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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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ALL HERE IS SPIRIT

All here is Spirit self-moved eternally
For Matter is its seeming or its form,
A finite motion of Infinity
Built up by energy's electric storm,

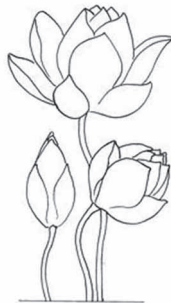
A flux of solid instability
Whirled into shape by a tremendous Force
That labours out the world's fabric endlessly,
Creates and then destroys without remorse

Titan and worm, the dew-drop and the sea,
Our fragile bodies like the aeoned star,
But through it all remains immortally
The secret spirit we for ever are.

Matter is Spirit's semblance glamorous
Self-woven for its own field and robe and house.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 597)



SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS ON THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of April 2014)

RELATION BETWEEN THE MOTHER AND HER CHILDREN

Consecration to the Mother

Sometimes when I sit in meditation, I say "Ma — Ma — Ma." Then everything becomes quiet and I feel great peace inside and outside me. Even in the atmosphere around me, I hear "Ma — Ma — Ma." Is this real or is it only echoes?

The atmosphere you carry around you is part of your consciousness as much as the rest that you feel inside you. When you repeat the name of the Mother, it begins to echo in all your consciousness, outside as well as inside you. What you experience therefore is quite true and it is a good experience.

*

When I asked what attitude I should hold during the silence of the mind, you replied, "Consecration." Please explain this to me in a wider sense.

It means the devoting of all that comes to you, all your experiences and progress to the Mother.

What should I do to keep the silence alert and constant while reading, talking and working.

The same thing — do all with a quiet mind, not throwing yourself out in what you do, but seeing quietly what is done and what happens.

16 January 1934

The Mother's Love

There is no need to ask for pardon, for the Mother has not in the least been angry or displeased with you. You may be sure of her love always.

29 September 1933

*

No more shall I seek signs of the Mother's love in an outward way. What difference does it make if she touches me a little or more or does not touch me at all? If the love is received properly within, that alone is the true thing. If it is not received or if it is diffused or dispersed or misdirected after receiving it, that is like throwing pearls before swine.

Yes, that is the truth and it is the attitude every sadhak should take.

8 May 1934

*

We all want Mother's love, but I wonder how many of us truly love the Mother. Where indeed do we see one-pointed, ever-sacrificing, never-failing love? Who has love only for the Divine?

It does not mean that there is no love, but that the love is mixed up and covered with egoism, demand and vital movements. At least that is the case with many. There are some of course who have no love at all, or "love" — if it can be called so — only for what they get, one or two who love truly — but in a great many there is a psychic spark hidden in much smoke. The smoke has to be got rid of so that the spark may have a chance of growing into a blaze.

9 November 1934

*

Do not think whether people agree with you or do not agree with you or whether you are good or bad, but think only that "the Mother loves me and I am the Mother's." If you base your life on that thought, everything will soon become easy.

30 April 1935

*

It is because of the thoughts about others and your "badness" that you feel far from the Mother. All the time she is very near to you and you to her. If you take the position I told you and make it the basis of your life, "the Mother loves me and I am hers", the curtain would soon disappear, for it is made of these thoughts and nothing else.

1 May 1935

*

The Mother loves because she is Love and cannot but love. Still, we feel that she cannot love as we do, and on our part we cannot bear the constancy and wideness of her Love.

Obviously, if people expect the ordinary kind of love from the Mother they must be disappointed — the love based on the vital and its moods. But that is just the kind of love that has to be overpassed in Yoga or transformed into something else.

14 March 1936

*

Certainly, it is not necessary for you to become “good” in order that the Mother may give you her love. Her love is always there and the imperfections of human nature do not count against that love. The only thing is that you must become aware of it always there. For that it is necessary for the psychic to come in front — for the psychic knows, while the mind, vital and physical look only at surface appearances and misinterpret them. It is that for which the Mother’s force is working, and whenever the psychic comes near the surface, you have felt love and nearness coming up. But it needs time to prepare the other parts so that they also may know and feel. Therefore the patience is necessary and the confidence that through all the delays and difficulties of the sadhana the Mother is leading you and will surely lead you home to her.

24 June 1936

*

X is probably making two mistakes — first, expecting outward expressions of love from the Mother; second, looking for progress instead of concentrating on openness and surrender without demand of a return. These are two mistakes which sadhaks are constantly making. If one opens, if one surrenders, then as soon as the nature is ready, progress will come of itself; but the personal concentration for progress brings difficulties and resistance and disappointment because the mind is not looking at things from the right angle. The Mother has a special kindness for X and every day at Pranam she is trying to put a sustaining force upon him. He must learn to be very quiet in mind and vital and consecrate himself so that he may become conscious as well as receive. The Divine Love, unlike the human, is deep and vast and silent; one must become quiet and wide to be aware of it and reply to it. He must make it his whole object to be surrendered so that he may become a vessel and instrument — leaving it to the Divine Wisdom and Love to fill him with what is needed. Let him also fix this in the mind not to insist that in a given time he must progress, develop, get realisations and experiences — whatever time it takes, he must be prepared to

wait and persevere and make his whole life an aspiration and an opening for the one thing only, the Divine. To give oneself is the secret of sadhana, not to demand and acquire a thing. The more one gives oneself, the more the power to receive will grow. But for that all impatience and revolt must go; all suggestions of not getting, not being helped, not being loved, of going away, of abandoning life or the spiritual endeavour must be rejected.

1 September 1936

*

As for the feelings about the Mother and that her love is only given for a return in work or to those who can do sadhana well, that is the usual senseless idea of the vital-physical mind and has no value.

17 January 1937

*

It is not Mother who makes you cry. It is forces from the vital Nature that make you sorrowful and think of dying and of the past. What comes from Mother is love and light and peace and joy and the spiritual life of the future.

*

Never mind about the purity of the body. The love of the Mother purifies both heart and body — if the soul's aspiration is there, the body also is pure. What happened in the past does not in the least matter.

Inner Union and Outer Relation with the Mother

Some part or parts of my being seem to be trying to live in the Mother all the time, and to leave the other parts completely in the hands of the Mother's Force.

That did not succeed in the past.

I mean "live" not in an impersonal sense, but live into her very manifested physical form. In such a case, is it still necessary to aspire for bringing down her Force?

I do not know how you are going to *live into* the manifested physical form. To live in the Mother's consciousness even to the physical with the manifested form as the centre of this unity is possible. Perhaps you mean that? But how are you going to do that if the other parts are left to remain as they are? They will go on pulling you out of the true consciousness as they do now. And how are they to be changed if the Mother's Force is not there in them to change them?

14 January 1936

*

It is true that the Mother is one in many forms, but the distinction between the outer and the inner Mother must not be made too trenchant; for she is not only one, but the physical Mother contains all the others in herself and in her is established the communication between the inner and the outer existence. But to know the outer Mother truly one must know what is within her and not look at the outer appearances only. That is only possible if one meets her with the inner being and grows into her consciousness — those who seek an outer relation only cannot do that.

10 August 1936

*

The spiritual union must begin from within and spread out from there; it cannot be based on anything exterior — for, if so based, the union cannot be spiritual or real. That is the great mistake which so many make here: they put the whole emphasis on the external vital or physical relation with the Mother, insist on a vital interchange or else physical contact and when they do not get it to their satisfaction, enter into all kinds of disturbances, revolt, doubt, depression. This is a wrong viewpoint altogether and has caused much obstruction and trouble. The mind, vital, physical can participate and are intended to participate in the union, but for that they must be submitted to the psychic, themselves psychicised; the union must be an essentially psychic and spiritual union spreading out to the mind, vital and physical. Even the physical must be able to feel invisibly the Mother's closeness, her concrete presence — then alone can the union be truly based and completed and then alone can any physical closeness or contact find its true value and fulfil its spiritual purpose. Till then any physical contact is of value only so far as it helps the inner sadhana, but how much can be given and what will help or hinder, the Mother only can judge, the sadhak cannot be the judge — he will be led away by the desires and lower vital ego, as so many have been in fact. Such means of help by physical contact as the Mother had established have been largely spoiled by the sadhaks' misuse of them, the wrong attitude of which I have spoken. When the vital demand is there with its claims and revolts and takes the desire for the exterior contact or

closeness as a cause or occasion for these things, then it becomes a serious hindrance to the development of the inner union, it does not help at all. The sadhaks always imagine in their ignorance that when the Mother sees more of one person than of another, it is because of personal preference and that she is giving more love and help to that person. That is altogether a mistake. Physical closeness and contact can be a severe ordeal for the sadhak; it may raise the vital demands, claims, jealousies etc. to a high pitch; it may on the other hand leave him satisfied with an outer relation without making any serious effort for the inner union; or it becomes for him something mechanical, because ordinary and familiar, and for any inner purpose quite ineffective — these things are not only possible but have happened in many cases. The Mother knows that and her arrangements in this matter are therefore dictated by quite other reasons than those which are attributed to her.

The only safe thing is to concentrate on the inner union foremost and altogether, to make that the one thing to be achieved and to leave aside all claims and demands for anything external, remaining satisfied with what the Mother gives and relying wholly on her wisdom and solicitude. It ought to be quite evident that a desire which raises revolt, doubt, depression, desperate struggles cannot be a true part of the spiritual movement. If your mind tells you that it is the right thing, then surely you must distrust the mind's suggestions. Concentrate entirely on the one thing needful and put away, if they come, all ideas and forces that want to disturb it or make you deviate. The vital assent to these things has to be overcome, but for that the first thing is to refuse all mental assent, for the mental support gives them a greater force than they would otherwise have. Fix the right attitude in the mind and the deeper emotional being — cling to that when contrary forces arise and by your firmness in that psychic attitude repel them.

14 March 1937

Relation with the Mother and with Others

I feel hurt when somebody tells me I am doing something wrong in my sadhana. I get restless and depressed. But today by the Mother's compassion, I can see that I have been childish and stupid. Is my experience true?

You ought to train yourself not to mind what people say — for what they say is also childish and stupid. Your sadhana — and your life also — lies between you and the Mother; other people do not matter.

23 March 1933

I have a deep regard for X and an inner affection for him. Now when I begin to meditate by thinking of the Mother, I sometimes see him meditating with us. This brings a happy feeling, yet I worry lest it should bring any harm in my sadhana. I hope it will not bring trouble.

If you bring somebody in between you and the Mother, it is bound to give trouble.

5 April 1933

*

It was your mistake to listen to what people say about you and X and Y and attach any value to their foolish chatter. X did not grow serious with you because of that. He was puzzled by your change of manner, the stiffness of your attitude towards him and your apparently diminished interest in the work. It is what the Mother says that is true and matters and not what people say; if you listen to what people say, you will lose touch with the Mother's consciousness. It is because of that that these thoughts have come back on you about your badness and the rest of it. The Mother had told you to work freely with X; she told you that his influence was good for you, and for many days you had peace and joy and freedom from the restless mind and you had the psychic opening. Now you must go back to that and do as you were doing before. Turn to the Mother only and let her consciousness and her will work in you. Then you will recover what you had got, silence the mind and be free.

29 April 1933

*

X would like to have a "pure" relation with me, a relation of quiet friendliness. But when I look within, I find always the same answer in the heart — no more relation of any kind with anyone, except the one, sole relation with the Mother, an undivided devotion of all of myself solely to the Mother. The vital clamours for relation, but let it. The one who speaks within has only an un-mixed aspiration for union with the Mother. I shall follow whatever guidance you give me.

To be turned wholly to the Mother and have nothing but friendly relations with the sadhaks, the same for all, is a counsel of perfection; but not many can carry it out — hardly one here and there. Yet to have that in tendency is to have the real turn towards the one-pointedness of sadhana; but people take time to arrive at it.

12 July 1935

*

Yes, it is the thing to be attained — not to receive any other influences than the Divine, as human nature ordinarily does. Then under the sole influence of the Mother's Light and Force, all that has to be changed in the nature can be quietly and smoothly changed, all that has to be developed can be developed without disturbance or trouble.

3 June 1936

*

The direct relation with the Mother is always open to you and it is there whenever you can feel it; for it is a thing of the inner being. Whenever you go deep within yourself you find it; it has to come out and govern the outer nature and life. That is why I want you to give time for going inside and for inner progress in the sadhana. The relation with X which the Mother thought of establishing was of two friends and fellow workers in her work, it was never intended that she should be between you and the Mother. In Y's case there was a help to be given to you so that you might not be carried away by the attacks from which you suffered and might have time and support till you could reach a point at which you could seek the Mother's presence within you and with you. That you can do now and there is no reason why anyone should be asked to intervene in any way — our work is directly in you and upon you and not through anyone.

22 December 1936

False Suggestions of the Mother's Displeasure

It is not surprising that you could not find out what you had done to make the Mother change her attitude towards you, and this for two good reasons, — first, that you had done nothing, and, second, that the Mother's feeling for you and her attitude had not changed at all — *not in any smallest respect, not in the least shadow of a degree*. She has the same care and love as she always had and during the last few days of which you speak, they were not clouded for a moment.

Then you ask, if so, why do I feel like this or like that? I can only answer that, in their origin, these were not your own feelings at all, but rather ideas, impressions, impulses pushed into your lower vital from outside; your mistake has been to admit them and identify them as your own — from want of knowledge and experience in these matters. There are certain vital forces of this lower vital plane that are constantly wandering about the Asram and trying to push their movements now on one, now on another, now on several at a time. The processus is always the same. First, suggestions: the Mother has done this or not done that, she has said this or not said that, she has had this or that thought about me or feeling towards me, she is displeased

with me, unfair to me, partial to others etc. etc. etc.; next, discouragement, wounded feelings, jealousy, despondency, revolt or any other kindred vital downfall or upheaval; result, the impulse to withdraw from the Mother, not to give her flowers or take flowers, to go away from soup or Pranam, not to come there, to shut oneself away from her altogether, to give up the Yoga, to go away — or worse. I give you the whole round in its ground plan, omitting many variations, so that you may be on your guard the next time these suggestions try to come. If you don't want to be misled by them and to go through much quite groundless and unnecessary disturbance and trouble, you must recognise them immediately they come, cast them out by the neck or break their backs as you would a snake's.

For they are in their nature not only irrational, but strongly mechanical. Irrational, because they have no true ground in reality. They are ready enough to seize on some (usually trifling) outward appearances and twist them this way or that in order to convince the easily deceived physical mind; they will even create circumstances and make them appear to have that colour. But if they cannot find or create, they will go on just as merrily with no other ground than imaginations or impressions which they persuade their victims to take for realities. And they are mechanical because, once they can make the mind their field, they always recur with the same inevitable round of suggestions, the same ideas, the same feelings, the same impulses, the same actions in consequence. It is like a recurrent illness with always the same series of symptoms and the same "course". And the object is always the same, to create a distance between the sadhak and the Mother and so to break the sadhana. It is a great mistake to think, as some do, that the Mother in such cases pushes the sadhaka away from her; on the contrary, it is he who pushes her away from him under the influence of these forces and believes all the time — for they have a great power of blinding the mind and clouding the judgment — that she is to blame.

To show how these suggestions mislead once one starts listening to them, I may instance the matter of your sister's letters. The Mother and I have always accepted without reservation your sister's coming and neither today nor at any other time had she the least idea in her mind against it. On the contrary, when you came in the midst of a hard and trying morning, she gave you full time, heard all you had to say, made her own suggestions and gave her full acquiescence. What more could she have done? And yet you have this suggestion made to you that she does not really want, that she is not frank, that she is cold to you about the matter. Why? Precisely because there was this predisposing influence at work on the lookout for any pretext to mislead you, — any, even less than a shadow's shadow.

I must ask you therefore to dismiss this kind of suggestion, these feelings and all the cycle in future the moment they try to come. Never mind what circumstances or justifications they may allege. Nothing is more dangerous than the inferences of the physical mind trying to build up conclusions upon outward appearances — they have nine chances out of ten of being false. One must learn to distrust hasty

conclusions from surface appearances — is not that the first condition of true knowledge? — and learn to see and know things from within.

You ask how to stem these movements? To begin with, observe three rules:

(1) Keep always confidence in the Mother's care and love — trust in them and distrust every suggestion, every appearance that seems to contradict.

(2) Reject immediately every feeling, every impulse that makes you draw back from the Mother — such as that about the Pranam — from your true relation with her, from inner nearness, from a simple and straightforward confidence in her.

(3) Do not lay too much stress on outward signs — your observation of them may easily mislead you. Keep yourself open to her and feel with your heart — the inner heart, not the surface vital desire, but the heart of true emotion, — then you are more likely to find her and be always near her in your self and receive what constantly she is working to give you.

27 June 1931

*

When I see the Mother in the evening, I notice that some being in me is trying to bring catastrophes, such as the idea, "Mother does not look at you", even though she may be looking at me. This has become very common. I always try my best to reject it, but still it comes constantly and forcibly and makes my consciousness disordered. I pray that the Mother may remove it. What is this being — is it vital?

Yes, it is a being of falsehood from the vital world which tries to make one take its false suggestions for the truth and disturb the consciousness, and get it to leave the straight path and either get depressed or turned against the Mother. If you reject and refuse to listen or believe always, it will disappear.

30 March 1933

*

All these [*suggestions of ill treatment, severity, lack of support*] are the mere ravings of the vital Force that attacks the mind with its lying suggestions until it succeeds in getting the sadhak to turn away from the Mother and against her. There is a part of the vital that accepts it, luxuriates in an exaggerated misery and suggestions of personal tragedy and catastrophe, the blame for which it wants to lay on the Divine. If you want to get rid of these attacks, it is this part of your vital being that you must change, its acceptance of these false suggestions, its want of fortitude in facing the difficulties of the sadhana. If you refused to indulge this vital tamasic tendency and the voices of darkness that come with it, there would be no such violent ups and downs in the sadhana.

