

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXI

No. 12

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

<i>Sri Aurobindo</i>		
EVOLUTION (Poem)	...	1111
<i>The Mother</i>		
‘TO BE ALWAYS IN COMMUNION WITH THEE . . .’	...	1112
‘ONE MUST WATCH OVER ONE’S FAITH’	...	1113
<i>Prema Nandakumar</i>		
WANDERING IN THE ARCHIVES OF MEMORY		
4. CURTAINS OF CORAL VINE	...	1115
<i>Chitra Sen</i>		
DORTOIR (A Compilation)		
III – RECOLLECTIONS OF ANU PURANI	...	1122

The Cripps Story

<i>Introductory Note: TWO SIDES</i>	...	1125
1. REFERENCES TO CRIPPS IN SRI AUROBINDO’S WRITINGS	...	1127
2. MENTION OF CRIPPS IN PURANI’S EVENING TALKS	...	1131
3. THE MOTHER ON THE CRIPPS PROPOSAL	...	1132
4. SRI AUROBINDO AND THE CRIPPS PROPOSALS — <i>Amal Kiran</i>	...	1134
5. ‘A BIT OF NIṢKĀMA KARMA’ — <i>Nirodbaran</i>	...	1138
6. BRAHMA DRISHTI AND BRAHMA TEJ — <i>Sisir Kumar Mitra</i>	...	1141

7. THE CRIPPS PROPOSALS AND THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT — <i>Kittu Reddy</i>	...	1145
8. SIR STAFFORD CRIPPS — <i>Sunayana Panda</i>	...	1150
9. A LETTER — <i>Isobel Cripps</i>	...	1158
10. STATEMENT BY WINSTON CHURCHILL IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ANNOUNCING THE MISSION	...	1159
11. LONDON PRESS COMMENTS	...	1161
12. REACTIONS IN INDIA	...	1161
13. SIR STAFFORD ARRIVES	...	1162
14. DRAFT DECLARATION FOR DISCUSSION WITH INDIAN LEADERS	...	1163
15. BROADCAST BY SIR S. CRIPPS	...	1164
16. RESOLUTION OF THE CONGRESS WORKING COMMITTEE	...	1169
17. LAST WORDS BY SIR STAFFORD CRIPPS	...	1172
18. C. RAJAGOPALACHARI'S RESOLUTION IN THE MADRAS LEGISLATURE AND HIS CONSEQUENT RESIGNATION	...	1177
19. A SADHAK'S ACCOUNT	...	1178
<i>End Note: NOT TWO SIDES</i>	...	1181

EVOLUTION

I passed into a lucent still abode
 And saw as in a mirror crystalline
 An ancient Force ascending serpentine
The unhasting spirals of the aeonic road.
Earth was a cradle for the arriving god
 And man but a half-dark half-luminous sign
 Of the transition of the veiled Divine
From Matter's sleep and the tormented load
Of ignorant life and death to the Spirit's light.
 Mind liberated swam Light's ocean vast,
 And life escaped from its grey tortured line;
I saw Matter illumining its parent Night.
 The soul could feel into infinity cast
 Timeless God-bliss the heart incarnadine.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 157)

‘TO BE ALWAYS IN COMMUNION WITH THEE . . .’

February 7, 1914

FOR him who, by being integrally united with Thee, is constantly conscious of what expresses Thee most perfectly in action considering the circumstances, no external rule is any longer necessary. The principles of life are in sum only makeshifts for diminishing as far as possible the ignorance of those who do not know Thee yet, and for counteracting somehow or other the moments of blindness and obscurity of those who have only an intermittent contact with Thee.

To make rules for oneself and to make them as general, that is, as supple as possible, is good, but provided one considers them only as artificial lights which should not be used except when the full natural light of communion with Thee fails. Besides, a constant revision of these rules is imperative, for they can be only the expression of a present knowledge and must necessarily gain by all growth and improvement of knowledge.

That is why when meditating upon the attitude one should have towards all those who come to us, in order not only to refrain from doing them any harm but, above all, to strive to do them the utmost possible good — that is, to help them as best one can in making the supreme discovery, the discovery of Thee within them — I saw clearly that no rule was vast and supple enough to be perfectly adapted to Thy law, and that the only true solution was to be always in communion with Thee, so that it could be adapted perfectly to all the infinite variety of circumstances.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM, 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 67)

‘ONE MUST WATCH OVER ONE’S FAITH’

“Religion has opened itself to denial by its claim to determine the truth by divine authority, by inspiration, by a sacrosanct and infallible sovereignty given to it from on high; it has sought to impose itself on human thought, feeling, conduct without discussion or question. This is an excessive and premature claim, although imposed in a way on the religious idea by the imperative and absolute character of the inspirations and illuminations which are its warrant and justification and by the necessity of faith as an occult light and power from the soul amidst the mind’s ignorance, doubts, weakness, incertitudes. Faith is indispensable to man, for without it he could not proceed forward in his journey through the Unknown; but it ought not to be imposed, it should come as a free perception or an imperative direction from the inner spirit. A claim to unquestioned acceptance could only be warranted if the spiritual effort had already achieved man’s progression to the highest Truth-Consciousness total and integral, free from all ignorant mental and vital mixture. This is the ultimate object before us, but it has not yet been accomplished, and the premature claim has obscured the true work of the religious instinct in man, which is to lead him towards the Divine Reality, to formulate all that he has yet achieved in that direction and to give to each human being a mould of spiritual discipline, a way of seeking, touching, nearing the Divine Truth, a way which is proper to the potentialities of his nature.”

The Life Divine, SABCL, Vol. 19, pp. 863–64

Sweet Mother, can faith be increased by personal effort?

FAITH is certainly a gift given to us by the Divine Grace. It is like a door suddenly opening upon an eternal truth, through which we can see it, almost touch it.

As in everything else in the ascent of humanity, there is the necessity — especially at the beginning — of personal effort. It is possible that in some exceptional circumstances, for reasons which completely elude our intelligence, faith may come almost accidentally, quite unexpectedly, almost without ever having been solicited, but most frequently it is an answer to a yearning, a need, an aspiration, something in the being that is seeking and longing, even though not in a very conscious and systematic way. But in any case, when faith has been granted, when one has had this sudden inner illumination, in order to preserve it constantly in the active consciousness individual effort is altogether indispensable. One must *hold on* to one’s faith, *will* one’s faith; one must seek it, cultivate it, protect it.

In the human mind there is a morbid and deplorable habit of doubt, argument,

scepticism. *This* is where human effort must be put in: the refusal to admit them, the refusal to listen to them and still more the refusal to follow them. No game is more dangerous than playing mentally with doubt and scepticism. They are not only enemies, they are terrible pitfalls, and once one falls into them, it becomes tremendously difficult to pull oneself out.

Some people think it is a very great mental elegance to play with ideas, to discuss them, to contradict their faith; they think that this gives them a very superior attitude, that in this way they are above “superstitions” and “ignorance”; but if you listen to suggestions of doubt and scepticism, *then* you fall into the grossest ignorance and stray away from the right path. You enter into confusion, error, a maze of contradictions You are not always sure you will be able to get out of it. You go so far away from the inner truth that you lose sight of it and sometimes lose too all possible contact with your soul.

Certainly a personal effort is needed to preserve one’s faith, to let it grow within. Later — much later — one day, looking back, we may see that everything that happened, even what seemed to us the worst, was a Divine Grace to make us advance on the way; and then we become aware that the personal effort too was a grace. But before reaching that point, one has to advance much, to struggle much, sometimes even to suffer a great deal.

To sit down in inert passivity and say, “If I am to have faith I shall have it, the Divine will give it to me”, is an attitude of laziness, of unconsciousness and almost of bad-will.

For the inner flame to burn, one must feed it; one must watch over the fire, throw into it the fuel of all the errors one wants to get rid of, all that delays the progress, all that darkens the path. If one doesn’t feed the fire, it smoulders under the ashes of one’s unconsciousness and inertia, and then, not years but lives, centuries will pass before one reaches the goal.

One must watch over one’s faith as one watches over the birth of something *infinitely* precious, and protect it very carefully from everything that can impair it.

In the ignorance and darkness of the beginning, faith is the most direct expression of the Divine Power which comes to fight and conquer.

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1957-1958*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 9, pp. 350-52)

WANDERING IN THE ARCHIVES OF MEMORY

(Continued from the issue of November 2008)

4. Curtains of Coral Vine

CURTAINS and curtains of coral vine enveloped the area where I spent my adolescent years. They were indeed curtains for I lived close to the Bay of Bengal in Visakhapatnam, right on the coast. A walk of two kilometres from the house would take us right to the beach. While the sea remained calm or roared explosively, the long Gajapathi Road separated the sandy beach from the inland. You crossed the road to go inland and again it was a mass of sand dunes for quite a distance. To my young eyes, the slack areas (the valley between sand dunes caused by wind) appeared like monstrous ravines. These sand dunes were reddish but many of the slacks were covered by coral creepers. There was no other vegetation in this area, except clusters of *Spinifex* on the beach proper. It keeps the sand together, I was told, what is known as sand binder. For me it was simply *Ravanan Meesai*, the moustache of Ravana with thorny ends.

Half a century ago very few houses had been built here. Visakhapatnam had only the Port Trust to boast of, and as I walked daily in the morning to the beach with my father, I would see the board, “Chairman, Visakhapatnam Port Trust” on the gate of a huge fort wall-like structure that enclosed the bungalow within. It was a mysterious area for me as I looked through the gate at the massive portico. Rows and rows of flowering plants in huge pots. I do not remember ever going in, though. Where the compound wall touched the ground outside, and on the wall were huge, healthy green-and-rose creepers, entwining themselves all over.

Sometimes the Chairman would happen to be near the gate and would exchange greetings with my father who was a Professor in the Andhra University. They would start a conversation. I would take a few steps here and there, always attracted by the creepers. I would warily go towards a place which showed a particularly thick bunch of blooms. “These are not merely pink, they are reddish pink!” I would tell myself. “It would be nice if I could take it home, amma could put it in the flower vase at the altar.”

Though engaged in talk, suddenly father’s voice would warn me: “No, don’t go too near! There are sure to be snakes.” The two would begin again about the snakes they had encountered in recent times and I would move closer and closer to father and stand near his walking stick. If a snake should come, thwack! I will finish it off!

When we started walking again, I would be the listener as father would dramatically retell stories like “Rappaccini’s Daughter” and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. He would wave at the sea and say: “Look, look at that distant ship! The Count of Monte Cristo’s ship must have looked just like that when Morrel and Valentine were

looking from the seashore!” The sea certainly took father back often to the classic by Alexandre Dumas and I listened avidly without comprehending much. But the names became familiar: Abbé Faria, Danglers, Comte de Morcerf and Heydee. When he went to England in 1952, father went to Marseille and sent me a printed postcard of the Château d’If in which Edmund Dantes had been imprisoned for fifteen years. It was some years after this introduction that I acquired the 1894 four-volume edition of the novel. And I think I came to understand why father looked so grim whenever he took up the story and am amazed that he could make it such an interesting tale in Tamil. No wonder whenever I take up this favourite set of books for a quiet read, I am taken back in the Time Machine to those sand dunes and remain veiled by the coral vines for hours as my eyes take in the innumerable twists and turns of this indestructible story of revenge and forgiveness.

As father spoke of the villain Danglers and the book-lover Vampa, I would be mumbling a syllable now and then but suddenly my voice would have stopped. For the coral vines would be everywhere inviting me silently: “Come! Take just a bunch!”

“Are you listening to me?” Father’s voice would come and I would automatically say, “Of course.” I must add here that our conversation was entirely in Tamil and it never sounded funny to me that Edmund Dantes was speaking such pucca, perfect, brahminic Tamil!

Sometimes we would stand gazing at these vast bed sheets of flowers on the sand slacks. The blossoms were never uniform. Some would be reddish pink, some like baskets of Edward roses and quite often the green leaves would be punctuated by clusters of sheer white blooms. Maybe it depended on the amount of water the particular area could conserve and give to its creeper. Or they may have been different varieties. I do not know. Father sensed my attraction for the flowers and so it became a regular affair when he would stop somewhere, stretch forward his walking stick, pull towards us a vine and allow me to get some bunches. He said we had to be careful for the vines covered innumerable snakes which abounded in that area. And there were holes where jackals hid during daytime.

Indeed so, for the nights were never free of the various animals like foxes and jackals giving voice. In case I woke up with a start having had a bad dream, amma would shush me: “Jackals howling, nothing more. Look at us, almost living in a forest!” For we lived in a crumbly old house surrounded by a huge garden. Once upon a time it had belonged to the Zamindar of Siripuram who was said to have had seven wives. It must have been a very grand garden-house, with long driveways from the Exit and Entry points leading to the central bungalow which was actually a low, tiled house with four small outhouses. The plants were all gone as there were no gardeners to tend them but huge and many-branched trees were everywhere. Except for the two main pathways, and the footpaths leading to the outhouses, the entire area was a carpet of coral vine.

Long ago I saw a beautiful film, *Madhumati*. The director must have been a

genius for he shows thin curtains swirling around the hero as he hears a tune and we are watching him in his earlier birth with a sudden change of background. For old people, their childhood, adolescence and youth are also earlier births. You recognise and see yourself too but it is not you and the people remain enviably at the same age when you saw them last! The coral vine has done that to me for I now see the house and a quieter, happier place I have not seen since then. Is that why the Mother named coral vine *Harmony*? The ugliness of a crumbly garden, the portico with two huge, cracked fish emblems, the snakes and a million other poisonous and not so poisonous reptiles, huge black ants which bit you so sharply that blood began to ooze, the gnarled trunks of the peepal and the jacaranda trees were all covered by the coral creepers. Such was the external harmony created by the vines. It was fun to watch when once in a way two or three professors who lived in these houses would come out with sticks in hand and brave the drumstick tree, drag away some of the vines, and get a peon to go up the tree and pluck drumsticks. For a few days after that, I think every house prepared drumstick sambhar only! It was also a great joy for children (there were perhaps five or six of us in that disintegrating area) as we could go fearlessly to the drumstick tree and pull away as much of the vines as we could. We then spent a long time decorating our doll's houses with bunches and bunches of this "*bataani puvvu*" and the older ones amongst us would order the younger ones about as if we were commanders-in-chief!

It was in 1954 that I heard for the first time *Savitri* being read. Among the stories told by father on our morning walks was *Savitri*. Then came the day when he returned from Pondicherry carrying a squat book titled *Savitri* along with the grand editions of *The Life Divine*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Foundations of Indian Culture* published in New York. This first single-volume edition of *Savitri* was also very well produced by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press at Pondicherry. Father went to Delhi immediately after and lectured on *Savitri* at the Sri Aurobindo Study Circle started by Surendranath Jauhar. When he returned he was very excited. Apparently this was the first time he had read the entire epic poem at one stretch. For months together he would keep reading from it in the evenings with my mother as his listener. My brother would join us sometimes; often he would have gone to meet his friends. I would sit now and then but go away whenever my friend called me to play hop-scotch. But when Destiny takes charge how can you run away from the Divine?

One evening when reading *Savitri*, my father looked up and asked mother in Tamil: "It looks as if he is describing this place." My mother assented and said: "Won't you read it again?" My attention which had been wandering elsewhere returned:

Happy they lived with birds and beasts and flowers
 And sunlight and the rustle of the leaves,
 And heard the wild winds wandering in the night,
 Mused with the stars in their mute constant ranks,

And lodged in the mornings as in azure tents,
And with the glory of the noons were one.¹

Yes, it is like our life here! Sri Aurobindo goes on to describe the hermitages in the forest where the teachers and students are engaged in the educational process with undivided attention:

One-souled to all and free from narrowing bonds,
Large like a continent of warm sunshine
In wide equality's impartial joy,
These sages breathed for God's delight in things.
Assisting the slow entries of the gods,
Sowing in young minds immortal thoughts they lived,
Taught the great Truth to which man's race must rise
Or opened the gates of freedom to a few.
Imparting to our struggling world the Light
They breathed like spirits from Time's dull yoke released,
Comrades and vessels of the cosmic Force,
Using a natural mastery like the sun's:
Their speech, their silence was a help to earth.²

At that time and even after, I did not know how this must have looked to others. Father sitting in a rickety cane-chair with his book and his family with him as the listeners. It was dark in the garden and a lone electric light shed illumination upon the book in father's hand. Apparently this was noticed by others. Very recently I was bemused to read in the memoirs of father's younger colleague V.V. Ramanadham, who taught Economics in the University at that time:

It was my good fortune as a neighbour to see every evening a beautiful family scene. He (Iyengar) used to sit in a cane chair in the corner of the verandah of his house, near the long steps. Within a few feet his wife and two children would be seated. So nicely, on the floor, so close. To those who had no such experience of family life, this was a wonderful lesson in family togetherness. Their togetherness, domestic felicity was not just for a day's show. On all the days when he was in town, this scene was sure to be there. Slowly — not only in the so-called advanced countries like America — even in India, this kind of physical togetherness has become a lightning in the dark.

1. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 381.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 383.

