

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## **‘EVEN IN THE WORM IS A GOD . . .’**

“ . . . Nor less in our death-besieged natures  
Gods are and altitudes. Earth resists, but my soul in me widens  
Helped by the toil behind and the agelong effort of Nature.  
Even in the worm is a god and it writhes for a form and an outlet.  
Workings immortal obscurely struggling, hints of a godhead  
Labour to form in this clay a divinity. Hera widens,  
Pallas aspires in me, Phoebus in flames goes battling and singing,  
Ares and Artemis chase through the fields of my soul in their hunting.  
Last in some hour of the Fates a Birth stands released and triumphant;  
Poured by its deeds over earth it rejoices fulfilled in its splendour.  
Conscious dimly of births unfinished hid in our being  
Rest we cannot; . . .”

SRI AUROBINDO

*(These lines are spoken by Paris, son of Priam, in the Trojan Assembly,  
in Sri Aurobindo's epic, Ilion.)*

*(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 383-84)*

## **‘LIFE ENTIRELY CONSECRATED TO THEE’**

**February 27, 1914**

O LORD, I sense the infinite happiness which is the portion of those whose life is entirely consecrated to Thee. And this does not depend upon outer circumstances but on one's own state of being and its greater or lesser degree of illumination. A perfect consecration to Thy law cannot but bring about modifications in the totality of circumstances, yet it is not these which make possible and express this perfect consecration. I mean that it is not under certain circumstances, always the same for all, that Thy law is manifested; for every one this manifestation is different according to his temperament, that is, according to the mission which for the moment is assigned to him in physical life.

But what is unchangeable and universal is the happy peace, the luminous and immutable serenity of all those who are solely consecrated to Thee, who no longer have any darkness, ignorance, egoistic attachment or bad will in them.

Oh, may all awake to this divine peace.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vol. 1, p. 85)*

## “BRAHMAN” —

Two or three days ago I tried to capture in this sonnet an Upanishadic idea, but put it aside as a total failure. Revising it to-day, I thought it might venture to come under your scrutiny.

# BRAHMAN

Why need I fear to merge with Him my heart?  
Although the magic message of the moon  
Be lost within Him, nor the starry rune  
                harmony  
Nor day's rich rhapsody have counterpart,  
He is no solitary blinded swoon  
Of infinite forgetfulness, a void  
Where every throb of colour is destroyed  
For those who with His potency dare commune!

If not a star can open its glimmering eye  
And moonrays wither and the sun grows black  
When He absorbs the soul, it is not lack  
Of light in Him; but all this splendoured sky  
Fades to a phantom shrivelled, shadowy, [1]  
Before the conflagration of His ecstasy!  
          deathless dazzle [2]  
          undying [3]

Would it be better to write a last line of normal length? — [4]

“Before His conflagrating ecstasy!” [5]  
 “Before the dazzle of His ecstasy!” [5]

[1] Is “shrivelled” too strong?

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

[1] No.

[2] [*Sri Aurobindo crossed out "deathless dazzle"*]

[3] [*Sri Aurobindo crossed out "undying"*]

[4] Perhaps — but not at the expense of the poetry.

[5] These are not good

It is a very good sonnet.

18 January 1934

\* \* \*

### BRAHMAN

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 Although the magic message of the moon  
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 Before the conflagration of His ecstasy!

[*From The Secret Splendour — Collected Poems of Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna), 1993, p. 452*]

AMAL KIRAN  
 (K. D. SETHNA)

## CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI AUROBINDO

(Continued from the issue of July 2010)

**Monday, 1 February 1926**

*All these days I have had many difficulties with my mind. At certain times, when I succeed in rising above it, everything is all right, but at other times I am overwhelmed. Meditation is laboured and without much benefit. At other times I feel how thin the veil is. The best method I have found consists precisely in climbing as high as possible — then the lower being is calm. The three centres (Sahasrara, Ajna and solar) are then united. When I am not in meditation the mechanical mind is very restless and I have difficulty even in reading — in concentrating on anything at all. Where does this difficulty come from? Should I put even more energy into my meditation and my effort?*

WHAT is happening to you is common. The dynamic mind (not the mechanical, which only repeats the actions and thoughts of ordinary life) acquires even more strength when the other higher parts are calm and when, at certain times, it is reduced to silence. When one relapses during meditation, one loses one's feet in the whirlwind. It is a common experience. Don't be afraid of it, but continue to detach yourself more and more. When this detachment is complete, the waves will gradually become less powerful and recede. This experience has to be extended to the whole conscious life and not only to the period of meditation.

The moment you feel tired, you should not force yourself. Overdoing will result in another delay. It is better to go slowly but surely.

Here is Z's letter, which you lent me. According to me, she is at the stage when one doesn't know how to distinguish between the creations of one's mind and the truth. In her book she is very positive and believes herself bound, in the name of Christ, to spread it to the world. In her letter she expresses doubts about her capacity of discernment — but then why attach so much importance to what is so doubtful? She writes, "The Force connected with it is, and because it is and I know it to be my Force (and your Force if you like), It cannot deceive me." Here is exactly what makes so many people stumble. They imagine that because they have an experience of something higher than the ordinary mentality, everything is the truth. But when the universal Force enters an individual, there is an entire part of him that rises up and tries to take advantage of this Force for its own benefit, to use it for personal ends. Her book seems to be a dialogue between her higher illumined mind and her ordinary mind. One gets the impression of a conversation between her conscious

self and her higher being or another being or a god.

But how many things creep in from below upwards! I know it, having myself remained for a long time in this state. But I always kept a critical mind, and my attention was alerted by doubtful mixtures. This is a common experience and unless one has a special tact it is extremely difficult to distinguish the truth in the beginning. One must have an absolute sincerity — not the sincerity of the ordinary mind but something deeper, a push that never lets one stop till the truth is reached, the whole truth, and one presses ahead.

You easily gave up your ideas when you came to me, but if they had been mixed with personal psychic experiences, it would have been far more difficult.

If there is a little pride in us — quite unconscious, even hidden beneath humility — it makes us exaggerate our personal importance and we believe we are called to something special. So he writes this book, takes disciples, and so on. It is a common trap.

Let us hope that the doubt she expresses in her letter will help her to shed the illusion.

\* \* \*

### Friday, 5 February 1926

*These last few days have been better — concentration is easier and also detachment of the mind. I can separate myself from the mind and observe its action. But when I try to make it completely still, I can do so only by concentrating near the Sahasrara, trying to separate myself from the body, and then the breathing becomes difficult.*

There are two ways of becoming conscious of a higher world. One is to send a part of oneself there, all the while remaining in one's physical consciousness. The other is to leave this physical consciousness and enter into a kind of trance, which may verge upon catalepsy or coma. You are not in a condition to try that. And probably there is a confusion in you between the two movements — one of quieting the mind and the other of going out of your physical body.

*That is likely. When I meditate, I am aware of certain movements that I locate in my vital body. They are not physical, though I feel them physically, especially between the chest and head and within the head.*

There are movements in the higher body and they are felt even physically. But most of them, as your breathing trouble proves, are the result of an effort to go out of

your physical body. They are not necessary. You can simply become aware of the shift of your consciousness from one point to another.

Now that you can observe the calmness of the mind and separate yourself from the action of the mind linked to the physical, you must give up these efforts and remain in an expectant attitude, open to the working from above — without making an effort to go towards that which is above, but, knowing it is there, offering yourself for its descent. Don't even make an effort to "see" or "feel". Quiet everything below and wait — make a simple aspiration towards what you know is near.

\* \* \*

**Thursday, 11 February 1926**

*I must in fact have confused two movements: quieting my dynamic mind and going out of my body. As a result, I have had to work all over again to get mental silence. I can get it, though not always, because the dynamic mind is very active and I am always obliged to keep an eye on it. I also get a kind of relative peace: I am motionless, attentive, in a sort of transparent surrounding. But this never lasts very long. It is another peace, deeper, that I want to acquire, one that will destroy the feeling of "me".*

*A difficulty comes from trying at the same time to keep the mind silent and to look beyond, making this silent and attentive offering.*

*These last few days, I forced the meditation a little too much and the tension has been too great. I have come back to three hours a day. Dental neuralgia. Why is this feeling of personal effort so strenuous? It is not inertia and rest that I want, but peace in action, the cessation of individual effort.*

The deeper peace cannot come till the "lotuses" are open and the Force descends to take possession. Moreover, a distinction has to be made between the real individuality and the illusory sense of the ego. The true individuality is a small portion of the universal consciousness, and even when it seems to merge in this consciousness, the distinction is nevertheless there. It permits organised action, which would be impossible without it.

As the supreme Force takes possession of you, this sense of effort will diminish; but separate action will disappear only with perfection. Besides, other difficulties have yet to come. Your active centres are the centres higher than the solar plexus; the others are asleep. With their awakening, the mind, even quieted and controlled, will again be invaded and submerged. The real difficulties come then. In the mind there is always an element that helps, but here everything is directly linked with life and action.



Since you feel the possibility of uniting yourself with Nature through the solar plexus, do that when you are not in regular meditation.

You also say that what you do outside of meditation seems to make your mind active again. That doesn't matter — you cannot 'do nothing'. Everything takes its own time. And you are among those who have built everything on the mind — hence the difficulty. Others open easily. But don't be impatient; it prolongs the sense of personal effort.

\* \* \*

### Monday, 15 February 1926

*The effect of sadhana makes itself felt especially outside of meditation. It is becoming more and more easy for me to assume the role of witness of the actions of the mind and even of the body. From this more quietude comes, but the mind is not yet silent. This separation has made me conscious of the disorderly chaos of the dynamic mind, so at first I thought it was becoming more active, while really I was simply conscious of its action.*

The main thing is precisely to deepen and increase this consciousness — this witness or Purusha consciousness. Silence of the mind is certainly a precious faculty, but it will come in its time. The widening of this consciousness will bring about the influx of a deeper consciousness. Besides, isn't this witness silent?

*Before coming here I used to smoke, but then I stopped. Now I often have the desire to smoke. What should I do?*

There is no absolute rule and it is not of very great importance. I too smoke.<sup>1</sup> But to abstain from something gives a clearer atmosphere. Besides, you have stopped; it is better not to begin again.

*The time spent in sleep seems wasted to me. Is there not a way of using it better?*

Is it wasted? Everything in sadhana is not conscious effort. Besides, it is a very difficult thing, which comes at the end. The body rests; but you have nothing to replace the torpor of the inner being. Later, sleep gradually gets organised in its turn.

\* \* \*

1. Soon afterwards, Sri Aurobindo gave up smoking.

**Monday, 22 February 1926**

*I am continuing the separation of myself from the mind. I can easily enough position myself as an inactive spectator of the movements of the personality. In these conditions I still exist as a mental being, endowed with the "I" and centred in the brain. But behind this mental self I can discern another state, free from all relation with manifested activity. There lies my true self, which uses the mental self as a window to look out from. What is this true self? Thus far I have only had a faint experience of it. I distinguish nothing; I have the impression of a void, a nothingness, but I also have the impression of a veil behind which lies a Presence.*

When you are a spectator, are you active or passive?

*Passive. It is not a question of witnessing a procession of images, of being the spectator of an action unfolding before me. The mental images are vague, fragmentary, like the waves of a sea growing calm. Otherwise, the sensory impressions often give rise to vivid images which are a cause of trouble.*

Do you have the feeling of being a mental being?

*When I remain on the level of the mind, yes; but when I can rise above it, the being that I am is not mental. The mental being is a mask assumed by the true self.*

*I see the way clearly, and I know that if I could make the complete and definitive surrender to the Divine Force, it would itself take charge of the Yoga. This self-giving has been made in my soul. My mind has accepted it, but there are certain points in the vital being which hinder the perfection of the giving and pull me down at times. But now, even these slips I see with an equal eye and offer them to the Divine Force. The good movements and the bad, all are parts of the process. Formerly I used to get upset easily; now I am more calm.*

Good. Now you have only to continue. Is there anything else?

As for Z's letter, what are you going to reply to her?

*I am waiting for a telegram announcing her arrival in order to go to the station to receive her. There is no need to go to Madras or Trichinopoly.*

Evidently she is coming here with this plan of work — imaginary work. India is not what she thinks. India is India. After a short time every foreign element either gets

absorbed or rejected. And life here is different from life in Europe. These ideas about a work to be done are common. It is the mental being that invents its own inspirations: a part of the mind rises up above and while coming down it takes on the nature of a revelation. The mind wants to achieve something and is looking for a great and important work. But all work, even the most humble, has the same value if it is the work one ought to do.

There is something true behind; it is the idea of a work to be accomplished. And that work is the divine work — but one has to be perfect to be able to undertake it. There are many men whose work has no need of perfection; they vaguely feel an impulsion, the mind mixes in its own desires and then they go on like that. But I am speaking of those who have to accomplish a spiritual work; for them the work will be found when the instrument is ready.

Of course, all work is a preparation. Your other friends seem to be in the same position as Z. It is the mind that is pushing them, though they are quite unaware of it. They must learn to put aside this illusion; then all work is good for Yoga.

But I wouldn't advise you to say all that to Z. I don't know if the mere fact of coming here and listening to what I have to say will be enough to make her see the truth. It may be that she needs to have her own experience. For it is the experience of life that is the touchstone. So long as one remains in abstractions, one doesn't see the crucial point; but when you try to realise something, experience teaches you. It is necessary for the whole being to know the truth. If she doesn't give up her idea, this tendency will remain there, intact, ready to reappear, and the final results may be bad. It may be better to let her have her own experience; that of another does not suffice.

You may write to her that you are engaged in sadhana and that for the time being you have given up all other work. If she wants to see you, she may do so here.

It is very dangerous to believe in one's inspirations about work. This happens especially to those who are very impatient, who have a strong desire for realisation. They don't see that it is their mind which is sending messages to their mind. The true work to be done does not present itself under this form, and the method of working is also completely different.

(To be continued)

PAVITRA

[From *Conversations with Sri Aurobindo* by Pavitra (Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire) published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry, 2007 being the English translation of *Conversations avec Pavitra*, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972.

The French text and the English translation first appeared in the *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* starting in 1969.]

# ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

## Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father

*(Continued from the issue of July 2010)*

### Chapter Nine

#### Summa of the Divine Consciousness

*Copy of a letter written to a disciple*

Pondicherry, February 21, 1929

Dear N . . . ,

Our letters crossed; mine would have shown and reassured you that if I spoke of writing to you less lengthily — not that I would not write to you at all — it was only because I did not know to what extent all that I wrote and sent you would interest you or be useful to you. Now your last two letters have convinced me that you not only follow my thought, but what we do here really interests you, and that you are interested in and have profited from the copies of letters, books and brochures from here. Well, they have kept me posted about your inner development and once again I feel you close and living.

My last letter was already a partial reply to the question on the subject of the Masters; I shall take up the subject again shortly. You have felt perfectly — and probably better than I had in the beginning — the doubtful side of Z's<sup>1</sup> atmosphere; her love of drama and melodrama had repulsed you right away, whereas it took me some time and some unpleasant experiences to rouse my suspicion, and even then I did not fully understand what was wrong.

A sentence from your letter makes me go over a point once more: you must fully understand that we are not guided by any philosophy, dogma, or even an ideal — in short, we do not have any “standard” to which we try to conform our life. We have no mental vision of an individual perfection or of a future world that we would like to realise! No, the process of this Yoga is almost the opposite. The beginning is a consecration to the Divine, with the certitude that if the self-giving is perfect, the Divine himself will guide our every step and **will accomplish in us** the appropriate realisation for each one of us. Above all one must guard against the preconceived ideas about the goal and the path that leads to it. The whole Yoga is a perfecting of

1. Does it refer to Zina Lubienska?

the same attitude and an adhesion of the whole being to the divine work which is being carried out in us.

For example, the propositions, arguments and conclusions that Sri Aurobindo has expounded in the *Essays on the Gita* and his other works (above all *The Life Divine*) may evidently be called philosophy. And yet, he who would like to see there a “philosophy of life” or a guidance given by Sri Aurobindo to his disciples, would greatly err. Rather, it is a series of observations and philosophical deductions made on the Yoga and which has been written down only to give mental nourishment to those who still need it — that is to say to disciples whose mind is not yet surrendered and peaceful and whose mental agitation prevents them from seeing the inner light and the inner direction. When the mind is quietened and stops asking questions, when the vital has accomplished its surrender and stops making its demands, when the physical itself has consented to the transformation, such a need will disappear completely. Among the disciples here there are a large number who have read only very little of Sri Aurobindo’s works. Naturally, they can do without it, above all because they have the privilege of personal guidance and of occult action! And I think that these books can be very useful to you, to you who have been caught in the whirlpool of ordinary life, because they will help you to turn to the spiritual life. Also, I am going to arrange for the second series of *The Essays on the Gita* to be sent to you.

But I would like you to understand the error of what you say:

“As many religions or philosophies, so many vessels with more or less vague notions about the stars above and the depths below. There are perhaps those whose guidance is right, but even for those, I think that they have a dogma, a theory by which they fix their direction.”

It may be that it is inevitable for a religion or a philosophy to have a dogma, a theory, but they immediately become false and **lose the true direction**. And, in any case, we are not followers of any religion or philosophy. The Theosophical Society, as a society and like all societies, has not avoided this reef which has wrecked the religions.

As far as what you call your exile is concerned, I do not think that it is entirely attributable to the circumstances which surround you. The external circumstances are in fact always the reflection of our inner state. And if we modify our inner state, the circumstances themselves will be transformed. What you must cultivate above all is your aspiration: may it be like the flame that warms you in difficult conditions! Above all, always be fully aware of your spiritual future. Keep the certitude that you are “destined” and that if the consecration to the divine is sincere and total, your spiritual destiny is to be an “Elect”.

