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Matter shall reveal the Spirit's face. — Sri Aurobindo

Life and Yoga

The Great Secret

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Flower on the Cover:
Skill in Works
Must be used knowingly.
(Spiritual Significance and explanation given by the Mother)
Botanical Name: Phlox drummondii

The Great Secret

Six Monologues and a Conclusion
by The Mother
in collaboration with Nolini (The Writer) Pavitra (The Scientist) André (The Industrialist) Pranab (The Athlete).



Letter of the Mother concerning The Great Secret

My dear André,

I know that you are a very busy man and that you do not have much time to spare. However, I am going to ask you to do something for me and I hope that it will be possible for you to do it.

The thing is this.

For the first of December I am preparing something which does not fall into any category of dramatic art and which certainly cannot be called a play, but, nevertheless, it will be put on the stage and I hope that it will not be without interest. I am putting words into the mouths of men who have had very different lives and careers, and it would be better, naturally, if they did not all speak the same language; I mean that their styles should differ. I have asked several people to put themselves in the shoes of one character or another, and to write down for me what, according to them, this character would say. If afterwards there is any touching up to do, I shall do it.

I am enclosing the introduction, which will be read out before the curtain rises; it will give you some idea of what I

want to do and help you to understand what I mean.

Among the characters, you will see that there is an industrialist, a big businessman. I am not very familiar with industrial terms and language and I thought that you could help me to write something true to life. The man tells the story of his life and I want it to be the life of a big magnate (American or other) on the lines of Ford, for example. I am making them speak one after another; they each have a maximum of ten minutes to relate their lives, their great triumphs which, at this critical hour, leave them unsatisfied and yearning for something which they do not know or understand. At the same time I am sending you the conclusion of the industrialist's speech as I conceive it, but of course you can make any changes you find necessary.

I have asked Pavitra to write the account of the scientist, Nolini is dealing with the man of letters, Pranab has already written what the sportsman will say (in English, but I shall put it into French), I have already outlined the statesman, I am taking care of the artist and of course the Unknown Man, since I shall be speaking through him.

Afterwards we shall still have to decide who the actors will be; Debou will play the Unknown Man, Hriday the sportsman, I am trying to persuade Pavitra to embody the scientist, Manoj will play either the artist or the writer. Naturally, the ideal would be for you to come and speak what you have written — but maybe you will regard that as an unrealisable folly... To tell the truth, this is only a feeler; we shall speak about it again later... I hope I have not left out anything important. But if you want any further details, I shall send them to you.

7 July 1954

The Great Secret
Six Monologues and a Conclusion

Six of the world's most famous men have been brought together, apparently by chance, in a life-boat in which they have taken refuge when the ship that was carrying them to a world conference on human progress sank in mid-ocean.

There is also a seventh man in the boat. He looks young or, rather, ageless. He is dressed in a style belonging to no period or country. He sits at the helm, immobile and silent, but listens attentively to what the others are saying. They treat him as a nobody and take no notice of him.

The persons are:
- The Statesman
- The Writer
- The Scientist
- The Artist
- The Industrialist
- The Athlete
- The Unknown Man

Water is running out, provisions have come to an end. Their physical suffering is becoming intolerable. No hope on the horizon: death is approaching. To take their minds off their present miseries, each one of them in turn tells the story of his life.

The curtain rises.

The Statesman

Since you ask me, I will be the first to tell you what my life has been.

Son of a politician, I was familiar from childhood with government affairs and political issues. All that was freely discussed at the dinners which my parents gave for their friends and which I used to attend from the age of twelve onwards. The opinions of the various political parties were no mystery to me and my enthusiastic young mind would find a simple solution to every difficulty.

Naturally, my studies ran along these lines and I became a brilliant student of Political Science.

Later, when the time came to pass from theory to practice, I had to face the first serious difficulties and I began to understand how virtually impossible it is to put one's ideas into practice. I had to resort to compromises and my great ideal gradually crumbled away.

I also noticed that success does not really correspond to a person's worth, but rather to his capacity to adapt himself to circumstances and to make himself agreeable. For that, one must flatter people's weaknesses rather than attempt to correct their imperfections.

No doubt, all of you know about my brilliant career, so I shall not dwell upon it. But I should like to tell you that as soon as I became Prime Minister and my position gave me some real power, I remembered the humanitarian ambitions of my youth and tried to be guided by them. I tried not to be a "party man". I wanted to find a solution to the great conflict between the various political and social trends that are tearing the world apart and all of which, nevertheless, in my opinion, have their advantages and disadvantages. None of them is perfectly good

or wholly bad, and a way should be found to adopt what is good in each one in order to form a harmonious and practicable whole. But I was not able to discover the formula of the synthesis that would reconcile these contraries, not to speak of being able to translate it into action.

Thus, I wished for peace, concord, understanding between nations, collaboration for the good of all, and I was compelled by a force greater than mine to wage war and to triumph by unscrupulous means and uncharitable decisions.

And yet I am considered a great statesman, I am overwhelmed with honours and praise and people call me "a friend of humanity".

But I feel my own weakness and I know that I have lacked the true knowledge and power which would have enabled me to fulfil the beautiful hopes of my childhood.

And now that the end is near, I feel that I have done very little and perhaps even very badly, and I shall cross the threshold of death sad and disillusioned.

The Mother wrote three dramas for the dramatic performance held annually on December 1 by the students and teachers of the Centre of Education. *Towards the Future* was produced in 1949, *The Great Secret* in 1954 and *The Ascent to Truth* in 1957. In the February 2011 issue of *All India Magazine "Towards the Future"* was published; in April 2011 *"The Ascent to Truth"* was included. In this issue of *All India Magazine* we have published *"The Great Secret".*

The Writer

With winged words I sought to capture the beauty and the truth that throb in our mortality. This panorama of creation that lies extended before our eyes — men and creatures, beings and things, scenes and happenings — and the other one equally extended in our feelings and perceptions, in our consciousness, they make a mysterious web, a Daedalus' complex. They cast their spell upon me and I heard their voice calling me to know, understand and seize, a voice sweeter and more compelling than any Aegean siren could command. The ring of that voice I sought to give to my words.