24 January 1934

*

It is of course the resistance of the old vital in the past that is being redeemed which creates this irritation and these imaginations about the Mother's displeasure. For as a matter of fact there was no dissatisfaction against you in the Mother's mind and this idea is usually a suggestion to the sadhak's mind from the Force that wants to create the wish to go or any other kind of discontent or depression. It is a curious form of delusion that has taken root, as it were, in the Asram atmosphere and is cherished not so much by the individual vital as by the forces that work upon it to break, if possible, the sadhana. You must not allow any harbourage to that or else it will create any amount of trouble. The absence of proper sleep naturally brings a state of fatigue in the nerves which helps these things to come — for it is through the physical consciousness that they attack and if it can make that consciousness tamasic in any way, their entry is more easy.

15 September 1936

*

The Mother has in no way changed towards you nor is she disappointed with you — that is the suggestion drawn from your own state of mind and putting its wrong sense of disappointment and unfitness on to the Mother. She has no reason to change or be disappointed, as she has always been aware of the vital obstacles in you and still expected and expects you to overcome them. The call to change certain things that seem to be in the grain of character is proving difficult even for the best sadhaks, but the difficulty is no proof of incompetence. It is precisely this impulse to go that you must refuse to admit — for so long as these forces think they can bring it about, they will press as much as they can on this point. You must also open yourself more to the Mother's Force in that part and for that it is necessary to get rid of this suggestion about the Mother's disappointment or lack of love, for it is this which creates the reaction at the time of Pranam. Our help, support, love are there always as before — keep yourself open to them and with their aid drive out these suggestions.

26 January 1937

Nearness to the Mother and Progress in Sadhana

“Early” or “late” has nothing to do with what you call nearness. Some who were “early” — and also some who are “near” to her see the Mother only at “pranam” time — physically; some who are late, have the occasion to see her every day because their work compels it. But they see her because of the work; the work was not given to them in order that they might be near! You have taken the thing by the wrong end — not for the first time.

You are mistaken in thinking that you are the only one to ask with such

persistence — there are others. Each one calls it a need, but when their “need” is freely given to them, they cease to value it — as happened with the soup and the pranam. And this shows that it is not a need, but a desire. The principle of all sadhana is to fix the will not on desires — even if presented to the mind as needs — but on the realisation only.

Our object is the supramental realisation and we have to do whatever is necessary for that or towards that under the conditions of each stage. At present the necessity is to prepare the physical consciousness; for that a complete equality and peace and a complete dedication free from personal demand or desire in the physical and the lower vital parts is the thing to be established. Other things can come in their proper time. What is the real need now is not insistence on physical nearness, which is one of those other things, but the psychic opening in the physical consciousness and the constant presence and guidance there.

I do not know what you mean by our wanting to use you for all practical purposes. We did not insist on your doing any work for us; it was you who asked for work, and we gave you what could be found for you. But we could not very well invent work with the express purpose of creating an occasion for physically meeting the Mother. That has not been done for anybody.

16 February 1932

*

As usual, all you have written in the letter under the wrong influence is based either on false inferences or a wrong attitude.

It is quite false that the Mother gives your letters or X's or those of others to Y to read. The letters and books are read and kept not by the Mother, but by me; it is I who read them to the Mother, put by those that are done with in my files and return the books and the answers which are sent immediately I have finished with them through Nolini. Other things like Y seeing your envelopes on a table etc. are mere trifles with no harm in them; if you twist and exaggerate and put a dark meaning on every harmless trifle and erect it into a grievance and a torture, how do you expect to have any quiet or peace or progress in the sadhana?

As for the advantages given to Y by her working here and seeing and speaking with the Mother being an injustice to you and a sacrifice of you to her development, she might equally complain, and most of the people in the Asram might complain that they are not allowed to send a book to Sri Aurobindo every second day and get an answer from him and a constant outward help, but are left out in the cold and an unjust partiality is being shown by him and they are being sacrificed to the development of Z [*the correspondent*]. These jealous recriminations are foolish and stupid in the extreme. I therefore hope that this is the last time you entertain them and that consequently, as you say, it may be the last time you write them. If you can

clear this out of you, there will be some chance of the liberation of your physical consciousness and a straight progress in the sadhana.

4 September 1932

*

People say that the sadhaks whom the Mother calls for interview now and then, and the sadhaks to whom she sends things personally, are those who are very close to her and they progress rapidly in every way. What is the truth in this?

It is all nonsense. Some of the best sadhaks are among those whom the Mother seldom or never calls and she sends them nothing. Nor do they expect it — they feel the Mother always with them and are satisfied and ask for nothing else.

27 July 1933

*

Is there any special effect of physical nearness to the Mother?

It is indispensable for the fullness of the sadhana on the physical plane. Transformation of the physical and external being is not possible otherwise.

Is it not likely that with more outer nearness and familiarity with the Mother, there may be less inner growth of consciousness and perhaps less aspiration?

It depends on the person. Some profit, some do not. No general statement can be made.

Is it possible to receive the Mother's help at a great distance — say Bombay or Calcutta — almost in the same way as here in the Asram?

One can receive everywhere, and if there is a strong spiritual consciousness one can make great progress. But experience does not support the idea that it makes no difference or is almost the same.

18 August 1933

*

I want to be close to the Mother. If I was close to her, the hostile forces would not attack me.

You are quite mistaken. Among those who are physically near the Mother there are some who have much worse attacks than you have ever had. It is the inner nearness that saves, not the physical nearness.

17 November 1933

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It is the inner nearness that matters. The idea of the mind — quite natural, of course — that the outer closeness is the sign of the relation or a special favour or the means of rapid progress is not borne out by experience. There are some who see the Mother daily and are very little advanced from what they were years ago — there were others who got worse because it fostered the vital demand in them — on the other hand there are some quite close to the Mother and forward on the path and cherished by her who come to her only very occasionally — and I could instance one case in which there is an interview only once a year, yet there is no one who has made more rapid progress or in whom the love relation has grown to a greater intensity and fervour. In all these things it is best to have an entire confidence in the Mother and the light that guides her.

10 December 1933

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One who is called to see the Mother often is fortunate because then one gets a chance to talk with her and to receive more Light in her presence. Is it not so?

No. It depends entirely on the condition of the person and his attitude. Especially, if they insist on seeing her or on remaining when she wants them to go or are in a bad mood and throw it on her, it is very harmful for them to see her. Each should be content with what the Mother gives them, for she alone feels what they can or cannot receive. Mental constructions of this kind and vital demands are always false.

3 April 1934

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If one has the close inner relation, one feels the Mother always near and within and round and there is no insistence on the closer physical relation for its own sake. Those who have not this, should aspire for it and not hanker after the other. If they get the outer closeness, they will find that it means nothing without the inner oneness and closeness. One may be physically near the Mother and yet as far from her as the Sahara desert.

11 June 1934

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My dissatisfaction and inner struggle are constant. My eyes are constantly on the outer nearness of the Mother, of which I have none at the moment, and I am left out completely.

And if you had the physical nearness, you would be no happier or calmer so long as the inner being is unchanged. Those who do physically approach her have just the same difficulties and struggles as yourself and some have not even the experiences of peace etc. that you have.

Since all this is in me, it has been expressed. Now let it burn into ashes, never to rise again.

It would be most foolish to call back this meaningless delusion — for nothing can be farther from the actual and practical truth than to suppose that those who have a physical nearness to the Mother or have frequent physical approach are happier or more satisfied than others; it is not in the least true — or to allow it to prevent the progress of the inner peace. If you could only get rid of this delusion, nothing would be able to prevent the growth of the Peace and that inner nearness which alone makes people in this Asram divinely happy. Happiness comes from the soul's satisfaction, not from the vital's or the body's. The vital is never satisfied; the body soon ceases to be moved at all by what it easily or always has. Only the psychic being brings the real joy and felicity.

8 September 1934

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I have completely recovered from the bad effect caused by the suggestion that the Mother was not seeing me enough. Now I am in peace.

As you have recovered, I do not write anything about that, for discourse on such matters does not help. The one thing important is to keep the inner attitude and establish the inner connection with the Mother independent of all outward circumstances; it is that that brings all that is needed. Those who are most deep in the Yoga are not those who physically see most of the Mother. There are some who are in constant nearness or union with her who apart from the Pranam and the evening meditation come to her only once a year.

13 November 1934

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Those are the Mother's children and closest to her who are open to her, close to her in their inner being, one with her will — not those who come bodily nearest to her. Did coming inside help X or Y? It is impossible for Mother to satisfy the demands of everybody, the external demands — it only wears out her body but helps no one.

25 December 1934

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While at the staircase I got an intense desire to see the Mother's rooms. X suggested that when one is in difficulty, one should ask to go near to the Mother.

But the coming near to the Mother should be in the inner rooms, not the outer. For in the inner rooms one can always enter and even arrange to stay there permanently.

28 January 1935

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X showed me a copy of your letter to Y in which you say: "Those are the Mother's children and closest to her who are open to her, close to her in their inner being, one with her will — not those who come bodily nearest to her." But have not those who are bodily nearest come nearest because they were already "open to her", "one with her will" and "close to her in their inner being"? And are there not certain special advantages of this bodily nearness?

It is not so easy to be "one with the will" of the Mother or to be entirely open. To be bodily close imposes a constant pressure for progress, for perfection, which no one yet has been able to meet. People have romantic ideas in this matter which are not true.

7 March 1935

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If one does not take care of one's ego from the beginning, it may develop into a strong spiritual ego which says, "I am progressing wonderfully; the Grace is with me. I am the Mother's instrument more than others." It may demand that the Mother show some special Grace to it. This ego wants to show others that "Mother loves me more than all of you", and it wants a physical manifestation of her love.

You are quite right. It is the ego that wants the satisfaction of being the first or specially singled out. It is this egoistic vital demand with all its consequent revolts and disturbances that made it necessary for Mother to limit the physical manifestation of nearness to a minimum.

17 April 1935

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Whatever you may say to suppress our desire for the Mother's nearness . . .

If one has the desire or the claim, one brings in all sorts of demands, anger, jealousies, despairs, revolts etc., which spoil the sadhana and do not help it. To others the nearness becomes a mixture.

I find that people are greatly fortunate who can approach the Mother often.

If they know how to approach her which hardly any do.

If you say that there is always an interchange going on between people . . .

A vital interchange. But there is a difference between the interchange of "people" and interchange with Mother.

surely one who often comes to Mother, will automatically take something precious from her.

And what if their condition is such that it merely passes or is spilt or is spoilt by their reactions?

And this is the easiest way of receiving.

If they know how to receive.

The Mother was giving freely of her physical contact in former years. If the sadhaks had had the right reactions, do you think she would have drawn back and reduced it to a minimum? Of course if people know in what spirit to receive from her, the physical touch is a great thing — but for that the constant physical nearness is not necessary. That rather creates a pressure of the highest force which how many can meet and satisfy?

22 April 1935

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Why should X complain when he knows full well that he can have Mother's contact for an hour and be near her for two hours more? He has no need of writing or receiving letters from her. Or maybe he understands Mother better on account of his long contact with her.

I am afraid all these are mental constructions. You are constructing in your mind what X ought to feel. But as a matter of fact neither X's nor anybody's difficulties are removed by their coming to Mother or by their sitting one hour or two hours or even three hours with her. Plenty of people have done that and gone away as glum, desperate and revolted as they came. Among the people who see the Mother are some who have crises as bad as yours and as frequent. It is also not true that those who have talked much with Mother (about houses, repairs, servants etc.) understand her better. In former days some people used to see much of Mother in another way, i.e. to talk with her on all sorts of subjects — but even those did not really understand her. I repeat that all that is mental building and constructed inference and does not square with the facts. It is only when one is inwardly open to her that one profits by the “contact” with her, not the physical but the spiritual or inner contact, and then the mere thought of her or a mere thought from her can set right anything wrong; then the physical contact also can help, but it is not indispensable. And as for understanding her, it is only by entering into the spiritual consciousness that one can understand her, or if not understand in the mind, at least feel and respond to what she is through an increasing oneness.

4 August 1935

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To come physically to the Mother for getting rid of a disturbance is unnecessary and useless; it is inwardly that you must take refuge in her and throw away the wrong movement, as you have seen on this occasion. To come physically would only create a habit of getting wrong and coming to her to get right and it would also lead to the wrong movement of throwing the difficulty on her instead of inwardly giving it up, making its surrender. But it is the general surrender that is needed which would prevent these useless disturbances over trifling matters, egoisms, insistences on one's own point of view, anger because one does not have one's own way or a due recognition of one's independence or importance. It is these feelings disguised by reasonings and self-justification that are at the bottom of more than half of the difficulty in the work of the Asram.

18 May 1936

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Is it true that the Mother is taking away her physical nearness from us because our inner closeness to her is increasing, so there is no need of outer closeness?

The Mother has for a long time past been limiting the outer contact with the sadhaks as much as possible. The reason you speak of is one of the reasons, but there are others which it is not necessary to speak of.

27 July 1936

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How is it that X so easily finds defects in Y's work and Y seems to be glad when I criticise X? If those who have an opportunity to be with the Mother for half an hour daily have not been able to have a fine, affectionate harmony, what to say of others?

X has not the opportunity you speak of; he sees [*the Mother*] only for a minute or two in the morning when taking back his daily report. But in fact it is a mistake to think that those who meet the Mother physically are any nearer the goal of perfection than those who do not meet her except at Pranam and meditation. All depends on the inner being and how it can meet her from within and receive her force and profit by it. Of course, if people meet her with their psychic prominent, and not with the outer consciousness only, it should be different, but —

29 July 1936

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You have said that those who are doing sadhana outside the Asram cannot do it fully — the daily touch and nearness of the Mother, gained by living in the Asram, alone can bring a possibility of transformation. Carrying this idea a little further, it naturally follows that those who live nearer to the Mother and meet her more often are of the inner circle, and even outwardly are more intimate, that is, nearer transformation. Q.E.D.?

Living in the Asram is one thing, living with the Mother in close proximity is another. Your Q.E.D., like most mental logic, is contradicted by the facts of life. One could argue on that basis that A who lives in the same house as the Mother is nearer perfection than B and much nearer than C or D who live outside. D never meets the Mother except at Pranam and on her birthday, so she must be an utterly backward person and E who meets the Mother daily for 5, 10, 15 or 20 minutes must be far ahead of her, well on towards perfection. But these things are not so. So the argu-

ment breaks down at every point. Progress in sadhana or superior capacity is not dependent on one's being near the Mother or meeting her more often. Q.E.D.

30 July 1936

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There is a confusion here. The Mother's grace is one thing, the call to change another, the pressure of nearness to her is yet another. Those who are physically near to her are not so by any special grace or favour, but by the necessity of their work, — that is what everybody here refuses to understand or believe, but it is the fact: that nearness acts automatically as a pressure, if for nothing else, to adapt their consciousness to hers which means change, but it is difficult for them because the difference between the two consciousnesses is enormous especially on the physical level and it is on the physical level that they are meeting her in the work.

27 April 1944

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I have a great desire to see the Mother. Why is she not allowing me to do so? Please tell me, what is the value of my desire?

There is more profit to be had by being open to the Mother than by coming physically to her at the present stage. Some even who make a point of her calling them go backward rather than forward — because they make a point of it, introducing thus a basis of vital demand which makes a very shaky foundation for relations with the Mother.

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Although the Mother is looking after me well, I feel that she is keeping me away from her. I feel as if covered in egoism and darkness. I ask her forgiveness for past mistakes.

You are mistaken in thinking that the Mother keeps you at a distance; you have only to open yourself to her sincerely and entirely. What has been done in the past does not matter if there is a sincere aspiration and resolution to change. Neither to lament nor to complain or be angry will help; a confident and happy opening of oneself to the Mother without insistence on personal demands and desires is the only thing to do.

Closeness to the Mother and Speaking French

Is it right to say that those who know French will be able to serve the Mother better in the years to come?

It is mostly that it brings a certain closeness to one side of the Mother.

3 May 1945

Special Relation with the Mother

I did not agree to your going for the same reasons as the last time. First, there was no good reason why you should go; a fit of quite causeless jealousy and pique could not be considered a sufficient ground for your wanting to leave us. You started your "revolt", as you call it, because the Mother took *X* to a private sale to buy things for her: you continued it because the next day (it being the first of the month) and the day after she was too busy with accounts and other affairs to occupy herself with you as you wanted. There could not be more absurd grounds for wanting to go away.

What you seem to claim from the Mother is impossible. No one can be given the right to control or question her actions and decisions or to dictate whom she must or must not take with her or what time she shall give to one or another. The Mother can do her work only if she is free always to do what she sees to be right and her decisions are accepted by all concerned. This is now generally understood in the Asram and no one makes this kind of demand; it is not possible that you alone out of eighty people should have the right to do it.

In fact, you have been given privileges of close daily personal contact with the Mother which very few in the Asram have and which all would be only too glad to have. It is not because you have a greater claim than theirs. If it were a matter of ordinary claim, there are many who would precede you. Some have been here since the beginning; some are more advanced than most in the spiritual life; some occupy a responsible position in the work of the Asram; yet many of them cannot come to the Mother separately every morning or meet her again in the afternoon as you have been allowed to do. This privilege was given you because she felt that you had a special need of her care and of help and support from her. For she does not act for her personal satisfaction or decide out of personal preference, but according to the necessities of the work and the true need of each one in the Asram. And she gave you as much as she could consistently with the call of her work and the time at her disposal. But instead of being satisfied and happy, you create in your mind flimsy grounds for revolt and "quarrel". You did this once and it was excused as a mistake which you recognised and would try not to repeat. It is discouraging to see you start

the same folly all over again as if you had understood and learned nothing.

