# MOTHER'S CHRONICLES

# BOOK ONE

# MIRRA

by

SUJATA NAHAR

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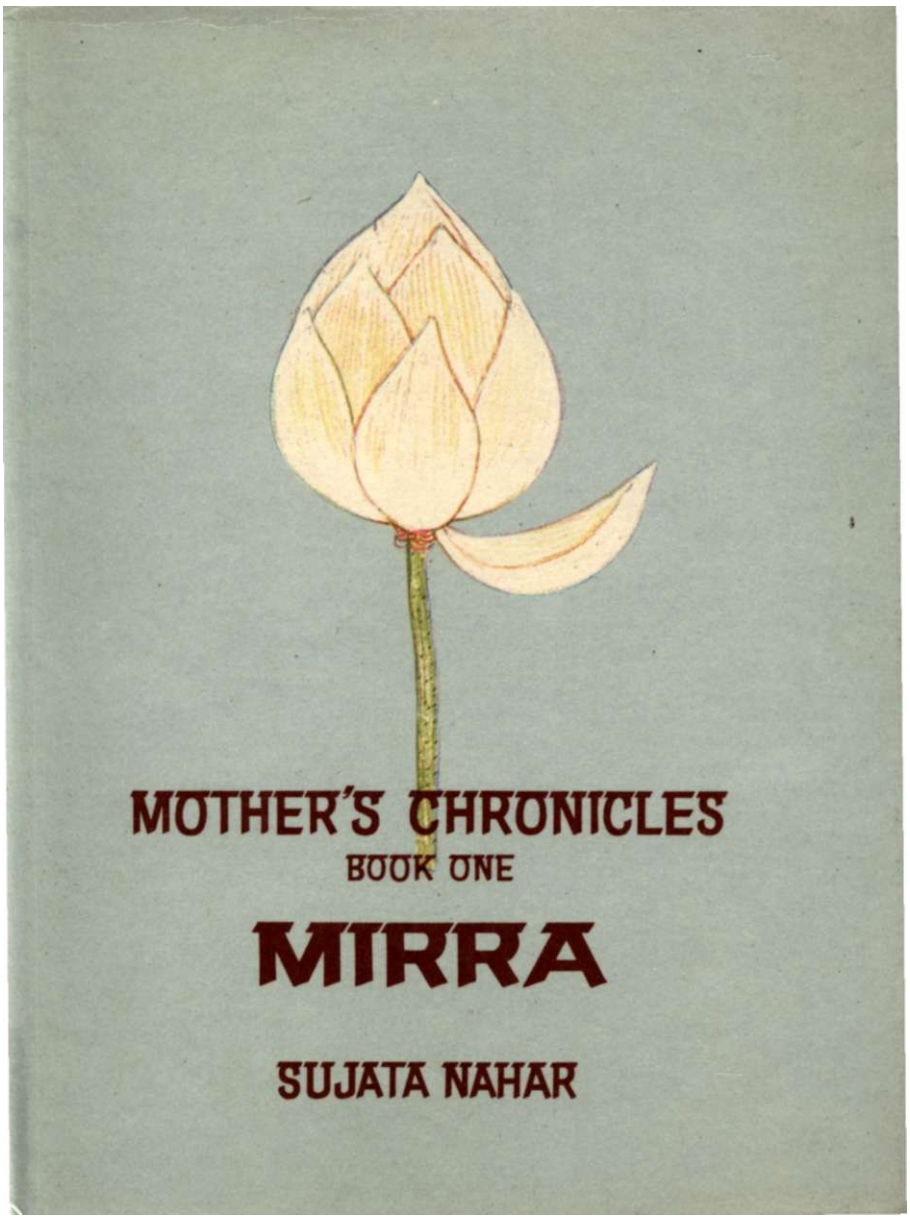


# Mother's Chronicles

**book one**

# MIRRA

**by**

**Sujata Nahar**

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**To be published in the series:**

**Book Two: MIRRA THE ARTIST**
**Book Three: MIRRA THE OCCULTIST**
**Book Four: MIRRA AND SRI AUROBINDO**
**Book Five : MIRRA IN JAPAN**
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**MOTHER'S CHRONICLES**

*To pull her out of that tomb*
*was somehow our ambition.*
*Sujata — Satprem*
April 30, 1984

## *Acknowledgement*

*The material in this book is drawn mostly from Satprem's works.*

*Satprem was Mother's confidant for over 17 years. From their taped conversations was born MOTHER'S AGENDA, in volumes.*

*Finally, it is due to his encouragement that this book was written.*

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## *A Word With You, Please!*

I have been asked to say something about myself: who I am, what prompted me to share with you Mother's story, how I met Mother in the first place, and so on and so forth. Well, I am not inclined to spill all the beans at this stage. You will soon find out for yourself some of the answers as you go on with the Real Story.

For now, suffice it to say that I am an elderly lady. But when I first met Mother I was just nine. Then, soon after, she took me under her wing. Up until 1973, when I was forty-eight years old, I lived securely with Mother, cocooned in the warmth of her love and affection. It is to the feast of Mother's love that you are invited.

I was born in Calcutta in the house of my grandfather, P. C. Nahar. Though a lawyer by profession, it was his wide-ranging cultural activity that made him a well-known figure all over India. These activities embraced a variety of spheres: education, literature, collections of all kinds, from matchbox labels to sculptures. He was also a social reformer. But above all, he was a devout Jain. My father, P. S. Nahar, was his fifth child of nine. My father wanted his children — we were eight —to have a broader education. To that end we were taken to Santiniketan, the campus of poet Rabindranath Tagore's "Vishwabharati" (World University). Our family lived in the house of Tagore's



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eldest brother which our father had rented. Thus, our formative years were spent in a clean open air, and we imbibed the cultural and artistic atmosphere prevailing there under the influence of the poet himself, and others, like the great artist Nandalal Bose. As was to be expected, we children spent more than half our time monkeying up trees.

Then my mother, S. K. Nahar, died. My father, who had built his world around her, suddenly found himself without a base. He was only thirty-four. Although pressured, he refused to

remarry. No, he wanted another kind of life. As it was, from his childhood he had been greatly attracted to sadhus and sannyasins. So now he went in search of a Master, someone who could guide him to his inner life, who could reveal to him the purpose of his being on earth. He started travelling all over India.

On his way down south, to the magnificent temple of Rameswaram, he halted at Pondicherry. There, in that French enclave, lived Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo was the great Bengali revolutionary leader of the early decade of this century. He had been jailed by the British, but they could not bring enough evidence against him to satisfy the judge. So, after one year in prison, he was released. But the British government did not give up. They soon got ready to rearrest Sri Aurobindo on some other trumped-up charges. It was then that Sri Aurobindo quietly left Calcutta and went away to Pondicherry, not only to evade arrest, but to pursue the experiences he had had while in prison.

There, in the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo, my father met



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Mother. In Sri Aurobindo and Mother he found the Guides he was seeking. And, as is natural with fathers, he wanted his children also to meet Sri Aurobindo and Mother. That is how we brothers and sisters came into contact with Them. Finally, one by one, we chose to stay under the wing of Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

They certainly did not allow us to run wild —if we were to do yoga, we needed discipline —but kept a vigilant eye on us young people and even arranged for our education. We had different tutors for different subjects. An English lady taught us English and French, so that we could read in the original the books written by Sri Aurobindo and Mother. A French gentleman, P. B. de Saint-Hilaire, was our science and maths teacher. We knew him as "Pavitra" (the pure one). A product of the *Ecole Polytechnique* of Paris, he was entrusted with running a variety of departments in the Ashram. As these began to get expanded, my brothers and I were quickly roped in, and very soon he left the day-to-day running of the affairs in our hands. My two younger sisters taught at the Ashram School, and during a number of years I was his personal secretary. Among other things, his office was responsible for the correspondence of Sri Aurobindo and Mother with the overseas disciples.

Then Satprem arrived on the scene. By this time Mother was getting pretty fed up with the unresponsiveness of the youth in the Ashram. She had wanted to mould them into a new shape, but these young people were not much interested in the Life Divine that Sri Aurobindo and Mother wanted to embody upon this earth. So Mother was glad when Satprem came.



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He was fresh from the Amazonian jungle, with a rebellious heart for all existing human ways—had he not suffered inhumanly in the Nazi concentration camps where he was imprisoned as a member of the French Resistance, just as he turned twenty? He was ready to give anything a try. He was hungry for something ELSE. In Satprem, Mother found the stuff she could mould —a stuff honest enough to let itself be moulded. As it happened, he had a natural mastery over the French language. That gift served as a pretext; Mother started calling him in Pavitra's office in order to consult him. She would tell him things from the past or the present, events in her own life, to illustrate some points or in answer to his questions. As their intimacy grew, as Satprem grew more and more understanding of what was at stake, Mother confided more and more what was REALLY happening to her, taking him along with her in to the future of the human species, describing to him the topography of the word she was exploring. Their recorded talks (in French) have been published in 13 volume as MOTHER'S AGENDA.

As far as possible, I have tried to let Mother herself speak of her own life. All I have done was to put these events in as chronological an order as possible.

Enough of these preliminaries.
On with the Real Story.



## *Prologue*

Matter.
What is the reality of Matter ?

"I was only a child," Mother narrated to us one day, "when I was told that everything is 'atoms' (that was the term used in those days). They said, 'You see this table? You think it's a table, that it's solid and it's wood-well, it is only atoms moving about.' I remember, the first time I was told

that, it made a kind of revolution in my head, bringing such a feeling of the complete unreality of all appearances. All at once I said, 'But, if it's like that then nothing is true!

Mother was no more than fourteen or fifteen years old when she had that decisive experience.

This "revolution in my head" led Mother to the quest of Real Matter. For over eighty years she relentlessly hunted down the falsehood of appearances. And she found Real Matter, the supreme Reality hidden in the centre of the atom.

Before we embark with her on this hunt and this quest, let us cast a glance at her background, which will help us to better understand all that was to follow.



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# *1*

# *Mira Ismalun*

Little Mirra's (with two r's) grandmother was quite a character. There was something very sparkling and beguiling in Mira (with one r) Ismalun. And Mother had her own share of it.

Mira Ismalun was born in Cairo in 1830, on December 18.

But the Ismaluns had also some roots in the old Ural-Altaic region of Hungary, and Mira Ismalun's father, Said Pinto, although Egyptian, traced back his roots to Spain. Protean winds blew over little Mirra's cradle, those from the Urals mingling with the mysteries of the Valley of the Kings and the fiery Iberia. Mother has many roots, very ancient roots, and perhaps extending everywhere. "I am millions of years old, and I am waiting," she said during these



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last years, with a look in her eyes that seemed to carry the burden of the world and all the resistances of her earthly children. It reminds us of Walter Pater's moving study on Mona Lisa, with whom Mother had strange affinities and shared a certain smile: "She is older than the rocks among which she sits . . . she has been dead many times and learned the secret of the grave.... 1830.

Mehemet Ali is Viceroy of Egypt. The Suez Canal has not yet been dug. The Pasha's armies are rebelling against the yoke of the Ottoman Empire. A feudalistic Egypt confronts the modern world while still remembering Bonaparte. But Bonaparte's tempest had possibly left something in the air, for Mira Ismalun, too, lost no time in casting off the iron collar.

At the age of thirteen, in the wise and well-bred fashion of those days, she married a banker, after meeting her fiancé on a boat on the Nile. "He offered

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* Walter Pater, *The Renaissance Studies in Art and Poetry (Macmillan,1912, p.130).*



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me a diadem of great value and a little basket of strawberries," she recounts in her *Memoirs,* as delightful and funny as they are brief, which she dictated in French to her grandson, Governor Alfassa, when she was seventy-six years old. Our guess is that she appreciated the strawberries more than the diadem.

At the age of twenty she embarked for Italy, a daring act if we recall the situation of women in the Middle East more than a century ago. "I spoke only Arabic, wore my Egyptian dress and travelled alone with my two children and a governess, while my husband remained in Egypt. I was the first Egyptian woman to venture out of Egypt in this manner.... I was found positively ravishing," she notes all the same, "in my sky-blue Egyptian robe, embroidered all over with gold and real pearls." She also sported a "small tarboosh worn very low, with a big gold tassel.... But I didn't know the language, so I vowed to learn it quickly." Which she did, and French too, for this lady was decidedly unusual, indeed a personage.

She made the acquaintance of the Grand Duke, "who sent me flowers every day, as did Rossini, the



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composer. But although well-bred and even strict," she adds with ingenuity, coquetry blending with wit, "I was not insensitive to all these attentions."

As for her strictness, we don't know. But we do know how exceptionally well she understood life, loved it frankly, and was endowed with a very universal spirit for which narrow patriotic frontiers seemed a vain and cumbersome contrivance.

She sent her eldest son to a boarding school in Vienna, herself commuting between Cairo and Europe, and later dropped off a second, then a third, son at *College Chaptal* in Paris. "I was wild about Paris. My temperament and character being original, it seemed to me quite permissible to go about everywhere only with Elvire [her eldest daughter]. But as my attire was very elegant and rather conspicuous, wherever I went I attracted a great deal of attention."

But the attention was not due to her dress and her looks alone. For Mira Ismalun was no featherbrain. She read Renan, Taine, Nietzsche, Darwin. She was also endowed with a remarkable poise (exactly like Mother) and knew how to reconcile opposites:



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"One of my most consistent character traits has been to keep the head and heart in a constant, reciprocal equilibrium, thus avoiding to get involved in the excesses of either.... As for my finances, I took great care to balance my income with my expenditures." Finding out that back in Egypt the princesses in their harems were dying to know about Parisian life, she had the brilliant idea of combining the useful with the agreeable, and packed her suitcases with the latest creations from *Worth,* jewellery from rue de la Paix, perfumes and chronicles —thus defraying the expenses of her own extravagances. "Everywhere I went, I was hailed and catered to like a queen. My dignified air, my strict comportment, my stunning wardrobe and my lavish expenditures placed me on a veritable pedestal." She also brought back oil-paintings; for the little princesses were very eager to see their own portraits, with their full array of jewellery, faithful reproductions of their photographs by the finest Parisian artists. So it was that Mira Ismalun mingled with the *Tout-Paris,* the Paris of the artists and the atelier of Vienot and Edouard



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Morisset, who was to become the father of young Mirra's husband.

Mira Ismalun's understanding of life made her liberal-minded. She had little concern for narrow patriotic frontiers, nor did she allow herself to get bogged down in religion. She let her children pursue freely their own separate ways. For instance, when she realized that Elvire, her eldest daughter, had been converted to Catholicism by a very devout chambermaid, she never reproached her daughter, but promptly set about finding Elvire a husband with similar beliefs, because it made her very happy to do so. "I was the first person in Egypt," she observes, "who allowed her daughter to marry a Catholic [not an Egyptian, let us point out, but an Italian, to boot]. This was much frowned upon in our circle, and I was criticized; some family members even harboured resentment against me for a time. It was a civil marriage," she adds, the convivial side being never absent in her, "conducted at the Italian Consulate; the ceremony was quite lovely and intimate, and I wore a magnificent pearl-grey gown of faille. . . .



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After the ceremony Elvire, with her husband and their witnesses, went to the church, and I pretended not to notice anything. Very liberal in my ideas, I always felt the better for it."

The liberalness of ideas in France had struck a deep chord in her.

Then came the turn of her second daughter, Mathilde, who was destined to be Mother's mother. Mira Ismalun let her choose her own husband. Thus Mathilde Ismalun married a Turk by the name of Maurice Alfassa, a banker by profession. The marriage took place in Alexandria in 1874. "It was celebrated in grand style in the governmental palace," Mira Ismalun said in her charming way, "the Viceroy as well as all the Ministers attended. I had a magnificent gown and they found me more beautiful than my daughter."

Finally she settled down in France.

She stayed long enough in Egypt, however, to be present at the inauguration of the Suez Canal: "Monsieur de Lesseps came to fetch me with a cavalry escort." M. de Lesseps was an accomplished rider and his horsemanship had impressed even the Arabs. So,



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the two rode to the glittering reception given by Ismail Pasha in the recently built palace overlooking the new town on the canal bank, named Ismailia after the Khedive.

The canal was filled with the ships in which many crowned heads of Europe had sailed to the inauguration of the Suez Canal. But the pride of place went to the magnificent *l'Aigle* which had brought from France Empress Eugenie, wife of Napoleon III, along with Ferdinand de Lesseps. For it was indeed thanks to the royal backing that de Lesseps could complete his project.

But as they rode, M. de Lesseps' thoughts must have turned to his friend, prince Said, who had died before completion of the canal. In his stead, his nephew, Ismail Pasha (who had taken the title of Khedive when he ascended the throne), was now declaring the Canal open.

Mira Ismalun knew how tenaciously Ferdinand de Lesseps had held on to his project through many ups and downs. Had he, perhaps, inherited Napoleon Bonaparte's dream? In 1798 Napoleon had discovered



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the ancient canal of the Pharaohs, lost in the mists of time. Now it was 1869. How long dreams take to mature! So Mira Ismalun must have lent a very sympathetic ear to the sixty-four-year-old Ferdinand de Lesseps as he spoke to her of the images that flitted through his white-haired head:

— 1854, November 15: A rainbow in the early morning sky, filling him with the hope of fulfilling his long-cherished dream. The ride on horseback to the camp of Prince Said, who succeeded his father, Mehemet Ali, as the Viceroy of Egypt. Obtaining his permission to dig the Suez Canal.