I aimed at uttering the mystery of things, I aimed at making the Sphinx speak out. What lies hidden, what lies sealed, what moves from its secrecy suns and stars and hearts, that I endeavoured to unveil and present in the broad light of day. The labour of things, mundane or supra-mundane, is a dumb and even confused pantomime; I offered speech and consciousness to them. Words appeared to me a most marvellous instrument, the instrument par excellence. It has just the consistency to embody and to express, neither so fluid as to be vague, nor so concrete as to be opaque. The word pertains to two worlds at once. It is of the material world and therefore can give a form of matter: and it is sufficiently immaterial to be in contact with subtle things, forces and vibrations, principles and ideas. It can materialise the immaterial, embody the disembodied; and above all, it can give the meaning of things, the precise sense enclosed in a form.

In my lyrics I sought to uncover the yearnings of the heart, in man or in nature, what things cry for, what their tears are for. On a larger canvas, through legends and parables, I portrayed the various facets of life's moods and

urges, its rare wisdoms and common foolishnesses, gave a pulsating accent and a meaningful concreteness to episodes that constitute history, the history of man's and nature's consciousness. The tragedies and comedies of life I cast in the dramatic form too, and it is not for me to say how pleased you were to see the ancient form serving magnificently the needs and demands of the modern temperament. I moulded in unforgettable individualities figures and characters of living forces. A wider and still more explicit instrument is the novel which is perhaps more agreeable to the scientific and enquiring spirit of the age. For it is both illustrative and explanatory. I have given you the life history of individuals and social aggregates and I have attempted to give you too something of the life history of humanity taken as a whole, the massive aggregate in its circling, coiling, mounting movements. But I knew and I felt that it is not mere extension, largeness — the wide commonalty — that is enough for the human spirit. It needs uplift. It needs the grand style. So I gave you my epic. It was indeed a whole life's labour. Well, many of you do not and did not understand, more were overawed, but all felt its magic vibration. Yes, it was my desperate attempt to tear open the veil.

I have varied the theme and I have varied the manner. Like a consummate scientist I juggled with my words, I knew how to change their constitution and transmute them as it were, make them carry a new sense, a new tone, a new value. I could command something of the Ciceronian swell, something of the Miltonic amplitude, something of the Racinian suavity; I was not incapable of the simplicity of Wordsworth at his best, nor was even the Shakespearean magic quite unknown to me. The sublimity of Valmiki and the nobility of Vyasa were not peaks too high for me to compass.

And yet I have not achieved. I am not satisfied. I am unhappy. For, after all, these are dreams that I have created, "dreams have I sown in the air". I feel I have not touched the true truth of things nor their soul beauty. I have scratched the mere surface, I have caressed the outer robe that Nature puts on herself; but her very body, her own self has escaped me. I have woven a gossamer around creation's limbs, however seemingly true, however apparently delightful. The means, the instrument itself which I once thought in its nature to be faultless and perfect in its capacity to penetrate and reveal and express and embody, I found in the end failing me. A great silence, a sheer dumbness, I thought at last to be nearer the heart of things.

In this unending flux, in this myriad mutability I stretch my helpless arms and cry out like Faustus, "Where, where shall I capture thee, O infinite Nature?" Another great poet was once likened to "an ineffectual angel beating in vain its luminous wings in the void". Our whole tribe is nothing better.

At the end of my life, I ask, in the ignorance of a child, what does all this mean? To which God shall we bow down and make our offering? What is the vision of the Shekinah like? Wherefore to have lived, wherefore to die? What is the sense of this fleeting appearance upon earth, all this effort and struggle, all this success balanced against so much suffering? The marvellous hopes and the triumphant enthusiasms leading but to abysses of inconscience and ignorance that nothing can fill up? And the inevitable finale of it all: disappearance, dissolution, more mysterious than appearance, that gives the impression of something absurd, a bad joke at once gruesome and useless.

The Scientist

Unlike some of you, I did not set out in life with any intention of improving the condition of my fellow-men. In my case, knowledge rather than action was the main attraction — knowledge in its modern guise: Science. I felt that nothing could be more wonderful than to lift a corner of the veil that screens from us the secrets of Nature, to understand a little more of her hidden springs. I assumed, perhaps unconsciously, the postulate that any increase of knowledge must necessarily result in an increase of power, and that any new mastery over Nature must sooner or later bring about an improvement in man's condition, his moral as well as his material well-being. For me, as for all other thinkers who have their roots in the last century, the century of the foundations of science, ignorance was the primary if not the only evil. It was this that held back mankind in its drive towards perfection. We admitted, without any discussion, the endless perfectibility of the human race. Progress might be rapid or slow, but it was nonetheless sure. Having come so far, we knew that we could go further. For us, to know more was automatically to understand more, to become wiser, more just — in short, to become better.

There is another postulate that we also accepted implicitly: that it is possible for us to know the Universe as it really is, to grasp its laws objectively. This seemed so obvious that it was never questioned. The Universe and I — we both exist, the function of the one being to understand the other. Undoubtedly, I am part of the Universe, but in the process of knowing it, I stand apart from it and view it objectively. I admit that what I call the laws of Nature exist independently of me, of my mind; they exist in themselves and they will be the same for any other mind capable of

perceiving them.

I started my work inspired by this ideal of pure knowledge. I chose the science of Physics and more particularly the study of the atom, of radioactivity, the field in which Becquerel and the Curies had mapped out a royal road. It was the period when natural radioactivity was being superseded by artificial radioactivity, when the dreams of the alchemists were coming true. I worked with the great physicists who discovered uranium fission and I saw the birth of the atom bomb: years of hard, dogged and one-pointed labour. It was at this time that I conceived the idea which was to lead me to my first discovery, the one which enables us today to obtain electric power directly from intra-atomic or nuclear energy. As you all know, this discovery resulted in a radical change in the economic condition of the whole world, because it brought energy at a low cost within the reach of all. If this discovery was so sensational, it was because it freed man from the curse of toil, from the need to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow.

So I realised the dream of my youth — a great discovery — and at the same time I saw its importance for humanity—to which, without especially intending to do so, I had brought this great boon.

I had reason enough to be fully satisfied, but if I was, it was not for long. For soon after — I can tell you this because we are now within an inch of death and my secret will probably be buried with me — soon after this, I say, I discovered the way to free atomic energy not only from uranium, thorium and some other rare metals, but from most of the common metals such as copper and aluminium. But then I was faced with a stupendous problem that strained me almost to breaking-point. Should I make known my discovery? To this day, no one knows this secret except me.