You have not been asked to do any Yoga; you were too young and unripe for that. You have therefore no reason to complain of being asked to do something beyond your power. But, without doing any Yoga, it was quite possible for you, merely by your work and by daily contact with the Mother and her silent influence, to grow quietly and easily and happily in consciousness and character and capacity until you were ready. But if you refuse to learn self-control and discipline, (these are not matters of Yoga, but what everyone has to learn unless he wants to waste his life and bring his capacities to nothing), and if you cannot be content and happy with the much that is given you, you yourself will make your own life here impossible.

My second reason for not agreeing to your departure was that I did not believe that you really wanted to go or that what spoke of going was the true *Y*. But if your desire to go is serious and deliberate, if you cannot be happy here with us, then it would not be right for me to keep you against your will. That is a thing which I never do with anyone.

My third reason was that I could only sanction your going if I saw that you were too young or otherwise unfit to bear the pressure of the Asram atmosphere. I know that there is in you the capacity if you choose to exercise it. But a certain attitude towards this life and towards the Mother is needed which you seem unwilling to keep. If you cannot be satisfied, if you are constantly revolting and discontented and unhappy, if you again and again violently insist on going away, if you are constantly driven by something in you into these outbreaks which might have been excusable when you were a young child but are no longer proper to your age, it will be difficult for me to avoid coming to the conclusion that, as yet at least, you are not ready, not only for the Yoga, but even for living here.

One thing I wish to make clear. Neither myself nor the Mother wishes you to leave us. I do not approve or sanction your going, still less do I decide that you must go. But if your desire to go is real, insistent and imperative, if you cannot be happy here and feel that you would be happier elsewhere, then I shall be obliged to withdraw my refusal. This is the situation. Try to get back to yourself, your real self, the real *Y* and see if he wants to go, if it is true that he cannot be satisfied by what the Mother gives him. It is upon that that the decision will rest.

3 September 1929

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At times I feel that Mother is not pleased with me. This feeling makes me very uncomfortable and I get the idea of going away from here. If she is not pleased, what is the use of my staying?

Mother is not displeased with your work or with you — there was no such thing in her mind. But the progress of no one here is complete — there is, as you know yourself, still much to change and from time to time the Mother puts a pressure that it may be done. You must not take that pressure for displeasure. As for going away, you must yourself realise that the suggestion can only come from a hostile source and you should not allow it to dwell in you for a moment. Mother is quite ready to tell you in what points more progress is necessary, though I think you must for the most part know it yourself. Especially she wants you to be more guarded in your speech. You are in a special position and one of great trust and whatever you say is taken up and commented on, so you must be careful that nothing should go out from you which ought not to be said or known. To talk less and not be too unguarded in your speech should be part of your discipline of sadhana.

Keep yourself open to the Mother and in perfect union with her. Make yourself entirely plastic to her touch and let her mould you swiftly towards perfection.

9 March 1934

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It is certainly true that the Divine has no preferences or dislikes and is equal to all but that does not prevent there being a special relationship with each. This relation however does not depend on the more or less identification or union. The purer soul has an easier access to the Divine. The more developed nature has more lines on which to meet Him. The identification creates a spiritual oneness. But there are other personal relations which are created by other causes. It is too complex for all relations to be determined by one cause.

Yes, Yogis whose progress does not depend on the personal intervention of the Mother, need have no personal relation with her — only the spiritual contact in distance. Some may have a special relation, but that is due to special aspects of their sadhana. On the other hand one may have a personal relation with the Mother even though no progress has been made in the sadhana. There are all kinds of possibilities in this matter.

There is such a relation with all of those who have come here with a psychic sufficiently developed to admit of the relation. In other cases it is more a possibility than a thing realised.

There are roughly speaking three parts of the being in manifestation which come into play here — 1. the psychic being in evolution which brings with it its past experience of past lives and something of the old personalities, so much as it can make helpful for the present life; 2. the present formation due to this birth and made up of many complex factors; 3. the future being, which in our case means the great lines of higher consciousness above the present manifestation by joining which the transformation becomes more possible and the work attempted can be done.

It is the psychic being which brings in the contact through past lives or personalities, i.e. through something essential and still operative in them which it has kept.

But, in addition, some psychic beings have come here who are ready to join with great lines of consciousness above, represented often by beings of the higher planes, and are therefore specially fitted to join with the Mother intimately in the great work that has to be done. These have all a special relation with the Mother which adds to the past one.

As for the present formation, it may obviously have elements which, not being joined or met with the Mother, may feel themselves strange to her. It is such an element which many feel standing in the way; but it is an exterior formation and does not belong to the past or to the future evolution, at any rate in its present figure. It must either disappear or change.

10 June 1935

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Yesterday we discussed the Divine Love in relation to the sadhaks. My points were these:

1. It is said that the psychic being of each sadhak has a special relation to the Divine; this must mean that the psychic gets from the Divine the response that is proper to it. But does it mean that one sadhak gets more love and another sadhak gets less?

2. If the Divine loves one person more and another person less, this implies partiality on the Divine's part — but the Divine cannot be partial.

3. People say that the Mother loves those who are physically near her more than those who are not. I think this judgment is apt to be wrong.

I hope you will correct me where I am wrong in my understanding.

To launch into too many mental subtleties in this connection is not very helpful; for it is a subject which is beyond mental analysis and the constructions of the mind about it are apt to be either very partially true or else erroneous.

There is a universal Divine Love which is equal for all. There is also a psychic connection which is individual; it is the same essentially for all, but it admits of a special relation with each which is not the same for all but different in each case. This special relation stands apart in each case and has its own nature, it is, as is said, *sui generis*, of its own kind and cannot be compared, balanced or measured with other relations, for each of these again is *sui generis*. The question of less or more is therefore perfectly irrelevant here.

It is quite wrong to say that the Mother loves most those who are nearest to her in the physical. I have often said this but people do not wish to believe it, because they imagine that the Mother is a slave of the vital feelings like ordinary people and

governed by vital likes and dislikes. “Those she likes she keeps near her, those she likes less she keeps less near, those she dislikes or does not care for she keeps at a distance”, that is their childish reasoning. Many of those who feel the Mother’s presence and love always with them hardly see her except once in six months or once in a year — apart from the Pranam and meditation. On the other hand one near her physically or seeing her often may not feel such a thing at all; he may complain of the absence of the Mother’s help and love altogether or as compared to what she gives to others. If the childishly simple rule of three given above were true, such contrasts would not be possible.

Whether one feels the Mother’s love or not depends on whether one is open to it or not, it does not depend on physical nearness. Openness means the removal of all that makes one unconscious of the inner relation — nothing can make one more unconscious than the idea that it must be measured only by some outward manifestation instead of being felt within the being; it makes one blind or insensitive to the outward manifestations that are there. Whether one is physically far or near makes no difference; one can feel it, being physically far or seeing her little; one can fail to feel it when it is there, even if one is physically near or often in her physical presence.

11 June 1935

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Sadhaks whom the Mother has accepted have some personal physical relation with her. I want to know if there is any personal relation with me.

There is a personal relation with most, but what is a personal physical relation?

Suppose a child wants to remain faithful to the Mother and tries to remain faithful, but he sees he is not getting any response. Is it not an illusion for him to try to remain faithful when the Mother never shows him her sweet side? Finally the sadhak will become unfaithful.

If the sadhak becomes unfaithful to the Mother, it means he did not want the sadhana or the Mother, but the satisfaction of his desires and his ego. That is not Yoga.

There are so many ways the Mother expresses herself physically to some, but it is to some only. Some she never gets tired of meeting for hours; with others she finishes in a few minutes. For example, she has spent a lot of time with X.

The Mother meets nobody for “hours” — if anybody stayed for hours she would get very tired.

Mother did not meet X more than others because she loved him more than

others, but because she was trying to get something done through him for the work which, if done, would have been a great victory for all. But precisely because he took it in the wrong way, grasping at it as a “personal physical” relation and satisfaction of his egoistic desire, he failed and had to go away.

25 June 1935

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You wrote once: “Those are the Mother’s children and closest to her who are open to her, close to her in their inner being, one with her will — not those who come bodily nearest to her.” I do not deny the truth of this. But why then has the Mother taken a body and why are we in Pondicherry? One can have an inner relation anywhere; there is no need of coming here.

Mother has taken the body because a work of a physical nature (i.e. including a change in the physical world) had to be done. She has not come to establish a “physical relation” with people. Some have come with her to share in the work, others she has called, others have come seeking for the light. With each she has a personal relation or the possibility of a personal relation; but each is of its own kind and none can say that she must do equally the same thing with each person. No one can claim as a right that she must be physically near to him because she is physically near to others. Some have a close personal relation with her, yet she sees little of them — some have a less close personal relation, yet for one reason or another may see her much oftener or longer. To apply the silly mathematical rules of the physical mind here is absurd — your physical mind cannot understand what the Mother does; its values and standards and ideas are not hers. It is still worse to make your personal vital demand or desire the measure of what she ought to do. That way spiritual ruin lies. She acts in each case for different reasons suitable to that case.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Mother with Letters on the Mother, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 478-509)

THE IDEAL OF THE KARMAYOGIN

(From *Karmayogin*, 19 June 1909)

A NATION is building in India today before the eyes of the world so swiftly, so palpably that all can watch the process and those who have sympathy and intuition distinguish the forces at work, the materials in use, the lines of the divine architecture. This nation is not a new race raw from the workshop of Nature or created by modern circumstances. One of the oldest races and greatest civilisations on this earth, the most indomitable in vitality, the most fecund in greatness, the deepest in life, the most wonderful in potentiality, after taking into itself numerous sources of strength from foreign strains of blood and other types of human civilisation, is now seeking to lift itself for good into an organised national unity. Formerly a congeries of kindred nations with a single life and a single culture, always by the law of this essential oneness tending to unity, always by its excess of fecundity engendering fresh diversities and divisions, it has never yet been able to overcome permanently the almost insuperable obstacles to the organisation of a continent. The time has now come when those obstacles can be overcome. The attempt which our race has been making throughout its long history, it will now make under entirely new circumstances. A keen observer would predict its success because the only important obstacles have been or are in the process of being removed. But we go farther and believe that it is sure to succeed because the freedom, unity and greatness of India have now become necessary to the world. This is the faith in which the *Karmayogin* puts its hand to the work and will persist in it, refusing to be discouraged by difficulties however immense and apparently insuperable. We believe that God is with us and in that faith we shall conquer. We believe that humanity needs us and it is the love and service of humanity, of our country, of the race, of our religion that will purify our heart and inspire our action in the struggle.

The task we set before ourselves is not mechanical but moral and spiritual. We aim not at the alteration of a form of government but at the building up of a nation. Of that task politics is a part, but only a part. We shall devote ourselves not to politics alone, nor to social questions alone, nor to theology or philosophy or literature or science by themselves, but we include all these in one entity which we believe to be all-important, the *dharma*, the national religion which we also believe to be universal. There is a mighty law of life, a great principle of human evolution, a body of spiritual knowledge and experience of which India has always been destined to be guardian, exemplar and missionary. This is the *sanatana dharma*, the eternal religion. Under the stress of alien impacts she has largely lost hold not of the structure of that *dharma*, but of its living reality. For the religion of India is nothing if it is not

lived. It has to be applied not only to life, but to the whole of life; its spirit has to enter into and mould our society, our politics, our literature, our science, our individual character, affections and aspirations. To understand the heart of this *dharma*, to experience it as a truth, to feel the high emotions to which it rises and to express and execute it in life is what we understand by Karmayoga. We believe that it is to make the *yoga* the ideal of human life that India rises today; by the *yoga* she will get the strength to realise her freedom, unity and greatness, by the *yoga* she will keep the strength to preserve it. It is a spiritual revolution we foresee and the material is only its shadow and reflex.

The European sets great store by machinery. He seeks to renovate humanity by schemes of society and systems of government; he hopes to bring about the millennium by an act of Parliament. Machinery is of great importance, but only as a working means for the spirit within, the force behind. The nineteenth century in India aspired to political emancipation, social renovation, religious vision and rebirth, but it failed because it adopted Western motives and methods, ignored the spirit, history and destiny of our race and thought that by taking over European education, European machinery, European organisation and equipment we should reproduce in ourselves European prosperity, energy and progress. We of the twentieth century reject the aims, ideals and methods of the Anglicised nineteenth precisely because we accept its experience. We refuse to make an idol of the present; we look before and after, backward to the mighty history of our race, forward to the grandiose destiny for which that history has prepared it.

We do not believe that our political salvation can be attained by enlargement of Councils, introduction of the elective principle, colonial self-government or any other formula of European politics. We do not deny the use of some of these things as instruments, as weapons in a political struggle, but we deny their sufficiency whether as instruments or ideals and look beyond to an end which they do not serve except in a trifling degree. They might be sufficient if it were our ultimate destiny to be an outlying province of the British Empire or a dependent adjunct of European civilisation. That is a future which we do not think it worth making any sacrifice to accomplish. We believe on the other hand that India is destined to work out her own independent life and civilisation, to stand in the forefront of the world and solve the political, social, economical and moral problems which Europe has failed to solve, yet the pursuit of whose solution and the feverish passage in that pursuit from experiment to experiment, from failure to failure she calls her progress. Our means must be as great as our ends and the strength to discover and use the means so as to attain the end can only be found by seeking the eternal source of strength in ourselves.

We do not believe that by changing the machinery so as to make our society the ape of Europe we shall effect social renovation. Widow-remarriage, substitution of class for caste, adult marriage, intermarriages, interdining and the other nostrums of the social reformer are mechanical changes which, whatever their merits or

demerits, cannot by themselves save the soul of the nation alive or stay the course of degradation and decline. It is the spirit alone that saves, and only by becoming great and free in heart can we become socially and politically great and free.

We do not believe that by multiplying new sects limited within the narrower and inferior ideas of religion imported from the West or by creating organisations for the perpetuation of the mere dress and body of Hinduism we can recover our spiritual health, energy and greatness. The world moves through an indispensable interregnum of free thought and materialism to 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. The religion which embraces Science and faith, Theism, Christianity, Mahomedanism and Buddhism and yet is none of these, is that to which the World-Spirit moves. In our own, which is the most sceptical and the most believing of all, the most sceptical because it has questioned and experimented the most, the most believing because it has the deepest experience and the most varied and positive spiritual knowledge, — that wider Hinduism which is not a dogma or combination of dogmas but a law of life, which is not a social framework but the spirit of a past and future social evolution, which rejects nothing but insists on testing and experiencing everything and when tested and experienced turning it to the soul's uses, in this Hinduism we find the basis of the future world-religion. This *sanatana dharma* has many scriptures, Veda, Vedanta, Gita, Upanishad, Darshana, Purana, Tantra, nor could it reject the Bible or the Koran; but its real, most authoritative scripture is in the heart in which the Eternal has His dwelling. It is in our inner spiritual experiences that we shall find the proof and source of the world's Scriptures, the law of knowledge, love and conduct, the basis and inspiration of Karmayoga.

Our aim will therefore be to help in building up India for the sake of humanity — this is the spirit of the Nationalism which we profess and follow. We say to humanity, "The time has come when you must take the great step and rise out of a material existence into the higher, deeper and wider life towards which humanity moves. The problems which have troubled mankind can only be solved by conquering the kingdom within, not by harnessing the forces of Nature to the service of comfort and luxury, but by mastering the forces of the intellect and the spirit, by vindicating the freedom of man within as well as without and by conquering from within external Nature. For that work the resurgence of Asia is necessary, therefore Asia rises. For that work the freedom and greatness of India is essential, therefore she claims her destined freedom and greatness, and it is to the interest of all humanity, not excluding England, that she should wholly establish her claim."

We say to the nation, "It is God's will that we should be ourselves and not Europe. We have sought to regain life by following the law of another being than our own. We must return and seek the sources of life and strength within ourselves. We must know our past and recover it for the purposes of our future. Our business

is to realise ourselves first and to mould everything to the law of India's eternal life and nature. It will therefore be the object of the *Karmayogin* to read the heart of our religion, our society, our philosophy, politics, literature, art, jurisprudence, science, thought, everything that was and is ours, so that we may be able to say to ourselves and our nation, 'This is our *dharma*.' We shall review European civilisation entirely from the standpoint of Indian thought and knowledge and seek to throw off from us the dominating stamp of the Occident; what we have to take from the West we shall take as Indians. And the *dharma* once discovered we shall strive our utmost not only to profess but to live, in our individual actions, in our social life, in our political endeavours."

We say to the individual and especially to the young who are now arising to do India's work, the world's work, God's work, "You cannot cherish these ideals, still less can you fulfil them if you subject your minds to European ideas or look at life from the material standpoint. Materially you are nothing, spiritually you are everything. It is only the Indian who can believe everything, dare everything, sacrifice everything. First therefore become Indians. Recover the patrimony of your forefathers. Recover the Aryan thought, the Aryan discipline, the Aryan character, the Aryan life. Recover the Vedanta, the Gita, the Yoga. Recover them not only in intellect or sentiment but in your lives. Live them and you will be great and strong, mighty, invincible and fearless. Neither life nor death will have any terrors for you. Difficulty and impossibility will vanish from your vocabularies. For it is in the spirit that strength is eternal and you must win back the kingdom of yourselves, the inner Swaraj, before you can win back your outer empire. There the Mother dwells and She waits for worship that She may give strength. Believe in Her, serve Her, lose your wills in Hers, your egoism in the greater ego of the country, your separate selfishness in the service of humanity. Recover the source of all strength in yourselves and all else will be added to you, social soundness, intellectual pre-eminence, political freedom, the mastery of human thought, the hegemony of the world."