Today is a day of celebration for us: it is Mirra Devi’s birthday. There are

flowers everywhere and I have asked her for one for you; I am sending it to you, it is a rose whose significance is *surrender*.

Affectionately to all three of you.

“Pavitra”

\* \* \*

*Copy of a letter written to a disciple*

Pondicherry, March 6, 1929

Dear Noémi,

I understand that you feel painfully the void created by your Mother's passing, because I know very well what Mrs. Brooks meant to you and in what loving communion of mind the two of you lived. But you know and you feel very well that by taking refuge in the depth of your consciousness you re-establish your contact with her. Therefore it is only the physical consciousness which suffers because it is still ignorant and attached to the illusion.

I think that no good can result — from the spiritual point of view — from a constant contemplation of the “sins of the world”, nor from the sorrow which it produces.

Catholicism has very largely distorted the spiritual truths and has introduced a kind of vital morbidity and perversity. Then again, the vital world has perverted the movement of true aspiration and devotional intensity which was there among the catholic mystics. From the spiritual point of view many catholic notions and dogmas are entirely erroneous. Their danger stems from the fact that they are more or less subtle distortions of truths. Spiritual knowledge and intuition being in general weak and incapable of distinguishing between the true and the false, the underlying fragment of truth gives a semblance of justification to these errors, like the exaggerated sense of sin and the insistence on repentance going as far as remorse; pain being considered as having in itself a redeeming value and as being pleasing to God; the total contempt for the body and the mortification which ensues, etc.

No doubt the blow that has struck you has predisposed you to accept the suggestions of the book about which you speak to me (*Abiding Sorrow in Sin*) and in a normal condition you would have recognised the perversion in it.

Certainly pain is, in a certain sense, useful for spiritual evolution — at least in the present state of the human consciousness. It is useful in this sense that it awakens the deeper consciousness. It shakes the inertia caused by the habits and severs the bonds of the ordinary external life by exposing the transitory, the incomplete and the imperfect. But the dissatisfaction and the disgust which result from it, and which

often have for effect the turning of man towards the Divine, are very much mixed with impure elements and a vital whirlpool, the outcome of the shock felt, of which they must be rid if they are destined to serve as the foundation of a veritable spiritual life. To admit the utility of suffering in spiritual life is one thing; to justify and raise it to a cult of suffering is going too far.

No, truly, “a crowd of personal remorse, of regrets and of sorrow”, if it persists in accompanying you, cannot but obscure your spiritual life and hide the pure light of the truth from you. It is not in sorrow that you must abide and establish yourself, but in **the Divine Consciousness**. And its characteristic is Peace, a luminous and joyous peace, equal in the serene view of beings and things and its perfect understanding.

It is also a very widespread error to believe that devotion (*bhakti*) is always accompanied by joy and sorrow, light and darkness, happiness and depression. It is true that many mystics have shown these characteristics. However, they are not at all indispensable to a sincere, deep and intense devotion; rather they indicate a lack of purification of the vital. If the movements of alternation are necessary, they can occur differently: the state of the consciousness can gain in scope and in wideness what it loses in intensity and vice versa, yet remaining meanwhile in the calm and joyous light of the divine Consciousness. I do not at all see the necessity of losing ground anew in order to struggle again in the whirlwind of illusion.

And in the Yoga that we follow, there is no place for anything sad, depressing or painful. If some of these states crop up — many are not yet totally free of them — they indicate a weakness or a defect which must be battled and changed. You must have noticed the insistence with which Sri Aurobindo speaks of *equanimity* as the first condition of this Yoga. It must be pointed out that there is unanimity among the Hindu mystics to make of an intense beatitude (*ananda*) the characteristic of all profound and durable contact with the Divine.

Since you are working on it read once more Chapter V of *The Mother*:

*“If you want to be a true doer of divine works . . .”*

You will see there that no mortification either inner or outer is needed but what is demanded is a constant *surrender* of all one’s activities, and that the self-giving must be done in a progression of joy and light, without anything that recalls the traditional idea of painful sacrifice.

You are approaching the light, that is why you must redouble your attention: you will face many difficulties and ordeals, some of which can be very subtle, to try to divert you and make you change your path. I do not think that this wave of depression will last because it is not in harmony with your character; in any case, throw away all this rubbish far from you. Above all, do not confuse, what you have often been tempted to do, the true spiritual aspiration, the clear and limpid flame,

with the tumultuous movements of the vital, dark and devouring fire which consumes the being in a sterile agitation and a perpetually dissatisfied ardour. This was the case with Zina whose ardent fervour you admired without guessing its origin.

I am sending you *Essays on the Gita*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series.<sup>2</sup>

*(To be continued)*

PHILIPPE BARBIER SAINT HILAIRE

(Translated by Aniruddha Sircar from the original French *Itinéraire d'un enfant du siècle* by Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire, published by Buchet/Chastel, Paris, 2001.

Our thanks for their kind permission.)

2. The carbon copy of the letter stops there, below the second page, without the usual letter ending. If this letter contained one or several other pages, Philippe did not consider it necessary to pass them on to his father.

*The outward revolt is the refusal of discipline and obedience — the inward revolt is of many kinds, it may take many forms, e.g. a revolt of the vital against the Mother, a revolt of the mind against the Truth, a rejection of the spiritual life, a demand to enthrone the ego as the Divine or to serve something that flatters the vital ego and supports its demands and call that the Divine, a response to vital suggestions of distrust, despair, self-destruction or departure — and many others.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1323)*



## MY HOMAGE TO SRI AUROBINDO

A BRIEF account of my association with Sri Aurobindo will serve as a good introduction to Sri Aurobindo's unique Yoga of the transformation of man into superman. As a young man I was inspired by the Freedom movement of Sri Aurobindo; but at that time I had no personal contact with him. When after the Alipur trial, he retired to Pondicherry for Yoga, we gave him up as lost to the country. When as Professor of Philosophy later I happened to see some writings of Sri Aurobindo in some newspapers, I could not understand anything. It was so abstruse though I was then a versatile scholar in philosophy. When the non co-operation movement came in 1921, I heard an inner voice, the divine Mother Kali calling me to sacrifice myself for the sake of the country. I was a married man and had a large family depending on me; I also had good prospects as a rising Professor. I gave up everything and threw myself wholeheartedly into the movement. That act of genuine sacrifice brought my soul, that is the psychic being as Sri Aurobindo calls it, to the front; and when at that time a copy of Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* fell into my hands and I read the first few chapters, I felt from my soul that only Sri Krishna Himself could interpret the Gita like that. Sri Krishna is on the earth and in India; I must somehow come into contact with him. Sri Aurobindo was living at Pondicherry then, one thousand miles away and I knew nothing about him. Yet I took a chance and wrote a postcard addressed to Aurobindo Ghose, Pondicherry. In that card I asked for his permission to translate his *Essays on the Gita* into Bengali. And, so that he might take some interest in me, I mentioned that I was doing Yoga. As a matter of fact, from early age I was very fond of the Gita and used to practise in my life whatever I could understand, though that was not much. Sri Aurobindo at once replied saying that I was a fit person for the translation of the *Essays*. He gave me the permission and asked what Yoga I was doing. That was a great day for me. After that my contact with him grew through correspondence. By the spiritual support of Sri Aurobindo I very soon reached the top in the freedom movement in Bengal. I became the right-hand man of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan and Subhas Chandra was my junior colleague. At that time Sri Aurobindo wrote to me to throw away all that burden from my head and come to Pondicherry for doing Yoga. That seemed impossible to me: I was then indispensable to Deshbandhu. I did not reply to Sri Aurobindo, though I knew him to be Sri Krishna. Within one month I was arrested under Re-gulation III of 1818. As a state prisoner, we had a very comfortable life in jail. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo that I had now plenty of leisure and asked him to instruct me in Yoga. He wrote back that I must decide now what I would do after my release. If I wanted to resume my political activities, it was no use doing Yoga. I was surprised. I argued, according to the teaching of the Gita all works, even

fighting, could be done in Yoga. Why should I give up political activity? Sri Aurobindo replied that if I wanted to do the Gita's Yoga, I could return to politics, but in that case he would not be able to help me. If I wanted his help, I must give up political work. I could not give up my guru. So after release I gave up politics, though at that time I was unanimously elected as the leader of Bengal after the demise of Deshbandhu. At that time Sri Aurobindo remarked, "Anilbaran has uncrowned himself."

At Pondicherry I asked Sri Aurobindo about the freedom of India. He replied that the freedom of India was a thing decreed, I had nothing to do for that, but should concentrate on Yoga. He said, "The Congress is a house on fire, I have saved you as a piece of wood from the fire." He further remarked, "The people of India do not deserve Freedom. But they will have it."

He explained to me the difference between Gita's Yoga and his Yoga. The aim of the former is to remove the veil between man and God so that man may live and act in conscious union with the Divine. He referred to this as his fourth aim in life in his famous Independence day message, "the gift by India of her spiritual knowledge and her means for the spiritualisation of life to the whole race." It was for this purpose that he wrote *Essays on the Gita*. About the fifth and the final aim of his life he said, "a new step in the evolution which by uplifting the consciousness to a higher level, would begin the solution of many problems of existence which have perplexed and vexed humanity, since men began to think and dream of individual perfection and a perfect society." It was to this that he referred as, "The rest is still a personal hope and an idea and ideal which has begun to take hold both in India and in the west on forward looking minds." As in the course of evolution man has come out of the ape, so in the next step in evolution, superman will come out of man. He will have a divine body free from disease, senility and death and a life of "unmixed bliss", "a constant miracle". I had seen no hint of it in the Gita or in any other book that I had read. I asked Sri Aurobindo, wherefrom he got this idea. He said, when he was in Alipur Jail, Vivekananda appeared before him and told him about this.

At that time Vivekananda was not in this world. I asked whether it was a vision that he saw. He replied, "No, if it had been a vision I would not have believed it." He had not the slightest doubt that it was not an illusion but a reality. I said, "Do you really think it to be possible?" He replied enigmatically, "It is both possible and impossible." Then he explained it. "If you look at the process of evolution, the creation of higher and higher species, man after the ape cannot be the final issue, there must come a higher species, who will be, as much different from man at least as man is different from an ape. Nietzsche said so. But he was a prophet who did not understand his own message. The advent of superman is inevitable, from the scientific point of view. But I do not see the conditions in which the superman can come. The gods must descend on the earth and co-operate. But I do not see any sign of the descent of the gods." This talk was in July, 1926. The next November, on the 24<sup>th</sup>

Sri Aurobindo saw the signs of the descent of the gods. Then he became sure of the supramental creation. He retired to concentrate on bringing down the supramental consciousness which would transform humanity. He used to see nobody except the Mother who was entrusted with the creation of the Ashram for accommodating sadhaks of the supramental Yoga. He used to give darshan on certain days in the year. Though he went into retirement I had always contact with him through correspondence. His last communication to me was on November 23, 1950. After that he did not communicate with anybody. He expired on December 5 next. That last communication to me was about the gods.

One day when I was watching the Sun rising in the Bay of Bengal from the roof of the house where Sri Aurobindo was living in his retirement, a beautiful poem in Bengali came to me. I was surprised. I was not a poet and had not studied the technique of poetry. I wrote it down, and when the Mother as usual came to my room, I hesitatingly showed the poem to her. She snatched it from my hands saying that she would show it to Sri Aurobindo. The next day she came with a smile saying, "I have very good news for you. Sri Aurobindo has said, it is excellent. Once he thought of writing his epic *Savitri* in Bengali. The metre he chose, your poem is written in that metre." The title of my poem was "Immortality on Earth" (refer to Wordsworth's *Ode to Immortality*). After that I wrote many good poems in Bengali as well as in English. Sri Aurobindo compared me with the English poet Wordsworth. I mention this as an illustration of his saying in *Savitri*:

All can be done if the god-touch is there. (p. 3)

My writing poetry was nothing short of a miracle. That shows what Yoga can do.

When in 1935, Miss Mayo's notorious book *Mother India* created a scandal, I asked for Sri Aurobindo's permission to write a reply. He gave the permission. I wrote only two chapters. The first chapter, 'Mother India', was thoroughly revised by him. The next chapter, 'The Spiritual Heritage of India', he did not touch at all. But he himself wrote three sentences and asked me to put them at the end of my article, to pass as my writing. The first sentence gave the nature of Sri Aurobindo's integral Yoga, the second described Sri Aurobindo's own realisations at that time, in 1935, the third gave his vision of the greatness of India's future. Here are those three memorable sentences:

Not the blind round of material existence alone and not a retreat from the difficulty of life into the silence of the Ineffable, but the bringing down of the peace and light and power of a great divine Truth and consciousness to transform Life is the endeavour today of the greatest spiritual seekers in India. Here in the heart of such an endeavour pursued through many years with a single-hearted purpose, living constantly in that all-founding peace and feeling the

near, and greatening descent of that light and power, the way becomes increasingly clear. One sees the soul of India ready to enter into the fullness of her heritage and the hour of an unparalleled greatness approaching when from her soil shall go forth the call and the leading to the highest destinies of the race.

Sri Aurobindo translated and commented on some Upanishads and other sacred and philosophical writings of the Hindus chiefly to familiarise the west with the spiritual thought of India. In his message, "The young and the Future", he wrote:

The West has made the growth of the intellectual, emotional, vital and material being of man its ideal, but it has left aside the greater possibilities of his spiritual existence. . . . The West has put its faith in its science and machinery and it is being destroyed by its science and crushed under its mechanical burden. It has not understood that a spiritual change is necessary for the accomplishment of its ideals. The East has the secret of that spiritual change but it has too long turned its eyes away from the earth. The time has now come to heal the division and to unite life and spirit.

This secret too has been possessed but not sufficiently practised by India. It is summarised in the rule of the *Gita*, *yogasthah kuru karmāṇi*. Its principle is to do all actions in Yoga, in union with God, on the foundation of the highest self and through the rule of all our members by the power of the Spirit. And this we believe to be not only possible for man but the true solution of his problems and difficulties. This then is the message we shall constantly utter and this the ideal that we shall put before the young and rising India, a spiritual life that shall take up all human activities and avail to transfigure the world for the great age that is coming. India, she that has carried in herself from of old the secret, can alone lead the way in this great transformation of which, the present sandhya of the old yuga is the forerunner. This must be her mission and service to humanity, — as she discovered the inner spiritual life of the individual, so now to discover for the race its integral collective expression and found for mankind its new spiritual and communal order. . . .

Our call is to young India. It is the young who must be the builders of the new world . . . all who are free in mind and heart to accept a completer truth and labour for a greater ideal. They must be men who will dedicate themselves not to the past or the present but to the future. They will need to consecrate their lives to an exceeding of their lower self, to the realisation of God in themselves and in all human beings and to a whole-minded and indefatigable labour for the nation and for humanity. (CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 511)

*The Life Divine* was meant to answer the questionings of the modern mind, and not as a guidance for the practice of Yoga. Indeed Indians do not require philosophy. Yoga is in their blood. For the creation of a new humanity the Gita as interpreted by Sri Aurobindo, is a sufficient guide. And for those who want to practise Sri Aurobindo's integral Yoga for realising supramental life, the small book, *The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo is a sufficient guide.

The present is the sandhya of the old age and the beginning of a new humanity which will be consciously united with the Divine. All who will fail to do this will perish. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of August last a wonderful change happened in the sun. Millions of hydrogen bombs exploded there as never before and according to eminent scientists it has changed the structure of the living cells and they fear spread of cancer, heart disease and senility. They see only the dark side. Previously variation of species occurred through periodical explosions in the sun. But now not only the cells but the very nature of the atom has changed making it possible to change the human body into a perfect divine body as foreseen by Sri Aurobindo. But for that man must now consciously unite with the Divine.

ANILBARAN ROY

(A talk on All India Radio; published in the September 1972 issue of the monthly paper *Light of Asia*.)

*It is normal that when special pressure is put on a vital movement, a resistance whether in the vital itself (here vital-physical) or in the subconscious should manifest itself. It is sometimes a real resistance, sometimes it is only the pravṛtti presenting itself for purification.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1339)

## INTERVENTIONS (II): PREVISIONS OF PARTITION AND OTHER ISSUES

*(Continued from issue of July 2010)*

### III

ONE of Sri Aurobindo's principal emphases during this period was on the necessity of an "integral national growth".<sup>1</sup> That an inclusive nationalism transcending various divisions and denominational impediments was to be the principal rock of the nationalist movement and the new nationalism that he embodied was clear to Sri Aurobindo even earlier. The call for inclusiveness was evident when he wrote during the height of the movement that "the new [nationalism] overleaps every barrier; it calls to the clerk at his counter, the trader in his shop, the peasant at his plough; it summons the Brahmin from his temple and takes the hand of the Chandala in his degradation; it seeks out the student in his College, the schoolboy at his books . . . its eye searches the jungle for the Santal and travels the hills for the wild tribes of the mountains. It cares nothing for age or sex or caste or wealth or education or respectability . . ." <sup>2</sup> Written a century ago, strikingly bold for the political discourse then, the words still retain a remarkable contemporary tenor and point towards an yet unfulfilled national agenda.