All of you know the story of the atom bomb. You know that it has been succeeded by an infinitely more destructive weapon, the hydrogen bomb. You also know as well as I do that humanity is staggering under the impact of these discoveries, which have placed in its hands an unequalled power of destruction. But if I now revealed my new discovery, if I unveiled my secret, I would place a diabolical power in the hands of just anybody. And without any control or restriction... Uranium and thorium were easily monopolised by the governments, first on account of their relative scarcity, but mostly because of the difficulty of activating them in atomic piles. But you can well imagine what would happen if any criminal or crank or fanatic could in any make-shift laboratory put together a weapon capable of blowing up Paris, London or New York! Would that not be the finishing blow for humanity? I too have reeled under the weight of my discovery. I hesitated a long time and have not yet been able to come to any decision which satisfies both my reason and my heart.

Thus the very first postulate with which I set out as a young scientist in quest of Nature's secrets, has fallen to pieces. Even though an increase in knowledge may bring an added power, it does not follow at all that humanity will be automatically bettered. Scientific progress does not necessarily imply moral progress. Scientific and intellectual knowledge is powerless to change human nature, and yet that has become the pressing need. If human greed and passion remain what they are today, almost the same as they were in the Stone Age, then humanity is doomed. We have reached a point where, unless there is a rapid and radical moral change, mankind will destroy itself with the power it has in its own hands.

Now what has happened to the second postulate of my

youth? Can I at least have the joy of pure knowledge, can I be certain that I have grasped something of the hidden mechanism of Nature? Can I hope to enjoy the understanding of the true laws that govern Nature? Alas! I fear that here too my ideal has failed me. We men of science have long ago given up the idea that a theory must be either true or false. We now say only that it is convenient, that it fits the facts and gives a working explanation of them. But as for knowing whether it is true, that is to say, whether it conforms to reality — that is quite another thing. And perhaps the question itself is meaningless. Undoubtedly there are, I should say, certainly there are other theories which explain the same facts just as well and are therefore just as valid. After all, what are these theories? They are nothing but symbols. They are certainly useful, since they enable us to predict; they tell us how things happen, but not the why or wherefore. They do not bring us into touch with reality. One always has the impression of circling around the truth, the reality, of approaching it from different angles, from different points of view, without ever being able to discover it or grasp it; nor does it spring forth and reveal itself.

Then again, on the other hand, we ourselves interfere with all the measurements that we take, expecting them to tell us something about the external universe. By the very fact of measuring we disturb, however slightly, the outer phenomena and thus alter the aspect of the world. And so the knowledge that these measurements give us is not at all sure. All that we can deduce from them is a probable state of the world, not a certainty. For phenomena on our own scale, the uncertainty is negligible, but this is not the case with the infinitely small, the world of the atom. Here, it is an essential incapacity, an obstacle that we can never hope to surmount. It is due to the very nature of things and not

to the imperfection of our methods of investigation, so that we shall never succeed in casting away the tinted glasses through which we study the universe. All my measurements, all my theories contain me, the human mind, just as much as they contain the universe. They are subjective as well as objective and perhaps, in fact, they exist only in my mind.

On the shores of the Infinite, I discovered a footprint and I sought to reconstruct the being which had left its mark on the sands. I succeeded at last and found that it was myself. This is where I stand — where we all stand — and I see no way out.

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But after all, perhaps the fact that I do not have any certitudes about the world, only probabilities, leaves a ray of hope — that the fate of humanity is not finally sealed.

The Artist

Born into a thoroughly respectable bourgeois family where art was considered as a pastime rather than a career and artists as rather unreliable people, prone to debauchery and with a dangerous disregard for money, I felt, perhaps out of contrariness, a compelling need to become a painter. My entire consciousness was centred in my eyes and I could express myself more easily by a sketch than in words. I learnt much better by looking at pictures than by reading books, and what I had once seen — landscapes, faces or drawings — I never forgot.

At the age of thirteen, through much effort, I had almost mastered the techniques of drawing, water colour, pastels

and oil painting. Then I had the chance to do some small commissions for friends and acquaintances of my parents, and as soon as I earned some money, my family began to take my vocation seriously. I took advantage of this to pursue my studies as far as I could. When I was old enough to be admitted, I joined the School of Fine Arts and almost immediately started taking part in competitions. I was one of the youngest artists ever to win the Prix de Rome and that gave me the opportunity to make a thorough study of Italian art. Later on, travelling scholarships allowed me to visit Spain, Belgium, Holland, England and other countries too. I did not want to be a man of one period or one school, and I studied the art of all countries, in all forms, oriental as well as occidental.

At the same time I went ahead with my own work, trying to find a new formula. Then came success and fame; I won first prizes in exhibitions, I sat on juries, my paintings were shown in the leading museums of the world and snatched up by the art dealers. It meant wealth, titles, honours; even the word "genius" was used... But I am not satisfied. My conception of genius is quite different. We have to create new forms, with new methods and processes, in order to express a new kind of beauty that is higher and purer, truer and nobler. So long as I still feel bound to human animality, I cannot free myself completely from the forms of material Nature. The aspiration was there, but the knowledge, the vision was lacking.

And now that we are about to die, I feel that I have produced nothing of what I wanted to produce, I have created nothing of what I wanted to create. And in spite of all the fame that has been heaped upon me, I feel that I am a failure.

The Industrialist

Since we are all opening our hearts and, moreover, since what I am going to say cannot be used by my competitors or by those who resent my success — my so-called success — I shall tell you the story of my life as I see it and not as it has been so often related.

The facts themselves have been correctly reported. My father was a blacksmith in a small country town. From him I inherited a liking for metal-work; it was he who taught me the joy of a work well done and the satisfaction of giving oneself entirely to one's task. He also instilled into me the desire to do always better — better than others, better than before. The desire for gain was not his chief motive, but he never denied that he was proud of being at the top of his profession and he enjoyed the praise of his fellow-townsmen without any false modesty.

At the beginning of the century, when the internal combustion engine made its first appearance, we small boys were thrilled by the possibilities it opened up, and to build a horseless carriage, or a motor-car as it was beginning to be called, presented itself as a goal worthy of our greatest efforts. For the few models we had already seen were very far from perfect.

The first car, built with my own hands from parts collected here and there and never intended for the use to which I put them, undoubtedly gave me the greatest joy of my whole life. Perched precariously on a somewhat uncomfortable seat, I drove the few hundred yards from my father's workshop to the Town Hall, and nothing seemed more beautiful to me than this odd contraption, wobbling and puffing its way along, scattering the pedestrians and making the dogs bark and the horses rear.

