relations, I felt sorry to hear this and evinced a desire to attend his next show. So I asked a common friend of ours if he would accompany me to it. He was only too pleased, and said he would go and inform Dada straight away. "He will be so glad!" he enthused. But I told him he must not say anything to Uncle, and that we would simply go together, occupy front seats, and quietly slip away after the performance was over. "As you wish," he concurred with some surprise.

When we reached the auditorium, we found it full to overflowing. Nevertheless there was complete silence as Uncle appeared. He had become flabby and infirm, a shadow of his former magnificent self, and had to be supported by friends as he walked onto the stage. Worse, when he began to sing I realised that what I had heard was true — his voice had lost its magic and his singing was often off pitch. In the end, he abandoned himself to uncontrolled emotion and began to chant *দেখা দাও প্রভু, দেখা দাও* (Show Thyself, Lord, show Thyself) like a god-intoxicated Ramkrishna or a Ramprasad. Tears flowed down his cheeks, and his cry was heart-rending. He seemed on the verge of losing his senses when someone shouted, "Drop the curtain! Drop the curtain!"

The audience was thrilled as well as overawed, then slowly began to melt away. The atmosphere was surcharged with a Presence, and I myself was entirely overcome and determined to go to Uncle. My companion led me onto the stage and exclaimed, "Dada, Dada, look who has come to see you. Your niece Esha!"

"Esha, Esha! Where? Where?" Uncle stammered, unable to see me.

I did pranam at his feet and he embraced me at last with a love that held back nothing.

# Experiences on the Way

## 1. Thakur's Protection

Before I continue my story, I would like to recount a few more recent experiences.

My Thakur Krishna had promised me that he would never leave me. One day as though to honour this assurance, he suddenly appeared to me holding his right hand outstretched in a gesture of peace and protection. But instead of setting my mind at rest, the visitation made me all the more worried and apprehensive that some calamity must surely be imminent.

A few days later, in the early morning, I went down from my room as usual to fetch water from the tank when I slipped into it and got completely drenched. Fortunately nothing more serious happened, and I understood the meaning of my Thakur's outstretched hand. The question arises why he could not have prevented the accident altogether. But all I can say is that his ways are often mysterious and beyond our understanding. It is also possible that I was fated to have a worse accident and he rendered it harmless.

## 2. Sri Aurobindo's Protection

On another occasion, all at once I saw the Samadhi effulgent. This filled me with great joy, and I recalled how often Sri Aurobindo had answered my many questions there. Without a doubt the Samadhi is fully alive. Indeed I believe that the Mother had once said that she could not leave the Ashram even for a day since the Samadhi was there.

Then again there was the time I sat down for my dinner, and found the lights dimming. I thought a power failure was in the offing. Not wanting to get caught in the darkness, I started to hurry through my meal, thinking that lighting a lantern was more a bother than it was worth. I distinctly heard the words: *আস্তে, আস্তে* (slowly, slowly). How exceedingly sweet the voice was! "Don't hurry. The light will take some time to go. Be at ease." And that is exactly how it happened. But the love embodied in the voice was unforgettable — no human voice could ever approach it. I had heard it only once before so full of tenderness. That was when I had completely run out of money. There was not a pice in the house, and I was desperately worried. Then the same voice came to me saying, "I'm here!" In this way, I know Sri Aurobindo is protecting me all the while, but I don't know why, and he has never told me. He only asked, "If I am helping you, as you say, will you give me something in return?"

"Yes," I answered without hesitation.

"Then give me your *আমি* (your 'I')," he replied, even though he knew full well that this was impossible for me, and I had no answer for him but silence.



## First Visit to the Ashram with My Son

Now let us return to the unpleasant story of my life. I shall later describe how my husband had been unfaithful to me but continued to live with me in my mother's house without our maintaining any marital relations. Soon our neighbours, having discovered his disloyalty, started criticising the fact that he still lived with us. Even my mother began pressurising me to cut all my bonds with him. But I was so afraid of losing the custody of my son in case of separation that I was prepared to tolerate not only the anomalous situation but my husband's occasional rudeness and taking other advantages as well.

To avoid his presence and find some relief from my mental agony, I left Calcutta with my mother and my son for Kalimpong. We stayed there for about six months and I wanted to prolong the stay, but people warned us that we would not be able to bear the coming winter, being entirely unaccustomed to the snowbound state of the mountains. So we were obliged to return to Calcutta. But as the same situation still prevailed there, I suggested to my mother that we leave immediately for Pondicherry. In this, I was motivated by a strong inner pull, which was unfortunately dampened to some extent by a feeling I had harboured for a long time that Sri Aurobindo was kind to me only because of my uncle, and that otherwise I was nothing to him.

In any case, my mother told Uncle, who was in Calcutta at the time, of our intention to visit the Ashram, whereupon he not only endorsed the plan but offered his house for our accommodation. The Darshan of November 1949 was approaching when we sent a telegramme to the Ashram for permission to come and, upon receiving a prompt reply in the affirmative, we set out for Pondicherry. When we arrived at the Pondy station, we discovered that, surprise of surprises, Nolini-da was waiting there for us with a car. He told us that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo had sent him with the vehicle and that we could indeed stay in Uncle's house. This gesture served to confirm me in my belief that we were receiving special attention only because of my uncle.

Meanwhile, Uncle too returned for the Darshan, and on that day he escorted our entire family, including my child, to the Ashram. Darshan by that time had been reduced to the sadhaks and devotees standing before the Mother and Sri Aurobindo for a brief minute — nothing more. But when my turn came, Sri Aurobindo fixed me with his penetrating gaze. I felt overwhelmed, almost suffocated, and inwardly cried out to him that I couldn't bear it. At once he lowered his eyes, and I was left to marvel at the dynamic power in his look.

The next day, Sri Aurobindo sent Nirod-da to me to ask how my son had been born with such a fair complexion when my own was darkish. The question took all of us by surprise, particularly my uncle, for he could not accept that Sri Aurobindo could take notice of such trivial details during Darshan. I could only answer that I did not know. No one in his father's family was so fair, and though my own mother was fair enough, it could not explain my son's complexion which was like a European's.

The following day, Nirod-da returned with the same question, Sri Aurobindo insisting that I knew the reason. I began to reflect. Then all of a sudden I remembered that during the child's gestation period, I had prayed fervently for a son and that he should have a fair complexion. Sri Aurobindo had granted that prayer. Now my uncle was more astonished than ever to hear that Sri Aurobindo had taken interest in such trifles. Further, Sri Aurobindo enquired through Nirod-da if the child could talk and hear properly. I answered that he could, but Sri Aurobindo said that I did not

know. He said so because he knew somehow that my husband's family was hard of hearing. Then he advised me to approach Sahana auntie to teach the child how to speak. His legs were also somewhat knock-kneed.

We stayed in Pondicherry till the next Darshan in February which turned out to be my last, for Sri Aurobindo passed away the following December. No wonder I had felt such a strong pull to come to the Ashram.

Meanwhile my uncle found another occasion to feel put out. The first incident was in November. The Mother had asked me to take part in a dance performance during the 1st December celebrations. I was to dance with Anuben, she taking the part of Radha and I that of Krishna. When my uncle heard of it he strongly disapproved and wanted the roles to be switched so that I would dance as Radha. But the Mother emphatically stuck to her choice because I was taller than Anu, and the roles could not logically be reversed. The Mother took it upon herself to teach me the various movements and would come to my uncle's house for the purpose.

The Mother continued to follow my progress closely. For example, during a rehearsal in the Playground, she made the following correction. As Anu and I were dancing, involuntarily I kept bringing my hands together in front of my chest. In my childhood, as I have already related, I used to sleep with my hands folded upon my chest, in the gesture of *pranam*. After the rehearsal, the Mother called me aside and told me to avoid this movement. The more I tried to shield myself, the more the attention of the audience would be drawn to that part of my body, she explained. At the same time she assured me that she would advise those in charge to costume me gorgeously so that I would have no reason to feel self-conscious.

The day after the performance, I went to see the Mother. She met me on the stairs and expressed her happiness and satisfaction with my dancing by drawing me close and embracing me.

The saddest part was that my uncle refused to see the show. It was the first time I had performed without him there, and when I remarked upon it, he did not reply.

In February, we had to shift from his house to a certain Bhaskar Lodge in the town. There my son contracted measles and the Mother sent strict instructions that we must not enter the Ashram under any circumstances. After a week or so, my uncle asked the Mother if I could come to see her after taking the proper hygienic precautions. She granted the permission, but when he asked if my mother could come too, she refused emphatically. This ruffled my uncle who could not accept such a discrimination with equanimity.



## Experiences on the Way

### Of Mangoes and the Lord

The other day, Nirod-da visited me and asked me how I was.

“I am all right,” I replied. “But I had to quarrel a lot with Him. Do you remember how I threatened Him when I was a child? I wrote to Sri Aurobindo that if he didn’t answer my letter, I would go away to the forest! He wrote back at once asking me how I could think of such a thing. Didn’t I know that there were lions and tigers in the forest and that they would devour me? What a pity I lost that letter. How sweet and tender it was. I find even now that simple prayer and quiet surrender are not effective, at least in my case. I suffer and suffer and He doesn’t seem to care.”

“Yes, there is some truth in it,” Nirod-da said. “Once Sri Aurobindo wrote to me that one must cry sometimes. But you are crying all the time!”

“I can’t help it,” I countered. “He has given me such bad health and such a weak stomach that I have been suffering from both for years and have had to complain to Him constantly. Once my Thakur Krishna told me with a smile, using the Bengali word দেহসর্ব্ব, that my body was my obsession, and that I was constantly preoccupied with my sickliness and my endless list of complaints. So I quarrelled with Sri Aurobindo after having suffered miserably for three or four days from a stomach upset, and was cured immediately.”

“But if you bring on your illness by your own indiscretion, you should pay the price for it,” Nirod-da remarked.

“What indiscretion?”

“I was told that you ate a lot of mangoes, and not of a very good quality.”

“No, no, that isn’t true! I was eating only one small mango a day. But in the end I did take a big mango of inferior quality and that was what made me sick.”

“But I thought that you had obtained his permission to eat it. What is the story? I want to know it first-hand.”

“As it happened,” I answered, “I had abstained from eating mangoes for years lest they upset my stomach. You know how I suffered from stomach trouble in my childhood. And then my astrologer had predicted that in later life I would continue to suffer from a bad stomach. However, this time when I saw some lovely mangoes, I was greatly tempted to try them. So I bought some and, holding them before Sri Aurobindo in an attitude of prayer, I said, ‘Please protect me. I have withheld my desire for so many years. Now I would like to try and eat this fruit. If nothing happens to me, I promise I will not go to Calcutta on a visit.’ He asked me if I was sure, as though doubting my word, and I assured him that I was. Then I ate a small mango — although with fear and trembling. Nothing went wrong. Delighted that he had kept his promise, I took one every day — until that last day when I took the big one. It was then that the pain and diarrhoea began, and I was in for it.

“But whatever happens, the picture of my childhood Thakur always smiles at me. The other day, however, I found that it did not. Straightaway I turned to Sri Aurobindo’s picture and complained about Thakur, whereupon I distinctly heard Thakur saying with a mischievous smile. ‘Oh, so you are complaining to him, are you?’

“This, in fact, is my sadhana and my life: talking with my Thakur and with Sri Aurobindo through my varying moods, like a child.”

Now I suppose you would like me to continue my life’s story. It has, in fact, come to an

interesting point, which is so unusual that many will have difficulty believing it, but it is nevertheless true.

## My Husband's Disloyalty

As I have already related, barely six months after my marriage, I returned to my mother's house in Calcutta, after I escaped from the prison-house that was my in-laws' house. But I did not cut off relations with my husband. He came to our place regularly and made it virtually his home. My mother looked after him and paid him all the attention due to a son-in-law. I was also happy, and the two of us spent much of our time together. He had finished his studies and, since he was a zamindar, had no need to work. In the evenings we would go out visiting places of interest, particularly to see animals and birds in which both of us were keenly interested. We would also take walks hand in hand around the Calcutta Lake, laughing and chatting like so many other couples. Because both of us were young and good-looking, we attracted the attention of the other strollers. Once one of my middle-aged relatives saw us and recognized me. "Are you not Esha?" she asked. "And who is this handsome young fellow?"

I smiled mischievously. "Oh, I know, I know!" she exclaimed. "He is your husband. How good-looking he is! A fine couple indeed. God bless you both!" And we parted, while my husband and I exchanged knowing glances.

The strange part was, you see, that we were comparatively free from physical desire. My husband had already told me he would like us to live like brother and sister, which delighted me, for physical intimacy had always struck me as gross.

Quite a few years passed and finally my mother asked me how it was that we had had no children. She insisted on our seeing a doctor, but when he examined the two of us he found us perfectly normal.

"What is your secret?" he asked. "Don't you want any children?"

"Not yet," I answered.

"Then why have you come to see me?" he retorted.

When after six years we did have a child, our sweet married life took a bitter and fateful turn.

Soon after I became pregnant, I noticed something strange had occurred in my relationship with my husband, though to be honest I could find no outward manifestation of it. It was a purely feminine intuition that something which had been there before was now missing between us. On the surface, he was as attentive and loving as ever, and so I tried to dismiss my feeling. I told myself that my psychological unease must be due to my pregnancy.

Then one day I was having some trouble with my eyes, and my husband arranged to take me to an eye-surgeon who was a friend of his. On the way, he suddenly said, "Don't tell him that you're my wife. Say that you are my sister."

Bewildered, I asked him why. "There are reasons," he replied. "I'll tell you about them later." I was greatly perplexed. When, after coming home, I told my mother about it, she answered, "Foolish girl, don't you see his 'reason'? He must have taken another girl and introduced her as his wife and therefore you have to be his sister. It's so simple and you are so naive." I really fell from heaven. However, I kept quiet. But the matter did not end there. Soon after, a close relative of mine asked me how it was that he saw my husband waiting daily in a certain locality, and whether I knew anything of it. I replied in the negative and put the matter away from my mind. I was too preoccupied with the vomiting and nausea of morning-sickness to be bothered about it. At the same time I felt so extraordinarily hungry that I doubled my food intake. Needless to say my weight increased rapidly

and I had to consult the doctor. He refused to medicate me in any way for fear of injuring the foetus, and instructed me instead to control my diet. Otherwise, he warned, the baby would grow too big and cause difficulties during the birthing — which did indeed happen.

At the same time, the situation with my husband became clearer and clearer, and soon there could be no doubt that my woman's intuition had not played me false. He had fallen in love with someone else, thus bearing out my uncle's misgivings about the character of zamindars. But unlike many other women in the same predicament, I felt no jealousy, nor any desire to sever relations with him. He continued to come to the house, and my mother received him as before. The only difference was that I could no longer bear to have any physical contact with him.

For his part, he too seemed to have retained some love for me. According to Sri Aurobindo, if I have understood him correctly, there is more than one kind of love, the psychology of love being one of the most complex. One may have genuine or true love for one person and yet the vital being may gambol about. Sri Aurobindo had remarked that I was free from attachment, and perhaps so it was with regard to my husband. I do not know whether I really loved him either. For, once, after he had a heart-attack in our house, I was having a sound sleep at night. My mother came and woke me up saying, "What's this? Get up, get up! What will people say? While they are attending on him, you are sleeping!"

## Experiences on the Way

### 1. Sri Ramakrishna. The Gita

There are three books I have read so often that almost all the episodes from them are fresh in my memory. They are the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. The last, in particular, was a cherished part of every Bengali household, and contributed a great deal to the spiritual culture of Bengal. In addition I had paid frequent visits to Dakshineswar and Belur Math since my childhood. I have already told you how Bharat Maharaj loved me from my infancy. Due to all these associations, and perhaps due also to something in my past life, Sri Ramakrishna, who is also known as “Thakur”, blessed me quite often with his darshan, though I was not actually his devotee.

In *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, he has said that if one repeated the word “Gita” ten times daily for a week, one would realise the Divine. I took his words literally, thinking, “Since Thakur has said it, it must be so. If the realisation can be so easily attained, I must give it a trial.” I started in right earnest, and felt a great force coming down. At the end of three days, however, a profusion of unexpected mishaps began to occur. Illness, danger, disharmony, misfortune surrounded me like a conspiracy and with a force that threatened to shatter my bones. Meanwhile, I kept hearing a voice saying, “Give it up, give it up; you won’t be able to bear it.” And things came to such a pass that I had to abandon the attempt after all. Who could imagine that the two syllables “Gi-ta” could have so much power?

Once I saw Thakur in a dream. He was surrounded by his disciples and was enjoying their company. Suddenly he exclaimed, “Where is Esha, where is Esha? Hasn’t she come?” Vivekananda, who was standing nearby, pointed his finger at me seated in a corner and replied, “There she is.” And Thakur graced me with a divine smile.

This brings to my mind the vision I recently had of Vivekananda himself — it was for the first time that I saw him thus. I saw him one night standing by my window. He was looking at me intently and smiling with loving sweetness. He was dressed in his usual sannyasi garb and was looking magnificent, his eyes and face shining with a divine lustre. I couldn’t help crying out, “How beautiful, how beautiful he looks!” Whereupon he replied, “Not as beautiful as your uncle!”

“No, no!” I protested. “There is no comparison!” Then he vanished.

### 2. Sri Ramakrishna’s Painting

A few months ago someone came to me with her paintings of saints, of which one was of Sri Ramakrishna. It was really well done. I had been wishing for some time to have a picture of Thakur and here it was. The lady said that she was in need of money, and asked me if I could find a customer for the painting. She would sell it for Rs. 300. I would have bought it but not at such a high price. So I suggested that we put it up for sale at a friend’s shop. But though the painting was displayed there it did not sell. When after some time it was returned to the artist, she approached me again and pressed me to buy it. I offered a sum I could afford — Rs 100/-, which she declined. But after a few days, she returned with the painting and said she would accept my offer, adding, “You know, Thakur appeared to me in a dream, and asked me to give the painting to you.”

After she left, I joked with the Thakur, “You have come to me on the strength of a bargain!” Strange to relate, more than a year later, she returned me the money, declaring that she has decided henceforth not to sell this kind of paintings of hers.