For me, this was an auspicious initiation into *Savitri*. As the years went by I became a doctoral student and *Savitri* was my subject. When one is not yet twenty years old, one has a feeling of being a conqueror of all unknown, unrealisable realms. So was it with me. My confidence was due to my father being the guide of the doctoral thesis. There were changes in the living spaces. The trees in the wonderful Siripuram garden were systematically cut down, the coral vines were pulled out by bulldozers and a set of ugly cement houses were built in the area for university staff. We had to bid goodbye to the Eden. My morning walks with father continued but as we walked towards the sea further assaults on Mother Nature went on as we watched. The Caltex began a massive building spree and the uprooted snakes which had escaped the bulldozers began to twine themselves on our fences. The sand dunes were shrinking too, for enterprising, land-hungry builders could put up structures on anything and everything! The coral vines were vanishing as well but a new life opened for me, as I went deeper into *Savitri* studies.

When mother gave us our morning tea at 5 a.m., father would open with, "It was the hour before the Gods awake." It was dark when we set out towards the beach. Past the Exit Gate of the University, past the occasional wayside tea shop lighting its boiler, past the gleaming houses of the brand-new Caltex Staff Quarters safely ensconced within a huge stone wall, past the house in which an elderly Englishman lived, past the slacks which had now some houses, onwards to the bend in the road that brought one face to face with the sea. It seemed perfectly natural to me then, but looking back after half a century, the scenario seems to have been photographed by Sri Aurobindo with words:

It was the hour before the Gods awake.
 Across the path of the divine Event
 The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone
 In her unlit temple of eternity,
 Lay stretched immobile upon Silence' marge.
 Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,
 In the sombre symbol of her eyeless muse
 The abysm of the unbodied Infinite;
 A fathomless zero occupied the world.³

Father would quote a few lines and then explain them and relate the lines to our present experience. Yes, it was dark but we could see the road thanks to an occasional electric light. But imagine the road with no electric lights? None of those houses having a winking electric light? And always father would end up with, "Remember Sri Aurobindo was watching *this* darkness before dawn for he was watching *this same* Bay of Bengal." I would then feel a familial closeness with Sri Aurobindo

3. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 1

himself! Such was my *gurukulavasa*.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have brought such a rare beauty and meaning to our lives that even an apparently wild flower plant can ensconce you in a velvety couch to remember, to dream and seek perfection in one's life. Thanks to the Mother we have been meditating upon flowers most of the time, and it is certainly a Pushpa Yoga that she initiated in the Ashram, when one reads Tara Jauhar on the subject. How true when the Mother says: "Flowers speak to us when we know how to listen to them; it is a subtle and fragrant language." But then, in Pushpa Yoga also there are no short cuts!

I had a very interesting, if also sobering, experience with the coral creeper. Most of us are familiar with it, and the botanist would say, *Antigonon leptopus*. It is not cultivated in homes, though. I have not come across any home garden having this creeper. It is generally referred to as "*bataani*" flower (as the flowers do look like small sets of chick peas), and I was fascinated by the Mother's attention to detail about the various shades of the flower. If harmony is a quality of nature, then it has so many shades too! *Harmony in the Material Vital* (deep pink), *Harmony in the Vital* (bright pink) and *Integral Harmony* (white).

One of my relatives in her late seventies was at loggerheads with her daughter-in-law. There were constant bickerings and accusations and one day the furious daughter-in-law smashed a prized table lamp deliberately, with a volley of curses. The mother-in-law went to an Aurobindonian gentleman for help, as he was writing a column in a leading Tamil magazine about the various miracles of the Mother. He gave her a lecture on the miraculous efficacy of flowers and gave her a pot with the coral vine plant and asked her to grow it in her home and harmony would be the automatic result. With complete faith the lady took it home and grew it in a big pot. Three years passed. It grew, twined itself around, put forth lovely pink flowers. But harmony eluded the house. Things came to such a pass that the old parents decided to leave their ancestral home and go away to a small house which was also theirs.

Before leaving her home in which she had lived for fifty years, this relative came to me with a servant carrying a huge pot in which she was growing the Harmony plant. "This plant has not brought harmony to our house. Perhaps you would like to have it." I accepted it with thanks and it is very much in my tiny home garden. As I have retained it in the pot there has been no wild growth, but it sheds its dry leaves, shines with a new set of green leaves and bunches of pink flowers now and then. The plant has been repeating this drama for the last ten years.

So I have wondered what is the significance of the Mother giving a new name for flowers. What is the purpose? At last I have got the answer. When we grow a plant or keep a flower in the vase, we must meditate upon its significance too. Harmony? Yes. Perhaps if my relative had simply remained silent when the daughter-in-law grew hysterical (eternal problems of generation gap!), gradually the negative force would have lessened and totally withdrawn also. If the elder had repeatedly looked at the plant and controlled her desire to verbally hit back ("I have the Harmony plant

here, I should not say something which will go against it!”), maybe all would have been well. Now the elder lady who was also a kindly lady is no more. What use regrets now? But I am glad the lady thought of me and gave me the plant as a blessing from the Mother.

By their mere presence, flowers can bring harmony. But we must also strive towards such harmony. The Upanishadic dictum is clear: *tapah prabhāvād deva prasādāscha*. The aim is achieved by tapasya as well as God’s Grace. That is what we learn from *Savitri*. Aswapati’s Yoga and Savitri’s Yoga are not the work of a magician on the stage who compels us to suspend our disbelief. This is tapasya, and father and daughter go through several excruciating experiences, not all of which we find in *Savitri*. Sri Aurobindo has given us only a brief sketch but that seems enough. The struggle has to be constant till the goal is reached but the Mother’s Mahasaraswati presence assures us that the answering grace is now not far off, and the flower (any flower, be it Coral vine for *Harmony* or Champa for *Psychological Perfection*) always brings the Mahasaraswati presence:

A mother to our wants, a friend in our difficulties, a persistent and tranquil counsellor and mentor, chasing away with her radiant smile the clouds of gloom and fretfulness and depression, reminding always of the ever-present help, pointing to the eternal sunshine, she is firm, quiet and persevering in the deep and continuous urge that drives us towards the integrality of the higher nature.⁴

This is Mother’s inviolable harmony, her unfailing protection, her answering grace.

(*To be continued*)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

4. *The Mother*, SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 35.

Correction:

On p. 782 of the September 2008 issue of the journal a passage from Sri Aurobindo was not quoted properly. We give below the text as it should be.

But why write my biography at all? Is it really necessary? In my view, a man’s value does not depend on what he learns, or his position or fame, or what he does, but on what he is and inwardly becomes.

SRI AUROBINDO
(*SABCL*, Vol. 26, opening quotes)

DORTOIR

(A Compilation)

(Continued from the issue of November 2008)

III — Recollections of Anu Purani

Working in Dortoir

SOME people tell me that I was brought to Pondicherry when I was 6 months old, with my mother. After about two years, when I started walking, I fell very ill and the Mother told my parents that I was not able to bear the pressure of Sadhana besides the terrible heat of summer. She told them that I should be sent back and my parents decided to send me to my grandparents. Pujalal-bhai took me to Surat and left me with my grandparents. My mother came after some years to Surat. It seems I had come to Pondicherry twice or thrice but I was not allowed to enter the building as I was still very young, but I did see the Mother passing by.

When I began going to school my mother asked me if I wanted to visit my father and see Babuji (Sri Aurobindo). I jumped at the idea at once. When I came I could recognise my father as I had already seen his photograph.

After some time the Mother made me an Ashramite, when I was about twelve years old. I was quite a restless child. Once my father sent me to Madras with Udar. There I saw a dance performance by Uday Shankar's troupe. It is only then I came to know about this activity known as dance. I came back and told my father that I wanted to learn dancing. Can you imagine his reaction? He flatly refused to send me for dance lessons. Finally the Mother had to step in. She told my father, "Purani, let her go." So off I went. After two years of training in Kalakshetra with Uday Shankar I came back and then the Mother gave me some work.

I was told to work with Mona for Golconde, which was then almost ready. We were taught to embroider on bedspreads to be used later in Golconde. I worked for about two years with Mona in Golconde. She had asked me to keep Kusum as my helper in my work.

During that period, Dortoir was supervised by two elderly ladies, Gul-ben and Shirin-ben. Once the Mother told me to go to Dortoir and iron the clothes of the children there. I became very friendly with them. Sometimes the Mother would ask me about the Dortoir children and I would report to her my observations. This work I did perhaps for two years. One day, Amrita-da came and told Kusum and me that the Mother had called us at 4.15 p.m. We were excited and surprised at this rare opportunity. When we met her and she told us that we were to work in Dortoir and look after the children there, our happiness knew no bounds. Perhaps the next day itself I told Kusum, "We should treat the children with such care that they should not

miss their mother.”

The Mother gave us a bell and said that the bell should be rung at 5.30 a.m. to wake the children. The Mother had told us that we should not touch the children while trying to wake them up. She had said that they are often in some other plane and it disturbs them if they are abruptly awakened by loud sound or by someone touching them. It was necessary to supervise their brushing of teeth and bathing. Breakfast time was at 7.30 a.m. Ravindra-ji came regularly at that time and checked that the children ate well. Sometimes he would tell them stories while they had their breakfast.

At about 9.00 a.m. I would go to the Mother and she would enquire if I had slept well, eaten well and if everything went well in the Dortoir. One day, as I was going up the stairs to meet the Mother I thought, “How lucky I am! Mother has given me so many children!” When I stood in front of the Mother she smiled and said, “How lucky to have so many children!” I stood stunned. I was convinced that she knows everything we think and do.

The children’s clothes were collected by some washermen and washed by them. Sometimes they did not wash them properly. So, I would myself sit down and wash the clothes with them. In the evening Kusum and I took turns ironing the clothes.

When the children came back from the Playground, we saw to it that they took their bath properly. After dinner we would sit with the children to get their homework done. About an hour after that Ravindra-ji would come and talk with them, tell them stories. At 9.00 p.m. we rang the bell and the lights were put out.

One day the Mother said that she had heard a complaint against me. I was truly shocked. Then she smiled and said “Tara says you are not telling them stories.” You cannot imagine my relief and joy. So a story session started. It proved to be very popular. At times both the children and I forgot our time limit.

One day, the children said they wanted some special food. In short, they wanted us to cook for them. I was a greenhorn as far as cooking was concerned but Kusum had some experience in it! We got hold of a book on cooking and we had a lot of fun. I would mix masala in a vegetable and taste it. The only thing I understood was that it was not the right taste. Then Kusum would try and taste it. Both of us continued this way till it turned out well. One day we had many tomatoes. So I thought to make juice of these and boil it. I told the Mother about it and she said, “Never boil juice. It is best as it is.” Sometimes when bread slices were not used for many days and they became dry, I asked the Mother what should I do with these. She told me to put the slices in a frying pan and to pour milk on it and just turn the slices twice over. This became a special treat.

Once, when I was ironing the clothes someone called me and I went down without putting the iron up. When I came back up Lata’s dress was burning. I informed the Mother about it. “What would you like to do?” she asked. I said, “I have a new saree. Shall I make a dress for Lata from my saree? It is new and I have not used it.” It was

a pleasure to see her magnificent smile.

The Mother visited the Dortoir one day. She found it clean but the toilets were not clean enough. She said we should use phenyl in the toilets.

The Mother gave us a prayer to repeat every morning before going down for breakfast.

Those were wonderful days. It was a wonderful experience and I can never forget it.

She taught us so many things! The best experience she gave us was the capacity to love children.

(To be continued)

CHITRA SEN

There are people who can't meditate in the set way that one calls meditation, but they progress through work or through bhakti or through the two together. By work and bhakti one can develop a consciousness in which eventually a natural meditation and realisation becomes possible.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 536)

TWO SIDES

That there are two sides to every question is an oft-repeated platitude.

When we consider that event in Indian history commonly referred to as the Cripps Mission, a rapid first glance reveals two sides to the question: the British and the Indian. Britain made an offer, and India rejected it.

A closer look, though, shows that this is too simplistic an explanation.

Firstly, was the offer made in good faith or was it a mere ploy to get India into the War? Then, was the offer worth accepting? Were the concessions meaningful? And did Cripps change course in mid-stream? Did he exceed his brief? Was the British Government fully behind him? Or was it all a move to checkmate Cripps' growing popularity at home? Was Britain's motive a genuine desire to grant independence to India after the War, or was it all a result of pressure from the United States?

Seen from the Indian side, did the proposals genuinely address India's aspiration for freedom? Were the discussions stalled because of the stand adopted by the Congress? Or was it the intransigence of the League? Or the position of the Mahasabha? Or were the Princes the real stumbling block? And what about the question of the minorities?

These and other similar questions still persist.

Much, indeed a great deal, has been written on the subject; points and counter points have been debated threadbare, again and again. Arguments and justifications have been put forth to support each position. And we are led to feel the impossibility of ever seeing an end to the debate. We are left bewildered by the innumerable points of view, the many sides of the question, these numberless pieces in a puzzle that eludes completion.

In this general debate, one voice that is usually ignored is that of Sri Aurobindo — just as it was ignored in 1942.

The outcome of it all was a repetition of the old story — “God proposes, man disposes”!

Yet, however convincing the arguments for the refusal may be, however natural for man to act by the light of his reason, there is no denying that we are often unable to see the full picture, especially when it concerns the future consequences of a present action.

“Weight of the event and its surface we bear, but the meaning is hidden.”

We, in our wisdom or folly, made a choice. We allowed “life’s clamour” to deafen “the ear of the spirit”, for

“Man his passion prefers to the voice that guides from the immortals.”

And what we have today is a consequence of that choice.

That there are two sides to every question may then not be a mere platitude, but a hint of a deeper truth. Yes, there are two sides, the human and the divine.

The real challenge, then, is to leave “life’s cherished guests . . . outside” so that we may listen to the promptings of the spirit.

Thus alone can we hope to get the true guidance.

That is what was demanded of us in 1942.

That is what is demanded of us now.

[We present in the following pages some extracts and documents bearing on the Cripps Mission.

This is not meant to be exhaustive, nor does it give the full picture of the complexities of the negotiations.

It is just to remind ourselves of an important event of Indian History, the real significance of which we cannot ignore.

Our thanks to the authors, publishers and compilers of these documents.]



1. REFERENCES TO CRIPPS IN SRI AUROBINDO'S WRITINGS

At no time did he consent to have anything to do with the sham Reforms which were all the Government at that period cared to offer. He held up always the slogan of "no compromise" or, as he now put it in his Open Letter to his countrymen published in the *Karmayogin*, "no co-operation without control". It was only if real political, administrative and financial control were given to popular ministers in an elected Assembly that he would have anything to do with offers from the British Government. Of this he saw no sign until the proposal of the Montagu Reforms in which first something of the kind seemed to appear. He foresaw that the British Government would have to begin trying to meet the national aspiration half-way, but he would not anticipate that moment before it actually came. The Montagu Reforms came nine years after Sri Aurobindo had retired to Pondicherry and by that time he had abandoned all outward and public political activity in order to devote himself to his spiritual work, acting only by his spiritual force on the movement in India, until his prevision of real negotiations between the British Government and the Indian leaders was fulfilled by the Cripps' proposal and the events that came after.

*(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings
of Historical Interest, pp. 62-63)*

* * *

. . . His retirement from political activity was complete, just as was his personal retirement into solitude in 1910.

But this did not mean, as most people supposed, that he had retired into some height of spiritual experience devoid of any further interest in the world or in the fate of India. It could not mean that, for the very principle of his Yoga was not only to realise the Divine and attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the Spirit and give it a spiritual meaning. In his retirement Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action; for it is part of the experience of those who have advanced far in Yoga that besides the ordinary forces and activities of the mind and life and body in Matter, there are other forces and powers that can act and do act from behind and from above; there is also a spiritual dynamic power which can be possessed by those who are advanced in the spiritual consciousness, though all do not care to possess or, possessing, to use it, and this power is greater than any other and more effective. It was this force which, as soon as he had attained to it, he used, at first only in a limited field of

personal work, but afterwards in a constant action upon the world forces. He had no reason to be dissatisfied with the results or to feel the necessity of any other kind of action. Twice however he found it advisable to take in addition other action of a public kind. The first was in relation to the second World War. At the beginning he did not actively concern himself with it, but when it appeared as if Hitler would crush all the forces opposed to him and Nazism dominate the world, he began to intervene. He declared himself publicly on the side of the Allies, made some financial contributions in answer to the appeal for funds and encouraged those who sought his advice to enter the army or share in the war effort. Inwardly, he put his spiritual force behind the Allies from the moment of Dunkirk when everybody was expecting the immediate fall of England and the definite triumph of Hitler, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the rush of German victory almost immediately arrested and the tide of war begin to turn in the opposite direction. This he did, because he saw that behind Hitler and Nazism were dark Asuric forces and that their success would mean the enslavement of mankind to the tyranny of evil, and a set-back to the course of evolution and especially to the spiritual evolution of mankind: it would lead also to the enslavement not only of Europe but of Asia, and in it India, an enslavement far more terrible than any this country had ever endured, and the undoing of all the work that had been done for her liberation. It was this reason also that induced him to support publicly the Cripps' offer and to press the Congress leaders to accept it. He had not, for various reasons, intervened with his spiritual force against the Japanese aggression until it became evident that Japan intended to attack and even invade and conquer India. He allowed certain letters he had written in support of the war affirming his views of the Asuric nature and inevitable outcome of Hitlerism to become public. He supported the Cripps' offer because by its acceptance India and Britain could stand united against the Asuric forces and the solution of Cripps could be used as a step towards independence. When negotiations failed, Sri Aurobindo returned to his reliance on the use of spiritual force alone against the aggressor and had the satisfaction of seeing the tide of Japanese victory, which had till then swept everything before it, changed immediately into a tide of rapid, crushing and finally immense and overwhelming defeat. He had also after a time the satisfaction of seeing his previsions about the future of India justify themselves so that she stands independent with whatever internal difficulties.