In 1906, a period when the colonial government was actively trying to enlarge and deepen chasms in the Indian polity, Sri Aurobindo continuously and openly spoke of the necessity of a united front against alien machinations, "the country, the Swadesh" he pointed out, "which must be the base and fundament of our nationality, is India, a country where Mahomedan and Hindu live intermingled and side by side."<sup>3</sup> Even before the so-called fissures were engineered, he was clear as to the process of "building up of the real Indian nation". "The Mahomedan, the Hindu, the Buddhist, the Christian in India will not have to cease to be Mahomedan, Hindu, Buddhist, or Christian, in any sense of the term, for uniting into one great and puissant Indian nation" he observed, the essential for it was "Devotion to one's own ideals and institutions, with toleration and respect for the ideals and institutions of other sections of the community, and an ardent love and affection for the common civic life and ideal of all. . . ." To try to build up the nation "in any other way", he felt, would be impossible. In his reading of the Indian collectivity he had already envisioned the nation-idea in India to be developing along "federal lines" consisting of "a union of different nationalities" with "each preserving its own specific elements both of organisation and ideal, each communicating to the others what they lack in either thought or character, and all moving together towards one universal end,

both in civic and social life. . . .”<sup>4</sup> Significant perorations if one looks at the political background of the period then and now. The true federal line in India still continues to struggle for space and acceptance while denominational issues remain perpetually unresolved. An absence of support for notions of homogeneity and hegemony is what is apparent in these expressions. It is therefore hard to see how outlooks such as these could be accused of belonging to “champions of social reaction and superstition, of caste division and privilege . . . seeking to hold down the antiquated pre-British social and ideological fetters upon the people.”<sup>5</sup> Yet celebrated “neo-traditionalists” and others who have constantly viewed the revolutionary nationalists as reactionaries have fallaciously attributed just such a narrow, sectarian and chauvinistic agenda to most policies Sri Aurobindo framed during this period. But before we take up for discussion the integrative aspect of his intervention during this period — we shall confine ourselves to it because of its continued contemporariness and its relevance to historical discourse — it shall be pertinent to our immediate purposes to take a brief look at Sri Aurobindo’s Uttarpara speech, “a speech hugely misunderstood by historians thoroughly imbued with the secular ideology of the post-colonial Indian state.”<sup>6</sup>

The speech at Uttarpara delivered on 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1909, among the cardinal interventions of the period and rightly considered as “central to the corpus of the literature on Indian nationalism”, spoke of spirituality as the “keynote in Indian nationalism.” It spoke of India’s rise for the *Sanatana Dharma* which according to Sri Aurobindo was “no narrow bigoted creed, but as large as life itself”, it spoke of India’s aspiration to “promote universal righteousness” and of Indian nationalism not as an “imperialistic or violent [force] directed at self-aggrandisement or domination” but as a force to uphold *Dharma*. It is clear to a discerning and unbiased mind that “when read carefully the contents of the Uttarpara speech are not directed against anyone or anything, but present a powerfully positive and inspiring message on what the Indian nation should be like. This should be a strong nation, based on *Dharma*, an eternal and ever self-renewing moral order. It should devote itself to the service of humanity and its spiritual upliftment” and not seek to become a nation “that will follow a narrow or exclusive creed, or attack others in order to dominate them.” And the *Sanatana Dharma* that it envisaged is “itself not in conflict with any of the religions or creeds of the world, but includes the best that is in them. [And thus] to that extent, it resembles the universalistic ‘perennial philosophy’ that informs all the religions of the world as their core . . . It allows for infinite plurality and differentiation”<sup>7</sup> and therefore can never be bracketed into a grand narrative framework. It contained the future vision of a liberal democratic world and national order at the base of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural collective existence. It is therefore difficult in light of such a reading to try and rationally ascertain the reason for the standard shoddy and confused treatment meted out by our “public intellectual” and others of his wavelength to such a major intervention made by Sri Aurobindo.



The same issue of his English weekly *Karmayogin* that carried his speech saw him clearly define the syncretic nature of the universal *Sanatana Dharma*; it “embraces”, he wrote, “Science and faith, Theism, Christianity, Mahomedanism and Buddhism and yet is none of these”, amongst its scriptures were the “Veda, Vedanta, Gita, Upanishad, Darshana, Purana, Tantra nor could it reject the Bible and the Koran; but its real, most authoritative scripture is in the heart in which the Eternal has His dwelling.” This *Sanatana Dharma* would eventually usher in, “a new synthesis of religious thought and experience, a new religious world-life free from intolerance, yet full of faith and fervour, accepting all forms of religion because it has an unshakable faith in the One.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, the *Karmayogin*, which gained huge popularity in a short span, constantly articulated with great vigour “the relationship between the nationalism of the age and an eternal humanistic religion.”<sup>9</sup> It was such a message that he publicly gave at that period and strove to work out in the national life and yet it remains conveniently ignored, facing deliberate obfuscation and routine reflexive denials from some quarters. At a time when national self-esteem was at a low ebb these words did convey a certain certitude, assurance and hope. To perceive traces of a “compensatory delusion” in a sincere exaltation of “Indianism”, its past civilisational achievements and future capacities and aims is to take recourse to extreme reductionism betraying irrational ideological entrenchments. The following point therefore that “the inversion of humanistic aspirations in Hinduism and Islam alike to a parody called communalism is the signal achievement of our secularist historians, [and] not of [Sri] Aurobindo”<sup>10</sup> perhaps contains more than a grain of truth.

#### IV

1909 saw the progress and culmination of Lord Minto’s<sup>11</sup> “excursion into communal politics”. The impact of the Swadeshi movement and the militant nationalists forced the colonial administration to focus on constitutional reforms and in the process it seized the opportunity to further institutionalise “the post-mutiny policy of alliance with conservative elements in Indian society”<sup>12</sup> and thus further encourage and accentuate fissures in it. Lord Minto had expressed his firm conviction to the Muslim deputation seeking, among other things, separate electorates in 1906, “that any electoral representation in India would be doomed to mischievous failure which aimed at granting a personal enfranchisement, regardless of the beliefs and traditions of the communities composing the population of this continent.” Keeping this angle as the central point of reference the colonial government advised London that Muslims be granted separate electorates, “the Indian Muhamadans” the communiqué noted, “are much more than a religious body. They form in fact, an absolutely separate community, distinct by marriage, food and custom, and claiming in many cases to belong to a different race from the Hindus.” London ratified the move after



some deliberation and Lady Minto quoted with relief a jubilant official as saying that such a concession had prevented “sixty-two million of people from joining the ranks of the seditious opposition”<sup>13</sup> revealing the existence of a deliberate calculated move behind the whole operation. The colonial officialdom was suspected by some of their own leaders back home, of having cleverly “pulled wires at Simla and in London and [of having sowed] discord between the Hindu and the Mohammedan communities by showing the Mohammedans special favour.”<sup>14</sup> The other provisions of the Act were enlargement of councils by appointing Indian members to the Viceroy’s Executive Council and to the Provincial Executive Councils and the enlargement of Legislative Councils in the provinces and at the Centre through an increase in both nominated and elected members. One of the main issues trumpeted was that the Act increased the non-official majority in the councils making them legitimate platforms for the popular voice. In reality the Act was a massive sham, the non-official majority would in fact have no majority, it would be thwarted from taking initiatives and would be hemmed in on all sides by an approved, loyal non-official official majority! Parliamentary reforms in India were actually never meant to absorb those clamouring for reform but rather aimed at empowering those on whose goodwill the occupying administration depended. It was in essence the perpetuation of control by other means.<sup>15</sup> But the fundamental aspect in the Act that is of interest to us in surveying Sri Aurobindo’s interventions is the introduction of separate electorates that eventually “drove a permanent wedge between the two communities [Hindu-Muslim] and made it impossible for them to regard themselves as members of a common nationality.”<sup>16</sup>

Sri Aurobindo stridently opposed the reforms in all their aspects right since inception,<sup>17</sup> not because he was opposed to the inclusion of the marginalised into the mainstream — rather he welcomed, encouraged and facilitated such a political occasion<sup>18</sup> — but because he firmly held that communal electorates once conceded would prepare the ground for eventual partition of the country. While the Moderate leaders welcomed the proposals<sup>19</sup> Sri Aurobindo refused to get swayed by a false sense of *minorityism*<sup>20</sup> and give his endorsement to the provisions of the Act; he cautioned those clamouring for separate electorates and rejoicing at the reforms that these were but illusory and would fall far short of their expectations and demands. He argued that the Act was one-sided and bestowed special care to one minority, even in provinces where it was “in a large majority” and that “no provision at all [had] been made for the safeguarding of the Hindu minorities, for the Parsis, the Sikhs, the Christians and other sections which may reasonably declare that they too [were] Indians and citizens of the Empire no less than the Mahomedans.” This divisive reform if enacted, he cautioned, would “cast all India into the melting pot and complete the work of the Partition.” The Nationalist position that he decided on the issue was thus forthright, it was to have “no part or lot in reforms which [gave] no popular majority, no substantive control, no opportunity for Indian capacity and

statesmanship", it would not accept even for a moment "separate electorates or separate representation," not because [the Nationalists were] "opposed to a large Mahomedan influence in popular assemblies when they [would eventually] come," but because they would "be no party to a distinction which recognises Hindu and Mahomedan as permanently separate political units and thus precludes the growth of a single and indivisible Indian nation." The Nationalists would oppose all attempts at division "whether it [came] from an embarrassed Government seeking for political support or from an embittered Hindu community [that would allow] the passions of the moment to obscure their vision of the future."<sup>21</sup> The first and firm demand of the Nationalists was the preservation of unity, which they felt, if sacrificed now under official manipulation, would drive the two communities and the country towards irreconcilable extremes. In a masterly critique of the Act published in the *Karmayogin* on 20 November, 1909, Sri Aurobindo attacked the reforms as having neglected four essential elements which have to be considered before any such changes are worked out, they were "first, the nature of the electorate, second, the composition of the body itself, thirdly, the freedom of election, [and] fourthly, the scope, the functions and powers of the assemblies." In all these counts he pointed out, the people did not gain anything and would remain as badly off as under the old system. The Act did not concede "an atom of self-government" and would gradually become "a potent engine for dividing the nation into two hostile interests" barring the way "towards the unity of India."<sup>22</sup> Sri Aurobindo opposed the granting of separate electorates truly keeping the interest of an united India in mind — favouring and suppressing none but demanding that all be given a balanced treatment — each time it came up for consideration and implementation following this first initiative, and yet at every step our leaders fell for this deceptive bait of a promised harmony and unity.

He took his arguments to the masses through the pages of his popular Bengali weekly *Dharma*; "The foundation of nationalism is the country," he exhorted, "not race, religion or anything else, but the country alone. All other elements of nationalism are secondary and contributory, it is the country that is primary and essential. Goodwill, unity and friendship have perhaps never existed among them, but what does it matter? When there is one country, one Mother, unity is bound to be realised one day; the union of many races will forge a single strong and invincible nation . . . One day, harmony must surely prevail by virtue of the powerful magnetism of the Mother incarnate in the country." He saw "the lack of a vision of the country as the Mother" as a major obstacle towards achieving the unity of the country; "our politicians," he noted, "were often incapable of having a vision of the Mother in her totality." India's unity, freedom and progress would become easy to achieve and obstacles against it vanish the day the "image of the Mother" will have been seen "in her indivisible reality" and "when enthralled by her beauty and grace" a passion shall be felt to dedicate "our lives to her work . . ."<sup>23</sup> A denominationally divided

vision of the Mother would never allow nationalism to fully flower and unify. Words and visions strikingly true for our nation now as never before.

Among those who read these words and assimilated not only their pure appeal but far-seeing projections and discerned no “hash-making” proposition in them were a number of leading lights. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), briefly a member of the revolutionary group in Bengal and later president of the Indian National Congress and independent India’s first education minister, recalled how “his [Sri Aurobindo’s] paper *Karmayogin* had become a symbol of national awakening and revolt.”<sup>24</sup> Maulana Hasrat Mohani (1875-1951) the radical revolutionary poet writing in November 1909 expressed abhorrence for the “Phiroz Shahi Congress as much as the Amiri Muslim League” and instead considered himself bound in politics “to follow in the footsteps of the leader of our patriots Mr. Tilak and the chief of our freedom-lovers, Babu Aurobindo Ghosh.”<sup>25</sup> Yet another, J. Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937) — later to become twice Prime Minister of the Empire — who met Sri Aurobindo during this period and held wide-ranging discussions with him, could not but be impressed by the fervour of his spiritual nationalism and observed that “he [Sri Aurobindo] was far more a mystic than a politician. He saw India seated on the temple throne . . . The *matripuja* — the worship of the Mother — has become [for him] a political rite . . . He returns to his Gods and to the faith of his country, for there is no India without its faith.”<sup>26</sup>

One wonders how the epithet of divisiveness could be stuck onto Sri Aurobindo’s vision against bifurcation and for unity. The only difference perhaps was in his tone — which was not a supplicating one but was bold, impartial, frank and assertive. Progenitors and protectors of vote-banks and analysts who dissect and prolong a compartmentalised society can scarcely be expected to assimilate the deeper truth behind these words. “But under modern conditions India can only exist as a whole”:<sup>27</sup> such was the pith and core of the message, intensely relevant, crying to be worked out then and acutely necessary under present circumstances.

## V

A detailed discussion of all aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s interventions during this brief period of about ten months would require a full length thesis and research; we have just ventured to analyse a few but vital parts of the whole period, and to show that one of the major interventions he had then made was against the process of division which he saw as unleashing forces that would gradually grow uncontrollable. The Act of 1909 did eventually “set the seal of Government approval on the theory of two nations or two races, or two separate communities, with distinct interests and outlooks [and] henceforth, there was no turning back and, as years rolled by, this idea of the Muslims being a separate political entity got greater and greater

momentum like a ball moving on an inclined plane. It constituted the chief problem of Indian politics”<sup>28</sup> or rather the “tragedy of Indian nationalism” leading ultimately to the creation of Pakistan. While most of the then prevailing leaders welcomed the inauguration of such a process and encouraged its institutionalisation in the body-politic of the nation, Sri Aurobindo anticipating by four decades the eventual climax of such a move launched a direct frontal attack against it as long as he was active in politics. He was to continue keeping this commitment to the vision of a united India through advice, indication and personal messages even in his retirement at Pondicherry.

The message, the fiat of Sri Aurobindo’s brand of nationalism to the Indian nation during the period under discussion was clear, it was a call to “Unite, be free, be one, be great”<sup>29</sup> and to develop a patriotism that should proceed “on the basis of love and brotherhood” and look “beyond the unity of the nation” and envisage “the ultimate unity of mankind.”<sup>30</sup> Most analytical studies of his politics however, seem to miss out that one central point!

(Concluded)

ANIRBAN GANGULI

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8. Karmayogin 19 June 1909, *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA) Vol. 8, p. 26, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1997.
9. Sugata Bose, *op. cit.*, p. 137.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Lord Minto (1845-1914) was Viceroy of India between 1905 and 1910. John Morley (1838-1923) British Liberal politician was Secretary of State for India between 1905 and 1910. The two together engineered the Indian Councils Act of 1909 popularly known as the Morley-Minto Reforms.
12. Sekhar Bandopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, p. 281.
13. V. P. Menon, *Transfer of Power in India*, pp. 9, 10, reprint, 1993. R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. II, pp. 216, 217. The Act also appeared to empower “the councils to discuss the budget and, before it was finally settled, to propose resolutions and divide upon them.” Members could move resolutions and take divisions “on all matters of general public importance.” But there were obvious riders to the whole show of generous liberality which made the councils an extended talking-shop, the resolutions for instance could be “disallowed by the Governor-General [Viceroy], or Governor acting as President of the Council, at his discretion.” And “resolutions

were barred on certain specified matters, e.g. those concerning the Army and the Indian States [Princes].” [V. P. Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 12]

14. J. Ramsay MacDonald, in his *The Awakening of India*, pp. 283-84, 1910. For the ‘engineering’ angle of the communal electorate provisions also see Rajendra Prasad, *India Divided*, pp. 109-115, Hind Kitabs, Bombay, 1947.

