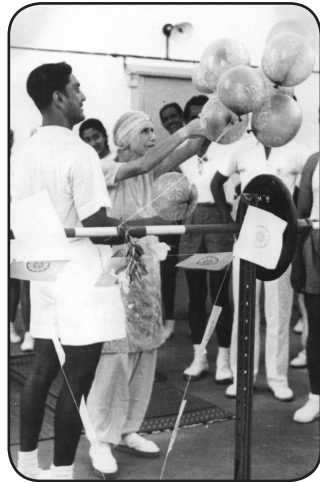
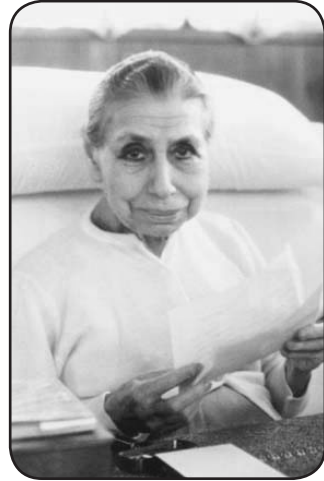
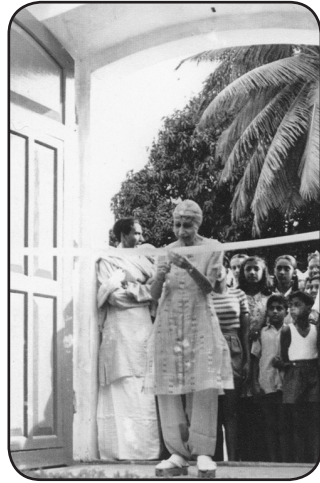


# INTERNATIONAL CENTRE



## I

In the Ashram's collective adventure of moving towards a New Life, a divine life, the Mother assigned (as we have seen) a central role almost to education. A school had been founded for children on 2 December 1943, but in the course of the seven years they had grown up in age and abilities and spread and depth of consciousness, and were now ripe for higher education. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had definite views about the future, and about the role of education in hastening that future. The Mother accordingly felt that the time was opportune for calling a Sri Aurobindo Memorial Convention, which met in the Ashram Tennis Ground on 24 and 25 April 1951.

Appropriately enough, on the 24<sup>th</sup> morning, the school-children and sadhaks in their uniform for physical education classes lined up in their respective group formations on the street outside the Mother's balcony, and as she appeared at seven, they gave the salute to her and then marched into the Ashram and formed a square around the Samadhi. The Mother too joined them, and the children gave their salute to her and Sri Aurobindo "in a complete and enthralling silence".<sup>1</sup>

The Convention itself was a representative and distinguished gathering of intellectuals and educationists of India who felt concerned about the future. In her inaugural message, the Mother said:

"Sri Aurobindo is present in our midst, and with all the power of his creative genius he presides over the formation of the University Centre which for years he considered as one of the best means of preparing the future humanity to receive the supramental light that will transform the elite of today into a new race manifesting upon earth the new light and force and life".<sup>2</sup>

In the course of his presidential address, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee remarked that Indians had lost track of their real culture and seem to have opted for "a base hedonistic view of life". In that bleak situation, the establishment of a university "where the eternal verities of life will be taught and re-taught to a stricken people" was of paramount relevance. "I am sure", he concluded, "the proposed University will symbolise the world's urge for a new spiritual rebirth; it will stand out as an oasis amidst the barren tracts that breed jealousies, suspicions and petty conflicts." The question had been posed earlier when the idea of the Convention was mooted whether, after all, a memorial to Sri Aurobindo should not take the form of a Yoga Institute "carried on under the guidance of great Indian Yogis" instead of a modern University. But clearly Sri Aurobindo himself had discussed the university idea with the Mother, and had also once told Surendra Mohan Ghose that it was intended to develop the School and the Ashram into a university that was as large as life, and comprehended the past, present and the future. Where else except in an Ashram of the Vedic type could boys and girls receive the blessings of an

integral education? And such an Ashram being already there in Pondicherry — a sanctified spot with its roots supposedly in the Vedic past — that was also the right place for the location of the proposed university. Another speaker, Somnath Maitra, affirmed:

“The new university will be informed by the spirit of our great Master, the spirit of the Life Divine. It will not only arrange for the study and propagation of his teachings and take steps to bring humanity nearer to the realisation of his supreme ideal of the perfectly integrated life, but it will also be invisibly fashioned and moulded at every turn by a sense of his deathless Presence”.