(Ibid., pp. 65-66)

* * *

It was not till Provincial Autonomy was conceded that he felt a real change in the British attitude had begun; the Cripps offer he accepted as a further progress in that change and the final culmination in the Labour Government's new policy as its culmination.

(*Ibid.*, p. 87)

* * *

As for the Cripps' offer, it was supported in a long telegram sent not to the Viceroy's Secretary but to Cripps himself after his broadcast in which he announced the offer.

(*Ibid.*, p. 104)

* * *

Sri Aurobindo does not know whether this can be described as a public political gesture.

(*Ibid.*)

* * *

On the Cripps Proposal

Sir Stafford Cripps
New Delhi

I have heard your broadcast. As one who has been a nationalist leader and worker for India's independence though now my activity is no longer in the political but in the spiritual field, I wish to express my appreciation of all you have done to bring about this offer. I welcome it as an opportunity given to India to determine for herself and organise in all liberty of choice her freedom and unity and take an effective place among the world's free nations. I hope that it will be accepted and the right use made of it putting aside all discords and divisions. I hope too that a friendly relation between Britain and India replacing past struggles will be a step towards a greater world union in which as a free nation her spiritual force will contribute to build for mankind a better and happier life. In this light I offer my public adhesion in case it can be of any help in your work.

Sri Aurobindo
The Asram
Pondicherry
31 March 1942

(*Ibid.*, p. 469)

* * *

[*Sir Stafford Cripps's telegram in reply, dated 1 April 1942:*]

I am most touched and gratified by your kind message allowing me to inform India that you who occupy unique position in imagination of Indian youth are convinced that declaration of His Majesty's Government substantially confers that freedom for which Indian Nationalism has so long struggled.

Stafford Cripps
(*Ibid.*)

* * *

In view of the urgency of the situation I am sending Mr Duraiswami Iyer to convey my views on the present negotiations and my reasons for pressing on Indian leaders the need of a settlement. He is accredited to speak for me.

Sri Aurobindo

April 1, 1942

(*Ibid.*, p. 470)

* * *

(*Telegram to Dr. B. S. Moonje*)

Dr Moonje Hindu Mahasabha New Delhi

Settlement India Britain urgent, face approach grave peril menacing future India. Is there no way while reserving right repudiate resist partition motherland to accept cooperation purpose war India union. Cannot combination Mahasabha Congress Nationalist and anti-Jinnah Muslims defeat league in elections Bengal Punjab Sind. Have sent advocate Duraiswami Iyer to meet you.

Sri Aurobindo

2 April 1942

(*Ibid.*)

* * *

(*Telegram to C. Rajagopalachari*)

Rajagopalachari Birla House New Delhi

Is not compromise defence question better than rupture. Some immediate settlement urgent face grave peril. Have sent Duraiswami insist urgency. Appeal to you to save India formidable danger new foreign domination when old on way to self-elimination.

Sri Aurobindo

2 April 1942

(*Ibid.*)

* * *

(Telegram to Amarendra Chatterjee)

Amarendra Chatterjee M.L.A. Delhi

Unable leave Pondicherry. Awaiting Congress decision necessary for total national action. Have appealed privately Congress leaders for understanding with Britain and fight defence India.

Sri Aurobindo

April 9, 1942

(Ibid., p. 471)

* * *

(Second Telegram to Amarendra Chatterjee)

My Blessings on your efforts to serve and defend Motherland now in danger.

Sri Aurobindo

(Ibid.)



2. MENTION OF CRIPPS IN PURANI'S *EVENING TALKS*

Sri Aurobindo had sent a message to the Congress regarding the Cripps' proposals.

Disciple: There are some people who even try to maintain that you knew fully well that your message to the Congress would fail and yet you sent it.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, I knew that there was very little chance of its success.

Disciple: But suppose you had known that it would certainly fail, then in that case you might have spared the trouble of going and coming to Doraiswamy.

Sri Aurobindo: No. Even if I had known for a certainty that it would fail, still it had to be done. It is a question of the play of forces and the important thing is that the other force should not be there. We cannot explain these things — this play of forces — to people who ask for a rational explanation, because it is so 'irrational'!

7 August, 1943

(Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo recorded by A. B. Purani, 4th Ed., pp. 768-69)

* * *

C. Rajagopalchari in the Puja issue of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* has pleaded for the reconsideration and revival of the Cripps' proposals. Sri Aurobindo found this comment "late" but remarked that C.R. had got back his clarity of mind. As to the actual revival, when Wavell comes the difficulties he will face will be the I.C.S. and the Congress on two sides, and Jinnah on a third.

4 October, 1943

(*Ibid.*, pp. 796-97)



3. THE MOTHER ON THE CRIPPS PROPOSAL

Mother, I was asking . . . (laughter) You said that India was free in 1915, but was she free as she is free now? Because India is not free as one whole. She is broken up.

Oh! Oh! that's what you wanted to know.

That . . . the details were not there. No, there must have been a possibility of its being otherwise, for, when Sri Aurobindo told them to do a certain thing, sent them his message, he knew very well that it was possible to avoid what happened later. If they had listened to him at that time, there would have been no division. Consequently, the division was not decreed, it was a human deformation. It is beyond question a human deformation.

But then, how can it be said that the decision of the Supreme cannot be eluded?

What?

If the Divine had chosen that India would be free . . .

No, no, it's not like that, my child! (*Laughter*)

It's a *fact*, that's all. It is the Divine who is India, it is the Divine who is freedom, it is the Divine who is subjection, it is the Divine who is everything — then how could He choose?

(*Silence*)

I advise you to go up there and see, then you will understand. So long as you have not climbed right up the ladder, it will be difficult to understand.

18 January 1956

(*Questions and Answers 1956*, CWM 2nd Ed., CWM, Vol. 8, pp. 31-32)

* * *

Sweet Mother,

Why did Sri Aurobindo advise India's leaders to accept the Cripps Proposal in 1942, when He knew fully well that they would not?

The Divine often advises or tries to guide man, knowing very well that His help will be refused. Why then does He do it?

The Divine *always* informs, but it is rare indeed for men to listen to Him. Either they do not hear Him or do not believe Him.

Men always complain of not being helped, but the truth is that they refuse the help which is *always* with them.

5 May 1965

(*Some Answers from the Mother — I*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 16, p. 318)

* * *

It was a repetition of the same stupidity as when Cripps came to make his proposal, when Sri Aurobindo sent a message saying, "Accept, whatever the conditions, otherwise it will be worse later on." That's what Sri Aurobindo told them. Gandhi was there and he retorted, "Why is that man meddling? He should be concerned only with spiritual life."

(A conversation of 17 November 1962)



4. SRI AUROBINDO AND THE CRIPPS PROPOSALS

(This article by Amal Kiran [K. D. Sethna] is taken from *Aspects of Sri Aurobindo*, published by *The Integral Life Foundation, U.S.A., 1995, pp. 144-49.*)

THE end of March and the beginning of April 1942 are memorable for one of the very few interventions of Sri Aurobindo in India's public affairs. World War II was in full swing and Japan had joined hands with Hitler and posed a threat to Burma and even India, both of which were then under British rule. There was considerable discontent in India and a great reluctance to join the war effort of the British Commonwealth. India could not see much difference between German Nazism and British Imperialism. Most people forgot that the latter was the gradually fading remnant of an old turn of the human political mind, which had once played a necessary role in history but had lost its *raison d'être* in the modern age of national freedom, whereas the former with its dogmas of master race and absolute dictator and merciless regimentation was a current contrary to the drive of human evolution with its many-sided variation both individual and collective.

Churchill was England's Prime Minister at the time. He had been known as a die-hard Imperialist. All of a sudden he appeared to have felt that in the war he was conducting against Hitler the cause of civilisation was at stake and that to serve it at all costs was more important than to preserve the sanctity of the British empire. He wanted India to give up her distrust of the British and throw in her lot wholeheartedly with Britain's own valiant effort to fight the barbarism that was on the march from Germany under the emblem of the Swastika. He gave ear to the advice of liberal thought in England which was in favour of conceding greater freedom to India that had been agitating for independence, especially since the days when Sri Aurobindo had become for a few years the leader of the Nationalist Movement. The well-known liberal thinker, Sir Stafford Cripps, was prominent as a spokesman of this advice. Churchill chose him to carry to India certain proposals meant to meet her basic demands and induce her to join the united front of Britain and her allies against Hitler and his associates. In connection with what came to be known as the Cripps Proposals it may be interesting to put together all the documents relating to Sri Aurobindo's intervention.

Sir Stafford, on arriving in India, issued the following Draft Declaration on behalf of the British Government: "His Majesty's Government, having considered the anxieties expressed in this country and in India as to the fulfilment of promises made in regard to the future of India, have decided to lay down in precise and clear terms the steps which they propose shall be taken for the earliest possible realization of self-government in India. The object is the creation of a new Indian Union which shall constitute a Dominion associated with the United Kingdom and other Dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown but equal to them in every respect, in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic and external affairs."

On hearing this declaration on the radio, Sri Aurobindo had the insight that the offer sent by Churchill through Sir Stafford Cripps had come on the wave of a divine inspiration and that it gave India the substance of independence. At once he sent a telegram to Sir Stafford: "I have heard your broadcast. As one who has been a nationalist leader and worker for India's independence though now my activity is no longer in the political but in the spiritual field, I wish to express my appreciation of all you have done to bring about this offer. I welcome it as an opportunity given to India to determine for herself and organise in all liberty of choice her freedom and unity and take an effective place among the world's free nations. I hope that it will be accepted and the right use made of it putting aside all discords and divisions. I hope too that a friendly relation between Britain and India replacing past struggles will be a step towards a greater world union in which as a free nation her spiritual force will contribute to build for mankind a better and happier life. In this light I offer my public adhesion in case it can be of any help in your work." (March 31, 1942)

Cripps immediately telegraphed back to Sri Aurobindo: "I am most touched and gratified by your kind message allowing me to inform India that you who occupy unique position in imagination of Indian youth are convinced that declaration of His Majesty's Government substantially confers that freedom for which Indian Nationalism has so long struggled." (April 1, 1942)

On the heels of this telegram came one from Arthur Moore, editor of the Calcutta Daily, *The Statesman*: "Your message to Sir Stafford Cripps inaugurates the new era. Nothing can prevent it. I am glad that my eyes have seen this salvation coming." (April 1, 1942)

By now negotiations had started between Cripps and the Congress leaders.

Arthur Moore the very next day sent to his paper an editorial comment on Sri Aurobindo's message: "We have not doubted that Sir Stafford Cripps's mission will succeed nor were we depressed by Tuesday's wave of pessimism. . . . But since then an event has happened which will change a whole army of doubters and pessimists into optimists. After listening to Sir Stafford's broadcast, Sri Aurobindo has, from his Ashram in Pondicherry, offered his public adhesion 'in case it can be of any help in your work'. Rarely in history can so great a help have been so unostentatiously offered. This is the release not only upon India but upon the world of a great spiritual force which has long been awaiting its appointed time." (New Delhi, 2-4-1942)

Seeing that the negotiations with the Congress were not going right Sri Aurobindo decided on a further intervention. This took two forms. On the one hand he sent messages to some important figures in Indian politics. Through Mr. Shiva Rao he communicated to Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru that Cripps's offer should be accepted unconditionally. He also sent a couple of telegrams. One was to "Rajagopalachari, Birla House, New Delhi": "Is not compromise defence question better than rupture. Some immediate settlement urgent face grave peril. Have sent Duraiswami insist urgency. Appeal to you to save India formidable danger new foreign

domination when old on way to self-elimination.” (2-4-1942, 9-30 a.m.) The reference to the danger of a new foreign domination was evidently to the presence of Japanese forces approaching India. The other telegram was addressed to “Dr. Moonje, Hindu Mahasabha, New Delhi”: “Settlement India Britain urgent, face approach grave peril menacing future India. Is there no way while reserving right repudiate resist partition Motherland to accept cooperation purpose war India Union. Cannot combination Mahasabha Congress Nationalist and anti-Jinnah Muslims defeat League in elections Bengal Punjab Sind. Have sent advocate Duraiswami Iyer to meet you.” (2-4-1942, 9-30 a.m.) Here an important point is the grave possibility of a division within the country due to Jinnah’s movement to separate Muslims from Hindus. One of the salutary effects of accepting the Cripps Proposals would be to keep India united in the face of the Japanese threat and thus lead to an unpartitioned free India in the future.

As the telegrams indicate, Sri Aurobindo also took the extraordinary step of sending a personal representative so that his appeal might go home better to the wrangling negotiators. Nirodbaran in his book *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* has memorably painted the scene:¹ “It was the evening hour. Sri Aurobindo was sitting on the edge of his bed just before his daily walking exercise. All of us were present, Duraiswami, the distinguished Madras lawyer and disciple, was selected as the envoy, perhaps because he was a friend of Rajagopalachari. . . . He was to start for Delhi that very night. He came for Sri Aurobindo’s blessings, lay prostrate before him, got up and stood looking at the Master with folded hands and then departed. We may remind ourselves of Talthylbius’s mission to Troy in Sri Aurobindo’s epic poem *Illion*. Similarly, Duraiswami went with India’s soul in his frail hands and brought it back, down-hearted, rewarded with ungracious remarks for the gratuitous advice.”

Nirodbaran has also written:² “Cripps flew back a disappointed man but with the consolation and gratified recognition that at least one great man had welcomed the idea. When the rejection was announced, Sri Aurobindo said in a quiet tone, ‘I knew it would fail.’ We at once pounced on him and asked him, ‘Why did you then send Duraiswami at all?’ ‘For a bit of *niṣkāma karma*,’³ was his calm reply, without any bitterness or resentment. The full spirit of the kind of ‘disinterested work’ he meant comes out in an early letter of his (December, 1933), which refers to his spiritual work: ‘I am sure of the results of my work. But even if I still saw the chance that it might come to nothing (which is impossible), I would go on unperturbed, because I would still have done to the best of my power the work that I had to do, and what is so done always counts in the economy of the universe.’ We know the aftermath of the rejection of the Cripps proposals: confusion, calamity, partition, blood-bath, etc., and the belated recognition of the colossal blunder.”

Gradually the colossal blunder is being rectified in general conformity with, though not yet in precise adherence to, the vision expressed by Sri Aurobindo when on his seventy-fifth birthday on August 15, 1947, India obtained her independence

and, as Nirodbaran puts it,⁴ “Sri Aurobindo’s ‘bardic’ voice was heard once again”, declaring about the partition of British India into India and Pakistan as a price of freedom: “. . . by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go: unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India’s future.” Nirodbaran has noted⁵ that “Sri Aurobindo’s prediction has been half-fulfilled, for Bangladesh (East Pakistan) is now entirely independent . . .”

We may conclude our account with a significant letter written by M. C. Desai, on September 29, 1942 to the Bombay Daily, *The Times of India*. It is entitled “Complex of Dependency” and runs:

“It is amusing to find such Congress and liberal stalwarts as Mr. Rajagopalachari and Sir Chimanlal Setalvad openly advocating almost unconditional acceptance of the Cripps Proposals and denouncing the Congress leaders for rejecting them.

“But what the Indian man-in-the-street would like to know is why these wise and eminent gentlemen did not speak out their real mind at the right time when Sir Stafford Cripps was here. What prevented ‘C. R.’, for instance, from breaking with the Congress Working Committee during the negotiations, when he knew it was giving a wrong lead to the country?

“Similarly, one remembers that Sir Chimanlal Setalvad saw Sir Stafford Cripps on behalf of the Indian Liberals and submitted their resolution. The elaborate resolution did not fail to emphasise such minor omissions in the scheme as that of a specific mention of women’s vote in the provincial plebiscite. But on the crucial question whether the country should accept or reject the scheme the resolution neither definitely said yes or no — quite like the Liberals.

“Curiously, the solitary Indian statesman who took a realistic view and had the courage of his conviction to advise his countrymen unequivocally to accept the Cripps Proposals was that mystic and visionary of Pondicherry — Shri Aurobindo Ghose. The belated wisdom of our leaders emphasises the truth of the ancient Sanskrit proverb: ‘The Brahmin always thinks too late.’