— 1859, April 25: Taking hold of a spade and starting to dig near the bay of Pelusium. Passing on the spade to the team of his engineers and of about hundred men. Each in turn digging up a spadeful of earth. A quiet, unheralded beginning for an enormous project that took ten years to complete and an army of professionals working with heavy equipment.

— 1869, August 15: The Red Sea joins the Mediterranean.

— 1869, November 17: Today, the road to India

is opened. A voyage of four months is now shortened to seventeen days.

Friends of such calibre had Mira Ismalun. Men capable of materializing their vision. And these men — and women —had a profound respect and admiration for her.

This little Arabian lady who took Paris by storm with her sky-blue pourpoint and her tarboosh tipped low, who read *The Origin of Species* and created havoc in the Grand Hotel, finally retired to Nice, where she spent the last years of her life, shuttling between the Mediterranean and the "calm shores of Lake Geneva." "After having frequented galas and theatres, swept through all the great capitals and spas, lived on intimate terms with celebrities —a grand existence in which I had no worry other than looking after my affairs and satisfying, if not my caprice, at least the legitimate desires of *la belle vie —I* had the wisdom to resign myself to a somewhat more modest and tranquil life. . . ." Her husband "generally" accompanied her, she notes prosaically. "He worshipped me," which does not surprise us.



But the most unexpected in this impetuous and irresistible life, impatient of all frontiers, although emerging from the Valley of the Nile, is a sudden cry that broke from her lips at the end of this gala jouney, as though all limits were unacceptable to her, including those of death: "Frankly speaking, at seventy-six I scarcely like old age, life is still beautiful to me . . . and I proclaim with Goethe, 'Beyond the tombs, forward!' "

From such seed came Mother.



## *2*

## *Mathilde and Barine*

Mathilde, Mira Ismalun's second daughter, was born in Alexandria in 1857, and just like her mother, on December 18.

As we have seen, in 1874, on June 18, at the age of seventeen, she had married in great pomp a young Turk, Maurice Alfassa. He was born in Adrianople in 1843. After their marriage the couple moved to Turkey, where Mathilde gave birth to their first child. But the infant died at the age of two months. The parents returned to Egypt.

Mathilde found Egypt stifling. She liked simplicity — all the pomp and pageantry of the court of Egypt disgusted her. The iron collar enforced on the women of those days had become intolerable to her —she believed in human dignity. So, one fine day, to the



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utter scandal of all the good people, young Mathilde refused to bow to the Khedive. She had to pack her bags.

That is how it came about that the Alfassa family, Maurice, Mathilde and Matteo — for by this time they had had another child —embarked for France, in 1877.

"It is curious," Mother mused, speaking of Mathilde, "I say 'curious' because it is due to her that I took birth in this body, that it was chosen. When she was very young she had a great aspiration. She was exactly twenty when I was born. I was her third child. The first was a son who died in Turkey when he was two months old, I think. They vaccinated him against smallpox and poisoned him." Mother added ruefully, "God knows what happened! Anyway, he died of convulsions. Next was my brother. He was born in Egypt, in Alexandria. And then I, born in Paris when she was exactly twenty years old."

Paris, the heartbeat of France.

"She was exactly twenty. At that time—mainly after the death of the first child —there was a kind of GREAT aspiration in her: her children had to be 'the



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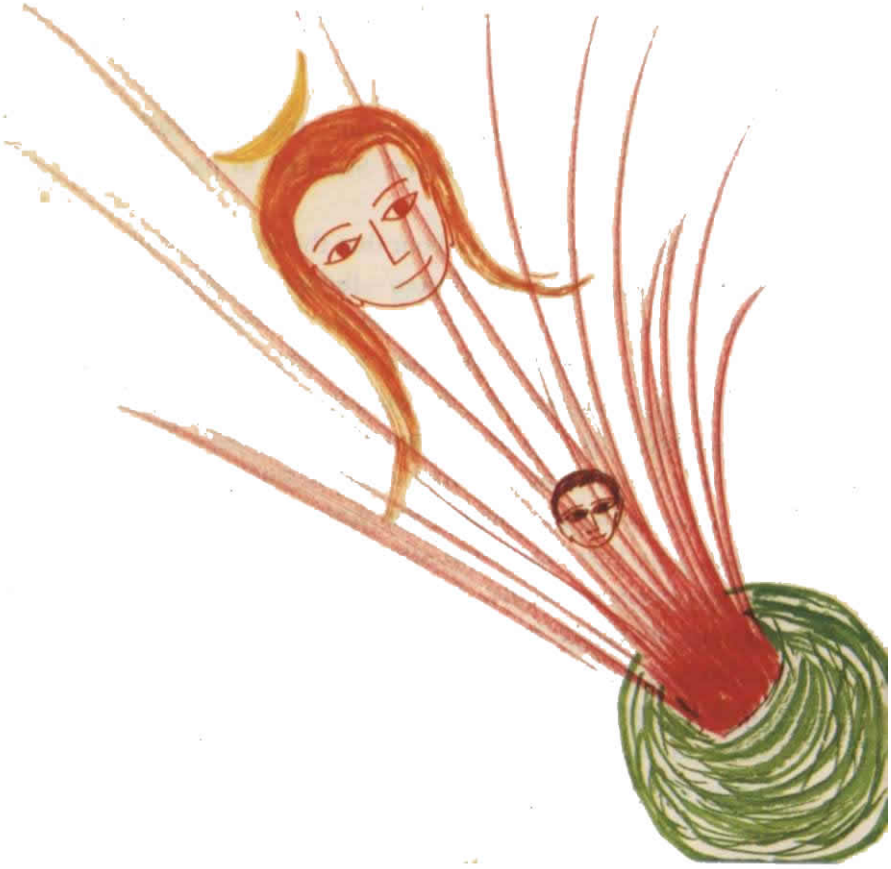

*"At that time, there was a kind of GREAT aspiration in my mother."*

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best in the world.' It wasn't ambition, I don't know what it was." Mathilde was strict but straightforward, progressist but headstrong. "And what a will she had!" Mother exclaimed. "My mother had a tremendous will! She was like an iron bar, utterly impervious to any outside influence. Once she had made up her mind, her mind was made up; even if someone were dying in front of her, she would not have budged! So, she had made up her mind: 'My children will be the best in the world.' " As we shall see, Mathilde succeeded wonderfully with her two children. "One thing she had, a sense of progress. She felt that the world was progressing, and that we had to be better than all that had come before us —that was enough."

That set Mother thinking, "That was enough, it's curious."

This sense of progress, of human progress, made Mathilde a Communist at a time when well-bred young ladies were busy knitting their trousseaux. And Communist she remained —doubtless because she had got it into her head to do so —till the age of eighty-seven, when she passed away in 1944. To be sure, her



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communism was of a special brand. "I remember," said Mother in 1970, "long, long ago, my mother had started a poultry (or something similar), to supplement her income. This goes back some fifty or sixty years. Well, she was very simple and uncomplicated, she had set up her business and was selling her chickens, eggs, etc., spending the money personally and running the whole business." When, one day, a plaguy tax collector got it into *his* head to make Mathilde pay taxes —not only on the current eggs but on all the eggs she had sold to date. "Then, one fine day," Mother chuckled, "she was called upon to submit accounts! She barely escaped a very severe penalty because she had used the money for her own expenses. She never understood! ... I found it very amusing." Which, however, did not prevent Mother from seeing the plain absurdity of all governmental and political systems. "You know," she said to Satprem, "I find it a queer turn of mind. You work —for what? Normally, to earn your living —it is illegal. You must work, but the business is in no way your personal affair. You have no right to draw your own expenses from the industry



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you have set up yourself!" Mother concluded, "The stupidity of the world is unparalleled."

The uncomplicated Mathilde could never understand. She must have told the tax collector, "Look here, these are *my* chickens!"

True, Mathilde was simple, but she was by no means uncultured. The young lady from Alexandria was as well read as her mother who admired Goethe, and considerably more intellectual. Life was seen by her as a set of mathematical theorems to be perpetually and rigorously demonstrated: it had to be exact and tend imperturbably towards some ideal asymptote,

"But she was in adoration before my brother," Mother laughed mockingly. "My mother scorned all religious sentiment as a weakness and superstition, and she absolutely repudiated the invisible. 'It's all brain disease,' she would say. But she could just as well say, 'Oh, my Matteo is my God, it is he who is my God.' And she truly treated him like a god. She left



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him only when he got married, because really she could not very well continue to follow him around!"

But all the same, even Matteo, the adored son, had to toe the line. "I was reared by an ascetic and stoical mother, you see," Mother commented to Satprem on another occasion, "who was like an iron bar. When we were very small, my brother and I, she spent her time dinning into our ears that one is not on earth to have a good time, that it is constant hell, but one has to put up with it, and the only satisfaction to be got out of life is in doing one's duty."

Mother added appreciatively, "A splendid education, my child!"

And Maurice Alfassa? Why did Mother choose him as her father? "There was another reason," Mother went on. "My father had a wonderful health, and was he strong! What a stability! He wasn't tall but stocky. He had done all his studies in Austria (in those days French was widely spoken in Austria, but he also knew German, he knew English, Italian, Turkish . . .); and there he learned to ride horses in a fantastic manner: he was so strong that he could bring a horse



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to its knees simply by pressing his legs into its sides. With a punch he could break anything whatsoever, even one of those big silver five-franc pieces current in those days: one blow with the fist —broken in two. Strangely enough, he looked Russian. I don't know why. They called him Barine. What a stability! An extraordinary physical poise! And not only did this man know all those languages, but I have never seen such a head for arithmetic. Never. He did accounts like child's play, effortlessly —accounts with hundreds of digits! And you know what," Mother smiled, "he loved birds! He had a room to himself in our apartment (for my mother could not much suffer him), he had his own room and in it he kept a big cage . . . full of canaries! And all the day long he would keep the windows closed, leaving all the canaries loose."

Well, can't a mathematician be as imaginative as a poet? Why not? Does he not unveil for us the power and the rhythm of NUMBER as the primeval poetry of the word?

"And could he tell stories! [There we have the source of Mother's own storytelling genius.] He must



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have read every novel in print, I think, any and every story —fantastic adventure stories. He loved adventures. When we were kids he would let us come into his room early in the morning, while he was still in bed, and tell us stories. Stories from the books he had read. But instead of telling us that the stories came from books, he narrated them as his own! So he had had extraordinary adventures —with brigands, with wild beasts. . . . Any story he picked up was narrated as his own. We, of course, enjoyed it hugely!"

Thus, in spite of stoical Mathilde, the children had fun with their father: "My father loved the circus." Barine would take little Mirra to the circus, both of them enjoying it equally in their own fashion. He was thirty-five when Mirra was born, and he adored his daughter.

"I can recall but one instance when I took things seriously, or rather I took on a serious AIR," said Mother. "It involved my brother, who was still quite young. My brother may have been twelve years old or less —ten, and I eight . . .no, nine and eleven, more likely —youngsters. One day my brother got carried



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away —he was quick to anger, was outspoken and a bit cheeky —he talked back to my father (I don't know what about, can't remember now). My father got furious and put him across his knees. My father was an extremely strong man, I mean physically strong. So then, he had taken my brother across his knees and was spanking him. He had pulled down Matteo's pants and was spanking him." Seeing the scene in her mind's eye, Mother smiled. "I enter —it was taking place in the dining room, my father was sitting on a sofa and spanking him. I see this, I see my father, I look at him, I say to myself, 'This man is mad!' ... I draw myself to my full height and tell him, 'You stop at once or I leave the house.' I said it with so much seriousness, oh! 'Papa, if ever you do this again, I leave the house.' And I was determined. And the father," Mother shook her head,

"my father was flabbergasted. I said it with such authority, my child!" Mother smiled at Satprem. "He stopped and never did it again."

From such seeds came Mother.



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*Matteo with Mirra*

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# *3*

# *Matteo*

Matteo, Mother's brother, was born in Alexandria on July 13, 1876. As a barely one-year-old infant, he was taken to France by his parents. Although the Alfassas became naturalized French citizens only in 1890 (August 28), still Matteo went to school in France, as did his little sister Mirra. He was eighteen when he entered the *Ecole Polytechnique,* the prestigious Parisian high-technology seat of learning which churns out the cream of French engineers, administrators, etc.

Coming out, Matteo was posted to the Martinique, an overseas department of France. Martinique is an island off the Windward group, in the West Indies. A street there still bears his name.

Then, in 1900, Matteo went to New Caledonia as the Navy's Supply Officer. Mathilde had accompanied



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her adored son. In 1905, soon after his return from New Caledonia, he married. His wife, Eva Brosse, was born in 1883. They had two daughters, Simone and Janine, and a son, Etienne. The son followed in his father's footsteps and became a Polytechnician, he too! Etienne specialized in railway engineering; he worked in the Congo as a director of Railways (of the Congo-Océanie line). He is now a retired engineer of the State Railways, the SNCF. Matteo's children were almost toddlers when Mother left France in 1914. But one of his granddaughters came to Pondicherry in the mid-fifties with her Japanese husband, to see her "great-aunt."

In 1919, Matteo was appointed Governor of the Congo in Central Africa. Then, in 1934, he became the Governor of French Equatorial Africa. While the parents were away in Africa the three children lived with their grandmother. Mathilde looked after them well. Even today, Etienne and his sisters have kept a vivid and deep impression of their grandmother as an exceptional woman.*

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* It is through the dilligence of our friend Rachel Neuville that the information on Matteo's family was obtained.



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The first eighteen years of Matteo's life were inextricably linked with his sister Mirra's. "A fright-fully serious boy," Mother said laughingly to Satprem, "and fright-fully studious, oh, it

was frightful! Nevertheless a very strong character, strong-willed. And interesting. There was something interesting in him. When he was studying to enter the *Polytechnique* I studied with him, it interested me. We were very close, very (only eighteen months separated us). He was very violent, but had a tremendous strength of character."

Mother was very fond of her brother and often told us stories from her childhood in which Matteo figured, naturally. I wonder if it was the sight of my brother Abhay and me that called up memories of her brother and herself? As she went to and fro from her boudoir to Pavitra's office, Mother constantly saw us in Pavitra's Laboratory, working together. Abhay may have been seventeen or eighteen and I was twenty months his junior. He loved mathematics, while I liked geometry. We attended the same class taken by Pavitra. We were a medley crowd learning mathematics —our ages ranged from the early teens to over thirty. My



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brother and I, the best of friends, worked together in harmony. Mother frequently stopped to see what we were making: bath salts for Sri Aurobindo or for her, unless it was pastilles; or creams and powders for different usages, or Blue Water for the eyes, and so on (all formulas courtesy Pavitra). More likely than not it was just a pretext for Mother to stand talking to us. Looking back it seems to me that the few minutes with us refreshed her no end. Anyway, *our* joy was indescribable. Hearing her voice Pavitra would come and join us.

Once, I don't know how it cropped up, Mother started telling us about the awful hot temper of her brother and his extraordinary strength of character as well. "One day, we were playing croquet. Either he got beaten or for some other reason, he flew into a rage and struck me hard with his mallet; fortunately I escaped with only a slight scratch. Another time, we were sitting in a room and he threw a big chair at me; I ducked just in time and the chair passed over my head. A third time, as we were getting down from a carriage, he pushed me down under it; luckily the horse didn't move." I looked at Mother with my heart



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in my mouth at the narrow escapes she had had. Mother went on, "So when, after he almost killed me thrice, my mother said the third time, 'Next time, you will kill her,' he at once resolved never to let it happen again. And it never happened again."

Indeed Matteo's strength of character was such that even when he was governor in Africa, for over fourteen years, not once did people see him get angry. It was not for nothing that Matteo was Mathilde's and Barine's son. Matteo was a gentleman, refined and cultured. Not only he did the *Ecole Polytechnique* but he also graduated in arts from the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* where only the most brilliant pupils in arts are admitted. All those who knew Matteo were struck by his sense of justice and impressed by his extraordinary personality. Mother wrote on 17.7.40 that "My brother, the Governor General Alfassa, was since the beginning of the war at the head of the Colonial Information Service in the French Government." He passed away in Blois, France, on 12 August 1942, at the age of sixty-six.

My brother Abhay assisted Pavitra in his Workshop also, learning to handle all sorts of machinery.



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Pavitra was very particular about his machines, but soon had confidence in the way Abhay handled them. Finally, Abhay was put in complete charge of running the Workshop, with Pavitra remaining as consulting Head. Now, one day, while Abhay was working along with others on a construction site a near fatal accident took place through some negligence on the part of another person. But everyone had a miraculous escape. Mother then explained to us: why collective accidents occur, why some people scrape through, why others succumb, and so forth.