### **3. Sri Ramakrishna’s Bite**

I told Sri Aurobindo, “Thakur appears so often to us. Why are you so rare?” He answered, “His work is different from mine. He has created a few great souls. My work is not to appear in visions but to change man from within and to change humanity. Have you changed much as a result of these visions? It is not that you have not seen me, you saw me and the Mother for many consecutive days. Do you remember? Tell me then, have you made much progress?”

“No!”

“Not vision. What is important is to feel the Presence,” he added.

Once I did see the Mother and Sri Aurobindo for fifteen days. Whichever way I looked, I saw them sitting within my forehead, very luminous. At first I was thrilled, but as the vision continued, I became tired of it and it vanished.

I recall another story about one of Thakur’s young disciples. This young man asked him dejectedly, “I have been with you for a number of years, but what have I gained and what, if anything, is in store for me?”

Thakur flared up. “What did you say? I tell you — those I have bitten once are doomed. My bite is like that of a cobra!”

### **4. Long lease of life**

Once, as I lay in bed, I fell into a pensive mood, and like the young disciple began to think, “I have been with Sri Aurobindo for so many years. He has, in fact, brought me to yoga against my will. And now even though I am getting old, I have gained nothing substantial so far.” My mind was running on in this vein when I suddenly saw a light curtain hung between my bed and the wall sway gently. I became hushed and attentive, feeling that something was going to happen. And then I saw Sri Aurobindo appear from behind the curtain which had parted slightly. He looked exactly like the picture of him taken in 1950 that we all have with us. Then he spoke: “I can give you a long lease of life so that you may realise the Divine. Will you accept it?”

Vehemently and spontaneously I cried out, “No, No! I don’t want a long life. My son will die, my closest friends will go, and I’ll be left all alone. You know how much I have suffered, and I don’t want to suffer any more. How often I have already prayed to you to take me away!”

“Think again,” he replied. “I have given you my word.”

“No, I don’t want a long life,” I insisted.

“All right,” he replied sweetly. “I won’t press you.” Then raising his right hand in a gesture as in the statues of the Buddha, he disappeared. Oh, how beautiful his palm was as he raised it and held it before my eyes! It meant so much to me.

Nirod-da responded to this account by saying, “But why were you so foolish as to refuse such a sublime boon? Don’t you know that there can be no suffering from separation when the Lord is with

you and leading you to the goal? It is he who will make you free of all bonds. So long as you keep such attachments intact, you cannot realise the Divine. What a childish thing to have done!”

### **5. Regarding India’s Present Condition**

The other day I was bemoaning the tragic fate that had overtaken Rajiv Gandhi, and was saying to myself, “He was such a fine personality. What a desperate condition India has been reduced to, these days! There has never been such chaos, confusion and violence since India gained independence. No one seems to be safe today.” While I was lost in these gloomy thoughts, I heard Sri Aurobindo telling me, “There is nothing to be surprised about. Among the present leaders there is hardly a true lover of India. Almost all of them want power, position, fame, and money. Corruption is rampant everywhere, so what else can you expect? In our time, we truly loved India. People sacrificed their lives for the sake of the Motherland. We never forgot God. We felt his power working through us. All the leaders were the disciples of yogis. And the cry of ‘Bande Mataram’ acted like a mantra. It echoed from shore to shore, State to State. That was India then. And today? Nobody takes the name of God. Or raises the cry of ‘Bande Mataram’! So long as it is like that, India will suffer. This trouble will continue for a long time. Then a change will come. You may not be alive to see that change. But I will raise up India.”

*(Editor’s Note: Here it will be relevant to quote some words by the Mother given many years ago; and a relevant extract from my book *Nirodbaran’s Complete Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*):*

#### **A Declaration**

Sri Aurobindo withdrew from politics; and, in his Ashram, a most important rule is that one must abstain from all politics — not because Sri Aurobindo did not concern himself with the happenings of the world, but because politics, as it is practised, is a low and ugly thing, wholly dominated by falsehood, deceit, injustice, misuse of power and violence; because to succeed in politics one has to cultivate in oneself hypocrisy, duplicity and unscrupulous ambition. . . .

Sri Aurobindo always loved deeply his Motherland. But he wished her to be great, noble, pure and worthy of her big mission in the world. He refused to let her sink to the sordid and vulgar level of blind self-interests and ignorant prejudices. This is why, in full conformity to his will, we lift high the standard of truth, progress and transformation of mankind, without caring for those who, through ignorance, stupidity, envy or bad will, seek to soil it and drag it down into the mud. We carry it very high so that all who have a soul may see it and gather round it.

25 April 1954

The Mother

*September 16, 1933*

Nirodbaran: In your scheme of things do you definitely see a free India? You have stated that for the spreading of spirituality in the world India must be free. I suppose you must be working for it! You are the only one who can do something really effective by the use of your spiritual Force.?



Sri Aurobindo: That is all settled. It is a question of working out only. The question is what is India going to do with her independence? Corruption? Bolshevism? Goonda-raj? Things look ominous.

## 6. A Vision of Hell

I had this vision after the passing of Sri Aurobindo.

One day, as I was lying in bed, I felt I was going to die. All on a sudden my soul came out of my body and began to fly very high up. I used to have the experience of going out of my body in my early days, but what happened now was most memorable and significant. After I had reached a certain height I began to turn round and round at a tremendous speed. It produced such an unbearable pain that I began to cry out, "O Thakur, O Sri Aurobindo, save me, save me. I am dying. I can't bear this excruciating pain. Do free me from this agony!" My cry was of no avail. The soul was kept on whirling. Then I felt someone coming near and standing and watching. I felt it was Sri Aurobindo.

The spinning soon stopped and the relief came. Then he said to me in a grave voice: "This pain of yours, you have suffered only for a while and you call it unbearable. Well, just have a look below." I did. My God, what a sight! Thousands and thousands of souls crowded, huddled together and squirming like worms and crying, wailing, howling in extreme agony.

"Do you see these souls?" Sri Aurobindo said. "They have been in this condition for ages and they will go on, one doesn't know for how long. Compared to their suffering, yours is a child's peevish discomfort."

I had no words to utter, so struck I was by what I saw. This was, I suppose, what goes by the name of suffering in Hell. Then Sri Aurobindo said, "This is the seventh plane — *bhumi* — to which you have come. Now go!" He uttered these words with such power that I was moved downwards. Suddenly a door with only one panel opened up and, gliding through it, I fell into a world of light. Light and nothing but light was there and I was bathed in that golden and blissful lustre. I remained plunged in it for a long time. Such indescribable joy, *ananda*, it was.

These two polar conditions so markedly contrasted are beyond belief. I said to Sri Aurobindo, "I don't want to go down into the world again. I shall live here for ever."

"No, you have to go down," he replied.

"When shall I be able to return?" I asked.

"You have to take one more birth."

Saying this, Sri Aurobindo vanished and I came back to my body.

## Nobility of My Husband

After all that I have said and shall say hereafter about my husband, I would like to recount one early story showing his nobility of spirit, despite the many defects of his lower nature and even some asuric propensities that surfaced later on.

Though I was supposed to be very pretty, I never knew any romance in my life, never having fallen in love, unlike many other young women. Even the joy of true friendship escaped me, though I loved and was loved by my relatives and many girls of my age. But there was one incident where I felt an unusual degree of happiness, though not of a high enough order to be considered spiritual. It happened in the following manner.

My husband had a friend, R, whom he had known since childhood. This young man fell in love with a girl of whom his family did not approve. The couple frequently visited us in my mother's house. R's father knew about his son's love-affair, and had warned him that if he proceeded with such an unsuitable match, he would be disinherited. R paid no heed, though even my husband attempted to bring him to his senses. "Would you be able to face the consequences of your father's displeasure?" he asked. "How would you support your wife and family after you have been disowned?" All to no avail.

R's resolve, however, soon turned to water. A few months afterwards, his girl-friend came to our house, fell at my husband's feet, and begged him to save her. "He is deserting me and going to Delhi!" she cried.

"What?" my husband exclaimed. "Deserting you? But why?"

"Don't you understand?" she sobbed.

My husband's face was suffused with a mixture of anger and pity. He gently told her that she should go home, and that he would see what he could do.

A few days later when R himself came to our house, my husband caught him by the collar and shouted, "It seems you are going to Delhi leaving your girl-friend behind!"

R replied that he had no other means of making a living.

"But what about marrying her?" my husband demanded.

"How can I?" R whimpered, "I can't even manage for myself. How am I going to support her?"

"Why didn't you think of that sooner?" my husband exploded. "I had asked you that very question myself and warned you of the consequences of defying your father. And now you're going to throw the girl on the street and go away when you know very well that her parents won't take her back? That simply will not do!"

R was in despair. "What choice do I have? There's no other way."

It was my husband's finest hour as he rose to the occasion.

"I'll feed you myself," he declared. "You, your wife, and your future children. But you *must* marry her."

R looked at him incredulously. "Are you serious?" he gasped. "Do you give us your word of honour?"

"Of course," my husband replied without hesitation.

When my mother heard of what he had done, she was both dumbfounded and dismayed. How would my husband fulfil such an enormous responsibility? But once his mind had been made up, he would not listen to her or to anyone else.

We secretly arranged the marriage in our own house. My mother, not wishing to be either implicated or included, left for Lucknow. Meanwhile, I and my husband arranged for the priest, invited a few friends, and married off the couple in fine style. It was the most social and worldly thing I had done in all my twenty-five years and, to add to it, we decided to travel to Delhi with the newly-weds to start them off on their honeymoon and married life.

It was after the four of us had boarded the train that our happiness reached its zenith. I think we made quite an impression on the other passengers, because none of them could make out which of us was married to whom, so mingled had our identities become, I might say one-souled. I had not experienced anything like this before.

Unfortunately, as always happens in this world, the situation changed, and the happiness of our companionship with it. Many years later my husband, in much altered circumstances, met R's wife. My husband's health had broken down and now he himself was destitute both of money and of friends, but the one he had given away long before as a bride passed him by as though he were a stranger.

## Last Days of My Uncle Dilip Kumar Roy

I have spoken of my husband's generous act and how he kept his word. My uncles's greatness, however, was of a spiritual character. It will be recalled that at his last performance, which I described in a previous episode, his voice had given way and he had abandoned himself to an emotional outburst of bhakti, keeping the audience spellbound. I also mentioned how his body had deteriorated almost to the point of infirmity. That occasion was the last time that I saw him. I never visited his Ashram in Pune, nor on his part did he know anything of the ordeals of my own life. His focus of concentration was his own sadhana and his Ashram which had gained wide popularity and attracted a large number of bhaktas from various parts of India.

But what interested me was that his attitude towards the Mother was changing. He was writing letters to Nolini-da enquiring about the Mother's health, offering his pranam to her and praying for her blessings. He even wrote to her that he was getting old and his end was near, to which she replied that he need have no regrets for he would still live sufficiently long.

The Mother had kept his old "Trésor House" vacant for many years after he had left Pondicherry. Then some people mooted the idea of setting up a clinic there. When the Mother heard of it, she finally gave her consent to let them approach Uncle for permission to use the property for this purpose, and he readily agreed.

Similarly, he was pleased to hear that I had taken up residence in the Ashram.

The most pathetic yet exalted moment of his life came when Sri Aurobindo's Relics arrived in Bombay. Uncle travelled there from Pune to have their darshan. But when he came near them, he burst into tears and had an overwhelming experience, so much so that he lost consciousness and remained in that state for two or three days. It seemed he had the Darshan of his beloved Guru and both embraced each other. This story was corroborated by a number of his bhaktas.

An equally apocalyptic wonder was once experienced by Nirod-da who relates: "I was sitting before my desk next to Sri Aurobindo's Room in the early morning, and was preparing the manuscript for my prospective book *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*. There were a number of letters exchanged between me and Sri Aurobindo concerning Dilip-da and I was quite perplexed as to what or how much of them to include. While I was lost in thought, all of a sudden a dhoti-clad figure appeared from Sri Aurobindo's Room. He had a slender and luminous subtle body, with face and eyes aglow: he looked like an angel. He stood by the door beside my desk, looked at me, and then disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. I was transfixed. My first thought was that it was Sri Aurobindo, but I corrected myself at once, when I realised that it was Dilip-da. At the same time, I found the answer to the problem that had been vexing me. Obviously he had come to silently give me the solution."

Recently, when I was thinking about Uncle, his chequered life, and his great love for Sri Aurobindo, Nirod-da's remarkable experience was confirmed by Sri Aurobindo himself. While revealing some inner secrets about Uncle to me, he told me that the Divine had sent Uncle to Nirod-da to convince him of the truth that the outer life was not always the criterion of a man's inner development.

## Experiences on the Way

### **An unbelievable experience**

Recently, something truly extraordinary happened to me for which there is no rational explanation. Even the many people I asked could give no answer to the enigma. It came about like this.

I and a close friend of mine were on our way from Pondicherry to Calcutta. During the taxi ride to Madras, we entertained each other with all kinds of stories and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Still in a jovial mood, we arrived at Madras station where we were to catch the Howrah Mail. Upon boarding the train, my friend, whom I will call Barun, found his seat without difficulty, but though I had made my reservation from Pondicherry we could find no seat reserved for me. Asking me to wait, Barun took my ticket and went to check with the Booking Office. There he was given the number of a bogey. When he returned, we quickly located it, and Barun helped me to my seat with my luggage, then left for his own compartment.

After a while, a man arrived and told me, “You are occupying my seat. Please let me have it — this is my number.” Disconcerted, I got down and searched out Barun. Once again he made the trip to the Booking Office and came back with another seat number. But soon after I had settled myself in that, a lady appeared and claimed it for herself. My dismay grew. There were barely ten minutes left for the train to leave. Close to panic, I called on Barun again. He explained my problem to a passing ticket collector but the man could not even spare a moment to listen.

Finally Barun and I went to the Booking Office together, only to be told that they had never received any confirmation of my reservation from Pondicherry. I was at the end of my tether and almost broke down. I told Barun that there was no other way for me to go but to sit on the floor of the train. But the booking officer objected, “It is against the law,” he declared.

Barun now expressed his own helplessness and advised me to go back to Pondicherry by myself as he had to return to Calcutta by this train. Then, as the first bell for the departure of the train had struck, he left me and boarded the train. I was terribly shaken. How was I to return to Pondicherry alone, late at night? Finding no other way, I did what I always do in such situations. With all my heart and soul, I began to call on the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to come to my rescue. Outwardly I kept looking this way and that for some escape from my predicament, when suddenly two young men came up to me and one of them said, “Ah, বৌদি (elder brother’s wife), how is it that you are here all alone? Don’t you recognize us? We are your husband’s younger cousins. We met you many years ago and still remember you — but perhaps you don’t remember us.” It was true. Both were complete strangers to me but I had no choice except to trust them. I poured out my story.

“Oh, is that the trouble?” one of them replied. “Then you can travel with us in our compartment. We have two bunks — you can have the lower one and we two can share the upper.”

Before I could reply they picked up my luggage, took me to their compartment and settled me there. Then they went off down the corridor. Soon after, the train started.

I arrived safely in Calcutta. During the trip I had been so relieved and so preoccupied with myself that I had completely forgotten about the two boys, who had never returned. We arrived about eight hours late because on the way a woman had committed suicide by throwing herself in front of the train. So it was not surprising that when I got down at Howrah, I found no one from my family waiting for me. When my friend Barun discovered me on the platform, he burst out in amazement: “How did you get on the train?”

It was only as I began to explain that I realised I had been alone throughout the journey, and that my two travelling companions had never reappeared. It now began to dawn on me who exactly it was who had helped me to reach Calcutta, but the riddle of the two boys remained. Barun was as happy and relieved at my good fortune as I was. Then, seeing that no one had come to receive me, he hailed a taxi for me and sent me home.

At home I recounted the incident to my relatives and asked if there were any cousins of my husband such as the two who had met me at Madras station. Completely mystified, their immediate impulse was to deny it. Still, they asked, "But did the boys touch your feet?"

"They must have," I replied, "though I don't have any recollection of it."

"And how did you pass two nights on the train without thinking of them even once?"

Here again was the unresolved question. "I don't know," I demurred, as confounded as they were. "It was only when we arrived at Howrah and Barun asked me how I got on the train that I came to my senses and remembered about them. All I could reply to Barun was that two of my cousins-in-law had miraculously appeared, put me on the train and then vanished."

"And not once — ?"

"I know, I know," I said shaking my head. "I was in such a dazed condition, almost as though under the influence of drugs, that I completely lost my normal awareness."

Only afterwards when I began to reflect in earnest on the bizarre happening did I ask my Guru if he had sent me those escorts. Was he really the one who had saved me, and were his instruments divine powers or men?

His answer was clear: "Of course they were divine powers and I did send them. But what does it matter to you whether they were human beings or something else?"

In this way, once again I realised my Guru's infinite grace that came in such a miraculous manner.



## About My Mother

Recently a young friend of mine affectionately teased me by telling me I had been born with a golden spoon in my mouth. “How much we had to struggle and suffer to achieve a modicum of comfort in life!” she said.

“Do you think so?” I replied. “Must you judge only by outer appearances? All right, I don’t mind your teasing. You still have a lot of growing up to do despite your hardships. Just bear in mind that money and wealth are not everything in life.”

Then I told her of my own experience, and how I looked after my ailing mother for five or six long years without any assistance. My mother had diabetes and her condition worsened with age. Finally she was confined to bed. I had to help her to the bathroom, which was no easy matter, because she was so heavy and I for my part was small and frail. With this routine day and night, often I did not get any sleep for days on end. Then one day, she discovered she couldn’t walk any more. “What’s the matter?” I asked her, “Why can’t you walk? Yesterday your legs were all right. What has happened today?”

But she was as bewildered as I was. I had to call our family doctor only to be told that it was a common feature of diabetes that paralysis could suddenly strike the lower limbs.

“What can I do?” I asked him in panic. “How will I manage her alone now?”

Then I suddenly remembered how once when my astrologer had started to tell my mother, “Listen, in future — ” she had protested vehemently:

“No, no! I don’t want to know the future. Why probe into what God has hidden from us?”

“So be it,” the astrologer had replied. “But allow me to say one thing. A day will come when you will lose your power to walk due to paralysis.”