I shall not dwell on the years that followed, on the hostility of those who proclaimed that the horse had been created by God to draw carriages and that it was already quite impious enough to have made railways without going even further and launching these new diabolical inventions upon the roads and in the cities. Even more numerous were those who could see no future in a temperamental machine that could only be handled by experts or single-minded cranks. The few adventurous souls who lent me my first dollars to set up a small workshop, hire a couple of hands and buy some steel, seemed to have the same blind faith as the first gold-seekers who went out in pursuit of a problematical and elusive fortune in a hostile and desolate country.

As for me, I was not seeking fortune but only the satisfaction of manufacturing amotor-car that would be easier to handle and cheaper than the existing models. I felt somehow that this means of transport should be economical because, after all, its driving power would only have to be fed while it was working. If its purchase price could be made low enough, many people would buy it who would shy at the permanent expense of maintaining a team of horses.

Everybody still remembers my first mass-produced model. It was high on its wheels so that it could run on country roads, it was robustly built to stand up to the rough handling of the crudest farm-hand, but somewhat despised by those who still considered the motor-car a luxury for the wealthy. And yet this model, which could be driven easily, almost effortlessly, already foreshadowed the time when motor-cars would be handled even by the most inexperienced drivers.

Still it was not until the First World War that the motor-car won its first great victory over the horse. Ambulances, ammunition transports, everything that had to move fast,

everything that was unusually heavy was "motorised". My factory reached a tremendous pitch of activity. The huge quantities ordered by the Army gave me the opportunity to improve my equipment and perfect new methods of manufacture and assembly.

By the end of the War, I had a smooth-running organisation which, however, seemed out of proportion to civilian needs. My assistants got scared. They urged me to reduce the rate of manufacture, to dismiss some of the employees, to cancel orders placed with suppliers and to wait some time to see where the actual demand would stand. This was wise, no doubt; but here was an opportunity, probably unique, to produce the cheapest car in the world. Slowing down the production would mean an increase in costs. So I decided that the problem lay in selling our output rather than in producing what people were willing to buy from us. Within six months, after a brilliant advertising campaign, I had proved my point.

From then onwards my company moved forward almost by itself. More and more I had to leave important decisions to my assistants and to confine myself to laying down the guiding principles. These were, to produce at the lowest cost without sacrificing quality and without reducing wages — actually, my workers should be the highest paid in the world; to sell at the lowest price in order to go on reaching ever new markets — not only should the profit margin be brought down to a minimum without jeopardising the stability of the company, but the advertising should be handled so as to obtain the required turnover without unduly increasing the cost of production; finally, in case normal suppliers demanded too much profit, to have no hesitation in undertaking the manufacture of our own spare parts, semi-finished products and even raw materials.

My business began to grow as if it were a living thing. Whatever I undertook seemed to become successful. This is how I became almost a legendary figure, a demi-god who had created a new way of life, an example to follow, so much so that any trifling word of mine, any act however insignificant was analysed, turned inside out, made into a great principle and presented to the masses as a new gospel.

Is there anything real in all this? My business survives only by getting bigger. Any check to its growth would be fatal. For the general expenses, which do not lag far behind the increasing production, would soon swallow up the profit margin, which is very narrow in comparison with the overall turnover. My business is growing so rapidly that it now looks more like an inflated balloon than a living body moving harmoniously and steadily towards maturity. For instance, some departments have to drive their workers like galley-slaves in order to keep pace with the rest, and as soon as this is corrected at one point by improving the equipment, it reappears at another. I feel helpless in face of this state of affairs, because any disruption in the production line would only result in more hardship for the workers.

And what have I contributed to humanity? Men travel more easily. Do they understand each other any better? Following my example, all sorts of labour-saving gadgets have been mass produced and made available to an increasing number of customers. How far has this done anything more than to create new needs and a corresponding greed for gain? My workers are well paid but it seems that I have only succeeded in arousing in them the desire to earn always more—and above all more than workers in other factories. I feel that they are dissatisfied, unhappy in fact. Contrary to my hopes, raising their standard of living, assuring their security, has not induced them to develop their human

personality. Indeed, the mass of human suffering remains practically unchanged, as formidable as ever, and, it seems, incurable by the means I have used. There is something fundamentally wrong which my actions fail to correct and which I even fail to understand. I feel that there is a secret yet to be discovered; and without this discovery all our efforts are in vain.



The Mother directing the Play "Conversations of the Dead" in the Ashram Theatre, November 1956

The Athlete

I was born in a family of athletes. Both my parents were very good performers in all sorts of games, sports and physical exercises. The speciality of my mother lay in swimming, diving, archery, fencing and dancing. She was well known for her skill in these events and she also held several local championships.

My father was a wonderful fellow. Whatever he touched turned out a success. In his student days he was a renowned footballer, basketball and tennis player. In boxing and cross-country running he was already the best in our district. Then, later, he entered a circus troupe and became famous in the flying trapeze and in horse-riding displays. But his speciality was in body-building and wrestling. He won a wide reputation for these activities.

Naturally these were ideal conditions to be born in and grow into a healthy, strong and capable state of physical fitness. All the physical qualities that were acquired by my parents by ardent practice of the different athletic exercises were easily passed on to me. Moreover, my athlete parents wanted to see their dream fulfilled in me, — they wanted me to be a great and successful athlete. So they brought me up carefully, devoting to me all their knowledge and experience of attaining health, strength, vigour and vitality; and they would let nothing that would help me to achieve this end escape. From my very birth, they fulfilled all the best conditions of health and hygiene, as regards food, clothing, sleep, cleanliness, good habits and so on, that were materially possible. Afterwards, through well planned physical exercises, they brought out gradually in my body symmetry, proportion, grace, rhythm and harmony. Then they cultivated in me agility, a daring spirit, alertness, accuracy and

co-ordination, and finally I was trained to acquire strength and endurance.

I was sent to a boarding school. Naturally the programme of physical education appealed to me the most. I started taking keen interest in it and in a few years I gradually took my place among the good players and athletes of my school. Then my first success came when I won the inter-school boxing championship. How happy and proud my parents were when they saw their dream on the way to fulfilment! I was very much encouraged by my success, and henceforth put all my determination with earnestness, care and hard effort into mastering the technique and acquiring the skills of all the branches of physical education. I was taught to develop all the different capacities of the body by participating in all the sporting activities. I believed that by an all-round physical training one could be highly successful and be master of more than one or even a few activities. That is why I participated in all the sporting items that opportunity offered me. Year after year, in open championship I regularly won the wrestling, boxing, weight-lifting, bodybuilding, swimming, track and field events, tennis, gymnastics and many other activities also.

