

# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE



OCTOBER 2020

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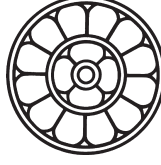
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXIII

No. 10

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## VISION

Who art thou that roamest  
Over mountains dim  
In the haunts of evening,  
Sister of the gleam!

Whiter than the jasmines,  
Roses dream of thee;  
Softly with the violets  
How thine eyes agree!

As thy raven tresses  
Night is not so black,  
From thy moonbright shoulders  
Floating dimly back.

Feet upon the hilltops,  
Lilies of delight,  
With their far-off radiance  
Tinge the evening bright.

In the vesper calmness  
Lightly like a dove,  
With thy careless eyelids  
Confident of love,

As of old thou comest  
Down the mountains far,  
Smiling from what gardens,  
Glowing from what star?

Racing from the hilltops  
Like a brilliant stream,  
Burning in the valleys  
Marble-bright of limb,

Singing in the orchards  
When the shadows fall,  
With thy crooning anklets  
To my heart that call,

By the darkening window  
Like a slender fire,  
With the night behind thee,  
Daughter of desire!

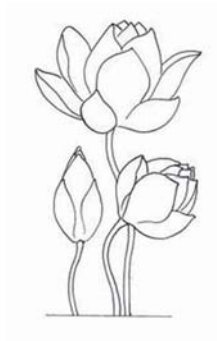
Open wide the doorway,  
Bid my love come in  
With the night behind her  
And the dawn within.

Take, O radiant fingers,  
Heart and hands of me,  
Hide them in thy bosom,  
O felicity!

SRI AUROBINDO

Circa 1900-1906

*(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 255-56)*





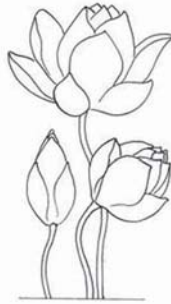
## A BIRTHDAY TALK

In my childhood before the full development of my faculties, I became conscious of a strong impulse in me. I did not realise what it was then, but it grew stronger and stronger as I gained in years till all the weakness of my childhood, fear, selfishness, etc., vanished from my mind. From the day of my return to the mother country, the impulse is surging forth in great force, and my set purpose and devotion are becoming more confirmed with the trials and oppressions to which I am subjected. When some divine power by the grace of God manifests itself in a human being any efforts to develop it give a new force to the national life. You will have to sacrifice yourself at the feet of your Mother. You should, therefore, devote yourself with firm faith and whole heart to her service. Service of our motherland is our highest duty at this moment. This must be our duty in this iron age. It is now the time for us to conserve our energy. Do not be impatient, do not despair. Do not lose faith. The present fatigue and inactivity are natural; you will find instances of them in the history of every nation. Everyone must store up energy. Be prepared with fresh hope and vigour for the worship of the Mother. Divine power has infused this nation with a new power. This power will exalt the nation one day.

SRI AUROBINDO

*[Delivered at Sri Aurobindo's residence in Calcutta on 15 August 1909, his thirty-seventh birthday. Text in Bengali published in Bharat Mitra on 21 August; subsequently translated into English and published in a police intelligence report.]*

(Karmayogin, CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 178)



## ON THE *KARMAYOGIN* ARTICLES

[Sri Aurobindo launched the *Karmayogin*, “A Weekly Review of National Religion, Literature, Science, Philosophy, & c.,” on 19 June 1909, six weeks after his release from jail on conclusion of the Alipore Bomb Trial. Between then and February 1910, when he left Calcutta, he edited this journal, writing most of its contents himself. In addition to articles on political and related matters, the *Karmayogin* contained essays on philosophy, yoga, education, art and literature, as well as translations and poetry. . . .

Some of the articles . . . were published in booklets brought out between 1918 and 1923 and later reprinted. When a revised edition of one of these booklets was published in 1937, a disciple of Sri Aurobindo’s wrote a review of it that he sent to Sri Aurobindo for approval. (From the publisher’s note in S8: vi-vii)]

*Have you seen my review of The Ideal of the Karmayogin?*

Yes, I have seen it, but I don’t think it can be published in its present form as it prolongs the political Aurobindo of that time into the Sri Aurobindo of the present time. You even assert that I have “thoroughly” revised the book and these articles are an index of my latest views on the burning problems of the day and there has been no change in my views in 27 years (which would surely be proof of a rather unprogressive mind). How do you get all that? My spiritual consciousness and knowledge at that time was as nothing to what it is now — how would the change leave my view of politics and life unmodified altogether? There has been no such thorough revision; I have left the book as it was, because it would be useless to modify what was written so long ago — the same as with *Yoga and Its Objects*. Anyway the review would almost amount to a proclamation of my present political views — while on the contrary I have been careful to pronounce nothing — no views whatever on political questions for the last I don’t know how many years.