Since then, I used to constantly tell my mother, “Ma, pray to the Mother. There is no other way. You know this astrologer’s predictions have almost always come true. From now on take refuge in God. Tell Him to protect you.”

But all my pleading proved to be of no avail. And now the predicted blow had fallen, while, for me, my miseries had only just begun. If I had had trouble before in helping my mother to the bathroom, now even taking her there became impossible. My son assisted me when he was at home, but the rest of the time I managed alone. How many times I had to change my mother’s clothes and bedding! Visiting relatives demanded to know why I did not employ a nurse, but Mother would object at once, dissolving into tears, “Don’t leave me in the hands of nurses,” she would plead.

Finally she was fitted with a catheter, and I could have some rest. But when I asked the doctor how long the respite would last, he replied that it would only be for about a month, because if the catheter were kept for longer than that, there would be the risk of infection. At any rate, I thought, at least I can get rest for a month. But a complication quickly set in with blood appearing in the urine. In my disturbed state, I fearfully imagined that my mother might have contracted cancer. However, when I consulted the doctor, he told me that whatever the diagnosis, nothing further could be done for her.

I objected: “That can’t be. I must try to do something, whatever her condition, otherwise I’ll be plagued by a sense of guilt for the rest of my life.” I recalled how due to my negligence my mother had lost the sight of one eye. When the trouble began she complained of blurred vision from time to time. The doctor diagnosed a cataract. But when her vision in one eye had been totally lost, another



doctor declared that diabetes had been the culprit and had dried up the nerves. Then when he examined the other eye, he found it was suffering from the same defect. He prescribed a medicine to be applied once a week. Thus the eye was saved. If only I had known enough to do the same for the first eye! I could not get over the remorse I felt in my very soul for the loss of that eye. So I was determined not to let such a thing happen again. I would learn the cause first, then decide on the next step.

Meanwhile, my mother's condition worsened beyond words. She soiled her bed which I cleaned myself, and she had to be fed by hand. We thought of taking her to a nursing home, but she refused outright. Besides, the charges were beyond our means, amounting to Rs. 1000 per day, and that too when we did not know how long the patient would survive. It was quite possible she would live another year.

A relative saw how conscientiously I was performing my task and remarked, "You must have a deep love for your mother. Otherwise none but a yogi could perform such ideal service — it would be humanly impossible."

But then something quite unexpected happened. One day, I left my mother alone and went to the bazar with a friend. When I returned, I found Mother had fallen down the staircase from the third floor to the second. We were stunned to find her lying on the landing. To carry her back up again was no easy matter, considering her massive weight. We had to call the neighbours for help. When we got her upstairs, we saw that she had probably dislocated her shoulder. Upon our asking her why she had gone out of her room, she replied, "Somebody seemed to be calling me. I got up with great difficulty, and opened the door. I saw someone who looked exactly like you, standing there. 'Come, come, ma,' she was calling. Then, when I tried to step out, I slipped and rolled down the stairs to the place where you found me."

I was non-plussed! Who was this woman who had impersonated me? What could have been her motive in playing such a malicious trick?

We took my mother to a doctor who confirmed that she had dislocated her shoulder, and ruled that it would have to go into plaster. But luckily our family doctor did not feel that in her condition she could tolerate a plaster cast. He advised a simple bandage instead.

On another occasion, during my mother's illness, a friend invited me and my cousin brother to dinner. My son too had gone out to dine with friends after which he planned to go to the cinema. Later he was to pick me up from my friend's house and take me home. I fed my mother, and then left, leaving my key with my mother. After the dinner, I decided not to wait for my son and returned home in a taxi with my cousin. I rang the bell expecting that my mother would open the door. But, when after repeated ringing there was no response, I began to panic. "Good Lord!" I exclaimed. "What if my mother is lying unconscious inside!" We could think of no way to open the door. Even though I prayed frantically to the Lord, or, perhaps because of it, my head began to reel and darkness swept over me as though I were going to faint. Like a mad woman I ran out into the street till I stood in the middle of the traffic passing in both directions. Drivers began to shout abuse at me, but I was so dazed I did not know what to do or where to go.

All at once, a car stopped right in front of me and my son got out of it and, stupefied, exclaimed, "Ma, what are you doing in the middle of the road amidst the passing cars? Have you lost your mind?" I flung my arms around him and he helped me into his car. "Oh my gosh!" He said. "Luckily the cinema was full and I was passing this side on my way to another one!" Reaching home, he

opened the door of our apartment with his own key. We found Mother lying senseless on the floor, and when we called the doctor he told us it was a case of kidney failure. He gave her repeated injections in the arm. After some time fluid began to spurt out from her mouth and would not stop. We began to pray to the Lord. When it did not work, I thought suddenly to make her drink চরণামৃত<sup>4</sup> and went to Sri Aurobindo's photo with a cup of water. That worked like a charm and the flow stopped gradually.

Another time during my mother's illness it happened that I did not have any money in the house, and it was raining heavily. Where and how could I go in that downpour? My mother had to be fed and there was nothing to eat. I was terribly upset. Somehow I managed to go out and reach a house we owned in which the tenant owed us rent. I explained my predicament to the man and asked him to give me some money, and he answered that I should not worry. If I went home, he would bring me the money later.

I returned but there was no sign of him even though I waited and waited. The idea of not having anything to eat tormented me. I fell to weeping before the Lord's photo, then suddenly I heard his voice, "Why are you so worried? I'm here. How can you starve when I am with you? You will get the money."

And then, in the dead of the night, in that downpour, I heard a knock on the door. It was our tenant with the money in his hand. "Please take the rent," he said humbly; "I am sorry I couldn't come earlier."

But on such a stormy night? And then I heard the voice. "Well, I gave you my word, and I meant it." I can't express how sweet was the voice of the Lord, the same voice I have heard so often.

<sup>4</sup> *Charanamrita* - Water touched by the feet of the Deity.

## The Burden of Property

I have told you that I had become the owner of a huge property left to me by my grandfather, Surendranath Banerjee. To a young woman who had no experience of life or of business matters and no one to guide her, property was a heavy burden.

We had a large house at Barrackpore situated on the banks of the Ganges. It had a big lawn, a garden and trees in the backyard. In all respects it was an enviable property. Since we were just a few family members, we had no need for such a huge building. It was an encumbrance. So I decided to sell it off. I went to see the then Chief Minister of Bengal and enquired if the Government would buy and preserve it as a memorial in honour of my grandfather who was a great patriot and had won the title “Uncrowned King of Bengal”. The Chief Minister was a man well-known all over India. He asked me the price of the building. I said, “One and a half lakhs.” “What?” he shouted at me, “your tenant is now paying only Rs. 90 per month and you demand such a huge sum for selling it! It’s impossible!” He spoke very rudely and dismissed me off-hand.

I then advertised in a newspaper and in reply a Marwari businessman turned up to negotiate. The news spread everywhere. The editor of a well-known Bengali paper came to see me. “Is it true that you are selling your grandfather’s house to a Marwari?” he asked. It was my turn now to be annoyed. I answered, “Why shouldn’t I? I offered it to your Chief Minister and he turned me out charging me with excessive greed for gold. And now you are accusing me of having no patriotic feeling!” The editor departed.

As the negotiations proceeded with the prospective buyer, I had a dream. I saw my grandfather and he told me, “You’re selling this house to a Marwari?”

“What else can I do? Everything is settled,” I answered.

“No, you can’t do that,” he said emphatically. “In tomorrow’s paper you will read about the issue.” And what did I read? The editor of the paper had taken the Chief Minister severely to task for allowing the great Surendranath Banerjee’s house to pass into a non-Bengali’s possession. It had an instantaneous effect. The Chief Minister wrote to me that the Government would accept my earlier offer and buy the house. I kept quiet and gave no answer. Finally, the Government bought it.

But later on they charged me what is called Capital Gains Tax to the tune of about Rs. 17,000 since the property, they claimed, had not been worth the high price it had fetched. I refused to pay and filed a suit, but lost. When I still did not pay the sum demanded, a bailiff was sent to confiscate my furniture. I sent him off with Rs. 50 as pocket money. I appealed now to the High Court. My pleader suggested, “The judge is from the North and is said to be a very strict man. All the same, offer him discretely a substantial bribe.” I refused. I approached my son for help, “What shall I do now?” He said roughly, “Why do you annoy me? What can I do? You say you have faith in God. Why don’t you tell Him?” I was angry and retorted, “Do you think it is so easy? Why don’t *you* try it for once?” He rebuffed me with, “I don’t boast of sharing such a faith!”

Well, my eyes were opened. I prayed to my Lord. I later learned that I had won the case. The judge took no time in giving the judgment in my favour. “Lord, you have taught me a lesson,” I gratefully acknowledged.

\*

We used to own two old houses, but when the refugees from East Bengal came, they occupied

them. We had no way of driving them out, and neither the police nor the Government would offer us any assistance. I was in a quandary, but fortunately there was a military cantonment nearby and we were on good terms with one of the officers, who had wanted to marry one of my cousins but had been refused. He was a non-Bengali and a very nice person indeed, so I told him about my predicament.

He advised me to submit an application to the Government stating that the houses had become so old that they needed urgent repair. "Start right away with the repair work and break down the roof," he said, "I shall be present during the demolition."

Because of this stratagem, the refugees had to leave one house immediately, but they refused to relinquish the other, saying their womenfolk were there and that men should not enter the place. I went in myself declaring that being a woman I could. Inside, I discovered that a number of these women were sitting quite naked. They were low-caste people and thought they had struck upon a fine trick to keep possession of the house. But as soon as I saw to it that the repair work began, they had no option but to leave. Of course, I got the courage to follow this course of action because of my military friend's support.

Now the refugees had their chance, and started a scandal-mongering campaign linking me to the young officer. When the rumour reached the ears of his superiors in the cantonment, they quickly transferred him to another station.

Soon another difficulty arose regarding the payment of taxes which came under the jurisdiction of the military. I immediately thought of approaching the commanding officer who had transferred my friend. But this was no easy matter, because his office was in Fort William where no one could enter without a pass. When I asked my son's advice about what to do, he simply turned away saying, "I know nothing about your affairs."

"In that case I'll go without a pass," I retorted.

"Don't do that, Ma. You're asking for trouble," he warned.

Without a backward glance, I brought out my car and started straight for the Fort, thinking all the while of my Lord. As soon as I arrived at the gate of the Fort, the guards blocked my path with their rifles and demanded to see my pass. "I have no pass," I said haughtily. I forced my way through and had advanced a short distance when I heard a thunderous shout, "Halt!"

I turned around and saw an officer aiming his revolver at me. I stopped. "Are you a Bengali?" he asked. I answered in the affirmative.

"How have you dared to enter here? Where is your pass?" he demanded. I told him I had no pass but that I urgently wanted to see Major Datta.

"Do you know him?" he asked after a moment's thought. "If you don't he won't see you."

"I must see him," I insisted. "I am in great trouble."

"How long will you take?" he said more gently.

"About five minutes," I replied.

"Well, then, his office is over there straight ahead."

Thanking him, I mounted the stairs and knocked at the office door. "Come in," Major Datta called. I walked in and the Major started with surprise. "Who are you?" he exclaimed gaping at me. "How did you get in here? Where is your pass?"

Once again I declared that I had no pass but that I had dared to come because I was in great difficulty. He asked me to sit down.

“Please tell me your story,” he said politely. I recounted how I owned property near the cantonment and the cantonment people were harassing me. “I have come to you because you are the senior officer,” I concluded.

“I am not the right one. The Executive Officer could look after your problem.”

I replied that I could not trust him.

“Very well,” the Major told me. “I will look into the matter. Please come tomorrow. I am giving you a pass so that you will have no trouble getting admitted.”

I thanked him and came away in a triumphant mood. When I told my son what had happened he could scarcely believe his ears. I know people might laugh at me or consider my stories outlandish, but when I call my Lord, something comes down into me — call it force or strength — and I can perform exceptional acts without any thought for the consequences. In addition, by God’s grace, I had a very striking face in those days.

Next day I arrived at the Major’s office on time. He told me he had been expecting me. “Come with me,” he said. “We must go to the Head Office.”

We had walked down to the car when Datta asked me where my driver was. I said I didn’t have one and got into the driver’s seat. He was about to get into the back, but I motioned him to sit beside me. As we drove through the Fort everyone stared at us wide-eyed with surprise and curiosity. At the Head Office, I waited while the Major went round to the various departments in the course of making enquiries.

“I’m sorry you had to wait so long,” he told me upon returning. “But you will be glad to hear that the work is done. You can go home in peace.” With these few words he left me.

The next morning I went to him again to offer him my thanks. After a while, I said to him, “Mr. Datta, may I ask you a question? Please tell me why you have gone out of your way to help a person whom you did not know and whom most likely you would never see again?”

The poor man was not prepared for such a question and could not find anything to say. I continued, “And yet, when you received a false report about your subordinate officer, you transferred him without troubling to verify the truth of the scandalous allegation against him. How much I myself had to suffer on this account! Still, if I had been your superior officer, perhaps I would have done the same thing. Why do people behave like this?”

Again he did not reply. Then I added, “You see, man is a most helpless creature. Should we not help him in his trials and ordeals as far as we can? Is the law everything? This is my question — please don’t be offended.”

## Woman of Property

### Candour and Courage – 1

My mother was ill, and as I could not look after my property, I thought of handing its management over to *Fowler and Co.*, a well-known Calcutta firm which does this kind of business. I wanted in fact to sell our big house and buy a smaller one to suit our needs. I gave over the charge of the building to the company and signed the document without scrutinizing the terms and conditions. They made an estimate of all my property and charged Rs. 50,000/- for the contract. When I showed it to my advocate, he fell from the sky. “You have signed the document without reading it even once!”

“Well, I thought they must be honest people!”

He was dumbfounded at my naiveté.

In such eventualities, my only refuge is the Guru. I heard him saying that if I went on worrying, then whatever had to happen in the natural course of things would happen. If I wanted otherwise I should leave it to him. That made me free from worry. I could sleep well as I felt he had taken up all the responsibility.

Then I went to the manager of *Fowler and Co.* and made a clean breast of everything and said, “I haven’t a pie at home. My mother is bed-ridden....”

“But why didn’t you read the document?” he asked. “Who will pay our expenses?” I looked at him helplessly. He went inside. After a while he came out with our contract papers and, looking straight at me, said, “I believe you. We won’t charge a thing.” So saying he tore up the document in front of me and said: “In future be careful. Don’t repose so much trust in people’s honesty. You’re very simple-hearted. You have a large property and you should consult your elders before taking any important decisions.” So saying he bade me goodbye.

A few years later he died. When I came to know about it I paid a visit to his wife to offer my condolences and thank her for her husband’s large-hearted gesture towards me. As she looked askance at me, I explained the predicament from which he had saved me. She listened to the story quietly. After a while her eyes moistened and she told me how he had a heart-attack and had quietly passed away. As I was leaving the house I felt a guardian presence in it.

### Candour and Courage – 2

We have a house in Calcutta with four floors which we give out on rent. The ground-floor tenant had not paid his rent for many years. We filed a suit against him and won the legal battle, but lost the actual fight. This is not an unusual case in Calcutta. One cannot drive away the tenant. The law does not permit it. I and my son went to him and told him firmly that he would have to leave as he had lost the case in court. The man, sitting upright on his cot, replied with calm insolence: “If you have the power, drive me out. Here am I sitting as firm as a rock.” I felt almost like asking my son to drive him out by force and face the consequences, but good sense prevailed. Beaten, we returned home.

The next day, however, the tenant of the third floor came running to me and said that our immovable tenant had decamped at night in a hurry. The flat was empty and we should go at once and take possession of it. But, he requested, we should give him the flat later on. We could hardly



believe our luck or, should I say, our God-sent opportunity. But we kept wondering why the man who was so adamant during the day should run away at night. However, I along with my son appeared on the scene. My son, indeed very happy, said, “Ma, we shall get a fair amount of money from the sale of the costly furniture he has left behind. He has cheated us for so many years, and now we shall realise at least some of the dues.” I kept quiet for a moment, then I told my son, “No, *Khoran* (Child), we won’t touch a single article.” “Why not?” he demanded hotly. “Not yet. For the moment, we will leave the things as they are under lock and key.” After that we came away. Then the tenant of the second floor came and wanted to have the flat. I refused, as I had already committed myself to the third floor tenant. He offered to pay a substantial rent. “Even for that kind of rent, I can’t break my word,” I replied.

That night our telephone rang. My son picked it up. A man’s voice said, “I want to speak to Mrs. Mukherjee,” meaning me. His pitch was high and the tone excited.

“I’m her son. Tell me.”

“No. I want to speak to her only. It’s a serious matter.”

I came and asked, “What do you want?”

“Are you Mrs. Mukherjee, the owner of that flat?”

“Yes.”

“Please listen. All the furniture of that flat should belong to us. Don’t, for heaven’s sake, touch a single article.”

My son was furious and said, “Oh, he wants to show his muscle to us?”

The man continued, “We are *mastans*<sup>5</sup>. We had lent the fellow a big sum of money, but he has cheated us. When we threatened to take recourse to our *dharma*, he ran away. We are now practically beggars. Many a night we have gone without any meal. We shall now be able to get some money out of the sale of his furniture. You are rich people and have let go the rent for years. If you spare a few thousand chips for poor people like us, it won’t be a big sacrifice for you. But,” he paused significantly, “if you don’t, well, may God help you.”

In spite of his veiled threat, which would normally have brought out the fighter in me, without the slightest hesitation I left the articles to them. You see, when my son and I had gone to the flat, I had heard a voice asking me not to touch the furniture.

Later on I came to know that our former tenant was involved in many forgeries and all kinds of shady dealings. And that night he had to run for his life from his revenge-seeking creditors. We benefited in the bargain. The Grace has many ways of showing itself.

The story, however, had a sequel to it. There was a *basti* (a slum quarter) in the neighbourhood of our residence. I was on good terms with a woman of the area and through her I met a man whom I abhorred at once. He had only one arm, which increased my animus against him. To my enquiry about his arm he replied evasively that the doctor had to amputate it. One day he said, “You haven’t done the right thing occupying that flat.”

I was astonished and said, “How did you know about it? And why, for that matter, haven’t I done well?”