"There was a great pilot, an ace of the First World War," Mother began her story. "A wonderful pilot. He had won a great many victories and always came out unscathed. But something happened in his life and suddenly he felt that something —an accident — was going to befall him, and that it would be the end. What they call their 'good luck' had deserted him. This man left the military and took up a civilian job as a pilot in one of the airlines. No, sorry," Mother corrected herself, "he came out of the war and stayed with the air force. Once he wanted to fly



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all the way down to the south of Africa — from France to the south of Africa." Mother added reflectively, "Obviously something in his consciousness must have got dislocated; but as 1 didn't know him personally I can't say what had happened to him. He started from a certain town in France to reach Madagascar, I think (I am not sure), and from there he intended to fly back to France." Matteo now enters the picture. "My brother was then the Governor of Congo and wanted to join his post quickly. He asked to be taken as a passenger in the plane —the plane was meant for professional flights and testing purposes. Many people tried to dissuade my brother from getting into that plane, saying, 'These flights are always dangerous, no, don't take it.' But he went all the same. They had a breakdown and were stranded in the middle of Sahara —not a pleasant situation. But ultimately everything was put right as though by miracle. The plane took off, set down my brother in the Congo, his destination, then flew off farther south. Later, midway through the flight the plane crashed . . . the other one died. That this would happen was evident."



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Mother explained the cause of the partial accident. "My brother had a firm belief in his destiny, a certainty that nothing was going to happen to him. But the mixture of the two atmospheres was such that he couldn't avoid a disruption, since there was a breakdown and they were forced to land in Sahara; but things were eventually put right and there was no 'real' accident." The cause of the fatal accident? "But once my brother was gone, the other one's 'bad luck' (if you like!) operated at full force, the accident was total, and he was killed."

Mother cautioned us: "You must pay attention to the combination of atmospheres." That's why we had better look attentively at our fellow travellers —in this age of herd-travelling —and more specifically if we see a traveller who has "a dark swirl around him, better not travel with him, for there is sure to be an accident . . . perhaps not to him."

The moral: "Therefore, instead of knowing the mere surface of things, it is quite useful to go a little deeper."



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One day Mother narrated to Satprem an experience that Matteo had, which showed her brother's 'interesting' side. "At the age of eighteen (or he may have been seventeen or sixteen), when he

was studying for the entrance examination to the *Polytechnique,* one day he was crossing the Seine (I think on the *Pont des Arts).* Halfway across, all of a sudden, he felt something descend into him, which immobilized him so powerfully that he stood rooted to the spot, petrified. Then he heard, though not actually a voice, something distinctly within him, 'If you want, you can become a god.' That's how it was translated in his consciousness. He told me that it had seized hold of him completely, immobilizing him —a tremendous power and extremely luminous. 'If you want, you can become a god.' But then, oh, in the experience itself, at that very instant, he replied, 'No, I want to serve humanity.' And it went away. Naturally, he took great care not to breathe a word to my mother, but we were close enough, and he told me. I said to him, 'Well, what a chump you are!'" Mother laughed. "Therefore, at that time he could have had a spiritual



realization. He had the stuff."

"I want to serve humanity." That was indeed Matteo's motto. But regrettably Matteo did not understand what Mother and Sri Aurobindo were attempting: a RADICAL PROGRESS for humanity. "My brother and I," Mother said, "we lived our entire childhood together, so close, so very close we were—up to the time when he entered the *Poly technique.* Eighteen years. Yet he understood NOTHING." Was there a tinge of wistfulness in Mother's voice? "Yet he was intelligent, a capable man, he became a governor, and a rather successful governor, in several countries. But he understood NOTHING."

As a matter of fact, Matteo's highest conception seems to have been to 'serve humanity.' As Mother said, "He could conceive of nothing better than 'to help others' —philanthropy. That's why he became a governor. Upon leaving the *Polytechnique* he had the choice of several posts, and he expressly chose this post in the colonies, because his idea was 'to help the backward races to progress'— all that nonsense."

Why is it 'nonsense'? "It is egoism pure and



simple," says Mother. "It's only because you consider that you are better than others and know better than they what they should be or do. That's what 'serving humanity' is. . . . When I saw the

film *Monsieur Vincent** I was greatly interested. He saw that whenever he fed ten, a thousand would flock to be fed. As Colbert told him, 'You seem to breed the poor by feeding them!'" Indeed, we can go on feeding the 'poor' by the millions till doomsday, we can open thousands of hospitals to cure the sick in billions, but can hunger ever be satisfied? Can the sick be cured for ever? Mother asks a very pertinent question, "How can you change something, without, in fact, having changed yourself?" Therein lies a key.

Matteo did not understand that Sri Aurobindo and Mother were concerned with the entire human species. They were preparing the next evolutionary step. "He was friends with Jules Romains, and Jules Romains told him that he had a great longing to

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* A film on Saint Vincent de Paul (1580-1660), a French Catholic priest who founded several orders devoted to helping the poor.



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come here [to Pondicherry to meet Sri Aurobindo and Mother], but that he could not. Jules Romains understood better than my brother." Mother sighed. "There you are."

Nevertheless, Matteo redeemed himself. "But he did do one good thing in his life, my brother. He was in the Ministry of Colonies. The Minister, a little older than him, was a friend of his. I don't know what position my brother had, but everything passed through his hands. When the world war broke out — the First World War, when I was here —the British Government asked the French to expel Sri Aurobindo and deport him to Algeria. They did not want Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry; they were afraid. So when we came to know of this (Sri Aurobindo knew, we knew), I wrote to my brother saying, 'This must not be passed.' You see," Mother explained, "the expulsion order had gone to the Colonial Office for ratification, and he had the ratification papers in his hands. He put them in the bottom of his drawer. They were shelved. And fell into oblivion." Mother smiled, "That made up for the rest."



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To be more explicit. The British Government in India was, frankly speaking, scared stiff of the "most dangerous man," as Lord Minto, the Viceroy of India, was apt to say. For, Sri Aurobindo

was not only the head of the nationalistic movement which was sweeping the country, he was also the FIRST Indian to send forth a cry for the independence of India. Another point. He had "an extraordinary hold over the affection of his countrymen," as observed Justice Beachcroft, when he acquitted Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Bomb Case in 1909. This fact was frightening indeed to the British Government. Thus, according to Sir Baker, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Sri Aurobindo was "our most conspicuous and most dangerous opponent." Whose object it was "to disseminate sedition through the press." Sri Aurobindo's pen had shaken the foundation of British imperialism.

As for Matteo, he really made up for his lack of understanding. Sri Aurobindo himself mentions how Matteo helped on another occasion, while explaining how a yogi applies an inner Force to deal with outside events. "We have had ourselves serious difficulties



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from the outside," he wrote on March 20, 1935, "petitions made against us to the Minister of Colonies in Paris and a report demanded from the Governor here which if acted on would have put the Ashram in serious jeopardy. We used outward means of a very slight and simple character, i.e. getting the Mother's brother (Governor in French Equatorial Africa) to intervene with the Ministry (and also an eminent writer in France, a disciple), but for the most part I used a strong inner Force to determine the action of Colonial Office, to get a favourable report from the Governor here, to turn the minds of some who were against us here and to nullify the enmity of others. In all these respects I succeeded," Sri Aurobindo states, "and our position here is made stronger than before; especially a new and favourable Governor has come." Sri Aurobindo concludes, "I give this as an example of how things have to be dealt with from the Yogic point of view."



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# *4*

# *Mirra*

21 February 1878

A new day broke.

A dawn opened the door of the Sun.

The light of the sun embodied itself and stepped out of the door.

Stepped out where?

On the earth.

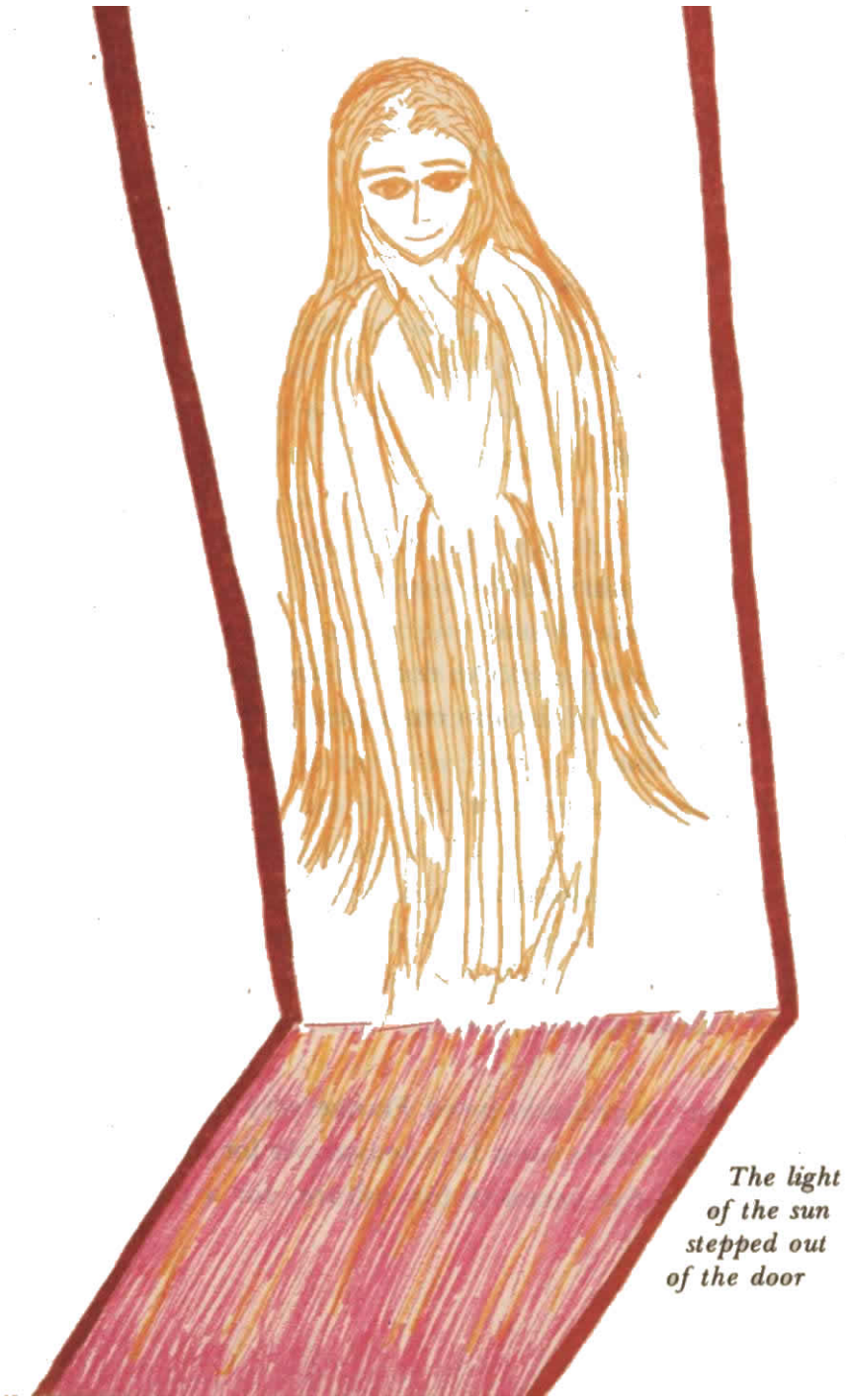
Where on earth?

In France.

Why in France?

"There is a reason," Mother explained to Satprem.

"Sri Aurobindo loved France very much. I was born there —there must be a reason. As for me, I know quite well: the necessity for culture, for a clear and



*The light of the sun stepped out of the door*

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precise mind, for the refinement of thought and taste, for clarity of mind. There is no other country in the world like that. None. And Sri Aurobindo too loved France for the same reason — very, very much. He said that during the whole of his life in England he liked France much more than England!"

Sri Aurobindo puts it this way: "If there was attachment to a European land as a second country, it was intellectually and emotionally to one not seen or lived in in this life, not England, but France."

The day: Thursday.

The time: morning, quarter past ten.

The place: 41 Boulevard Haussmann, Paris.

Thus the birth of Blanche Rachel Mirra Alfassa was registered at the 9th arrondissement of Paris.

And began a sadhana* which will never see an end.

"I began my sadhana from my birth, without knowing I was doing it," Mother told Satprem in 1958. "I have continued it throughout my entire life,

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* *Sadhana:* the practice and discipline of yoga.



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that is, almost eighty years (although for the first three or four years of my life it was still something stirring about unconsciously). And I began a deliberate, conscious sadhana upon prepared ground around the age of twenty-two or twenty-three. I am now past eighty. I thought of nothing but that, I wanted nothing but that, I had no other interest in life, and not for a single minute did I forget that THAT is what I wanted."

"When I was five years old ..." Mother looked back at the unfolding of her yoga. "I must have started before, but the memory is a bit blurred, nothing precise stands out. But from the age of five it is noted in my awareness — not a mental memory —the notation in the awareness. Well, I began with the consciousness; naturally, without knowing what it was. My very first experience was of the consciousness above, which I felt as a Light and a Force, which I felt here [pointing above the head] at the age of five."

So deeply etched was this notation in her awareness that whenever Mother spoke about that experience she still saw the scene vividly. "The sensation



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was very pleasant. I would sit in a tiny armchair, made especially for me. I would be alone in the room, and I. . . . You see, I didn't know what it was, nothing, nothing at all, mentally nil. But I would feel a sort of VERY PLEASANT sensation of something very strong and very luminous, here [above the head] — Consciousness. And my feeling was: this is what I must live, what I

must be (of course, not with all those words), and I would pull it downward, because that was my true raison d'être. That is my first memory —at age five."

That 'pleasant sensation' was so very pleasant that almost ninety years later, in 1972 —when other, later memories were fading away — Mother still recalled

*Mirra standing by her little armchair*



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this first memory in all its freshness. Seated in her low armchair, gazing at the Service tree* which spread its branches over Sri Aurobindo's samadhi** and sprinkled its flowers like golden teardrops, Mother said slowly to Satprem, "The only thing I remember with clarity is being very young (something like five or six, I don't know), very young, seated in a tiny armchair made especially for me where I felt a GREAT FORCE above my head. And at that tender age I knew— in the way a child thinks —that that was bound to do great things.... I didn't understand a thing, I didn't know a thing."

Given Mathilde's sternness, Maurice's "couldn't-care-less ness"' and Matteo's quick temper, little Mirra, so sensitive, had a pretty rough time of it. When it became too much for the child, she would go sit in her own little chair.

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* 'Service' is the significance given by Mother to the fragrant flowers of Rusty Shield-bearer, otherwise known as Copper Pod *(Peltaphorum pterocarpum).* The flowers are golden yellow, with delicately crinkled petals and rust-coloured at the base and sepals.

** *Samadhi* (lit: yoga-trance), where Sri Aurobindo's body rests under a marble tomb in the ashram courtyard.



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"Whenever there was any unpleasantness with my relatives or playmates or friends, and I felt all the nastiness or ill will —all kinds of unpretty things that came —I was rather sensitive, mainly because I instinctively nurtured an ideal of beauty and harmony, which was shocked by daily life's littleness. ... So when I was pained I took great care not to go tell anything to my mother or my father; for my father couldn't care less, and my mother would scold me —always, that was the first thing she did. So I would go to my room and sit down in my tiny armchair; and there I would concentrate and try to understand ... in my own way."

We can almost see little Mirra in that child's chair, looking at it all and trying to 'understand.' Her huge eyes would, maybe, take on a golden-hazel colour, or change into an emerald-green, which would as easily turn into black or sky blue perhaps. Strange, ever-changing eyes, beneath a broad band of ribbons that clasped together her already long auburn hair—or was it chestnut brown? — which later turned into spun gold and amber. The low-cut bangs on her forehead were reminiscent of the headdress of Queen Tiy of Egypt.



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Mirra found it so fascinating, so interesting to try and fathom life's mysteries that later on she would be extremely puzzled by the indifference of the Ashram youth in these matters. "I don't know," Mother told us, "but let me tell you this: it seemed tremendously interesting to me, the most interesting thing in the world. There was nothing, but nothing, that interested me more. It even happened to me. ... I was five or six or seven years old (at seven it had become very serious), and my father, who loved the circus, would come and ask me, 'Come, I am going to the circus on Sunday, come with me.' I would reply, 'No. I am doing something far more interesting than going to the circus.' Or else, my little playmates would invite me to a party, all to play together, to have fun together: 'No, no, I am enjoying myself much more.' And this was absolutely sincere. There was nothing more enjoyable on earth than that."

But from time to time Mirra did go to the circus, for instance when Buffalo Bill came to Paris with his troupe for the Universal Exhibition of 1889.

"The physical senses have a kind of extension,"



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Mother remarked. "The Red Indian's senses of hearing and smell, for example, have a greater range than ours (not to speak of dogs!)." Which brought to her mind her Red Indian friend. "I knew an Indian. He was my friend when I was eight or ten. He had come with Buffalo Bill in the days of the Hippodrome (oh, long ago! I was eight). He would put his ear to the ground, and he was so skilled that he could gauge distances: by the intensity of the vibrations he could tell from what distance the footfalls of someone walking by were coming. After which all the children said, T want to learn it, I do!' And so you try. . . . That's how you prepare yourself. You think you are just having fun, but you are actually preparing yourself for later on."

That is how little Mirra was preparing herself for 'later on.'



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# *5*

# *Boulevard Haussmann*

Life went on with its ups and downs at 62 Boulevard Haussmann; that is where the Alfassas lived till Mother was eight.

One day Mother showed us on a map where she had lived as a child. The house was located in the 8$^{th}$ arrondissement of Paris. It no longer exists —it has either been demolished or amalgamated with the *Annexe du Printemps.* "I lived there up to the age of eight." Then the family moved a little westward to N°3 Square du Roule, where Mother lived with her parents till the age of nineteen, when she married.