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 23-28)

EPISTLES FROM ABROAD¹

I

Dearly beloved,

You, my alter ego, my second existence, now sitting comfortably at home and, doubtless, reading the romantic fictions of the *Empire* by the light of heavily-priced kerosine; I, who roam uncomfortably in foreign climes, sighing for the joys of the Press Act and the house-search; these faces, white and unfamiliar, that surround me; these miles of soulless brick and faultless macadam, the fitting body for a point-device and dapper civilisation which has lost sight of grandeur, beauty and nobility in life, — are we, I wonder, flitting visions of a nightmare that passes or real men and women made in God's image? Was life always so trivial, always so vulgar, always so loveless, pale and awkward as the Europeans have made it? This well-appointed comfort oppresses me; this perfection of machinery will not allow the soul to remember that it is not itself a machine.

Is this then the end of the long march of human civilisation, this spiritual suicide, this quiet petrification of the soul into matter? Was the successful business-man that grand culmination of manhood toward which evolution was striving? After all, if the scientific view is correct, why not? An evolution that started with the protoplasm and flowered in the ourang-outang and the chimpanzee, may well rest satisfied with having created hat, coat and trousers, the British Aristocrat, the American capitalist and the Parisian Apache. For these, I believe, are the chief triumphs of the European enlightenment to which we bow our heads. For these Augustus created Europe, Charlemagne refounded civilisation, Louis XIV regulated society, Napoleon systematised the French Revolution. For these Goethe thought, Shakespeare imagined and created, St. Francis loved, Christ was crucified. What a bankruptcy! What a beggary of things that were rich and noble!

Europe boasts of her science and its marvels. But an Indian cannot content himself with asking like Voltaire, as the supreme question, "What have you invented?" His glance is at the soul; it is that into which he is accustomed to inquire. To the braggart intellect of Europe he is bound to reply, "I am not interested in what you know, I am interested in what you are. With all your discoveries and inventions, what have you become? Your enlightenment is great, — but what are these strange creatures that move about in the electric light you have installed and imagine that

1. Sri Aurobindo wrote the first three of these six fictional letters in Bengal in 1910. They were published in 1920–22 without his editorial supervision. He wrote the last three letters in Pondicherry in 1910 or 1911 but never published them.

they are human?" Is it a great gain for the human intellect to have grown more acute and discerning, if the human soul dwindles?

But Science does not admit the existence of soul. The soul, it says, is only an organised republic of animalcules, and it is in the mould of that idea Europe has recast herself; — that is what the European nations are becoming, organised republics of animalcules, — very intelligent, very methodical, very wonderful talking and reasoning animalcules, but still animalcules. Not what the race set out to be, creatures made in the image of the Almighty, gods that having fallen from heaven remember and strive to recover their heritage. Man in Europe is descending steadily from the human level and approximating to the ant and the hornet. The process is not complete but it is progressing apace, and if nothing stops the debacle, we may hope to see its culmination in this twentieth century. After all our superstitions were better than this enlightenment, our social abuses less murderous to the hopes of the race than this social perfection.

It is a very pleasant inferno they have created in Europe, a hell not of torments but of pleasures, of lights and carriages, of balls and dances and suppers, of theatres and cafés and music halls, of libraries and clubs and Academies, of National Galleries and Exhibitions, of factories, shops, banks and Stock Exchanges. But it is hell all the same, not the heaven of which the saints and the poets dreamed, the new Jerusalem, the golden city. London and New York are the holy cities of the new religion, Paris its golden Paradise of Pleasure.

It is not with impunity that men decide to believe that they are animals and God does not exist. For what we believe, that we become. The animal lives by a routine arranged for him by Nature; his life is devoted to the satisfaction of his instincts bodily, vital and emotional, and he satisfies himself mechanically by a regular response to the working of those instincts. Nature has regularised everything for him and provided the machinery. Man in Europe arranges his own routine, invents his own machinery, and adds to the needs of which he is a slave, the intellectual. But there will soon be no other difference.

System, organisation, machinery have attained their perfection. Bondage has been carried to its highest expression, and from a passion for organising external liberty Europe is slaying her spiritual freedom. When the inner freedom is gone, the external liberty will follow it, and a social tyranny more terrible, inquisitorial and relentless than any that caste ever organised in India, will take its place. The process has already begun. The shell of external liberty remains, the core is already being eaten away. Because he is still free to gratify his senses and enjoy himself, the European thinks himself free. He does not know what teeth are gnawing into the heart of his liberty.

Still in his inmost self he has an uneasy consciousness of something terribly, vitally wrong, and therefore he is turning more and more to Socialism among the thinking or cultured, among the unthinking to Anarchism. The Socialist hopes, by

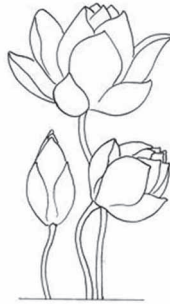
accepting, swiftly fulfilling and thoroughly organising the inevitable tyranny of society, at least to recover leisure and create a breathing space in which to realise the dignity, beauty and repose of the god in man. The Anarchist sees in Government and Society the enemy of the race and gropes for the bomb and the revolver to recover individual liberty and destroy the tyranny of the majority. Both are guilty of the same fallacy, the mechanical fallacy. One hopes to liberate man by perfecting machinery, the other by destroying it.

And yet the true secret is ready to their hand in the formula of the great Revolution. Two ideas of that formula Europe has pursued with some eagerness, Liberty and Equality; but she has totally rejected the third and most necessary, Brotherhood. In its place she has erected the idol of her heart, Machinery, and called it Association; for Association without Brotherhood is merely Machinery. Yet what can be more evident than that the French thinkers were perfectly guided in their selection of the three things necessary for an ideal associated happiness? It is only Love that can prevent the misuse of Liberty; it is only Brotherhood which can make Equality tolerable.

(To be continued)

SRI AUROBINDO

(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 545-48)



‘BE THE SOVEREIGN MASTER OF ALL HEARTS’

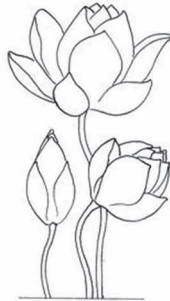
April 20, 1914

After having hoped so much, after having believed that my outer being was at last to become an instrument adapted to Thy purpose, after feeling hopeful that I would at last be delivered from this obscure and cumbersome “self”, I feel I am as far from the goal as before, as ignorant, as egoistic as I was before this great expectation. And the path stretches out once again, interminable across the fields of inconscience. The sublime door has closed again and I find myself still on the threshold of the sanctuary without being able to enter within. But I have learnt to look at everything with a smile and a tranquil heart. I ask only this of Thee, O my divine Master, not to let me make any mistakes; even if the instrument is still condemned for a time to unconsciousness, grant that it may let itself be guided faithfully and docilely by Thy divine law.

I bow to Thee, O Lord, with a deep and pure devotion. Oh! be the sovereign Master of all hearts.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 130)



FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE MATERIALIST

THE other day, for some question of work, I was led to explain my position from the standpoint of the materialist conviction (I don't know what their position is today, because that's something I am not concerned with generally), but anyway I was led to do it because of a certain work.

For them, all the experiences men have are the result of a mental phenomenon: we have reached a progressive mental development (they are at a loss to explain why or how!), anyhow it was Matter that developed Life, Life that developed Mind, and all of men's so-called spiritual experiences are mental constructions (they use other words, but I believe that's their idea). It is, at any rate, a denial of all spiritual existence in itself and of a Being or Force or Something superior which governs everything.

As I said, I don't know what their position is today, what point they have reached, but I was in the presence of a conviction of that type.

Then I said, "But it's very simple! I accept your point of view, there is nothing other than what we see, than mankind as it is; all the so-called inner phenomena are due to a mental, cerebral action; and when you die, you die — in other words, the phenomenon of agglomeration comes to the end of its existence, and it dissolves, everything dissolves. That's all very well."

(Quite likely, had things been that way, I would have found life so disgusting that I would have left it long ago. But I must add right away that it's not for any moral or even spiritual reason that I disapprove of suicide, it's because to me it's an act of cowardice and something in me doesn't like cowardice, so I did not . . . I would never have fled from the problem.)

That's one point.

"But then, once you are here on this earth and you have to go to the end, even if the end is nothingness, you go to the end and it's just as well to do so as best you can, that is to say, to your fullest satisfaction. . . . I happened to have some philosophical curiosity and to study all kinds of problems, and I came upon Sri Aurobindo's teaching, and what he taught" (I would say 'revealed', but not to a materialist) "is by far, among the systems men have formulated, the most satisfying *for me*, the most complete, and what answers the most satisfactorily all the questions that can be asked; it is the one that helps me the most in life to have the feeling that 'life is worth living'. Consequently, I try to conform entirely to his teaching and to live it integrally in order to live as best I can — for me. I don't mind at all if others don't believe in it — whether they believe in it or not is all the same to me; I don't need the support of others' conviction, it's enough if I am myself satisfied."

Well, there's no reply to that.

The experience lasted a long time — for all details, to all problems, that’s what I answered. And when I came to the end, I said to myself, “But that’s a wonderful argument!” Because all the elements of doubt, ignorance, incomprehension, bad will, negation, with that argument they were all muzzled — annulled, they had no effect.

That work, I think, must have had worldwide repercussions. I was in it, in that state (with the sense of a very great power and a wonderful freedom) for certainly at least six or eight hours. (The work had started long before, but it became rather acutely present these last few days.)

And afterwards, everything was held in a solid grip — what do you have to say?

(*silence*)

It’s much easier to answer out-and-out materialists who are convinced and sincere (‘sincere’ within the limit of their consciousness, that is) than to answer people who have a religion! Much easier.

With Indians, it’s very easy — they’re heaven-blessed, these people, because it takes very little for them to be oriented in the right way.¹

.....

But for instance, I told you I spoke with the Pope for quite a long time the day of his election, and the conversation was abruptly interrupted by a reaction he had. (It was really a mental conversation we were having: I spoke, he replied, I heard his reply — I don’t know whether he was conscious of something . . . probably not, but anyway; it wasn’t at all a formation of my own mind because I received quite *unexpected* replies.) But the conversation was interrupted abruptly by a reaction he had when I told him that God is everywhere and in all things; that everything is He; and then a great Force came down into me and I added, “Even when you descend into Hell, He is there too.”

Then everything stopped dead.

Since then I’ve learned that it’s part of their teaching: that what is terrible in Hell isn’t so much the suffering, but that there is no God there; that it’s the only part of the creation in which there is no God — there is no God in Hell. And I asserted that He is there too.

But naturally, from an intellectual point of view, all those things are explained and find their place — man has never thought anything that wasn’t the distortion of

1. Later Mother added: “This isn’t quite correct because I am in contact with the best among Indians, but those who are materialists are very darkly and brutishly so.”

a truth. That's not the difficulty, it's that for religious people there are certain things they have a *duty* to believe, and to allow the mind to discuss them is a 'sin' — so naturally they close themselves and will never be able to make any progress. Whereas the materialists, on the other hand, are on the contrary supposed to know and explain everything — they explain everything rationally. So (*Mother laughs*), precisely because they explain everything, you can lead them where you want to.

There.

There's nothing to be done with religious people.

No. And it's not good to try either. If they cling to a religion, it means that that religion has helped them somehow or other, has helped something in them which in fact wanted to have a certitude without having to seek for it — to lean on something solid without being responsible for its solidity (someone else is responsible! [*Mother laughs*]), and to leave their bodies in that way. So to want to pull them out of it shows a lack of compassion — they should just be left where they are. Never do I argue with someone who has a faith — let him keep his faith! And I take great care not to say anything that might shake his faith because it's not good — such people are unable to have another faith.

But with a materialist . . . “I don't argue, I accept your point of view; only, you have nothing to say — I've taken my position, take yours. If you are satisfied with what you know, keep it. If it helps you to live, very good.

“But you have no right to blame or criticise me, because I am taking my position on your own basis. Even if all that I imagine is mere imagination, I prefer that imagination to yours.” That's all.

THE MOTHER

(A conversation of the Mother with a disciple on September 7, 1963)



K. D. SETHNA AND P. BRUNTON — CORRESPONDENCE & ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

(A Compilation)

(Continued from the issue of April 2014)

[Paul Brunton's letter to K. D. Sethna; the first one of the set of eight letters found and reprinted in *Mother India*, May 1986. — Ed.]

Vani Vilas Road, Mysore
18th February 1943

Dear Sethna,

Your last interesting letter to me dated 27-10-41 has remained unanswered along with a pile of very many others, not because I want to break off correspondence, but simply because of my own difficulties and over-pressure of work. At last this pressure has come to an abrupt end and it is now possible for me to relax a little to keep better time with correspondence. So please pardon my silence. It did not mean that I have forgotten you at all. On the contrary I often wish we can meet again under more leisurely circumstances than before to discuss various matters which I would like to discuss with you. However, it may be that one day you will perhaps be revisiting your old Ashram at Pondicherry. If so, you will probably have to travel via Bangalore. In that case I would request you to break your journey there and go a little way farther to Mysore to spend a few days with me as my guest.

Did you ever hear from Prof. Eagleton about your book *The Secret Splendour*? He has not said anything further to me and I have hesitated to ask him. I would like to make a suggestion in connection with bringing your name to the western reading public. Please send a copy of your book *The Secret Splendour* by Registered Post to my old friend Mrs. R. W. Hutchinson, c/o English-speaking Union, Dartmouth House, Charles Street, London, and write her at the same time saying that I have asked you to do so with a view to her recommending the publication of one or more individual poems in the American magazine *Tomorrow* for which she is British Representative. She will, I know, be delighted with your work as she has written much mystical poetry of the same kind under her maiden name Hesper Le Gallienne, and is the daughter of the late Richard Le Gallienne who was famous 30/40 years ago as poet, playwright and essayist. You will probably have to point out that the book is privately published by yourself. Otherwise the magazine might hesitate to reproduce any of the poems. You will also have to take the risk of the book failing to reach its

destination owing to enemy action causing the loss of so many ships. In any case she will be glad to make your acquaintance, is a much more satisfactory correspondent than I, and you might be able to give each other useful suggestions in your work.

I wonder also whether you have been doing any work for *Blitz* weekly. If so, please let me know which articles have been from your pen, because as a one-time editor I might be able to give you useful suggestions. I have been getting it on order through a local news agent ever since you introduced me to it. I see they appear to have dropped the astrological articles by “Astro” which would be a pity. I have a feeling that the writer is a Sadhu whom I once met whilst he was journeying to Lake Manasarovar.

One of the higher officials of the Mysore Government at Bangalore is a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and on his last visit to Mysore a few months ago he let me read a report of an address which Nolini Kanta Gupta was to give from All India Radio, Delhi, upon the ‘world war and its inner bearings’. I was delighted to find so many of my own thoughts expressed in this talk and also admire the boldness of the Ashram in coming forward and saying what so much needs saying during these dark days.

Here are the two phrases which were used by Gupta in his talk and which recur in Sri Aurobindo’s writings. I am rather doubtful whether I interpret the meaning in a different sense from which they are used by the Ashram and would be grateful if you could give me a precise interpretation of these phrases from the Ashram’s standpoint. The phrases are: (1) adverse or dark forces and (2) the asuras.

How are you getting on generally? It is undecided whether I should go north this year to Delhi on a visit for a week or not. But if I do, I shall certainly include Bombay in my programme and thus have the pleasure of meeting you again.

With kind regards
Paul Brunton

[Nolini Kanta Gupta’s essay “The World War — Its inner bearings” reproduced from *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Volume 1, 1970, pp. 67-76. — Ed.]

THE WORLD WAR **Its inner bearings**

This is a war to which even spiritual seekers can hardly remain indifferent with impunity. There are spiritual paths, however, that ask to render unto God what is God’s and unto Satan what belongs to Satan; in other words, spirituality is kept apart from what is called worldliness, clean and untouched by the dust and murk of

Ignorance — Maya. The injunction accordingly is that they who are worldly must remain worldly, they have no business, no right to meddle with spirituality, and they who are spiritual should, on the other hand, remain strictly spiritual, should have nothing to do with worldliness. Because of this complete divorce between the spiritual and the worldly, the world remains worldly even today, continues to be the empire of unspirituality and obscurity, of suffering and grief, it is unable to become a dynamic and living expression and embodiment of the Spirit.

Not that spiritual men have not served and worked for the welfare of the world; but their work could not be wholly effective, it was mixed, maimed, temporary in effect. This could not be otherwise, for their activity proceeded from inferior and feebler sources of inspiration and consciousness other than those that are purely spiritual. Firstly, little more was possible for them than to exercise an indirect influence; their spiritual realisation could bring into the life of the world only a reminiscence, an echo, just a touch and a ray from another world. Or, secondly, when they did take part in worldly affairs, their activity could not rise much beyond the worldly standard; it remained enclosed within the sphere of the moral and the conventional, took such forms as, for example, charity and service and philanthropy. Nothing higher than ideas and ideals confined to the moral, that is to say, the mental plane, could be brought into play in the world and its practical life, — even the moral and mental idea itself has often been mistaken for true spirituality. Thus the very ideal of governing or moulding our worldly preoccupations according to a truly spiritual or a supramental or transcendental consciousness was a rare phenomenon and even where the ideal was found, it is doubtful whether the right means and methods were discovered. Yet the sole secret of changing man's destiny and transmuting the world lies in the discovery and application of a supreme spiritual Conscious-Power.