“For this reason, that you go to many places all alone and return alone at night. I’ve marked it. Any day — ”

“What! Are you trying to insinuate that I am too bold? Do you know where my courage comes

<sup>5</sup> Professional goondas.



from? None, nobody has the power to touch even a single hair of my head. Let me not hear such words again.”

Someone I addressed as জ্যাঠামশাই (elder uncle) — about whom I shall speak later — and my son disapproved of what they thought was my utterly show-off attitude. They argued, “The man is not to blame. He warned you for your own good. You needn’t have been so piqued.”

“Why not? Out of fear? You should know very well by now that I’m not an ordinary woman, particularly when I’m challenged. There is something evil in that man. I get into such moods only when needed.”

A few days later, I ran into that man again. He gave me a broad smile and said facetiously, “The day will pass well with me. I have seen your face.”

“Is that so? My days don’t pass well even though I see my own face every day. So how can yours?” I retorted sharply. After that the man avoided me.

## Experiences on the Way

### 1. Complaining to the Lord

Now let me narrate a few pickings from my current contacts with the Lord. The other day I said to him, “I get very easily upset by physical or material inconveniences; for instance, minor problems like some electrical malfunction make me imagine a world of obstacles I would have to overcome in order to set it right.” I prayed to him to remove this inborn nervous weakness. He answered, “No, I can’t do that. You have to try to do it yourself.”

Later, I asked Nirod-da, “Why did he say that?”

“Well,” he replied, “that is common sense. We ourselves have to make some effort. If the Divine did everything for us, then no sadhana would be needed. We have to do our own bit, and only then leave the rest to him. I have seen how easily you perceive things as dark and dreary and feel helpless in spite of the fact that the Lord is always with you. Since you were brought up by your father like a hot-house plant, material existence has gone very smoothly for you. Now you are having to pay for it.”

On another occasion, I made a most extraordinary request of the Lord. I told him that I saw him often and heard his voice, but one thing I wished for more than anything was his blessings with his two hands placed on my head. To this he answered, “That is very difficult. Things like visions and dreams are much easier than physical contacts.”

In this fashion, I go on talking to him when I am in my room. “O Lord, where are you? Why have you left me alone? Where are you?” And suddenly I hear his voice: “কি?” (“What [is it]?”). Only one syllable but oh, how sweetly said!

### 2. Regarding Nirod-da and Champaklal

Another day I asked him a silly question: “Champaklal, Nirod-da and others have served you so well and you have loved them all. Was there no jealousy among them, say particularly between Champaklal and Nirod-da?” He laughed and said, “Ask Nirod.”

And so when I asked Nirod-da, he told me: “It is a very interesting question particularly coming from a woman, for in women this frailty is supposed to be more commonly found. Our group, however, consisted of men, and elderly men at that. So we were more or less free from that taint of personality. Besides each one of us had his own duty allotted to him according to the nature of his service and his personal convenience regarding time. Maharaj — that is, Champaklal — and myself had to be present most of the time, but somehow I did not feel any jealousy towards him. We combined very well indeed. But the main reason for our harmonious comradeship was Sri Aurobindo himself whose impersonality bound us together. He was Samam Brahman, affable towards all of us — whereas in the Mother’s case, it was her personal aspect that was in front as she had to deal with each person individually. I have said elsewhere that Sri Aurobindo was the very epitome of impersonality. Your question takes me back to those days and makes me relive the time spent in his adorable Presence.”

### 3. Settling Down in the Ashram

I came in 1978 for the Darshan in February and did not feel inclined to go back, though I knew that I

could not stay on, for matters concerning my property, money etc. would have to be settled before I could ever think of making the Ashram my home. On the other hand I felt so much peace that it outweighed every other consideration. In this state of conflict I thought of praying to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to help me find a house where I could live by myself. On hearing my prayer, Sri Aurobindo said, “Why should you go back? Haven’t you been taught enough lessons? Now give your mind to the sadhana for which I have brought you here. You have to give up your attachments. You can’t go on whiling away your time in idle talk and cheap company. Have a firm determination. I have given you asylum here since your childhood and it still stands and will stand for ever.”

“But where shall I stay?” I asked.

“Why, you’re quite comfortable at Sahana’s place, aren’t you?” he replied.

“But how can I stay there for good? There must be some security for me, and who will look after me here? I’m all alone!” “There’s no need of any security. X will do all that is required. You needn’t bother your head about it.”

But I was not satisfied with this answer and went on. “Everybody here is well placed, but I have none to call my own. I’m a stranger.”

“Stranger? Then how are you able to live here so peacefully?”

“But some accommodation is needed.”

“Well, you’ll get Rs. 500/- a month for your expenses, not more. That should be enough.”

A few days later, I was still praying to stay on. This time he answered, “Instead of prayer, have trust in my word. That should be your main sadhana.”

#### 4. Japa

Another day I said to him, “Do show me how to do meditation. As I can’t settle my mind, I do *japa*.” He made a gesture of joining the thumb and index finger of both hands and doing the *japa*:

कृष्ण केशव पाहि माम्;  
माँ श्रीअरविन्द त्राहि माम् ।

O Krishna, O Keshava, save me;  
O Mother and Sri Aurobindo, deliver me!

I very distinctly heard him uttering the *japa*.

Whenever I don’t see him, I complain and he says, “Be like a child, just as you were when you came first, because like that you’ll see me. I am in you.”

“I don’t understand.”

“At that time, you were not concerned about other people’s opinions. You would just jump into the Mother’s lap. Give up your desire to be good in people’s eyes.”

#### 5. Publishing my Experiences

Some days later I asked him: “Nirod-da says he would like to write and publish all that you tell me. It would be good for others, he says.”

“Nirod? What has *he* to say? It is I who am making him say it.”

“Can I ever speak of your greatness?”

“What greatness of mine can you speak of? On the contrary, what you say will be good for *you*.”

“What good?”

“Why, the more you will think of me, the better it will be for you.”

“But am I not thinking of you as much as I can?”

“No, if it is to be written about, you will have to think deeply indeed.”

*(Editor’s Note: I reproduce here the following discussion I had with Esha because there are many who doubt her experiences like Sahana did. Not that they will be convinced, but I must do my job. In fact, I discovered it accidentally as I was going through my records.)*

### **About my Experiences**

One day I was thinking of all that I had told Nirod-da. Sahana Auntie says that there is something like an Intermediate Zone and people going there hear lots of things and take them to be genuine. Since the Guru isn’t now in his body, one can’t verify their truth directly from him. Who knows if I am not hearing the same kind of thing?

Then I heard the Guru’s voice: "Shame! Sitting before the Samadhi you are thinking like this? And you believe it?"

“Lord, if you were in your body, the question would not arise. Others too would believe it.”

“It doesn’t matter in the least. The effect would be just the same whether I were in the body or not.”

“But people won’t believe — ”

“It’s not with *their* belief, but with your own that I am concerned.”

“I understand, Lord. But I am so insignificant — where is the power in me by which I can write or speak about you?”

“Oh, you are priding yourself on your humility? Beware! The consciousness in which you find yourself at present may not remain at all times. So do sadhana from now on.”

“I don’t tell everything to Nirod-da lest he should disbelieve it. That’s why I did not speak of the incident regarding Sri Ramakrishna.”

“No, you must be candid. Whether he believes you or not, you have to tell him.”

## Darshan of Sri Ramakrishna

Earlier I had alluded to an incident, the details of which I suppressed from Nirod-da as I feared that he would not believe it. But Sri Aurobindo insisted he should be told all about it and I did. Here is the complete story.

It happened in 1948. At that time I was not interested in Sri Ramakrishna nor did I want to know anything about him. One morning, however, at about 7.30 a.m. while still in bed I saw his figure high above on the wall. He was wrapped in a white *chaddar* and said, "Bring me a blanket. I'm feeling very cold." I was thinking, "Who is he? I seem to have seen him somewhere, but can't recollect it." He stayed for about five minutes. After he was gone, I remembered and exclaimed, "Oh! It was Sri Ramakrishna."

I told my mother about it and asked her why he had asked me to offer him a blanket when there were so many of his bhaktas in Belur Math. Then I forgot the vision completely.

One night, about ten years later, as I was about to go to sleep I saw a round ball of fire suddenly flame up before my eyes, like a fire in a burning *ghat*. I thought the flame must be symbolising my mother's death as she was ill at that time. I prayed to my Lord. For seven days the fire appeared before me. After the seventh day it neared and stood before me. I kept looking at it. Then a hollow space formed in the middle of the fire and the bright face of Sri Ramakrishna filled it up. This happened three times.

Now a new chapter started in my life. I forgot the Mother and Sri Aurobindo altogether. In their stead, day and night my mind was preoccupied with Sri Ramakrishna alone. My entire being was burning with the pain of separation from him. My mother said, "Go to Belur Math; you'll get peace there." I did, but to no effect. That night, as I was thinking of him while lying in bed, he appeared before me and said, "Why have you come back? You should have sat in my lap."

Again I became restless. And as my indifference to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo began to increase I looked at Sri Aurobindo's picture and cried out, "O Lord, are you taking me to hell?" An exceedingly sweet smile parted his lips and he replied, "Can anybody think of the Paramhansa and go to hell?" That gave me support and I was plunged in a deep ecstasy at the thought of Sri Aurobindo and his response to my prayer.

For four or five years Sri Ramakrishna absorbed me completely. Many changes and reverses in my external life took place but his presence was there in everything. Once I had a craving to see his sweet smile. After some weeks, I saw a big hall with a crowd of devotees and Sri Ramakrishna was seated there. He asked, "Where is Esha? Hasn't she come?" Vivekananda pointed towards me. Sri Ramakrishna looked at me and amply fulfilled my desire with an exquisite smile.

One day as I was lying in bed, he came near me and said, "Get up." For no apparent reason I was terribly afraid and clutched my bedsheets firmly. He said, "Have no fear." As soon as I approached him, he caught hold of me by the neck and brought me to Sri Aurobindo's presence in the Ashram Meditation Hall and said, "Bow down to Him." Sri Aurobindo was sitting on a sofa and blessed me, while Sri Ramakrishna stood by. As I next did pranam to Sri Ramakrishna, he said to me while blessing me with both hands, "My blessings are with you to protect you from all danger and catastrophe." Then he simply melted away and did not reappear.

Life became dry and empty. Neither he nor Sri Aurobindo was anywhere near. I lost faith in God. For one year I suffered. Then one day at about 3 a.m., a crow outside my window began to call

in an intensely shrill voice while looking at me. Suddenly two figures, bright and resplendent, appeared before me; they were none other than the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. How resplendent indeed they were! At once a deep peace descended and enveloped my whole being in ecstasy. For one year I used to see a half-moon between my brows and they were sitting on it. I regained my lost faith.

Sri Ramakrishna's assurance of protection, however, had intrigued me as at that time all was well with me and my family. But I was grateful for it when it was brought home to me very powerfully after the incident of my son's getting waylaid and beaten up by Naxalites and left for dead on the wayside. I shall recount the incident in its place.

Sri Aurobindo too had warned me to give up all attachment to my son as the worldly life was incompatible with my spiritual future.

Once I went to Dakshineswar and was walking about in the Panchavati, the area of five trees. As I was musing on Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Aurobindo, I heard a very distinct voice saying "দুই মহীরুহ" ("Two colossal trees")!

## Experiences on the Way

### Sri Krishna's Prasad

One day, I had a good reason to be happy, and as soon as Nirod-da entered my place, I exclaimed: "Today I shall give you a very good piece of news. You know X who looks after me and helps me in so many ways?" Then I launched into my anecdote.

When she came yesterday morning I offered her some *prasad*, saying, "Take this. It is Sri Krishna's *prasad*."

"No, *Didi*, I won't. I don't take any *prasad* other than the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's."

"You won't take Sri Krishna's *prasad*?" I asked, a little taken aback. With a definite "No!" she departed without a second word. I was a bit hurt.

Early this morning she came, as she usually does, and excitedly cried out: "*Didi*, I had a strange experience while coming to you just now. You know that little bridge just before your house which is under repair? When I was crossing it, suddenly I lost my vision and became blind. Then a voice came out of my throat, 'Kanhaiya, where are you? Where are you? Show me the way, show me the way.' I was calling Sri Krishna and at the same time thinking, 'Why am I calling *him*, with whom I had nothing to do? And why *Kanhaiya*, a Hindi expression?' Then after two or three calls, suddenly a bright light, a blend of blue and gold, flared up. It came like a brilliant column from your house and fell before me, the entire area shining in that dazzling light. Then I heard a voice, 'Why are you going in that direction? Kanhaiya is in that house from where the light is coming. Go there!' I was struck with wonder. I have never called him in my life and here I have this extraordinary experience of him!"

You can imagine my euphoria. Sri Krishna has been my Thakur since my childhood.

Let us leave aside His Lila and come to the facts of my life.



## Aversion Towards God – 1

My mother's death burdened me with a heavy load of property and its management. You will be surprised to hear that I had to commit even illegalities under compelling circumstances because of my lack of worldly experience. And you will be even more surprised to hear that the Lord helped me out even here. Is it not that He looks into the heart of his devotee?

I had a very intimate friend from childhood, a distant relation, called M. She was very fond of me; it was like an obsession. We were almost twins — eating, sleeping, going for walks together. She would not even get married because of the fear of getting separated from me; but my own response to her love was not as whole-hearted, because she had a strange antipathy towards God. As God was all-in-all for me, I could not understand this strong aversion. One need not accept God, but why such a revulsion? One day I was ready to visit Sri Ramakrishna's Dakshineswar when she arrived. I invited her to come along but she immediately refused, "No, I won't go there." Similarly she would not come to Pondicherry either. Well, to each his own preference. Nevertheless, it was she who looked after the legal points concerning the property, making me free from all anxiety. One day her mother pleaded with me, "Look. You know all these years M didn't want to get married for your sake. You must do something before it's too late." I made M consent to marry. After her marriage she left for England. I was now extremely worried. Who would take charge of my legal papers, documents, etc.? She had asked me to send them over to England and she would return them after putting them in order. But that was hardly a practical solution.

Utterly resigned, I tried to look into the papers, but nothing entered my head. I called my son. He too confessed total ignorance in these matters. "Take them to the advocate," he bluntly advised. But that advice did not appeal to me. In this predicament I fell back upon my only refuge — my Thakur, the Lord who "never deserts his bhakta even when the whole world leaves him", as says a Bengali song:

যার কেহ নাই, তুমি আছ তার ।

The answer was not long in coming. As I was desperately struggling with the figures, my "Elder Uncle" arrived. (I shall introduce him in detail later.) He asked, "What is the matter? You look plunged in such dark despair! What are all these papers?" I told him. "Oh, is that all? Don't worry. I'll take charge!" What a relief! Since then, for so many years he has been looking after all these tangled affairs. He never fails to send me my monthly expenses. And he does all this without the least expectation from me. God knows what will happen when he is no more there. Sometimes that thought crosses my mind.

Now when M returned to Calcutta for a visit, she enquired about me from my son and was told that I was in Pondicherry. "Oh, then I will never see her again," she remarked. I did not feel sad about it, even though she had done so much for me. Someone harbouring such an abnormal feeling towards God is unbearable to me, however deep her love for me.

But why does she have such a strong aversion towards God? Is it out of fear? I don't know exactly. Maybe she has imbibed it from her parents. Because, I believe, it was with her father's help that my mother had taken me away from the Ashram when I was little. Her mother too harboured baseless bitter feelings against the Ashram. And both of them had to pay a very heavy price for it. M might have attributed it wrongly to the Divine Power whom the Mother and Sri Aurobindo

represented. But it is a fact that they never inflict any punishment.

To all this Nirod-da commented, "I shall tell you an interesting story in this context. One day a young disciple came to see the Mother. He was in a bad mood. He began to abuse her as if she had done something wrong to him. The Mother remained absolutely quiet. After a few days, when he came again, his knee was bandaged and he walked with difficulty. Somehow he managed to do the *pranam*. While he was leaving, the Mother said to him, 'Listen, my child. Don't think that I have done anything to you. But there are Powers who do not tolerate such offences done to us.' "

Next time I shall narrate some more instances of God-haters known to me.

## Experiences on the Way

### 1. Be Like a Child

I told the Lord, “You are doing so much for me. At every step I feel your protection, your love and care for me, Lord. I don’t know why you are doing so much for me. I have done nothing for you so far. I have been self-centred, busy with my own thousand problems, major and minor, and complain to you all the while. You are never annoyed but are ever gracious and sweet. What have I done to deserve this bounty? I can only offer my gratitude — ”

“Don’t talk of gratitude, forgiveness, etc. — all those human sentiments, high though they are. Be just like a child as you were when you came to the Ashram and used to fall into the Mother’s lap — simple, innocent and beautiful. Questions of gratitude do not become you. Be that child again.”

“My old bone-trouble has reappeared. Sometimes the pain is very acute. Homeopathy helps me; the pain subsides, but only for a few days and then comes back. My stomach also gives me trouble now and then. I can’t say that I ever enjoy good health.”

The Guru answered: “It is because you are not doing any work for the Mother. Those who do her work enjoy good health.”

“But I do a lot of work at home. I have no servant. I mop the floor every day, clean the furniture, wash my own clothes. All these chores take away the entire morning. I have to go to the bazar, the bank and what not. I am all alone. I have never been used to this kind of life. You know it very well.”

“It is true indeed. That is why my constant help and protection are with you. Go on in your usual way. One day all these troubles will disappear. But at present you have to be ready to face such minor troubles. Eventually your love for me will conquer everything.”

### 2. In Auroville

I had a very fine experience the other day in Auroville, when I accompanied Nirod-da there. After his talk to the Aurovilians, which was very good indeed, we went to see the Matrimandir. We sat down for meditation in the Hall; everything was hushed. When I was meditating I saw a bearded rishi plunged in deep meditation high above. I was surprised, for in my previous visit I did not have any experience at all except that everything was quiet and peaceful. Suddenly the Guru’s voice spoke: “There are seven other such Rishis who are constantly on guard and are doing the Mother’s work.”

No wonder that everything is so well organised at Matrimandir and is running so smoothly.

The other day a sadhak came to me and asked: “You are Esha? We used to see you as a sweet little girl, long ago, walking with the Mother. You used to come to Nirod’s room with Jyotirmoyee. What a lovely child you were! I am now reading your reminiscences. Can I come and see you?” I kept quiet. Guru said, “He is a great bhakta of mine. When he comes to see you, pay for his rickshaw fare. He can’t walk so far.”