15. See for instance David Page, *Prelude to Partition*, Introduction, OUP, 2<sup>nd</sup> imp, 2006.

16. R. C. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

17. Calling the reforms ‘pretentious shams’ Sri Aurobindo pointed out that the new council did not really differ from the old and that the much-trumpeted non-official majority was “so carefully arranged as to secure a permanent popular minority.” Hence with “permanent popular minority and the denial of all control” the other provisions of increased elected members, facilities for debate etc. would become “mere heaping of guilt on the surface of the toy.” The Moderates too, he felt, would realise “that the new Councils are not only void of any true principles of popular representation and control, but injurious to the interests of the people.” It took the Congress seven years to finally denounce these reforms “as the merest moonshine.” [Sri Aurobindo, *Karmayogin* 20 November 1909, “Pretentious Shams”, *CWSA Vol. 8*, p. 319, V. P. Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 12]

18. Discussing the impending Act Sri Aurobindo stated that the Nationalist Party welcomed Mahomedan opposition so long as it was genuine and not manufactured from the seats of colonial power, for the Party saw this as “a sign of life and aspiration.” The Nationalist did not “shun” but desired the “awakening of Islam in India even if its first crude efforts” were to be misdirected against the Nationalists themselves, for they believed that “all energy, all action is grist to the mill of the nation-builder.” [For a detailed reading of his arguments see his “Swaraj and the Muslims”, *Karmayogin* 19 June 1909, *CWSA Vol. 8*, pp. 29-31] The Nationalist party, it may be mentioned, always attracted a number of Muslim leaders and included them in its activism; some called them token, while others perceived them as solid leaders who refused to be allured by colonial largesse and enticements. Maulvi Liakat Hossein e.g. suffered rigorous imprisonment at an advanced age because of his unflinching support of Swadeshism and nationalist politics; the colonial mentors were harsh with those who refused to be swayed by their dictates. In fact, after the division between the Moderates and Extremists at the Midnapore Provincial Conference in early December 1907, the Nationalists held an open air Conference at Midnapore on 9<sup>th</sup> December; it was the ‘first formal Nationalist Conference held in India’ and was presided over by Maulvi Abdul Huq and attended by one hundred delegates and three thousand people. [S. K. Mitra, *The Liberator — Sri Aurobindo India and the World*, p. 90, Jaico, 1954, Amalendu De, *Raja Subodh Chandra Mallik and His Times*, pp. 118, 165, 166, 167]

19. R. C. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

20. Sri Aurobindo had foreseen the communal angle and its being deliberately fuelled by colonial policies as far back as 1893. He pointed towards this danger in the 7<sup>th</sup> instalment of the “New Lamps for Old” on December 4, 1893, when he ominously and prophetically cautioned that “while we are playing with baubles, with our legislative Councils, our Simultaneous Examinations, our ingenious schemes for separating the judicial from the executive functions, — while we, I say, are finessing about trifles, the waters of the great deep are being stirred and the surging chaos of the primitive man over which our civilised societies are superimposed on a thin crust of convention, is being strangely and ominously agitated. Already a red danger-signal has shot up from Prabhas-Patan, [Saurashtra, Gujarat] and sped across the country, speaking with a rude eloquence of strange things beneath the fair surface of our renaissance, enlightened India; yet no sooner was the signal seen than it was forgotten. . .” Prabhas-Patan a sacred place for Hindus saw severe communal rioting during Muharram around 1893. How true the red danger-signal was can be ascertained from the fact that the clashes at Prabhas-Patan set in motion a cycle of riots all over the country in the 1890s. Friday the 11 August, 1893 saw “the bloodiest riot in the history of nineteenth century Bombay”, the military had to be requisitioned and it would be a week before normalcy could be restored to the beleaguered metropolis. The official casualty count was 80 dead and 530 wounded and over 1500 detained on charges of “unlawful assembly”. [Prashant Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis: Colonial Governance and Public Culture in Bombay 1890-1920*, pp. 115-18, Ashgate, 2007. For a colonially biased and heavily tilted official perspective of riots of that period see: S. M. Edwardes, *The Bombay City Police — A Historical Sketch: 1672-1916*, pp. 100-106, reprint, Read Books, 2008] The feeling that these riots were administratively engineered gained ground during this period. [A. K. Bhagwat & G. P. Pradhan, *Lokmanya Tilak — A Biography*, pp. 144-45, Jaico reprint, 2008] A similar pattern would be noticed in Bengal post the founding of the Muslim League in 1906. Sri Aurobindo strove to expose the colonial administrative hand behind the chain of communal disturbances

in the province through the *Bande Mataram*. The Aligarh instigation and division movement was at its peak during the 1890s. The “callow” principal of the Aligarh College, Theodore Beck (1859-1899), cleverly manipulated Muslim sentiments by working closely with Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) and influencing him on political matters and stands. Beck, encouraged and aided by the officialdom, was to eventually institutionalise the sense of a concrete separateness in the collective psyche of a large and influential bloc of Muslims. For an analysis of Beck’s manoeuvres see for instance: Rajendra Prasad, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-109, Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century*, pp. 322-24, Cambridge University Press, 1971 & S. L. Karandikar, *Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak — The Hercules & Prometheus of Modern India*, p.112, Poona, 1957. Ushering in the era of minorityism the Congress’s resolution of 1888 decided not to discuss any subject to which “Hindu or Muslim delegates as a body object”, this was accepted in spite of the fact that only two Muslims attended the 1885 Session, 33 the 1886 and 156 (22% of total) the 1890. [P. Sitaramayya, *History of the Indian National Congress*, pp. 53, 19, 55, 1935] Despite having tried the resolutions and en par methods, the Congress could still not prevent the balance tilting in favour of Sir Syed and the clamorous band his trusted principal had assorted, the Aligarh movement’s opposition to the Congress began getting stouter, shriller and vicious. Sri Aurobindo barbed this policy of minorityism that the then Congress inaugurated, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the “New Lamps for Old” on August 28, 1893. Discussing whether the Congress was truly of a national character he wrote, “Now I do not at all mean to re-echo the Anglo-Indian catchword about Hindus and Mahomedans. . . [That] has been still farther stripped of meaning by the policy of the Congress. The Mahomedans have been as largely represented on that body as any reasonable community could desire, and their susceptibilities, far from being denied respect, have always been most assiduously soothed and flattered.”

21. Sri Aurobindo, *Karmayogin* 6 November 1909, CWSA Vol. 8, pp. 288-89.

22. Sri Aurobindo, *Karmayogin* 20 November 1909, “The Reformed Councils”, CWSA Vol. 8, pp. 322-26. In a detailed analysis of the main provisions of the Act Sri Aurobindo shows how at every stage from the district, province to the Centre the Govt. will continue to retain its iron grip and will effectively obstruct nationalist opinion from entering the councils. For a further reading on how the Govt. ensured that nationalists were allowed no entry in the councils which would be instead filled with “*Jo-hukums* or yes-men whose subservience to the Government was above suspicion” see for instance R. C. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-46.

23. Sri Aurobindo, *On Nationalism*, pp. 488-90.

24. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, p. 4, reprint, 2007.

25. Maulana Hasrat Mohani in his Urdu magazine *Urdu-e-Mu’alla* quoted in A. G. Noorani, *Indian Political Trials 1775-1947*, p. 162, OUP, New Delhi, 2007. This passage was referring to Pheroze Shah Mehta (1845-1915) the formidable Moderate leader of the Congress and probably Syed Amir Ali (1849-1928) prominent leader of the Muslim League who pushed for separate electorates and welcomed them in 1909. Maulana Hasrat Mohani, also known as Syed Fazl ul Hasan, romantic poet, extremist politician, journalist and parliamentarian, suffered imprisonment because of his fearless anti-British journalism and had the distinction of placing the complete independence (*Azadi-e-Kamil*) demand at the Ahmedabad Session of the Congress in 1921. He did not stop at that and also advocated “violent methods, including guerilla warfare, to win independence.” Mohani’s speech at the Session was used by the colonial authorities to convict him of sedition and to sentence him to three years in jail. Mahatma Gandhi’s view “that the issue of dominion status be kept open” instead of complete independence won overwhelming support. *Purna Swaraj* had to wait for 1929 and Lahore. [For a brief account of this demand of Mohani’s made during the Ahmedabad Session see e.g. Durga Das, *India from Curzon to Nehru and After*, pp. 96-102, New Delhi, 1969] After independence Mohani stayed back in India and became a member of the Constituent Assembly from the United Provinces.

26. J. Ramsay MacDonald quoted by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *op. cit.*, p. 216. MacDonald met Sri Aurobindo in 1909 while touring India. “To his question ‘What is your conception of the end which is being worked out by our Indian administration?’ Sri Aurobindo replied, ‘A free and independent India.’ ” In his *Awakening of India* MacDonald highlighted a number of extracts from Sri Aurobindo’s writings in the *Karmayogin* on Indian freedom and nationalism. [S. K. Mitra, *op. cit.*, p. 88]

27. Sri Aurobindo, *op. cit.*, p. 483.

28. R. C. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

29. Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches — On Indian Politics and National Education*, p. 128, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pondicherry, 2005.

30. Sri Aurobindo, *On Nationalism*, p. 439, “An Open Letter to My Countrymen”, July 31 1909.



## DETERMINATION AND WILL — DOUGLAS BADER, CHURCHILL AND THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

*(Continued from the issue of July 2010)*

BESIDES the loss of lives and destruction of cities Sri Aurobindo commented on the adverse effects of the war. Speaking of the economic miseries unleashed by Hitler in the invaded countries, he said:

In winter there is likely to be starvation in all the occupied areas. Without crops and exports how will they survive? There is failure of crops this year, they say. In all the countries occupied by Hitler, the same fate will visit them. Denmark was a prosperous country, its prosperity has gone; so too with Belgium. The Scandinavian countries were some of the most advanced economically. They tried to solve the problem of poverty. Now all that is gone. The German invasion has come as a cataclysm. It is on the way to destroying all civilisation. (24 June 1940, TW,<sup>1</sup> pp. 748-49)

Referring to the enormous costs of the war he said:

That means one plane costs eight lakhs of rupees, and it can be destroyed in one minute? (18 May 1940, TW, p. 644)

After the fall of Belgium, Sri Aurobindo referred to the tragic mass migrations:

. . . These huge migrations are quite unprecedented in history. Two million Belgians have gone to Paris. (10 June 1940, TW, p. 703)

The Mother too spoke about the suffering during the Second World War and how the body endured untold misery and how some people survived only because they had a strong will to live. She said:

During the last war [World War II], it was proved that the body was capable of enduring such suffering as is normally impossible to endure. You have surely read or heard these stories of war in which the body was made to suffer and endure terrible things, and withstood all that, it proved that it had almost inexhaustible capacities of endurance. Some people happened to be

1. Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 2001 edition in 2 volumes; abbreviated to TW.

under conditions that should have killed them; if they survived, it was because they had in them a very strong will to survive and the body obeyed that will.  
(*CWM*, Vol. 4, p. 54)

In 1915 the Mother had touchingly spoken about the nobility of the suffering soldiers during the First World War:

I have visited trains, each one bringing in five and six hundred wounded from the front. It is a moving sight, not so much because of all that these unfortunate men are suffering, but above all because of the noble manner in which most of them bear their sufferings. Their soul shines through their eyes, the slightest contact with the deeper forces awakens it. And from the intensity, the fullness of the powers of true love which could, in their presence, be manifested in perfect silence, it was easy to realise the value of their receptivity.  
(*CWM*, Vol. 2, p. 141)

Explaining the phenomenon of endurance, Sri Aurobindo writes:

The principle of endurance relies on the strength of the spirit within us to bear all the contacts, impacts, suggestions of this phenomenal Nature that besieges us on every side without being overborne by them and compelled to bear their emotional, sensational, dynamic, intellectual reactions. The outer mind in the lower nature has not this strength. (*SABCL*, Vol. 21, pp. 681-82)

Besides the material destruction of the war the Mother spoke about a more serious issue:

. . . But it is truly a “great madness”, in the sense that it precipitates a whole mass of individuals and wills into an activity which leads straight to destruction — their own destruction. I am not speaking of bombs and the destruction of a city or a people, I am speaking of destruction as it is spoken about in the Gita, you see, when it is said that the Asura goes to his own destruction. That’s what happens, and this is a very great misfortune, because it is always better to be able to save, illumine, transform, than to have to destroy brutally. And it is this terrible choice of the war which is its true horror; it’s that it materialises the conflict so brutally and totally that some elements which could have been saved during peace are, because of war, necessarily destroyed — and not only men and things but forces, the conscience of beings.

(*CWM*, Vol. 7, pp. 302-03)



The Second World War was an intense play of forces which would ultimately determine Britain's destiny. The Mother had said:

It is an error or superstition to believe that an external thing or circumstance can be the cause of anything. All things and circumstances are the accompanying results of a Force that acts from behind the veil.

The Force acts and each thing reacts according to its own nature.

(CWM, Vol. 14, p. 213)

Nirod-da writes:

In a talk in 1940 Sri Aurobindo said: "There are forces which are trying to destroy the British and their empire — forces above and here in this world, I mean inner forces." (TY,<sup>2</sup> p. 131)

In a letter Sri Aurobindo has stated:

Certainly, my force is not limited to the Ashram and its conditions. As you know it is being largely used for helping the right development of the war and of change in the human world. (SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 196)

Once during the Evening Talks, Sri Aurobindo spoke about the effects of his will-force:

Disciple: You wrote in a letter to Dilip that your will never fails.

Sri Aurobindo: No. I did not say that. What I said was that I have not seen my will fail — so far as the major events of the world were concerned — until now.

Disciple: What events?

Sri Aurobindo: For instance, Ireland's freedom. Also, I wanted Alsace Lorraine to go to France. . . . (25 June 1940, ET,<sup>3</sup> p. 745)

On another instance during the Evening Talks he said:

. . . I wanted de Gaulle to become the Chief of the Free French armies in North Africa. There were many obstacles and the Americans came in with their pro-Vichy attitude. But I went on pressing and ultimately it has succeeded.

2. Nirodbaran: *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2000; abbreviated to TY.

3. A. B. Purani: *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 2007 edition; abbreviated to ET.

Also about the Tunisian campaign. There was a lot of swaying to and fro. But I persisted. The first time when the Allies attacked, they were only thirty thousand against three lakh Italians. If Wavell had gone to Tripoli at that time he would have succeeded. But they went to help Greece and naturally they had to retreat. But I went on pressing, and at last they took Tunisia.

(7 August 1943, *ET*, p. 768)

In a letter to Paul Richard, dated 12 July 1911, Sri Aurobindo revealed how he was developing his powers and exercise of will:

. . . I am developing the necessary powers for bringing down the spiritual on the material plane, and I am now able to put myself into men and change them, removing the darkness and bringing light, giving them a new heart and a new mind. This I can do with great swiftness and completeness with those who are near me, but I have also succeeded with men hundreds of miles away. I have also been given the power to read men's characters and hearts, even their thoughts, but this power is not yet absolutely complete, nor can I use it always and in all cases. The power of guiding action by the mere exercise of will is also developing, but it is not so powerful as yet as the other. My communication with the other world is yet of a troubled character, though I am certainly in communication with some very great powers. But of all these things I will write more when the final obstacles in my way are cleared from the path. . . .

(CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 283)

On the question of how England was going to fight alone Sri Aurobindo replied:

If she can win against the Germans, it would mean that she is specially protected.

(23 June 1940, *TW*, p. 744)

Nirod-da writes:

When somebody asked the Mother why England was meeting reverses in spite of Sri Aurobindo's support, she replied, "If he had not helped Britain, she would have been swallowed up by Hitler long ago." (*TY*, p. 140)

Nirod-da recounts that when Sri Aurobindo was asked why didn't the Divine intervene in France, he replied:

Because the French were corrupt and had no power of resistance. The English had still some of their old virtues left, to which support could be given. The Mother says "The French have betrayed Czechoslovakia and thereby stand condemned." (*TY*, p. 133)

Just a brief historical background on the France-Czechoslovakia treaty: France had signed a treaty with Czechoslovakia after the First World War that it would protect Czechoslovakia against any aggressors. Through the 1930's Hitler was slowly expanding his territory to the consternation of Britain. Like many in Britain who had lived through World War I, Chamberlain was determined to avert another war. His policy of appeasement towards Adolf Hitler culminated in the Munich Agreement in which Britain and France accepted that the Czech region of the Sudetenland should be ceded to Germany. Chamberlain left Munich believing that by appeasing Hitler he had assured 'peace for our time'. However, in March 1939 Hitler annexed the rest of the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia, with Slovakia becoming a puppet state ruled by Germany. During this period France failed to protect or help Czechoslovakia, thus reneging on the treaty.

Nirod-da continues:

Similarly, when France, after the fall of Dunkirk, rejected Churchill's proposal of a common citizenship for Britain and France so that they might carry on the fight as one country, the Mother seems to have considered it a rejection of the Divine Grace itself that had come to the help of France at the most opportune moment. The entire speech of Churchill was dictated in the occult way by the Mother, we were told. (*TY*, p. 133)

When a disciple said that England's offer of common citizenship with France was a brilliant one for economic combination, Sri Aurobindo remarked:

Not only economic but much more than that. Practically one nation. It is a tremendous step for the English, beyond all tradition, prejudice and character of the nation. (18 June 1940, *TW*, p. 724)

When a disciple remarked that France could still retrieve her honour if she accepted England's offer, Sri Aurobindo said:

Quite so. But, as I said, Pétain and Weygand are too old and inelastic. (18 June 1940, *TW*, p. 725)

Before entering into the Battle of Britain we shall briefly touch upon the unrivalled British Navy. Sri Aurobindo said:

Against Germany there is one advantage: the British navy is supreme. What Germany intends is a long-term blockade of England and thus to exhaust her. But to do that she must have Mediterranean supremacy. If she gets that and

can also occupy Africa, then she will have endless resources at her disposal. Germany bungled by treating conquered people like slaves and not making use of her opportunity. (7 October 1940, *TW*, p. 912)

When a disciple said that the English are in their element at sea, Sri Aurobindo agreed:

Yes, it is in their blood. That means that, besides training, there is something in heredity which one can't acquire by training. (17 December 1939, *TW*, p. 312)

When the question of invading the British Isles arose, Sri Aurobindo said:

What Hitler may do is that he may choose a point and strike with his aeroplanes, destroy the ports and carry troops inland. That is the only possible way, it seems to me. But to maintain a regular supply line will be difficult.

(22 June 1940, *TW*, p. 741)

On 20 July Sri Aurobindo was asked how far an air attack would be successful; he replied:

I don't know. Aeroplanes can be tremendously destructive and if the industrial areas are destroyed, it will be a great blow. (*TW*, p. 817)

On 18 June 1940 Sri Aurobindo also referred to Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*, indicating his motive of invading England was to take control of its colonies:

. . . He [Hitler] has said plainly in *Mein Kampf* that his aim is to destroy France and Russia. Now he is speaking of colonies which means that England also must be destroyed. . . . (*TW*, p. 727)

\* \* \*

By the beginning of July 1940, the Royal Air Force had built up its strength to 640 fighter planes. In stark contrast, the German Air Force, Luftwaffe was far stronger, at least on paper, with 2600 bombers and fighters. The stage was set and the dice was heavily loaded against Britain. The future of Britain was about to be decided and the situation was extremely delicate and precarious as the Luftwaffe was a far larger Air Force than the RAF. In order to invade Britain, the Germans had to have control in the air over the English Channel, otherwise the RAF and the Royal Navy would be able to thwart the invasion force before it reached English shores. The decisive Battle of Britain was about to take off.