Humanists once affirmed that nothing that concerned man was alien to them, all came within their domain. The spiritual man too can make the affirmation with the same or even a greater emphasis. Indeed the spiritual consciousness in the highest degree and greatest compass must needs govern and fashion man in his entire being, in all his members and functions. The ideal, as we have said, has seldom been accepted; generally it has been considered as a chimera and an impossibility. That is why, we repeat, even to this day the world has its cup of misery full to the brim — *anityam asukham*.

All this has to be said by way of explanation and apology. For if we are spiritual seekers even then, or rather because of that, we too, we declare, have our say in a matter which looks so mundane as this war. We refuse to own the nature and character so often ascribed to us by the West, which finds a graphic description in the well-known lines of Matthew Arnold:

The East bow'd low before the blast
 In patient deep disdain.
 She let the legions thunder past,
 And plunged in thought again.

In fact, however, there is no insurmountable disparity between spirituality and “worldliness”, between meditation and the most “terrible work” — *ghore karmani*: the Gita has definitively proved the truth of the fact millenniums ago. War has not been the monopoly of warriors alone: it will not be much of an exaggeration to say that Avatars, the incarnations of the Divine, have done little else besides that. And what of the Divine Mother herself? The main work of an Avatar is often to subdue the evil-doers, those that follow and pull others to follow the Wrong Path. And the Divine Mother, she who harbours in her bosom the supreme Truth and Consciousness and Bliss, is in one of her essential aspects, the slayer of the Demon, of the Asura.

Now, it is precisely with the Asura that we have to deal in the present war. This is not like other wars — it is not a war of one country with another, of one group of Imperialists with another, nor is it merely the fierce endeavour of a particular race or nation for world-domination: it is something more than all that. This war has a deeper, a more solemn, almost a grim significance. Some thinkers in Europe, not the mere political leaders, but those who lead in thought and ideas and ideals, to whom something of the inner world is revealed, have realised the true nature of the present struggle and have expressed it in no uncertain terms. Here is what Jules Romains, one of the foremost thinkers and litterateurs of contemporary France, says:

Since the end of the Middle Ages, conquerors did harm perhaps to civilisation, but they never claimed to bring it into question. They ascribed their excesses and crimes to motives of necessity, but never dreamed for a moment to hold them up as exemplary actions on which subject nations were called upon to fashion their morality, their code, their gospel . . . Since the dawn of modern times the accidents of military history in Europe have never meant for her the end of her most precious spiritual and moral values and a sudden annulment of all the work done by the past generations in the direction of mutual respect, equity, goodwill — or, to put all into a single word, in the direction of humanity.

Modern thinkers do not speak of the Asura — the Demon or the Titan — although the religiously minded sometimes refer to the Anti-Christ; but the real, the inner significance of the terms is lost to a mind nurtured in Science and empiricism; they are considered as more or less imaginative symbols for certain undesirable qualities of nature and character. Yet some have perceived and expressed the external manifestation and activities of the Asura in a way sufficient to open men's eyes to

the realities involved. Thus they have declared that the present war is a conflict between two ideals, to be sure, but also that the two ideals are so different that they do not belong to the same plane or order; they belong to different planes and different orders. On one side the whole endeavour is to bring man down from the level to which he has arisen in the course of evolution to something like his previous level and to keep him imprisoned there. That this is really their aim, the protagonists and partisans themselves have declared frankly and freely and loudly enough, without any hesitation or reservation. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* has become the Scripture of the New Order; it has come with a more categorical imperative, a more supernal authority than the Veda, the Bible or the Koran.

When man was a dweller of the forest, — a jungle man, — akin to his forbear the ape, his character was wild and savage, his motives and impulsions crude, violent, egoistic, almost wholly imbedded in, what we call, the lower vital level; the light of the higher intellect and intelligence had not entered into them. Today there is an uprush of similar forces to possess and throw man back to a similar condition. This new order asks only one thing of man, namely, to be strong and powerful, that is to say, fierce, ruthless, cruel and regimented. Regimentation can be said to be the very characteristic of the order, the regimentation of a pack of wild dogs or wolves. A particular country, nation or race — it is Germany in Europe and, in her wake, Japan in Asia — is to be the sovereign nation or master race (*Herrenvolk*); the rest of mankind — other countries and peoples — should be pushed back to the status of servants and slaves, mere hewers of wood and drawers of water. What the helots were in ancient times, what the serfs were in the mediaeval ages, and what the subject peoples were under the worst forms of modern imperialism, even so will be the entire mankind under the new overlordship, or something still worse. For whatever might have been the external conditions in those ages and systems, the upward aspirations of man were never doubted or questioned — they were fully respected and honoured. The New Order has pulled all that down and cast them to the winds. Furthermore in the new regime, it is not merely the slaves that suffer in a degraded condition, the masters also, as individuals, fare no better. The individual here has no respect, no freedom or personal value. This society or community of the masters even will be like a bee-hive or an ant-hill; the individuals are merely functional units, they are but screws and bolts and nuts and wheels in a huge relentless machinery. The higher and inner realities, the spontaneous inspirations and self-creations of a free soul — art, poetry, literature — sweetness and light — the good and the beautiful — are to be banished for ever; they are to be regarded as things of luxury which enervate the heart, diminish the life-force, distort Nature's own virility. Man perhaps would be the worshipper of Science, but of that Science which brings a tyrannical mastery over material Nature, which serves to pile up tools and instruments, arms and armaments, in order to ensure a dire efficiency and a grim order in practical life.

Those that have stood against this Dark Force and its over-shadowing menace — even though perhaps not wholly by choice or free-will, but mostly compelled by circumstances — yet, because of the stand they have taken, now bear the fate of the world on their shoulders, carry the whole future of humanity in their march. It is of course agreed that to have stood against the Asura does not mean that one has become *sura*, divine or godlike; but to be able to remain human, human instruments of the Divine, however frail, is sufficient for the purpose, that ensures safety from the great calamity. The rule of life of the Asura implies the end of progress, the arrest of all evolution; it means even a reversal for man. The Asura is a fixed type of being. He does not change, his is a hardened mould, a settled immutable form of a particular consciousness, a definite pattern of qualities and activities — *gunakarma*. Asura-nature means a fundamental ego-centricism, violent and concentrated self-will. Change is possible for the human being; he can go downward, but he can move upward too, if he chooses. In the Puranas a distinction has been made between the domain of enjoyment and the domain of action. Man is the domain of action *par excellence*; by him and through him evolve new and fresh lines of activity and impulsion. The domain of enjoyment, on the other hand, is where we reap the fruits of our past Karma; it is the result of an accumulated drive of all that we have done, of all the movements we have initiated and carried out. It is a status of being where there is only enjoyment, not of becoming where there can be development and new creation. It is a condition of gestation, as it were; there is no new Karma, no initiative or change in the stuff of the consciousness. The Asuras are *bhogamaya purusha*, beings of enjoyment; their domain is a cumulus of enjoyings. They cannot strike out a fresh line of activity, put forth a new mode of energy that can work out a growth or transformation of nature. Their consciousness is an immutable entity. The Asuras do not mend, they can only end. Man can certainly acquire or imbibe Asuric force or Asura-like qualities and impulsions; externally he can often act very much like the Asura; and yet there is a difference. Along with the dross that soils and obscures human nature, there is something more, a clarity that opens to a higher light, an inner core of noble metal which does not submit to any inferior influence. There is this something more in man which always inspires and enables him to break away from the Asuric nature. Moreover, though there may be an outer resemblance between the Asuric qualities of man and the Asuric qualities of the Asura, there is an intrinsic difference, a difference in tone and temper, in rhythm and vibration, proceeding as they do from different sources. However cruel, hard, selfish, egocentric man may be, he knows, he admits — at times, if not always, at heart, if not openly, subconsciously, if not wholly consciously — that such is not the ideal way, that these qualities are not qualifications, they are unworthy elements and have to be discarded. But the Asura is ruthless, because he regards ruthlessness as the right thing, as the perfect thing, it is an integral part of his swabhava and swadharma, his law of being and his highest good. Violence is the ornament of his character.

The outrages committed by Spain in America, the oppression of the Christians by Imperial Rome, the brutal treatment of Christians by Christians themselves (the Inquisition, that is to say) or the misdeeds of Imperialists generally were wrong and, in many cases, even inhuman and unpardonable. But when we compare these with what Nazi Germany has done in Poland or wants to do throughout the world, we find that there is a difference between the two not only in degree, but in kind. One is an instance of the weakness of man, of his flesh being frail; the other illustrates the might of the Asura, his very spirit is unwilling. One is undivine; the other anti-divine, positively hostile. They who cannot discern this difference are colour-blind: there are eyes to which all deeper shades of colour are black and all lighter shades white.

The Asura triumphs everywhere for a while because his power is well-built, perfectly organised. Human power is constituted differently and acts differently; it is full of faults and flaws to start with and for a long time. There is no gap anywhere in the power of the Asura, no tear or stitch — it is streamlined, solid, of one piece; it is perfection itself in its own kind once for all. Man's being is made up of conflicts and contradictions; he moves step by step, slowly and laboriously, through gradual purification; he grows through endeavour and struggle. Man triumphs over the Asura only in so far as he moulds himself in the ways of the divine power. But in the world, the Divine and his powers remain behind, because the field of actuality in front is still the domain of the Asura. The outer field, the gross vehicle — body and life and mind — all this is constituted by Ignorance and Falsehood; so the Asura can always establish there his influence and hold sway and has actually done so. Man becomes easily an instrument of the Asura, though often unwittingly; the earth is naturally in the firm grasp of the Asura. For the gods to conquer the earth, to establish their rule in the earth consciousness requires labour and endeavour and time.

No doubt, the violences indulged by men in older times, especially when they acted in groups and packs, were often inflamed and inspired by an Asuric influence. But today it must be clearly seen and recognised that it is the Asura himself with the whole band of his army that has descended upon the earth; they have possessed a powerfully organised human collectivity, shaped it in their mould, using it to complete their conquest of mankind and consolidate their definitive reign upon earth.

As we see it we believe that the whole future of mankind, the entire value of earthly life depends upon the issue of the present deadly combat. The path that man has followed so long tended steadily towards progress and evolution — however slow his steps, however burdened with doubt and faintness his mind and heart in the ascent. But now the crucial parting of the ways looms before him. The question is, will the path of progress be closed to him for ever, will he be compelled to revert to a former unregenerate state or even something worse than that? Or will he remain free to follow that path, rise gradually and infallibly towards perfection, towards a purer, fuller, higher and vaster luminous life? Will man come down to live the life

of a blind helpless slave under the clutches of the Asura or even altogether lose his soul and become the legendary demon who carries no head but only a decapitated trunk?

We believe that the war of today is a war between the Asura and men, human instruments of the gods. Man certainly is a weaker vessel in comparison with the Asura — on this material plane of ours; but in man dwells the Divine — and against the divine force and might, no asuric power can ultimately prevail. The human being who has stood against the Asura has by that very act sided with the gods and received the support and benediction of the Divine. The more we become conscious about the nature of this war and consciously take the side of the progressive force, of the divine force supporting it, the more will the Asura be driven to retire, his power diminished, his hold relaxed. But if through ignorance and blind passion, through narrow vision and obscurant prejudice we fail to distinguish the right from the wrong side, the dexter from the sinister, surely we shall invite upon mankind utter misery and desolation. It will be nothing less than a betrayal of the Divine Cause.

The fate of India too is being decided in this world-crisis — on the plains of Flanders, on the steppes of Ukraine, on the farthest expanses of the Pacific. The freedom of India will become inevitable and even imminent in proportion as she becomes cognizant of the underlying character and significance of the present struggle, deliberately takes the side of the evolutionary force, works for the gods, in proportion as she grows to be an instrument of the Divine Power. The instrument that the Divine chooses is often, to all appearances, faulty and defective, but since it has this higher and mightier support, it will surely outgrow all its drawbacks and lapses, it will surmount all dangers and obstacles and become unconquerable. This is what the spiritual seeker means by saying that the Divine Grace can make the lame leap across the mountain. India's destiny today hangs in the balance; it lies in the choice of her path.

A great opportunity is offered to India's soul, a mighty auspicious moment is come, if she can choose. If she chooses rightly, then can she arrive at the perfect fulfilment of her age-long endeavour, her life mission. India has preserved and fostered through the immemorial spiritual living of her saints and seers and sages the invaluable treasure, the vitalising, the immortalising power of spirituality, so that it can be placed at the service of terrestrial life for the deliverance of mankind, for the transfiguration of the human type. It is this for which India lives; by losing this India loses all her reason of existence — *raison d'être* — the earth and humanity too lose all significance. Today we are in the midst of an incomparable ordeal. If we know how to take the final and crucial step, we come out of it triumphant, a new soul and a new body, and we make the path straight for the Lord. We have to recognise clearly and unequivocally that victory on one side will mean that the path of the Divine — of progress and evolution and fulfilment — will remain open,

become wider and smoother and safer; but if the victory is on the other side, the path will be closed perhaps for ever, at least for many ages and even then the travail will have to be undergone again under the most difficult conditions and circumstances. Not with a political short-sightedness, not out of the considerations of convenience or diplomacy, of narrow parochial interests, but with the steady vision of the soul that encompasses the supreme welfare of humanity, we have to make our choice, we have to go over to the right side and oppose the wrong one with all the integrity of our life and being. The Allies, as they have been justly called, are really our allies, our friends and comrades, in spite of their thousand faults and defects; they have stood on the side of the Truth whose manifestation and triumph is our goal. Even though they did not know perhaps in the beginning what they stood for, even though perhaps as yet they do not comprehend the full sense and solemnity of the issues, still they have chosen a side which is ours, and we have to stand by them wholeheartedly in an all-round comradeship if we want to be saved from a great perdition.

This war is a great menace; it is also a great opportunity. It can land humanity into a catastrophe; it can also raise it to levels which would not have been within its reach but for the occasion. The Forces of Darkness have precipitated themselves with all their might upon the world, but by their very downrush have called upon the higher Forces of Light also to descend. The true use of the opportunity offered to man would be to bring about a change, better still, a reversal, in his consciousness, that is to say, it will be of highest utility if it forces upon him by the pressure of inexorable circumstances — since normally he is so unwilling and incapable to do it through a spontaneous inner awakening — the inescapable decision that he must change and shall change; and the change is to be for or towards the birth of a spiritual consciousness in earthly life. Indeed the war might be viewed as the birth-pangs of such a spiritual consciousness. Whether the labour would be sublimely fruitful here and now or end in barrenness is the question the Fates and the gods are asking of man — the mortal being — today.

(Nolini Kanta Gupta)

(To be continued)

K. D. SETHNA
(AMAL KIRAN)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of April 2014)

Chapter: XXXII

Surat: The Gathering Storm

The Congress has contented itself with demanding self-government as it exists in the Colonies. We of the new school would not pitch our ideal one inch lower than absolute Swaraj, — self-government as it exists in the United Kingdom. We believe that no smaller ideal can inspire national revival or nerve the people of India for the fierce, stubborn and formidable struggle by which alone they can again become a nation.

Sri Aurobindo
(23.4.1907)¹

THE ardent appeal to the nationalists through the *Bande Mataram* and other means to attend the 23rd Session of the Congress at Surat served its purpose well even though it was not easy for most of the nationalists to muster means enough for that long travel to and fro. Tilak too had not spared any effort to mobilise delegates from Maharashtra. Even though the Moderates were confident of majority, they did not relax their drive to recruit as many delegates as possible at Surat itself. Leaders of both the groups could foresee the event as momentous, a challenge to their positions.

The affluent city of Surat, dominated by the merchant class, was pro-Moderate if at all a political character could be attributed to it. A festive spirit marked the contours of the city well ahead of the Congress, though the air was steeped in anxiety and excitement so far as the organisers were concerned. As Dr. K. M. Munshi, who later rose to statesmanlike stature and who was present in the city as a volunteer, recollected:

The people of Surat, in spite of their reputation as being always engaged in enjoying life, began to revel in politics, and were soon split into two camps — Extremists and Moderates, *Jahal* and *Mawal*. Brothers quarrelled with brothers, fathers with sons on the burning topic of the day.²

The venue for the session was known as the French Gardens. The Reception Committee managed to reserve some of the best bungalows in the city for accommo-

dating the Moderate leaders; the Nationalists seem to have been taken for granted!

Let us have a few glimpses of Sri Aurobindo's travel from Kolkata to Surat along with, literally, a train-load of delegates. This is from the memoirs of Barindra Kumar in Bengali:

That I would attend the Surat Congress was beyond my imagination. One of the main principles of our secret society was that none of its members should ever attend any political meeting or discussion. Fewer the people to know them the better, the more they avoid public gaze, the better for their work. That is why we never attended even a single one of the thousands of Swadeshi meetings; we even used foreign goods so that the police had no reason to suspect us. Lectures and agitations were anathema to these silent workers dedicated to their cause.³

However, someone bought a ticket for Barindra Kumar at the last moment and it suddenly struck him that the conference could enable him to identify like-minded individuals among the delegates assembling from far and wide. There was no time to lose. With a few clothes in a canvas bag he set out for the railway station.

Though Calcutta was connected with several major cities by railway, the Howrah station had been built as a big centre only a year earlier.⁴ Till the mid-20th century (A.C. was not dreamt of) the train offered four classes: the 1st, the 2nd, the Inter and the 3rd. In the early years the 3rd class did not contain any facility, barring wooden benches. But the authorities had arranged for a special edition of the 'Bombay-Calcutta Mail' for the Congress delegates to depart from Howrah on the 21st of December.