And now to resume my stories.

## Aversion Towards God – 2

Last time I told you that I would give some more instances about aversion to or unaccountable lack of faith in God. Here is another instance.

This one is about a very intimate friend of mine. She comes from a respectable family: educated, honest, upright, does not tell lies, nor does she do any harm to anybody — she is, in short, endowed with many good qualities. Still hers is a life of worries and wants which has made her bitter about God and she has lost faith in Him.

One day she was going somewhere in a bus — you know those double-decker buses in Calcutta — crammed with people. While getting down from the bus, the end of her sari got entangled in a wheel and she was dragged along the road. People noticed it and began to shout and scream, “Driver, driver, stop the bus!” When the bus finally stopped, her body was seen to have been hurt at many places and was smattered with blood. Part of her sari too had been torn away, exposing her body. A woman rushed to her and covered her with a shawl. She took her home, nursed her and had her escorted back to her house.

When I came to know about the accident I went to see her. What a pitiable condition I found her in! I had no words to console her. Dark questions disturbed me, “Why should such an honest person suffer in life while dishonest ones are thriving and enjoying themselves? How can one keep faith in God; is He there at all?” With such questions so many people inveigh against Him and blame Him for their sufferings.

Relating the above to Nirod-da, I added, “There was another relative of mine who also turned against God because he had to face a hard life. Can you give a satisfactory answer to their questions?”

“All these are foolish questions, blaming God for all our troubles. Poor God, as Mother says. As if He has no other work than causing miseries to people for nothing. When they are happy, when they are fortunate, do they attribute it to God? However, tell me one thing. Is your friend whose sari got caught in the bus wheel really so honest and faultless?”

“I can’t say that. She abuses her husband when she gets into a temper for his faults, however trivial they may be, just because the husband comes from a poor family and is below her social status.”

“Well, you find there a clear answer to your question,” Nirod-da said. “If you make others suffer, you have to pay for it. It is a simple rule of common sense. We need not go into philosophic problems to find an answer. Of all faults, bad temper is a grievous one. It makes life unhappy. If you had faith in God, at least you could have found some solace by praying to Him, but this lady had only herself to blame and therefore suffered. Where peace is lacking, all kinds of trouble, physical, vital and mental, are bound to occur.”

“Let me give you however one bright instance of her honesty that may compensate for her other faults. My mother had a costly gold watch which she gave to my husband as a present. I wanted to have it in my hands for a while, specially because our relation was getting strained. He gave it to me. After a while, our divorce case started and I couldn’t return it to him, though it rightly belonged to him. So I gave it to my mother for safe custody. But as she was not keeping well, she locked it in an almirah. One day, when I opened the almirah I found it missing. As Mother was not well we hushed up the matter.

“Later, after my mother’s passing, I invited that lady friend of mine on the occasion of Mother’s *shraddha* ceremonies. She came and expressed her condolences at Mother’s death. While leaving she handed over the missing watch to me saying, ‘Your mother had given it to me to get it repaired, cautioning me that as it was a very costly watch I should get it repaired in my presence. She asked me to keep the whole thing secret, even from you. I was so busy that I couldn’t return it sooner. Here is the watch. I feel a great relief to be able to give it to you.’

“I was stunned. A watch worth two to three thousand rupees! She could have easily sold it and kept the money to make her financial position a bit easier. But she stood by her honesty. What a contradiction is man’s life! In spite of so many virtues, one suffers but does not yield to temptation. One can’t be blamed for turning one’s face away from God.”

“Yes, because it is easy to do so,” Nirod-da commented wily.

## Experiences on the Way

### **Calendar Distribution, 1992**

Something remarkable happened to me on New Year's day. I had gone to the Ashram for the calendar distribution. As I am not on "Prosperity", I received only the one with the Mother's picture, while Prosperity-holders received, in addition, one with Sri Aurobindo's picture. I approached one of them and asked and obtained in exchange her picture of Sri Aurobindo for mine of the Mother.

Later, I heard Sri Aurobindo's voice saying, "Why did you do that? Don't you know that the Mother and myself are one? If you divide us in your consciousness, you will lose her grace. And when that happens, you will not be able to receive mine either."

I felt truly humbled. It was not that I did not love the Mother, but as I had always turned towards Sri Aurobindo for everything, it was his picture I had preferred without knowing the consequences of making such a preference.

## A Tragic Story

Here is another story. A rather complicated and heart-rending tale that baffles reason. It is about a rich family, respectable, upright and honest. This family was inclined towards Brahma Samaj and did not have much faith in a personal God. My uncle Dilip Kumar Roy was very friendly with them, particularly because of their younger daughter who was a marvellous singer. One day Uncle thought of going on a trip to Shillong with that family. Shillong is a very beautiful place with hills and rivers, trees and flowers and fruits in plenty: an ideal place for someone of my uncle's temperament. He asked me to come along too and I agreed. But my mother did not allow me to go as I had a sore throat and Shillong being a cold place she feared an aggravation of the trouble. This was indeed a grace as you will see presently.

Uncle started on the journey with a party of five people. They were going up the hills in their own car. He sat beside the driver, the others were at the back. Uncle's whole being bubbled like a fountain of joy. The girl started singing rapturously. Her father said, "Dilip, let us exchange seats. Then you two can sing together and your spirits will soar together towards heaven and regale us no end." Uncle did so. He had a tremendous vitality, as you know, and could transmit it to others. All were thoroughly enjoying the duet. But soon, when the car was going through many twists and turns on the hilly road, the driver suddenly lost control of the vehicle and it went off the edge of the road, careened and rolled down the slope of the hill till it reached the bottom of the valley. Uncle had perceived the danger early and was able to open the door and jump through it and landed safely in a bush. The driver met instant death, three others were somehow safe, but where was the father? People living near about rushed to the scene. They began searching and calling out for him. They heard a faint "I'm here," and found him lying helpless, pinned down under one of the wheels of the car. With great difficulty they pulled him out and took him to the hospital. It was found that all his ribs had been crushed. He died within a few days.

His wife was grief-stricken. After a year her daughter too died, the girl who had a wonderful voice, so sweet was it that Gandhiji called her the Nightingale of Bengal.<sup>6</sup>

The tragedy did not end here. After two or three years the younger brother of the girl, an exceptionally brilliant student, also died. Now remained only the utterly bereaved widow. After quite a few more years she developed cancer. When Uncle tried to console her by saying, "Pray to God," she became grave and said very forcefully, "Dilip, please don't utter that word in my presence."

This tremendous, yet natural *abhiman* (resentment, revolt) towards God — very few people under similar circumstances would be able to overcome it. Her thinking must have been: "If there is indeed a God, why this terrible curse on my innocent happy family?"

In contrast look at the other side of life. How I was once saved from the jaws of death. It happened in the middle of the heavy Calcutta traffic. I stepped down from a tram and was crossing the road in a hurry, without due caution. Suddenly I saw a car coming at me at great speed from the

<sup>6</sup> Editor's Note: Dilip Kumar Roy was her teacher and was very fond of her. He felt bereaved and asked Sri Aurobindo why such a lovely flower had faded away even before blossoming. Sri Aurobindo replied: "Uma Bose had reached a stage of her development marked by a predominance of *sattwic* nature, but not a strong vital (which works towards a successful or fortunate life) or the opening to a higher light - her mental upbringing and surroundings stood against that and she herself was not ready. The early death and much suffering may have been the result of past (prenatal) influences or they may have been chosen by her own psychic being as a passage towards a higher state for which she was not yet prepared but towards which she was moving. This and the non-fulfilment of her capacities could be a final tragedy if there were this life alone. As it is, she has passed towards the psychic sleep to prepare for her life to come."



right while a bus was coming from the left. Not knowing what to do, all atremble I lost my senses and stood transfixed. The bus driver, perceiving my predicament, brought the bus to a screeching halt inches away from me, and, pointing a finger at me, motioned me to pass. I ran for my life and exclaimed, "Thank God! O thank God!"

How many times such miracles, small and big, have happened in my life and are still happening!

## My Husband's Solicitude for Me and My Son

By the time I visited the Ashram with my child, my married life had already come to an end, though my husband continued to visit our house in Calcutta.

My child was my only preoccupation now — “the jewel of my eye” as the Bengali expression goes. However, I had unfortunately learned very little about child-care, and neither had my mother, even after Sri Aurobindo enquired during our visit about his complexion, his speech and hearing defects and other physical problems. The crisis came later when my son had a severe attack of diphtheria. As the condition became critical, I could think of nothing better than to telephone my husband and ask him to come to our assistance.

He was furious. “Why are you calling me now?” he demanded. “When I asked you to get the boy vaccinated against cholera, smallpox, diphtheria, polio and the rest, you refused point-blank. Now pay for it. But listen: diphtheria is extremely contagious. Take my advice and send the child to a nursing home to avoid catching the disease yourself.”

“What?” I exploded, “I shouldn't nurse my own child? Since when is a mother's life more precious than her son's? How dare you sit at a safe distance and give me this fiendish advice? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?”

Despite this outburst, I did send for the doctor; my son's condition was such that I could not do otherwise. He could scarcely breathe and his whole face had turned bluish. But by God's grace the doctor was able to save him.

There was a kinder side to my husband's nature though, which showed itself in the following incident. I was suffering from typhoid. The fever continued for days, but my doctor persisted with his treatment and gave me hope. My husband, somehow hearing of my illness, came to see me, even though I had told my doctor not to inform him or let him visit me.

As soon as my husband saw me he realised that the treatment was at fault, and that the doctor would have to be changed. Turning a deaf ear to my protests, he called in an eminent physician. The latter perceived at once that the treatment I had been receiving was indeed wrong. My brain had been affected, and had the correct treatment been delayed by two more days the damage would have been irreparable. So it was that my husband saved me, and that too at considerable financial cost.

When I recovered, I asked him why he had bothered about me. He knew full well that after my recovery, my attitude towards him would not change and that I would go on fighting him tooth and nail.

“I know your ingratitude,” he replied. “But I couldn't let you die before my eyes.” He said this even while our divorce case was still in progress. Such was our curious marital relationship.

My son was also to be a beneficiary of his care and generosity. Aside from his other disabilities, my child had knock-knees and flat feet. He could not stand erect or walk straight. To balance he had to shuffle forward with his feet wide apart. One day his father came to visit us and saw his pitiable condition. He was greatly upset. “What have you done to the child?” he exclaimed, horrified. “Don't you know that if this defect isn't corrected now, the boy will be a lifelong cripple? I am taking him to a doctor immediately — his legs must be put in plaster.”

“You'll do nothing of the sort!” I retorted vehemently. “If his feet are put in plaster how will he walk? His life will become miserable — ”

“Would you prefer him to be a cripple for life? What kind of misery will he suffer when he will

see that he can't stand up and move about with his friends? How do you think he'll feel then? Won't he curse both of us? I can't allow this — he's my child as well as yours. Though you have never listened to me in any matter, this time I'm going to have it my own way.”

As my husband had predicted, the doctor had the child put in a plaster jacket from hips to toes. For about two years, my son remained imprisoned in his white sepulchre. When finally the plaster was removed and I saw the condition of his feet and legs I burst into tears. The skin had sloughed off and there were wounds everywhere. The child wept with pain as the injuries were treated with medicine and dressed. Slowly his condition improved, but the doctor was of the opinion that he would have to be put in plaster a second time. As the days passed, however, it became apparent that this would not be necessary — the boy could walk adequately with crutches. Little by little he started to go to school, and after a year he had dispensed with his crutches and could walk normally. What a joy for both father and son! It made even the ten thousand rupees he had spent on his child's treatment fade into insignificance.

Though my husband had many serious faults this one bright spot shone through. He could not bear to see suffering, either in his relatives, his servants, or even in total strangers. He would take up each case and bear the financial burden of the treatment. Such is God's creation! The varied combinations and contradictions of traits found in human beings are both baffling and amazing.

After my son's recovery, I again went against my husband's wishes and had him admitted in St. Xavier's School. He objected, saying that missionary schools spoil the children's character by christianising them and giving them a foreign mentality rather than allowing them to retain a love for their own religion and their motherland. I replied that there was no alternative as no other good private or government schools were available. My husband pointed out that he had not had a bad education himself even without attending a missionary school, to which I answered that he had been a brilliant student, whereas our child was not. That ended the debate, and for once I believe that my point of view turned out to be the correct one. I had to take my son to school and bring him back every day in my car. I followed this routine for years and came to know the Jesuit Fathers at the School; a friendship grew up with them which turned out later to be most fruitful.

## My Son's Marriage

Though I had come to Pondicherry for good in 1972, I would go from time to time to visit my son in Calcutta. As I have already mentioned, he had found a good job in which he was doing well, and had a wide circle of friends. At the time he was still unmarried and was living alone, as his grandmother, who had brought him up since childhood, had passed away.

A friend of mine asked me why I did not go to him more often. She herself went to see her children whenever a relation of hers paid her fare, she told me.

I explained to her that my case was different. Whenever I had asked my Thakur if I could go to see my son he had refused. "You will suffer a great deal if you do," he would tell me. I could never understand why. What was there that would make me suffer?

An occasion finally came, however, when Thakur did give me permission to go. I was a little surprised, and had no inkling of what was in store for me. As soon as I stepped into my house and was climbing the stairs, I saw my son standing at the top waiting to greet me.

"Mummy, you've come!" he exclaimed. "I'm so relieved!"

"Relieved? Why?" I asked.

"Because I'm getting married!"

Now I was *really* surprised. "Getting married? To whom?"

He promptly invited me in to see for myself. The moment I saw the girl I was disappointed, and I told him so later. Then he explained that when he had been suffering from malaria and was running a high fever, she was the only one who had tended him, his grandmother no longer being alive. There had been no one else around, aside from the maidservant, to so much as give him a glass of water. So it was this girl alone who had saved his life. "Then what objection can you have to my marrying her?" he demanded. "You never thought of marrying me off to anyone!"

"What nonsense!" I protested. "How can you forget the number of offers we had? It was just that between you and me we didn't like any of them. Then when I couldn't wait any longer, I went away to Pondicherry leaving you to find your own match. Now that you've done it, who am I to say anything? My likes or dislikes don't matter, so long as you are happy."

Now at last it became clear to me why my Thakur had permitted me to come to Calcutta. I discovered that the girl was Goanese. Though rather dark, she was both well-educated and sweet-natured. Her family had settled in Bengal, and she had a good job in a firm.

The marriage was celebrated in royal style. My son moved in the high society of Calcutta. All his friends contributed to the glamour of the occasion. My relations also came forward and arranged an elaborate ceremony. I offered all my ornaments and jewellery worth several lakhs to the bride. I even gave her a gold sari I had been presented for my own marriage. Being entirely woven of gold thread, that too was worth a few lakhs. But the poor girl refused to wear it, as she was afraid to be seen in anything so valuable. Instead, she deposited the sari in the bank where it still lies safe, and wore something far less splendid and gorgeous.

Some time later, after turning me down many times, my Thakur again suddenly gave me permission to visit my son and his bride. On this occasion I was able to observe how the marriage was working out. I thoroughly enjoyed the company of the young couple. I found my daughter-in-law very charming and she took excellent care of me. But what was most striking about her — a characteristic not easily found these days — was her complete and self-effacing devotion to her

husband. There was only one problem between them. I had mentioned once before that many of my son's friends who came to his house were drug addicts. He had always claimed that he was unaffected by their unwholesome habits and that no one had a right to criticise their way of life. Not surprisingly, his wife did not agree. She told me how bitterly she resented these rich vagabonds coming to her house, so much so that her conjugal happiness was threatened. She even mentioned that one of them was married to a girl who smoked and was always scantily clothed!

When my son heard her complaining to me about his friends, he was furious. He repeated all his old assertions about no one having any right to criticise his friends or their life-styles. I could do nothing to remove this bone of contention between husband and wife except to pray to the Lord to protect them both.

After spending several months at their house, I wanted to return to Pondicherry well before the August Darshan. But I was unable to procure a ticket. When only a month remained before the Darshan and I had still not been able to get a railway booking I began to worry. On no account did I want to miss the Darshan. I now approached a very good friend of mine, about whom I will speak later, in the hope that he might be able to exert some influence and arrange a ticket for me. This he was finally able to do, but for a date not as early as I had hoped it to be. I would be arriving just before the Darshan.

A few days after the ticket had been purchased, my husband died. Now at last I understood. I could not get the train ticket for when I wanted it because my Thakur knew I must be in Calcutta when my husband passed away. This was mainly because my son, being estranged from his father's family and having no one else to help him, would not have been able to manage the funeral on his own. How embarrassed and bewildered he would have been knowing nothing of the rites and rituals that he would have to perform!

Inscrutable are the ways of the Lord. How many times have I not seen how he knows the past, the present and the future — in my own life and in that of others! And even so, I have so often failed to keep my trust in him. Such is human nature.

## My Son – 1

I will never forget the day my son Devrup and I were to go to my husband's place for a social function. Devrup had promised to pick me up from my house at seven-thirty in the evening. I waited on the road outside for about half an hour, but there was no sign of him; considerably annoyed, I returned to my apartment.

At about nine o'clock, I phoned a friend of his to ask if he knew what had happened to him, but he could not help me. When another hour passed with no news of Devrup, my alarm grew. My mother too became anxious. I went down to the apartment below and knocked on the door of my tenant, Mr Rao, waking him from his sleep. When I told him that Devrup had not returned, he asked me into his flat and suggested that I phone "Elder Uncle". (I shall describe his miraculous advent in my life as soon as I finish the present story.)

Elder Uncle arrived at about eleven and surmised that Devrup might have gone to a cinema. He suggested we should wait a little longer, but I was already sure Devrup could not have gone to see a film. When another hour and a half had passed, Elder Uncle and the Raos began to whisper among themselves that it was time to enquire about Devrup at the various city hospitals. A violent Naxalite movement was raging in Calcutta at the time, and no one's life was safe. I ran to my mother in desperation. "Ma, my son must be dead!" I cried.

With admirable self-control, she replied, "Weren't you telling me the other day that Sri Ramakrishna had assured you that nothing disastrous would happen to you? If that is true I am sure Devrup will come back tonight."