"When the first fire of the *Magasin du Printemps* broke out," Mother narrated to us, "I was still living in the next-door building. They had burned the building purposely —to rebuild and expand —but as this could

not be proved, the insurance company had to pay."

Mother and fire. "From our house at Square du Roule, I remember seeing the *Opéra Comique* in flames." She added, "And I was still there when the *Comédie Française* burned down. There was an actress, Petit Henriot, who was burned to death in it. She wasn't in the building when the fire broke out but went in to fetch her dog which was inside."

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She would listen wide-eyed to the adventure stories her father told his two offsprings, always in the first person singular! But although she may have guessed them to be invented, still she would get into the spirit of the stories.

Mirra always got into the spirit of everything.

She would go for a stroll with her father to the *Tuileries,* the *Bois de Boulogne,* the *Jardin des Plantes,* her little hand tucked in the big Turk's huge fist. She would look quietly, silently, at the animals, the trees, the flowers. Her gaze had but to linger



awhile on any of these, and she would feel in her very depths a communication, an exchange, like a wordless language.

"You know the moths that go bumping against lights? Well, each one's consciousness is like that," Mother told us, "it goes bumping here, bumping there, because things are foreign to it."

Of course nothing was foreign to Mirra.

"But, if instead of bumping against things, you go right inside," Mother pointed out to the growing children of the Ashram, "then they start to become part of yourself. You become wide, you have air to breathe, you have room to move about, you don't bump against things; you enter them, penetrate them, you understand."

"Understand". . . . Well, we have yet to meet someone who understands so thoroughly. How many times have I stood before Mother, mutely, and she knew at once if I had any pain in my heart —which she would soothe away by her look; or if any problem was troubling my mind — the solution would be given along with peace. Yes, Mother "understands." Why,



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even a lion agrees with me.

"I shall tell you an amusing story," Mother smilingly told us once (a master raconteur, our Mother). "In Paris, there is a park called the *Jardin des Plantes,* where there are animals as well as plants. A magnificent lion had just been received there. Naturally, he was caged. And he was furious. In his cage was a door, behind which he could hide. And sure enough, whenever visitors came to see him, he would go hide himself. I had observed this; so one day, I stood near the cage and began speaking to him —animals are very sensitive to articulate language, they really listen. I started speaking gently to my lion. I said to him, 'Oh, how beautiful you are! What a pity you hide thus, we would so much love to see you. . . .' Well, he was listening. Then, little by little, he cocked an eye at me, then craned his neck the better to see me; next he stretched his limbs and finally pressed his nose on the bar with an air as though to say, 'At long last, here is someone who understands me!'

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She would play games with her brother. "One of the favourite games my brother —who was only eighteen months older than I —and I played, was to take the Animal Dictionary and become a particular animal for ten minutes. Have you ever tried?" Mother asked us, half a dozen brothers and sisters in our teens. "Well, you know, it's not that easy to become a great anteater. What a long snout it has!" Her laughter pealed out and ours mingled with hers.

'Becoming' was one of the keywords in Mother's life.

But life with Mathilde was less amusing, in fact harsh, for a sensitive child like Mirra. "I remember once. . . . She used to scold me very often —but that was very good, it was a very good lesson! —she would scold me very, very often . . . for things I had not done!" Mother smiled ruefully. "Once she berated me for something I did do but which she hadn't understood— I had done it with my best consciousness. She reproached me as if it were a crime, or at any rate an unseemly act —I had given something to someone without asking her permission!



*She would look uncomprehendingly at this harsh world.*

"At first I stiffened and told her, T have not done it.'

"She started to say that I was lying.

"Then suddenly, without a word, I looked at her, and I felt ... I felt all the human misery and all this human falsehood, and silently the tears fell.

"She said to me, 'What! Now you have begun to weep!'

"All at once I was a bit fed up and told her, 'Oh, my tears are not for me, they are for the world's misery.'

" 'You are going crazy!' She truly thought I was going crazy!"

Mother's mouth widened a little in amusement. "It was perfectly amusing."

But it was rare for Mirra to cry. She would generally sit in her little armchair, all alone, and look uncomprehendingly at this harsh world, bizarre, obscure, which smelled of mothballs from the high-hanging curtains, and shook and rattled with the early trams pulled by four horses. She would draw down that something strange and luminous, and oh, what a pleasant sensation!



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"Otherwise, I was all the time in a state of dazed stupefaction. And the blows I received! Constantly. Each thing came to me like a stabbing or a pummelling or a clubbing, and I said to myself, 'What? How is this possible?' You understand," Mother explained to Satprem, "all the baseness, the lies, the hypocrisy . . . I saw it in my parents, in events, in friends, in everything—a stupefaction. It wasn't expressed intellectually, it expressed itself in this stupefaction."

Until the age of twenty or twenty-one, when Mirra began to meet Knowledge and someone who would explain to her the meaning of her sensations, she spent her life with this stupefaction: "'How —is this life! What —are these men! How. . . !' And I was as though beaten black and blue."

But someone literally turned little Mirra blue. It was her English governess. Seemingly, Mirra was just like any ordinary child "except that I was difficult." Among a number of things Mother casually mentioned, "I was even difficult from the point of view of making my toilet. Because being in the hands of an Englishwoman, I was given cold baths; my brother took that

quite well, but I used to howl! Later on it was proven — because the doctor said so —that it was not good for me; but that was much later."

And really speaking, Mirra was always cold. "Up to the age of thirty, all my childhood and youth, always I was cold, always cold. Yet, I used to skate, I did exercises, I led a very active life —but cold, terribly cold! A feeling that I lacked the sun. But when I came here [in India], 'Ah, at last! Now I am comfortable.' The first time I came here [in 1914] —I had brought along such an accumulation of cold in my body —I used to go about in a woolen ensemble . . . in full summer! A skirt, blouse and cloak. People would stare at me ... I didn't even notice —it was my natural dress."



## *6*

## *Taste and Distaste*

Little Mirra was a difficult child in more ways than one. "I was apparently like any other child, you see," Mother was telling Satprem one day, "except that it seems I was difficult. Difficult in the sense that I had no interest in food, no interest in ordinary games, no liking for going to my playmates' parties because eating cakes wasn't the least bit interesting! Also, impossible to punish, for I didn't care a fig —to be deprived of dessert was rather a relief to me!"

Yes, the simple act of eating was disagreeable to Mirra. And when it came to eating meat . . . whew! "When I was six to eight years old, I ate with my brother. And in order to make ourselves eat we were obliged to tell each other stories. We were given meat, you see, beefsteak —a nightmare! So my trick

was to tell my brother, T am an ogre . . . before me is half an ox,' and with each slash of knife I would carve my ox! I would tell myself a story and end up swallowing my beefsteak!"

"But Satprem never tells me any stories," I complained.

"She wants me to write tales," Satprem said, "fairy tales."

"Do you know fairy tales?" Mother asked him.

"I'll invent some."

"Yes, of course! I used to invent an enormous lot of tales! Real fairy tales, in which everything is so pretty, everything falls so nicely into place —not a single misery. Nothing but beautiful things!"

Anyway, as soon as she could, Mirra became a vegetarian. "I myself was vegetarian by taste — everything by taste, not by principle. I became vegetarian at the beginning of the century, a long, long time ago," said Mother in 1965. "Yes, it's at least sixty years ago. Because in my childhood I was forced to eat meat, which disgusted me —not the idea: I didn't like the taste, it disgusted me!"



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But Mirra had inherited from her grandmother a profound distaste for any kind of limit or limitation. "But, my child," Mother expostulated with me one day when I pulled a long face at her attempt to give me a cosmopolitan taste in food, "my child, food has never interested me! I never liked eating. When I was small, all sorts of tricks had to be conjured up to make me eat; of all things it seemed to me the most absurd and the least interesting. Well," Mother stated, "I know the food of every country, and I made a comparative study of all the cuisines. I can be anywhere without it disturbing my body."

Her inherent taste for freedom and her distaste for slavery to *any* habit made her try all sorts of experiments. "I had a go at everything, you know, from total fasting to meat diet, everything, everything."

Only, more often than not, she practically lived on air. "There were long periods when I ate so little that it was almost nothing. Then one day I said to myself: why waste so much time over this? The reply came, 'Not yet, wait; this is not your concern.' "

"After which," her eyes twinkling, Mother said



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to Satprem, "I decided to encourage everybody to eat!" And she heaped foodstuffs on him: cheese and soup, biscuits and chocolate, comfit and caviar. . . . With what loving care Mother tried to put some flesh on Satprem's bony body!

But what happens when one fasts? "When I fasted for ten days —totally, not even taking a drop of water— without thinking once about food (I had no time to eat), there was no struggle: it was a decision. A faculty in me then developed bit by bit: for instance, when I breathed in the fragrance of a flower, it nourished me. I saw that one is nourished in a subtler way. Only, the body is not ready." Mother repeated, "The body isn't ready, it deteriorates, I mean, it eats itself up."

In any event, Mathilde tackled her difficult daughter in the only way she knew. "As a child, whenever I complained to my mother about food or some similar petty things, she always told me to go do my work or go on with my studies instead of giving importance to futilities. She would ask me," Mother said to some young men who gave a great deal of



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importance to futilities, "whether I had the illusion of thinking that I was born for my own pleasure. 'You are born to realize the highest Ideal,' she would say and send me packing."

But what Mirra heartily detested was to be like a "public place," to be at the mercy of every passing breeze. Mother put it squarely to us, the Ashram boys and girls, men and women: "At any rate, I find it preferable to be the master than the slave. To feel oneself pulled by strings is a pretty unpleasant sensation. It's very annoying. Well, I don't know, but I, for one, found it very annoying even when I was a child. At the age of five it began to seem absolutely intolerable to me. And I sought a way for it to be otherwise — without anyone to tell me anything. For I knew

none who could help me. I didn't have your luck, to have someone who can tell you, 'Here, this is what you have to do!' I had no one to tell me. I had to find out all by myself. I found it. I began at the age of five. While you, it is long since you crossed five." Mother was really disgusted. But she was not one to give up so easily. She tried again and again. But even through



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her legendary patience, sometimes despair would peep out. "Oh, I am posing very difficult problems, aren't I! But, my children, this preoccupied me when I was five years old! ... So I thought you would have been preoccupied with this for a long time now."

Yes, Mirra always preferred "to be the master," she was not one to let even a single vibration enter her at its own sweet will, she would always pick and choose —an ever alert consciousness was the sentinel.

Once, Mathilde took her very small daughter to a funeral. Mirra was not particularly well acquainted with the deceased. But there, in that house full of people lamenting the departed soul, she was suddenly in the grip of a great emotion —a great sorrow, a great grief seized hold of her. "I was very small when I had this experience," Mother told us, young and not so young people of the Ashram. "I was not yet doing a conscious yoga —perhaps I was doing yoga, but not consciously. I observed very, very clearly. I told myself: 'Surely, it is their grief I am feeling, for I don't have any reason to be particularly affected by the death of this person.' All of a sudden, tears prick at my eyes, I



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feel all upset, I have a lump in my throat, I feel like weeping, as if I had a terrible sorrow. I was but a little child —I understood immediately: 'Well! It is their grief that has come inside me.' " Mother put it in a nutshell: "Quite simply vibrations have entered you, nothing else."

Yes, Mirra was an observant child; she would minutely study whatever crossed her field of observation. Study? Hmmm. We may perhaps sympathize a little with Mathilde, for Mirra was a stubborn child, as stubborn as they come. As Mother said, "I flatly refused to read, to learn to read, refused to learn."

If, instead of her rough and ready methods, Mathilde had tried to arouse her small daughter's interest in "learning," she would have been quite surprised at the quick result, I dare say. Because, as it happened, once Mirra got interested, she learned to read in three days flat.

"I learned to read out of curiosity. It fell out this way. Did I tell you?" Mother asked Satprem. "I was around seven, a little less than seven; my brother was eighteen months older than I. He was just back



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from school, and had brought along some of those big pictures they still make (you know, those drawings for children with short lettering at the bottom), and he gave me one. I asked him, 'What's written here?' He told me, 'Read.' 'Don't know how,' I replied. 'Learn!' Upon which I said, 'All right, give me the letters.' He brought me a book in which were letters to learn the alphabet. In two days I knew it, the third day I started to read. That's how I learned. 'Oh, this child,' they used to tell me, 'is retarded. Seven years old, and she doesn't yet know how to read. Disgusting.' The whole family used to lament, you know. But it so happened that what would have taken me years to learn, I knew within eight days." Mother chuckled, "That gave them something to ponder on."



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## *7*

# *Square du Roule*

Then the Alfassa family shifted to 3 Square du Roule.

Mirra was eight. She lived there up to the age of nineteen.

Those twelve years were a period of intensive growth.

Life presented its myriad facets. Life mysterious.

Mirra had to learn its secrets. Mirra had to understand.

"But I remember, you see, I remember so well my own attitude when I was learning. ... I liked only what I understood."

'Learning' was absorbing. Her whole life through Mother never stopped learning! "And the ease:



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whatever I wanted to do I could do." She did and went on. She would plunge wholeheartedly into the subject in hand —no half-measures for little or big Mirra —master it and pass on to the next. "But after a time I had experienced it, and the thing didn't seem important enough to me to devote a whole life to it. So, I would pass on to another thing: painting, music, science, literature . . . all, all; and practical things."

Practical things —dancing, running, jumping, playing games ... an entire range of them. Not only was Mirra a fast runner who easily outstripped her playmates, but she was wonderful with a skipping rope, too.

One day I was skipping away all by myself when Mother came and stood watching me. Becoming aware of her I stopped. She then asked me, "How many times can you swing the rope in a complete circle in one jump?"

"Normally twice, Mother, at times thrice."

She smiled, "Thrice? I did that normally. Generally I did four times. And with a little effort I could swing the rope five times in one jump."

But her 'passion' was tennis. "I remember learning



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*She was wonderful with a skipping rope.*



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to play tennis when I was eight. It was a passion. But I never wanted to play with my little playfellows, for I learned nothing (generally I beat them). I always went to the best players. They sometimes looked surprised, but ended up playing with me. I never won, but I learned a lot."

Learning was what mattered; and retaining what was learnt. She played tennis even in 1958, when she was eighty. Of course, her feet by then had lost some of their fleetness, but her eyes were as keen as ever and her hand had lost none of its accuracy. What a control she had! She could place the ball exactly where she wanted. Having played with her, and being at the receiving end, I can tell you how much we had to run! Mother was full of praise for Ramanathan Krishnan, the Indian tennis champion, when she played with him in 1952. Krishnan himself still remembers it very vividly. As he wrote on August 20, 1984, in reply to a query: "Yes, I did have

the privilege of playing tennis with the Mother in the Pondicherry Ashram tennis court. It was during the last week of April, 1952 (I do not remember the date



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but am sure of the week, month and year). It happened just prior to my departure for the Wimbledon Junior championship for the first time. I went to take Her blessings." He was accompanied by his father. "We had a few games of singles followed by some doubles. Mother was regular with her tennis on the green cement courts facing the sea. I received a 'Dunlop' (Maxply) racquet from Her. I was 15 years old at that time and the whole thing was an education as well as inspiration to me." He might have been only fifteen, but he was already an artist wielding not a paintbrush but a tennis racquet. With his deft touch he could give Mother exactly the type of game she liked to play. No tennis lover needs to be told that Ramanathan Krishnan became the Wimbledon Junior champion. Later, he twice reached the semifinals of the Wimbledon grasscourt tennis championship. Today he plays in the Grand Masters' circuit with his old friends Rod Laver, Ken Rosewall and others. And as a person he remains as unassuming and friendly as we could hope to meet.

A few years later the Dane Törben Ulrich also



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gave a fine display of tennis on the same green cement court. He was the reigning champion of Denmark. Both he and Krishnan represented their respective countries at the Davis Cup matches. Both were seeded players at Wimbledon. But coming in February 1959 as he did, Ulrich did not have Krishnan's luck: Mother only watched him play. Because just a month or two earlier she had stopped playing tennis.

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On holidays, little Mirra would go visiting her cousins and they would all play together. More often than not, their game consisted in theatrical activities, mainly doing tableaux.

One morning in 1969, Mother suddenly saw a scene in her memory's eye. "Suddenly was awakened the memory of something that happened in my childhood, when I was about eight or ten years old, which I had completely forgotten. On Sundays (I suppose so, or anyway on holidays), I used to go and play with my first cousins, the children of my father's brother. I would go



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and play with them. I can still see the house. We generally spent our time playing scenes or enacting a story in tableaux. . . . There's a story of Bluebeard, isn't there? Well, one day we did a tableau vivant, in several tableaux, of the story of Bluebeard, who cut off the heads of his wives. That's how the story goes, no?" Mother asked Satprem amidst our laughter. "Now, we played in a big room, a sort of enclosed verandah —a big and long room, in Paris. We had stood—our playmates were little boys and girls —we had stood some girls against the wall. We had pressed them against the wall and strung their hair above their heads," said Mother with a grin. "We had also wrapped the rest of their bodies in a sheet, like this. The sheet reached the floor so that the body could not be seen, only the head was visible." Mother then added reflectively, "I saw this scene, in my memory's eye I saw the room and how it was arranged. Well, at the same time it came to me that. . . . You see, we found it quite natural, just a story we had read, no horror, it didn't seem hideous to us, we were having great fun. . . . For one full hour I saw a whole stage of humanity —the stage of the late



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1800s, the second half of 1800. Strange, isn't it?" said Mother musingly. "It happened some eighty years ago probably (82 or 83 or 84 years ago), yet it came intense, vivid, living; so extraordinary that even now if I look I can S-E-E. I see the setting so very clearly, the apartment, the people, the scene, everything. But it did not rise from within, it was shown to me. Well, whilst seeing it, all at once I said within myself, 'Hello, but I have lived this!' It was stored somewhere, stored as one would collect memories for educational purposes. It is far more precise, complete and concrete than any book or anything said with so many words."