Dr. Kalidas Nag, after reviewing the different phases of Sri Aurobindo’s career devoted respectively to the political liberation of Asia, the intellectual liberation of his epoch and the spiritual liberation of the world, concluded his brilliant address with the peroration:

“Thus, Sri Aurobindo is the University pointing to a radically new conception of the term. It should not be a mere copy of any of the universities of India or abroad. Sri Aurobindo University should aspire to provide the training ground for youths who would build up a new personality in a new universe”.

The Convention concluded on 25 April. The consensus was that the emphasis in the proposed university should be on quality, not quantity in terms of size and numbers; that, of the two kinds of knowledge — that obtained by an approach from the outside through the intellect and that obtained from within by spiritual realisation — the proposed university should restore to the latter its rightful place and help the pupils to receive integral rather than piecemeal education; and, finally, that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother — their thought, their personality, their influence, their yogic direction — should give the needed dynamism and creative unity to the forthcoming university. As if anticipating this consensus, Salvador de Madariaga had said in his message to the Convention:

“The analytical age is coming to its close...The age of synthesis is about to begin. And how could it begin if no high centre of perspective were provided for all the parts to fall in into harmony”?

And Nolini Kanta Gupta, Secretary of the Ashram, laid the right stress when he said that the ideal before the sponsors of the University would be “nothing less than the founding of a new mankind upon earth - with a new life and a new consciousness”.<sup>3</sup>

It may be added that there was no reference to the proposed University in the Mother’s talks in the Playground. It was as though she had convened the Memorial Conference more as a concession to the traditional way of doing

such things than because she expected spectacular results from the meeting or the resolutions. Unless institutions were built from within, and reared on the foundations of the Spirit, they would be pitiful edifices indeed. Besides, even as not walls but men make a city, so too not buildings nor brave speeches make a university but boys and girls and their teachers. And the Mother found the nucleus of her vision of a university in her evening Playground audiences, and she was content.

## II

The proposed International University Centre was visualised from the very beginning as an extension, a heightening and a deepening, of the Ashram School itself; an organic growth, in fact, and the soul's progressive self-finding in the fullness of time. The athletics and sports of July-August were followed by the eighth anniversary of the School which began on 1 December 1951, and the celebrations included recitations of Sri Aurobindo's *Hymn to Durga* and from the Mother's *Prayers*, as also a dance-rendering of her "Radha's Prayer". Then came the 5<sup>th</sup> December, and the interim from 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>, recalling the time of Sri Aurobindo's body lying in state a year earlier and the *mahasamadhi*. His Presence, for all that it was unseen, was a felt beneficent power. Sadhaks, children, visitors — the Mother herself — enacted their paean of gratitude to the Master who had "willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all" for present and future humanity. Around the Samadhi under the Service Tree, the unceasing procession of devotees seemed to affirm unconsciously the sentiments in J. Vijayatunga's apostrophe wrung from him soon after the Master's passing on 5 December 1950:

"Are we sad today? Is the earth dark without light?  
Nay, Master, Thou didst not live in vain,  
Thy life sublime and austere was not spent  
For nought...Holding to the hem  
Of Thy garment we shall raise ourselves  
To High Heaven, by Thy Grace..."

For the New Year, 1952, the Mother distributed an apposite message:

"O Lord, Thou hast decided to test the quality of our faith and to pass our sincerity on Thy touchstone. Grant that we come out greater and purer from the ordeal".<sup>4</sup>

Faith, sincerity — without these nothing great, nothing noble, could be attempted or attained. The Mother had issued the call for support to the International University idea, but the response from the outside world was pitifully lukewarm. People still weighed the Mother's idea in the balance of mentalised categories, and found it wanting. While she was for a bold leap

into the future, the timid majority were slaves of the present and the past. This adventure into the infinitudes of the future was certainly going to be difficult, but with faith and sincerity, the pioneers— the barrier-breakers — could safely come through, whatever the intervening trials and ordeals.

The Mother accordingly lost no time and inaugurated the International University Centre on 6 January 1952. On that day the pupils were given a prayer that was also an inspired definition of the true goal of education:

“Make of us the hero warriors we aspire to become. May we fight successfully the great battle of the future that is to be born, against the past that seeks to endure; so that the new things may manifest and we be ready to receive them”.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, perfect the human instrument into a harmony of structure, aim and function; win the battle of the future so that the New may manifest without hindrance, and so that the children of today may prove to be the pioneers and pathfinders of the future. It is not simply a question of acquiring a skill or qualifying for a degree or a diploma; it is rather an adventure to be undertaken, a battle to be fought, so that the future may be won. For the hero warriors, however, it will be both an outer struggle with the protagonists of the past and an inner battle of knowledge to win the new consciousness and achieve self-transformation. Everyone has to wrestle, late or soon, with the ego’s propensity to separativity, selfishness, narrowness, stupidity and fear, put the miserable ego in its place, and bring into the forefront the now behind-the-scenes psychic being which alone is touched with the elemental power of the Spirit. It is thus that the psychic being should be awakened and invoked and installed as “the leader of the march set in our front”.