21 April 1937

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 76-77)*

## THE HINDU SABHA

*(Karmayogin, 6 November 1909)*

An indication of the immense changes which are coming over our country, is the sudden leaping into being of new movements and organisations which are, by their very existence, evidence of revolutions in public feeling and omens of the future. The dead bones live indeed and the long sleep of the ages is broken. The Moslem League was indicative of much, the Hindu Sabha is indicative of yet more. The Nationalist party, while in entire disagreement with the immediate objects and spirit of the League, welcomed its birth as a sign of renovated political life in the Mahomedan community. But the Mahomedan community was always coherent, united and separately self-conscious. The strength of Islam lay in its unity and cohesion, the fruit of a long discipline in equality and brotherhood, the strength of the Hindu in flexibility, progressiveness, elasticity, a divination of necessary changes, broad ideas, growing aspirations, the fruit of a long discipline in intellectual and moral sensitiveness. The Moslem League meant that the Mahomedan was awakening to the need of change, the growth of aspiration in the world around him, — not yet to the broad ideas modern life demanded. The Hindu Sabha means that the Hindu is awakening to the need of unity and cohesion.

Does it mean more? Does it indicate a larger statesmanship, quicker impulse to action, a greater capacity for the unity and cohesion it seeks? Is the Hindu Sabha a novel body, with the power in it to effect a great object never before accomplished, the effective union of all shades of Hindu opinion from the lax Anglicised Agnostic, Hindu in nothing but birth and blood, to the intense and narrow worshipper of the institutes of Raghunandan? Or is it merely an ineffectual aspiration, like the old Congress, capable of creating a general sympathy and oneness of aim, but not of practical purpose and effective organisation? There are only two things strong enough to unite Hinduism, a new spiritual impulse based on Vedanta, the essential oneness of man, the transience and utilitarian character of institutions, the lofty ideals of brotherhood, freedom, equality, and a recognition of the great mission and mighty future of the Hindu spiritual ideas and discipline and of the Indian race, — or else a political impulse strong enough to unite Hindus together for the preservation and advancement of their community. The Hindu Sabha could not have come into being but for the great national movement which awakened the national spirit, the sense of past greatness, the divination of a mighty future, transforming the whole spirit and character of the educated community. But we fear that in its immediate inception and work it leans for its hope of success on a lower and less powerful motive — rivalry with Mahomedan pretensions and a desire to put the mass and force of a

united Hinduism against the intensity of a Mahomedan self-assertion supported by official patronage and Anglo-Indian favour. Alarm and resentment at the pro-Mahomedan policy underlying the Reform Scheme and dissatisfaction with the Bombay conventionists for their suicidal support of the Government policy entered largely into the universal support given by Punjab Hindus to the new body and its great initial success. Mortification at the success of Mahomedans in securing Anglo-Indian sympathy and favour and the exclusion of Hindus from those blissful privileges figured largely in the speech of Sir Pratul Chandra Chatterji who was hailed as the natural leader of Punjab Hinduism. These are not good omens. It is not by rivalry for Anglo-Indian favour, it is not by quarrelling for the loaves and fishes of British administration that Hinduism can rise into a united and effective force. If the Hindu Sabha takes its anchor on these petty aspirations or if it founds any part of its strength on political emulation with the Mahomedans, it will be impossible for the Nationalist party to join in a movement which would otherwise have their full sympathy and eager support.