Mirra had a huge store of collected memories.

And by any standard, all of Mirra's doings bore the stamp of strangeness — although she herself took everything in her stride —be it playing with her brother, on outings with her friends, or studying . . . history, for instance.

"When I was small —between ten and twelve, I think—I had some rather interesting experiences which I didn't understand at all. I had some history books — textbooks they give you to learn history. Well, I would



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read, and all of a sudden the book became transparent, as it were, the written words became transparent, and I would see other words instead, or pictures. I hadn't the faintest notion of what was happening to me! And it seemed so natural to me that I thought it was the same for everybody. But my brother and I were great chums (he was only a year and a half older than I), so I would tell him, 'They talk nonsense in history, you know. It is LIKE THIS !' it isn't like that —it is LIKE THIS !' And several times the corrections I got, on certain details, about one person or another, turned out to be quite exact."

Mirra was simply reliving some memories of her past lives awakened by history books.

"Reading some passages, I would even say, 'How silly! It was never that: this is what was said. It never happened that way: this is how it happened.' And it was because of the book —the book was open in front of me; I was merely poring over it like any other child and . . . something would suddenly happen. Of course, it was all in me, only I thought it was in the book!"

Strange Mirra.



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# *8*

# *It's My Habit*

"This nasty habit of wanting rules ..." said Mother one day. "It means building yourself an iron cage and getting in it."

Mirra was not one to be kept in a cage, let alone get in one, be it of iron or of gold, she who had come to break all

Square du Roule or Boulevard Haussmann, what difference did it make? The curtains might be different, the walls might be different. But life? The Big Turk had his canaries and Mathilde had her theorems.

A great deal took place which had little to do with theorems and defied the laws of Newton.

She was reproached more than once for her disregard of rules, moral or Newtonian. "But naturally, it's against the rules! Everything I do is against the



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rules, it's my habit! Otherwise, it wouldn't be worth my being here, the rules might as well continue."

We can well believe what she confided in us one day: "Had I been born in India, I think I would have broken everything!" Yes, break the tentacles of the past to shape anew the present. Yes, like Mathilde with the Khedive, like Mira Ismalun with the customs of a feudalistic Egypt. The same seed.

Let us come back to Newtonian laws, or rather, let us see how Mirra broke these laws.

One day, in the grand salon of Square du Roule, all the little friends were gathered. A grand salon, therefore ornamental and awe-inspiring. But nothing awed little Mirra. "I'll show you something: how one should dance." The little friends cleared the space, the Louis xv (or xviii, whichever) pedestal tables were shoved out of the way, and "I went to a corner of the room to get the longest distance from one corner to the other. I told them, 'One single step to the middle' [the salon was about 12 metres long and 4 metres wide]. And I did it!" Mother laughed joyously. "I sprang (I hadn't even the impression of



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jumping: like I was dancing, you know, just as one dances on points), landed on my toes, rebounded and reached the other corner. One can't do that by oneself, not even champions —to

take off they run, then jump. But I didn't run. I was standing in the corner, and hop! up I went (I said 'hop' to myself, soundlessly), and frrt! I came down on the tips of my toes, rebounded and reached the other corner. Quite evidently I was carried."

Who carried her?

Mother went on, "I remember also, once. . . . There were hoops [low and thin arched fencing] bordering the lawns in the *Bois de Boulogne* — I don't know whether they still exist — I used to walk on them! I was challenging my brother (sixteen months separated us; he was older —and much more sensible!), I would dare him to it: 'Can you walk on these?' He told me, 'Let me alone, it's not interesting.' I said to him, 'Just watch!!' And I began walking on them, with such ease! As though I had done it all my life."

Mother concluded, "It was the same phenomenon: I didn't feel any weight. Always a feeling of being



carried. Something that supported me, something that carried."

With her disarming can dour, she said one day, "I didn't know the rules, so I didn't even have to fight them!" Mirra saw things very simply, without any rules cluttering her brain, so she did things very simply without a cluttered head, and naturally everything worked very simply too, without a hitch.

"You know the flint stones in France?" Mother queried. "I was nine or ten years old, and I was running with my friends in the Fontainebleau forest. The forest is sufficiently dense, so one can't see much ahead. We were running, and in the rapidity of my sprint I didn't see that I was nearing the edge of the road. The place where we were jutted out over the road by about 3 metres (a drop of over one storey), and the road was paved with stones — freshly paved. And we were running. I was racing ahead, the others were behind. Well, so great was my momentum that I was unable to stop. Whish! I sailed through the air. Mind you," Mother said to Satprem, "I was ten, at the very most eleven, with no notion of the miraculous

or marvellous, nothing, nothing —simply I was flung into the air. And I felt something upbearing me. Something up bore me and I was literally SET DOWN on the ground, upon the stones. I got up (it seemed perfectly natural to me, you understand!); not a scratch, not a speck of dust, nothing —absolutely intact. I fell very, very slowly. Everybody rushed up to see. I said, 'Oh, it's nothing! I am all right.' "

Mother continued, "And I left it at that. But that impression lingered, of something carrying me. I fell this slow [Mother shows a leaf falling by stages, with slight pauses]. And the material proof was there, it wasn't an illusion, since I was intact. The road was paved with stones —you know the flint of France? Not a scratch, nothing. Not a speck of dust."

Mother added, "A lot of things like this happened, which seemed absolutely natural to me. I never had any impression of doing something miraculous. It all was quite natural."

Mother explained, "The soul was very alive at that time. It resisted with all its strength the intrusion of the material logic of the world. Things seemed



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perfectly natural to me. I simply told myself, 'No. No accident can happen to me.'

But from the age of thirteen or fourteen it became more difficult. Before that everything was 'natural' to Mirra.

"But flung like that!" Mother mused awhile, then resumed. "Later on, when I was working with Theon, I saw it was an entity, what the Europeans call angels . . . 'Guardian Angels,' that's right. They have wings by free choice, because they find them pretty! Well, Mme. Theon saw two of these beings always near me. Yet, she knew me after more than ten years. It appears they were always with me. So I looked, and sure enough I saw them."

Years later, indeed it was seventy-five years later, when Mother was narrating these episodes to Satprem, recalling all those dancing, air-borne memories, she suddenly noticed a strange link connecting that impertinent non-gravitation to a certain inner centre which as a child she already felt very clearly near the heart and which was "like great beatific wings, vast as the world, beating slowly. . . ."

The same centre to which she drew down the 'Great Force' when she wanted to shake off the tirades of Matteo or the rebukes of Mathilde, "the same vibration."

There is perhaps another way of vibrating that escapes Newton and his apple with its tiresome habit of falling?



## *9*

## *The Guardian Angels*

Shall we pay a flying visit to the "Guardian Angels" ?

Mother told us a very funny story about one of

them.

"One even tried to do drawings. He asked me to lend him my hand to draw. I lent my hand, then I saw the drawing —he did do a drawing —and I said to him, 'Mine, the ones I do without your help, are far better!' So that was the end of it."

"What did it depict?" Satprem wanted to know.

"Funny drawings: a sea with a rock and a small figure (that one came off the best). A high cliff, a tiny figure and next the sea. It wasn't brilliant!" Mother smiled whimsically. "I would lend my hand, then look elsewhere to be sure not to have any subconscious action.



I could plainly feel his hand moving mine. Then, by and by I said to myself, 'Well, I'll look.' I looked. 'Oh! Say,' I told him, 'this isn't too brilliant!'

It never occurred to Mirra, who took everything in her stride, that to see Guardian Angels or talk with them was anything out of the ordinary. "It seemed quite natural to me."

Mother specified where it had happened, "It was in Tlemcen."

Poor Guardian Angel! How could he possibly hope to compete with Mirra? She had had such a long practice.

"When did you first start painting, Mother?" I asked her with curiosity one morning in 1951. Mother had just returned from the balcony that adjoined Pavitra's bedroom. The balcony faced north. Being on the first floor it gave a wide view —most of the houses in those times were one-storeyed —and from one end, if you turned to the east, you could glimpse the sea. Mother used to go there every morning to give a few minutes of concentration to the disciples assembled in the street below.



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A few of us had the privilege of meeting her on her way to and from the balcony. We would wait in Pavitra's Laboratory. We were: Pavitra, my two brothers Noren and Abhay, my two sisters Sumitra and Suprabha, and I. After returning from the balcony Mother would give us some flowers and fruits. This was the best time for us to ask questions. We asked all sorts.

So one morning I requested, "When did you start painting, Mother?"

Mother leaned back a little, gripping lightly with both hands the edge of the slate-topped table. "At the age of eight, with three old sisters," she replied. Her large eyes twinkled with mischief as she looked at the three young sisters standing right there. The room sent out waves of laughter.

Mother herself never said it in so many words, but for some unknown reason I retained the impression that the "three old sisters" were little Mirra's future sisters-in-law, daughters of Edouard Morisset whom Mira Ismalun knew so well. I might well be mistaken of course.



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After our laughter subsided, Mother continued, "Already at the age of ten I was doing oil-paintings — portraits."

Seeing the light of surprised admiration in my eyes, Mother added smilingly, "I have done all kinds of paintings: miniature, aquarelle, gouache. . . ." Followed a long list, which unfortunately I did not note down.

Many years later, while telling Satprem about the stages of her development, she said, "Very young I began (about eight or ten), I started painting; while going on with my studies I painted. At twelve, I was already doing pictures: portraits. I had an all-absorbing curiosity, an interest for anything to do with art, with beauty —music, painting."

Beauty. Expressions of beauty. Yes, all her life long that love of beauty ran like a silvery stream.

And that silvery stream would flow out of her fingers as she sat at the organ.

How I loved it!



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## *10*

## *Musical Waves*

"Music, Mother."

The Second World War was more than a year behind us. My twenty-first birthday was approaching. Mother gently asked me, "What would you like, child, for your birthday?"

"Music, Mother," I said hopefully.

She smiled softly.

Dear Reader, would you not have done the same in my place? For "It is not music that I play," Mother explained to Satprem some fifteen years later. "I don't try to play music, it's a kind of meditation with sounds."

Of which "sounds" the Italians were much appreciative. "The Mother had a remarkable experience," Sri Aurobindo said. "She was staying in northern

***Mother at her organ***

Italy for some time and was once playing on the organ all alone in a church. After she had finished, there was a big applause. She found that a crowd had gathered and was ecstatic in appreciation."

But Mirra was more gladdened by the ecstatic appreciation of her music from a . . . yes, a toad!

"I was playing —don't know what, a Beethoven or a Mozart piece —in Tlemcen." Mirra was on a visit to Theon, the occultist, in Algeria. "Theon had a piano, because his English secretary played the piano. The piano was in his drawing-room, which was on a level with the mountain, halfway up, almost at its top. That is to say, you had to climb two flights of stairs inside the house to reach the drawing-room. The drawing-room had large French windows opening on a level with the mountain. It was very pretty. So then, I used to play there in the afternoon, with the French windows wide open. One day, as I finished playing, I turned round to stand up and, I

saw a big toad, all warty —a huge toad —and it was going poff, poff, poff! You know how they puff up and deflate. It was puffing up, deflating, puffing up, deflating . . .



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as though it were in seventh heaven! It had never heard such a wonderful thing! It was all alone, big like this, quite round, quite black, quite warty, in the middle of those big doors —large bay windows open to the sun and the light. It stood in the middle. It continued a little longer, but when it saw that the music was gone it turned round, hopped-hopped-hopped . . . and vanished."

Mother's lips curved in a sweet smile, "That admiration of a toad filled me with joy! Truly charming."

The "meditation with sounds" —or music —"is the first embodiment of Consciousness as joy." And that joy is what the Italians felt, as well as I and the toad.

"I remember, I found the same vibration of joy in Beethoven and Bach (in Mozart also, but more subdued)."

Beethoven vividly reminded Mother of Ysaye, the renowned violonist (1838-1931) and colleague of Rubinstein.

"The first time I heard Beethoven's Concerto



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in D, in D major, for violin and orchestra —the violin starts up abruptly, not right at the beginning; first, there is an orchestral passage, then the violin repeats. Well, with the first notes of the violin —Ysaye was playing, what a musician!—with the very first notes, it's as if my head had suddenly burst open and, I was cast up into such a splendour, oh! . . . Absolutely marvellous. For more than an hour I was in a state of bliss. A true musician was Ysaye!"

Not only music, but painting also had the same effect on her. "When I looked at a painting, suddenly there would be an opening in my head and I would see the origin of the painting —and such colours!" In those days Mirra had no knowledge of the zones of artistic creation. All her experiences came "unexpected, unsought."

Mirra also knew some people who, "when they began playing, felt as if another hand had entered theirs, and who would play in such a wonderful way as they could never do on their own." She noticed another phenomenon. "There was even a person, a lady, who played the violoncello. When she played



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Beethoven, her features underwent a change and absolutely resembled those of Beethoven; the way she played was sublime, as she could have never played had not something of Beethoven's mentality got into her."

After all this, it will not be surprising to find that one of Mirra's earliest experiences was brought about by music. "I haven't very often been to churches," said Mother. "I have been to mosques and temples—Jewish temples. Now, the Jewish temples in Paris have such beautiful music. Oh, what beautiful music! I had one of my first experiences in a temple. It was at a marriage, and the music was marvellous (I was up in the galleries with my mother). The music (Saint-Saëns, I was later told) was organ music —the second best organ in Paris, sublime! The music was playing, and I was up there, rapt (I was fourteen then). There were some leaded-glass windows —white glass, without designs —and I was gazing at one of them, when suddenly, through the window came a flash, like a thunderbolt, like lightning. It entered — my eyes were wide open —it entered like this [Mother



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strikes her breast violently], and next ... I felt myself becoming vast and all-powerful.... It lasted for days."

After a few months Mother gave some more details: "That Light which went through me, I saw it physically enter me. Obviously it was the descent of a Being —not a past incarnation, but a Being from another plane. The Light was golden. It was the incarnation of a divine consciousness."

But where does music come from?

"Once I went to the world of music," Satprem said to Mother. "And what I heard was so marvellous, so unbelievably beautiful, that even after waking I remained stunned for hours. Unbelievable." He asked Mother, "Where is that world situated?"

"I am very familiar with it," Mother replied. "I often went there. It is to be found at the very top of human consciousness. Very high, it is very, very high."

Mother went on to explain that there were several 'zones': "The first zone you meet is painting, sculpture, architecture: all that has a material form. The zone of forms." Artists, sculptors, writers, landscape



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gardeners, all-all draw their inspiration from that zone. "Next comes the musical zone. There you find the origin of the sounds that have inspired various composers. These are great musical waves without a sound. It may seem a bit strange, but that's how it is.

Is this the ethereal music supposed by Pythagoras and other early mathematicians to be the "music of the spheres"? I don't know. But in India, very probably, it is this that is known as "unwounded music" — *anāhata vāni* (lit. music that never hurts or strikes against anything). The Indian yogis know it. It comes as rhythmical waves. Waves with a slow rhythmic beat, like the beat of great wings. Unceasing waves that come from Eternity and go away to Eternity.

Mother also explained that each zone is made up of several layers. And, "At the very top of the musical zone it starts to become waves, vibratory waves. But it is directly related to music. It is a zone where you don't hear any sound, but which, afterwards, is translated into sound, into music. That's the topmost."



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Mother drew down her music from that topmost source.

"Constantly I hear like great musical waves. I have but to go within a bit and it's there, I can hear it. It's always there! They are not sounds, yet it is music! Great musical waves. And each time I hear these waves my hands long to play."

# *11*

## *Maps & Maths*

"My hands long to play."

Not only to play the organ, but also to paint, to draw, to. . . .

Everything, therefore, went on together: music, painting, games, studies.

Mirra, we saw, began to learn her alphabet a bit . . . late; at age seven. But once begun there was no holding her back. She easily outstripped all the children her own age. All that she needed was 'to understand,' as she reiterated to Satprem.

"But I recall, you see, I perfectly recall my own attitude when I was learning. I also clearly remember all my schoolmates: who for me was a girl with brains, who was a wordmill. ... I have some entertaining memories about that, for I couldn't understand



the meaning of learning for the sake of having a knowing air I had a tremendous memory at that lime, but 1 ucvci made use of it. And i liked only what 1 understood."

Then Mother tailed to mind some 'entertaining memories.'

For a time 1 attended a private school. I never went to public school because my mother considered n unfitting lot a girl to be in a public school. But 1 attended a private school that had a great reputation at the time; they had as teachers really highly com mendable men. The geography teacher, a reputed man, had written books (his books on geography were well-known) and was a very line man. So then we were doing geography 1 enjoyed enormously doing maps because they had to be drawn. One day, the teacher looked at me (he was an intelligent man), he looked at me. He asked me, 'Why are towns, the big cities, situated on river banks?' 1 saw the

faces of the-students flabbergasted- saying to themselves: Lucky! The question wasn't put to *me*\ 1 answered: But it's very simple! Because that's a natural way of



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communication!'" Mother laughed, "He too was taken aback."