The delegates, including Barindra Kumar, rushed into the 3rd class compartments as soon as the train inched back into position on the large platform. It was at Kharagpur that someone saw Barindra Kumar and directed him to another 3rd class compartment. Now let us look into another invaluable record of the travel he has left — this one in English:

Sri Aurobindo and Shyam Sundar Chakravarty were sitting smiling in that compartment while J. Ghosal, the Congress Secretary of the Moderate party, was travelling in a 1st class compartment in perfect European clothes and style. The train started in the midst of deafening cries of 'Bande Mataram' and the whole long route from Kharagpur to Surat was a triumphal journey of lights, crowds and continued cheering. The wayside stations, even the ones which the Special did not touch, were lined with admiring crowds; lights flashed and cheer after cheer rose and fell as the train leaping for a time into the lighted yards again rushed into the darkness of the night.

We alighted at Amraoti and Nagpore. In both places a sea of heads cov-

ered the station and the adjoining grounds and short halts were made in order to deliver appropriate speeches.

Aurobindo, the new idol of the nation was hardly known then by his face, and at every small and big station a frantic crowd rushed about on the platform looking for him in the 1st and 2nd class carriages, while all the time Aurobindo sat unobserved in the 3rd class. By the time this fact became known and he was found out, the train was about to start. In these days of style, luxury and easy leadership no one could imagine that Aurobindo — nurtured and educated in England and a high official of His Highness the Gaekwad's service who could leap into an all India fame in such a short time — would dream of travelling 3rd class. J. Ghosal felt small in contrast and tried again and again to invite Aurobindo into his 1st class carriage and to keep him there to save his face.

This simplicity of Aurobindo was natural and quite unostentatious. All his life he wore nothing but his country-made *dhoti*, *piran* (Indian shirt) and a *udani* with gold threads in its border. Small in stature and slender in build this quiet and unobtrusive man was very often lost in the crowd of his own admirers. When he rose to speak his voice was hardly audible except to those nearest to him, — that thin and almost girlish voice which in measured cadence gave vent to truth ringing with strength and beauty. Crowds of thousands materialised as if by magic and were kept spell-bound as it were in a dream by his wonderful personal magnetism.

We detrained in Bombay. There a meeting was arranged on the sea beach. We could hardly walk to the place through the living streams converging through the streets and lanes towards the chosen spot, automatically stopping all the vehicular traffic for a time. It was a sight for the gods to see: the awakening of a whole nation from its age-long sleep and inertia into conscious life of flaming aspiration. . . .⁵

Barindra Kumar, feeling surprised at the situation, cannot be interpreted as being subjectively inspired when we remember the conditions prevailing at the time. There was no media like the TV channels or even the radio. Newspapers were few and they commanded limited readership. In any case there were no easy means at the disposal of their correspondents to communicate such programmes in advance for publication. The powerful sector of the Press was controlled by the colonial vested interest and it would never publicise any rally by the Nationalists in advance. There were no microphones through which the people could be notified of such events. Thus one had every reason to feel surprised at the huge masses of people that turned out to listen to a leader who had just emerged to the forefront. The biggest single factor for such unusual enthusiasm of the people could of course be the influence of Tilak over the region.

Sri Aurobindo and his party arrived at Surat on the 23rd of December. According

to a report despatched to London by the correspondent of the premier news agency Reuters:

The streets are daily decorated with bunting, and scrolls bearing appropriate mottoes are seen everywhere. Numerous triumphal arches have been erected. The approaches to the Railway station are thronged by crowds who cheer the delegates as they arrive. The Congress will meet in a specially erected pavilion in the grounds known as the French Gardens, situated on the banks of the river Tapti. A hundred marquees have been provided for accommodating the delegates, who will, it is expected, number 1500. The scene in the vicinity of the camp is most animated. A miscellaneous stream of automobiles, bullock carts and sight-seers is continually passing and re-passing.⁶

A recent research adds:

At little intervals people were offering small bunches of flowers and garlands to the guests. Perfume was being sprinkled. Rose water was sprinkled everywhere abundantly. From all sides one could hear the slogan of 'Bande Mataram'. Roofs of the temples and the balconies of mosques were full of spectators. A new kind of enthusiasm was visible in the people.⁷

The local Reception Committee, as expected, had arranged for treating the Moderate leaders quite discerningly. They were lodged in aristocratic bungalows belonging to the local Seths.⁸ For their immediate use, close to the site of the conference

. . . were pitched luxurious tents. The whole atmosphere here breathed style and European fashion; volunteers in uniform and a whole host of butlers and peons running here and there serving the proud leaders of India all clad in hat, coat and trousers. None could meet Surendranath, Mehta or Gokhale without previous appointments and visiting cards.

In the heart of the city a mile or so away was encamped in several houses and temples the vast army of Tilak from Maharashtra and Aurobindo from Bengal. . . . Eight hundred young and ardent souls as delegates poured in from the Deccan and day and night continuous streams of people flowed up the staircase of a temple where sat Sri Aurobindo and the redoubtable Tilak in constant conclave. The crowd feasted their eyes in silent adoration and quickly passed down the other end of the staircase. Day and night, there, the two makers of modern India, Tilak and Aurobindo, sat and nurtured their plans of action and devised new ways and means of attack on the moderate clique ruling the Congress at that time.⁹

We have already described in brief the factors that made the Moderates change the venue of the Congress from Nagpur to Surat and the suspicion of the Nationalists that the radical spirit reflected in the resolutions passed at the Calcutta session had been either ignored or toned down in the draft resolutions to be placed before the Congress at Surat. In order to appreciate the subsequent developments we should remember the clean ideological divide that had hardened between the two camps. Here is a terse and matter-of-fact description of the situation, culled from the secret report prepared by Mr. F. C. Daly, D.I.G., Special Branch, Bengal:

At the Congress which was held in Calcutta in December 1906, the Extremists or Nationalist party openly avowed their object of gaining complete autonomy for India. It was probably at this Congress that a definite line was drawn between the Extremists and the Moderates. The Moderates profess to aim at nothing more than a measure of self-government within the Empire; the Extremists or Nationalist party, of which Arabindo Ghose and Bipin Chandra Pal were the organisers in Bengal, aim at nothing short of complete freedom from British and all other foreign rule and hold that for this object the adoption of any measure towards which the conscience of its advocates lead them, is morally justifiable.¹⁰

The situation is further explained by a biographer of Motilal Ghose. Motilal was outwardly with the Nationalists, but he relished playing the role of a liberal mediator between the two camps, not very effectively though:

Dr. Rash Behari Ghose, who was the President-elect, belonged to what was then known as the Moderate Party. Lord Minto was then following the policy of repression laid down by his predecessor Lord Curzon. The Extremists were in no peaceful mood. Somehow or other they got scent of the fact that the Moderates had decided upon giving up the fighting programme of the Extremists and dropping Swadeshism, Boycott, National Education and Self-Government from the resolutions they wanted to pass at the Congress — at least that was what the Extremists apprehended. This was too much for them and they made up their minds to prevent such a scandal. Moreover the Extremists were at this time smarting under a sense of grievance at certain observations of the President-elect and were thus not well disposed towards him.¹¹

The Nationalists held a meeting of their own on the 24th of December. Let us glance at the entry dated the 24th of December 1907 in the personal diary of G. S. Khaparde, an outstanding champion of the Nationalist cause:

This was a very busy day. We had to make arrangements for our Nationalist conference. Delegates kept pouring in all morning. Bengal, Madras, Belgaun, Dharwad, Berar, C.P. — and Nationalists from all over the country have turned up very very strong and we number about six hundred. Babasaheb Khare of Nasik, Balasaheb Deshpande of Ahmednagar and very many others have either arrived or are on their way. Arobindo Babu, Suresh Babu and many others are here. Talks of compromise are all in the air and our party without exception are in favour of an amicable settlement. The Moderates would appear to be in uncertain temper. Some are for compromise and others for holding out indefinitely. Our conference held in Ghee-Khanta Wadi was an unqualified success. All our Nationalist delegates attended. We have made a separate camp for ourselves and that is a distinct advantage. The Moderates are mostly gathered in the camp near the Pandal and are more or less dispersed. Tilak made a very clear and forcible statement in our conference. Mr. Arobindo Babu presided. After the conference we went to our Tedka meeting. It was unprecedentedly large, over ten thousand being present . . .¹²

A prominently published report of the meeting in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* said:

Surat, Dec. 24: The first Indian National Conference was held today at one o'clock at Haripura Ghanchi Vadi under the Presidentship of Mr. Aravind Ghose. Every one was allowed to enter after solemnly declaring himself that he was a Nationalist and by paying a fee of Rupee One. The President made a short speech and said: — "We were making individual efforts for Nationalism. We have done more than we did in the last 50 years from the time of Lord Macaulay's first resolution."

Mr. Tilak made a long speech reviewing the Nationalist position, then that of the Moderates, and declared that ". . . our ideal was for total independence of our country." He said: — "We do not want to revolt against the Government, but we have courage to approach our goal. We are prepared to suffer for that, we want democracy in the Congress and Congress work should not be done in the office of an Autocrat."¹³

Taking a small break from the chronological narration of the events, it may not be out of place to correct a misinformation that prevailed in certain quarters for some time. From the tone of the following passage it should be evident that its author, Pramodaranjan Ghose, a former Principal of Rabindranath's Visva Bharati, was sure of his 'fact'; probably many others were:

As the President of the conference (of the 24th December) Sri Aurobindo informed the Moderate leaders through a letter that if the four resolutions adopted

at the Calcutta Congress were omitted or their tone changed, then the Nationalists would be obliged to raise their protests from the very start, right from the moment the President would be proposed. In reply to this query from Sri Aurobindo it was stated that the four earlier resolutions were included in the programme. The reply was given by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. He was then not known to many in India. He was in India to garner support from the Congress and its leaders for his Indian movement in South Africa. He was present at the Surat Congress. He requested (the authorities concerned) to be given a chance to assist in the Conference. He was given the task of assisting the Congress Secretary. Hence Gandhiji's reply to Sri Aurobindo. It seems the Nationalists were not quite convinced with a reply from an unknown person. Tilak announced in a meeting on the 25th that if the Moderates had truly retained the four resolutions in their programme, then the Nationalists would offer no obstruction to the election of Rash Behari Ghose as the President of the Conference.¹⁴

But Gandhi-ji was still in South Africa. It is possible that Chunilal Maneklal Gandhi, a secretary of the local Congress who was active as an organiser could have been the reason for the confusion.

The Nationalists were evidently quite a cohesive group and the leading ones among them were well aware of the ideology for which they stood. They were sure that the Congress under the Moderates would not only be unable to take the national aspiration for throwing off the foreign yoke, it would even prove damaging to such a cause if it was allowed to proceed along its present beaten track that only took it round and round and never forward. That they were not incorrect should become clear from the embarrassingly reactionary Address of the President-elect Rash Behari Ghose (which could not be read in full):

The growth of a new party in India has also served as a very useful excuse for delaying all reforms. I am, however, bound to say that this party is not, at the present moment, at all dangerous. Every sensible man disapproves of its methods; if the Government can only rally the Moderates to their side by gradually preparing the country to take its position as a Self-governing State or a federation of States, united together under the supreme authority of England, they will extinguish the new party completely, and the ominous shadow which has projected itself over the future fortunes of the country will disappear.¹⁵

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

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The work of Nationalism is therefore twofold. It has to win Swaraj for India so that the present unhealthy conditions of political life, full of the germs of that social and political phthisis which is overtaking Europe, may be entirely and radically cured, and it has to ensure that the Swaraj it brings about shall be a Swadeshi Swaraj and not an importation of the European article.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 7, p. 1039)

ACHARYA PRAFULLA CHANDRA RAY — VI

(Continued from the issue of April 2014)

P. C. Ray, The Social Worker

THE scientist Satyendranath Bose, a pupil of P. C. Ray, remarks about the Acharya's life ([3], p. ix):

His saintly life is a beacon light to all who wish to dedicate their lives in the service of humanity.

An epitome of compassion, Prafulla Chandra Ray never failed to respond to a call for help whether from an individual or from a mass of people in distress. During his rural life, when he was still a young boy, Prafulla Chandra used to take care of the poor people who fell ill but did not have the means to procure the prescribed diet. With his mother's consent, Prafulla Chandra used to take food items like sago, arrowroot and sugarcandy from his mother's stores and distribute them among the sick. Years later, the villagers would readily respond to the Acharya's appeal for donations for flood-victims, for they dearly loved their "Peeceerai" ([10], p. 17). M. Gupta records ([3], p. 65) that when the Acharya used to visit his village home during the Puja and summer vacations, he would take with him a few gunnybagfuls of sugarcandy, sago and barley to be distributed among the needy.

One can also see the social worker in P. C. Ray in his choice of the first research theme after his return to India: the investigation into the adulteration of ghee and mustard oil which were practically the only source of fat for the people in Bengal. (cf. *Mother India*, November 2013, p. 960)

The Acharya's organisation of relief during famine and floods became a legend. During the Khulna famine in 1921, when there was no relief measure from the colonial Government, the Acharya launched a vigorous campaign, collected subscriptions, and began relief work by his own arrangement. Volunteers joined him in large numbers from the districts of Faridpur and Barisal (now in Bangladesh); economic assistance came from various parts of India. The work was so well-organised that adequate relief reached all the afflicted people.

The very next year, at the time of the Durga Puja festival in September 1922, a devastating flood swept through North Bengal after a heavy downpour in the region during 25-27 September. It was "the most terrific of its kind in the memory of the living generation" ([5], p. 249). Villages in districts like Pabna and Rajshahi (now in Bangladesh) got completely submerged, the water level rising up to 7 or 8 feet at

places. About 2000 square miles, with a population of over a million, were covered by the flood and a vast tract of land remained under water for about two months. Almost all the dwelling houses of the area were washed away; the residents of the afflicted area had to take shelter on higher lands near the railway line and elsewhere. About a hundred people lost their lives. Those who survived lost their means of livelihood as all crops and livestock were destroyed — about 12,000 cattle perished. Even according to a Government report, properties worth crores of rupees were lost in the flood-ravaged areas of the affected districts. Faulty construction of railways and roads, obstructing the natural drainage, was the main cause of the calamity. Waterways had been drastically curtailed six years before, already resulting in a serious flood in 1918 and a minor flood in 1920. A year before the devastation in 1922, the villagers had petitioned the Magistrate of the Bogra district urging that a bridge be constructed, in place of a narrow culvert, for the outflow of the immense volume of water during any monsoon deluge; their prayers had been dismissed.¹

Again, with the Government indifferent to the enormous tragedy (for which they were largely responsible), it was the fragile 61-year-old Prafulla Chandra Ray, ably assisted by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose (“whose heart always melts at the sight of suffering humanity”), who launched the relief and rehabilitation programme. The “Bengal Relief Committee” was formed, with P. C. Ray as President, comprising members of various political, industrial, social and youth organisations including the Congress and Bengal Chemical who were to work in friendly coordination. In response to the appeals from Ray and his team, money and relief materials started coming from all corners of India, from all segments of the society — whether rich or poor. Contributions also came from Indians settled in Japan and Africa.

The relief work was undertaken on a war footing. Separate rooms and halls in the spacious buildings of the Science College were used by the Bengal Relief Committee for its General office, the Treasurer’s office, the Stores, the Despatch department, and Stations for receiving donations in cash and in kind. The Committee also formed a Publicity Bureau to supply authentic updated information to the public. About 200 volunteers, in batches, were engaged at the Science College and the relief centres in the flooded areas. Heaps of old and new clothes, blankets, etc., were collected and distributed regularly. The Acharya himself prepared the bundles of clothes and medicine packets. “This vast organisation worked on with clock-like

1. Acharya Ray writes on the basis of his personal inspection of the railway line after the flood had subsided ([5], p. 236): “It will be evident to any impartial reader that the Government was wilfully and criminally responsible for the great havoc. . . . The petitioners were ignorant village folks but they had the intelligence and shrewd commonsense to realise that unless the narrow culverts were replaced by bridges of long span they would always be liable to the calamity of a flood. And this is exactly what happened. The fact is that railway lines are constructed with an eye to the interests of foreign shareholders. The less the cost, the greater the expectation of dividend; hence many a natural waterway is either filled up with earthwork or shortened. . . .” Unfortunately, even in Independent India, disasters still get invited by haphazard construction activities, driven by vested commercial interests, ignoring potential hazards.

regularity and precision.” ([5], p. 240) Apart from the Acharya and Netaji Subhash Chandra, special mention should be made of Dr. J. M. Dasgupta, Satis Chandra Dasgupta, Dr. Indra Narayan Sen, Jatindra Nath Ray, Kshitish Chandra Dasgupta, Profs. Prafulla Chandra Mitra, Meghnad Saha and Niren Chowdhury, who all worked hard and in harmony, over a long period. Their work spoke for their planning excellence, organisational capability, high integrity and kindness. It was the personal supervision and influence of the Acharya that ensured such a disciplined and selfless service. A former student of the Acharya records ([6], p. 62):

Those who have visited the Palit Research Laboratory, the place of Prafulla Chandra’s activity at that time, could not but be struck [at] the wonderful organisation of the relief work. . . . It is not too much to say that the soul of this stupendous organisation was Acharya Prafulla Chandra. It was simply by the power of his personality and character that this noble endeavour has been brought to such a wonderful success. The achievement of this relief will ever remain engraved in golden letters in the national history of Bengal.