Lala Lajpat Rai struck a higher note, that of Hindu nationalism as a necessary preliminary to a greater Indian Nationality. We distrust this ideal. Not that we are blind to facts, — not that we do not recognise Hindu-Mahomedan rivalry as a legacy of the past enhanced and not diminished by British ascendancy, a thing that has to be faced and worked out either by mutual concession or by a struggle between nationalism and separatism. But we do not understand Hindu nationalism as a possibility under modern conditions. Hindu nationalism had a meaning in the times of Shivaji and Ramdas, when the object of national revival was to overthrow a Mahomedan domination which, once tending to Indian unity and toleration, had become oppressive and disruptive. It was possible because India was then a world to itself and the existence of two geographical units entirely Hindu, Maharashtra and Rajputana, provided it with a basis. It was necessary because the misuse of their domination by the Mahomedan element was fatal to India's future and had to be punished and corrected by the resurgence and domination of the Hindu. And because it was possible and necessary, it came into being. But under modern conditions India can only exist as a whole. A nation depends for its existence on geographical separateness and geographical compactness, on having a distinct and separate country. The existence of this geographical separateness is sure in the end to bear down all differences of race, language, religion, history. It has done so in Great Britain, in Switzerland, in Germany. It will do so in India. But geographical compactness is also necessary. In other words, the *desh* or country must be so compact that mutual communication and the organisation of a central government becomes easy or, at least, not prohibitively difficult. The absence of such compactness is the reason why great Empires are sure in the end to fall to pieces; they cannot get the support of that immortal and indestructible national self which can alone ensure permanence. This difficulty stands in the way of British Imperial Federation and is so great that

any temporary success of that specious aspiration will surely result in the speedy disruption of the Empire. In addition, there must be a uniting force strong enough to take advantage of the geographical compactness and separateness, — either a wise and skilfully organised government with a persistent tradition of beneficence, impartiality and oneness with the nation, or else a living national sense insisting on its separate inviolability and self-realisation. The secret of Roman success was in the organisation of such a government; even so, it failed, for want of geographical compactness, to create a world-wide Roman nationality. The failure of the British rule to root itself lies in its inability to become one with the nation either by the effacement of our national individuality or by the renunciation of its own separate pride and self-interest. These things are therefore necessary to Indian nationality, geographical separateness, geographical compactness and a living national spirit. The first was always ours and made India a people apart from the earliest times. The second we have attained by British rule. The third has just sprung into existence.

But the country, the *swadesh*, which must be the base and fundament of our nationality, is India, a country where Mahomedan and Hindu live intermingled and side by side. What geographical base can a Hindu nationality possess? Maharashtra and Rajasthan are no longer separate geographical units but merely provincial divisions of a single country. The very first requisite of a Hindu nationalism is wanting. The Mahomedans base their separateness and their refusal to regard themselves as Indians first and Mahomedans afterwards on the existence of great Mahomedan nations to which they feel themselves more akin, in spite of our common birth and blood, than to us. Hindus have no such resource. For good or evil, they are bound to the soil and to the soil alone. They cannot deny their Mother, neither can they mutilate her. Our ideal therefore is an Indian Nationalism, largely Hindu in its spirit and traditions, because the Hindu made the land and the people and persists, by the greatness of his past, his civilisation and his culture and his invincible virility, in holding it, but wide enough also to include the Moslem and his culture and traditions and absorb them into itself. It is possible that the Mahomedan may not recognise the inevitable future and may prefer to throw himself into the opposite scale. If so, the Hindu, with what little Mahomedan help he may get, must win Swaraj both for himself and the Mahomedan in spite of that resistance. There is a sufficient force and manhood in us to do a greater and more difficult task than that, but we lack unity, brotherhood, intensity of single action among ourselves. It is to the creation of that unity, brotherhood and intensity that the Hindu Sabha should direct its whole efforts. Otherwise we must reject it as a disruptive and not a creative agency.

SRI AUROBINDO

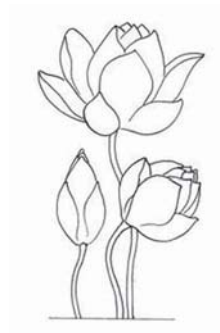
(*Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 302-06)