Mirra enjoyed herself thoroughly.

"That's how it was, all my studies were like that, the whole time 1 enjoyed myself enjoyed-enjoyed-enjoyed —it was all enjoyable."

Not only did she startle her teachers with her answers, she also scared some of them.

"My teacher of literature was an old fellow full of all the most conventional ideas imaginable. What a bore he was, ugh! So all the students sat there, their noses to the grindstone. He gave subjects for composition. Do you know *The Path of Later On and the Road of Tomorrow?** I wrote it when 1 was twelve; it was my test paper to the question he had set the class to do. He had given a proverb (1 don't remember the exact words) and he expected to be told ... all the sensible things! 1 told my story, that little story (written at the age of twelve). He eyed me with misgivings." Mother laughed mischievously, "He expected me to

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* *Le sender de tout-á-l'heure et la route de demain.*



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make a scandal. . . . No, I was a good girl, don't you know!"

Her enjoyment remained unabated even during examinations. "Only once in my life 1 sat for an exam (I forget which one). But 1 was just at the age limit, I mean, at the time of the regular examination 1 was under age, so they sat me with those who had failed in the first exam (I sat at that time because it was in autumn when I was just the right age). Well, 1 remember that we were a small company; the teachers were greatly annoyed because their holidays had been cut short in the middle, and the students for the most part were pretty mediocre or else rebellious. So then 1 was observing all that (1 was very young, you see, the -teen or fourteen, I don't know), I

was observing all that. A poor little thing had been called to the blackboard to do a mathematical problem she didn't know how to do it, she was faltering. 1 looked 1 wasn't being questioned just then 1 looked and 1 smiled. Oh dear me! The teacher saw it. lie was quite displeased with me. As soon as the girl went back to her place, he called me. lie told me, 'You do it.' Well



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naturally (1 loved mathematics very much, really very much; besides 1 understood it, it spoke to me), 1 did the problem. . . . The chap's face!"

Mirra's own face gave her an air of seriousness. But "1 had the most extraordinary fun."

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Yes, Mirra "loved mathematics very much, really very much." After all, was she not the daughter of a mathematical wizard? "Besides, 1 Understood it, it spoke to me." Mother explained, "Everything would become like a picture, you see. . . ."

Mother recounted to us: "At home, my hi other was doing advanced mathematics, for his entrance to the *Polytechnique,* and he found it difficult. So my mother had engaged a tutor to coach him. I was two years younger than my brother. 1 used to look on, and then everything would become clear: the why, the how, everything was clear. So, the tutor was working hard, my brother was working haul, when 1 blurted out, But it's like this! 1 hen 1 saw the tutor's



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expression! ... It seems he went and told my mother, It is rather your daughter who ought to study this!' It was all such fun, such fun!"

This love for mathematics never left Mother, I think.

Way back in the forties, there was a very young boy, always up to some mischief. He was eight or ten, I don't exactly know. Anyway he was so small that his feet did not reach the pedals if he sat on the saddle of his father's bicycle. So the little fellow would stand on the pedals, swing his body from side to side and pedal away for all he was worth. If he fell down, well, what of it? He

got up, dusted himself or not, and went on with his pedalling act. Now, one day he wandered into a place where he was not supposed to go. A building had just been constructed, but the garden was not yet laid out, the grounds were still in a litter. There was an open well in the compound. So the boy went wandering around, and when nobody was looking his way, he went to the well, bent over to have a very good view, lost his balance, and promptly fell inside. Very soon he was fished out. But how scared he was, oh!



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Not because he had fallen in the well and was almost drowned —he couldn't swim then —but because his family insisted that he go and tell Mother of his misadventure himself. He wept and wept but was finally persuaded to go and tell Mother. Mother is Mother. She wiped away his tears, soothed his troubled heart, saying that she was his friend so he should never feel afraid of her but come and tell her at once if anything troubled him. When he was quite consoled, Mother asked him what he liked doing. Surprisingly he said, "Sums." Mother was delighted and told him that she herself was very fond of maths and, when young, was very good at it. And would he like to learn it from her? Imagine the boy's joy. Mother herself teaching him to do sums! Did not all his elders stand in awe of her? His parents, his sisters, and others as well, were all dumbfounded at this turn of events. Naturally.

Thus, the bright little boy had his grounding in mathematics, and, let us hope, had as much fun as little Mirra.



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## *12*

## *Mira and Mirra*

"Thank God, my mother was an out-and-out materialist," Mother exclaimed one day to Satprem, "so much so that naturally one could not speak to her about invisible things."

But all the same.

"But then, what is interesting, for instance, is that when her father died (my mother's father), she knew it: she saw him. She thought it to be a dream — 'a silly dream,' mind you. But he came to her to intimate that he was dead, and she saw him. 'It is nothing but a dream,' she said." Mother gurgled.

"When my grandmother died. . . . My grandmother, now, *she* had a sense of the occult. She had made her own fortune (a rather sizable fortune). She had five children, each more prodigal than the one



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before. So she would tell me —she considered me the only sensible person in the family and confided her secrets to me —she would say, 'You know, all these fellows, they are going to squander all my money!' She had a sixty-year-old son, for she had married very young and had him young. She got married in Egypt when she was fifteen; and her son was now sixty. So she would tell me, 'You see, this boy (!), he goes out, he frequents impossible people! And next he starts playing cards and loses all my money.' I saw 'this boy.' I was in the house when it happened. He came to her and said very politely,

" 'Good-bye, mother, I am going out to so-and-so's house.'

" 'Ah, if you please, don't waste all my money, and take an overcoat, will you, for it gets chilly at night.' "

Mother laughed, "Sixty years old! It was most comical. Well, to return to my story. When she died, my grandmother came (I took care of her a great deal), she came to find my mother. My mother was with her when she died. As she wanted to be cremated



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— she had got it into her head —she had to be embalmed, for she died in Nice and was to be cremated in Paris. I was in Paris then. My mother arrives with the body and tells me,

" 'Just imagine, I am seeing her constantly! And what's more, she enjoins on me saying, do not squander your money.'

" 'Well, she is right,' I replied to my mother, 'one must be careful.'

" 'But look here, she is DEAD! How can she speak to me! I tell you she is dead and quite dead at that!'

" 'What does it mean,' I asked her, 'to die?' "

Mother burst into a lively laughter at the memory. "It was all very droll."

Some eight to ten years before, one day Mother was telling us how she took care of her grandmother, without naming her. "An old lady I knew very well, who had five children, each more extravagant than the other." That is how Mother put it. "The more she had taken care to amass a fortune the more they took care to dissipate it; they spent it without rhyme or reason. So, when she died, the old lady came to find



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me and said, 'Ohh! Now they will squander all my money!' She was most miserable. I consoled her a bit. But I had great trouble persuading her not to stay on and watch over her money so they don't squander it away."

Mother had helped her own grandmother, just as she had helped many other people, to cross the passage after their death. "I had experiences at night, a sort of night activity, when I looked after people who were leaving their bodies.... I was twenty or so." Although she had not been taught the method nor knew the process, yet Mirra did exactly what needed to be done. The teaching and the knowledge were to come later. But that is another story.

Mira and Mirra.

A deep affinity ran between the grandmother and the granddaughter.

One day in 1969, Mother sent me downstairs to fetch a box where she used to keep her 'precious' things. She opened the box and started rummaging in it, bringing out one treasure after another. But she could not find her mirror. "There's a mirror somewhere,



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*Mira Ismalun, a sketch by Mother.*



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I don't know where. A mounted mirror; the mounting has gold in it. It is very pretty. A small, foldable pocket mirror. It belonged to my grandmother. My grandmother gave it to me. She was presented with it when she was . . . twelve. She gave it to me and I kept it; I still have it. Which makes that object well over one hundred years old!" Mira and Mirra.

Surely Mira with her "sense of the occult" had felt, if not known, a special something in the lovely silent child Mirra? On her side, the child Mirra —who from her earliest childhood was "extremely sensitive to the composition of air," as Mother said—appreciated the tranquil "air" of her granny.

Mother was talking that day on the subject of sleep, children's sleep in particular. "This has brought back to my mind all kinds of things from my childhood, from my infancy. My

grandmother lived next door to us, and at night (in the evening after dinner), we used to visit her before going to bed. I can't say it was great fun, but she had very good armchairs! So then, while my mother chatted with her, I had one of



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those splendid sleeps over there, lying in that armchair; a kind of blissful sleep. I rested wonderfully." Mother concluded, "What's required is to give children a tranquil atmosphere, as much tranquillity as possible."



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## *13*

## *The Sleepwalker !*

But Mirra's own sleep was . . . strange.

"Even as a child, very young, suddenly, plump in the middle of an action or a sentence or whatever, I would go off into a trance, and nobody knew what it was! At the time they all thought I was asleep! But I stayed conscious —with an arm raised or in the middle of a word, and next pfft! gone," Mother laughed. "Outwardly gone, but inwardly quite an intense, interesting experience. But that used to happen to me even when I was very small."

Mother reminisced. "I remember —I was perhaps ten or twelve —once there was a luncheon at my parents' house. A dozen or so people, all decked out in their Sunday best (they were family members, but all the same it was a 'luncheon' so there was a certain



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protocol; in short, you had to maintain a certain decorum!). I was at one end of the table, next to a first cousin of mine. He later became director of the Louvre for a time (he had an artistic intelligence, a rather capable young man). So there we were, and I remember I was perceiving

something quite interesting in his atmosphere (mind you, I knew nothing; had I been told of 'aura' and all that . . . but no, not a thing did I know about occultism, although the faculties were already there). I was in the process of perceiving a kind of sensation I had felt in his atmosphere, when, with the fork halfway to my mouth, I was off! Did I catch it! I was told that if I didn't know how to behave properly, I shouldn't come to the table." Mother went into peals of laughter.

Memories came crowding. "Gradually, my body became a sleepwalker— that is, the link remained securely tied to it, but the consciousness of the form got more and more conscious."

Here, a word of explanation may not be amiss. Who amongst us has not had an out-of-body experience sometime or other? It can take place anywhere: on



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the operation table, at an accident site, or simply in bed while we are asleep. The latter is the most common experience, and happens to practically everybody. But in every case, the part of our being (we are made of many parts, aren't we?) that goes out is attached to the body by a cord or thread, or, as Mother called it, a "link." So long as this link remains intact and tied to the body, we can always return to it. But if for some reason or another the link snaps, then we cannot return to the body and are declared "dead." This link is extremely elastic and can be stretched indefinitely. It is also extremely slender.

Anybody soundly asleep, when awakened abruptly, can come to harm because of the risk of causing damage to the link. This is also the reason why it is considered bad to awaken a sleepwalker. Now, in the case of a sleepwalker, the consciousness of the body is so attached to the part of the being that goes out, that it identifies itself to that part and automatically follows it, doing what it does.

Let us go back to Mirra and see where her sleepwalking led her! "I got into the habit of getting up



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— only, not in the manner of ordinary sleepwalkers: I would get up, open my desk, take a sheet of paper and write . . . poetry. I who had nothing of the poet in me!"

Mother had once exclaimed, "Me! I am not a poet." She said candidly, *"Savitri** is the first poem I appreciated in my life. Before, I was closed. Poetry had always appeared to me as mere words —hollow-hollow-hollow, nothing but words. Words for words' sake. As sound, nice enough, but ... I would rather music. Music is better."

But Mother's was not quite "the manner of ordinary sleepwalkers." To resume our story: "Yes, poetry! I would jot down things. And very consciously I would put everything back into the desk drawer, shut everything very carefully before going back to bed. One day, for some reason or other, I forgot, I left it open. My mother comes.... It was my mother who used to wake me up; because in France thick drapes are pulled over the windows, so she would

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* *Savitri;* Sri Aurobindo's epic poem.



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come in the mornings, brusquely fling wide the drapes, thus waking me up, brrm! without forewarning. But I was used to it, so I would be about ready to wake up, otherwise it wouldn't have been so very pleasant! Anyway, she comes in, calling me with unquestionable authority, then finds the desk open and a paper inside, 'What's this!' She grabs it. 'What have you been doing?' I don't know what I replied, but she went to the doctor: 'My daughter has become a sleepwalker. You must give her some drug.' " Mother smiled ruefully, "It wasn't easy."



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## *14*

## *The Golden Robe*

"It wasn't easy."

But this unpleasant quality of Mathilde's was in reality a blessing in disguise. It forced Mirra to keep her experiences to herself and not breathe a word to anybody, least of all to her mother, who would have whisked her off to the nearest doctor without a moment's loss. "Nothing counted for her except what one touches and sees. But it was a divine grace," Mother

acknowledged, "I had no possibility of telling her anything. I kept my experiences to myself." Thus the materialistic armour served Mirra as a protection and helped her to withstand the strange experiences that were for ever crashing down upon her. "From my babyhood, experiences came massively."

As young Mirra approached or entered her teens



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her true role in life —although she did not understand it then —began to be clearly outlined.

"That was the period," Mother said, referring to the luncheon with her first cousin, "when I used to go out [of the body] every night, and every night do the work to which I have alluded in passing in the *Prayers and Meditations.* When the whole house had become very quiet, every night at the same hour, I would go out of my body and have all kinds of experiences." Let us turn the pages of Mother's book, *Prayers and Meditations —her* journal, in reality —on the date of 22 February 1914.

"When I was a child —around the age of thirteen, and for about a year —every night, as soon as I was in bed, it seemed to me that I came out of my body and went straight up above the house, then above the city, very high. I then saw myself clad in a magnificent golden robe, longer than myself; and as I rose, that robe lengthened, spreading in a circle around me to form, as it were, an immense roof over the city. Then I would see men, women and children, the old, the sick and the unfortunate come out from all sides.



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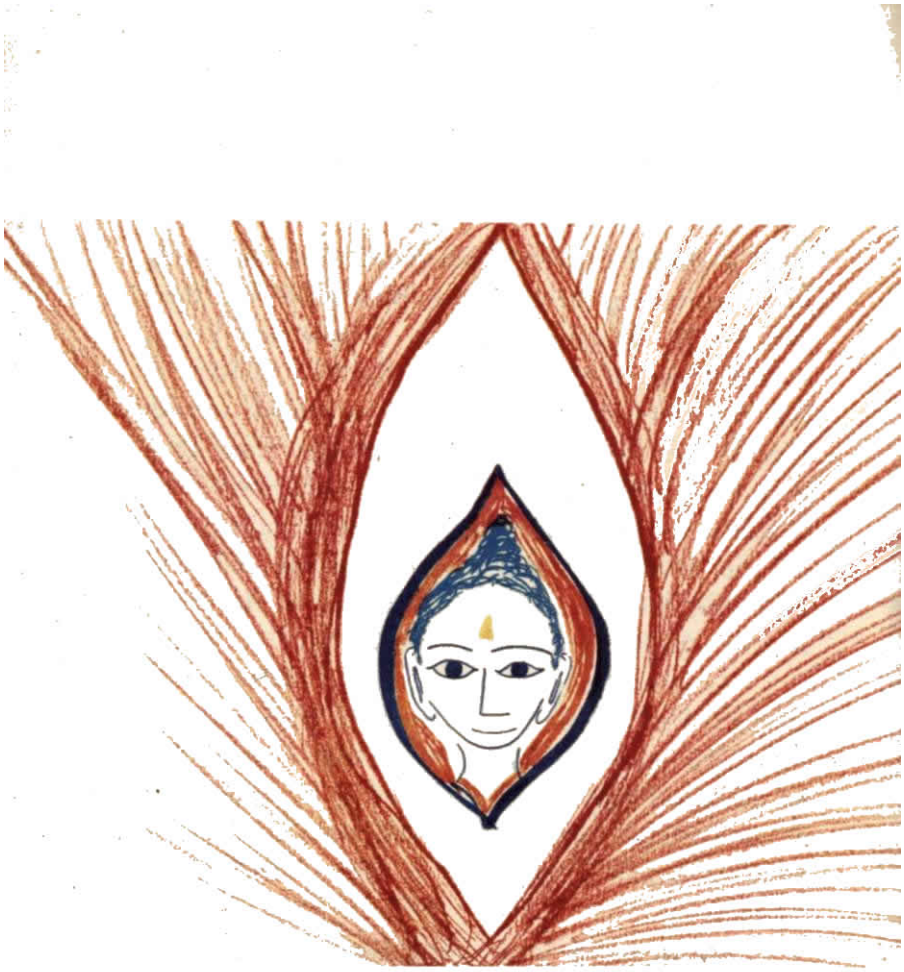
They gathered under the outspread robe, imploring help, recounting their miseries, their sufferings, their sorrows. In response, the robe, supple and living, stretched out to them individually, and as soon as they touched it they were consoled or healed, and reentered their bodies happier and stronger than when they had come out of them. Nothing looked more beautiful to me, nothing made me more happy; and all the daytime activities seemed to me dull and colour less, without real life, compared to this night activity which, for me, was the true life."

As Mirra rose over the city, she would often "see on my left an old man, silent and still, who looked at me with a benevolent affection and encouraged me by his presence. This old man, dressed in a long garment of dark purple, was the personification —I came to know it later —of him who is called the Man of Sorrows."