Churchill, in adversity, evokes to our mind a few lines from *Savitri*:

The spirit rises mightier by defeat;  
Its godlike wings grow wider with each fall.  
Its splendid failures sum to victory. (CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 458)

In his House of Commons speech of 18 June 1940 following the defeat of France, Churchill echoed the grave peril that Britain faced:

What General Weygand called the Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilisation. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire. The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands. But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, "This was their Finest Hour."

There is a remarkable uncanny likeness in Churchill's speech and Sri Aurobindo's observation on the play of forces. In a letter dated September 1940 Sri Aurobindo writes:

... the Germans and Italians believe that they are establishing a new civilisation and a new world-order. The English believe that they are defending not only their empire but their very existence as a free nation and the freedom also of other nations conquered by Germany or threatened by the push to empire of the Axis powers; ... They believe also that they are standing up for the principles of civilisation which a Nazi victory would destroy. ...

It is in fact a clash between two world-forces which are contending for the control of the whole future of humanity. One force seeks to destroy the past civilisation and substitute a new one; but this new civilisation is in substance a reversion to the old principles of dominant Force and a rigid external order and denies the established values, social, political, ethical, spiritual, altogether. Among these values are those which were hitherto held to be the most precious, the liberty of the individual, the right to national liberty, freedom of thought; even religious liberty is to be crushed and replaced by the subjection of religion

to State control. The new ethics condemn and reject all the principles that can be summed up in the word “humanitarianism”; all that is to it a falsehood and a weakness. The only ethical values admitted are those of dominant Force on the one side and, on the other, of blind obedience and submission, self-effacement and labour in the service of the State. . . . [This new idea] . . . is pushing for world conquest, for the enforcement of the new order everywhere, securing it, — this at least Germany, its principal agent, conceives to be the right method and carries it out with a scientific thoroughness by a ruthless repression of all opposition and a single iron rule.

The other Force is that of evolutionary tendencies. . . Its workings had their good and bad sides, but among the greater values it had developed stood the very things against which the new Force is most aggressive, the liberty of the individual, national liberty, freedom of thought, political and social freedom with an increasing bent towards equality, complete religious liberty, the humanitarian principle with all its consequences and, latterly, a seeking after a more complete social order, which will organise the life of the community, but will respect the liberty of the individual while perfecting his means of life and helping in every way possible his development. . . . In the working of that force as represented by Britain and other democracies there may not be anywhere full individual freedom or full national liberty. But the movement has been more and more towards a greater development of these things and, if this evolutionary force still remains dominant, their complete development is inevitable.

. . . its gospel [of dominant Force] is a worship of Force and its effect is the rule of a brutal and pitiless violence, the repression of the individual, not only a fierce repression but a savage extinction of all that opposes or differs from it, the suppression of all freedom of thought, an interference with religious belief and freedom of spiritual life and, in an extreme tendency, the deliberate will to “liquidate” all forms of religion and spirituality. On the side of the other more progressive force there are . . . a tendency towards an enlargement of the human mind and spirit, towards an increasing idealism in the relation of men with men and of nation with nation and a tolerant and humane mentality.

(CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 455-57)

The Battle of Britain started on 10 July 1940. The Luftwaffe planned to annihilate the RAF by bombing all its air bases, thereby destroying all aircraft and making the airfields and runways non-functional. A non-operational RAF, both in the air and on the ground, would enable the German Army to invade and capture Britain with the aid of the Luftwaffe. Never in the history of mankind had civilisation been so threatened that its very survival was held by such a slender thread of just one battle.

The first phase of the battle was from 10 July to 7 August 1940. In this stage of the battle, the Luftwaffe was in effect probing the British defences — looking for

weaknesses before a major assault could be launched to exploit them. On 2 August, the Luftwaffe chief, Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering, issued the *Adlertag* (Eagle Day) directive, a plan of attack in which a few massive blows from the air were to destroy British air power and so open the way for the invasion of Britain.

On 30 July Sri Aurobindo referred to the invasion:

He [Hitler] must have relied on the French fleet surrendering to him. If he had attacked at once there might have been some chance of success.

(30 July 1940, *TW*, p. 821)

On 6 August the radio news stated that the Germans were concentrating for an attack on the English Channel ports using the Baltic as a base. When a disciple remarked that the Germans were preparing for an invasion, Sri Aurobindo said:

Yes. Perhaps they will attack from Holland and Belgium. The Baltic is too far away. If it is a quick stroke and cleverly done, then it is possible and it depends on where they land. The British Navy can't protect the whole coastline.

(*TW*, p. 837)

The second phase of the Battle of Britain was from 8 August to 6 September 1940. At the beginning of August, with the German invasion forces and troop barges being assembled on the French coast, the raids against the south coast of England increased in size and number. In August the terrifying aerial battles intensified — the Luftwaffe began launching raids of more than 1000 aircraft in one day. They focused on Britain's airfields and radar installations. The radars were Britain's silver lining as these were vital in detecting and warning the approach of the German aircraft thus giving the RAF precious minutes to get ready. The early warning of the radar enabled the RAF pilots to be airborne when the Luftwaffe arrived. Further, they also manoeuvred their fighters to get an advantage of height over their enemy, thereby enabling them to swoop down and shoot down many German aircraft. This was one of the prime tactics which enabled the RAF pilots to neutralise the German strength of numbers. By the end of the first week of August, the RAF had lost nearly 100 fighters but inflicted losses of more than 190 German planes. On 8 August 1940 about 300 German bombers severely bombed different parts of the UK. As the Luftwaffe was about three to four times the size of the RAF, the RAF strategy was to fight the Luftwaffe in squadrons of a dozen fighter aircraft against fifty or even a hundred German planes comprising mainly of bombers assisted by a few fighters. The reason for this strategy was to minimise RAF casualties — both pilots and aircraft — to ensure the longevity of the RAF.

Sri Aurobindo affirmed that though British pilots were grossly outnumbered they were better than the Germans:



Individually they are superior to the Germans. . . . The Germans act by mass and drive. (15 May 1940, *TW*, p. 636)

On 10 August the Luftwaffe lost sixty planes. A disciple triumphantly declared that Hitler's Blitzkrieg had got a rude shock. Sri Aurobindo concurred:

Yes, to lose sixty planes in one attack is something. . . . (*TW*, p. 846)

On 13 August, massive raids began on the British airfields. These continued till the early hours of 14 August 1940.

On 15 August another savage attack on several air bases took place. Nirod-da relates the events on this auspicious day:

. . . the radio news at noon said that 144 German planes had been brought down over England in half a day, the biggest number so far. We commented that it was the result of the Darshan. Sri Aurobindo laughed and said, "The day of Hitler's triumphal entry into England!" (*TY*, pp. 137-38)

Hitler had earlier fixed 15<sup>th</sup> August 1940 as the day he would be triumphantly addressing the British nation from Buckingham Palace. Instead the Luftwaffe was given a sound beating; hence Sri Aurobindo's jocular remark.

Earlier Sri Aurobindo had remarked about the invasion itself:

I wish it (the invasion) had been fixed to come after the 15<sup>th</sup>; I don't want the Darshan to be disturbed. . . . (7 August, 1940, *TW*, p. 837)

A few days of bad weather in mid-August gave the exhausted pilots on both sides a much needed reprieve, but soon the attacks began again. The Luftwaffe's aim was to destroy the RAF, either in the air or on the ground. By late August, the Germans had lost more than 600 aircraft whilst the RAF lost only 260. However the RAF, being the smaller Air Force, was rapidly losing badly needed fighter planes and experienced pilots. Further its effectiveness was hampered by the bombing damage done to its radar stations. This pattern continued into September and the situation became desperate for the RAF. Small civilian airfields were used in the emergency, as many RAF stations were severely damaged. Maintenance and the supply of spare parts became dangerously stretched. Ground crews working in the open suffered heavy casualties from the air raids, and many maintenance facilities were destroyed in the bombing.

The situation had become extremely grim and on 20 August 1940 Churchill paid the ultimate tribute to the RAF pilots who were desperately trying to avert a catastrophe:



The gratitude of every home in our island, in our Empire, and indeed throughout the world, except in the abodes of the guilty, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of the World War by their prowess and by their devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.

In a letter dated end September 1940 — just when the crisis in the world during the Battle of Britain was at breaking-point — Sri Aurobindo encapsulated the impending disaster:

At present the balance in the development of human thought and action has been turning for some time against the larger evolutionary force and in favour of a revolutionary reaction against it. This reaction is now represented by totalitarian governments and societies, the other tendency by the democracies; but democracy is on the wane everywhere in Europe, the totalitarian idea was gaining ground on all sides even before the war. Now with Hitler as its chief representative, this Force has thrown itself out for world-domination. Everywhere the results are the same, the disappearance of individual and national liberty, a rigid “New Order”, the total suppression of free thought and speech, a systematic cruelty and intolerance, the persecution of all opposition, and, wherever the Nazi idea spreads, a violent racialism denying the human idea; outside Europe what is promised is the degradation of the coloured peoples to helotry as an inferior, even a subhuman race. Hitler, carrying with him everywhere the new idea and the new order, is now master of almost all Europe minus Great Britain and Russia. [Faced with the stubborn opposition of Britain he is turning southwards and if the plan attributed to him of taking Gibraltar and the Suez Canal and forcing the British fleet out of the Mediterranean and its coasts were to succeed, he would be able with his Italian]<sup>1</sup> ally to dominate Africa also and to turn towards Asia, through Syria and Palestine. There would be then nothing that could stand in his way except Russia; but Russia has helped his projects by her attitude and seems in no mood to oppose him. The independence of the peoples of Middle East and Central Asia would disappear as the independence of so many European nations has disappeared and a deadly and imminent peril would stand at the gates of India.

These are the patent facts of the situation, its dangerous possibilities and menacing consequences. What is there that can prevent them from coming into realisation? The only material force that now stands between is the obstinate and heroic resistance of Great Britain and her fixed determination to fight the

1. Sri Aurobindo cancelled the bracketed passage during revision but did not write anything to replace it. — Ed.

battle to the end. It is the British Navy alone that keeps the war from our gates and confines it to European lands and seas and a strip of North Africa. If there were defeat and the strength of Britain and her colonies were to go down before the totalitarian nations, all Europe, Africa and Asia would be doomed to domination by three or four Powers all anti-democratic and all pushing for expansion, powers with regimes and theories of life which take no account of liberty of any kind; the surviving democracies would perish, nor would any free government with free institutions be any longer possible anywhere. . . . On the contrary, if the victory goes to Britain, the situation will be reversed, the progressive evolutionary forces will triumph and the field will lie open for the fulfilment of the tendencies which were making India's full control of her own life a certainty of the near future. (CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 457-59)

To step up the pressure, the Germans began night raids to prevent the defenders repairing the airfields during the night. On one particular night raid, some German aircraft inadvertently bombed some civilian areas of London; a mistake which was to become a crucial turning point in the battle. Hitler was still hoping that the desperateness of the situation would force the British to sue for a negotiated peace. However Churchill's bulldog mentality spurred him to give a fitting reply to this accidental attack — the RAF bombed Berlin! Consequently, out of vengeance, Hitler surprisingly changed tactics by beginning to bomb British cities. Just when it seemed that the RAF was stretched to its limit and couldn't continue for another day, it was given a much needed reprieve.

The third phase of the Battle of Britain was from 7 September to 5 October 1940. It was also known as the Blitz. Hitler was enraged by the attack on Berlin and wanted to retaliate by destroying the major British cities. Further his frustration increased because the attacks on airfields were not paying enough dividends. But largely it was his anger and outrage at Churchill's bravado and daring to bomb Berlin that changed the course of events. Hitler changed strategy by extensively bombing civilian areas, little realising that the RAF was at breaking point and had he continued with bombing the airfields and the Air Force bases, the RAF would have been defeated. By attacking cities and industry, Hitler hoped to break British morale and destroy the factories that built fighter aircraft. For the people living in the cities, the Blitz had begun, as night raids followed daytime raids and gave civilians little rest. The change of plan was a mistake, for it gave the RAF a much needed breather and a chance to repair their airfields and radar sites. This enabled the defences to be made fully operational again. The RAF recuperated and soon large numbers of Hurricanes and Spitfires were ruling the skies. This came as a shock to the Luftwaffe pilots, who had been informed by their intelligence officers that the RAF had been severely weakened by the earlier raids on the airfields. By changing tactics and targeting cities instead of airfields, the Germans had actually unwittingly helped the

RAF to resuscitate. Perhaps a Divine Intervention!

On 7 September the Blitz intensified and around 950 German aircraft attacked London. It heralded the first of 57 consecutive nights of bombing!

However, by mid-September the RAF had effectively denied the Luftwaffe air superiority by shooting down German bombers faster than they could be rebuilt. On 15 September 1940 Sri Aurobindo said:

Germany is speaking of invasion of England but again says that invasion is not necessary. Their air attacks and submarine blockade will break down the English.

Laughing he added:

They are preparing their people in case the idea of invasion is given up.

...

In the meantime the RAF is battering the French coasts and Germany too.

He then continued apropos the invasion,

Now it will be difficult. Hitler had his chance after the fall of France. If he had attacked at once, it would have been difficult for England to resist. Hitler really missed the bus. Now England is equally strong in air and navy. Only on land, if they come to grips, it has to be seen what the outcome will be.

(TW, p. 880)

When the RAF had a field day on 15 September, Sri Aurobindo smilingly announced:

England has destroyed 175 German planes. (TW, p. 882)

Subsequently the RAF designated 15 September as the victory day in the Battle of Britain. After the war, on 15 September 1945, Douglas Bader led a fly-past of 300 aircraft over London to commemorate this victory day.

Years later, Sri Aurobindo revealed that he put his force for Germany's defeat both on 15 August and 15 September.

I had fixed the 15<sup>th</sup> August and the 15<sup>th</sup> September as the dates on which Germany would suffer defeat and both days it was defeated. In August, I believe, over London; and in September, the invasion idea and preparation.

(7 August 1943, ET, p. 768)

On both these days the Luftwaffe lost a record number of aircraft and pilots.

Following the Luftwaffe debacle of 15 September, Sri Aurobindo said:

It appears from an Englishman bringing news from Rome that Hitler will try to take Gibraltar first, then cross to Morocco, capture Egypt, the Suez Canal, the whole of Africa and finally invade England. (24 September 1940, *TW*, p. 894)

*(To be continued)*

GAUTAM MALAKAR

*You should not allow yourself to be discouraged by any persistence of the movements of the lower vital nature. There are some that tend always to persist and return until the whole physical nature is changed by the transformation of the most material consciousness; till then their pressure recurs — sometimes with a revival of their force, sometimes more dully — as a mechanical habit. Take from them all life-force by refusing any mental or vital assent; then the mechanical habit will become powerless to influence the thoughts and acts and will finally cease.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1337)*

## **LIBRARIES OF SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM**

### **— Addendum —**

WE conclude the series on the Libraries with a few notes.

In the article on the Sri Aurobindo Library, two names were inadvertently left out. Bonolata-di and Nolina-di were both very much part of the Library, looking after the Children's section.

### **THE EDUCATION RESEARCH LIBRARY**

On the northeast corner of the school building two rooms were used for keeping a large number of periodicals of different types. There was also a selection of interesting books one could borrow or consult on the spot. This library was used by the teachers and the older students to keep abreast with current progress in various fields of knowledge. One great advantage of this section was that one could choose from the catalogue provided to the readers and books could be obtained from the British Council Library at Madras. It proved to be of immense help to the teachers.

This library was closed when the main Sri Aurobindo Library became functional. This place was used as Language Laboratory Section by the Centre of Education.

### **LIBRARY OF THE SRI AUROBINDO CENTRE OF EDUCATION**

The Centre of Education was started as a modest school for the few children residing in the Ashram. There was a kindergarten section and the older students were divided into three classes. Right from its inception there was in the School, a collection of books, not too large, kept in one almirah. This was the library. The students were supplied all the textbooks they needed for their classes. Very soon the number of students increased. Each year as these students were promoted to a higher level, more subjects were added to the curriculum. Consequently, the number of textbooks also increased. Thus one important part of this library was devoted to the textbooks. At present the library occupies a large area, housing books on various subjects in different languages. There is a good collection of reference books, and magazines and periodicals.

Some sections of the Centre of Education i.e. the Physics and Chemistry Laboratory, the Technical Laboratory, the Psychology section, the Applied Science section, the Computer Centre, and the Science of Life (Biology) Laboratory have their small collection of books on topics related to that branch of studies.

CHITRA SEN

In 1944-45 the school did not at first need any library, for the teachers already had whatever they required for teaching.

But soon there arose the need for dictionaries and some reference books. There was a big cupboard with asbestos sides and doors in which these books were kept and everyday at 11:30 and again at 4 p.m. we checked to see that all the books were back and put neatly in their place.

Sisir-da had the key to this cupboard, but off and on he would give it to Amita to fetch a book or to put one back in its place. The books were numbered, and so were the wall maps which the geography teachers would take to their classes. Soon Amita was asked to look after these and an arrangement was started for issuing the books and keeping track of them. The teachers would make an entry in a notebook, sign for the book they wished to borrow before taking out the book they wanted.

Every morning, a fresh page was used where the date and the day of the week was written.