## NATIONAL EDUCATION

The whole movement of the national life of India at the present moment may be described in one phrase, — a pressure from within towards self-liberation from all unnatural conditions which obstruct or divert its free and spontaneous development. It is the movement of a stream trying to break open a natural path for its dammed-up waters. This effort takes inevitably many sides and aspects; for in politics and administration, in society, in commerce, in education, this national life finds itself bound up in forms, condemned to move in grooves which give no natural play to the new aspirations, powers and tendencies which have become its inner impelling motives. The effort to discover and organise a system of national education is part of this general effort of self-liberation, of self-finding, but perhaps the most central movement of all, in the end even the most important; for it is this which will give shape to the spirit of the nation at present in a state of rather formless flux. It is in fact no more than a chaotic press of tendencies; a national culture alone can give it form and consistency; and national education is the attempt to create and organise that culture.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 414)*



## NATIONAL EDUCATION

*(Karmayogin, 1 January 1910)*

From the beginning of the national movement, in spite of its enthusiasm, force, innate greatness, a defect has made itself apparent, a fatality of insufficient effectiveness has pursued it, which showed that there was a serious flaw somewhere in this brilliant opening of a new era. The nature of that flaw has been made manifest by the period of trial in which, for a time, the real force which made for success has been temporarily withdrawn, so that the weaknesses still inherent in the nation might be discovered and removed. The great flaw was the attempt to combine the new with the old, to subject the conduct of the resurgence of India to the aged, the cautious, the hesitating, men out of sympathy with the spirit of the new age, unable to grasp the needs of the future, afraid to apply the bold and radical methods which could alone transform the nation, sweep out the rottenness in our former corrupt nature and, by purifying Bengal, purify India. It is now apparent that it was the Nationalist element which by its energy, courage, boldness of thought, readiness to accept the conditions of progress, gave the movement its force and vitality. Wherever that force has been withdrawn, the movement has collapsed. The older men have shown themselves utterly unable either to supply the moral force that would sustain the forward march of the nation or the brain-power to grapple with national problems. In Swadeshi the force of sentiment supplied, and the persistence of the great mass of silent nationalism in resisting any attempt to draw back from boycott has preserved, the movement to prefer indigenous and boycott foreign goods, but the withdrawal of active Nationalist endeavour has resulted in the stoppage of progress. Swadeshi maintains itself, it no longer advances. National Education languishes because the active force has been withdrawn from it; it does not absolutely perish because a certain amount of Nationalist self-devotion has entrenched itself in this last stronghold and holds it against great odds under the most discouraging circumstances. A certain amount only, — because part of the active enthusiasm and self-sacrifice which created the movement, has been deliberately extruded from it in obedience to fear or even baser motives, part has abandoned it in disgust at the degeneration of the system in incapable hands and the rest is now finding its self-devotion baffled and deprived of the chance of success by the same incapacity and weakness at headquarters.

The National Council of Education, as it is at present composed, has convicted itself of entire incapacity whether to grasp the meaning of the movement or to preserve or create the conditions of its success. To the majority of the members it is merely an interesting academical experiment in which they can embody some of



their pet hobbies or satisfy a general vague dissatisfaction with the established University system. To others the only valuable part of it is the technical instruction given in its workshops. The two or three who at all regard it as part of a great national movement, are unnerved by fear, scepticism and distrust and, by introducing the principles of Chanakya into its public policy, are depriving it of the first condition of its continued existence. It is folly to expect that the nation at large will either pay heavily or make great sacrifices merely to support an interesting academic experiment, still less to allow a few learned men to spoil the intellectual development of the race by indulging their hobbies at the public expense. That the people will not support a mere technical education divorced from that general humanistic training which is essential to national culture, has been sufficiently proved by the failure of Mr. Palit's Technical College to command adequate financial support. Unless this movement is carried on, as it was undertaken, as part of a great movement of national resurgence, unless it is made, visibly to all, a nursery of patriotism and a mighty instrument of national culture, it cannot succeed. It is foolish to expect men to make great sacrifices while discouraging their hope and enthusiasm. It is not intellectual recognition of duty that compels sustained self-sacrifice in masses of men; it is hope, it is the lofty ardour of a great cause, it is the enthusiasm of a noble and courageous effort. It is amazing that men calling themselves educated and presuming to dabble with public movements should be blind to the fact that the success or failure of National Education is intimately bound up with and, indeed, entirely depends upon the fortunes of the great resurgence which gave it birth. They seem to labour under the delusion that it was an academical and not a national impulse which induced men to support this great effort, and they seek to save the institution from a premature death by exiling from it the enthusiasm that made it possible. They cannot ignore the service done by that enthusiasm, but they regard it merely as the ladder by which they climbed and are busy trying to kick it down. They are really shutting off the steam, yet expect the locomotive to go on.