Now I was eighteen years old. I wanted to compete in the national games championship. As a believer in all-round development I selected the Decathlon event as my item in the national championship. It is the toughest of all events,— it demands a supreme test of speed, strength, endurance, co-ordination and many other qualities. I got down to training and after six months of hard work I took the championship easily, keeping my second man far behind.

Naturally my success made the national organisers of physical education think of sending me to compete in the world Olympics. I got an offer to represent my country in

the world Olympiad which was going to be held within the next two years, in the Decathlon event. It is no joke to compete in the world championship, where the cream of the world's best athletes come together. There was not much time to waste.

So I got down to training under my father's coaching and mother's care. I had to do a lot of hard work. Sometimes the progress seemed impossible and everything seemed so difficult. But I pushed on in my work day after day, month after month, and then finally came the date of the world Olympic sports.

I should not boast, but I did much better than even I had expected. Not only did I become the world champion in the Decathlon event, but I scored so high as had never been done before, nor has again been repeated. Nobody thought it was possible. But so it happened, and the highest ambition both of myself and my parents was fulfilled.

But something strange happened in me. Though I was on the pinnacle of success and glory, I noticed a kind of sadness, a kind of emptiness was slowly approaching me;—as if somebody was saying within me that something was missing, something had to be found out, something had to be established in me. It seemed to be saying: perhaps there is something more for which my physical skill, capacity and energy may be better utilised. But I had not the slightest idea what it could be. Then slowly this condition passed away. Afterwards I joined many important competitions and did very well in all of them. But I noticed this feeling used to possess me after each success.

My reputation caused a batch of young people to gather round me. They asked me to help them in different activities of physical training, which I gladly did. Then I found that there was a great joy in helping others in my favourite oc-

cupation, that is, games, sports and physical exercises. I was also doing well as a coach. Many of my students were showing wonderful results in different events of games, sports and physical activities. Seeing my success as a teacher of physical education and because I liked games and sports so much that I did not want to lose touch with them, I thought of taking up this teaching as my life's work. In order to prepare myself in the theoretical side of it, I took my admission in a famous college of physical education and in four years I got my degree in physical education.

Being a master of both practice and theory in the subject of physical education I got down to work. So long as I was an athlete, my sole purpose had been to gain health, strength, skill, physical beauty and to reach a high perfection in my own body. Now I started helping others in order to make them do the same. I organised teachers' training centres all over my country and trained very good instructors and directors of physical education. With the help of them I opened innumerable centres of physical education in every corner of my country. The object of these centres was to spread the popularity and practice of health, physical education and recreation in a scientific way among the general masses of our country. They did their work very well and after several years the general health of my country was very much improved. They showed good results at home and abroad in games and sports. Soon my country got a very high international reputation in the sporting world. I must admit that I was helped and backed by the government of my country and a special portfolio was given to me as the Minister of Physical Education. That is why I could do so much.

Soon my name spread to every part of the world as a great physical educator and organiser, and I was consid-

ered an authority on physical education in the international sphere. I was invited to many countries by the authorities to speak on and introduce my system of physical education to their land. Letters were pouring in from every corner of the earth asking me about my method and seeking my advice on their special problems in the field of Physical Education.

But in the midst of my busy hours often I was feeling that all my energy and skill, all my country-wide organisation and the power that was growing from it, all the strong influence that I had in the international sphere, could be used perhaps for some higher, some nobler and loftier purpose and then only all that I did could have some true meaning. But up to now I could not know what it might be.

Even sometimes I have been called "superman"; but I am not a superman. I am still the slave of nature, a man with all his ignorance, his limitations and incapacities, at the mercy of an accident or illness or one of those human passions that empty you of all your energy. I feel that after all I am not above all these things and that there is something else to learn and to realise.

Now, when I am standing face to face with death, I am not afraid in the least to die. The thought of extreme suffering, hunger and thirst does not disturb me. But I am sorry that I could not solve my problems in my lifetime. I achieved a great success in life, got fame, honour, wealth and everything that a man could dream of. But I am not satisfied because I have no answers to my questions:—

"What is it that I miss so badly in the midst of all? What could be the highest use of my physical perfection and ability? For what purpose could the power of my country-wide organisation and my international influence be best utilised?"

Then the voice of the Unknown Man is heard, calm, gentle, clear, full of a serene authority.

The Unknownman

What you want to know, I can tell you.

All of you have had a similar experience, although your activities are so different in their nature and scope. All six of you have come to a similar conclusion in spite of the success that has crowned your efforts. For you have been living in the surface consciousness, seeing only the appearance of things and unaware of the true reality of the universe.

You represent the élite of mankind, each one of you has achieved in his own sphere the utmost of what man is capable of; you are therefore at the summit of the human race. But from this summit you look down into an abyss and you can go no further. None of you are satisfied but at the same time none of you know what to do. None of you know the solution to the twofold problem presented by life and your own goodwill. I say a twofold problem, for in fact it has two aspects, one individual and the other collective: how can one fully realise one's own good and the good of others? None of you have found the solution, for this riddle of life cannot be solved by mental man, however superior he may be. For that, one must be born into a new and higher consciousness, the Truth-Consciousness. For behind these fleeting appearances there is an eternal reality, behind this unconscious and warring multitude there is a single, serene Consciousness, behind these endless and innumerable falsehoods there is a pure, radiant Truth, behind this obscure and obdurate ignorance there is a sovereign knowledge.

And this Reality is here, very near, at the centre of your being as it is at the centre of the universe. You have only to find it and live it and you will be able to solve all your prob-

lems, overcome all your difficulties.

This, you may say, is what the religions preach: most of them have spoken of this Reality, calling it God, but they have supplied no satisfactory solution to your problem, no convincing answer to your questions, and they have totally failed in their attempt to provide a remedy to the ills of suffering humanity.