AMITA SEN

## THE LIBRARY OF THE PHYSICAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Another section that began to crystallise by Dada's personal effort and will was the Library of the Department of Physical Education. A few months after he took over the charge of physical education, Dada felt the need to improve his own theoretical and technical knowledge of physical education activities. So, in 1945 or '46 he wished to attend the Physical Education College in Madras and take a course there. But the Mother did not approve of his going and she told him, "The Organisation you are going to build up will be so good that people from everywhere will come to see it." And thus Dada dropped the idea of going out. Instead, he obtained the syllabus for physical education and studied at home. He was helped in his study by the Mother who gave him two books every month which she procured with the help of Nolini-da.

The Library thus started with these books given by the Mother as well as some of Dada's personal books. After the demise of Dr. Nogen Bhattacharya, the present library room was obtained and the Library took proper shape. Some individuals, like Shri Mohanlal Dhar and Dada's own teacher, Shri Prabodh Chandra Dey, contributed a considerable number of books to the Library. With the help of Monsieur André, Dada procured some French journals on physical education; some American and English journals were arranged for by Eleanor Montgomery. A few journals are obtained in exchange for our *Bulletin* which is sent to some sports organisations. As of now, the Library has several thousand books and receives about 33 journals.

Dada's policy has always been of providing full facilities for the aspiring

individual and this Library has been, like many other facilities created by him, one such opportunity for growth and development.

ANANDA REDDY

(Sourced from *SportSpirit* June 1997)

## THE MEDICAL LIBRARY

In the early 1950's a course in Advanced Biology was started in the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre. Dr. Satyabrata Sen was in charge of this section. He started a collection of medical and biological books. Thus a small library was started. Some books were his own, while quite a few others were also received from the Sri Aurobindo Library. This unit was dismantled in 1990. The books were donated to the Auroville Health Centre and to the Library of the Pondicherry General Hospital.

## A Note on AUTOGRAPHS

In the article 'Prithwi Singh and the Publication Department' (*Mother India*, September 2009) Sumitra Nahar has said that many visitors who bought books written by Sri Aurobindo sent them through the Publication Department to Sri Aurobindo. "Sri Aurobindo would write the name of the recipient and autograph the copies." She has tentatively said that 1942 was most probably the year when this form of receiving blessings in writing may have started.

We now know that quite a few persons have in their possession the autographed copy of the first edition of *The Life Divine* published in 1939. These books were sent to Sri Aurobindo through Nolini-da.

When the Archives department was asked about the earliest books autographed by Sri Aurobindo, this was the answer we received.

The earliest books autographed by Sri Aurobindo in the possession of the Archives are:

1) *Sri Aurobinder Pondicherir Patra* (Bengali) 1921

2) The booklets:

- a) *Baji Prabhou*,
- b) *Ideals and Progress*,
- c) *The Superman*

are also autographed, and dated 1922.

We quote the following interesting extract from *Champaklal Speaks*:



Mother spoke to Sri Aurobindo of the number of people to whom she had to attend when she opened the door and what she felt then.

She also told him that she had asked Nolini to stop books being sent up for signature. She enquired from me whether a notice to this effect had been put up on the board. I said it was not, but probably he informed people orally.

In the beginning Sri Aurobindo used to sign books with the name of the person and write “Blessings”. For some he even wrote the date. Though it was a strain on him later, he did not express it. But Mother did not want to trouble him and so she asked him only to sign leaving place for the name and the word “Blessings”. For some time Sri Aurobindo signed and wrote “Blessings” and Mother added the name, and in some cases also the date.

Afterwards he only signed and Mother wrote the rest.

Thus people began to get the handwriting of both Sri Aurobindo and Mother.

13.4.1950

(*Champaklal Speaks*, p. 201)

(*Compiled by Chitra Sen*)

*I do not know that sadness has the power to cure [the dryness in the vital]. I have myself followed the Gita's path of equanimity — but for some the psychic sadness may be necessary. But I think it is more an indication of a mistake than a cure.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1347)

## LIVING WITH *THE LIFE DIVINE*

(Continued from the issue of July 2010)

### 7. Magnetised by the Upanishads

IN the years of my growing up, the Upanishads were simply seen as a huge, lovely garden. We were asked to memorise stotras and nobody bothered to explain the meaning. We just glimpsed into a few scenes all by ourselves. Come evening, we had to wash our hands and feet and sit near the heavy brass oil lamp shaped like a plantain flower. No electric lights in this village in those days, and the shadows on the walls could either entertain the growing consciousness or frighten it. But we were told that these stotras were there to guard us from all mishaps, and so why worry? Just memorise some and repeat them when you have some worry or fear! If you are afraid of snakes when you walk near a bush, repeat the ‘Garuda Dana-dakam’ of Vedanta Desika; if you are caught unawares in a strange place, be sure to recite the ‘Margabandhu Stotram’ of Adi Sankara; if you are not sure whether you will clear the examinations, think of Mahasaraswati and declaim Kumaraguruparar’s ‘Sakalakalavalli Malai’. Somehow, the mind was set at rest in a trice. Our elders knew the science of psychotherapy.

When we repeated these verses, some phrases caught the imagination and some images remained illumined in the heart. There were no questions asked when we recited the ‘Navaratnamala’:

*Omkarapanchara sukhīm Upanishad udyanakelikalakantīm  
Aagama vipina mayurīm aryām antharvibhāvaye gaurīm*

(I meditate upon Gauri, the Noble One, who is a parrot in the cage of Pranava; the nightingale that plays in the garden of Upanishads; the peahen who resides in the forest of Vedas.)

That was an age when the mind did not ask questions about the Pranava or the Upanishads or the Vedas. The Upanishads were a garden and one could see in the mind’s eye all the trees one wanted: the parijata, the champak, the bakul, the Flame of the Forest. If the Upanishads were not an enchanting garden, they were a group of absolutely charming girls, for we had another popular prayer which happens to be the final decad of *Narayanīyam*, “agre paśyāmi tejo . . .”

Before me I see a bluish Radiance excelling the charm of a thick array of Kalaya flowers. At its sight I feel the upsurge of Bliss like one bathed in nectar (both without and within). Next I see in the core of that Brilliance the form of a Divine Boy charming by the graces of budding youth. He is encircled by sages like Narada athrill with ecstatic bliss, and by a bevy of beauties who are none but the Upanishads embodied.<sup>1</sup>

If one saw directly all the greenery of the trees with their flowering brilliance in Adisankara's evocation, Narayana Bhattatiri brought to the mind a familiar game that we played in the village, the *kolattam*. Girls with two sticks in their hands went round and round singing and tapping the sticks to varied rhythms, and of course, we thought we were as beautiful as the Upanishad girls in this verse. Well, the verse says Krishna is in the midst of the girls who are going round and who can be an ugly person in the presence of Krishna? Those distant days flash across the inward eye whenever I take up Sri Aurobindo's *Ahana*:

Come then to Brindavan, soul of the joyous; faster and faster  
Follow the dance I shall teach thee with Shyama for slave and for master.  
Follow the notes of the flute with a soul aware and exulting;  
Trample Delight that submits and crouch to a sweetness insulting.  
Then shalt thou know what the dance meant, fathom the song and the singer,  
Hear behind thunder its rhymes, touched by lightning thrill to his finger,  
Brindavan's rustle shalt understand and Yamuna's laughter,  
Take thy place in the Ras and thy share of the ecstasy after.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly enough, understanding the Upanishads needs this kind of self-losing ecstasy on our part. So it is with *The Life Divine* as well. Just as the total faith in Krishna leads the cowherdesses to move in and out in intricate steps, Sri Aurobindo also inspires a total trust. In his presence approaches to the Upanishads do not intimidate us, nor need we be daunted when we draw close to *The Life Divine*. The Upanishads form the basis of a majority of our philosophical systems but they also contain some of the most heart-warming images in one's experience. So it is with Sri Aurobindo's masterpiece. The two get entwined so completely that we have a soundless brilliant introduction to the Upanishadic world.

For, the Upanishads are seeds. The commentaries on them have given us huge banyan trees which are well known as Darshanas. Without the seeds these Darshanas would not have come into existence. Without these Darshanas the Upanishads would not have grown into life-sustaining guides as we walk through the perilous pathway

1. Translated by Swami Tapasyananda.

2. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 491.

of earthly life. The Aurobindonian Darshana is also a sustained commentary on the Upanishads and a Guardian of the Way.

The Upanishads often provide the vital springboard to move the argument in *The Life Divine*. The Taittiriya Upanishad offers the opening for a brilliant chapter in Sri Aurobindo's work. I have been fascinated by the way in which my mind, never trained in science, is yet able to understand the creation of Matter, thanks to Sri Aurobindo. 'The Ascending Series of Substance' is initiated by a Taittiriya quote:

There is a self that is of the essence of Matter — there is another inner self of Life that fills the other — there is another inner self of Mind — there is another inner self of Truth-Knowledge — there is another inner self of Bliss.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently, creation's first object was not Matter. We get to recite often the evolutionary mantra: Matter-Life-Mind-Supermind-Sacchidananda. Just take a few steps carefully into the intricate 'ras' produced by Sri Aurobindo's sentences. We realise that Matter itself was the final stage of an earlier, opening chord of evolution. The original Substance has taken its own time to get solidified into Matter which can provide a firm base for cosmic workings.

If there had been a process of solidification, there could now be a process of de-solidification towards the essence:

And if there is, as there must be in the nature of things, an ascending series in the scale of substance from Matter to Spirit, it must be marked by a progressive diminution of these capacities most characteristic of the physical principle and a progressive increase of the opposite characteristics which will lead us to the formula of pure spiritual self-extension. This is to say that they must be marked by less and less bondage to the form, more and more subtlety and flexibility of substance and force, more and more interfusion, interpenetration, power of assimilation, power of interchange, power of variation, transmutation, unification. Drawing away from durability of form, we draw towards eternity of essence; drawing away from our poise in the persistent separation and resistance of physical Matter, we draw near to the highest divine poise in the infinity, unity and indivisibility of Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

That's it. *Annamaya Kosha* is the only sheath we understand readily. Of course we cannot deny the *Pranamaya* or *Manomaya* sheaths. We live with these 'unseen' entities all the time. If we are able to recognise and understand so much of the 'substance', shan't we leap with ease towards the *Vijnanamaya* sheath? And if that

3. Taittiriya Upanishad, II. 1-5, used as epigraph in *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 266.

4. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 267-68.

comes within our grasp, the rest is Bliss, we have made a tryst with the *Anandamaya* sheath. This Ananda cannot come to us on a platter. It is understood by *anubhava*, experience. The Upanishadic seer knew that the student had to be given a concrete image for this experience. We are still in earthly life, not in the Greater Life we have glimpsed in *Savitri*. For us, it is no easy task to understand abstractions. So the seer shows this *anandamaya* essence as a recognisable person:

Now the Bliss Self is made in the image of a man; according as is the human image of the other, so is it made in the image of the man. Love is the head of Him; Joy is His right side; pleasure is His left side; Bliss is His spirit which is the self of Him; the Eternal is His lower member wherein He resteth abidingly.<sup>5</sup>

But even this image is not clear enough for us. These are concepts! *Priya, Moda, Pramoda, Sat, Chit, Ananda*. We cannot see them with our naked eye! My senses ask for a concrete sensation, my heart needs to be touched by feelings of ecstasy. Sri Aurobindo knows the student's inability at comprehending high truths and so very sweetly, with electrical ease, produces the concretised figure that had been conceptualised in the Taittiriya Upanishad:

Therefore when the heart and life turn towards the Highest and the Infinite, they arrive not at an abstract existence or non-existence, a Sat or else a Nirvana, but at an existent, a Sat Purusha, not merely at a consciousness, but a conscious Being, a Chaitanya Purusha, not merely at a purely impersonal delight of the Is, but at an infinite I Am of bliss, an Anandamaya Purusha; nor can they immerse and lose his consciousness and bliss in featureless existence, but must insist on all three in one, for delight of existence is their highest power and without consciousness delight cannot be possessed. That is the sense of the supreme figure of the intensest Indian religion of love, Sri Krishna, the All-blissful and All-beautiful.<sup>6</sup>

Sri Krishna! The Ras again! That has been the result of living with *The Life Divine* all these years. You never know where it will lead you, but then one always remains within the magic circle of Ras danced to the rhythm of the sublime sentences.

Getting engaged with *The Life Divine* has definitely made the passage to the Upanishads easy. Once we get a 'taste' for these teachings, we just cannot turn away from them. They have given us the Mahavakyas. They have given us some of the most lovable stories. They have certainly raised the flag of our Sanatana Dharma

5. Taittiriya Upanishad, Brahmananda Valli, Chapter V, translated by Sri Aurobindo, *Kena and Other Upanishads*, CWSA, Vol. 18, pp. 219-20.

6. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, pp. 579-80.

all over the world. Amazement struck me dumb when I read Swami Thathagat-ananda's *Journey of the Upanishads to the West* (2002). I realised that steadily the wisdom of the East had percolated into the West even from the days of ancient Greece. The Rock Edicts of Ashoka have extended references to the Hellenic kings of his time like Antiochus (Amtiyoka), Ptolemy (Turamaya) and Alikasundara (Alexander). The doors of India have always been kept open in the matter of knowledge-giving (*vidyā-dāna*): Schelling, Schopenhauer, Sir Monier-Williams . . . the list grows long. Thus Archibald E. Gough:

The Upanishads are the loftiest utterances of Indian intelligence. Whatever value the reader may assign to the ideas they represent, they are the highest product of the ancient Indian mind, and almost the only elements of interest in Indian literature which is at every stage replete with them to saturation. . . . The Upanishads have been justly characterised . . . as the basis of the enlightened faith of India.<sup>7</sup>

Such praise from the European scholars could have drawn Sri Aurobindo to the Indian literature first and it is significant that he had the Upanishads and the Gita with him in the Alipore Jail.

In the same way, living with *The Life Divine* has meant an encounter with some Upanishad or other all the time. Whenever the volume is taken up for reading a few pages, an Upanishadic phrase is sure to arrest us. In the early days such encounters of curiosity would take me to the shelf of Sanskrit and translations from Sanskrit. When I expressed my desire to read them, my father placed in my hand *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* by R. E. Hume. There was not much poetry in Hume's literal rendering and sometimes I was disconcerted by the appearance of the term, 'verily' in almost every sentence of this sumptuous volume. But the work had a salutary effect upon me. I was driven to read the original and later on marvelled at the poetic representation of these rich seeds of Indian philosophy.

Childhood in Brahmin families sixty or seventy years ago meant certain jingles which were probably our version of nursery rhymes. While giving us an oil bath on the banks of the flowing Tambraparni river, grandmother kept our attention away from the irritations of soap-nut powder by engaging us in such jingles. "Never mind the powder. Just close your eyes. Now what are the seven worlds?" The child would feel very important and begin sonorously: *Atala-Vitala-Sutala-Rasātala-Talātala-Mahātala-Pātala*! I never knew I was imbibing with ease a very important concept in the Upanishads until I opened the chapter 'The Order of the Worlds' in Sri Aurobindo's book. There it was, a sentence from the Mundaka Upanishad:

7. Quoted in *Journey of the Upanishads to the West*, p. 263.

Seven are these worlds in which move the life-forces that are hidden within the secret heart as their dwelling-place seven by seven.<sup>8</sup>

Evidently ‘seven’ is a mystic number when it comes to making gradations in the cosmos. Once we enter *The Life Divine*, the *Atala-Vitala-Sutala* of childhood is laid aside. *That* was an introduction to *this* vast tree of cosmos. The gradations do not imply a compartmentalisation. The seven worlds of the Mundaka in which the life-forces move are explained by M. P. Pandit:

They are the worlds of Sat, Chit, Ananda, Mahas (Gnosis), Mind, Life and Matter. All the seven principles on which these worlds are formed are there embedded in each world. Thus in each world one principle is paramount, the other six are subsidiary. Each world holds in its bosom all the seven powers of the manifesting Consciousness. . . . It is a system of interrelated and interacting worlds in which the seven principles — and their respective powers — are in action.<sup>9</sup>

The sphere of cosmos which forms the base for the Aurobindonian philosophy! In this chapter we get to know that the Energy which had solidified into Matter must be a spiritual Energy and it would be silly of us if we seek any “physically valid proof of a supraphysical fact”. Sri Aurobindo minces no words:

. . . it is an irrelevant attitude of the physical mind which assumes that only the objective and physical is fundamentally real and puts aside all else as merely subjective.<sup>10</sup>

For me it is enough to know that even this body created by the five elements I have put on is actually shot through with spiritual Energy! Our Master has a way of making us feel good and worthy denizens on the earth. Well, the feeling carries a responsibility too. We have to strive to be worthy of this energy which is said to course through us, we must try to be ideal children of the Mother!

To the Mundaka (Lotus) Upanishad then. Going through this brief work, one realises how much of its diction has enriched our discourses. The Upanishad has three Lotuses (chapters). For the common reader it is a description of how Brahma taught the knowledge of the Brahman to his son Atharvan. Down the line of disciples Angir, Bharadwaja and Angiras, the knowledge had percolated. The householder Shaunaka sought illumination from Angirasa:

8. Mundaka Upanishad, II. 1.8, used as epigraph in *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 795.

9. M. P. Pandit, *Legends in The Life Divine*, p. 189.

10. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 802.



“Lord, by knowing what does all this that is become known?”

Immediately we receive the two terms ‘para’ and ‘apara’ in the answer:

“Twofold is the knowledge that must be known of which the knowers of the Brahman tell, the higher and the lower knowledge.”<sup>11</sup>

Now comes an existential shock for us. The Vedas themselves are but *apara vidya*, the lower knowledge!