After the water receded, the relief committee got the agricultural land of affected villagers ploughed by tractors and supplied (for free) a large quantity of seeds. They built sheds, rebuilt the houses of the peasants, arranged medical aid for the sick, and introduced spinning wheels and handlooms. The work of village reconstruction continued for some years.

We quote below excerpts from a long report by a special correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* ([5], pp. 242-47):

. . . In these circumstances a professor of chemistry, Sir P. C. Ray, stepped forward and called upon his countrymen to make good the Government’s omissions. His call was answered with enthusiasm. . . .

. . . He is also a real organiser and a real teacher. I heard a European saying, ‘If Mr. Gandhi had only been able to create two more Sir P. C. Rays he would have succeeded in getting Swaraj within this year.’ A Bengali student told me, ‘If any Government officer or any of the Non-Co-operating politicians² had called for subscriptions the public would not have given even three farthings. But when Sir P. C. Ray calls everyone knows that the money will be spent and well spent, and not wasted.’ I had the good fortune to see Sir P. C. Ray . . . The volunteers were busy under his eye, bringing order out of disorder, and arranging for the despatch of the clothes to the scene of the relief operations. The next day I caught a glimpse of him assisting two young students to carry out some experiment in chemistry, and it seemed to me there

2. Politicians in the Non Co-operation Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1921.

was affection between the teacher and the taught. . . .

. . . Government have lost immensely in prestige over the whole affair, and that Non-Co-operation has won³ what Government have lost, thanks to the fine work of Sir P. C. Ray's volunteers.

C. F. Andrews reported that owing to the severe strain and lack of proper food and rest, some of the volunteers on the field used to fall sick; they would be nursed back to health at the camp hospitals after which they bravely returned to their duty without any further break. He described the work of the Bengal Relief Committee as "one of the noblest efforts made in modern India on behalf of distressed humanity" ([5], p. 248).

History repeated itself nine years later, in 1931: another furious flood in the region, again a Government official declaring that the Government is not a "charitable institution" ([5], p. 251) and again an organisation "Sankat-tran-Samiti" sprang up under the Acharya's leadership, got the required financial resources from his countrymen, and did commendable relief work.

Under the instruction of the Acharya, the volunteers of the Bengal Relief Committee had also provided swift service to the people of Bihar affected by the devastating earthquake of 1934. During the Midnapur flood of 1940, though an infirm Ray could no longer render active service as before, he issued appeals to his countrymen to generously contribute to the Midnapur Central Flood Relief Committee which was organising the relief.

The first-hand experience of the misery caused by floods had a deep impact on Meghnad Saha, the beloved pupil of Acharya Ray. Saha went on to become the architect of river-planning in India — it was he who prepared the original plan for the Damodar Valley project.

P. C. Ray's Munificence

The Acharya personified the Oriental ideal of "plain living and high thinking" to the fullest extent. He lived an austere life, a life of Spartan simplicity, and gave away most of his earnings in donations and charity. His calorically adjusted and balanced diet cost less than Re 1 per day. Because of his dress, comprising of the cheapest costume of coarse hand-made fabric, he was often mistaken for his laboratory peon or servant.⁴ His bed consisted of a light mattress, a pillow and a bed-sheet spread on a *khatia*. This, and a few almirahs packed with books, made up the entire

3. Most of the volunteers in the relief operations were activists of the Non Co-operation Movement.

4. Prof. Charuchandra Bhattacharya, a student of Acharya Ray at Presidency College in 1901, recalls ([8], p. 232) that, on the first day, he was puzzled to see the Acharya coming to class wearing a coat identical to the one worn by the bearer. Later, he came to know that the Acharya had made 4 coats from a piece of cloth; he gave two to the bearer and used the other two!

furniture in his room. A true ashram life! Even in the hot summer months, no electric fan was to be seen in his room.

Extremely frugal in spending for himself, he was generous in spending for a cause and for the needy, viz., for poor students, for the cause of science especially chemistry, for indigenous industries, for the support of the widows, orphans and destitutes, and so on.

In the words of the Acharya ([9], p. 553):

The idea that education is not for the poor, that it is only a luxury for the rich, appears to us atrocious — we Orientals cannot stand it — our whole traditions are against it.

There are numerous instances of the Acharya giving financial support to needy students. Nilratan Dhar (the famous scientist and one of Ray's former students), writes ([8], p. 160):

For many years Acharya Ray contributed Rs. 400 per month for helping the needy students of the Calcutta colleges and paid liberally to the Sadharan Brahma Samaj and to Brahma Girls' School . . . I gratefully acknowledge his help of 40 pounds (Rs. 500) when I proceeded to Europe for research work as a State Scholar in 1915.

Similar reminiscences have been recorded by many others about P. C. Ray's financial help during their student days. The incredible extent of his donations reminds one of the great Vidyasagar. It is estimated that Acharya Ray used to spend over 90 per cent of his salary (which ranged from Rs. 250 initially to Rs. 800 per month) at Presidency College on charity. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, while introducing Acharya Ray to Mahatma Gandhi in 1901, said ([10], p. 2):

This is Professor Ray. He gets a monthly salary of Rs. 800 but he keeps only a sum of Rs. 40 for himself, giving away the rest for the cause of the country.

Mahatma Gandhi, himself a symbol of ascetic denial, spoke (in 1931) about his first impression of P. C. Ray in 1901 ([7], p. 4):

It was difficult to believe that the man in simple Indian dress and wearing simplest manners could possibly be the great scientist and professor he even then [in 1901] was. And it took my breath away when I heard that out of his princely salary he kept only a few rupees for himself and the rest he devoted to public uses and particularly for helping poor students. Thirty years made no difference to the great good servant of India. Acharya Ray has set us an exam-

ple of ceaseless service, enthusiasm and optimism, of which we may well be proud.

At least 45 Institutions (listed in [9], pp. 405-06) benefited from the munificence of Acharya Ray; we shall mention a few specific instances.

After his retirement from Presidency College in 1916, P. C. Ray used to get a monthly pension of Rs. 430 out of which he would spend about Rs. 200 to meet his expenses, including travel; the rest would be given away in charity ([3], p. 63). He would also return the honorarium for lectures, examination fees, etc, for the advancement of science education. In February 1918, P. C. Ray delivered his famous addresses at the University of Madras on “Chemistry in Ancient India” and the “Antiquity of Hindu Chemistry”. The honorarium that he received for these lectures was offered back by him to the University for creating an annual prize called Wedderburn prize to be awarded for the best original work in Chemistry. The prize was named after Sir William Wedderburn⁵ who passed away on 25 January, 1918, a few days before Ray’s lectures. P. C. Ray made a similar gift to the Punjab University ([6], p. 68).

On turning 60 (in 1921), P. C. Ray submitted his resignation from the post of Palit Professor of Chemistry. But the University extended his service by 15 years. The Acharya did not draw his salary (Rs. 1,000 per month) for these 15 years; in 1936 he returned the amount of Rs. 1,80,000 and requested the University to utilise it for setting up a modern research laboratory for Inorganic Chemistry and instituting a research fellowship in the Chemistry Department.

In 1922, he donated Rs. 10,000 to the University of Calcutta for funding an annual prize for research in chemistry to be named after Nagarjuna, the great ancient Indian chemist. The money represented the best part of his life’s savings. In 1936, when retiring from the University, he donated another Rs. 10,000 for a prize in

5. Sir William Wedderburn (1838-1918) was a liberal statesman remembered for his contributions towards administrative reforms in India. His life-long efforts to solve the problems of Indian peasants must have touched Acharya Ray, prompting him to institute the Award in his memory.

Belonging to a reputed Scottish family, William Wedderburn served the Indian Civil Service (ICS) in Bombay from 1860 till 1887. His father and elder brother too were ICS officers; his elder brother was killed in the 1857 uprising. Along with A. O. Hume, William Wedderburn was a founder of the Indian National Congress (1885) and served as its President in 1889 and 1910.

As an official of ICS, Wedderburn was deeply concerned with the peasants’ misery due to famine, poverty and debt. He suggested establishment of co-operative agricultural banks to provide credits at reasonable rates. He participated in the work of the Indian Famine Union set up in 1901 to investigate famines and propose preventive measures. Wedderburn also advocated the principle of local self-government suggested by Lord Ripon. He wanted Indian judges to be given the same status as their European counterparts. His support for Indian aspirations annoyed the administration and he was denied the position of a Judge at the Bombay High Court. In the British Parliament, which he entered in 1893, Wedderburn voiced Indian grievances. As the Congress President in 1910, he attempted to reconcile the differences between the Moderates and the radicals, and to bridge the rift between Hindus and Muslims.

Zoology and Botany in memory of Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, due to whose initiative and support science research and education could flourish at Calcutta University. He gifted Rs. 10,000 to the City College. He founded an Educational Society in his village and provided Rs. 10,000 for its funding. The Indian Chemical Society was started with a donation of Rs. 10,000 from him for its building fund.

P. C. Ray did not accept any salary from Bengal Chemicals; that money was spent largely for the welfare of the employees. He had shares in Bengal Chemicals and other companies worth Rs. 56,000. He formed a Trust to utilise the dividends for the cause of khadi and service to villagers.

While he virtually wished nothing for himself, he struggled to ensure respectable remuneration and social stature for those who pursued science. It appears that he had taken up with the Government the question of raising the emolument of science students to the standard of the Indian Civil Service ([3], p. 157).

An incident that took place when the Acharya used to stay in the Science College brings out the economic philosophy practised by Acharya Ray. In those days, two bananas costing one pice (one-fourth of an anna, i.e., 64 pice equals one rupee) were procured daily for the Acharya's household. One day, N. Adhikari, a youngster staying with the Acharya (later a Manager at Bengal Chemical), procured two bananas of a larger variety. Initially pleased to see the fruit, the Acharya got infuriated on knowing that those bananas had cost three pice (i.e., about 5 paise) and severely reprimanded him for "learning the way of a Nawab" ([3], p. 66). Two hours later, Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh⁶ came to the Acharya for monetary help (and advice) for the activities of his Abhay Ashram. The Acharya wanted to know the amount required. Dr. Ghosh replied "Three Thousand". The Acharya, whose bank balance at that time was Rs. 3,500 only, signed a cheque of Rs. 3,000 (an amount 64,000 times what was spent injudiciously by the hapless Adhikari) and gave it to Dr. Ghosh.

M. Gupta records ([3], p. 65) that P. C. Ray gave him a cheque for the school at Baghil⁷ and that this cheque wiped off his last remaining bank balance. Acharya Prafulla Chandra has been aptly compared with Rishi Dadhichi ([1], p. 188; [9], pp. 365-66).⁸

6. The Gandhian leader and social worker whom we have mentioned in Part V (*Mother India*; April 2014, p. 313 fn. 4). In 1921, Dr. P. C. Ghosh had established the "Abhay Ashram", a welfare organisation which became a shining model for constructive work in village restoration and renovation, propagation of khadi, agricultural development, national education and medical assignments. Under the leadership of Dr. Ghosh, the Abhay Ashram provided splendid service to the victims of devastating floods in East Bengal. Dr. Ghosh also made several efforts to support and develop the village industries.

7. The village of Krishna Kumar Mitra, the maternal uncle (*mesho*) of Sri Aurobindo.

8. Dadhichi, revered among the greatest sages of Indian mythology, had sacrificed his life to enable the Devas to manufacture the all-powerful weapon "Vajra" from his bones. Dadhichi's bones, the Vajra, form the symbol in the medal of the Param Vir Chakra, India's highest military award for self-sacrifice.

9. The illustrious student of the Acharya, who was a pioneer in biochemical research and education in India, whom we mentioned in Part V (*Mother India*; April 2014, p. 319 fn. 13).

“A new generation came up which knew not Joseph.” Quoting this Biblical sentence, Bires Guha⁹ observes ([8], p. 182) that new generations have come up in India which have not known Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray. Writes Dr. Guha ([9], p. 265):

It is necessary that our young people know the dedicated life of this great man, the like of whom I have not met. His slogan may be summed up in the words, “patriotism, sincerity and hard work”. Is it too much to expect that our young people who have now got the inestimable boon of political freedom will work unremittingly with this slogan on their lips to build up a great India for which he lived and died?

Einstein once remarked that generations to come will scarcely believe that a man like Mahatma Gandhi “ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.” Will generations of Indians care to remember and emulate the life of Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray? Or will they take the easier option of treating the well-documented legacy of this devoted son of Mother India with a haughty cynical disbelief?

As Dr. Bires Guha emphasises ([8], p. 182):

But we have to remember him and his legacy *not for his sake but our own*.

Epilogue

While reviewing P. C. Ray’s autobiography [5], H. E. Armstrong wrote in *Nature* (1933):

A more remarkable career than that of P. C. Ray could not well be chronicled. The story told is not only fascinating: it has an altogether special value, as a presentation of a complex mentality, unique in character, range of ability and experience.

In order to understand such a complex mind, we juxtapose below a few apparent paradoxes in P. C. Ray’s life, writings and activities.

An academician steeped in research, writing books and moulding students, P. C. Ray was unsparing in his criticism of the intellectual snobbery of the Bengali middle class, urging them to venture into industrial and business enterprises.

Passionate about literature and history, P. C. Ray promoted the cultivation of science.

Himself a D.Sc. in Chemistry, Ray condemned the craze for degrees.

Methodical and punctual in his habits, P. C. Ray was casual in matters of dress, manners and conventions.

Averse to power and luxury, Ray advocated the creation of wealth by the development of industries and trade.

Himself an industrialist, P. C. Ray raised his voice against relentless capitalism and mechanisation and the ruin of village life.

Deeply fond of the peasantry, P. C. Ray never approved of their idleness.

At the service of the colonial Government during the best years of his life, P. C. Ray remained a staunch patriot to his last breath.

The same P. C. Ray, who looked to the future and began a new dawn of chemical research in modern India, looked to the past and recovered the forgotten history of chemical research in ancient India.

Again P. C. Ray, who brought to light an important aspect of ancient Indian achievements, was contemptuous of any lazy pride in past glory.

Merciless and intolerant in his criticisms of the defects and evils in contemporary society, P. C. Ray dearly loved his country.

Living like a pauper but donating like a prince, he literally gave away all he had to his fellow-countrymen.

His sacrifices flowed spontaneously “untainted by vanity and unsullied by any desire for fame, but promoted solely by a strong and sincere emotion to help forward the cause of national regeneration” ([6], p. 71).

Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh observes ([8], p. 259) that there have emerged in India greater scientists than P. C. Ray, more capable industrialists, teachers as simple and dedicated as P. C. Ray who too loved their students, social workers who, like him, served the distressed, and patriots who have made greater sacrifices. There have been thinkers like P. C. Ray who combined a modern outlook with a reverence for the ancients; thinkers who believed in big industries and yet favoured the spread of cottage industries in villages; people who, in spite of being city-dwellers, appreciated the simple charm of rural life; leaders who worked for the progress of the people of their respective provinces without any hostility to people from other areas; and authors who have been more effective than P. C. Ray in lovingly articulating the defects, lapses and weaknesses of their own provinces. But, as Dr. P. C. Ghosh remarks, it is rare to come across *all these qualities* in a single individual and, in times of crisis, the nation needs a person like P. C. Ray.

Dr. Bires Guha points out that not even a fraction of the Acharya’s exhortations “which he constantly made to his people out of the anguish of his heart has yet been implemented in the lives of our people.” He adds ([8], p. 182):

Still the star of his life continues to send its beneficent light on the path of our nation. Let us be guided by it in our onward march to build the India of his dreams, India — which he loved so truly and so well.

J. C. Bose concludes his profound tribute to his dear friend P. C. Ray with the words ([7], p. 6):

The association of plain living and high thinking is always very rare; in addition to these there is in Sir P. C. Ray the element of vigorous action which knows no rest. The combination of such qualities in a single individual is indeed rare in any country, and there can be no higher example for the younger generation to emulate than the life of this great teacher.

We end our tribute with excerpts from P. C. Ray's autobiography ([5], p. 541):

. . . there is a connecting link pervading my life-work . . . my activities are but parts in a comprehensive piece. . . . Whatever field I have ploughed I have ploughed as an humble instrument in the hand of Providence: my failures are my own . . . But my successes, if any, are to be attributed to the guidance of the All-knowing, who chose me to be His humble instrument. After all, a Divinity shapes our ends.

(Concluded)

AMARTYA KUMAR DUTTA

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RHETORIC IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PROSE

(Continued from the issue of April 2014)

IX

RHETORICAL Question, which is the third of the figures based on construction, has been divided into four categories:

(i) Interrogatio (ii) Rogatio (iii) Quaestitio and (iv) Percontatio.

(i) Interrogatio — This is the figure popularly known as rhetorical question, i.e., a question that requires no answer. It takes for granted some kind of agreement between the writer and his reader. Besides directly addressing the audience or the reader it involves a dramatic change of tone and compels the attention of the audience, so it used to be a favourite device of orators. Writers of prose also employ it for the same reasons: dramatic change of tone, addressing the reader directly and agreement between the writer and the reader. Our writer uses it quite often:

... but who shall lay down rules for creative genius or say what it shall or shall not attempt?¹

It implies the emphatic answer: no one can or should. The reader will notice that it fulfils all the three functions mentioned above. There is a change of tone which becomes clear in the context. In the preceding sentence the writer was discussing the nature of poetry and the tone was discursive and thoughtful. Then comes this sudden question, changing the tone dramatically. It addresses the reader directly and also takes it for granted that the reader agrees with the writer that no one can or should lay down rules for creative genius.

(ii) Rogatio — This is a question to which the answer is immediately given by the writer himself. Longinus strongly approves of it:

And this method of asking questions and providing your own answers gives the appearance of being a natural outburst of feelings.²

He has many other things to say about this figure. There are many of these in *The Hour of God*:

1. *The Future Poetry* (1953 ed.), p. 10.