### III

Not long after the inauguration of the University Centre, K. M. Munshi paid his second visit to the Ashram on 12 March 1952. He had seen and conversed with the Mother during his earlier visit in July 1950, but at that time he was rather more engrossed with the sublime Master. Now he came closer to the Mother, and watched her with reverent attention, and also conversed freely with her. As he wrote later, recalling his impressions:

“A tennis-playing, silk-garmented lady of seventy-five, carrying a tenuous veil and saluting the Ashramites at the march past day after day was not exactly a symbol of spirituality to the normal Indian mind. Was she a miracle-worker or just an artist? Was she carrying forward the Master’s work? Was this how it should be carried on”?<sup>6</sup>

At the Playground, where she sat on a high-backed chair, her feet resting on a footstool, Munshi found her eyes “transparent, almost clear as crystal”. Of

particular significance was the Spiritual Map of India, done in bas-relief in green on the wall of the Playground, with the Mother's symbol at the centre. Transcending the political divisions, the geographical contours of the map — comprising undivided India, Nepal, Burma and Ceylon — boldly projected the spiritual entity that was — and is — and will always be the real India with her divine role. As the Mother sat with this map for a backdrop, her very presence was an inspiration. And what if she played tennis and received the salute at the march past? The right answer came to him at last:

“We ourselves put on silks, eat machine-ground flour, play tennis; but for our spiritual uplift we want only ways considered acceptable five thousand years ago...

If the spirit has to permeate and transform life, it must be through life as we live it; and that is perhaps the Ashram's speciality”.<sup>7</sup>

In the course of their conversation, when the talk turned on Sri Aurobindo's vision of India's role in the future, the Mother said with strident emphasis:

“Sri Aurobindo is still alive, as living as ever and will continue to live... We are determined — he and I — to complete the work he lived for... India must maintain the spiritual leadership of the world. If she does not, she will collapse, and with her will go the whole world”.

Everything he saw, everything he heard, duly impressed him, and he found the Ashram “a unique experiment... which enabled people to live a self-contained community life”, and he seems to have told a friend, Charupada: “If the world were to be drowned in a flood again, you needn't have a Noah's Ark, if the Ashram is saved. It would be sufficient to set up the world again”.<sup>8</sup>

As regards the University Centre, the Mother confided to Munshi that she was building up “slowly, step by step, but firmly”. For one thing, the entire adventure of education from Kindergarten to the Higher Course was a single spectrum; and the whole arc, from physical to spiritual, was in integral whole. If in May 1951, she had opened the Sports Ground, now on 24 April 1952, she opened a section of the University Centre which was to house the temporary library and music and dance room and some additional classrooms. Then she opened the weight-lifting and body-building sections of the gymnasium at the Playground.<sup>9</sup> The divers limbs of the new International Centre thus started taking their significant shapes and performing their allotted functions. The Mother herself had at no time any doubt whatsoever regarding the crucial role the International Centre was expected to play in the fulfilment of Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future man. As she wrote a year hence to Surendra Nath Jauhar:

“I am perfectly sure, I am quite confident, there is not the slightest doubt in my mind, that this University, which is being established here, will be the greatest seat of knowledge upon earth.

It may take fifty years, it may take a hundred years, and you may doubt about my being there; I may be there or not, but these children of mine will be there to carry out my work.

And those who collaborate in this divine work today will have the joy and pride of having participated in such an exceptional achievement”.<sup>10</sup>

A new seed, the seed of integral knowledge, was being sown; and the time of sprouting and foliage and flowering would come, and the harvesting too — in good time — of the New Life, the supramental manifestation upon the earth and the transfiguration of humanity.

## References

1. *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education*, Aug 51, Report on the Quarter.
2. *Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol.12, p. 112
3. *The Advent*, Aug 51, p. 208ff
4. *Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol.15, p. 183
5. *ibid.*, p. 112
6. *Mother India*, Sep-52, p. 4
7. *ibid.*, p. 6
8. *ibid.*, p. 5
9. *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education*, Aug-52, p. 90
10. *Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol.12, p. 112

### Regarding ‘Compulsion’ in Physical Education

*Mother: Compulsion is necessary.*

*If you want to remain in the Group, you have to obey the Group discipline. That is quite reasonable. I will tell you one thing: without discipline, strict discipline, no progress can be made in life. No yoga is possible without it. You can't take one step forward without strict discipline. You may utter a mantra for a hundred years, but without discipline you won't be able to see beyond the tip of your nose.*

Nirodbaran, *Memorable Contacts with the Mother*, pp.83-4