Of which the lower, the Rig Veda and the Yajur Veda, and the Sama Veda and the Atharva Veda, chanting, ritual, grammar, etymological interpretation, and prosody and astronomy. And then the higher by which is known the Immutable.<sup>12</sup>

That knowledge which reveals to us the Immutable, the Absolute, the Akshara alone is *para vidya*, the higher knowledge! And this is gained not by studies but by one’s own *tapasya*. The Upanishad gives some details about the nature of this Absolute in the ‘*neti, neti*’ style:

That the invisible, that the unseizable, without connections, without hue, without eye or ear, that which is without hands or feet, eternal, pervading, which is in all things and impalpable, that which is Imperishable, that which is the womb of creatures sages behold everywhere.<sup>13</sup>

The *tapasvins* can see, since they are the seers, the visionaries. How about us? Can we draw close to an understanding of it as a first step to experiencing it in some near (or far) future? This is where the poets help us. While living with *The Life Divine* has led me to explore the riches of the Upanishads for decades, *Savitri* has lifted the veil for the fraction of a moment by its superb poetic images. Does the Absolute create and take back these worlds “as the spider puts out and gathers in”? We get close to this idea in *Savitri*.

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone  
Has called out of the Silence his mute Force  
Where she lay in the featureless and formless hush  
Guarding from Time by her immobile sleep  
The ineffable puissance of his solitude.

11. Mundaka Upanishad, I. 1. 3-4, translated by Sri Aurobindo, *Kena and Other Upanishads*, CWSA, Vol. 18, p. 131.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

13. *Ibid.*

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone  
 Has entered with his silence into space:  
 He has fashioned these countless persons of one self;  
 He has built a million figures of his power;  
 He lives in all, who lived in his Vast alone;  
 Space is himself and Time is only he.  
 The Absolute, the Perfect, the Immune,  
 One who is in us as our secret self,  
 Our mask of imperfection has assumed,  
 He has made this tenement of flesh his own,  
 His image in the human measure cast  
 That to his divine measure we might rise; . . .<sup>14</sup>

The Mundaka Upanishad has more for us. We learn of the seven flames of fire that have illumined Tantra with names such as Kali, Karali, Manojava, Sulohita, Sudhumravarna, Sphulingini, Vishwaruchi. We are told repeatedly not to become attached to rituals, not to be puffed up by knowledge and the warning is issued to sages too:

Minds bewildered who hold the oblation offered and the well dug for the greatest righteousness and know not any other highest good, on the back of heaven they enjoy the world won by their righteousness and enter again this or even a lower world.<sup>15</sup>

*Punarapi janani jātahre śayanam!* However, we are also told that a life of humility devoid of the dust of passions definitely leads us through the gate of the sun (*Suryadvara*) to the Akshara Brahman. And the sadhana-path is indicated in detail in the concluding portions of the Upanishad.

Take up the bow of the Upanishad, that mighty weapon, set to it an arrow sharpened by adoration, draw the bow with a heart wholly devoted to the contemplation of That, and O fair son, penetrate into That as thy target, even into the Immutable.<sup>16</sup>

Living with *The Life Divine* I have realised that no ordinary scholar could have written the book. Recently I saw an exhibition in Pondicherry where the typewriter

14. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 67.

15. Mundaka Upanishad, I. 2.10, translated by Sri Aurobindo, *Kena and Other Upanishads*, CWSA, Vol. 18, p. 135.

16. *Ibid.*, II. 2.3, translated by Sri Aurobindo, *Kena and Other Upanishads*, CWSA, Vol. 18, p. 139.

used by Sri Aurobindo had been displayed. It was hard to prevent the eyes from getting wet. I stood silently wondering how page after page of *The Life Divine* was typed by the Master on this machine. Would this be the truth? I am not sure. I would rather think of the machine as the mighty weapon, the *mahāstra* that the Upanishad speaks about.

The Mundaka Upanishad has given us other brilliant images too. The Universal Effulgence that gives the sun and the moon and the stars their brilliance; the two birds with brilliant plumage (*dvā suparṇā*) on a tree; the mantric phrase (part of which is) used as our national emblem, *satyameva jayate, nānṛtam*; the truthful saying that listening to lectures or bookish knowledge will never win the Self for us, *nāyam ātmā pravachanena labhyah*; and the sublime utterance which makes Sanatana Dharma the Path nonpareil for the entire humanity:

As rivers in their flowing reach their home in the ocean and cast off their names and forms, even so one who knows is delivered from name and form and reaches the Supreme beyond the Most High, even the Divine Person.<sup>17</sup>

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

17. Mundaka Upanishad, III. 2.8, translated by Sri Aurobindo, *Kena and Other Upanishads*, CWSA, Vol. 18, p. 146.

*If the mind does not respond to any suggested reasons for despondency, that is indeed a great liberation.*

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1350)

## THE TWO PATHS OF YOGA

### Tapasya and Surrender — Effort and Grace

(Continued from the issue of August 2010)

[All the passages in this section are from Nirodbaran's *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*. The page numbers refer to the 2-volume Complete Set published in 2001.]

*The Divine Grace has done something. I acted up to your advice and N felt better the whole day, as he wasn't in bed.*

It was not the Divine Grace but the Divine Force. If it had been the Grace, it would simply have said तथास्तु<sup>1</sup> and the thing would be done. As it is, last night I had to work a damned lot for this result — I only hope it will last and complete itself.

January 30, 1935

(p. 118)

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*But may I ask you why you are wasting such a lot of Force when a word could do the job? Why not cut short our labour and the patients' discomfort by saying तathāstu? Is it as easily done as it is said? If working "a damned lot" reduces the temperature only by one degree and that too for 12 hours or less, what am I to think? I would surely like to see Thy Grace operate on this poor man — certainly this is a case for the descent of Grace!*

I did not expect you to take my तथास्तु with such grim seriousness. Speaking semi-seriously, I am not here to do miracles to order, but to try to get in a new consciousness somewhere in the world — which is itself however to attempt a miracle. If physical miracles happen to tumble in in the process, well and good, but you can't present your medical pistol in my face and call on me to stand and deliver.

As for the Force, application of my force, short of the supramental, means always a struggle of forces and the success depends on (1) the strength and persistency of the force put out, (2) the receptivity of the subject, (3) the sanction of the Unmentionable — I beg your pardon, I meant the Unnameable, Ineffable and Unknowable. N's physical consciousness is rather obstinate, as you have noticed,

1. *Tathāstu*: so be it.

and therefore not too receptive. It may feel the Mother inside it, but to obey her will or force is less habitual for it.

January 31, 1935

(p. 119)

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*My friend C is extremely troubled by his own defects and is in utter despair and thinks of putting an end to his life. What should I tell him?*

You have seen my answer I suppose. You can add that despair is absurd and talks of suicide quite out of place. However a man may stumble, the Divine Grace will be there so long as he aspires for it and in the end lead him through.

June 9, 1934

(p. 53)

\*

*I seem to be contented with myself, in peace and bliss and have nothing to pray for. Is this not tamasic peace in a sattwic garb?*

It is far more favourable to spiritual progress than being miserable and depressed or in vital revolt and agitation and disturbance.

*I have ceased even to aspire, believing that you will give me inspiration. I simply refuse to make even a mental effort.*

Mental effort is one thing and aspiring and holding yourself in readiness is another.

*Need one aspire even for writing poetry?*

Aspiration is an essential part of the sadhana.

*If one waits calmly, does not the Grace descend by itself without our asking?*

Not unless one is in a state of Grace — in a psychic condition.

*If a person asks for something and doesn't get it, he is likely to get disappointed . . .*

If he asks with the vital, yes.

Your mind is too active in these matters. Get your mind silent, learn to feel within, to aspire from within — then things will come more easily.

May 10, 1934

(pp. 47-48)

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. . . *Whatever I produce is most mediocre.*

Even supposing what you produce is not something extraordinary — what does it matter? Do your best and leave it to the Power to improve your best.

*I feel quite helpless and without force and energy, without aspiration or faith. I would like to know if and how one is responsible for such a condition. Shall I persist in meditation or try to replace it by some reading?*

These things must be the result either of desires or of inertia or of vital restlessness. If you stop meditation, I do not see how you are going to get rid of these things. It is only by bringing in a higher consciousness that you can get rid of the habitual conditions of the old consciousness.

October 15, 1934

(p. 64)

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*. . . I went on till I again reached the conclusion that all efforts are useless, useless! And with that conclusion I slept a most disturbed sleep of depression, inertia and restlessness.*

*These are the thoughts of depression, but the impression is still settled in the mind that though efforts have to be made, they will bear no fruit whatsoever and they can do mighty little . . .*

One can either use efforts and then one must be patient and persevering, or one can rely on the Divine with a constant call and aspiration. But then the reliance has to be a true one not insisting on immediate fruit.

All that is the physical mind refusing to take the trouble of the labour and struggle necessary for the spiritual achievement. It wants to get the highest, but desires a smooth course all the way. “Who the devil is going to face so much trouble for getting the Divine?” — that is the underlying feeling. The difficulty with the thoughts is a difficulty every Yogi has gone through — so is the phenomenon of a little result after some days of effort. It is only when one has cleared the field and ploughed and sown and watched over it that big harvests can be hoped for.

October 24, 1934

(pp. 65-66)

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*You have shown two ways of sadhana: one of effort, another of reliance on the Divine with constant call. But aren't they really the same? How do they differ? Constant call and aspiration means the constant acceptance of Truth and*

*rejection of falsehood, which means a constant effort at rejection and acceptance since our mind being what it is, will always run after physical things and its pleasure. Is there any less effort in this method?*

Much less. The other is a constant effort to get things down and pull down what one wants. Acceptance and rejection are quite a different thing.

October 26, 1934

(p. 67)

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*What are the things, if any, that have a chance of getting manifested in me — poetry, prose, philosophy, etc., or medicine? I am asking for a yogic prophecy.*

Why bother your head? When the supramental comes, and you bloom into a superman, you will just pick up anything you want and become perfect in it with a bang.

April 13, 1935

(p. 214)

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*I don't know how to take this "bloom into a superman", except as a great sarcastic joke — striking me with my own rod, so to say. Have you not so often silenced and ridiculed my easy and lazy reliance on you to open up everything as the opening of a flower, by repeated examples of yourself, your plodding, your labour, your tapasya?. . .*

It is a joke and not a joke. One must rely on the Divine and yet do some enabling sadhana — the Divine gives the fruits not by the measure of the sadhana but by the measure of the soul and its aspiration. Also worrying does no good — I shall be this, I shall be that, what shall I be? Say "I am ready to be not what I want, but what the Divine wants me to be" — all the rest should go on that base.

April 15, 1935

(p. 215)

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*I know only you and none else. You may say, "What's the use if you don't keep true to me?" Will you also say, "No such sentiments without fulfilling the conditions"?*

The sentiment is all right, but you must either trundle along yourself or allow yourself to be kicked along (excuse the simile) towards the goal — one of the two, what the blazes!

June 30, 1935

(pp. 268-69)

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*I am as unconscious as before about the Force and its working.*

Doesn't matter. Let the force work anyhow — in time it will have its result.

*What most upsets me at present is that there is no current of aspiration.*

Low current of electricity? Well, well, let us see to the dynamo.

*Is that a very satisfying state or is there any future ray of hope?*

Any number of rays — a whole sun.

*What I would like to have is something stabilised: peace, force, purity or Presence.*

So would I, so would anybody. It is not enough to like, you must get the thing done and peg on till it is done.

*Neither can I fix my aspiration on any particular aspect. Now I want peace, now force, now Ananda . . .*

That's the confounded wobbling mobility of your mind.

*Isn't it a confusion and isn't it despairing?*

It may be a confusion but it is not *désespérant*.<sup>2</sup> (Despairing in this sense is bad English, by the way.) Plenty of people have had that before you and yet arrived all right.

*Once you gave me the formula of Peace, Force and Presence. Shall I try to stick to it?*

For mercy's sake, do. Peace first, Force tumbling into the Peace, the Presence at any stage.

*But really, Sir, how long to stagnate in this passive pool of the Immobile? Is there no chance of being as dynamic as a flood?*

2. [A French word meaning 'hopeless' — Ed.]

Not so long as you merely ratiocinate and wobble — unless the dynamo begins to work in sheer exasperation at your foolishness — which is quite possible.

September 13, 1935

(pp. 315-16)

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*The psychic fire you write about in the Synthesis of Yoga and the psychic being are identical?*

The psychic fire is the fire of aspiration, purification and tapasya which comes from the psychic being. It is not the psychic being, but a power of the psychic being.

May 15, 1935

(p. 242)

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*Personal and Impersonal are two aspects of the Divine, aren't they? How is it possible for one who realises the Impersonal to be in darkness about the existence of the Divine from which his truth is coming? And why do you say that Impersonal does not guide or help, that one has to rely on oneself absolutely?*

Whatever impersonal Truth or Light there is, you have to find it, use it, do what you can with it. It does not trouble itself to hunt after you. It is the Buddhist idea that you must do everything for yourself, that is the only way.

April 27, 1935

(p. 229)

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*But isn't it curious that Buddha did not concern himself with any play of forces?*

Why should he? It was the play of sanskaras<sup>3</sup> that interested him, the binding play of wrong ideas, and his whole aim was to get rid of that.

*He seemed to have gone in for personal effort and struggle, didn't he?*

Yes, because individual salvation was his aim and for him God and Shakti did not exist — only the Permanent above and a mechanical chain of karma below. To undo the chain of sanskaras that create the individual is the point; the individual is a knot that must undo itself by disowning all that constitutes itself. The individual

3. Fixed impressions, habitual reactions formed by one's past.

must do it, because who else is going to do it for him? There isn't anybody. All else including the Gods are only other knots of sanskaras and no knot can undo another knot — each knot must undo itself. Comprenez?

September 27, 1935

(pp. 334-35)

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*If Shakti didn't exist for Buddha, and if for the individual, his own efforts must undo the "knot", then I must say that his disciples had a very uphill job — to do everything by themselves.*

Buddhist Yoga is an uphill business like the Adwaita Vedanta. You have to do the whole thing off your own bat, and even Tota Puri, Ramakrishna's teacher in Adwaita, was after thirty years of sadhana far from his goal, so much so that he went off to the Ganges to drown himself there — only Ramakrishna and Kali interfered in a miraculous way; that at least is the story.

The Buddhist Church, however, as distinguished from the uncompromising theory of the thing, proved weak and admitted শরণ<sup>4</sup> in Buddha as well as in the Dharma and the Sangha.

September 28, 1935

(p. 335)

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*I have resorted to prayer. Well, if a prayer means a call to the Above, why doesn't the Above have the kindness to respond?*

But just answer! If it responded to everybody in all circumstances, there would by this time be 100 million poets writing away for all they were worth, let us say 1000 pages of poetry a day each and publishing them. Wouldn't it be a disaster? Wouldn't such kindness be a cruelty to all the rest of the creation?

*Throughout the history of my writing, you know that the Above has been stingily charitable to me so that all my works — very few though — have been corroded with the marks of my labour and hence fallen short of poetic excellence . . .*

Not correct — they look quite innocent as if you had written them off with ease.

*My hard labour and effort deprive me of the joy of creation and discourage me with a dread of the work. You say this is because I am an "efforter" and a*

4. sharanam: refuge.

*“hower”. All very well. Sir, but have you shown me the Grand Trunk Road of non-effort — not to speak of leading the way?*

There are two ways of arriving at the Grand Trunk Road. One is to climb and struggle and effortise, (like the pilgrim who traverses India prostrating and measuring the way with his body, — that’s the way of effort). One day you suddenly find yourself on the G.T.R when you least expect it. The other is to quiet the mind to such a point that a greater Mind of mind can speak through it. (I am not here talking of the supramental). You will do neither. Your mind refuses to be quiet — your vital kicks at the necessity of effort. One too active, the other too lazy. How can I show you the G.T.R when you refuse either way of reaching it?

*Or would you say that a beginner can’t, at a leap, settle on the top?*

Of course not!

March 29, 1936

(pp. 542-43)

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*... as you said, “If you wait for things to happen, there is no reason why they should happen at all”, has shattered all my imagination, illusion, fancy, speculation about the Force and the Grace.*

*You deal too much in paradoxes and contradictory statements, for my little brain to understand. You say, “within there is a soul and above there is Grace.” Is it not contrary to the foregoing one?*

I don’t see how it is contrary. Naturally the soul and the Grace are the two ends, but that does not mean that there is to be nothing between. You seem to have interpreted the sentence “There is a dawdling soul within and a sleeping Grace above. When the Grace awakes, the soul will no more dawdle, because it will be abducted.” Of course, it can happen like that, but, as I put it, there is no reason why it should. Generally the soul wakes up, rubs its eyes and says “Hallo, where’s that Grace?” and begins fumbling around for it and pulling at things in the hope that Grace is at the other end of the said things. Finally it pulls at something by accident and the Grace comes toppling down full tilt from God knows where. That’s the usual style — but there are others.