2. T. S. Dorsch transl., *Classical Literary Criticism*, Penguin, 1965, p. 128.

I aspire to infinite force, infinite knowledge, infinite bliss. Can I attain it? Yes, but the nature of infinity is that it has no end.³

The reader will notice that besides having the feature of interrogation this example also has that of “answering the question spontaneously, and with energy and complete candour” that Longinus talks about.

(iii) *Quaestitio* — This is a figure in which a number of questions are asked one after another for the sake of emphasis. Here is an instance from the story, *The Phantom Hour*:

But then who had given him that mystic warning? Who had put the revolver in his hand? or sent him on a mission of slaughter? Who had made Imogen rise just in time? Who had fired that shot in the drawing-room? The God within? The God without?⁴

Usually writers are content with three questions in a row, but here there are seven, emphasising the intervention of the supernatural in the story. Perhaps this is the longest example of its kind, without the least suspicion of bathos or exaggeration. No mean achievement.

(iv) *Percontatio* — This is a figure of speech in which the question is put to some definite person, or by the writer to himself. But it is a question which really cannot be answered — it is far too complex. The following two sentences will clarify the point:

In regard to poetic style we have to make, for the purpose of the idea we have in view, the starting-point of the mantra, precisely the same distinctions as in regard to poetic rhythm, — since here too we find actually everything admitted as poetry which has some power of style and is cast into some kind of rhythmical form. But the question is what kind of power and in that kind what intensity of achievement?⁵

The reader will easily understand that the question is far too complex to be easily answered. It will take a long discussion to answer it. So it is not what is ordinarily understood by rhetorical question nor is it a *rogatio*.

The next figure is a simple one: *Hyperbaton* or *Inversion*. In it the proper sequence of words is changed. Longinus has given a fine definition of it:

3. *The Hour of God*, p. 6.

4. *Collected Plays II*, SABCL, Vol. 7, p. 1024.

5. *The Future Poetry*, p. 32.

. . . the arrangement of words or ideas out of their normal sequence, and they carry, so to speak, the genuine stamp of powerful emotion.⁶

The stock example of this is the first line of Keats' written after reading Homer in translation: "Much have I travelled in the realms of gold". Here the grammatical order is "I have travelled much" etc., but then the poetic beauty would be lost. Keats has turned an ordinary sentence into poetry by simply changing the word-order. It is a device used more in poetry than in prose, for inversion is often necessary in poetry. But it can be used effectively in prose as well:

Here comes in the side of success and achievement.⁷

He could have said: "It is here that the side of success and achievement comes in." The result would not be as economical or compact as it is in his sentence.

(To be continued)

RATRI RAY

6. T. S. Dorsch transl., *Classical Literary Criticism*, Penguin, 1965, p. 131.

7. *The Future Poetry*, p. 73.

Rhetoric is a word with which we can batter something we do not like; but rhetoric of one kind or another has been always a great part of the world's best literature; Demosthenes, Cicero, Bossuet and Burke are rhetoricians, but their work ranks with the greatest prose styles that have been left to us.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Poetry and Art, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 335)

AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

(Continued from the issue of April 2014)

8. Pilgrims to Canterbury

THE Cathedral and Metropolitan Church of Christ at Canterbury was founded in the 6th century. For fifteen hundred years, this Cathedral in Kent has exerted a fascination for the lover of history, religion and literature for many reasons. One of them is, of course, that it is the Cathedral of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primate of all England as he is known. The most famous of the Archbishops of Canterbury was Thomas Becket. The holy Church became a much sought-after pilgrim site because of this Archbishop who became a martyr.

Becket's martyrdom was an important reference point to us in those days because of papers on the history of England, Chaucer as well as T. S. Eliot. Thomas Becket (1120-1170) was at loggerheads with the King of England at that time. When discussing with some of his knights the problems being created by Becket, King Henry II seems to have said: "Will not somebody save me from this troublesome priest?" William de Tracy and three other knights who were with him at that time thought it was a command to them to put an end to Becket. Which they did by cutting him down even as he was drawing close to the altar for evening prayers. He had been known as a venerable person who did not fail to punish himself whenever he thought there was a need to do so, and hence the whole of Europe stood up as one person to hail him as a martyr. Within three years, he was canonised by Pope Alexander III. Henry II made public penance to prove his loyalty to the Church and the Archbishop. Since then, Canterbury became a holy place of pilgrimage for Christians.

The importance of the Cathedral and the historical tragedy of a holy man's assassination have continued to be in the consciousness of the European mind all these centuries. As recently as 1935 T. S. Eliot wrote a memorable drama on the subject, *Murder in the Cathedral*. Even by the fourteenth century the Canterbury Cathedral had become very famous as a pilgrim centre. Chaucer, with unerring aim chose a few pilgrims on their way to Canterbury as his story-tellers. When I look back upon my student days poring over English literature and attending the classes, Chaucer happens to be definitely one of the bright spots, unforgettable.

The Canterbury Tales can be termed as an *avatamsaka kavya*, an epic-array of stories. India is familiar with this idea of a group of pilgrims, banding together to go on pilgrimage, exchanging information and often telling stories to while away an evening when resting in a deserted zone or caught in the Himalayan trek by a

landslide. They must wait till the path is restored. Not always are the stories of a religious or spiritual character. All the shades of everyday life get into the telling and Chaucer's work is no exception.

The work is quite long. There are twenty-four tales narrated by different pilgrims and there is a general Prologue as well. So much of Middle English was too large an area to be covered for our Middle English Paper in the course. Only two sections were prescribed: the 'Prologue' and the 'Nun's Priest's Tale'. These came as annotated texts. The teacher was Ila Sen, a young lecturer, the first woman to be appointed to an academic post in Andhra University. We were quite excited, of course. Today, in her middle-eighties, Ila (Rao) laughs no end when we converse, going over those far off days when she was worried about getting our attention to the difficult (almost foreign) language and I assure her how we were more interested in the lovely sarees she wore and were amazed at the aplomb with which she drove her car. Cars were a rarity in those days in that mofussil town and a woman driving a car was quite inspirational to us!

So she came to the first hour on Chaucer which was about his life and times. We were to come with the text books on the next day. We did. She breezed in, opened her text and began:

Whan that aprill with his shoures soote
 The droghte of march hath perced to the roote,
 And bathed every veyne in swich licour
 Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
 Whan zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
 Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
 Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
 Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne,
 And smale foweles maken melodye,
 That slepen al the nyght with open ye
 (so priketh hem nature in hir corages);
 Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages . . .

Miss Sen raised her eyes and gave us a stern look. "Have you understood?" We looked blank. We remained silent. 'April' was familiar and the term 'Zephirus' vague. I was familiar with Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' thanks to Palgrave's *The Golden Treasury*, a dear companion of teenagers in those far off days. What was this language? Are we getting dropped from the frying pan of Old English into the fire of Middle English?

We sighed with relief when she explained the words. It was after all such a beautiful rural scene and how wise of the common man to enjoy Nature's bounty everywhere by undertaking pilgrimages in the midst of his drab life:

When the sweet showers of April have pierced to the root the dryness of March and bathed every vein in moisture by which strength are the flowers brought forth; when Zephyr also with his sweet breath has given spirit to the tender new shoots in the grove and field, and the young sun has run half his course through Aries the Ram, and little birds make melody and sleep all night with an open eye, so nature pricks them in their hearts; then people long to go on pilgrimages to renowned shrines in various distant lands, and palmers to seek foreign shores. And especially from every shire's end in England they make their way to Canterbury, to seek the holy blessed martyr who helped them when they were sick.¹

More than fifty Aprils have showered the earth with sweet rain since those days of studying the Prologue, but I remember my Chaucer classes very clearly. Though only two cantos were prescribed, I sought out summaries of the other tales. Now the entire work has been translated into modern English making it easier for all to read and understand Chaucer. The tales come one after another like an array of multi-hued flowers, with the Prologue leading like a gardener and giving us an idea of the pilgrims. When we heard the lecturer reading and explaining the passages, we felt very familiar with the person being described as also the description itself. So would a grandfather tell a tale at home with a chuckle to the avid children at nightfall.

Twenty-nine pilgrims join the omniscient narrator at the Tabard Inn. They spend the day together, introducing themselves, exchanging information about themselves and the narrator gives clear thumbnail sketches of them all in the Prologue. In the following cantos each of them will be telling a story but now they are themselves part of the narration by Chaucer. The first to appear in this photography-session is the Knight who is not unlike our globe-trotting executive. He has seen so much of foreign lands!

He was valiant in his lord's war and had campaigned, no man farther, in both Christian and heathen lands, and ever was honoured for his worth. He was at Alexandria when it was won; many times in Prussia he sat in the place of honour above knights from all nations; he had fought in Lithuania and in Russia, and no Christian man of his did so more often; he had been in Granada at the siege of Algeciras and in Belmaria; he was at Lyeys and in Attalia when they were won, and had landed with many noble armies in the Levant. He had been in fifteen mortal battles, and had thrice fought for our faith in the lists at Tremessen and always slain his foe; he had been also, long before, with the lord of Palathia against another heathen host in Turkey; and ever he had great

1. Translations from the 'Prologue' to *The Canterbury Tales* cited here are by Gerard NeCastro.

renown. And though he was valorous, he was prudent, and he was as meek as a maiden in his bearing.

Well, despite this modesty, he has let fall names that would have impressed the company. The Knight was clad in simple clothes, no pride of style with him in spite of frequently travelling abroad. His son however, was clad gaily being a dapper young man who had seen action in Flanders, Artois, and Picardy. A yeoman (bodyguard) was with them. Madame Eglantine was a nun, most courteous, well-mannered, pious. A handsome Monk had also joined the pilgrims. He had chosen a new Order and he couldn't care less for the generally-held opinion that renunciates should renounce hunting and good food also. All this sounds so contemporaneous to us. This was because Chaucer knew the pulse of the common man and the common citizenry thinks in the same manner down the centuries.

A point noted by Sri Aurobindo:

The first early motive and style of this poetry as it emerges in Chaucer strikes at once an English note. The motive is a direct and concrete poetic observation of ordinary human life and character. There is no preoccupying idea, no ulterior design; life, the external figure and surface of things is reflected as near as possible to its native form in the individual mind and temperament of the poet. Chaucer has his eye fixed on the object, and that object is the visible action of life as it passes before him throwing its figures on his mind and stirring it to a kindly satisfaction in the movement and its interest, a blithe sense of humour or a light and easy pathos. He does not seek to add anything to it or to see anything below it or behind its outsides. He is not concerned to look at all into the souls or deeply into the minds of the men and women whose appearance, action and easily apparent traits of character he describes with so apt and observant a fidelity.²

Chaucer leaves the job of looking deeply into the minds and souls of his characters to us by following their tales. Their choice and the way they tell the story gives us a perfect idea of all that. A contrast to the imperious Monk is the begging Friar, "an easy man to give penance." Chaucer prefers to be generous with his compliments (we would realise that some of them were left-handed compliments when we read the story told by that character) and never lets fall a cutting remark in the Prologue. The Merchant is colourful with his "Flanders beaver-hat" but we tarry a little more with the Clerk from Oxford. After all, Oxford and Cambridge are familiar territory for us because of Sri Aurobindo's Cambridge days. If the studious Sri Aurobindo suffered much because of financial problems, things seem to have been the same for scholars five hundred years ago!

2. *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 66.

His horse was as lean as a rake, and he was not at all fat, I think, but looked hollow-cheeked, and grave likewise. His little outer cloak was threadbare, for he had no worldly skill to beg for his needs, and as yet had gained himself no benefice. He would rather have had at his bed's head twenty volumes of Aristotle and his philosophy, bound in red or black, than rich robes or a fiddle or gay psaltery. Even though he was a philosopher, he had little gold in his money-box! But all that he could get from his friends he spent on books and learning, and would pray diligently for the souls of who gave it to him to stay at the schools. Of study he took most heed and care. Not a word did he speak more than was needed, and the little he spoke was formal and modest, short and quick, and full of high matter. All that he said tended toward moral virtue. Gladly would he learn and gladly teach.

It is then not surprising that Sri Aurobindo compliments Chaucer for his "poetic observation of ordinary human life and character." There is a mind-boggling variety in Chaucer's choice of pilgrims. Next to the Clerk from Oxford, we have a Sergeant of the Law. And then, a Franklin who is an amazing connoisseur of wine; a Haberdasher, a Carpenter, a Weaver, a Dyer, an Upholsterer, a Cook — choice specimen all. For sea-girt Britain, sailors are important. We have a Shipman too:

The hot summer had made his hue brown. In truth he was a good fellow: many draughts of wine had he drawn at Bordeaux while the merchant slept. He paid no heed to nice conscience; on the high seas, if he fought and had the upper hand, he made his victims walk the plank. But in skill to reckon his moon, his tides, his currents and dangers at hand, his harbours and navigation, there was none like him from Hull to Carthage. In his undertakings he was bold and shrewd. His beard had been shaken by many tempests. He knew the harbours well from Gothland to Cape Finisterre, and every creek in Spain and in Brittany.

We even get to know that his ship was called the 'Maudelayne'. When such a big group sets out, Chaucer does not forget the Doctor who combined astrology with his medical skills to cure his patients. Chaucer compliments him for his in-depth studies of Aesculapius, Dioscorides, Rufus, Hippocrates, Haly, Galen, Serapion, Rhasis, Avicenna, Averroes, Damascene, Constantine, Bernard, Gatisden and Gilbertine. Grown breathless by now, let us now look at the immortal "Good Wife from the Bath". I have known her; she was very much there when I was growing up in our tiny hamlet, Kodaganallur on the banks of the Tambraparni river in South India. The talkative old know-all who could keep us engrossed about her many pilgrimages. An independent lady who would always wear a white sari. I was of an age which did not know about the horrors of widowhood and we just took it for

granted that though she lived in the biggest house in the street, she yet wore no jewels nor colourful clothes.

Probably in her late sixties at this time, a little deaf, she could keep her listeners always laughing about her encounters in Bombay and Calcutta and how she fell off a horse while going up Kedarnath. The most familiar was her trip to Benaras when she went in a boat to the middle of the river and suddenly the boatman asked for double the fare, "Else, I will dump you here and go back!" he declared. While her fellow-travellers wailed, our lady dared him saying she was trained to swim in Tambraparni in floods and what was this little Ganga compared to her river back in South India? She would swim back to another ghat and report it all to the police. The boatman saluted her spirit and silently took them all back to Dasasvamedh Ghat and refused to take any money from our Lady of Kodaganallur!

The swimming part was true enough but her dare-devilry in referring to the Ganges as no more than a river channel was good copy for her listeners. Our Lady of the Bath provides such a personality. No wonder we were charmed.

There was a Good Wife from near Bath, but she was somewhat deaf, and that was a pity. She was so skilled in making cloth that she surpassed those of Ypres and Ghent. In all the parish there was no wife who should march up to make an offering before her, and if any did, so angered she was that truly she was out of all charity . . . She had thrice been at Jerusalem; many distant streams had she crossed; she had been on pilgrimages to Boulogne and to Rome, to Santiago in Galicia and to Cologne. This wandering by the way had taught her various things.

She would give us a whipingly feminist presentation in her tale later on.

Getting back to the Prologue we get to meet a Parson, a hard-working Ploughman; also a Reeve. Reeve? Our teacher explained the term as a 'supervisor' and we were content. A Miller, a Summoner, a Pardoner, and a Manciple brought up the rear. We were getting into the Middle English terminology with glorious speed. A Summoner was a church official who served summons on the erring sheep, a Pardoner had the right to give temporary relief from punishment, and the Manciple was one who was in charge of purchase and storage of food, commonly known as '*Sarakku Master*' in Tamil. What a complete world caught in Chaucer's web!

"And myself", says Chaucer. Of course! He was living in Greenwich and had ample occasion to watch pilgrims going by this place on their way to Canterbury. Did he ever join a group? He may have, we have no idea. He must have, to judge by the way the different characters speak and behave in a perfectly natural manner.

The simplicity of Chaucer's method, its complete lack of any artifice, the sure hand with which he traced portraits to form the prologue of his *Tales*, are surprising. He made his group of pilgrims into a picture of the society of his time of which the like is not to be found elsewhere. Except for royalty and the nobles on the one hand, and the dregs of the people on the other, two classes whom probability excluded from sharing a pilgrimage, he painted, in brief, almost the whole English nation.³

Having given us a complete picture, he allows the Innkeeper to take over. That good man speaks pleasantly and proposes that all the pilgrims would be telling stories to overcome the weariness of passage. He would himself accompany the pilgrims and on their return, the best story teller would get a free supper. This idea is welcomed by all those present. The next morning sees them all ready for the journey after a good night's rest and a healthy breakfast. Once they start, the tales should begin. Who will be the first to tell a story? Lots are drawn and the Knight gets the chance to be the first story-teller. He accepts the challenge gracefully. As the pilgrims to Canterbury began their journey, "he soon began his tale with a cheerful spirit, and spoke in this way."

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

3. Leguois and Cazamian, *History of English Literature*, p. 146.

Nobody says that the value of the poet must be measured by the scantiness of his audience any more than it can be measured by the extent of his contemporary popularity. . . . What is contended is that it cannot be measured by either standard. It is to be measured by the power of his vision, of his speech, of his feeling, by his rendering of the world within or the world without or of any world to which he has access. It may be the outer world that he portrays like Homer and Chaucer or a vivid life-world like Shakespeare or an inmost world of experience like Blake or other mystic poets.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Poetry and Art, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 670)



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