“Instead of harping on the Mahatma’s admittedly ‘unpractical idealism’, let our leaders organise a countrywide educative propaganda to convince the wide mass of the people of the wisdom of accepting a compromise solution like the Cripps plan if India’s problem is to be resolved peacefully and create opportunities for ordinary people to express their honest opinion.”

Notes and References

1. P. 153.
2. Pp. 153-54.
3. Disinterested work, the essence of which is that the work is inwardly dedicated to the Divine with no attachment to the result.
4. P. 154.
5. *Ibid.*, fn. 2.

5. 'A BIT OF NIṢKĀMA KARMA'

(In Nirodbaran's book, Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1972, we find on pages. 149-54, an account of Sri Aurobindo's action in regard to the Cripps Proposal.)

WHEN Gandhi complained that the Viceroy did not say anything in reply to all his questions, Sri Aurobindo said to us in one of our talks on October 7th 1940: "What will he say? It is very plain why he did not. First of all, the Government doesn't want to concede the demand for Independence. What it is willing to give is Dominion Status after the War, expecting that India will settle down into a common relationship with the Empire. But just now a National government will virtually mean Dominion Status with the Viceroy only as a constitutional head. Nobody knows what the Congress will do after it gets power. It may be occupied only with India's defence and give such help as it can spare to England. And if things go wrong with the British, it may even make a separate peace leaving them in the lurch. There are left wingers, Socialists, Communists whom the Congress won't be able to bring to its side, neither will it dare offend them and if their influence is sufficiently strong, the Congress may stand against the British. Thus it is quite natural for them not to part with power just now as it is also natural for us to make our claims. But since we haven't got enough strength to back us, we have to see if we have any common meeting ground with the Government. If there is, a compromise is the only practical step. There was such an opportunity, but the Congress spoiled it. Now you have to accept what you get or I don't know what is going to happen. Of course, if we have the strength and power to make a revolution and get what we want, it would be a different matter. Amery and others did offer Dominion Status at one time. Now they have changed their position because they have come to know the spirit of our people. Our politicians have some fixed idea and they always go by it. Politicians and statesmen have to take account of situations and act as demanded by them. They must have insight."

— But it is because of the British divide-and-rule policy that we can't unite, we parried.

— Nonsense!¹ Sri Aurobindo rebuffed. Was there unity in India before the British rule? . . . Does Jinnah want unity? His very character shows what he wants — independence for the Muslims and rule over India if possible. The old spirit.

In the impasse created partially by the bankruptcy of the Congress policy, Providence came to the rescue in the form of the Cripps' Proposal which, if accepted,

1. Sri Aurobindo meant not that the British never followed the policy of divide-and-rule, but that divisions were already there for them to take advantage of and increase.

would have changed the fate of India. But the forces of distrust, discontent and wanting everything at once, led to a failure to see the substance of Swaraj, as Sri Aurobindo has said, in the offer. There was a pother about small points and overlooking of the central important objective to be attained. Sri Aurobindo found in the proposal a fine opportunity for the solution of India's intricate problems and her ultimate liberation.

We may note that the Proposal envisaged a single, free, undivided India setting up a united front against the enemy. He promptly sent a message to Sir Stafford Cripps welcoming the Proposal and recommended its acceptance to the Indian leaders. The message was as follows: "I have heard your broadcast. As one who has been a nationalist leader and worker for India's independence though now my activity is no longer in the political but in the spiritual field, I wish to express my appreciation of all you have done to bring about this offer. I welcome it as an opportunity given to India to determine for herself and organise in all liberty of choice her freedom and unity and take an effective place among the world's free nations. I hope that it will be accepted and the right use made of it putting aside all discords and divisions. I hope too that a friendly relation between Britain and India replacing past struggles will be a step towards a greater world union in which as a free nation her spiritual force will contribute to build for mankind a better and happier life. In this light I offer my public adhesion in case it can be of any help to your work."

Sir Stafford Cripps replied, "I am most touched and gratified by your kind message allowing me to inform India that you who occupy unique position in imagination of Indian youth are convinced that declaration of His Majesty's Government substantially confers that freedom for which Indian Nationalism has so long struggled."

Sri Aurobindo also sent messages through Mr. Shiva Rao to Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru that Cripps' offer should be accepted unconditionally. Lastly, he sent his envoy to Delhi to appeal to the Congress leaders for its acceptance, for sanity and wisdom to prevail. At this crucial moment Sri Aurobindo could not remain a passive witness to the folly that was about to be committed. His seer-vision saw that the Proposal had come on a wave of divine inspiration. The scene is still fresh in our memory. It was the evening hour. Sri Aurobindo was sitting on the edge of his bed just before his daily walking exercise. All of us were present; Duraiswami, the distinguished Madras lawyer and disciple, was selected as the envoy, perhaps because he was a friend of Rajagopalachari, one of the prominent Congress leaders. He was to start for Delhi that very night. He came for Sri Aurobindo's blessings, lay prostrate before him, got up and stood looking at the Master with folded hands and then departed. We may remind ourselves of Talthylbius's mission to Troy in Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Ilion*. Similarly, Duraiswami went with India's soul in his frail hands and brought it back, downhearted, rewarded with ungracious remarks for the gratuitous advice. Sri Aurobindo even sent a telegram to Rajagopalachari and Dr. Moonje urging them to accept the Proposal. Cripps flew back a disappointed man but

with the consolation and gratified recognition that at least one great man had welcomed the idea. When the rejection was announced, Sri Aurobindo said in a quiet tone, “I knew it would fail.” We at once pounced on him and asked him, “Why did you then send Duraiswami at all?” “For a bit of *niṣkāma karma*,”² was his calm reply, without any bitterness or resentment. The full spirit of the kind of ‘disinterested work’ he meant comes out in an early letter of his — (December, 1933), which refers to his spiritual work: “I am sure of the results of my work. But even if I still saw the chance that it might come to nothing (which is impossible), I would go on unperturbed, because I would still have done to the best of my power the work that I had to do, and what is so done always counts in the economy of the universe.” We know the aftermath of the rejection of the Cripps’ Proposal; confusion, calamity, partition, blood-bath, etc., and the belated recognition of the colossal blunder. Then when the partition had been accepted as a settled fact, Sri Aurobindo’s ‘bardic’ voice was heard once again, “But by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India’s future.” Past events have justified Sri Aurobindo’s solemn warning and recent events point to the way to liquidation of that division.³

2. Disinterested work the essence of which is that the work is inwardly dedicated to the Divine with no attachment to the result.

3. We are happy to see that Sri Aurobindo’s prediction has been half fulfilled, for Bangla Desh (East Pakistan) is now entirely independent . . .



6. BRAHMA DRISHTI AND BRAHMA TEJ

(This is an extract from Sisir Kumar Mitra's *The Liberator — Sri Aurobindo, India and the World*, pp. 213-19, published by Jaico, Bombay, 1970.)

THE Yoga that Sri Aurobindo started at Baroda and pursued in Calcutta, he perfected at Pondicherry. This perfection meant for him possession and mastery of the spiritual powers of Yoga through which to help forward the evolution of man to a higher status above the mind. To this he devoted himself exclusively. His spiritual power was always active upon world affairs, and when necessary, he publicly intervened and took a direct part. In a certain context he said that he had never had any will which had not been fulfilled.

In one of his early letters — written in 1905 [. . .] Sri Aurobindo said that he had possessed and would use his spiritual force which he called *Brahma tej* to bring about the political liberation of his country, mentioning at the same time that this force is superior to the force of arms (*Kshātra tej*).

The words of admission of King Visvamisra after a total rout of his tremendous military forces at the hands of Rishi Vashistha ring in the ears of a student of India's history: '*Dhigbalam kshatriyabalam brahma tejo balam balam.*' (Fie upon the force of arms, the spiritual force is the force of forces.) With Sri Aurobindo, this belief in it was no mere intellectual belief. With him it was a tested truth. "It was this force which, as soon as he had attained it, he used, at first only in a limited field of personal work, but afterwards in a constant action upon world forces. He had no reason to be dissatisfied with the results or to feel the necessity of any other kind of action."

Sri Aurobindo used his Yogic force on certain world movements. He said: "In Spain — in Madrid — I was splendidly successful. . . . In Ireland and Turkey the success was tremendous. In Ireland I have done exactly what I wanted to do in Bengal."¹ "I was one of the influences that worked to make the Russian Revolution a success."²

In the mid-twenties Sri Aurobindo remarked: "The experience of humanity would have remained incomplete without the experiment in Russia."³ Later, he wrote: "Russia is different — unlike the others it has lingered in medieval religionism and not passed through any period of revolt — so when the revolt came it was naturally anti-religious and atheistic. It is only when this phase is exhausted that Russian mysticism can revive and take not a narrow religious but the spiritual direction."⁴

Now came one of those early-foreseen upheavals in which he was to take part. It was the Second World War. The Truth-vision of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

1. Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 44.

2. A. B. Purani: *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Second Series, p. 263.

3. A. B. Purani: *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, First Series, p. 184.

4. Sri Aurobindo: *On Yoga*, Vol. II, pp. 200-01.

discerned in it an upsurge of the Asuric or anti-divine forces with Hitler and his satellites as the spearhead of their attack upon the Allied Powers that stood for the higher values of life. The joint declaration they made ran as follows:

We feel that not only is this a battle waged in just self-defence and in defence of the nations threatened with the world-domination of Germany and the Nazi system of life, but that it is a defence of civilisation and its highest attained social, cultural and spiritual values and of the whole future of humanity. To this cause our support and sympathy will be unswerving whatever may happen; we look forward to the victory of Britain and, as the eventual result, an era of peace and union among the nations and a better and more secure world-order.

Hard was it for such a declaration, so sharply contradictory to prevailing ideas, to go down with an unbelieving world. They had therefore to emphasise and re-emphasise this truth in several other statements clearing up its implications and people's doubts. In one of these Sri Aurobindo said:

You should not think of it as a fight for certain nations against others or even for India; it is a struggle for an ideal that has to establish itself on earth in the life of humanity, for a Truth that has yet to realise itself fully and against a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overwhelm the earth and mankind in the immediate future. It is the forces behind the battle that have to be seen and not this or that superficial circumstance. It is no use concentrating on the defects or mistakes of nations; all have defects and commit serious mistakes; but what matters is on what side they have ranged themselves in the struggle. It is a struggle for the liberty of mankind to develop, for conditions in which men have freedom and room to think and act according to the light in them and grow in the Truth, grow in the Spirit. There cannot be the slightest doubt that if one side wins, there will be an end of all such freedom and hope of light and truth and the work that has to be done will be subjected to conditions which would make it humanly impossible; there will be a reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race such as people in this country do not dream of and cannot yet at all realise. If the other side that has declared itself for the free future of humanity triumphs, this terrible danger will have been averted and conditions will have been created in which there will be a chance for the Ideal to grow, for the Divine Work to be done, for the spiritual Truth for which we stand to establish itself on the earth. Those who fight for this cause are fighting for the Divine and against the threatened reign of the Asura.

Behind the Nazi aggression characterised by Sri Aurobindo as 'the peril of black servitude and a revived barbarism threatening India and the world', were those forces

of Darkness which were out not only to destroy human civilisation with all its higher values but also to frustrate the Divine Work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother — the work of liberating man from his bondage to these forces into the freedom and power of a New Light from above that would transform man into his destined divine perfection. When these hostile forces found that their sovereignty over the earth was challenged they attempted, said Sri Aurobindo, an attack on the Mother's body. But as he concentrated exclusively on repelling it without even allowing a shade of the black force to fall on the Mother, the attack came on him. It was on 23 November 1938, that is, on the eve of the 24 November Darshan, and about a year before the outbreak of the Second World War, Sri Aurobindo had an impacted fracture of the right thigh — just an external instance of how 'the Warrior of the Ages' gave in in his war with the adverse forces, so that the ultimate victory might be his and man grow in his strength to receive the Light the time for whose Manifestation was drawing near. Indeed, the nearer was the Manifestation, the fiercer was the resistance of the hostile forces which, says Nolini Kanta, no earthly power could hit back. Sri Aurobindo's self-abnegation is in line with Siva the Nilkantha's and Dadhichi's with the same end — saving the world from the asuric hold.

The next occasion that called for his personal intervention was when Britain in seeking India's co-operation in the war effort made an offer to her — one of those which Sri Aurobindo had foreseen and to which he attached great value. The offer was made in March 1942 through Sir Stafford Cripps, a member of the British Cabinet, and an eminent statesman of sincere convictions, whose stand for India's independence free India afterwards fully appreciated.

As in the case of the War, this also was looked upon with the same dubious mind. While the people and leaders of India, save a few, read into it sinister designs of the British to exploit her man-power and other resources during the war and then back out of their promises after the victory, Sri Aurobindo found in it a welcome opportunity for India's advancement, her ultimate political liberation and a step on the way to her self-fulfilment. He had provisioned such a deal. It was, in his view, a 'real' negotiation between the British Government and the Indian leaders. The occasion impelled his personal intervention. He promptly sent a message to Sir Stafford Cripps in the course of which he said:

. . . I welcome it as an opportunity given to India to determine for herself and organise in all liberty of choice her freedom and unity and take an effective place among the world's free nations. I hope that it will be accepted and the right use made of it putting aside all discords and divisions. I hope too that a friendly relation between Britain and India replacing past struggles will be a step towards a greater world union in which as a free nation her spiritual force will contribute to build for mankind a better and happier life.

He followed it up by sending personal messages to C. Rajagopalachari, one of the leading brains of the Congress High Command, and to B. S. Moonje, leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, and sent S. Duraiswami Iyer, an eminent advocate of the Madras High Court, and a disciple, as his personal envoy to the Congress Working Committee at Delhi.

The viewpoints which Sri Aurobindo instructed his envoy to place before the Congress leaders, as Duraiswami himself has stated them to the writer, were: (1) Japan's imperialism being young and based on industrial and military power and moving westward, was a greater menace to India than the British imperialism which was old, which the country had learnt to deal with and which was on the way to elimination. (2) It would be better to get into the saddle and not be particular about the legal basis of the power. Once the power came into our hands and we occupied seats of power, we could establish our positions and assert ourselves. (3) The proposed Cabinet would provide opportunities for the Congress and the Muslims to understand each other and pull together for the country's good, especially at that time of the crisis. (4) The Hindu Mahasabha also being represented, the Hindus as such would have a chance of proving their capacity to govern India not only for the benefit of the Hindus but for the whole country. (5) The main problem was to organise the strength of India in order to repel the threatened aggression.

Sri Aurobindo held that by accepting the Cripps' offer India would be able to take part in the administration of the country as also in the war effort as a co-partner with Britain and the solution of Cripps could be turned into a means of India's independence. The Congress took it as an invitation to co-operate but not as an equal partner.

As always, so in the present instance, Sri Aurobindo was for dynamic action in the political field. His idea was that the acceptance of the proposals, though short of the mark, would lead at once to India's industrial and economic improvement and to an efficiently up-to-date military training for her youth — the objectives for which the Congress had been fighting for years. Another important consideration was that it was to the Congress, the largest representative body of the land, that the offer was made. Therefore there could arise no two-nation theory, no division of the country with its deadly and disastrous consequences. Some of the Congress leaders, however, admitted afterwards that the decision of the Congress should have been otherwise.

But the Congress chose to go by their own reasons rather than pay heed to the Seer, one who for the first time after his retirement in 1926 made a public pronouncement on a subject he regarded as of vital consequence to the destiny of his country. The second instance of the tragic failure of the human mind to rise to the truth beyond itself. Truly has the Poet said:

For man shall not know the coming till its hour
And belief shall be not till the work is done.⁵

5. Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, Bk. I, p. 57.

Sri Aurobindo was aware that his advice would not be accepted. Why did he then make the effort, he was asked. — ‘I have done a bit of “*nishkama karma*” (disinterested work)’, was his smiling reply.⁶

Yet it is a fact that, despite the contrary policy of the Congress, the country gave to the British Government in India large co-operation through which they could raise the strength of the Indian army to a force of two million, the biggest figure in its history, recruit large numbers as technicians, expand and modernise ordnance factories and other industries, and carried the war on to a successful finish with the help of Indians and improved resources. One wonders how free India could stand, how, for instance, she could save Kashmir or Hyderabad, or take a responsible part in international assignments, as in Korea or Indo-China, if she had not a number of capable military leaders, mechanised troops and other sections, seasoned in the last war, to face the situation after the British personnel, at any rate, the major part of it, had left. The Divine works out his purpose even when man fails to understand him.

6. Nirodbaran: *Sri Aurobindo: I am Here, I am Here*, p. 17.



7. THE CRIPPS PROPOSALS AND THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

(The following perspective is excerpted from Kittu Reddy's A Vision of United India — Problems and Solutions, pp. 93-99, published by Standard Publishers, New Delhi, 2005)

[...] THE next important event that hastened the creation of Pakistan was the rejection of the Cripps Proposals. What exactly were the Cripps Proposals?