I was comforted. I felt a force descend from the top of my head and spread down to my feet, and faith returned to me that everything would be all right. I remained unruffled even when enquiries at the city hospitals yielded no result.

Now my friends thought of searching for Devrup by car and invited me to join them but I declined.

Just at that moment, about one a.m., Devrup returned driving his own car. Part of his face was covered with a bloodstained handkerchief. He explained that when he had been on the way home after getting his examination results, he had been attacked by four or five people. They overpowered him and robbed him of everything he had. Then they left him for dead in the gutter. After four or five hours, a lady found him and took him to her house, where she attended to his wounds. "I drove home when I felt better," he concluded. You can imagine our relief.

At one time Sri Aurobindo had told me that I would have to give up my attachment for my son. "If you imagine that you will have the money to live with your son and enjoy life with him indefinitely, you are mistaken," he said. "Nor can I protect him always; I am only doing it for your sake while you are still with him. No disaster will befall either of you during this period. But you must finally come to terms with the fact that you cannot plant your feet in two boats. You must be prepared to leave worldly happiness behind you, and your worldly attachments as well."

"But people will laugh at me," I exclaimed.

"They will do nothing of the sort," he replied firmly. "They will learn to recognize a higher side of your being. But you must be ready to give up everything you call your own."

So it was that I asked God to free me from my attachment to my son. How unnatural an aspiration it seemed! It would be difficult for anyone to imagine how strong an attachment it was,

and how much I had already suffered for it. It was a torture for me to have Devrup out of my sight. My mother, seeing my state of mind, finally advised, “God alone can relieve you of the torment of this attachment. Call Him with all your heart.”

Acting upon her suggestion, I shut myself in my room. There, all alone, I prayed repeatedly to the Lord to deliver me from this mad obsession. My food was left at my door and I allowed no one to see me. My friend M witnessed this solitary confinement of mine and told her friends in London about it. They were amazed, all the more so after it had continued for seven long years.

For me, those seven years were amazing in their own extraordinary way. As I would weep and pray to the Lord to deliver me, he would listen and reply, giving me solace in an unimaginably sweet voice. I could not see him clearly except that at times I would discern a golden light flooding the room. But what is most indescribable and marvellous is the state of joy and rapture I experienced during that time. Because of that experience I am now able to live in the Ashram at peace with myself, without my son.

Of course when I return to Calcutta for a visit, the old movements reassert themselves to some extent. If my son returns home late, I begin to fret. Seeing this, one of my relatives asked me how I could live in Pondicherry without him, yet got so easily upset when he did not appear on time in Calcutta. The only answer I could give was that it was a matter of psychology. When I was with my son, his absence caused the old nervous tension; but when a great distance separated me from him, I could maintain my detachment.

It was during those seven years of solitary confinement that I came to know the person I call জ্যাঠামশাই (“Elder Uncle”), one who since that time up to the present has been a source of unfailing support and assistance to me. I will write more about him later. Here it will suffice to say that Elder Uncle came to our house at the bidding of my own uncle, Dilip Kumar Roy, from Pune. He knocked on our door one day while I was in seclusion, and I slammed the door in his face. Naturally he was offended, but my mother made it up to him by inviting him in, then overwhelmed him with kindness and hospitality.



## Experiences on the Way

### **Calendar Power**

You remember the picture of Sri Aurobindo on the New Year calendar? I hung it beside the picture of Sri Krishna on my window near the head of my cot. My friends suggested I remove it and place it by the side rather than behind my head, so that I could always see it while lying on the bed. The idea appealed to me. Sri Ramakrishna's picture was already there, and both of them side by side would look well. But to my surprise, whenever I wanted to remove it, I distinctly heard Sri Aurobindo's voice, "No, no! I'm quite comfortable here. Don't remove me!" I was struck dumb.

The other day I was mopping the floor of my room. When I came near this picture, suddenly I felt the Presence of the Lord standing there — a massive powerful Presence. The entire room was filled with the atmosphere of that Presence. My whole being was as if held in a trance before the Presence and the utter ecstasy of it!

Now I shall return to the story of my family life.

## My Son – 2

While my son was studying at St. Xavier's High School, I had to keep a constant watch over him and would take him to school and fetch him back in my car. My husband knew that I was intending to file a suit for divorce and that I would plead for the custody of the child. To frustrate me, he struck upon the idea of abducting him. The boy did in fact belong legally to his father, but my husband would not go to court to claim his right. For my part, I was determined not to relinquish my child to him, as such a sacrifice would have been suicidal for me.

Now the administrators of the school used to send their students out of Calcutta for the annual camps organised by the N.C.C. That particular year, they chose Ranchi as their venue. As my husband was living in Ranchi at the time, I was terrified that on one pretext or another, he would take possession of the child. I hastened to put my problem to the school authorities. They explained that all the students had to be sent to Ranchi, but that I could go to the military officer in charge and tell him my predicament. Luckily, the officer in question happened to be a Bengali. After hearing me out, he assured me that he would take full responsibility for returning my son to me safe and sound at the end of the training.

When they reached Ranchi, the two thousand cadets from St. Xavier's in their red uniforms and caps made a grand display as they marched down the street. Suddenly my son saw his father's car pass by. The father too caught sight of the boy. It was easy to distinguish my son at once because he had the complexion of a European, and so always stood out in any crowd of Indians. (Many people make the mistake of taking him for a westerner even now.)

My husband wasted no time in seeking out the military officer concerned. Presenting himself as the father, he demanded custody of the boy. As he had promised me, the officer refused to comply, saying that it was his duty to see that the entire group of school children were returned intact to the school authorities in Calcutta. My husband, after a series of futile altercations with the officer, had no choice but to withdraw.

For his part, my son had developed an intense fear of his father and his designs. But my mother's point of view was quite the reverse. "Why are you so obstinate?" she would say. "What is so frightening about the child living with his own father?"

My retort was so vehement that it might appear to be irrational — but I shall justify it presently. I said, "Don't you know why he is determined to have the boy? To take revenge on me, and then to do the worst with him so that he can marry again. See for yourself — the poor child fears him as though he were Yama himself!"

Finally my son matriculated from St. Xavier's High School. He had developed a manly figure and in many ways resembled an Englishman more than a Bengali. At college, he took a degree in Commerce and found a job in a private business concern. At the same time he cultivated a circle of friends who belonged to wealthy and well-known families. I did not interfere with his freedom, but some of his attitudes surprised me. One of his old classmates, a close friend of his, was about to be married. But my son took no interest in the marriage preparations and remained as aloof as he could. Piqued, I asked him, "Why are you so unconcerned? Your friend has even stopped coming to the house." My son did not bother to reply. When I pressed him, he answered in his usual vein, "Leave me alone, Ma."

I had to resign myself to the fact that that was his nature. Since childhood he had been a boy of

few words. Even during an illness, he would lie as quietly as an animal, giving no answer to even the most repeated enquiries.

Finally when the marriage was imminent, his friend did come to the house only to find my son absent. He spoke to me instead, "Where is he? Has he decided not to come to my wedding? If it had been his marriage, I would have worked like a slave night and day. But for mine, he hasn't even shown his face once!"

I sympathized with him and asked, "Has something gone wrong between you?"

"Even if it has, is this the time to act on it?" Saying this, he left in a huff.

After a while my son returned. When I told him what had happened, he wanted to know what his friend had said. "He said that you're a most inhuman creature," I replied.

This seemed to pull him up. "He said that? He called me inhuman?"

"Why not? I would have said worse," I snapped.

It was only then that he picked up the telephone, had a long conversation with his friend, and cleared up the misunderstanding between them.

Aside from this incident, my son remained unapproachable with regard to his social life and the company he kept. He had his own job and his own income and made it clear that I had no right to meddle in his affairs. Still, when I saw the kind of friends he would bring home, I could not help feeling sorry for them on the one hand, and fear their bad influence on him on the other. Some of them drank while others took drugs. They all called me "Auntie" and when they came to our bourse they would stretch themselves out on the floor. Their health was broken, their appearance wretched, their limbs shaky — a pathetic picture of derelict youth. It was not that they were unaware of their miserable state, but simply that they could not give up their deadly addictions. Time and again I would say to my son, "Are these your friends? How can you keep company with such people?"

His response would always be along the same lines, "Why not? They don't affect me. They're very good at heart, and the only thing wrong with them is that they have acquired some bad habits that they can't give up. That's all."

There was nothing I could ever do or say to persuade him otherwise.

There was, however, one instance where my son was compelled to change his point of view and submit to mine.

In our house in Calcutta we have a big table covered with a sheet of glass under which I had placed a picture of Sri Aurobindo. One day, I noticed that my son had put his own photo beside Sri Aurobindo's. I was appalled. "What have you done?" I exclaimed. "How dare you put your photo next to Sri Aurobindo's? They are almost touching! Take it out right now — I would have done it myself but the glass is too heavy for me. Remove it immediately, for heaven's sake."

"Why, what's wrong?" he asked.

I was flabbergasted. "My God, what are you saying? Don't you know who Sri Aurobindo is?"

"I don't see anything wrong with what I've done. All your ideas are nothing but superstition. I don't believe in any of them. I'm not going to take out my picture."

"Remove it!" I cried, shocked by his arrogance. "Otherwise something terribly inauspicious will happen."

"I don't care. I won't remove it." And he left the house in a fit of temper.

The moment he was gone, I pleaded with my Thakur, "Lord, don't take offence. I have tried my best with him, but he won't listen. What more can I do?"

After about two hours, there was a knock at the door. When I opened it, I saw a gentleman standing there supporting my son by the arm. I was stunned. My son's face looked ash-grey. Asking the man in, I enquired what had happened.

He replied, "I saw from a distance that the boy was reeling as he was trying to cross the road. I thought it unlikely that he was drunk, as it was only noon, so I was sure there must be something wrong with him. Just then I saw a big lorry heading straight for him. I rushed forward and pulled him away. He was still unsteady on his legs, but he told me his address, so I was able to bring him here. Now that he is safely home, please take care of him." Saying this, he rose, excused himself, and left.

I put my son to bed. He soon fell into a deep sleep out of which he later awoke in a normal state. It was only then that I had a chance to ask him what had taken place.

"I was driving my car," he answered, "when suddenly I felt something very heavy pressing on my head. I couldn't bear it and my head began to spin. I parked the car by the roadside and got out. My legs were trembling. Suddenly, as I looked at a man standing in front of me, I discovered I could see very clearly inside him. I could even pierce through him and see things beyond. I couldn't believe it and thought I was going mad. Dazed as I was, I tried to cross the road when someone rushed up and grabbed me."

I was completely overwhelmed and demanded, "Now do you understand what it means to put your photograph beside Sri Aurobindo's? Here is proof of his enormous power. How can we poor humans even think of sitting by his side? Remove your picture immediately!"

He did so without demur.

## Going out of the Body

I used to have uncanny experiences at night. When I slept with my child some spirit or force seemed to come and want to drag me away forcibly and fly somewhere. I was very frightened and tried to resist. I would catch hold of the bedding or the cot, but beside its strength mine was like a child's. Still, as long as I could hold on to my child, I would be safe, but in my sleep my hand would lose its grip and that was the moment when the Force would come. I could hear the sound of a bell in my sleep before its coming as well as see something whirling before my eyes and I knew that the Force was coming to wing me away. With all my heart I would cling to anything I could get hold of but all in vain. I would see in the course of my flight my body lying inert on my bed. Once the Force flew me somewhere very high up where it was all blue and as I looked down there was an infinite sea, nothing else. The more frantically I cried, "Let me go, let me go," the more powerfully would its grip tighten itself. After a long time I would feel I had come back to my bed and fallen asleep. Sometimes the scene would be repeated twice and I would feel tired for want of sleep. In the morning my eyelids were heavy, the neck stiff, seeing which my mother would be worried. One day she said, "I'll lie by your side and keep awake." But it was useless: she would fall asleep and then the same ringing of the bell and the Force dragging me away!

Once, in a stupor I actually uttered the words, "Just the reverse." That time I was flown to the same place. There I saw a sannyasi, quite tall, very fair, standing before me. I was telling him, "let me go, you're hurting me a lot," and he replied, "Just the reverse." The very words I had uttered in sleep I heard from the sannyasi's mouth. When I told my mother about it in the morning, she said that she had heard those two words uttered by me.

However, the sannyasi took me to a place where I saw Sri Aurobindo seated on a large sofa. He had a huge body, the two legs were comfortably stretched out in front of him; the face was lit with a serene smile. What a handsome face! I sat at his feet, placed my right elbow in his lap for a long time. Not only did comfort and ease, peace and joy come down and bathe my body, I felt too that there was no sorrow, no worry, no want anywhere. In my utter ecstasy I told him, "Lord, take me away at this supreme moment." Then I saw many sadhus and saints coming in a row to offer their pranam to him and I was watching wonder-struck!

## My Driving

My son by my side, I was driving my car along a Calcutta road. He was quite young. I was teaching him how to drive. Calcutta streets are well known for their heavy traffic; from every side cars keep rushing on. Suddenly we heard big bells ringing from behind: it was a fire-engine! All cars gave way but I was nonplussed. I could neither drive nor move the car out of its way: it was stuck in the middle. My hands and feet were as if frozen. My son cried out, "What are you doing, Ma, drive on!" But no use, I simply let go and began to weep. All eyes were on us in consternation; the bells of the fire-engine had no effect. Somebody came forward and said, "Madam, what are you doing?" But still no response. Then the fire-engine just passed by me and going over the footpath swept away. I don't know when and how I came to my senses. The vehicle could quite justifiably have knocked me down. Somewhere there was a fire; they had to rescue people! Those several lives were more precious than a few others!

That was my last feat of driving.

## After My Mother's Death

I have already spoken about the death of my mother after a long history of suffering. I thought her soul would now have peace and I would also feel relieved. At one time I wished that I should die before her because I could not bear the sight of the great suffering she was passing through and my trouble was beyond endurance. So I prayed fervently for it. Then suddenly a figure appeared before me and asked me, "Do you seriously want to die? I can fulfil your wish." I was at once struck with fear and cried out, "No, no, I don't want to die."

Now, the day after my mother's death, when I was sleeping at night, somebody seemed to wake me up. I looked at my mother's cot. A dim lamp was alight. I saw there only the upper part of her body very clearly. It was the figure of her diseased condition. She was looking intently at her cot. I sat up and tried to call her, but not a word could I utter as if my voice was choked. Then her figure disappeared but the spirit began to move about. There was no body, only a shadow-like something was walking and my eyes began to follow her. Seized with a sudden terrible fear, I jumped out of my bed and escaped to my son's room and lay down by his side. But what if she appeared again the next day? — I thought. My only refuge was the Divine and I turned to Him in prayer. He answered my call. I saw a golden hand appear and drive away the spirit for good.



## My 'Elder Uncle'

Now I shall tell you how I started on a new chapter of my life.

My mother having gone, my son an inexperienced teenager, myself unpractical in worldly affairs, there was not a soul to stand by me. That was when a strange man appeared as if from nowhere and became an integral part of my lonely world. This stranger, by being just a simple human being, was one I could trust entirely and who would fulfill all my needs. I used to call him 'Elder Uncle' জ্যাঠামশাই as we say in Bengali.

His father was a friend of my uncle, Dilip Kumar Roy when they used to study together in the Calcutta Presidency College. They met again when he became a professor at a College in Pune where my uncle had his ashram. Once he told my uncle, "We are going to Calcutta where you have many relatives. We can meet them." He replied, "It's true that I have plenty of them. But I would like you to meet my sister and niece." Consequently they came to our house.

I was, at that time, observing a strict solitude and meeting no one. That day when somebody knocked at my door and I opened it, I saw a number of strangers and at once banged the door in their faces. Naturally they were very much offended, but my mother called them in and had a very friendly chat with them. They went away much pleased. I also became friendly with them later on. The professor went back to Poona, and used to meet my uncle now and then. When he died, Uncle did not go to see his people though he knew of his death. When he was told the news, he told the bringer of the news, "Yes, I know. His spirit came to me and said, 'Dilip, I have lost the key of my room; I don't know how to get out of it.' You go to his place and sing *bhajans*. That will help him. I'll come later on."

Even now 'Elder Uncle' is my closest friend in Calcutta on whom I depend for all material help.

## Experiences on the Way

### **Wrong Drug**

Before proceeding further, I wish to narrate another small experience showing how the Guru's protection is always with me, and with others too, though they may not be aware of it.

I have told you that I suffer from chronic stomach trouble. My astrologer had warned that this trouble would be with me even in my old age. Any slight indiscretion in diet upsets the stomach and cholera-like diarrhoea racks my body and nerves, exhausting me completely. I have always to keep some drugs with me that check the disease. One day a friend told me about a drug which would be very effective in this condition. It was available at the chemist's. I bought some pills and took two of them at the onset of the diarrhoea. Before I was due to take the third one, I saw in a dream our doctor here telling me, "Don't take those pills. They will have serious effect on you." Next morning I went to the doctor with the medicine and told him the story. On seeing the medicine, he cried out, "Good Lord, you would have lost your eyesight if you had continued to take this drug. It has been proscribed by the Government. I don't know how it is still being sold."

## Elder Uncle – 2

Now about Elder Uncle. He is very clever, practical and conscientious regarding others' affairs, but about his own he is extremely careless. He loses his money and things often without knowing it. His wife would boss him around and make him do her will in all matters big and small. One day I told him, "Why do you accept all this hectoring from your wife in such a sheepish manner? You are a man, after all; why should she lead you by the nose?"

"What can I do?" he replied humbly, "She won't do a thing!"

"Then you have to tell her that you are the master of the house. If she doesn't cook, go to a restaurant and have your meal there. Do this once or twice and she will fall at your feet."

In this way, I have straightened his backbone to some extent. His wife was very jealous of me because of his friendly and docile attitude towards me. One day she came to my house and asked why he was so attentive to me.

"I can assure you," I said, "I have no possessive feelings towards him. I have no guardian to help me in my worldly affairs about which I am extremely ignorant and inexperienced, and his help is invaluable to me in those matters. Besides he is a very good man, you know that quite well."

"Yes, I do."

"Then why this jealousy?"

She could not answer. Very probably she could not bear to see him doing so much for me and almost nothing for her. That seems natural.