Much, much later, years later in fact, Mirra would understand what her experience meant: "The impersonal, eternal divine Love. Being this Love, I feel myself living in the centre of all things upon the





*"I feel myself living in the centre of all things."*

whole earth and, at the same time, it seems to me that I am immense, infinite arms stretching out and enveloping with a boundless tenderness all beings clasped, gathered up, nestled upon my breast, vaster than the universe."

A boundless love.

A love that intensifies the impulses that are swift and straight and frank. A love that strengthens. Divine Love.

Years before, Mother had related to us an ancient Chaldean legend. "Long ago, very long ago, in the arid country which is now Arabia, a divine being had incarnated upon earth to awaken there the supreme love. As one would expect, the Incarnation was persecuted by men, misunderstood, suspected, hunted down. Mortally wounded by assailants, this Being wished to die alone and quietly, so that the work might be accomplished; and, followed by them, he fled. Suddenly, in the vast denuded plains, a small bush of pomegranate sprang up. The Saviour stole under the low branches in order to give up his body in



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peace; and immediately the bush developed miraculously, grew up, widened, became deep and luxuriant, so that when the pursuers passed by they did not even suspect that the one whom they were chasing was hidden there, and they continued on their way. While drop by drop the sacred blood fell, fertilizing the soil, the bush covered itself with marvellous flowers, scarlet, enormous, clusters of petals, innumerable drops of blood. . . ."

Mother named the pomegranate flower, which blossoms even in the desert: DIVINE LOVE.



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# *15*

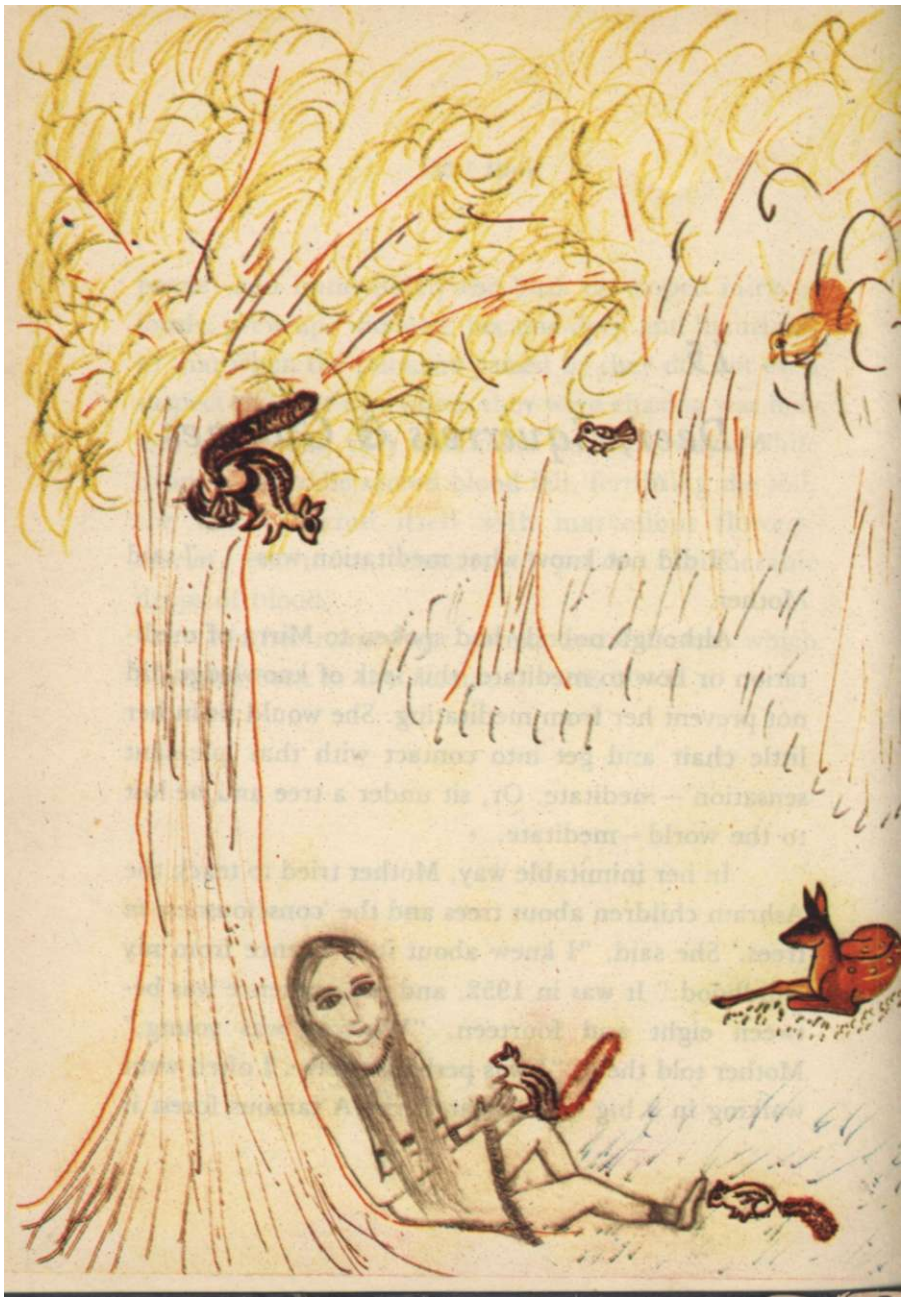
# *Deer, Squirrels & Gnomes*

"I did not know what meditation was ..." said Mother.

Although nobody had spoken to Mirra of meditation or how to meditate, this lack of knowledge did not prevent her from meditating. She would sit in her little chair and get into contact with that 'pleasant sensation' —meditate. Or, sit under a tree and be lost to the world—meditate.

In her inimitable way, Mother tried to teach the Ashram children about trees and the 'consciousness *in* trees.' She said, "I knew about it in France from my childhood." It was in 1952, and her audience was between eight and fourteen. "When I was young," Mother told them, "I was perhaps twelve, I often went walking in a big forest near Paris. A famous forest it





was, the Fontainebleau forest. Great trees of over two thousand years old are there. At that time nobody had yet spoken to me of meditation or how to meditate. All the same, whenever I went there and sat under those great trees, I would feel very calm and concentrated inwardly, and almost lose the sense of the external world and feel an intimate contact with them. And I was very happy. 1 was so much identified with those great trees in my consciousness that little birds and squirrels would come in front of me without any hesitation and even sit on my body and play freely." Mother said to the children, "If you go and sit with your back against a tree, you can feel in your very body its sap rising." Mother added that some trees can even grow in friendship with men. "They have a very great affection," she said. "Their generosity in giving protection is probably far greater than man's."

Through Mother's storytelling, we children learned to love trees; we learned about meditation, about identification, about consciousness. And we learned that all things are endowed with "life" because all things have "consciousness" in them.



"This consciousness exists not only in human beings and plants and trees, but also in all the things of the universe. It is there in the sun and in the moon and in the stars. It also exists in animals and birds; as well as in countries, nations, rivers and mountains."

As usual, when talking to Satprem, Mother gave the true reason (which she learned when she was in her twenties) for the birds, the squirrels coming to her as they did, without any hesitation. Mirra herself was as yet unaware of what she embodied, but not so the animals.

Mother then described to Satprem what happened in the Fontainebleau forest: "I was eleven, or twelve, when my mother rented a cottage at the edge of the forest. We didn't need to cross the town. I used to go out and sit in the forest all by myself. I would sit and be lost in reverie. One day —it happened often — one day squirrels had come, several birds were there, and also," Mother opened wide her large eyes, "deer, looking on. So pretty it all was! When I opened my eyes and saw this, I found it charming."

At the time Mirra simply lived her experiences in

*"I didn't know what meditation was."*

the visible and the invisible. "Interestingly there was nothing mental about it: I didn't know the existence of these things, I didn't know what meditation was —I meditated without having the least idea of what it was. I knew nothing, absolutely nothing, my mother had kept it all completely taboo: these subjects are not to be broached, they drive you crazy."

When we say "the visible and the invisible," we of course mean, for our eyes. Mirra's eyes pierced easily, automatically even, the veil of invisibility.

One morning in 1953, I was in the laboratory, filling bottles with *Pine Bath* received from France, which Mother used in her baths. Pavitra dropped in for some work or other —I was also his secretary —and stood looking at the dark green colour of the liquid, with a golden-russet tint to it. Mother was passing by just then. Seeing us, she too came in. She asked what we were talking about. Pavitra said he was asking me what the colour reminded me of. (As a matter of fact, he would often test me and others in a similar offhand way.) I said, "Autumn." Mother looked at Pavitra; he said, "It reminds one of a forest." Mother agreed



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with him. She said, "Yes, the Black Forest." Then Mother told us a story from her childhood. "I had once been to the Black Forest. I was quite small, about eight years old. My brother was one and half years older. We had gone to Baden-Baden. There I saw gnomes." She gave a vivid description, "They like to play hide-and-seek. I loved watching them. They were dressed in green. It was very difficult to distinguish them from the green foliage. But I could see them quite plainly." Not so Matteo. "My brother didn't like it, though. He could only hear the sound caused by their games, but couldn't see them. It scared him. And he would also ask me not to go to the forest." Their nanny added her voice to Matteo's. "Our bonne would tell us not to go to the forest towards dusk, as it was the time when the little people came out to play. Our bonne would ask us to stay near the house and play in the garden." Mother then remembered that "This was my only visit to Germany. I have never been there since."

Sri Aurobindo once referred to this "sight" of Mother's when he was discussing Jules Romains' book



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*The Eyeless Sight* with some disciples. He said, "In her chil hood, the Mother was able to see even in the dark and she had developed the power of sight everywhere. She is, even now, able to see from behind and this general sight works more accurately than the physical eyes. It works best when the eyes are closed."

Which fact two of Sri Aurobindo's attendants found out to their discomfiture. One day, as Mother was combing Sri Aurobindo's silken hair (which could not be left to the tender mercies of the ham-handed disciples, for even Sri Aurobindo ended up by jokingly asking them, 'Have you left some hair?'), she was overtaken by trance —a frequent occurrence during that Second World War period. Well, her eyes were half-closed, her body swayed, but the hands went on doing their work. The two attendants there, overgrown babies that they were, began to joke and play with each other, silently of course, assuming that she would not notice their pranks. But as Mother went out of the room, she told them, "I can see everything. I have eyes at the back of my head."



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# *16*

# *Lives Past*

"At the Guimet Museum in Paris, there are two mummies. Nothing remains in one; but in the other, the spirit-of-form has remained very conscious." Mother was answering a question as to why calamity often befalls archeologists engaged in excavations. She was explaining to us that even when a person is outwardly dead, the body is not destroyed so long as the 'spirit-of-form' persists. This 'spirit-of-form' is a part of our physical form. Ancient Egypt had the knowledge of body preservation. Mother expounded: "In the other, the spirit-of-form has remained very conscious. Conscious to such a degree that one can have a contact of consciousness with it. Evidently, when so many idiots come and stare at you with uncomprehending round eyes, saying 'Oh! he is like this,



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he is like that,' it can't give pleasure."

Not surprising, "considering that ordinary people were never mummified, but only those beings who had achieved a considerable inner power, or else members of the royal family, persons more or less initiated." In ancient Egypt, where occultism was highly developed, "exceptional beings such as pharaohs or high priests etc. were mummified, because they were greatly developed

externally, that is to say, there was the beginning of a voluntary and conscious cellular grouping in them—which is why the form was preserved for as long as possible."

Mummification was not a tradition in India. But in the days of yore, there was a tradition of preserving bodies by petrifying them. This was done to those who had developed and organised the cellular consciousness of their bodies. "Generally they were petrified, in the Himalayan petrifying springs." Once Mother even told Satprem that she had "seen" one of her bodies, lying petrified in a Himalayan cave.

To go back to what Mother was saying: "A particular mummy has been the cause of a great number of



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calamities. She was a princess, the Pharaoh's daughter, and secretly headed an initiatory school at Thebes."

Now, how did Mother know all this about the princess? Was it only through books? Or through some other means?

It was Satprem's birthday. Mother meditated with him. After the meditation she said, "As soon as the meditation started, I saw some perfectly familiar scenes from ancient Egypt. And you, you were slightly different but very similar all the same." The first thing Mother saw was the jackal-faced Egyptian god, Anubis, who helped reassemble the strewn pieces of Osiris' body, so that Isis could restore him to life (Osiris was killed and dismembered by Seth). The jackal-god is also the protector of mummies, and thus helps to preserve the body's conscious cells. "This god is very intimately linked with you," Mother told Satprem, "almost as though you had fused into each other: you were like a priest of the sacrifice and at the same time he was entering you.... It was interesting, so I went on looking and I lived the scene. All kinds of scenes: scenes of initiation, of worship, and so on.



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For a long time."

Ah, so Mother had 'lived' in Egypt!

On another occasion, she saw other scenes. "When I was resting in the afternoon, I had a vision, that is to say, I relived a life in Egypt. Ancient Egypt, as I saw by my own dress, by the walls, by everything. I was obviously the wife of the Pharaoh or his sister." Mother showed us a note on which she had immediately jotted down the salient points of her vision. "A temple or palace in ancient Egypt. Paintings in light and fresh colours on very high walls. Clear light.... I am the Pharaoh's queen, or the High Priestess of the temple, with full authority." This flashback took her to the times of Amenhotep IV, better known to us as Akhenaton. A great religious reformer, he substituted the cult of Amon with the worship of Aton, the sun-god.

But are these all imaginings? How to be certain? By the feeling that accompanies the experience. Mother describes this feeling: "Not exactly an emotion, but a certain emotional vibration associated 'with an occurrence. That's what is full and which remains, which lasts. Also, along with it, you get a



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perception —a bit vague, a bit fuzzy—of the people who were there, of the occasion, the occurrence. That makes up the psychic memory."

Mirra had many psychic memories.

"I could narrate many such things," said Mother, "it's very interesting. I have had a lot in Italy. I travelled in Italy with my mother when I was fifteen." One of these past lives in Italy had remained extremely vivid. As soon as Mirra saw the place, images came rushing up. "This Italian experience struck me much," Mother said with a smile. "I was fifteen. I was travelling with my mother. Very striking it was, moreover! The memory of being strangled in the prison of the Doges! It's quite a story."

As we know, the Doges presided over the government of Venice —all the 117 islands that make up the city. The Ducal Palace was first built in 814 and rebuilt several times at later periods. Finally, A. da Ponta restored it in the XVI $^{th}$ century, after it was burnt down. The palace is rich in paintings of sixteenth century artists: II Tintoretto, Paolo Veronese, Jacopo Palma (the Younger).

This is what happened to Mirra: "I was with my mother and a group of tourists, and we were being shown round the *Palazzo ducale* by a guide. Well, you were taken underground where the prisons were located. He began telling some story (which didn't interest me), when abruptly I was seized by a kind of force that came into me, and then not even . . . not even aware of it, I went to a corner and saw a written word. It was. . . . Well, the memory that / had written it came at the same time. The whole scene kept coming back: I had written that on the wall (and I saw it, I saw it with my physical eyes, the writing had remained; the guide said that all the walls with writings on them, made by the prisoners of the Doges, had been left intact). The scene continued. I saw, I had the sensation of people entering, catching hold of me. I was there with a prisoner. I was there, then people were entering, catching hold of me [Mother indicates her neck] and tying me. And then —I was with a bunch of about ten people who were listening to the guide, near a small aperture which gave on the canal —then, the sensation of being lifted and thrown



out through the aperture. Well, naturally, fifteen years old, you understand! I said to my mother, 'Let us get out of here!' " Mother laughs. "It was difficult to contain myself. We left."

Mirra never accepted anything at face value. Not even her own sensations. She always checked the facts. "We left," said Mother. "But afterwards I made inquiries; I questioned, I researched — we had some family there [her aunt Elvire, we presume], I knew some people. And I found out how true it was. The next day, I researched in museums, looked up archives, found out my name, other people's names. Historically it was a true story. Well. A Doge had imprisoned his predecessor's son as a living danger to him, for he had tried to step in his father's shoes. So the Doge, who himself had usurped the father's place, imprisoned the son. But the Doge's daughter was in love with the son, and she managed to go and visit him. Then the Doge, in his rage, decided to have her drowned." Mother paused. But what did Mirra's action and sensation signify? What was written on the wall? "The whole story was there. It was really spontaneous.

I knew absolutely nothing of that story —these stories are not known in other countries, only the local people know them. But the most interesting of all was that something which said to me, 'There.' I went to look and found written on the wall exactly what I remembered having written myself."

This particular Doge will keep cropping up in Mirra's life.

In this way, Mother got lots, lots of information about Joan of Arc, "lots. And then, of such striking exactitude! Most interesting, most."

Mother remarked, "Generally, these are fragments, individualized fragments of life." She had literally hundreds of such memories. "For instance, I had one when I was quite young (I was perhaps twenty), and it was not night, but I was resting stretched out: suddenly I felt myself on a horse, with a formidable warrior power, and the feeling of ... a will for victory and the POWER of victory." She saw herself in men's clothes, leading armies to a fantastic victory. "I felt I was riding a horse: I saw a white charger, and I saw my legs —my pantaloons, you know —and a costume



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in red velvet. And I was at full gallop. Naturally, I did not know what the face looked like or anything. I saw also the crowds, the armies and the rising sun. And it was so strong, this feeling ... it was the feeling of the will for victory and of the power of victory. That is how it came. Then, some time later, I happened to read the story of Murat and immediately understood that that was the moment of going into battle : he had called inwardly upon a Power, therefore an identification took place and it was that which I remembered and which came. . . . The feeling remained for a long time with the feel of the battle, but above all the feel of that power which makes you invincible." Mother added as an afterthought, "I was, so to speak, the spirit of victory in Murat."