The war, which had started in 1939, was now continuing in full rage. By the summer of 1940, Germany had conquered all those who were against them in the European continent except England. England now stood alone. The Congress Working Committee held a meeting in July 1940 and demanded “an immediate and unequivocal declaration of the full independence of India, which will enable it to throw its full weight into the efforts for the effective organisation of the defence of the country”. In response to this, the Viceroy made an offer known as the August Offer. While reiterating the offer of Dominion Status, he agreed that the writing of an Indian constitution was the primary responsibility of Indians themselves. He, therefore, offered to set up a constitution-making body after the war. As for the present, he

suggested that there would be an increase of Indians in the Governor-General's Council; also a war-advisory council would be established. The Congress rejected the offer, saying that it was too little and too late. After the rejection, the Congress resorted to a Civil Disobedience Movement on a small scale; it was restricted to an individual and not to a mass Satyagraha. In 1941, the campaign picked up some momentum but met with very little success. The British Government arrested and convicted over 20,000 persons.

By the end of 1941, the war took a very serious turn. The Japanese after the attack on Pearl Harbour, joined the Axis powers against Britain. Very soon they overran Singapore, which had been considered impregnable; next came the turn of Malaysia and soon after they entered Burma, thus coming to the doorstep of India. The impending threat of a Japanese invasion of India loomed large. The Viceroy made a public appeal for a united national front, but it fell on deaf ears. At the same time, there was a section of English opinion led by Mr. Amery, the Secretary of State that was openly with the Muslim League. But the enlargement of the Governor-General's Executive Council without the approval of the Muslim League stiffened its attitude. It passed a resolution stating that any fresh declaration, which affected the demand for Pakistan or proceeded on the basis of a Central Government with India as one single unit and Mussulmans as an all-India minority would be strongly resented by the Muslims. The Muslim Press rang with cries such as: "Pakistan is our demand and by God we shall have it." The Hindu Mahasabha challenged the threat and like the Congress demanded full independence, but unlike the Congress it was ready to cooperate with the British in the war effort. The British Government, partly realising the inevitability of India's future independence and partly under American pressure to secure her support during the war, sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India in March 1942, with a proposal for Dominion Status after the war, as a first step towards full independence.

The Cripps Mission

The proposals that Sir Stafford Cripps brought with him may be summarised as follows:

In order to achieve the earliest possible realisation of self-government, a new Indian Union would be created with the full status of a Dominion. This would mean that India would be 'associated with the United Kingdom and the other Dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown, but equal to them in every respect in no way subordinate to them'.

Immediately after the war, India would be free to frame its own constitution.

Until then, a new Executive Council would govern the country; the British would retain control of the defence of India as part of their World War effort, but the task of

organising the military, moral and material resources would be the responsibility of the Government of India in cooperation with the peoples of India.

Here is an extract from the speech given by Sir Stafford Cripps on March 30, 1942:

First of all you will want to know what object we had in view. Well, we wanted to make it quite clear and beyond any possibility of doubt or question that the British Government and the British people desire the Indian peoples to have full self-government, with a Constitution as free in every respect as our own in Great Britain or as of any of the great Dominion members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. In the words of the Draft Declaration, India would be associated with the United Kingdom and other Dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown but equal to them in every respect, in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic or external affairs.

The principle on which these proposals are based is that the new Constitution should be framed by the elected representatives of the Indian people themselves. So we propose that immediately after hostilities are ended, a constitution-making body should be set up consisting of elected representatives from British India and if the Indian States wish, as we hope they will to become part of the new Indian Union, they too will be invited to send their representatives to this constitution-making body, though, if they do, that will not, of itself, bind them to become members of the Union. That is the broad outline of the future.

There are those who claim that India should form a single united country: there are others who say it should be divided up into two, three or more separate countries. There are those who claim that provincial autonomy should be very wide with but few centrally controlled federal services; others stress the need for centralisation in view of the growing complexity of economic development.

These and many other and various ideas are worthy to be explored and debated, but it is for the Indian peoples, and not for any outside authority, to decide under which of these forms India will in future govern herself.

So we provide the means and the lead by which you can attain that form of the absolute and united self-government that you desire at the earliest possible moment. In the past we have waited for the different Indian communities to come to a common decision as to how a new Constitution for a self-governing India should be framed and, because there has been no agreement amongst the Indian leaders, the British Government has been accused by some of using this fact to delay the granting of freedom to India. We are now giving the lead that has been asked for and it is in the hands of Indians and Indians only, whether they will accept that lead and so attain their own freedom. If they fail to accept this opportunity the responsibility for the failure must rest with them.

This was followed by protracted negotiations with the parties. The Congress rejected the offer because it doubted Britain's declared intention to share executive power. Another reason for the rejection was the clause that permitted the provinces to secede from the proposed union. In addition there was Gandhi's pacifism, which proved to be a stumbling block. Gandhi called the proposals 'a post-dated cheque on a crashing bank'. On the other hand, the Muslim League too was not satisfied because it was not agreeable to the creation of one Indian Union; it wanted the possibility of the creation of more than one Union. The Cripps Mission thus ended in failure.

However, Sri Aurobindo took a totally different position. As seen earlier, he supported the Allies in the war, and when the Cripps' offer was made, he sent Cripps the following message.

. . . As one who has been a nationalist leader and worker for India's independence though now my activity is no longer in the political but in the spiritual field, I wish to express my appreciation of all you have done to bring about this offer. I welcome it as an opportunity given to India to determine for herself and organise in all liberty of choice her freedom and unity and take an effective place among the world's free nations. I hope that it will be accepted and the right use made of it putting aside all discords and divisions. . . . I offer my public adhesion in case it can be of any help in your work.

The next day, on April 1, Cripps replied with the following telegram:

I am most touched and gratified by your kind message allowing me to inform India that you who occupy unique position in imagination of Indian youth are convinced that declaration of His Majesty's Government substantially confers that freedom for which Indian Nationalism has so long struggled.

Sri Aurobindo, in addition, sent a personal messenger to the Congress to urge them to accept Cripps' proposal; he also sent a telegram to C. Rajagopalachari, in which he said:

. . . Appeal to you to save India formidable danger new foreign domination when old on way to self-elimination.

Sri Aurobindo's advice was ignored: "He has retired from political life, why does he interfere?" said Gandhi to Duraiswami Iyer, Sri Aurobindo's messenger. Although Nehru and Rajagopalachari favoured acceptance of Cripps' offer, Gandhi found it unacceptable because of his opposition to war. Had Cripps' proposal been accepted, the Partition and the bloodbath that followed might have been averted.

Sri Aurobindo gave reasons for accepting the proposals.

First, Hitler represented an Asuric force and his victory would be good neither for India nor for the world.

Second, this offer was made chiefly to the Congress party and it was an opportunity for it to handle the communal problem.

Third, while the British were in India, Indians would be administering the country with their support from behind the scenes. That would have meant that a very large number of Indians would have been trained in administration.

Fourth, he said that by participating in the war effort, almost a million soldiers would be trained in the very thick of war and fighting in the thick of war was the best experience; and if the British decided to back out of the agreement after that, there would be a very large number of Indians who could take up arms against the British.

Fifth, he said that when one has to choose between a known enemy and an unknown enemy, it was better to choose the known enemy. Because if the Germans or Japanese won the war, there was no guarantee that India would get freedom. The Indians would only change their masters and knowing the British, knowing the background of their history with all their shortcomings, they had generally a democratic approach to life and second, the Indians knew them well having fought them for almost 200 years.

The Quit India Movement

As a result of the failure of the Cripps Mission, Gandhi's attitude towards the British changed radically. He was convinced that the presence of the British in India was an invitation to the Japanese to invade India. He suggested that the safety and interest of both Britain and India "lie in orderly and timely British withdrawal from India". He believed that with the withdrawal of the British, the danger of a Japanese invasion would disappear. At this time, differences emerged between Nehru and Gandhi: Nehru believed that India must fight with Britain against Fascism, while Gandhi felt that all ideas of cooperation or friendly understanding between Britain and India must end. On June 7, he wrote: "I waited and waited until the country should develop the non-violent strength necessary to throw off the foreign yoke. But my attitude has now undergone a change. If I continue to wait I might have to wait till doomsday. For the preparation that I have prayed and worked for may never come and in the meantime I may be enveloped and overwhelmed by the flames that threaten all of us. That is why I have decided that even at certain risks, which are obviously involved, I must ask the people to resist the slavery." On July 14, 1942, the Congress Working Committee passed the Quit India resolution. It renewed the demand that British rule should end in India immediately, and gave the assurance that it was agreeable to the stationing of the armed forces of the Allies in India. It pleaded with Britain to accept the very reasonable demand, failing which it would be reluctantly

compelled to utilise all the non-violent strength for the vindication of its political rights and liberty. On August 8, the Congress Working Committee endorsed the Quit India resolution.



8. SIR STAFFORD CRIPPS

(It was this article by Sunayana Panda submitted to Mother India that sparked off the idea of the compilation for this issue.)

ALL human knowledge is like a jigsaw puzzle. At first you know only a few things and by and by you add other bits of information because they connect with what you already know. It is a moment of great joy when you accidentally discover something which is a missing piece of the puzzle, and which connects two parts of knowledge you already have.

As I was looking at the books on the shelves of our local library in London my eyes fell on a biography of Sir Stafford Cripps. Was this the same Cripps to whom Sri Aurobindo had sent that famous telegram? Was this the same man who had replied with such dignity to him? Strange that we know next to nothing about Cripps although we cannot stop repeating how the tragedy of the partition of India would never have happened if this man's proposal had been accepted by the leaders of the country in 1942.

I did not lose a minute and borrowed the book that day. The first thing I did was to look at the index in the hope of finding what his biographer might have said about his exchange of telegrams with Sri Aurobindo. No, he wasn't under 'S' and he wasn't under 'A'. Maybe he was classified under 'Ghose'? But he wasn't under that either. How could it be that a piece of information that was so important to us, the followers of Sri Aurobindo, was not even mentioned once in this exhaustive biography of Sir Stafford Cripps? Perhaps this is the sad truth, that no one actually registered how important that communication was.

We know that the national leaders did not think that Sri Aurobindo could advise them since he had left the field of active politics long before this incident. They may have imagined that a man who was immersed in his spiritual pursuits would not have understood the complexities of the issues at stake. Possibly they dismissed Duraiswami's visit and his verbal message as totally irrelevant to their work and this is why the whole incident has been lost from public memory. But I expected that at least Sir Stafford would have spoken of it to someone, that there had been at least one person who supported his proposal. Obviously no one had taken note of that if he did

mention it to anybody.

This biography, which is aptly called “The Cripps Version”, is written by a historian who is a professor of Modern History at Cambridge. If you think it is all academic jargon you are wrong because this biography reads like a novel and has a flowing language which can pull in a reader’s interest. The book is almost entirely built up with the material the author has culled out of Sir Stafford’s diaries. And it is not only one diary that we see the quotes from. An incident is often reconstructed from the point of view of several people who had all noted it in their diaries. One can assume that maintaining a diary was a very popular activity in Britain because we see paragraphs quoted from his children’s diaries, his aunt’s diaries as well as the diaries of his close associates and colleagues.

What kind of a man was Sir Stafford Cripps? What was his background and how important was he in his own country? I was even curious to know what he was like in his personal life. I have known his name since my school days and yet it was only when I saw the cover of this book did I actually see his face. I was amazed to find that there was so much to know about him but somehow he has remained just an undefined silhouette in our minds.

His real name was Richard Stafford Cripps although somewhere in his early adult life he dropped the “Richard”. Interesting to us is the fact that he was born in London on 24th April. The year he was born, 1889, Sri Aurobindo was in his final year at St. Paul’s School. The street in Fulham where he was born in London is only a kilometre away from Cromwell Road where Sri Aurobindo was living at that time. Cripps was brought up in a privileged and aristocratic environment. He was keenly interested in science and did his MSc. from University College London although he had been accepted at Oxford. In actual fact, Oxford would have been a more advantageous choice considering that he wanted to eventually enter politics in later life. There he would have been able to make those crucial social contacts which are so necessary to the life of a politician but he chose University College London because it had better laboratory facilities. This may seem as a minor detail but essentially it shows that he was true to himself. Again interesting to us is the fact that he ended his student life after getting his MSc. in 1910, the year Sri Aurobindo left active politics and came to Pondicherry.

Stafford Cripps took up a career in law after getting a degree in science. This was only one of the many contradictions in his life. Although he was born into a wealthy family he chose to be a socialist and joined the Labour Party. He always stood out of the crowd. People were always baffled by the fact that he was a vegetarian, never drank and towards the latter part of his life gave up smoking. Today such a choice would seem the sensible thing to do but for British society of the 1930s this was considered something striking, because he belonged to the upper class and could afford to have the best of luxuries. At a time when most people could not even dream of possessing so much wealth he was willingly choosing to live a simple life.

He studied science because that was the natural bent of his mind and what truly interested him, but he took up law as a profession firstly because his family was already well-known in the legal circles and he could take over his father's practice but also because a legal experience was a sure road to a political career. Although it was his family connections that started off his law practice, in the end it was his own hard work that made him successful and famous. He could easily put in a 15-hour day. In fact, all his life he worked unusually long hours in spite of his unstable health. He suffered from digestive problems which were always aggravated when he was under stress.

His biographer notes, "The uncanny accuracy with which he could recollect and pinpoint relevant documents became the stuff of anecdotes." He became well known for his phenomenal memory and for the way in which he held his cross-examination of the expert witnesses. He made sure that his preparation was flawless. "A Rolls-Royce mind, you knew as soon as you met him," this was a comment from one of his young admirers.

Had he never entered politics he would still have made his mark in England. Having a background in science he specialised in patent law. Very few lawyers of his time had that rare skill of having an equally deep knowledge of legal procedures as well as of science. By combining the knowledge of the two disciplines he made a contribution to the field of patent law by developing a means of evaluating the 'inventive step'. It demands that the inventor should be able to demonstrate that he is actually capable of manufacturing the product. This is still taught to law students as the "Cripps test".

In 1930 he became the Solicitor-General and was given the customary knighthood. Since then he was known as "Sir Stafford". He was also elected to the House of Commons, having already joined the Labour party. By the early 1930s he was taking sure steps in his political career.

All these years, having only seen him mentioned in books connected with Sri Aurobindo, I had imagined that he had come only once to India, bearing in his hands the gift of his proposal which was rejected. From this biography I learnt that he had, in fact, come three times to India and always in connection with some mission or the other relating to the independence of the country. His relationship with India had started much before his first visit and continued well after the political ties had ended. It would indeed be a difficult task to go into all the details of what the Cripps Mission was and to go into an exhaustive discussion about why it failed. A rough idea of the situation however is necessary so that we can better understand why Sri Aurobindo went to such lengths to try and convince the decision makers of the merits of his proposal.

That famous 1942 visit was actually his second trip to India. The Second World War had reached a crucial point, the British had lost Singapore and Hong Kong and now the Japanese were almost at our doorstep. There was a pressing need to get India to participate in the war and to help the British to win it. The deal that Cripps wanted

to strike on behalf of the British Government was that India would be given a Dominion Status in exchange for that help and it was understood that this status would eventually become self-government.

Stafford Cripps's first visit was in December 1939. It was supposed to be an unofficial one but from the Indian side it was taken as seriously as an official trip. For Cripps the purpose was to get a first-hand view of the communal relations and to see how the different groups could be brought together to participate in the solutions that would eventually have to be worked out for the whole country. In India people were aware that he was seen by many in Britain as a possible future Prime Minister. His third visit in March 1946 was called the Cabinet Delegation and it was to chart out the details of the transfer of power in the context of the Indian independence. He tried his best to avoid partition but did not succeed.

Let us go back to that famous second visit. Sir Stafford Cripps came to India on 22nd March 1942 and on 11th April he announced officially that his offer had been rejected. This was a time when communications were slow and urgent messages were sent by telegram. Telephones existed but there were only a few of them and the connections were unreliable. Bearing this in mind it is really remarkable how quickly Sri Aurobindo took the step of sending him a message. That message is dated 31st March and begins with the words "I have heard your broadcast." This radio broadcast by Cripps was made on the 30th March and it followed his press conference held on the 29th.

We know that during the war years Udar-da had a radio and that at the beginning, every day Pavita, the Englishwoman and Pavitra-da used to go to his house and note down in shorthand the news which was being broadcast, then write it out in longhand and maybe even type it out, then send it to Sri Aurobindo. At first the Mother did not want the radio to be brought to the Ashram but after a couple of years Udar-da insisted that they take it so that Sri Aurobindo could hear the news himself. In our present world of round-the-clock news flashing out of over a dozen TV channels in every house that story of the radio being brought to the Ashram is almost out of a fairy tale.

Considering that Sri Aurobindo had taken the unusual step of actually sending a telegram and an envoy to Sir Stafford the question that begs to be asked is, "Why was this proposal rejected?" Every party who was involved in it had a different answer to that question because it was a complex situation, but if we reduce it to a simple answer it would be that there was a great deal of misunderstanding and mistrust among the Indian leaders. Gandhi was against the war on grounds of non-violence, not realising the magnitude of Hitler's evil intentions. He was so sure that the British would lose the war that he even publicly commented that the Cripps' proposal was a "post-dated cheque on a failing bank". One of the major stumbling blocks to the agreement was the matter of the leadership of the Indian Army, the other being the role of the Viceroy and the extent of his powers.