Some of these religions were based on prophetic revelation, others on a philosophical and spiritual ideal, but very soon the revelation changed to rituals and the philosophical ideal to dogmas, and so the truth they contained vanished. Moreover, and most important, all religions, almost without exception, offer man an almost identical other-worldly solution, based on death, not on life. Their solution amounts to this: bear all your miseries without complaining, for this world is irremediably evil, and you shall be rewarded for your meekness after death; or else: renounce all attachment to life and you shall escape forever from the cruel necessity of living. This certainly cannot provide any remedy to the sufferings of humanity on earth nor to the condition of the world in general. On the contrary, if we want to find a true solution to the confusion, chaos and misery of the world, we have to find it in the world itself. And this is in fact where it is to be found. It exists potentially, we have only to discover it; it is neither mystic nor imaginary; it is altogether concrete and disclosed to us by Nature herself, if we know how to observe her. For the movement of Nature is an ascending one; from one form, one species, she brings forth a new one capable of manifesting something more of the universal consciousness. All goes to show that man is not the last step in terrestrial evolution. The human species will necessarily be succeeded by a new one which will be to man what man is to the animal; the present human consciousness will be

replaced by a new consciousness, no longer mental but supramental. And this consciousness will give birth to a higher race, superhuman and divine.

The time has come for this possibility, promised and anticipated for so long, to become a living reality upon earth, and that is why you are all unsatisfied and feel that you have been unable to obtain what you wanted from life. Nothing but a radical change of consciousness can deliver the world from its present obscurity. Indeed, this transformation of the consciousness, this manifestation of a higher and truer consciousness, is not only possible but certain; it is the very aim of our existence, the purpose of life upon earth. First the consciousness must be transformed, then life, then forms; it is in this order that the new creation will unfold. All Nature's activity is in fact a progressive return towards the Supreme Reality which is both the origin and the goal of the universe, in its totality as well as in its smallest element. We must become concretely what we are essentially; we must live integrally the truth, the beauty, the power and the perfection that are hidden in the depths of our being, and then all life will become the expression of the sublime, eternal, divine Joy.

There is a silence as the six men exchange glances, showing their approval. Then:

The Writer:

Your words have a compelling force, a contagious power. Yes, we feel that a new door has opened before us, a new hope is born in our hearts. But it will take time to realise, a long time perhaps. And now death awaits us, the end is near. Alas, it is too late.

The Unknown man:

No, it is not too late, it is never too late.

Let us unite our wills in a great aspiration; let us pray for an intervention of the Grace. A miracle can always happen. Faith has a sovereign power. And if indeed we are to take part in the great work to be done, then an intervention will come and prolong our lives. Let us pray with the humility of the wise and the candid faith of a child; let us invoke with sincerity this new Consciousness, this new Force, Truth and Beauty which must manifest, so that the earth may be transformed and the supramental life realised in the material world.

They all concentrate in silence. The Unknown Man continues:

"O Supreme Reality, grant that we may live integrally the marvellous secret that is now revealed to us."

They all repeat the prayer softly and remain in silent concentration. Suddenly the Artist cries out:

Look! Look!

A ship appears, like a dot on the horizon, and slowly comes closer. Exclamations. The Unknown Man says:

Our prayer is heard.

When the ship becomes clearly visible, the Athlete jumps up onto the gunwale waving a white handkerchief which he pulls from his pocket. The ship comes nearer. The Scientist exclaims:

They have seen us. They are coming!

And the Unknown Man says slowly:

Here is salvation, here is new life!

Curtain.

(CWM Vol. 12, 2nd ed., pp. 475-496, 513)

Yoga and Skill in Works

Yoga is skill in works (*Gita*): Its meaning*

Yoga, says the Gita, is skill in works, and by this phrase the ancient Scripture meant that the transformation of mind and being to which it gave the name of Yoga brought with it a perfect inner state and faculty out of which the right principle of action and the right spiritual and divine result of works emerged naturally like a tree out of its seed. Certainly, it did not mean that the clever general or politician or lawyer or shoemaker deserves the name of a Yogin; it did not mean that any kind of skill in works was Yoga, but by Yoga it signified a spiritual condition of universal equality and God-union and by the skill of the Yogic worker it intended a perfect adaptation of the soul and its instruments to the rhythm of the divine and universal Spirit in a nature liberated from the shackles of egoism and the limitations of the sense-mind.

Yoga and its utility

Essentially, Yoga is a generic name for the processes and the result of processes by which we transcend or shred off our present modes of being and rise to a new, a higher, a wider mode of consciousness which is not that of the ordinary animal and intellectual man. Yoga is the exchange of an egoistic for a universal or cosmic consciousness lifted towards or informed by the supra-cosmic, transcendent Unnameable who is the source and support of all things. Yoga is the passage of the human thinking animal towards the God-consciousness from which he has descended. In that ascent we find many levels and stages, plateau after plateau of the hill whose summit touches the Truth of things; but at

* Sub-titles added.

every stage the saying of the Gita applies in an ever higher degree. Even a little of this new law and inner order delivers the soul out of the great peril by which it had been overtaken in its world ward descent, the peril of the ignorance by which the unillumined intellect, even when it is keenest or sagest, must ever be bound and limited, of the sorrow and sin from which the unpurified heart, even when it wears the richest purple of aspiration and feeling, must ever suffer soil and wound and poverty, and of the vanity of its works to which the undivinised will of man, even when it is most vehement and powerful or Olympian and victorious, must eternally be subject. It is the utility of Yoga that it opens to us a gate of escape out of the vicious circle of our ordinary human existence.

Working of the ordinary man and of the Yogin

The idea of works, in the thought of the Gita, is the widest possible. All action of Nature in man is included, whether it be internal or external, operate in the mind or use the body, seem great or seem little. From the toil of the hero to the toil of the cobbler, from the labour of the sage to the simple physical act of eating, all is included. The seeking of the Self by thought, the adoration of the Highest by the emotions of the heart, the gathering of means and material and capacity and the use of them for the service of God and man stand here on an equal footing. Buddha sitting under the Bo-tree and conquering the illumination, the ascetic silent and motionless in his cave, Shankara storming through India, debating with all men and preaching most actively the gospel of inaction are all from this point of view doing great and forceful work. But while the outward action may be the same, there is a great internal difference between the working of the ordinary man and the working

of the Yogin,— a difference in the state of the being, a difference in the power and the faculty, a difference in the will and temperament.

The divine Existence is unlimited

What we do, arises out of what we are. The existent is conscious of what he is; that consciousness formulates itself as knowledge and power; works are the result of this twofold force of being in action. Mind, life and body can only operate out of that which is contained in the being of which they are forces. This is what we mean when we say that all things act according to their nature. The divine Existence is pure and unlimited being in possession of all itself, it is sat; whatever it puts forth in its limitless purity of self-awareness is truth of itself, satya; the divine knowledge is knowledge of the Truth, the divine Will is power of the Truth, the divine workings are words and ideas of the Truth realising themselves in manifold forms and through many stages and in infinite relations. But God is not limited or bound by any particular working or any moment of time or any field of space or any law of relation, because He is universal and infinite. Nor is He limited by the universe; for His infinity is not cosmic, but supracosmic.