History provides us with many instances when a man (or a woman) forgot his little person and felt something else take over from him. He became a force in action. Isn't Mother's narrative a fine example of it?

Another memory of which Mother spoke in detail was also of France. Mirra was then twenty or so, when she went on a visit to Versailles. "I had been invited

to dinner by a cousin, who served us champagne during dinner without warning me that it was dry champagne, and I drank, unsuspecting —me, who never took wine or liquor! When it was time to get up and cross the crowded hall, oh, how difficult it was! So very difficult." Mother sighed. "Then we arrived near the chateau, at the place overlooking the park where you get a full view of it. There I was, looking at the park, when I saw there ... I saw the park filling up with lights —that is, the electric lights had vanished —with all kinds of lights: torches, lanterns, etc. And many people were walking about ... in Louis XIV costume! My eyes were wide open as I stood staring at all this. I was holding on to the balustrade to be sure not to fall down! For I was rather unsure of myself. I was looking at all that when I saw myself there, having an entire conversation with some people. That is, I was someone (now I can't remember who), and those two sculptor brothers were there; anyway, all sorts of people were there, and I saw myself among them, talking and discussing things."

This too was no dream, for Mirra had retained



enough control to describe what she had seen. "It seems there were some extremely interesting details and rectifications."

What the child Mirra used to see in the "transparent" pages of her history books, the grown-up Mirra saw as living scenes unrolling before her eyes.



## *17*

## *Carrying on the Evolution*

It was February, 1951. Mother told us the following incident from the life of Queen Elizabeth I. "She had reached the last days of her life and was extremely ill. But there was trouble in the

country; and for reasons of taxation a group of people (merchants, I think) had formed a delegation to her, on behalf of a section of the people. She was in her chamber, very ill, so very ill that she could hardly stand on her feet. But she got up and dressed to receive them. The person who was nursing her cried out, 'But this is impossible! You will die of it.' The Queen replied calmly, 'One dies after.'

September 1964. Satprem was preparing Mother's *Talks* of 1951 for publication, reading them aloud to her for her comments and elucidations. When he



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read the above text, Mother interrupted him to say, "This remark, 'One dies after,' is my own experience — it was not a 'dream.' Even now I can see the picture: I see the picture of the people, the populace, of myself, of the gown, the person who nursed me —all these I see. And I answered. ... It was so evident! I felt so strongly that things were controlled by the will that I answered, 'One dies after,' quite simply." Mother smiled, "In English, not in French!"

Among all her past lives, each more dangerous than the other, the most acute and poignant imprints were left by her lives as a sovereign — empress and queen and suchlike. Most painful. To be a king is to be tied up in protocol and ceremony, which amounts to one's being a slave with no freedom of action. "I remember acutely a resolve I made in my last life as an empress. I said: 'Nevermore! Enough is enough. I want no more of it! I would rather be —not even 'I would rather,' the choice was definite —I want to be a commoner, in an ordinary family, free at last to do as I want.' " In this birth Mother was not "watched by by a pack of people scrutinizing my every action and



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*Mirra had lived everywhere, in all times.*

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making rules for what I should do."

Mother had lived not only in France and Italy and England, but also in Russia; ancient Egypt, Assyria, India, China —Mirra had lived everywhere, in all times.

Wherever and whenever humanity— nay, creation itself—had reached a certain stage of evolution, Sri Aurobindo and Mother were there to carry on the evolution to a farther stage.

Once when someone asked Sri Aurobindo what he and Mother were doing during their many births on this earth, Sri Aurobindo replied laconically, "Carrying on the evolution."

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We may, perhaps, get an overall picture from a vision Mother had in the early years of this century.

"I slept and now I am awake.

"I awoke in a distant past, at the edge of a pool, its water a deep sapphire, as calm as a mirror.

"To the east of the lake I see a superb clump of



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trees —trees of rare species —and shrubs. Their long branches bend down to caress the surface of the tranquil water, which reflects in its limpidity flowers dazzling with rich and variegated colours. In the shade of this natural and charming retreat, glorious white lotuses bloom.

"The retreat is entirely illumined by an irised radiance. And in the centre of this radiance is a young and blond *passive* [woman] asleep in her gracious beauty, reclining on the large flat leaves, her head pillowed on one of the lovely five-petalled flowers. Her large white dress is caught in at the waist by a golden girdle.

"To her left, straight and proud, like a vigilant sentinel, stands a white ibis perched on one of its coral feet. A protective cloak of deep amethyst is spread over the sleeper. The picture emanates a calm and serene beatitude. The *passive* must be reposing in an enchanting dream.

"A cool and soft breeze soughs between the leaves, gently rippling the water; and in its caressing breath the breeze seems to murmur: 'Queen of the



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Islands of Deep Waters . . .' 'Queen of the Islands of Deep Waters' is taken up in echo by a harmonious voice rising from the fathomless sapphirine depths.

"Thereupon I fell asleep and awoke in the immense hall of the palace.

"By the form of the columns and the carvings on them, by the paintings, so magnificent and yet so sober, that adorn the walls, I realize that I am in one of those superb palaces of ancient Egypt, in Memphis or Thebes.

"The hall is filled with a picturesque crowd; bright-coloured loincloths and plumed headdresses, jewels and draperies make up a rich and strange harmony. All eyes are turned to the north side of the hall, where, placed in the middle of the wall and raised over twelve steps, is a throne with a purple canopy above it. At the bottom of the steps are two recumbent young lions, placid and strong guardians. To the left of the throne, a white ibis stands on its pink feet. The throne itself is all enveloped in an intensely radiant light. And, in the centre of the light, I see the blond, young *passive,* holding a white lotus in her hand.



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"Turn by turn, all those present pass before the steps, bowing and taking an oath of loyalty."

As we can see, this vision is pregnant with symbols known in ancient Egypt. According to Egyptian tradition:

The WHITE LOTUS was a symbol of birth and dawn, it was thought to have been the cradle of the sun on the first morning of creation, rising from the primeval waters.

Ibis or the *Bennu* bird was symbolic of rebirth, of the principle of life and, among other things, was the carrier of eternal light from the abode of the gods to the world of men.

The TWO LIONS symbolized Yesterday and Today, or, it can be said, Osiris and Re.

Then another image of another life is seen by Mirra in her vision; a life in ancient India.

After which she lives yet another scene, in another life. A vast forest of oaks. Through the high tree trunks glints a green sea, coppery in the setting sun. A Western Isle.



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But in each scene the central personage is the young *passive.*

Once again Mirra falls asleep. "And upon waking, I recognize the unique and marvellous setting of the Queen of the Adriatic at the fairest moment of her royalty.

"Venice the strange, the wild, Venice the city of art and mad passion, Venice whose walls exude crime and whose canals exhale drama..... Here are the magnificent palaces in all the splendour of their flourishing youth; here are the elegant gondolas carrying noble dames and great lords in their rich attire.

"But a strong sensation pulls me to the Ducal Palace; I know that there I shall again find her whom I have just seen through the centuries.

"I enter the great courtyard. And, effectively, by the Giant's Stairway, half hidden behind a pillar, I espy the blond young *passive,* dressed in a white robe. She is pressed against the shoulder of a fine old man who folds her in his arms as though to protect her. Their faces are sad; their demean our grave. Thus pressed against one another, they watch a stately

*"Once more we have attempted our grandiose Work,*
*and it cannot be in vain."*

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procession slowly climbing the stairs that lead to the palace. And I distinctly sense that their fate lies in the hands of those climbing thus, and who are their mortal enemies.

"Then the old man bends down, kisses the child's forehead and solemnly says to her: 'For eons we have fought and suffered for the sacred cause and for humanity's salvation, across widely different countries, in widely varying situations.

" 'Once more we have attempted our grandiose Work, and it cannot be in vain. Man's enemies are probably stronger than us at the moment, but our hour will come inevitably. They work for division and falsehood. We are of those who fight, and have always fought, for Truth and

Harmony: these alone are immortal. The more bitter the fight, the more beautiful the triumph. What does effort matter, when one is sure of the result.'

"The child replies in a sweet voice: 'Assuredly. I have the certitude that upon our next return to the earth, we shall see the Victory!' "

On that note ended Mirra's vision.



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# *18*

# *Atoms*

Thus time passed.
Life brought its thousand and one riches to the growing child.
The child was now a girl.
The girl was now a woman.
Mirra was now in her late teens.
Matteo had entered the *Polytechnique.*
The nineteenth century was drawing to its close.
Mirra was finding the life she was leading more and more limitative and distateful. In all likelihood sparks flew often and often between Mathilde and Mirra.
"Born in a perfectly respectable bourgeois family, where art was considered as a pastime rather than a career, and artists as frivolous, easily inclined to



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debauchery and with a dangerous disregard for money, I felt —perhaps out of a spirit of contradiction — a compelling need to become a painter." Thus begins the speech of the Artist, written by Mother in 1954, in the play *The Great Secret.*

As soon as she attained the required age, Mirra joined the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* in Paris. There she came into closer contact with Henri Morisset, son of Edouard Morisset whom Mira Ismalun had long known. The two families had continued to be on friendly terms.

On October 13, 1897, Mirra Alfassa and Henri Morisset were married. Mirra was nineteen, going on twenty.

This was as good a way as any to change her surroundings. At any rate, a good way to plunge into a new way of life.

Mirra was already in quest of a truer way of life.

For, some years back, a casually acquired knowledge had shaken her to the core. This was when she came to know that everything was nothing but 'atoms.' "I still remember my impression," Mother said to



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us in 1966, "when I was quite young and was told that everything is 'atoms' (that was the term used in those days). They said, 'You see this table? You think it's a table, that it is solid and it's wood —well, it is only atoms moving about.' I remember, the first time I was told that, it made a kind of revolution in my head, bringing such a feeling of the complete unreality of all appearances. All at once I said, 'But if it's like that then nothing is true!' I couldn't have been more than fourteen or fifteen."

Thus began Mirra's quest for the true Reality.

Which was to lead her ultimately, through life's byways and highways, to Sri Aurobindo.

Then Mirra would become the MOTHER.

Then Sri Aurobindo and Mother would set out together to "make r-e-a-1 what is True."

End of Book One



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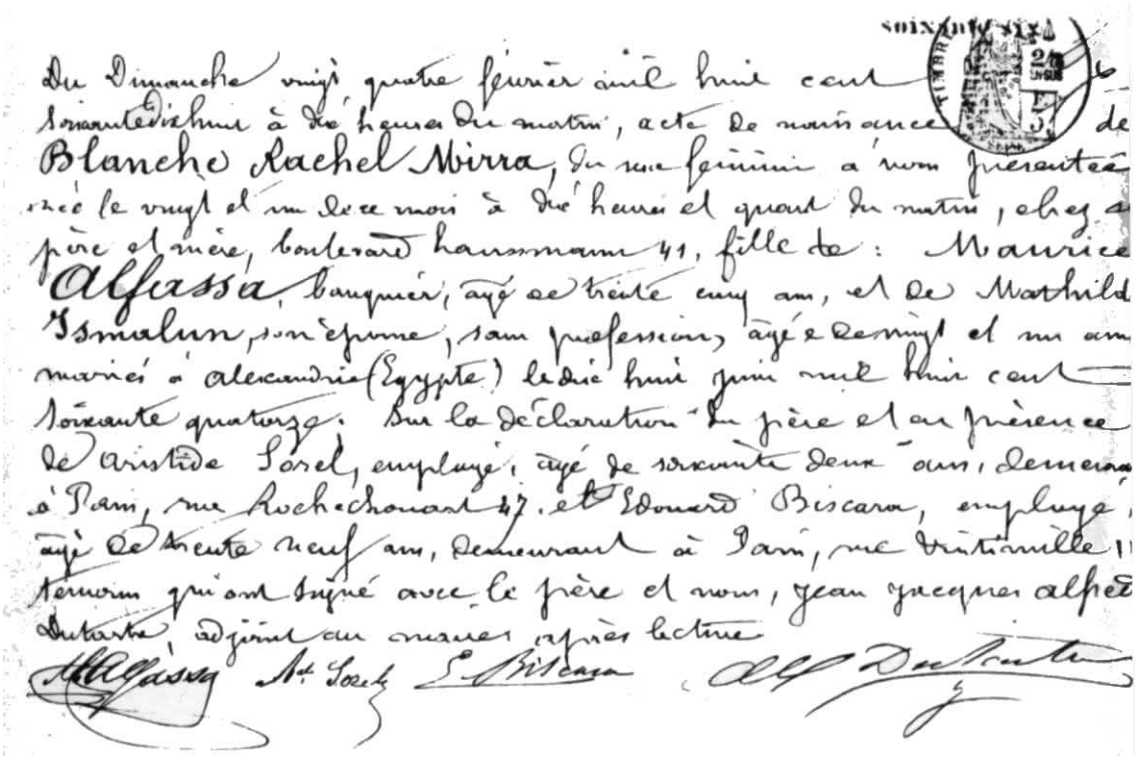

MIRRA'S BIRTH CERTIFICATE

(translation)

This Sunday 24 February 1878 at 10 a.m., birth certificate of BLANCHE RACHEL MlRRA, of female sex, surname as under, born the 21st of this month at 10:15 a.m., at the home of her father and mother, 41 Boulevard Haussmann, daughter of: Maurice ALFASSA, banker, aged thirty-five, and Mathilde ISMALUN, his spouse, housewife, aged twenty-one, married at Alexandria (Egypt) on 18 June 1874. Under notification of the father, in the presence of the witnesses Aristide Sorel, employee, aged sixty-two, residing at Paris, 47 Rue Rochechouart, and Edouard Biscara, employee, aged thirty-nine, residing at Paris, 11 Rue Vintimille, who have signed with the father and me, Jean-Jacques Alfred Dutartre, deputy mayor. Read and approved:

M. Alfassa Ade. Sorel E. Biscara Alf. Dutartre

# Mother's Chronicles

## *Book One - Mirra*

**Chronology**

1830, December - MIRA PINTO, daughter of Said Pinto, is born in Cairo, Egypt. Mother's grandmother. She died in Nice and was cremated in Paris in 1909.

1843 -MIRA PINTO and MATTEO ISMALUN are married in Alexandria.

1843, July -MAURICE ALFASSA is born in Adrianople, Turkey. Mother's father. Died on September 13, 1918.

1857, December 18— MATHILDE ISMALUN is born in Alexandria. Mother's mother. Died in Paris, on December 9,1944.

1874,June 18-MATHILDE ISMALUN and MAURICE ALFASSA are married in Alexandria, Egypt.

1876, July 13- MATTEO ALFASSA is born in Alexandria. Mother's brother. Died in Blois, on August 12, 1942.

1877, April -The ALFASSA family arrive in France.

1878, February 21— MIRRA ALFASSA (MOTHER) is born at 41 Boulevard Haussmann. Birth registered at the

Town Hall of Paris' 9th arrondissement.

1878 to 1886 -The ALFASSA family lives at 62 Haussmann (Paris VIII). Mother spends the first eight years of her life in that house.

1886 to 1807 - The Alfassas shift to 3 Square du Roule. Mother lives there from the age of eight to nineteen.

1890, August 28 - MAURICE ALFASSA gets French naturalization.

1897, October 13-MIRRA ALFASSA and HENRI MORISSET get married.

# Bibliography

To weave Mother's story, I had necessarily to pick up a line here, a sentence there. But Readers interested in finding out more about Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's experience may like to consult the following books by Satprem:

***MOTHER'S AGENDA,*** 1951-1973 (13 volumes)

Recorded by Satprem in the course of countless personal conversations with Mother, the log of her fabulous exploration in the cellular consciousness of the body. Twenty-three years of experiences which parallel some of the most recent theories of modern physics. The key to man's passage towards the next species. *(Volumes 1, 2, 3, 12 & 13 already published in English)*

*Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness,* an essay (1984)

*The Mind of the Cells,* an essay (1982)

*Mother,* a trilogy,

I *The Divine Materialism* (1980)
II *The New Species* (1983)
III *The Mutation of Death* (forthcoming)

*On the Way to Superman hood,* an essay (forthcoming)

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Who is Mother?

I can hear you, dear Reader, wondering. You ask, "What is so interesting in the story of Mother?"

Let *me* ask you: Do you like thrillers that take you hunting for the hidden treasure? Do you like historical novels that take you back in time? Do you like space odysseys that take you forward in time? Do you like science fiction stories that break all bounds of space and time? Do you like scientific discoveries in which scientists painstakingly gather proof after proof and note meticulously their findings? Do you like the story of evolution? Evolution that never stops, evolution that has produced you and me—mankind. And finally, who does not like love stories, love so fierce and absolute that it descends into inferno and confronts death in order to retrieve the beloved?

Dear Reader, if you like any or many or all of these things, then come with me. Let us walk together in Mother's Geography and find out.

Then, perhaps, we shall know: Who is MOTHER.

S. N.

MIRRA is *book one* in MOTHER'S CHRONICLES. Its story covers Mother's background, from her maternal grandmother, her parents and brother to her birth and childhood, mostly narrated in her own words, including her many extraordinary experiences. This book brings the reader up to the time of her marriage, when she was nineteen.