At this point let us take a look at the telegram sent by Sri Aurobindo to Sir Stafford.

I have heard your broadcast. As one who has been a nationalist leader and worker for India's independence though now my activity is no longer in the political but in the spiritual field, I wish to express my appreciation of all you have done to bring about this offer. I welcome it as an opportunity given to India to determine for herself and organise in all liberty of choice her freedom and unity and take an effective place among the world's free nations. I hope that it will be accepted and the right use made of it putting aside all discords and divisions. I hope too that a friendly relation between Britain and India replacing past struggles will be a step towards a greater world union in which as a free nation her spiritual force will contribute to build for mankind a better and happier life. In this light I offer my public adhesion in case it can be of any help in your work.

This message was sent on 31st March. Since it is written out in complete sentences it doesn't look like the usual telegram but it could not have been anything else because the answer to that is a telegram sent by Sir Stafford the very next day, 1st April 1942.

I AM MOST TOUCHED AND GRATIFIED BY YOUR KIND MESSAGE ALLOWING ME TO INFORM INDIA THAT YOU WHO OCCUPY UNIQUE POSITION IN IMAGINATION OF INDIAN YOUTH ARE CONVINCED THAT DECLARATION OF HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT SUBSTANTIALLY CONFERS THAT FREEDOM FOR WHICH INDIAN NATIONALISM HAS SO LONG STRUGGLED.

The most striking thing is that this exchange of messages is not mentioned in this detailed biography. Sir Stafford kept a diary in which he noted everything that happened to him and from which Clarke, the biographer, quotes extensively. How strange that he has not written anything about this sole voice agreeing with him, coming from a remote corner of the country, from a small town governed by the French. Cripps stopped writing his diary after his last visit to India but before that he noted every personal observation, every impression and every hope and apprehension. It could also be that he did write about Sri Aurobindo's telegram in his diary but that the biographer did not consider it important enough to quote it in this book.

Sri Aurobindo did not stop at that message; he sent Duraiswami Iyer, the Madras lawyer, who was a disciple and an important member in the life of the Ashram, to go to Delhi as his emissary and to speak to the leaders. He also sent this telegram to C. Rajagopalachari who was in Delhi and was participating in these talks:

IS NOT COMPROMISE DEFENCE QUESTION BETTER THAN RUPTURE.
SOME IMMEDIATE SETTLEMENT URGENT FACE GRAVE PERIL.
HAVE SENT DURAISWAMI INSIST URGENCY. APPEAL TO YOU TO
SAVE INDIA FORMIDABLE DANGER NEW FOREIGN DOMINATION
WHEN OLD ON WAY TO SELF-ELIMINATION.

The fact that Rajagopalachari is mentioned as agreeing with the proposal is an indication that at least he could get that message to Cripps. In fact, let me quote Clarke's very words about that situation and we can see how faithfully he maintained what Sri Aurobindo had asked him to convey.

On the Congress side, Rajagopalachari spoke out prominently along these lines: refusing to blame Cripps himself, urging rapprochement with the Muslim League, and arguing that for Britain to quit India at its moment of peril from Japanese invasion would constitute betrayal.

After Cripps's departure the Indian leaders blamed him for the failure of the talks. Nehru, who had so far been seen as a friend of Sir Stafford, now openly criticised him. In fact, Nehru had been very warm to Cripps's proposal at first and for a while it seemed as if the mission had been successful. But suddenly the tables turned at the last minute and it was formally rejected. Later Nehru said in a public speech "I am happy that the negotiation failed and we were not caught in that snare." The situation became even more volatile and the Quit India movement was launched in August of that same year.

A peep into K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's biography of Sri Aurobindo reveals an interesting anecdote told by Nirod-da. After Cripps's mission was declared a failure Sri Aurobindo told those who were around him that he knew this mission would fail. They asked him why he had taken the trouble to send an emissary if he knew that it would fail. Nirod-da says "He smiled in his usual enigmatic way, and said "Well, I have done a bit of *nishkama karma* (disinterested work)."

Cripps gradually rose from being the leader of the House of Commons in 1942 to the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer, the equivalent of the Finance Minister. During the War he was made a member of the War Cabinet and later the Minister of Aircraft Production. This must have been a particularly suitable post considering that he actually had constructed a life-size working model of one of those very early planes in the grounds of their country house when he was a teenager. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, a position he held from 1947, he worked unusually long hours, starting early in the morning. In the end he had to resign due to ill health and after two years of fighting against cancer he died in 1952 just three days before his 63rd birthday.

He is remembered as the rival of Churchill and his opposite in every way. While Churchill did not hide his strong reluctance to give independence to India, Cripps had always sympathised with India's desire for democracy. He was related to the India Conciliation group, made up of British people who supported the Indian freedom movement. Churchill was known to be fond of luxuries but Cripps believed in renouncing them. So much so that he was often referred to as "the English Gandhi". Churchill once said of him "He has all the virtues I dislike and none of the vices I admire."

It is something of a discovery to read that he had a strong inner life. He believed that “trying to remedy the inequalities in the world” was being faithful to the Christian teachings. He even wrote a book which he called “Towards Christian Democracy”. In 1948 in an address at the Westminster Chapel he spoke about his belief that the aim of life was to establish the Kingdom of God here on earth.

There is a diary entry from his early youth which gives us an indication about his inner reflections. He writes “. . . it is the re-genesis of the divine spirit which is needed and not a genesis. Every child is born with the same amount of divine spirit, that spirit may be crushed or it may be encouraged, or it may succeed or fail in spite of everything — but it cannot die . . .” This is written in July 1910 when he was 21 years old.

He is remembered in England as “Austerity Cripps” because he advocated austerity in public spending. He took charge of the country’s finances after the Second World War and tried to build it up. It was generally understood that he was extending to the life of the whole nation his personal preference for living austerely. The war had already brought a lot of hardships so people were not exactly pleased to deny themselves the good things of life even after the war had ended.

Since Cripps was born into a Christian culture he expressed his feelings in a Christian way. But clearly what he was seeking was something beyond religion. He wanted to bring to his country an ideal way of life. He was not interested in talking, what mattered to him was to see his thoughts turned into actions. To him his work in the outer world was directly connected to his progress in the inner world.

As I come to the final chapters of the book I realise that Peter Clarke, the author, has a style which is so engaging that what could easily have become a dull book about a British politician, who wasn’t particularly colourful or witty, has turned out to be a fascinating volume about a man who was so closely connected with the independence of India. The author makes sure that the reader never loses sight of Cripps the man as he reads about Cripps the member of the War Cabinet or Cripps the Minister for Economic Affairs. The details of his innermost aspirations make the book worth reading.

Here is what he wrote in his diary on 16th April 1946, in India, after a day spent in talking to Jinnah and being unable to persuade him to change his stance.

“This is the really critical time and I feel personally that I must leave no stone unturned to get a favourable result for the future of 400 million people hangs in the balance in the next few days. May God give us wisdom to do what is right. I have never felt a heavier responsibility on my shoulders than just at this moment. I still feel we must succeed somehow. That is our duty and our debt to India . . .”

Let us look into what he writes in his diary a few days later on 20th April 1946, which was Good Friday. This was written during a short break spent in Kashmir while the crucial talks were still on. Although it is a diary entry it was meant to be read by his wife Isobel.

“In the evening light it was a quite unforgettable sight. I had to wander off alone, it was too beautiful to share with anyone but you — it was that beauty which makes one happily sad — a deep sadness for humanity, an overwhelming sense of the smallness of man and his inability to cope with life . . . Somehow it seems peculiarly appropriate that this should be Eastertide and somehow this and Easter and our job all seem fitted in together — I am not sure how but I am sure that they are. This is perhaps God’s answer to my and your prayers for guidance and out of this experience will come wisdom to deal with what is so intensely difficult a problem. I am sure that beauty and peace give wisdom and perhaps in the next 3 days God will give his guidance.”

Behind the broad lines of history are individuals, made up of body, mind and heart — and a soul. We can gather from what he says in his telegram to Sri Aurobindo that he knew how he had inspired the nation towards independence. He probably didn’t know more than that. How interesting it would have been for Cripps, on a personal level, if he had understood who Sri Aurobindo really was.

A few days after Sir Stafford’s death his wife received a letter from Clementine Churchill, the wife of Winston Churchill, with the following words: “I know that Stafford was upheld by an intense spiritual life and an unshakable faith.”

As I took the book back to return it I had one last glimpse at his photo. Here was a man I had heard so much about, who is almost a part of Ashram history, and yet I had been unaware of the most basic facts of his life. The more we know the more we discover that there is so much more to know, and every piece of knowledge is one more piece added in an infinite jigsaw puzzle.

(All quotations are from *The Cripps Version: The Life of Sir Stafford Cripps* by Peter Clarke, published by Penguin, 2002. Quotations from Sri Aurobindo as well as the telegraphic message from Cripps are from *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest* published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2006.)



9. A LETTER

(For Sri Aurobindo's Centenary, Sri Aurobindo Research Academy brought out a book Sri Aurobindo — A Garland of Tributes, edited by Arabinda Basu. Sir Stafford Cripps' wife was asked to contribute to the book. This is her reply.)

Dear Arabinda,

I AM glad to know that you are editing a volume of tributes and essays on the occasion of the Birth Centenary of Sri Aurobindo. I feel honoured and gratified by your invitation to contribute a short description of the background of the formation of and the work of the British Parliamentary Mission led by my late husband Sir Stafford Cripps. I wish so much I could be helpful but I cannot do what you ask. It is 19 years since I was in close contact with the India scene, and though this makes no difference to the warmth of my feelings, there is nothing definite I could write about it all. This is one reason, another is that a definite biography of my husband is about to be written and all material of value has been closed till the biographer decides what he wants.

However I may say that Stafford was very much heartened by Sri Aurobindo's unequivocal message to him. He was especially touched by the fact that Sri Aurobindo offered his public adhesion to the proposals of the Parliamentary Mission and that his message was given wide publicity:

[. . .]

Some of the most eminent political leaders of India subsequently admitted the folly of rejecting the proposals of the British Parliamentary Mission. But I am not surprised that the unerring vision of a spiritual mystic of Sri Aurobindo's stature saw the reality of the situation and that he recommended strongly the acceptance of the proposals.

With all my thoughts and wishes,

ISOBEL (CRIPPS)



10. STATEMENT BY WINSTON CHURCHILL IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ANNOUNCING THE MISSION

THE crisis in the affairs of India arising out of the Japanese advance has made Britain wish to rally all the forces of Indian life to guard their land from the menace of the invader. In August 1940 a statement was made about the aims and policy which we are pursuing in India. This amounted in short to a promise that as soon as possible after the war India should attain Dominion Status in full freedom and equality with this country and other Dominions under a constitution to be framed by Indians by agreement amongst themselves and acceptable to the main elements in the Indian national life.

This was, of course, subject to the fulfilment of our obligations for the protection of minorities, including the Depressed Classes and our treaty obligations to the Indian States and a settlement of certain lesser matters arising out of our long association with the fortunes of Indian Sub-Continent.

However, in order to close these general declarations with precision and to convince all classes, races and creeds in India of our sincere resolve the War Cabinet have agreed unitedly upon conclusions for present and future action which, if accepted by India as a whole, would avoid alternative dangers of either that the resistance of a powerful minority might impose an indefinite veto upon the wishes of the majority or that a majority decision might be taken which would be resisted to a point destructive of internal harmony and fatal to the setting up of a new Constitution.

We had thought of setting forth immediately the terms of this attempt by a constructive contribution to aid India in the realisation of full self-government. We are, however, apprehensive that to make a public announcement at such a moment as this might do more harm than good. We must first assure ourselves that our scheme would win a reasonable and practical measure of acceptance and thus promote concentration of all thought and energies upon the defence of the native soil.

We should ill serve the common cause if we made a declaration which would be rejected by the essential elements in the Indian world and which would provoke fierce constitutional and communal disputes at a moment when the enemy is at the gates of India.

Accordingly we propose to send a member of the War Cabinet to India to satisfy himself on the spot by personal consultation that the conclusions upon which we are agreed and which we believe represent a just and final solution will achieve their purpose. The Lord Privy Seal and the Leader of the House, Sir Stafford Cripps has volunteered to undertake this task. He carries with him the full confidence of His Majesty's Govt. and he will strive in their name to procure the necessary measure of assent, not only from the Hindu majority but also from those great minorities amongst which the Moslems are most numerous and on many grounds prominent.

The Lord Privy Seal will at the same time consult with the Viceroy and the

Commander-in-Chief on the military situation bearing always in mind the paramount responsibility of His Majesty's Govt. by every means in their power to shield the people of India from the perils which now beset them. We must remember that India has a great part to play in the world struggle for freedom and that her helping hand must be extended in loyal comradeship to the valiant Chinese people who have fought alone so long.

We must remember also that India is one of the bases from which the strongest counter blows must be struck at the advance of tyranny and aggression.

Sir Stafford Cripps will set out as soon as convenient and suitable arrangements can be made. He will command in his task heartfelt good wishes of all parts of the House and meanwhile no words will be spoken or debates held here or in India which would add to the burden he has assumed in his mission or lessen the prospects of good result. During Sir Stafford Cripps' absence from Parliament his duties as Leader will be discharged by the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Eden.

(The Cripps Mission edited by Sukhamay Banerjee and Shanti Mitra, published by Bamabo, Calcutta, October 1942, pp. 12-14.)



11. LONDON PRESS COMMENTS

THE announcement that the Government had decided to send Sir Stafford Cripps to India was given great prominence in the newspapers.

The “Evening Standard” in an editorial thereon said, “Sir Stafford Cripps has undertaken a mission to India to convince her leaders of the sincere desire of the British people to see India united and free. What precise powers he is given and what exactly is ‘just final solution’ propounded by the Prime Minister is not known. It is not an easy task to convince India that her problems are to be settled and Sir Stafford is the brave man to do it. He starts with the advantage of long personal friendship with many of India’s most beloved leaders. The whole of Britain and the whole free world wishes him well in his difficult undertaking.”

The “Evening News” in an editorial entitled a ‘Momentous Mission’ said “Mr. Churchill’s announcement is a dramatic stroke. Both Sir Stafford and Indians themselves will be working against time. The Japanese will not wait on the conferences on prolonged bargaining.

“Unless the spirit of India rises to the heights of the hour, unless quarrels between creeds can be set aside in a common determination to face the common foe, unless Britain is recognised as India’s true friend, India may go the way of Singapore, Java and Burma.

“Indians standing together with the free peoples can be a bulwark against the tide of savagery from the East. The fate of Hong Kong is the fate of Indians and Britons alike if we fail or falter.”

(The Cripps Mission edited by Sukhamay Banerjee and Shanti Mitra, published by Bamabo, Calcutta, October 1942, p. 15.)



12. REACTIONS IN INDIA

CONGRESS President, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad said, “When Sir Stafford Cripps visited India about the beginning of 1940, he was pleased to see me. I would welcome him as a friend when he visits India again in the near future.”

Dr. Syamaprasad Mookerjee, Working President of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha said, “The decision of the British Government to send out Sir Stafford

Cripps to tackle the Indian problem by establishing personal contact with India is a move in the right direction. In view of Sir Stafford's broad outlook and real grasp over the problem no better selection could have been made. The Indian problem will be easy of solution only if the British Government genuinely makes up its mind to part with power and to trust Indians to administer their own country and to defend it against aggression"

(*The Cripps Mission* edited by Sukhamay Banerjee and Shanti Mitra, published by Bamabo, Calcutta, October 1942, p. 16.)



13. SIR STAFFORD ARRIVES

I HAVE come to India to discuss with the leaders of Indian opinion, conclusions which the War Cabinet have unitedly reached in regard to India. I am here to ascertain whether these conclusions will as we hope be generally acceptable to Indian opinion. Obviously it would not be appropriate for me to say anything further about the precise nature of the proposals at this stage beyond the indications which were given by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons

I have come here because I am, as I have always been a great friend and admirer of India and because I want to play my part as a member of the War Cabinet in reaching a final settlement of the political difficulties which have vexed our relationship

There is no time to lose and no time for long discussions

I believe that the proposals of the War Cabinet will appeal to the Indian leaders

(*The Cripps Mission* edited by Sukhamay Banerjee and Shanti Mitra, published by Bamabo, Calcutta, October 1942, pp. 17-19.)



14. DRAFT DECLARATION FOR DISCUSSION WITH INDIAN LEADERS

[The conclusions of the British War Cabinet as set out below are those which Sir Stafford Cripps had taken with him for discussion with the Indian Leaders.]

30 March 1942

His Majesty's Government, having considered the anxieties expressed in this country and in India as to the fulfilment of the promises made in regard to the future of India, have decided to lay down in precise and clear terms the steps which they propose shall be taken for the earliest possible realisation of self-government in India. The object is the creation of a new Indian Union which shall constitute a Dominion, associated with the United Kingdom and the other Dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown, but equal to them in every respect, in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic or external affairs.