When his wife would go to Bombay, he would not call her back.

Now let me recount how he rendered me help in a trivial matter which appeared to me serious. My mother and myself used to sleep together and go on talking till midnight. One night, I felt a salty taste in my mouth. I went into the bathroom and found that there was blood in my mouth. I got a fright. I called my son who was sleeping in the next room. He too became nervous. Our whispering and movements woke up Mother. Seeing fresh blood seeping from my mouth, she said, "Call Elder Uncle." I said, "No, we shouldn't disturb him at this hour of the night."

But they insisted. We telephoned him and my son went to fetch him in his car. What he did was so simple and yet so effective. He brought out two big pieces of ice from the fridge and applied them on my chest and back, and gave me some ice to suck. I had done that before without any effect. But Uncle's treatment had a quick result; the blood flow stopped. Next day the doctor was called. His examination yielded no clue. There was no sign of T.B. Later, an X-ray revealed that there was something like a hole in the left lung. The doctor said that blood might have oozed out from that suspected spot.

## Illness of My Elder Uncle

When Elder Uncle had fallen seriously ill, and nothing but a very drastic operation could save his life, I prayed fervently to Sri Aurobindo day and night for weeks to save him. For he is a very dear friend and without his help I, with the problems of a vast property that fell upon my weak shoulders, would have been utterly lost.

I was facing a crucial situation. Elder Uncle's lower limbs were gradually losing their strength. Recently the pains had increased. The doctor seemed to have said that arterial circulation of the heart was becoming sluggish. It was a serious case. A by-pass surgery had to be done. He was asked to go to Bombay for a further check-up and, if advised, for an operation as well. His relatives were all in Bombay.

Uncle had told me long ago that according to Bhrgu 1988 was a critical year for him. He would have to undergo a serious operation and his life might even be in danger. I had told him to inform me beforehand about it wherever I might be. Accordingly, he had written to me at Pondicherry not to worry and that I didn't need to go to Calcutta to meet him. But that couldn't be, for he who had been by my side for the last thirty years helping me in all my needs without any expectation, how could I stay away from him during his hour of distress? If some misfortune overtook him, how would I face it? Would I not suffer life-long guilt?

On the other hand I was all the time hearing my Thakur's voice: *যেও না, যেও না* (don't go, don't go!). This was causing a serious dilemma for me.

And so I asked Nirod-da, "What should I do?"

"Why, when your Thakur insists that you shouldn't go, you have to listen to him," he replied.

But I couldn't console myself. I had been telling Thakur that the man who had been helping me so much and without whose help I would have been a wreck, should I not see him once at this hour? And Thakur replied, "Whether you go or not, the result will be the same. But if you go you will face a lot of trouble and I shall have to work hard to save and protect you. Be at peace."

In spite of all this, I wrote to Elder Uncle that I would start on a certain date. I went to buy a ticket but was told, "No ticket will be available for a week." A strike was on in Madras. There were riots in places between Pondy and Madras and in Madras itself. I thought, "Well, there is still time. Let me wait until the week is over." But no ticket was available even after that. When a friend heard about it she said, "How's that? I got my ticket all right." Well, here is a puzzle. I thought of phoning to Calcutta. I did, only to find that Uncle had already left for Bombay on receiving an urgent telegram. I told Thakur, "Why have you done this?" He simply said, "You would have been in real danger."

After some days a letter came from Uncle saying that all tests had been done. The operation would soon take place. All his relatives had arrived there.

Though I was somewhat calm, I could not be entirely free from anxiety and fear. The date of the operation was over and still there was no news. Imagine my condition. After two or three days I received a note of two lines scribbled by him saying that he was all right. He was allowed to pace a few steps in the corridor of the hospital. The doctor had said that a difficult operation like that had been finished in a very short time! I was immensely relieved. Beside myself with joy, I stood before the Lord's picture and said, "You have saved him. You have saved me. You have heard me." As I went on repeating these words, tears began to flow. Then something unbelievable happened. Slowly,

his face began to fade and in its place appeared a face of unparalleled beauty illumined with the sweetest smile. I was watching with my eyes transfixed. Slowly that also faded. I was so overjoyed that I had to lie down on my bed to contain the ecstasy. I prayed to him, "Let my life end at this hour of supreme delight, O Lord, and take me to you. Otherwise I shall again be a prey to the same human reactions of fear, doubt, etc. At this moment when my heart is filled with infinite gratitude let me leave the world." The Lord said, "Man forgets his gratitude to God, but not to man."

You know, from the day the date of the operation was fixed, I used to get up at midnight and offer the Lord my prayer, "Thakur, save him, save my friend." Who says prayers are not heard?

His letter has come: he has returned home from the hospital, very weak indeed. He has never been so weak before. He fears he will not live long and wishes that I should pray for him. I have replied, "There is no cause for fear. You should remember that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have saved you."

I had come to know Elder Uncle over the years and our relation had become very intimate with the passing of time. From the very start I used to tell him, "Uncle, turn towards God. Haven't you done enough for the family? Now is the time for God."

"Who will then look after my wife and children?"

"And if you die who will do so?" I queried.

My mother would laugh at my naiveté and ask, "Can one be turned towards God by force? One who has no pull, no bhakti, can't love God overnight." I would not listen to her. I used to take him to the burning ghat and say, "Look, this is what life is: the dead body burning away; the five elements that make up that body today, where will they be tomorrow? Still we have so much *maya*!" (attachments, illusion) and all such familiar homilies.

One day I took him to the cremation grounds at Kalighat. Dead bodies arrived one after another. Standing to one side we looked at them. I said to him, "See, how beautiful it looks. God himself seems to be present and is witnessing his own *Lila*! Don't you feel anything?"

"No. But if I turn towards Him, what will happen to my property?"

"Let property go to hell! If you do turn towards God, can anything be compared to that?"

These repeated sermons finally had some effect. He bought the photos of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and one of Sri Ramakrishna and Ma Saradamoyee in which, the shopkeeper said, she was made to sit by Sri Ramakrishna in front of him.

Once Uncle felt a desire to go and see Satya Saibaba at Bangalore. But was he approachable in such crowds to a simple man like him! I said, "He will certainly see you. He'll call you. When he does that don't ask for any worldly goods. Tell him, 'I want God. Please fulfil my desire.'"

Satya Saibaba came. Hundreds had thronged. He cast a moment's glance at them, then beckoned to Uncle and said, "You have ear-ache. Don't eat eggs," and so on, but gave him no chance to speak. Finally taking courage and, recalling my words to him, he asked, "Baba, I've a prayer...." No sooner had he uttered these words than Saibaba looked piercingly into his eyes and asked, "What prayer?"

He replied, "I don't crave for any worldly goods; I want only God, please...." Before he could end, Saibaba gave him a piercing look and asked, "Is this your prayer? Don't ask parrot-like for things that others have taught you. Ask what comes from within." And he left. What power!

However, my repeated teachings seem to have produced some effect, for my Guru told me that I had done a good service.

Uncle's wife who was a devotee of Saibaba was supposed to have complained to him that her husband had fallen under the spell of a lady whom he almost worshipped and listened to nobody else. Would Baba free him from her evil power? Baba replied, "No, nothing evil will happen to him. On the contrary it will do him good. Don't worry."

Let me narrate another story about Saibaba. Uncle and I had a mutual friend. He was very much charmed by his wife's singing of *bhajans*. He went with them to Saibaba at Bangalore. Baba asked my friend, "What do you want from me?" My friend replied with much humility, "I have a brother who is suffering from gangrene on his feet. Would Baba cure him?" Baba pointed a finger to his chest and said, "It is not gangrene, there is something wrong here." My friend failed to catch the indication. Much later he understood it, for the gangrene was cured but the patient died from heart-failure.

Such indeed is the power of Saibaba. What a personality!

## Elder Uncle and My Son — A Contrast

We have rarely found Uncle losing his temper. His wife also used to tell us about it. He is a very simple, frank old man. The first time he came to see me in Pondicherry I was living in Sahana-auntie's house. I had written to him that he could come there with his luggage and that after resting awhile we could go and look for accommodation in the town. Later Sahana-auntie told me that he should not come to her house. I was astonished to hear it, for she had agreed to the arrangement. And when he arrived she said this to his face in such a rude manner and for no fault of his! I was in a fix. I took him with all that luggage to another friend's house. They welcomed him and took good care of him. I was relieved. After a short rest, we took him to a hotel. Uncle was not in the least disturbed by Sahana-auntie's rude behaviour. He went to visit her the next day and delivered the presents offered by her friends. Now she apologised for her rude conduct.

On another occasion during the Puja festival in Calcutta, my son, Uncle and myself were making arrangements to go about in a car seeing the many idols of the Goddess Durga in the town. Just then I received a phone-call from a friend inviting me to join her group to see the festival. I told her we were also intending to do the same thing and since I had a friend with me I could not join her. She insisted that I could bring him along. So we got into her car and went around enjoying the various celebrations. Suddenly there was a heavy downpour and all of us got drenched. My friend, after leaving us at home, was going away when I told her that Uncle had no means of going back; there was no vehicle on the road. Could she not see him home? But she left him in the lurch and drove away. I was exasperated but Uncle said, "Why do you lose your temper? I can manage." He did not take even my umbrella and walked all the distance soaked to the skin.

My son on the other hand was a picture in contrast — very bad-tempered and self-willed. Uncle had a son, very rich and unmarried. He was charmed by my son's wife, for which my son was extremely displeased with him. "Why should he run after her? I'll have a word with his father." I tried to mollify him and said, "Uncle is quite innocent. For heaven's sake, don't quarrel with him. He will be mortally hurt. Furthermore, what will be the use of it? If, suppose, you were to run after a girl, would I be able to do anything about it?" That stopped him.



## Experiences on the Way

### Those who Die Here

I asked my Lord, “You seem to have said that those who die here in the Ashram will be under your protection and bear your symbol on their foreheads.”

He answered, “Does it mean that any rogue or *goonda* will enjoy that benefit equally with a sadhak? That is absurd. What I meant was that we would try to make the soul’s passage through the subtle regions less painful and more smooth, for it is very difficult. It is absurd to think that any crook or dishonest person will have our protection because of his death here. That can’t be because there is a Law of God for all things. I can’t go against that Law, can I?”

“It is said that those who die in Benares enjoy that protection — ”

“Certainly not the rogues! There are plenty of them. I believe, who are dying there without any concern for their afterlife. Would they also get this protection?”

“I would like to know about X. It is said that when she died you put your symbol upon her forehead. The Mother was very much surprised to see it there, it seems, for that sadhika had nothing uncommon in her. Is it true?”

“Of course it is true.”

“What about Mridu? She was, I’m told, a bumptious sadhika!”

“Do you know how many thousands of births she had to pass through before she came to the Ashram? Besides, she was not a ‘rogue’. She had genuine love and bhakti for me. Moreover, do you think it will be possible for a rogue to die in the Ashram? Sadhaks who die here may have defects in their nature, but their soul is certainly of a higher order. So their soul will have that protection.”

## My Friend Tripti

I used to suffer from a strange malady. Quite often I would have fainting fits and lie unconscious for hours. Doctors could not detect any cause for it. One day I had just recovered from such a fit. My son had bought our food from a restaurant. After eating his share he went to his office, leaving my share on the table saying that I could take it at my convenience. We had no servants. When he returned from work in the afternoon, he found to his surprise the lunch had not been touched. When he asked me about it, I said that there was not a bit of strength left in me to get up and walk to the table. He was quite in a fix. What was to be done? Just at that time arrived my friend Tripti. "What's wrong?" she asked. She was shocked to see my haggard face. She said, "I was going in my car to visit my sick sister. Suddenly I heard a voice whispering in my ear, 'Go to Esha!' I have never before heard any voices. It startled me. It was so distinct! Now let us go to my place. If your son has no objection you will stay there till you have recovered." A few tenants were called from below. With their help I was carried down to the car.

I stayed with my friend and her family for about six months. They had me examined by a physician. He could not detect anything wrong. "A thorough examination will be needed," he said. X-ray, E.C.G. etc. were done. A dark spot was visible in the X-ray in one lung. When the doctor asked if I had T.B., I told him the history of my blood vomiting and of a "hole" in the lung. "That may be the cause of this fainting. When you get exhausted for any reason, some part of that lung fails to do its work due to the shortage of oxygen and you lose your consciousness."

I returned home apparently in good health. But again the ghost of my illness reappeared. The whole body would shiver without any definite cause. Elder Uncle then suggested, "Since here you don't keep well you had better go to the Ashram. You have yourself said that your Thakur wants you there." I refused, for I felt no call to go there. "Just because I keep well there, it is no reason for me to treat that place as a health-resort," I objected. Nevertheless, I did notice that when I thought of Pondicherry during a tremor it would stop. Funny indeed. Was it an indication that I should settle in Pondicherry? I wasn't sure. Finally, I took the decision to go. Tripti accompanied me. I stayed on in Pondicherry for many months, while Tripti went back. But due to some serious inner upset I had to leave too, and resolved not to return.

So, back to Calcutta. My son and I, we two, as before, but most often I by myself, since he had his office and his own life to lead. I still had not taken up sadhana seriously.

After a few months that old trouble reappeared. This time Uncle brought me my meals from his place and fed me.

Once I was lying unconscious for some hours. My son had gone out of town on business. When I came to, I managed with great difficulty to phone my friend Tripti and tell her of my distress. She came posthaste, and was stunned to see my condition. She took me to her place again, after phoning my son's number and leaving a message for him to come back immediately.

When Devrup arrived and looked up from the street, he found to his dismay that the topmost flat of our house, where we lived, was quite dark. Broken-hearted, he "saw darkness at noon", as we say in Bengali, and thought everything was over. After a long while he met a resident of one of the lower flats. You can imagine his relief when he heard what really had happened. He was directed to my friend Tripti's place.

He came to me, learnt the story in detail, then in a firm tone said, "Ma, better go to Pondy."

I was stung to tears and said, "For five years I served my mother. I never uttered such rude words. And you, my son, want to get rid of me for this little inconvenience!" He answered, "Listen Ma, you were healthy then. When *Didi-ma* (maternal grandmother) was ill you could do the needful; you had no other work, while I have a job and am away most of the time. You have these frequent fainting fits. Who is there to look after you? If something happens to you, God forbid, imagine my condition. The entire world will blame me. If you have an ordinary illness now and then it doesn't matter, but you have a sickness which baffles the doctors. When your Thakur is calling you, you had better listen to him. Perhaps because you don't, this punishment is the result. Who knows! See this friend of yours, what hasn't she done for you in spite of her many wants and inconveniences?"

My son's remonstrances opened my eyes. I felt that he was quite right. At least, I should not stand in his way. I decided finally to leave Calcutta, though much against my wish.

As soon as I had taken my decision and was trying to buy a flat in Pondy, most unexpectedly a lady-friend turned up one night at my house and said, "I hear you are looking for a flat in Pondicherry. I have bought two. If you like you can have one of them." The offer came as a godsend. I was, needless to say, deeply moved and wonder even now how his Grace acts from behind without our knowledge. I jumped at the offer and, well, here I am in my corner flat, living free from that mysterious malady!

## Experiences on the Way

### 1. Before Darshan Day of 17th November 1993

I was boiling some water in a kettle. As I brought down the kettle from the stove, I lost my grip and the boiling water fell on my feet. As a result the right foot got very badly scalded. At once I dipped both my feet in cold water. Though it had an immediate soothing effect, an intensely burning pain followed, so much so that I had to go to the doctor. For two days I remained at home, but when blisters had formed and the right foot had swollen, I had to be shifted to the Nursing Home where I stayed till I was much better. The accident prevented me from attending not only the Darshan of the 17th, but also that of 24th November 1993.

I asked Sri Aurobindo why I had to meet with this accident when I was supposed to be under his protection. He replied, "There cannot be an absolute protection under the present conditions. There are small entities around who are always trying to make mischief. One has to be always on one's guard till the protection becomes absolute."

I will tell you an interesting thing I have noticed in this connection. You see, I was living all alone in my flat for many years without engaging any servants, doing all my chores by myself. But a few weeks before the accident, an old woman came as if from nowhere and was employed as a gatekeeper for our apartment building. For no apparent reason she became fond of me and was helping me by running some of my errands. Had this woman not been there during my accident, life would have been very difficult indeed, for the burning pain made me unable to move from my bed for the first few days that I stayed at home. Was there a Divine Eye that had foreseen the probable mishap befalling me and had made this provision?

Though I cannot claim my conclusion to be the truth of the matter, I have no doubt in my own mind because of a similar incident some years ago. I believe I have recounted it already. It was the incident of my having fallen down into the water tank early one morning when I had gone down to fetch some water. I was waiting there helplessly till some one came and rescued me. A few days earlier I had wondered why I had seen Sri Krishna's right hand stretched out in a gesture of protection. I realised later that the accident could have been serious given the circumstances, and that his protecting hand, though it could not prevent it altogether, had minimised the ill effects.

On one Darshan day I did not feel like attending the meditation at 10 a.m. Sri Aurobindo told me distinctly, "No, you must attend the meditation. It is very important."

On another day I asked him, "How can I be sure that it is your voice that is speaking?"

He replied, "Be quiet; make your mind free from all desires. Then you will hear the true voice. It applies to all who can observe this condition. Desire distorts the true answer."

### 2. Vision of Mother Kali

Some time ago I had a few striking visions during my pranam at the Samadhi. Quite a number of my experiences happen then. So, the Samadhi is very living for me and I have been asked not to miss my pranam there. It is as if the Guru is waiting for me and our talks go on. I come back full of joy and peace.

One day I saw the entire Samadhi all aglow with bright light, and Sri Aurobindo was lying on a bed of Light, in a trance as it were. His body was luminous. And Kali was standing by his side. She

was rather of a short stature and dark, but sparkling, as if her black figure was dazzling. It was really wonderful. This was the first time I had seen her. As soon as I saw Sri Aurobindo I rushed towards him. But before I could touch him Kali stretched out her hand and said in a stern voice, “Don’t touch!” I stopped.

After a few months the same experience repeated itself, but this time Kali was of a bigger size and was full of power. She was like a dazzling dark statue of light, and her pose was majestic. She was the Mother herself in her form of Kali. As I approached her, she said in a strident voice, “Without my Grace you cannot meet your Guru.” I was struck dumb.