Individual acts as limited due to his egoistic error: Life teaches him the need of universalisation

But the individualised being is or acts as if he were so bound and limited, because he treats the particular working of existence that he is and the particular moment of time and field of space in which it is actually operating and the particular conditions which reign in the working and in the moment and in the field as if they were self-existent realities and the binding truth of things. Himself, his knowledge, his

force and will, his relations with the world and his fellows, his need in it and his desire from them he treats as the sufficient truth and reality, the point of departure of all his works, the central fact and law of his universe. And from this egoistic error arises an all-vitiating falsehood. For the particular, the individual can have no self-existence, no truth, no valid force except in so far as it reflects rightly and relates and conforms itself justly to the universal, to the all-being, the all-knowledge, the all-will and follows its true drift towards self-realisation and vast delight in itself. Therefore the salvation of the individual lies in his universalising himself; and this is the lesson which life tries always to teach him but the obstinate ego is always unwilling to learn; for the universal is not any group or extended ego, not the family, community, nation or even all mankind, but an infinite far surpassing all these littlenesses.

The next step: To transcend the cosmic formula

Nor is the universalising of himself sufficient for liberation, although certainly it will make him practically more free and in his being nearer to the true freedom. To put himself in tune with the universal is a step, but beyond the universal and directing and determining it is the supracosmic Infinity; for the universe also has no self-existence, truth or validity except as it expresses the divine Being, Knowledge, Will, Power, Delight of Him who surpasses all universe, so much that it can be said figuratively that with a petty fragment of His being and a single ray of His consciousness He has created all these worlds. Therefore the universalised mind must look up from its cosmic consciousness to the Supernal and derive from that all its sense of being and movement of works. This is the fundamental truth from which the Yogic consciousness starts; it helps the individual to uni-

versalise himself and then to transcend the cosmic formula. And this transformation acts not only on his status of being but on his active consciousness in works.*

Equality is the foundation of ascent: True meaning of equality

The Gita tells us that equality of soul and mind is Yoga and that this equality is the foundation of the Brahman-state, that high infinite consciousness to which the Yogin aspires. Now equality of mind means universality; for without universality of soul there may be a state of indifference or an impartial self-control or a well-governed equality of temperament, but these are not the thing that is meant. The equality spoken of is not indifference or impartiality or equability, but a fundamental oneness of attitude to all persons and all things and happenings because of the perception of all as the One. Such equality, it is erroneously thought, is incompatible with action. By no means; this is the error of the animal and the intellectual man who thinks that action is solely possible when dictated by his hopes, fears and passions or by the self-willed preferences of the emotion and the intellect justifying themselves by the illu-

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* *Here we would like to present to the readers a passage from the Mother's talk of 1930-31 (CWM 3: 168-69) -ed.*

...you must bear in mind that the universal consciousness so beloved of Yogis is not the Divine: you can break your limits horizontally if you like, but you will be quite mistaken if you take the sense of wideness and cosmic multiplicity to be the Divine. The universal movement is after all a mixture of falsehood and truth, so that to stop there is to be imperfect; for, you may very well share the cosmic consciousness without ever attaining the transcendent Truth. On the other hand, to go to the Divine is also to attain the universal realisation and yet remain free of falsehood.

sions of the reason. That might be the fact if the individual were the real actor and not merely an instrument or secondary agent; but we know well enough, for Science and Philosophy assure us of the same truth, that the universal is the Force which acts through the simulacrum of our individuality. The individual mind, pretending to choose for itself with a sublime ignorance and disregard of the universal, is obviously working on the basis of a falsehood and by means of an error and not in the knowledge and the will of the Truth. It cannot have any real skill in works; for to start from a falsehood or half-truth and work by means of blunders and arrive at another falsehood or half-truth which we have immediately to change, and all the while to weep and struggle and suffer and have no sure resting-place, cannot surely be called skill in works. But the universal is equal in all and therefore its determinations are not self-willed preferences but are guided by the truth of the divine will and knowledge which is unlimited and not subject to incapacity or error.

Yoga brings progressive change in the state of being

Therefore that state of the being by which the Yogin differs from the ordinary man, is that by which he rises from the foundation of a perfect equality to the consciousness of the one existence in all and embracing all and lives in that existence and not in the walls of his body or personal temperament or limited mind. Mind and life and body he sees as small enough things which happen and change and develop in his being. Nay, the whole universe is seen by him as happening within himself, not in his small ego or mind, but within this vast and infinite self with which he is now constantly identified. All action in the universe he sees as arising in this being, out of the divine Existence and

under the stress of the divine Truth, Knowledge, Will and Power. He begins to participate consciously in its working and to see all things in the light of that divine truth and governance; and even when his own actions move on certain lines rather than others, he is not bound by them or shut to the truth of all the rest by his own passions and preferences, gropings and seekings and revolts. It is evident that such an increasing wideness of vision must mean an increasing knowledge. And if it be true that knowledge is power, it must mean also an increasing force for works. Certainly, it would not be so, if the Yogin continued to act by the light of his individual reason and imagination and will; for the intellect and all that depends on it can only work by virtue of rigid limitations and exclusive determinations. Accordingly, the continued activity of the unillumined intellect and its servants conflicts with the new state of consciousness and knowledge which arises out of this larger existence, and so long as they remain active, it cannot be perfect or assured; for the consciousness is being continually pulled down to the lower field of ego-habit by the claim of their narrow workings. But the Yogin ceases, progressively, to act by the choice of his intellectual or emotional nature. Another light dawns, another power and presence intervenes, other faculties awake in the place of the old human-animal combination.