His Majesty's Government therefore make the following declaration:

(a) Immediately upon the cessation of hostilities, steps shall be taken to set up in India, in the manner described hereafter, an elected body charged with the task of framing a new Constitution for India.

(b) Provision shall be made, as set out below, for the participation of the Indian States in the constitution-making body.

(c) His Majesty's Government undertake to accept and implement forthwith the Constitution so framed subject only to:

(i) the right of any Province of British India that is not prepared to accept the new Constitution to retain its present constitutional position, provision being made for its subsequent accession if it so decides. With such non-acceding Provinces, should they so desire, His Majesty's Government will be prepared to agree upon a new Constitution, giving them the same full status as Indian Union, and arrived at by a procedure analogous to that here laid down.

(ii) the signing of a Treaty which shall be negotiated between His Majesty's Government and the constitution-making body. This Treaty will cover all necessary matters arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands; it will make provision, in accordance with the undertakings given by His Majesty's Government, for the protection of racial and religious minorities; but will not impose any restriction on the power of the Indian Union to decide in the future its relationship to the other Member States of the British Commonwealth.

Whether or not an Indian State elects to adhere to the Constitution, it will be necessary to negotiate a revision of its Treaty arrangements, so far as this may be required in the new situation.

(d) the constitution-making body shall be composed as follows, unless the leaders

of Indian opinion in the principal communities agree upon some other form before the end of hostilities:

Immediately upon the result being known of the provincial elections which will be necessary at the end of hostilities, the entire membership of the Lower Houses of the Provincial Legislatures shall, as a single electoral college, proceed to the election of the constitution-making body by the system of proportional representation. This new body shall be in number about one-tenth of the number of the electoral college.

Indian States shall be invited to appoint representatives in the same proportion to their total population as in the case of the representatives of British India as a whole, and with the same powers as the British Indian members.

(e) During the critical period which now faces India and until the new Constitution can be framed, His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for and retain control and direction of the defence of India as part of their world war effort, but the task of organising to the full the military, moral and material resources of India must be the responsibility of the Government of India with the co-operation of the peoples of India. His Majesty's Government desire and invite the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations. Thus they will be enabled to give their active and constructive help in the discharge of a task which is vital and essential for the future freedom of India.

(Transfer of Power 1942-7, Vol. 1, Cripps Mission, January-April 1942, edited by Nicholas Mansergh and published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1970, reprinted in India by Vikas Publications, Delhi, pp. 565-66.)



15. BROADCAST BY SIR S. CRIPPS

30 March 1942

I WANT tonight to give you a short explanation of the document which was published in the Press this morning, and which gives the proposals of the British War Cabinet for the future of India, a document unanimously agreed upon by every member of that Cabinet.

First of all you will want to know what object we had in view. Well, we wanted to make it quite clear and beyond any possibility of doubt or question that the British

Government and the British people desire the Indian peoples to have full self-government, with a constitution as free in every respect as our own in Great Britain or as of any of the great Dominion members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. In the words of the draft Declaration, India would be, "associated with the United Kingdom and other dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown but equal to them in every respect, in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic or external affairs".

There is however an existing constitution which regulates the central and provincial Governments of India and everyone agrees that in these troublous times we cannot here and now set about forging a new Constitution. It is far too important a matter for the future of India to be improvised in a hurried way.

The principle on which these proposals are based is that the new Constitution should be framed by the elected representatives of the Indian peoples themselves, so we propose that immediately hostilities are ended a Constitution-making body should be set up consisting of elected representatives from British India, and if the Indian States wish, as we hope they will, to become part of the new Indian Union, they too will be invited to send their representatives to this Constitution-making body, though, if they do, that will not, of itself, bind them to become members of the Union. That is the broad outline of the future.

Now what is to happen in the meantime?

The British people are determined to do their utmost for the Defence of India and we are confident that in that great task the Indian peoples of all races and religions are eager to play their full part.

Let me read to you what the statement says on this point —

"(e) During the critical period which now faces India and until the new Constitution can be framed, His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for and retain control and direction of the defence of India as part of their world war effort, but the task of organising to the full the military, moral and material resources of India must be the responsibility of the Government of India with the co-operation of the peoples of India. His Majesty's Government desire and invite the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations. Thus they will be enabled to give their active and constructive help in the discharge of a task which is vital and essential for the future freedom of India". So ends the document.

The Governor-General, whose task it is to form the Central Government of India, has done his utmost to assist me with my mission, and I am certain that the Indian leaders can rely upon him to find the best way in consultation with them for carrying out the general principle laid down in the Clause that I have just read to you.

So much for the general framework of the proposals. But, as we all know, the

most vital and difficult question is that which concerns the interests of the various communities amongst the Indian peoples.

I will not attempt to go into any of the historical origins of these difficulties, let us instead look at them as a present fact. In the great sub-continent of India there is more than one people, there are many peoples and races as there are in the great sub-continent of Russia. Our object is to give to the Indian peoples full self-government with complete freedom as to how they will devise and organise their own Constitution.

There are those who claim that India should form a single united country, there are others who say it should be divided up into two, three or more separated countries. There are those who claim that Provincial Autonomy should be very wide with but few centrally controlled federal services; others stress the need for centralisation in view of the growing complexity of economic development.

These and many other and various ideas are worthy to be explored and debated, but it is for the Indian peoples, and not for any outside authority, to decide under which of these forms India will in the future govern herself.

If the Indian peoples ask our help it will of course be gladly given but it is for you, the Indian peoples, to discuss and decide upon your future Constitution. We shall look on with deep interest and hope that your wisdom will guide you truly in this great adventure.

We ask you therefore to come together — all religions and races — in a Constitution-making body as soon as hostilities are over to frame your own Constitution.

We have specified the form which that body will take, unless, and this is an important point, the leaders of the principal sections of Indian opinion agree between themselves before the end of hostilities upon some other and better form.

That Constitution-making body will have as its object the framing of a single Constitution for the whole of India — that is, of British-India together with such of the Indian States as may decide to join in.

But we realise this very simple fact. If you want to persuade a number of people who are inclined to be antagonistic to enter the same room, it is unwise to tell them that once they go in there is no way out — they are to be forever locked in together.

It is much wiser to tell them they can go in and if they find they can't come to a common decision, then there is nothing to prevent those who wish, from leaving again by another door. They are much more likely all to go in if they have knowledge that they can by their free will go out again if they cannot agree.

Well, that is what we say to the Provinces of India. Come together to frame a common Constitution — if you find after all your discussion and all the give and take of a Constitution-making assembly that you cannot overcome your differences and that some Provinces are still not satisfied with the Constitution, then such Provinces can go out and remain out if they wish and just the same degree of self-government and freedom will be available for them as for the Union itself, that is to say complete self-government.

We hope and expect to see an Indian Union strong and united because it is founded upon the free consent of all its peoples; but it is not for us Britishers to dictate to you, the Indian peoples, you will work out and decide that problem for yourselves.

So we provide the means and the road by which you can attain that form of the absolute and united self-government that you desire at the earliest possible moment. In the past we have waited for the different Indian communities to come to a common decision as to how a new Constitution for a self-governing India should be framed and because there has been no agreement amongst the Indian leaders, the British Government has been accused by some of using this fact to delay the granting of freedom to India. We are now giving the lead that has been asked for and it is in the hands of Indians and Indians only whether they will accept that lead and so attain their own freedom. If they fail to accept this opportunity the responsibility for that failure must rest with them.

We ask you to accept this fulfilment of our pledges in the past and it is that request that I have put before your leaders in the document which you have now seen.

As regards the position of minority communities within the new Indian Union, I am confident that the Constitution-making body will make just provision for their protection. But in view of the undertakings given to these minorities by His Majesty's Government in the past we propose that in the Treaty which, under the draft Declaration, will be concluded between His Majesty's Government and the Constitution-making body, the new Indian Union should undertake to protect the rights of these minorities. If there should be any non-acceding Provinces a similar Treaty provision would be made in respect of minority communities within their borders.

I have already indicated to you the position as to the immediate future.

I know that His Excellency the Viceroy has the greatest hope that the acceptance in principle of this document by the leaders of Indian opinion will make it possible for him to start forthwith upon the consultations which will enable him to implement the principle laid down in the last paragraph of the document which I have already read over to you.

It contains one essential reservation — that in respect of the responsibility for Defence. This reservation does not mean that the Governor-General and his Executive Council will or indeed could be excluded from taking an effective share in the counsels for the defence of India. In this wide-flung war, defence cannot be localised in a single country and its preparation must permeate the activities of every department of Government and must demand from every department the fullest co-operation. If His Majesty's Government are to take full responsibility for the conduct of the naval, military and air defence of India, as it is their duty to do, then the defence of India must be dealt with by them as part of the world war effort in which they are now engaged, and the direction of that defence must rest in the hands of the Commander-in-Chief under the War Cabinet and their highest staff officers. But, as I have already pointed out, the Government of India must also have an effective share in the Defence

counsels and so we have decided that the Commander-in-Chief must retain his position as a Member of the Executive Council.

In order, however, that India may have her full voice in this central control of strategy, defensive and offensive, not only in India itself but in all the interrelated theatres of war, we have invited the appointment of a representative Indian to the War Cabinet and to the Pacific Council of the United Nations — that is one of the ways in which India will have her full say in the counsels of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations as an equal partner. And when it comes to the making of the peace, India will appoint her own representatives to the Peace Conference side by side with those of the other free Nations and so make her contribution to the building of a new world order.

I am confident that nothing further or more complete could be done towards the immediate realisation of the just claims and demands of the Indian peoples. Our proposals are definite and precise. If they were to be rejected by the leaders of Indian opinion, there would be neither the time nor the opportunity to reconsider this matter till after the war and it would be a bitter blow to the friends of India all over the world.

I consider it a high honour that it has fallen to my lot to be the messenger of the War Cabinet in a matter of such vital and far-reaching importance to the future world order. I personally am convinced of the soundness and completeness of these proposals, and I have asked your leaders to give to them an ungrudging acceptance.

There will still be difficulties perhaps — the result of the distrust which has grown up between us in past years, but I ask you to turn your back upon that past, to accept my hand, our hand of friendship and trust and to allow us to join with you for the time being in working to establish and complete your freedom and your self-government. This as you may know has long been a cause dear to my heart and it is with the greatest hopes that I look to the events of the next few days which may if wisely handled seal for ever your freedom and our friendship.

Your country today is in peril from a cruel aggressor, an aggressor whose hand has soaked in blood and suffering great areas of China with its friendly and democratic peoples, an aggressor allied to those nations who have deluged with tragedy the once peaceful plains of Russia. Against those aggressors we and the allied nations will fight to victory.

The outlook is overcast for the moment but believe me, I have no doubt as to the final result. Russia, the United States, China and Great Britain have resources which the axis and its allies can never defeat.

We stand by our duty growing out of our past historical associations, to give you every protection that we can, but with your willing help and co-operation this can be made more effective and more powerful.

Let us enter upon this primary task of the defence of India in the now sure knowledge that when we emerge from the fire and travail of war it will be to build a free India upon foundations wrought by the Indian peoples themselves, and to forge

a long lasting and free friendship between our two peoples. Regrets and recriminations as to the past can have no place beside the confident and sure hopes of the future, when a free India will take her rightful place as a co-worker with the other free nations in that world reconstruction which alone can make the toil and suffering of the war worth while.

Let the dead past bury its dead! And let us march together side by side through the night of high endeavour and courage to the already waking dawn of a new world of liberty for all the peoples.

(The Cripps Mission edited by Sukhamay Banerjee and Shanti Mitra, published by Bamabo, Calcutta, October 1942, pp. 32-38.)



16. RESOLUTION OF THE CONGRESS WORKING COMMITTEE

Issued 11 April 1942

THE Working Committee have given full and earnest consideration to the proposals made by the British War Cabinet with regard to India and the elucidation of them by Sir Stafford Cripps.

These proposals, which have been made at the very last hour because of the compulsion of events, have to be considered not only in relation to India's demand for independence but more especially, in the present grave war crisis, with a view to meeting effectively the perils and dangers that confront India and envelop the world.

Congress has repeatedly stated, ever since the commencement of the war in September 1939, that the people of India would line themselves with the progressive forces of the world and assume full responsibility to face the new problems and shoulder the new burdens that had arisen, and it asked for the necessary conditions to enable them to do so to be created. The essential condition was the freedom of India, for only the realisation of present freedom could light the flame which would illuminate millions of hearts and move them to action.

At the last meeting of the All-India Congress Committee, after the commencement of the war in the Pacific, it was stated that: "Only a free and independent India can be in a position to undertake the defence of the country on a national basis and be able to help in the furtherance of the larger causes that are emerging from the form of war."

The British War Cabinet's new proposals relate principally to the future, upon

the cessation of hostilities. The Committee, while recognising that self-determination for the people of India is accepted in principle in that uncertain future, regret that this is fettered and circumscribed and that certain provisions have been introduced which gravely imperil the development of a free and united national government and the establishment of a democratic state. Even the constitution-making body is so constituted that the people's right of self-determination is vitiated by the introduction of non-representative elements.

The people of India have, as a whole, clearly demanded full independence, and Congress has repeatedly declared that no other status except that of independence for the whole of India could be agreed to or could meet the essential requirements of the present situation.

The Committee recognise that future independence may be implicit in the proposals, but the accompanying provisions and restrictions are such that real freedom may well become an illusion.

The complete ignoring of ninety millions of people in the Indian States, and their treatment as commodities at the disposal of their Rulers, is a negation both of democracy and self-determination. While the representation of an Indian State in the constitution-making body is fixed on a population basis, the people of the State have no voice in choosing those representatives, nor are they to be consulted at any stage while decisions vitally affecting them are being taken. Such States may in many ways become barriers to the growth of Indian freedom, enclaves where foreign authority still prevails, and where the possibility of maintaining foreign-armed forces has been stated to be a likely contingency and a perpetual menace to the freedom of the people of the States as well as of the rest of India.

The acceptance beforehand of the novel principle of non-accession for a Province is also a severe blow to the conception of Indian unity and an apple of discord likely to generate growing trouble in the Provinces, and which may well lead to further difficulties in the way of the Indian States merging themselves into an Indian Union. Congress has been wedded to Indian freedom and unity and any break of that unity especially in the modern world when peoples' minds inevitably think in terms of ever larger federations would be injurious to all concerned and exceedingly painful to contemplate. Nevertheless the Committee cannot think in terms of compelling the people of any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will. While recognising this principle, the Committee feel that every effort should be made to create conditions which would help the different units in developing a common and co-operative national life. Acceptance of this principle inevitably involves that no changes should be made which would result in fresh problems being created and compulsion being exercised on other substantial groups within that area. Each territorial unit should have the fullest possible autonomy within the Union consistently with a strong National State.

The proposal now made on the part of the British War Cabinet encourages and

will lead to attempts at separation at the very inception of the Union and thus create great friction just when the utmost co-operation and goodwill are most needed. This proposal has been presumably made to meet the communal demand, but it will have other consequences also and lead politically reactionary and obscurantist groups among the different communities to create trouble and divert public attention from the vital issues before the country.

Any proposal concerning the future of India must demand attention and scrutiny, but in to-day's grave crisis it is the present that counts and even the proposals for the future in so far as they affect the present. The Committee necessarily attached the greatest importance to this aspect of the question and on this ultimately depends what advice they should give to those who look to them for guidance. For this the present British War Cabinet's proposals are vague and altogether incomplete, and there would appear to be no vital changes in the present structure contemplated. It has been made clear that the defence of India will in any event remain under British control. At any time Defence is a vital subject; during war-time it is all-important and covers almost every sphere of life and administration. To take away Defence from the sphere of responsibility at this stage is to reduce that responsibility to a farce and nullity, and to make it perfectly clear that India is not going to be free in any way and her Government is not going to function as a free and independent Government during the pendency of the war.

The Committee would repeat that the essential fundamental prerequisite for the assumption of responsibility by the Indian people in the present is their realisation as a fact that they are free and are in charge of maintaining and defending their freedom. What is most wanted is the enthusiastic response of the people, which cannot be evoked without the fullest trust in them and the devolution of responsibility on them in the matter of Defence. It is only thus that even in this grave eleventh hour it may be possible to galvanise the people of India to rise to the height of the occasion. It is manifest that the present Government of India, as well as its Provincial agencies, are lacking in competence and are incapable of shouldering the burden of India's defence. It is only the people of India, through their popular representatives, who may shoulder this burden worthily. But that can only be done by present freedom and full responsibility being cast upon them. The Committee are, therefore, unable to accept the proposals put forward on behalf of the British War Cabinet.

(Transfer of Power 1942-7, Vol. 1, Cripps Mission, January-April 1942, edited by Nicholas Mansergh and published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1970, reprinted in India by Vikas Publications, Delhi, pp. 745-48.)