I began thinking, why did the Mother say that? Have I not received her grace? If I think more often of Sri Aurobindo it is because from my childhood he has been with me and it is natural that my thoughts and feelings should be occupied with him. Then the question that troubled me was, “How to receive the Mother’s grace?” See and meet Sri Aurobindo I must. I began to pray to her. Some friends suggested that I should do some work for her. Besides, Sri Aurobindo had also said that doing the Mother’s work keeps the body healthy. So I took up making garlands for the Samadhi, for that work was the most suitable for me.

I began the work, doing it as an offering, with full concentration. After a few days something very startling happened. As I bowed down at the Samadhi, I saw the Mother’s face with three eyes, two wide-extended and one in the middle of the forehead. And they were gazing into my eyes. Beams of light issued forth from them and penetrated my sight and kept me transfixed with their gaze. Such wondrous eyes I had never seen before.

When I returned home I told Sri Aurobindo of my experience. He seemed to be happy and said, “It is true that without Her grace none can see me, just as without Radha’s grace none could come to Krishna.”

### 3. A Dream-Vision

Recently, I had a very interesting dream. It may even be called a vision. I was sleeping in the afternoon when I saw a picture etched in the sky. Two huge elephants, their trunks upraised, were lifting their front feet in a desperate effort to touch the chariot of Lord Krishna. Sri Krishna stood in the chariot, the reins gathered in his hands, his eyes brilliant with light as he gazed straight ahead. Meanwhile, every time the elephants tried to put their feet on the chariot they failed, which made them try all the more desperately only to fail repeatedly. Behind the elephants a cyclone raged.

Suddenly I woke up, astonished at what I had seen, and immediately asked the Guru if the vision had any meaning.

Sri Aurobindo explained: “The elephants represented your *Chaitya Purusha*. They wanted to do pranam to Sri Krishna, but could not touch his chariot. The storm behind was the symbol of your vital urges agitating to do the pranam.”

I asked what *Chaitya Purusha* meant, and he said, “Ask Nirod.” (Nirod-da later explained to me that it is the psychic being.)

“Then what does it all mean?” I asked the Lord. “Won’t I be able to do pranam? Is it due to some fault on my part?”

“Not exactly. Sri Krishna is not so easily attainable it is always difficult to approach him. Perhaps you need to do more sadhana. You have been inclined to him from your childhood and have always wanted to see him, but you must pay for the privilege.”

“But you said Sri Krishna and yourself are one,” I interjected.

“That’s true, but you wanted especially to see him; if it had been me you had wanted to see, it would have been easier.”

“Then why can’t you fulfil my aspiration by your Grace?

“That I can’t. I can only give you my blessings.”

“Then what should I do?”

“You must aspire strongly. Aspiration alone can get your wish granted.”

For some time afterwards I thought of my intense desire to see Lord Krishna — not in a dream or a vision, but as tangibly as I could see Nirod-da and the others. I don’t want to die without seeing him.

## My Divorce

I was not in favour of a divorce. In fact there was no need for it. I had my child who was now my sole preoccupation and my entire life was centred upon him. Though my conjugal life had definitely come to an end, my husband and I had kept a good friendly relationship. His personal life did not matter to me so long as he did not interfere with his claim on my child. And since I was not going to marry again and nor was he, I thought there was no point in suing for a divorce. Besides, a divorce case in high society is delicious food for scandal and the entire social elite of Calcutta would be buzzing with the exciting news. Already my relatives and friends were pressing me to cut off my connection with him, for they did not approve of the way he was leading his life. There were others who were against any break with him. Only one influential lawyer-relative encouraged me to go ahead with the divorce; otherwise, he said, my life would be at the mercy of my husband. I was particularly afraid of going to court lest he should demand possession of the child, nor was I sure that I would win the case against him. However, circumstances, or the Divine Will I should say, forced upon me the choice.

To make myself sure of his attitude towards a divorce, I sent a friend of mine to ascertain his opinion about it. My message said that since both of us had no intention of remarriage there would be no point in creating a scandal for the wide attention of the Calcutta élite society. I received a taunting reply from him. He said, "Oh, she is afraid of me and wants to placate me by this overture? I don't care a bit for the scandal. Let her do as she likes." That settled the matter for me. And my friends too now lent their weight to my resolve and pressed for immediate action. I filed a suit against him on the grounds of his betrayal of the conjugal bond. Strangely enough, he did not defend himself. And it was not at all difficult for me to prove his infidelity. I won the case in a month's time. Our relations were now completely broken.

But now also began the work of his vindictive spirit with all the power he could command. He filed a suit against me for possession of the child. The case dragged on for more than two years. For a young woman with no elders in the family to guide her, who had very little experience of the world, least of all lawsuits, and who had none to help her and stand by her, and many opposed to her because she went against their advice to give up the child to the legal claimant — those two years were like the condition of one who was drowning with hardly a straw to clutch at to save herself. But the Divine stood by me and finally I won and my husband was utterly routed.



## The Case Proceeds

When my case had proceeded to some extent, my lawyer called me and said, "I have to be frank with you. Our case has become very difficult, the way it is going. I am afraid we have very little chance of winning it. If it is to be turned around, there is only one lawyer who can do it. You may have heard of him. He is the well-known Mr....."

"Oh yes, I know him very well indeed as he happens to be a relation of mine. But, for reasons I don't want to go into now, I would rather not go to him. Is there no one else?"

"I'm afraid not. Whatever hesitation you may have, you'll have to forget them and go to him. I am sure he'll win it for you. You know, there is a saying in English 'Nothing succeeds like success.' And he is a very successful lawyer indeed."

I pondered over this for some days, then finally decided to go and see him, as my entire future and that of my son depended on the outcome of the case. I prepared myself to face him, come what may.

Accordingly, I arrived at his house without, on purpose, making an appointment. The peon received me and said, "The *sahab* is now all alone. You're lucky. Please write your name on this interview paper..." Instead of writing my own name, I wrote "Mr. Mukherjee". I was called in. As soon as I entered, he said in a rough voice. "Who are you and why have you come without making an appointment?"

Without giving an answer, I quietly sat down, looked at him and said, "I see that you haven't recognised me." He then looked at me sharply, and I continued, "I am Esha."

"Oh, you're Esha!" he said, softening. His look changed and then he asked, very tenderly, "What brings you to me, Esha?"

"I'm sure you have guessed the reason why. You must have heard all about my case."

"Yes, I have indeed."

"Now my lawyer says that without your help, I have very little chance of winning. That's why I'm at your doorstep."

He heard me out with concentrated attention, looked at all my papers and then said, "All right. I'm ready."

"Will you make me win?"

"I cannot say that for sure. Victory or defeat is not in our hands. All I can say is that I give you my word that I will do my best."

"That's enough for me. Now I would like to make one thing very clear. You may find it strange."

"Let me hear it."

"I'll be ever grateful to you for taking up my case and more so if you win it for me, but in my outer conduct and manner please don't expect any formality from me, as is often done in society, you know. I hope you have no objection —."

"No," he interjected, "none. Those formalities, courtesies, flatteries, etc. need not bother you. I'd rather you be yourself and come in a simple and easy manner. Only," he added, not without humour, "let me know beforehand of your coming!" Thus I returned home thanking him, considering myself lucky for his easy-going manner with me in spite of his reputation as an arrogant lawyer.

It is true that without his help I would have lost my case and the custody of my son and I am ever grateful to him. But you may think it odd that I kept no contact with him afterwards. Even when he had a serious accident I did not go to see him. People may think I am devoid of humanity, or that I am self-centred and things like that. But it is not so. In my heart I have always been grateful to him and have goodwill towards him. But it is not in me to be always humble with or to please or flatter my benefactor. And I appreciate his largeness of mind that he did not expect it of me or resent its absence.

Years later, on the occasion of my son's marriage, I asked my son to go and invite him. As he was not part of my son's circle of friends or relations he didn't want to. I told him all that this man had done for me, for us. He then came willingly with me to give the invitation in person. As soon as we approached him, with much warmth he welcomed us. I introduced my son to him and said that we had come to invite him and his family to my son's marriage.

"We shall most certainly come."

"It's an inter-caste marriage," I warned him. "I hope you won't mind."

"Not at all. What does it matter? In fact, my own son has married a Muslim girl who comes from a highly placed family in Afghanistan. She was studying in St. Xavier's College with my son. He refused to change his decision in spite of all our objections and persuasions."

"Oh him? He is *your* son? My son knows him. They were class-mates."

"Oh, I didn't know that! How interesting!"

On this happy note ended our meeting. Strange indeed are the world and its ways!

## The Saviour

### Dénouement of the Divorce Case

The case dragged on for more than two years. Though there are many interesting incidents connected with it, I will leave them out and give only the resume of the case.

A year after I had won my divorce case, my husband filed a suit against me for possession of our child. Of course, I had apprehended such a possibility, for he was not the man to take things lying down. The Voice had warned me that he was a devil, a Satan and would seek every possible means to do me harm, and was in fact gathering all sorts of information before he would strike his lethal blow at me. When he thought he had sufficient evidence in his favour, he launched the case.

When I appeared before the Court with my mother and child who was four or five years old and was studying in St. Xavier's School in Calcutta, the judge told me sweetly, "You see, Madam, I can perceive from your looks and your demeanour that you are an honest and innocent lady, but being a judge I am bound by the law and the law is in favour of your husband. You have to surrender your child to him."

My lawyer pleaded that the plaintiff had been writing letter after letter to the tutors claiming that he wanted to transfer his child to another and better school in Calcutta. But the tutors paid no heed to his claim, for it was the mother who had put the child in their care and she had pleaded with them not to accede to his demands.

Now the judge wanted to hear the evidence of the tutors. But they were not supposed to appear before the Court. I had therefore to go myself to them and plead with them to grant me the favour. My supplication moved their hearts and two of them were allowed by the School authorities to appear in court and give evidence. They said that the husband had shown no interest and not even once inquired from them how the child had been getting on. How could he then claim the child and transfer him to another school which had quite a different system of education from theirs?

As the legal battle was going on I brooded on my fate, feeling helpless and forlorn. Then all on a sudden something happened. To my eyes the courtroom was suffused with a pale blue light; two giant legs spread apart and covering the hall stood on the floor, and the ankles were adorned with two exquisite anklets with shining golden bells. It was a ravishing sight. I was overwhelmed with the beauty and splendour of those bells. I knew it was my Krishna who had come and I felt peaceful and secure. Mind you, I never prayed to Sri Krishna or anyone else during the crisis and still he came!

The judge, after hearing the evidence, postponed the case to another date. Now my principal lawyer had his chance. He advised me not to appear in court on one excuse or another, and that I should employ this pretext repeatedly till my husband's resources were drained out.

Many months passed in this way. One day my husband appeared before the Court and complained, shedding crocodile tears, that we were harassing him by applying all pretexts and ruses and had made him a pauper. The judge moved to pity for him gave a final date for the hearing and if the defendant did not appear he would decide in his favour.

Now we had to appear on the fixed date. As we reached the courtroom, I heard the wailing voice of my husband appealing to the judge in his private chambers. As soon as I came out, the judge called me and said that my husband had given up his claim for the child and would like to have me back. I saw through the whole satanic move behind it. The judge now began to play on my sentiments and, moved to pity by my husband's tears, asked me to come to a reconciliation with him saying, "Let

your child be with your mother and you can go back to your husband since he is keen on having you.”

I thought much over the proposal with tears rolling down. After a long while, I said, “All right, I agree.”

My lawyer, flabbergasted, exclaimed, “What have you done? You have surrendered to him, that devil!”

“Well, I did it for the sake of my child. What does it matter to me, after all, it is a question of only one life.”

At this point another tremendous thing happened. I felt a hand on my head with peace descending. Then I saw Sri Aurobindo standing by my side just as physically as I see Nirod-da. He was a very large figure, full of power as if he could crush the whole world. I felt protected. Suddenly I proposed to the judge, “I will go with him but he must take me at once with him.” My husband got suddenly frightened and cried out, “No, no! I can't, I won't! I don't want her!” Here too I had not invoked Sri Aurobindo.

The judge was completely baffled and much annoyed. He said, “Very well. The case is dismissed.” And turning to me he added, “Are you satisfied now?” I replied, “No, he must now sign a document that he must on no account try to see me or meet my child. If he does not comply, he'll be arrested.” On hearing this my husband burst into loud sobs.

Thus Satan was worsted by the Divine Power. He met his Nemesis.

Only that Power could have inspired me to be so bold.

My lawyer said later, “You are an extraordinary lady. God is certainly with you.”

## The Court Case: Conclusion

My astrologer had made a prophecy that a Westerner would stand as a witness in my case and his evidence would help me win it — as actually did happen. But the strange thing was also his other prediction that this man was in love with me! More than a year later, one of the Jesuit Fathers, a Belgian by birth, whose evidence in court helped me win my case, appeared in my house. I was very much surprised at his unexpected visit. I introduced him to my mother. He said something in English which my mother could not catch.

However, he opened his heart to me and said that he wanted to marry me since he loved me. I felt as if I had fallen from the sky! I could not believe my ears. When he asked for my consent, I had to say, “I’m sorry, I don’t love you. I am a Hindu woman; to me my *dharma* is higher than everything else. Besides, you are a priest and have remained a bachelor for so many years. If you marry me, you will lose everything, your *dharma*, your *karma* etc.”

He replied, “That matters little. I have enough property in my country. I don’t need to depend on any job.”

“But,” I replied, “property, happiness are not everything. There are things of higher value in life. You will have to lose your priesthood for my sake. That will be a great sin and I shall be the cause. We shall never enjoy a happy life. Forgive me, please, for my —.”

“Oh,” he interrupted, “that’s all right.” He accepted my refusal so calmly that I myself was surprised. While leaving he told my mother, “Your daughter —”. I could not catch the rest.

A few years later, my Elder Uncle asked me if I could help the son of a friend of his to get admission in the St. Xavier’s School. I agreed and took the boy to the School. That Father had then become the Principal. As soon as he saw me he extended eagerly his two hands towards me and, on hearing the reason of my visit, he was at once ready to admit the boy. “But,” I said, “he is a very ordinary boy.”

“That does not matter,” he replied.

## Looking Back from Pondicherry

Now settled in Pondicherry, looked after by the Lord, I am free from all worries and am trying to lead a spiritual life for which He has brought me here. But now and then I'm given to the mood of introspection and I begin to ask myself why my life has been so strange, why I could not be happy with all the advantages given to me: born in a high and wealthy family, the only child of my parents, brought up with so much care and with a rare passionate love for Krishna at an early age. Only as I grew up, there was a strange marriage which proved a dismal failure. The astrologer's warning was that I was fated to marry whether I liked it or not, for I had to have a child! How strange are all these happenings in the life of a young girl! Then the most exceptional phenomenon — why Sri Aurobindo, after leaving his body came to me and made that mysterious utterance? And why is he so close to me and why does he help and protect me from all calamities? No answer from him! I am not a great *adhara*, by any means; I am full of human frailties. If he was so close to me, so solicitous for my good, why was I given so much pain and suffering? Even my child for whom I had fought in the court, I had to forget him!

I do not find any explanation that is satisfactory. People refer it to my past birth's karma — a facile solution to our life's problems when no other solution can be found!

I'm waiting patiently to know the solution to the mystery. The Lord hides it.

## Experiences on the Way

### 1. An Afternoon Dream-Vision

Some months ago I had a very sweet dream-vision. It was in the afternoon. I was reading a favourite book of mine, the Bhāgavat, in Bengali, the life of Sri Krishna, sitting on my cot and leaning against the wooden mosquito-curtain support. After a while I felt very sleepy, which is rather an unusual occurrence when I read such books. Suddenly I saw the Mother standing near the foot of the bed dressed in an exquisite golden Benarasi sari. As I looked at her she beckoned to me with her hand. I responded; I saw my physical body left behind. As soon as I was within her reach, she caught hold of my hair and, lifting me up, just as a cat does her kitten, dragged me towards Sri Aurobindo who was sitting nearby and was reading a book. She told him, "This girl is all the time weeping for you." Saying this she left. I cast a furtive glance at him and saw him absorbed in reading. The whole room was bathed in peace. I felt like living eternally in that peace and never going back to the world. Then my eyes opened with that memorable experience still alive.

### 2. Nolini-da, Champaklal and Mama

On my last birthday I had a strange vision with open eyes. Suddenly I saw Nolini-da, Champaklal and Mama (my uncle, Dilip Kumar Roy) sitting in that order in a horse-carriage going somewhere as if for an evening ride. They looked just as they did when they were alive. When I asked Sri Aurobindo inwardly its meaning, he simply said, "They are with me and go about from time to time to see the condition of the world, how it is going on."

### 3. "Depend on Me Entirely"

A third experience happened very recently.

After an incident I was very badly shaken. I had a disagreement with an Ashram lady who had been helping me for some years by providing me with some material necessity of life. Disagreement led to argument to hot words, and, after an unpleasant scene, I refused all further assistance from her. Though I am grateful to her for all her help, I have no regrets in stopping our arrangement. For now I rely on the Lord, as I have done before in times of dire need, for providing me even with small necessities. My prayer was answered when suddenly I saw Sri Krishna with his flute, just as he is portrayed in some pictures, standing behind Sri Aurobindo with his right hand resting on Sri Aurobindo's shoulder. He was all resplendent. Sri Aurobindo said, "Be quiet. Don't get agitated. I shall set everything right. Depend on me entirely. "

"I know that and I am sure of it. My previous sense of a helpless being has left me now. Only at times when my foot trouble increases, and gives me pain I become restless."

"That pain will go. There is nothing seriously wrong with the foot. It is due to your flat-foot and excessive pressure on it that causes the pain. But it will be cured. You know that I have cured your chronic stomach trouble which was much more serious. For if it continued it could have turned into cancer. This trouble also I can cure. But if I cured it now something else will crop up. The hostile forces will become more active. Everything has its time and one must learn to bear. Be patient."

"But at times I want to leave the body, and pray to be taken away so that I can live forever in peace."



“You will live in peace, I assure you, and I bless you that you will live in the Divine Peace which you have felt at times. The Divine Peace is something which is beyond any human comprehension and I promise that you will have it.”