Then will and temperament get modified

As the state of being changes, the will and temperament must necessarily be modified. Even from an early stage the Yogin begins to subordinate his personal will or it becomes naturally subordinate to the sense of the supreme Will which is attracting him upward. Ignorantly, imperfectly, blunderingly it moves at first, with many recoils and relapses into personal living and personal action, but in time it

becomes more in tune with its Source and eventually the personal will merges upward and all ways into the universal and infinite and obeys implicitly the transcendent. Nor does this change and ascension and expanding mean any annihilation of the will-power working in the individual, as the intellectual man might imagine; but rather it increases it to an immense forcefulness while giving it an infinite calm and an eternal patience. The temperament also is delivered from all leash of straining and desire, from all urge of passion and pain of wilful self-delusion. Desire, even the best, turns always to limitation and obscuration, to some eager exclusive choice and pressure, to some insistent exclusion of what should not be excluded and impatient revolt against the divine denials and with holdings. It generates anger and grief and passion and obstinacy, and these bring about the soul's loss of its divine memory or steadfast consciousness of itself and its self-knowledge and its equal vision of the truth of things. Therefore desire and its brood are incompatible with skill in works and their persistence is the sign of an imperfect Yoga.

New faculties emerge

Not only must the will and fundamental knowledge-view of things change, but a new combination of faculties take the place of the old. For if the intellect is not to do all our mental work for us or to work at all in its unillumined state and if the will in the form of desires, wishes, intellectual preferences is not to determine and enforce our action, then it is clear that other powers of knowledge and will must awaken and either replace the intellect and the mental preference or illumine and guide the one and transform and dominate the other. Otherwise either the action may be nil or else its impulses mechanical and chaotic, even if the static

being is blissfully enlarged; for they will well up indeed out of the universal and not the personal, but out of the universal in its lower formula which permits the erratic action of the heart and mind, while the old personal will and reason will not be there to impose some light and order on their ill-connected impulsions. Such faculties and new combination of faculties can and do emerge and they are illuminations and powers that are in direct touch and harmony with the light and power of the Truth; therefore in proportion as they manifest and take hold of their functions, they must increase the force, subtlety and perfection of the Yogin's skill in works.

The greatest cunning of Yoga

But the greatest skill in works of Yoga is that which to the animal man seems its greatest ineptitude. For all this difficult attainment, the latter will say, may lead to anything you please, but we have to lose our personal life, abandon our personal objects, annul our personal will and pleasure and without these life cannot be worth living. Now the object of all skill in works must be evidently to secure the best welfare either of ourselves or of others or of all. The ordinary man calls it welfare to secure momentarily some transient object, to wade for it through a sea of grief and suffering and painful labour and to fall from it again still deeper into the same distressful element in search of a new transient object. The greatest cunning of Yoga is to have detected this cheat of the mind and its desires and dualities and to have found the way to an abiding peace, a universal delight and an all-embracing satisfaction, which can not only be enjoyed for oneself but communicated to others. That too arises out of the change of our being; for the pure truth of existence carries also in it the unalloyed delight of existence, they are

inseparable in the status of the infinite. To use the figures of the Vedic seers, by Yoga Varuna is born in us, a vast sky of spiritual living, the divine in his wide existence and infinite truth; into that wideness Mitra rises up, Lord of Light and Love who takes all our activities of thought and feeling and will, links them into a divine harmony, charioteers our movement and dictates our works; called by this wideness and this harmony Aryaman appears in us, the Divine in its illumined power, uplifted force of being and all-judging effective will; and by the three comes the indwelling Bhaga, the Divine in its pure bliss and all-seizing joy who dispels the evil dream of our jarring and divided existence and possesses all things in the light and glory of Aryaman's power, Mitra's love and light, Varuna's unity. This divine Birth shall be the son of our works; and than creating this what greater skill can there be or what more practical and sovereign cunning?

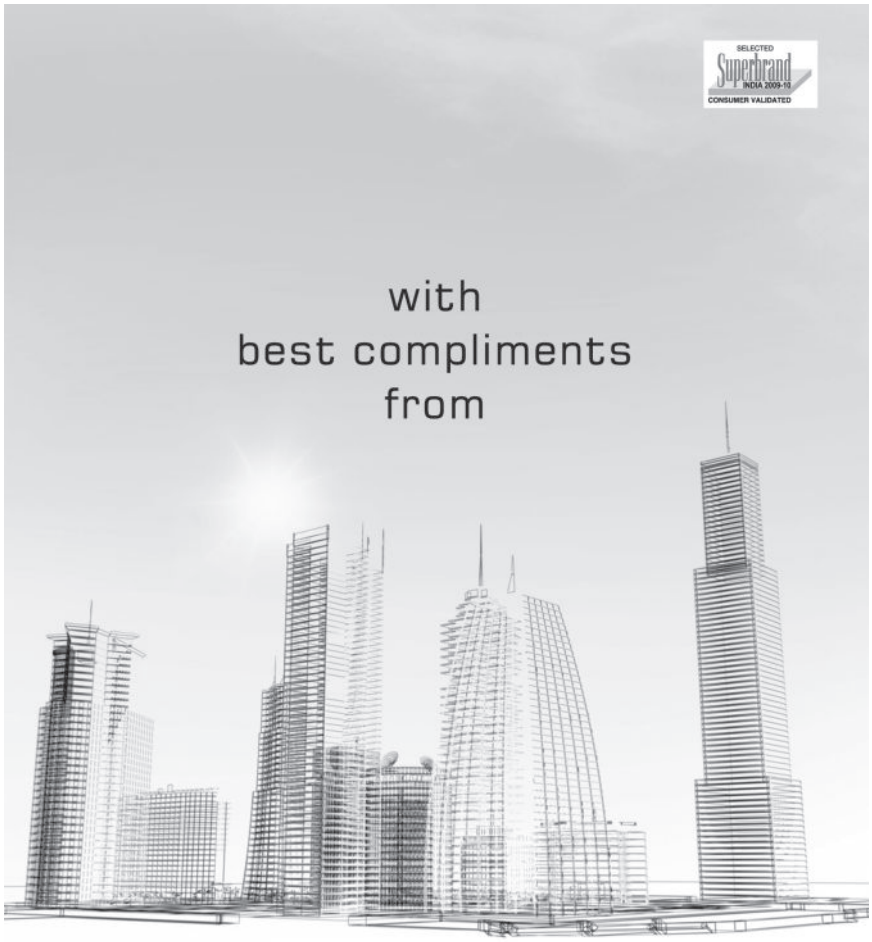
Sri Aurobindo

(CWSA Vol. 13, pp. 119-126; SABCL Vol. 16, pp. 291-297)

Announcement

Savitri Study Sessions in August

Study Sessions on Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri* will be held at the Society House (formerly known as beach office), Puducherry, from 17th to 23rd August 2012. It will be conducted by Dr. Alok Pandey. There will be two sessions daily, from 5.15 to 6.00 p.m. and 6.15 to 7.00 p.m. All are welcome.



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