May 2, 1936

(pp. 579-80)

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*... about Yoga: you know how much progress I have made. I don't blame you. I can't meditate, I can't pray, I can't aspire. Without them, I don't see how I am to get anything. Why not do them — you ask? If I could, would I have troubled you with all these wailings? Since I can't, I have no peace, no joy! You can't give them without any urge or aspiration for them, can you? I know, I understand, I gather how much one has to aspire for all these and then the result is sometimes zero. Then if one can't aspire at all, where is his hope? . . .*

*Sometimes I think — don't bother your head. Eat, drink, be merry — with yogic reservations! no thought, no worry. I thought I would go on chatting, eating, reading novels, etc. But I can't. I don't get peace, though I find some are all right. Anilkumar, for instance (I don't mean any offence, though) reads novels the whole night practically. How can he? He must have got something. If I could do it, I would, but how would that bring me peace, progress in sadhana? As you have said, personal effort is absolutely imperative and a sustained effort too, until your Grace descends. God knows what will happen then! I don't see anywhere that effort nor the capacity nor even the will for it. So with what shall I hope, on what shall I rely? Neither can I try it myself nor can I believe that you will do everything for me. Hence all these precious agitations, disbelief. . . I am not meant for any big endeavour.*

*Give an answer that will pierce the mind-soul. By an answer only. I don't expect more!*

As there are several lamentations today besieging me, I have very little time to deal with each separate Jeremiad. Do I understand rightly that your contention is this, “I can't believe in the Divine doing everything for me because it is by my own mighty and often fruitless efforts that I write or do not write poetry and have made myself into a poet”? Well, that itself is *épatant*, magnificent, unheard of. It has always been supposed since the infancy of the human race that while a verse-maker can be made or self-made, a poet cannot. “*Poeta nascitur non fit*”, a poet is born not made, is the dictum that has come down through the centuries and millenniums and was thundered into my ears by the first pages of my Latin Grammar. The facts of literary history seem to justify this stern saying. But here in Pondicherry we have tried, not to manufacture poets, but to give them birth, a spiritual, not a physical birth into the body. In a number of instances we are supposed to have succeeded — one of these is your noble self — or if I am to believe the man of sorrows in you, your abject, miserable, hopeless and ineffectual self. But how was it done? There are two theories, it seems — one that it was by the Force, the other that it was done by your own splashing, kicking, groaning Herculean efforts. Now, sir, if it is the latter, if you have done that unprecedented thing, made yourself by your own laborious strength into a poet (for your earlier efforts were only very decent literary exercises), then, sir, why the deuce are you so abject, self-depreciatory, miserable? Don't say that it

is only a poet who can produce no more than a few poems in many months. Even to have done that, to have become a poet at all, a self-made poet is a miracle over which we can only say ‘Sabash! Sabash!’<sup>5</sup> without ever stopping. If your effort could do that, what is there that it can’t do? All miracles can be effected by it and a giant self-confident faith ought to be in you. On the other hand if, as I aver, it is the Force that has done it, what then can it not do? Here too faith, a giant faith is the only logical conclusion. So either way there is room only for Hallelujahs, none for Jeremiads. Q.E.D.

By the way what is this story about my four or five hours’ concentration a day for several years before anything came down? Such a thing never happened, if by concentration you mean laborious meditation. What I did was four or five hours a day pranayam — which is quite another matter. And what flow do you speak of? The flow of poetry came down while I was doing pranayam, not some years afterwards. If it is the flow of experiences, that did come after some years, but after I had stopped the Pranayam for a long time and was doing nothing and did not know what to do or where to turn once all my efforts had failed. And it came as a result not of years of Pranayam or concentration, but in a ridiculously easy way, by the grace either of a temporary guru (but it wasn’t that, for he was himself bewildered by it) or by the grace of the eternal Brahman and afterwards by the grace of Mahakali and Krishna. So don’t try to turn me into an argument against the Divine; that attempt will be perfectly ineffective.

I am obliged to stop — if I go on, there will be no Pranam till 12 o’clock. So send your Jeremiad back tonight and I will see what else to write. Have written this in a headlong hurry — I hope it is not full of lapsus calami.

January 20, 1936

(pp. 458-60)

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*I send you the “Jeremiad”, Sir. My observations are reserved. Anyway, you have succeeded in almost chasing away the clouds of depression.*

To continue. The fact that you don’t feel a force does not prove that it is not there. The steam-engine does not feel a force moving it, but the force is there. A man is not a steam-engine? He is very little better, for he is conscious only of some bubbling on the surface which he calls himself and is absolutely unconscious of all the subconscient, subliminal, superconscient forces moving him. (This is a fact which is being more and more established by modern psychology though it has got hold only of the lower forces and not the higher, so you need not turn up your rational nose at it.) He twitters intellectually (= foolishly,) about the surface results and

attributes them all to his “noble self”, ignoring the fact that his noble self is hidden far away from his own vision behind the veil of his dimly sparkling intellect and the reeking fog of his vital feelings, emotions, impulses, sensations and impressions. So your argument is utterly absurd and futile. Our aim is to bring the secret forces out and unvalled into the open so that instead of getting some shadows or lightnings of themselves out through the veil or being wholly obstructed, they may “pour down” and “flow in a river”. But to expect that all at once is a presumptuous demand which shows an impatient ignorance and inexperience. If they begin to trickle at first, that is sufficient to justify the faith in a future downpour. You admit that you once or twice felt a “force coming down and delivering a poem out of me” (your opinion about its worth or worthlessness is not worth a cent, that is for others to pronounce). That is sufficient to blow the rest of your Jeremiad into smithereens; it proves that the force was and is there and at work and it is only your sweating Herculean labour that prevents you feeling it. Also it is the trickle that gives assurance of the possibility of the downpour. One has only to go on and by one’s patience deserve the downpour or else, without deserving, stick on till one gets it. In Yoga itself the experience that is a promise and foretaste but gets shut off till the nature is ready for the fulfilment is a phenomenon familiar to every Yogin when he looks back on his past experience. Such were the brief visitations of Ananda you had some time before. It does not matter if you have not a leechlike tenacity — leeches are not the only type of Yogins. If you can stick anyhow or get stuck that is sufficient. The fact that you are not Sri Aurobindo (who said you were?) is an inept irrelevance. One needs only to be oneself in a reasonable way and shake off the hump when it is there or allow it to be shaken off without clinging to it with a “leechlike tenacity” worthy of a better cause.

All the rest is dreary stuff of the tamasic ego. As there is a rajasic ego which shouts “What a magnificent powerful sublime divine individual I am, unique and peerless” (of course there are gradations in the pitch,) so there is a tamasic ego which squeaks “What an abject, hopeless, worthless, incapable, unluckily unendowed and uniquely impossible creature I am, — all, all are great, Aurobindos, Dilips, Anilkumars (great by an unequalled capacity of novel-reading and self-content, according to you), but I, oh I, oh I!” That’s your style. It is this tamasic ego (of course it expresses itself in various ways at various times, I am only rendering your present pitch) which is responsible for the Man of Sorrows getting in. It’s all bosh — stuff made up to excuse the luxury of laziness, melancholy and despair. You are in that bog just now because you have descended faithfully and completely into the inert stupidity and die-in-the-mudness of your physical consciousness which, I admit, is a specimen! But so after all is everybody’s, only there are different kinds of specimens. What to do? Dig yourself out if you can; if you can’t, call for ropes and wait till they come. If God knows what will happen when the Grace descends, that is enough, isn’t it? That you don’t know is a fact which may be baffling to your

— well, your intelligence, but is not of great importance — any more than your supposed unfitness. Who ever was fit, for that matter — fitness and unfitness are only a way of speaking; man is unfit and a misfit (so far as things spiritual are concerned) — in his outward nature. But within there is a soul and above there is Grace. “This is all you know or need to know” and, if you don’t, well, even then you have at least somehow stumbled into the path and have got to remain there till you get haled along it far enough to wake up to the knowledge. Amen.

January 21, 1936

(pp. 460-62)

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*A most stimulating formula I find in your letter — “within there is a soul and above there is Grace” — about which you say “This is all you know or need to know.” Is that all really?*

For anyone who wants the spiritual life, yes, it is enough.

*Can one arrive at what is called “a state of grace” simply by sticking or simply because there is a soul within?*

Yes, one can, plenty of people have done it.

*But then the soul is there in everybody and Grace is above everybody. How is it that people have turned their backs on the Divine?*

Because of rajasic ego, ambition, vanity — because they believed in their own efforts and not in the Grace.

*I have never heard that Grace did everything. And, where it seems to do so, how do we know that someone has not done sadhana in his past life? You can’t deny it, can you?*

I could point you at many instances in spiritual history — beginning with the famous Jagai Madhai. But it is no use against a brain that does not want to admit that  $2 + 2 = 4$ .

You can’t affirm it, can you?

*Simple sticking won’t do. In that case our Asram cat Bushy would have a chance.*



Of course she has — of rising to a new grade of birth with all in her favour in the next life.

*Because we have to make a Herculean effort in sadhana I rather hesitate to believe much in Grace. Is not Grace something that comes down unconditionally?*

It does not depend on conditions — which is rather a different thing from an unconditional surrender to any and every sadhak.

*Even Ramakrishna's baby cat type of sadhak has to make a decisive movement of surrender and compel the rest of the being to obedience, which, let me tell you, Sir, is the most difficult thing on earth.*

I never heard that the baby cat was like that — if it were it would not be a baby cat. (It is the baby monkey trying to become a baby cat who does that.) But you have evidently so great a knowledge of spiritual things (surpassing mine and Ramakrishna's) that I can only bow my head and pass humbly on to people with less knowledge.

*If anybody can do the baby cat surrender at a stroke, it is not because his "unfinished curve" in the past life has finished it in this.*

Hail, Rishi, all-knower! Tell us all about our past lives.

*Now, if the soul instead of sleeping has to aspire etc. to call down its Lord the Grace, where do you see that aspiration in me? If you build my spiritual castle on those one or two minutes' brief visitations of Ananda, and that too once or twice only, excluding the moments of darshan of your great self, which also have been sometimes marred in these three years — and if you build my poetic mansion on little trickles, then I can only say — well, what shall I say?*

Better say nothing. It will sound less foolish.

*You have often inveighed against my asking you not to use yourself as an argument against the Divine. But what is the history of your sadhana in your own words — a Herculean practice of Pranayam, concentration and what not and then after years and years of waiting the Grace of Brahman. Still you are pañcamukha<sup>6</sup> in praise of Grace!*

6. Literally "five mouths", meaning full of praise.

What a wooden head! What is the use of saying things if you deliberately misinterpret what I write? I said clearly that the pranayam brought me nothing of any kind of spiritual realisation. I had stopped it long before. The Brahman experience came when I was groping for a way, doing no sadhana at all, making no effort because I didn't know what effort to make, all having failed. Then in three days I got an experience which most Yogis get only at the end of a long Yoga, got it without wanting or trying for it, got it to the surprise of Lele who was trying to get me something quite different. But I don't suppose you are able to understand — so I say no more. I can only look mournfully at your ununderstanding pate.

*Calling for ropes and waiting till they come is all right, but who knows what may happen meanwhile. Won't the expeditionist expire in the jungles, in trying to scale the Himalayas?*

Who asks him to explore the jungles (of his own logic, I suppose) or climb the Himalayas? What has this to do with what I said? I did not tell you to make Herculean efforts.

*I remember instances where people have failed in their sadhana and gone away. The Divine couldn't do much because he says he doesn't propose to do anything against the will of the individual, which means aspiration, rejection, surrender, before the Grace comes down.*

It can mean also waiting on the Grace of the Divine! The will of the individual in this respect does not mean anything like that. If the will of the individual is towards perdition, if his ego becomes hostile to the Divine, then the Divine is not bound to show him a Grace he does not want at all and kicks at.

*It seems to me that behind any difficult endeavour, there is the seeking for Ananda which acts as the motive-power, isn't it so?*

Not that I know of!

*Take the case of X. My God, to think that after all those Napoleonic efforts in poetry, and having succeeded, one is still driven to madness because, after all, one has obtained nothing spiritually in spite of aspiration, meditation, etc. — this is blood-curdling and at once smashes your theory of Karmayoga through poetry.*

Napoleonic rubbish! He was the worst poet in the world before he came here and here immediately as soon as I put my force he began writing beautiful poems. Yet it

was by his Napoleonic efforts that he did it? Imbecility, thy name is ego.

I was not putting any Karmayoga theory — I was simply mocking at your absurd idea that it was by your own mighty efforts that you had succeeded in writing poetry which any good judge (you are not one) would call genuine poetry.

*I would not like to invite the same inevitable fate on my weak bony shoulders.  
So in every way is there room for Hallelujah or for Jeremiad.*

All right, sir, Jeremy away.

*To think that five or six years more of barren desert stretch between me and  
the Divine Grace, coagulates my blood!*

Coagulate! coagulate! coagulate!

*Please give an answer to these points — if no time tonight, tomorrow.*

Non monsieur, — j'ai d'autres chats à fouetter. I have other cats to whip — I can't go on whipping one cat all the time. A few lashes in the margin are all I can spare for you just now.

There are three main possibilities for the sadhak —

1. To wait on the Grace and rely on the Divine.
2. To do everything himself like the full Adwaitin and the Buddhist.
3. To take the middle path, go forward by aspiration and rejection etc. helped by the Force. The first, it appears, is too easy for you to do it, the second is too difficult for you to do, the third being easy in parts and difficult in parts is as impossible for you to do it. Right? Amen!!!

January 24, 1936

(pp. 465-69)

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*Very well, Sir, whip the cats and dogs, bulls and hogs, to your heart's content!  
Only the whipping has been rather severe in my case, but no help since I have  
surrendered my life and death at your feet. O cruel one, I shall accept all  
whipping as a gift of your compassion.*

Righto.

*I was grieved to see that after writing such a lot, you struck off all of it — it  
would have perhaps helped me. My difficulties run parallel to X's, I find; only  
there's a difference of degree.*

Say rather that you have borrowed your difficulties from him or, say, run in his wake — a big steamer throwing a yacht into stormy waters.

*But he has the great advantage of having a magnificent vital.*

You have a sturdy but very sluggish one.

*X has on the one hand your love, affection, letters, etc., on the other his sufferings, paroxysms of despair, depression, etc.*

His paroxysms of despair were not caused originally by the Yoga but by disappointments of the vital, — this one's behaviour, that one's refusal to be under his influence, ingratitude etc. These things had nothing to do with Yoga. But the devil once admitted turned itself upon his sadhana also.

*He has passed seven years here, Sir, and still he groans and groans . . .*

And why please? Because he has never practised my Yoga, he has done his own. He has always put up some extremely traditional ideas about Yoga, jap, bhakti etc. etc. and challenged my own teachings with his reasoning mind which had no real conception of the things they meant. It is with great difficulty that I could sometimes get him to any direction by a secret pull and when I could do it he has always made some progress — which afterwards he refused to admit. And yet he made my incapacity as a Guru and the difficulty of my sadhana responsible for his failure — when he had never even given it a trial. That is a thing others beside him have done, also.

*Don't tell me that because he takes butter and tea, enjoys good company that the Grace is afraid of coming down, for that would not solve the problem.*

There is no problem at all. It is simply because he has been pulling his own way with a savage tenacity instead of allowing his Guru to lead him. He now speaks of making his surrender. If he does it inwardly as well as outwardly, there may well be some considerable change.

*Just one word about his labouring at it. I admit he had no vestige of poetry before he came here and that the Force has done it. But how shall I forget that he had to labour a lot at it?*

It is ridiculous to talk of his labouring at it. He has an easy flow which ninety-one poets out of a hundred would envy him. The only thing he laboured over was his

prosody and metrical experiments, but prosody is not poetry. The rhythm, the capacity for chhanda came to him at once when he started writing here — although till then he had been absolutely and hopelessly inefficient in that respect.

*I admit the Force, but you have to admit the big personal contribution, the collaboration. If you aver that the contribution also was done by the Force you will throw me into shallow or deep waters.*

I don't admit it. It is a legend he has foisted on you. If you mean his writing for many hours a day that is no labour when one has the capacity. That is use of the power given, it is not effort and straining to get the power.

*Anyway, I suppose I am again talking rot. These are fundamental wooden-headed difficulties.*

Terrible rot.

*Lastly, I have embraced your waiting on the Grace. I'll now dance and prance. A little khichuri, ālubhājā, a little harmless platonic love. Agreed?*

I have no objection to alubhaja, but to the devil with your platonic love!

January 25, 1936

(pp. 470-72)

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*... In Yoga, you say surrender, and in poetry — this personal effort business? No, Sir, no!*

Wait a minute — Where have I said that there is to be no personal effort in Yoga. Kindly read the passages in The Mother about tamasic surrender and the place of personal effort in the sadhana.

March 20, 1937

(p. 865)

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*I am satisfied with the answers exposing brilliantly the symptoms and providing the diagnosis. Now the prognosis and the treatment.*

That is more difficult. Panacea there is, but only one, which you have indicated in your today's poem.<sup>7</sup>

7. A Bengali poem, 'Nirbhar', published in *Swapnadīp*, p. 19.

*How should I develop the push, the harmony and resolution of the central being, and how should I wake up the vital enthusiasm for poetry? If there is one workable formula that will be a panacea, so much the better.*

For the rest there are several formulas which are not panaceas. The first is to get into touch with your central being and get it into action. That central may be the psychic, it may be the Self above with the mental Purusha as its delegate. Either of these once in action does the harmonising etc.

The second way is to act with your mental will on these things, not allowing yourself to drift and not getting upset by difficulties and checks, calling on the Mother's Force to assist and finally use your will. There are others, but I stop here.

*I want urgently that part of the Divine which will help me keep my poise, calm, peace against any assault from the vital quarter . . .*

It is what is trying to come down in the block condition.

August 9, 1936

(pp. 650-51)

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*In your yesterday's answer you wrote that I have indicated the panacea in my poem. I thought I spoke of faith and surrender! Is that it?*

You described very admirably the attitude of perfect *nirbhar*<sup>8</sup> which is the great secret of the most perfect kind of sadhana.

August 10, 1936

(p. 651)

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