17. LAST WORDS BY SIR STAFFORD CRIPPS

At a press conference in New Delhi on April 11, Sir Stafford Cripps announced that His Majesty's Government's offer to India had been withdrawn.

He said that nothing further could have been done by way of giving responsibility for Defence services to Indian members without jeopardising the immediate defence of India.

In the course of a broadcast from All-India Radio, he said:

You will have heard that the draft declaration which I brought to India on behalf of the War Cabinet, and which I explained to you last time I spoke over the wireless, has been rejected by your leaders.

I am sad that this great opportunity of rallying India for her defence and her freedom has been missed.

None could have been more fully conscious than I of the great difficulties which history has placed in the way of a settlement of the relations between British and Indian peoples and even more between the different communities in India.

The War Cabinet in sending me upon this mission realised to the full that Indian opinion — though united in the desire for full self-government was widely disunited as to the methods by which it should be attained.

It was with these wide differences of view that we had to deal, and it would have been of no use if we had closed our eyes to the hard realities of the situation.

In the past British Governments have been accused of using vague terms to cloak a lack of purpose; and when they have stated that it must be left to the Indian communities to agree amongst themselves it has been said that this was only a device by which Great Britain might indefinitely retain its control over India.

But Congress has since the outbreak of war repeatedly demanded two essentials as the basis for its support of the Allied effort in the war. First a declaration of Indian independence and second, a Constituent Assembly to frame a new and free constitution for India. Both these demands find their place in the draft declaration.

It was in the light of the demands and criticism of the Indian leaders that the War Cabinet drafted their declaration with the object of convincing the Indian peoples and world public opinion of the sincerity of their desire to offer freedom to India at the earliest practicable moment.

To avoid the complaints that had been made in the past, they put out a clear and precise plan which would avoid all possibility of Indian self-government being held up by the views of some large section or community, but they left it open for the Indian leaders to agree upon an alternative method if they wished.

Of course every individual and organisation would have liked the draft declaration to express his or their point of view, forgetting that if it did, it would inevitably have

been rejected by others.

The War Cabinet were thus in a position rather like that of an arbitrator who tries to arrange a fair compromise between conflicting points of view.

They could not, however, without denying the very freedom which they were offering, impose a form of Government upon the Indian peoples which they did not themselves freely choose.

Criticism has been showered on the scheme from all sides; parties and individuals have vied with one another in a competition to discover the greatest number of defects. But in all this spate of criticism, those vital parts of the document with which all agree have never been mentioned. Full and free self-government for India that is its central feature.

This critical and unconstructive attitude, natural enough in the law courts or in the market place, is not the best way of arriving at a compromise, but compromise there must be if a strong and free India is to come into being.

Some day, somehow the great communities and parties of India will have to agree upon the method of framing their new constitution. I regret profoundly for the sake of India, for whom I have a deep and admiring friendship, that the opportunity now offered has not been accepted.

But all this concerns the future. The immediate difficulties have been as regards the present. First there was the difficulty as to defence.

Upon that the attitude of the British Government was very simple. For many decades the defence of India has been in the charge of His Majesty's Government. That charge has been carried out for over twenty years by a Commander-in-Chief who was also Defence Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council.

This has led to an organisation which places the control of the armed forces under a Defence Secretariat containing British and Indian [members], headed by a Commander-in-Chief. The Army units — the Navy and the Air Force all come under this supreme command.

The demand has been made that the defence of India should be placed in Indian hands. No one suggests that the Commander-in-Chief, as the head of the armed forces, should be under the Indian Government, but they say, his function as defence member should be transferred to an Indian.

This may sound simple — in fact it would mean a long and difficult reorganisation of the whole Defence Secretariat and unscrambling of eggs scrambled many years ago — which would cause delay and confusion at the very moment when the enemy is at the gates and the maximum of speed and efficiency is essential in defence. The duty of the British Government to defend India and our duty to our American allies who are giving such valuable help, makes such a course impossible.

To show our complete sincerity of desire to give to representative Indian members of the Executive the maximum of power, we offered to create a new War Department which would take over the Governmental relations of the Commander-in-Chief's

General Headquarters and Naval and Air Headquarters and which would be in his charge as War Member, leaving the rest of the Defence Department — with a number of most important functions added to an Indian Defence Member.

This arrangement satisfied some of the parties but not Congress, who demanded a degree of control in the Indian Defence Member which might have gravely jeopardised the Allied war effort in India.

In the wider area of defence, which touches almost every department of the Government of India, the administration would have been wholly under the control of representative Indians.

But none of these things were the real cause of the breakdown of the negotiations.

In their final letter addressed to me, the Congress Working Committee have stated that the temporary form of Government envisaged during the war, is not such as to enable them to join the government.

They have two suggestions to remedy the situation. First, an immediate change of the Constitution, a point raised at the last moment, and one that everyone else has admitted to be wholly impracticable while the war is proceeding: and second, that they are prepared to enter a true National Government with a cabinet of Indian leaders untrammelled by any control by the Viceroy or the British Government

[. . .]

One thing I must make clear. I alone in India carry the responsibility for what has been done, neither the Viceroy nor the Commander-in-Chief carries any responsibility for these negotiations. They have throughout done their utmost to help me and I express to them and many other willing helpers of all nationalities my most sincere thanks for that help.

We have tried by the offer that I brought to help India along her road to victory and to freedom, but for the moment, past distrust has proved too strong to allow of present agreement.

But in that failure to achieve immediate results there is no bitterness. Our effort has been genuine. No responsible Indian has questioned the sincerity of our main purpose — the complete freedom of India.

Such an effort inspired by goodwill and sincerity, will leave its mark upon the history of our relations, and will cast its beneficent light forward into the future. It will prove to have been a first step along the path of freedom for India and of friendship between our two countries.

[. . .]

Our philosophies, our religions and our traditions differ widely. But in whatever form we may each worship our own conception of supreme power and absolute

goodness, we one and all desire to see those ethical and moral standards which are implicit in our religion become the touch stone of our behaviour in all the wide and human constants which make up for day-to-day life.

And in this epic struggle for decent moral standards in the world we fight against the godless barbarism and bestiality of our enemies, but we do not fight alone. Russia, China, the United States of America, and all the allied nations with their suffering peoples, stand beside us, a great company of gallant men and women who will give their all for those things which they know to be right and just. On the battlefields of Russia and China, in their cities and on their farms, millions of our fellow men and women have already given their lives that we might live. To that great and gallant army of the heroic dead we not only owe a debt of gratitude, but we acknowledge a duty and an obligation.

“To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.” To strive, to seek, to find that righteous victory which they died to win, and not to yield to that barbarous aggression against which they made their bodies a living wall of resistance.

It is true that millions have died in those countries, as others have died in the crowded streets of our English cities, in our ships upon the high seas and fighting in our armies on the land and in the air, but as each has fallen others have crowded forward to take the vacant place and countless millions are even now preparing to strengthen and reinforce the effort, to make victory sure.

The hour has struck when India herself is being driven inexorably by the aggression of Japan into the front line of defence in a war which now spreads its evil tentacles into nearly every country in world.

India takes her place, and takes it proudly, beside the peoples of Russia, China and America as yet another vast continental area attacked by an unscrupulous and self-seeking foe.

We shall do our utmost, despite all our heavy commitments elsewhere, and the United States of America will lend her great and growing aid as well, to assist the Indians, in the defence of their country. We ask them to help us as we seek to help them. Together we can do much, divided we can do far less.

Hard and difficult times surely lie ahead, the path of hour and of duty has never been an easy one, and to-day in those who would follow it to its end there must be found a greater courage and determination than ever before; but the end is certain as the slow wheels of justice grind out defeat for the aggressor nations. The vast resources of manufacture of the United States, of Great Britain and of Russia, matched to the unlimited man-power of the Allied nations can bring out one result — the final victory, even though it be delayed, and that towards that victory India can and must play her part, a part that will give her a proud right of full and free representation in the council of the nations when they meet to make the final peace which can, if we will it, lead the peoples of the world into a brighter and happier future of organised and co-operative freedom. As during all wars the tempo of historical development must be accelerated,

so during this the greatest of all wars the speed of advance and the pressure of events will be greater than ever before. The common peoples of the world will have opportunities in the world resettlement such as they have never had before, and the Indian peoples and their leaders must make ready to play their full part in the building of the New World Order.

Let us then put aside the discussions of the last month and let them take their ordered place in history, while we turn all our energies to the defence of India, the first step to building a new and free future for the Indian peoples.

This is the time when the youth of the world are called upon to make every sacrifice, to the ultimate sacrifice of life itself, but through that selfless service to humanity they earn the right to take their full share in the shaping of the future. That future must inevitably be influenced by what is done during these anxious days and months of war. Though old heads may be wiser, old hearts cannot have the fire and courage of youth — it is that fire and courage which we must summon to the defence of India and to the building of her freedom. When Victory is won risks must be taken, innovations must be tried and we must climb quickly out of the ruts of peacetime habits and customs. A new tempo is needed, a new devotion, a more total effort to finish quickly with the horrors of war and reach that new and constructive era of our world civilisation, upon which we all must concentrate our every energy, once the war is won.

I have seen that effort being made in the Soviet Union, — the whole-hearted devotion of an entire continent — more varied in racial origin than India itself — and the world has learnt — what a great and courageous people inspired with the love of their country and of their freedom can achieve. I have witnessed too the Chinese — ill-equipped — lacking many essential supplies — indomitably carrying on their defence year after year and wearing down the aggressor who has penetrated deep into their homeland. The cities and towns of England have been deeply scarred and her people have suffered as none ever before from the concentrated hate of enemy bombing. Their courage and fortitude have thrilled the world.

Now is the time for India and her peoples to join their courage, their strength and their endurance in this great heroic and world-wide army of the common people, and to take her part in those smashing blows for victory against brutality and aggression which shall for ever free the masses from the age-long fear and tragedy of poverty and of war.

(The Cripps Mission edited by Sukhamay Banerjee and Shanti Mitra, published by Bamabo, Calcutta, October 1942, pp. 56-64.)



18. C. RAJAGOPALACHARI'S RESOLUTION IN THE MADRAS LEGISLATURE AND HIS CONSEQUENT RESIGNATION

This was the resolution passed in the Madras Legislature:

The Madras Legislature Congress Party notes with deep regret that the attempts to establish a National Government for India to enable her to face the problems arising out of the present grave situation have failed and that, as a result of this, Nationalist India has been placed in a dilemma. It is impossible for the people to think in terms of neutrality, of passivity during an invasion by an enemy power. Neither is it practicable to organise any effective defence independently and un-co-ordinated with the defence measures of the Government. It is absolutely and urgently necessary in the best interests of the country at this hour of peril to do all that the Congress can possibly do to remove every obstacle in the way of the establishment of a national administration to face the present situation, and, therefore, as much as the Muslim League has insisted on the recognition of the right of separation of certain areas from United India upon the ascertainment of the wishes of the people of such areas as a condition precedent for a united national action at this moment of grave national danger, this party is of opinion and recommends to the All-India Congress Committee that to sacrifice the chances of the formation of a national Government at this grave crisis for the doubtful advantage of maintaining a controversy over the unity of India is a most unwise policy and that it has become necessary to choose the lesser evil and acknowledge the Muslim League's claim for separation; should the same be persisted in when the time comes for framing a constitution for India and thereby remove all doubts and fears in this regard and to invite the Muslim League for a consultation for the purpose of arriving at an agreement and securing the installation of a National Government to meet the present emergency.

The Congress party did not take this favourably, and Rajagopalachari had no option but to obey his conscience and resign:

April 30, 1942.

Dear Maulana Saheb,

With reference to your observation on the resolutions passed on my motion by the Madras Congress Legislative party, I admit that I should have talked the matter over with you and other colleagues of the Working Committee before moving the resolutions, knowing as I did their disagreement on the subject. I write this to express my regret.

I have explained to you already how strongly I feel. I believe that I should be failing in my duty if I do not endeavour to get people to think and act in the direction

which my conviction leads to. I feel that in the public interests I should move the resolutions already notified by Mr. Santanam; I desire, therefore, to request you to permit me to resign my place in the Working Committee.

Let me tender my grateful thanks for the unqualified trust and affection bestowed on me by you and the other colleagues during all these many years that I have served in the Committee.

Yours sincerely,
C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

(Taken from *India Wins Freedom* by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Orient Longmans, Calcutta, 1959, pp. 67-69.)



19. A SADHAK'S ACCOUNT

(*Nirodbaran's Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo, 1988 edition, pp. 152-55, has a firsthand account of the Mother's response to the Cripps broadcast. Nirodbaran is quoting from a fellow-sadhak's report.*)

THEN came the famous Cripps' Proposals. In the evening Sir Stafford Cripps broadcast his Proposals to the Indian people, from Delhi; they were discussed everywhere. In P's room the radio was installed and a connection made to Sri Aurobindo's room so that he might listen to the war-news and reports from all quarters of the globe, except from the Axis zones.

The next day at about 2 p.m., after the All India Radio news at 1.30, there was a hot discussion among three sadhaks, including P, in his room. P took the standpoint of the purely spiritual man, who judges by looking at what is behind appearances. It seemed that he had already spoken with the Mother and thus was arguing forcefully for the acceptance of the Proposals. The second person was an experienced politician of the Gandhian Congress days and took the negative position. He argued the pros and cons of the Proposals and was of the opinion that the Indian leaders would reject them. The third, a novice, with no political experience, was more for its acceptance. The discussion became hotter and hotter, so much so that the Mother, while going from Her bathroom to Her dressing room, was attracted by the unusual volume of sound. She did not enter Her dressing room, but turned Her steps towards P's room. Before entering there, She heard part of the argument. Then She stepped in and asked,

“What is it all about?” P said that one person argued that Cripps’ offer would not be accepted by the Indian leaders. The Mother felt amused and inquired, “Why?” By then She had sat on the chair that was in front of Her. It was a very unusual and interesting scene; the Mother, still in Her beautiful Japanese kimono just out of the bath, didn’t seem to care to change Her dress, and was more interested in the arguments against the acceptance. Then She began to talk with a very calm and distinct voice. One could see that She who had entered a few minutes ago had been transported somewhere else and the voice was coming from that plane

She said something to this effect: “One should leave the matter of the Cripps’ offer entirely in the hands of the Divine, with full confidence that the Divine will work everything out. Certainly there were flaws in the offer. Nothing on earth created by man is flawless, because the human mind has a limited capacity. Yet behind this offer there is the Divine Grace directly present. The Grace is now at the door of India, ready to give its help. In the history of a nation such opportunities do not come often. The Grace presents itself at rare moments, after centuries of preparation of that nation. If it is accepted, the nation will survive and get a new birth in the Divine’s consciousness. But if it is rejected the Grace will withdraw and then the nation will suffer terribly, calamity will overtake it.

“Only some months ago, the same Grace presented itself at the door of France, immediately after the fall of Dunkirk, in the form of Churchill’s offer to her to have joint nationality with England and fight the enemy. Sri Aurobindo said that it was the right idea, and it would also have helped His work immensely. But France could not raise herself above the ordinary mind, and rejected it. So the Grace withdrew and the Soul of France has gone down. One doesn’t know when the real France will be up again.

“But India with her background of intense spiritual development through the ages, must realise the Grace that is behind this offer. It is not simply a human offering. Of course its form has been given by the human mind, and it has elements of imperfection in it. But that does not matter at all. Have faith in the Grace and leave everything to the Divine who will surely work it out.

“My ardent request to India is that she should not reject it. She must not make the same mistake that France has done recently and that has plunged her into the abyss.”

As soon as She had finished speaking She hurried back to Her dressing room, without a word or a look at anybody. Later, on the same day, the first of April, 1942, when She returned from the Prosperity after the distribution, She disclosed that Sri Aurobindo had already sent a telegram to Sir Stafford, and the latter had reciprocated very heartily, and both the telegrams were being put on the notice board by Nolini. We then read the messages and were very much encouraged.

But the next day or the day after it, the Congress announced that it had rejected the offer. The Mother was quite unperturbed; She only said, “Now calamity will befall India.”

The events that followed in India right up to now need no mention. We have been paying all along for our mistake.



NOT TWO SIDES

Not two sides for us but only one.

“O Lord, the world implores Thee to prevent it from falling back always into the same stupidities.

Grant that the mistakes recognised may never be renewed.

Grant lastly that its actions may be the exact and sincere expression of its proclaimed ideals.”¹

* * *

“May our mistakes, acknowledged and rectified within us, be no more than vain mirages powerless to bring any consequences and, pressing our foot down firmly upon all that no longer should exist, on all ignorance, all obscurity, all egoism, may we take our flight boldly towards wider horizons and intenser light, a more perfect compassion, a more disinterested love . . . towards Thee.”²

* * *

“No human will can finally prevail against the Divine’s Will. Let us put ourselves deliberately and exclusively on the side of the Divine, and the Victory is ultimately certain.”³



1. The Mother, *Words of the Mother — III*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, p. 167.

2. The Mother, *Prayers and Meditations*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 42.

3. The Mother, *Words of the Mother — III*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, p. 184.