The successful organisation of the Bengal National College in Calcutta was the work of its able and enthusiastic Superintendent aided by a body of young and self-sacrificing workers. The National Council which nominally controlled, in reality only hampered it; all that the Council contributed to the system, was its defects. The schools in the Mofussil were created by the enthusiasm of the Nationalist party, the propaganda of its leaders and the ardent self-devotion of little bands of workers who gave their self-sacrifice and enthusiasm to lay the foundations. The Nationalist Council has never lifted a single finger to help the Mofussil schools beyond doling out unsubstantial grants to maintain them merely as necessary feeders of the Calcutta institution. But unless a movement of this kind is supported by wise organisation and energetic propagandism emanating from an active central authority, it must soon sink under the weight of unsolved problems, unsurmounted difficulties and unamended defects. The curriculum of the Council is extraordinarily elaborate and



expensive, and involves a great outlay for the formation of library, laboratory and workshops, and, arranged as it is on the vicious Western system of driving many subjects at a time into the growing intellect, is slow, cumbrous, a strain on the mind of the students, wasteful of time, impossible without an unusual number of good teachers. The financial problem created is one of crushing difficulty, yet the Council think they have done their duty when they have created the problem and do not seem even to dream that there is any call on them to solve it. Even for the Calcutta College in whose maintenance they are more keenly interested, they can only make feeble and spasmodic efforts when, as annually happens, there is a deficit in the budget. The academical problem of teaching so many subjects in so short a time without outdoing the exploits of the Calcutta University as a brain-killing and life-shortening machine, does not seem to occur to these lofty and secluded minds. They are content with creating the problem and maintaining it by their system of examinations. Even if funds were forthcoming, there would still be the necessity of providing a regular and plentiful supply of teachers trained in an entirely new system of instruction. This urgent problem the Council has systematically ignored, and not even the elementary steps of establishing a Teachers' Training Class in Calcutta and issuing a series of suitable books in the vernacular has been attempted. The only problems which the Council seems willing to grapple with are, first, the problem of supporting National Education without incurring the wrath of the officials and, secondly, the problem of evading the spirit of the clause which forbids it to subject itself to any form of Government control, while observing the letter so as to prevent the invalidation of its endowments.

But if the National Council is content to fail in its duty, the country cannot be content to allow this great educational enterprise to perish. We do not know how or by whom the Council is elected. It seems to have followed the example of so many bodies in India which have started as democratic institutions and ended as close corporations self-electing and self-elected. But if it is impossible to alter the component character of this body and put into it keener blood and clearer brains, some other centre of effort must be created which will undertake to grapple with the problems of National Education, the supply of trained and self-devoted teachers and of books which will guide them in the imparting of knowledge on new lines, the reawakening of interest, hope and enthusiasm in the country, the provision of the necessary funds to the mofussil schools, the forcing on the Council by the pressure of public opinion of a more rational and a more national system of teaching. But the first condition of success is the reawakening of the national movement all along the line, and this can only be done by the organisation and resolute activity of the Nationalist party.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 385-89)

## THE AWAKENING SOUL OF INDIA

(*Karmayogin*, 26 June 1909)

No national awakening is really vital and enduring which confines itself to a single field. It is when the soul awakens that a nation is really alive, and the life will then manifest itself in all the manifold forms of activity in which man seeks to express the strength and the delight of the expansive spirit within. It is for *ananda* that the world exists; for joy that the Self puts Himself into the great and serious game of life; and the joy which He sees is the joy of various self-expression. For this reason it is that no two men are alike, no two nations are alike. Each has its own separate nature over and above the common nature of humanity and it is not only the common human impulses and activities but the satisfaction and development of its own separate character and capacities that a nation demands. Denied that satisfaction and development, it perishes. By two tests, therefore, the vitality of a national movement can be judged. If it is imitative, imported, artificial, then, whatever temporary success it may have, the nation is moving towards self-sterilisation and death; even so the nations of ancient Europe perished when they gave up their own individuality as the price of Roman civilisation, Roman peace, Roman prosperity. If, on the other hand, the peculiar individuality of a race stamps itself on the movement in its every part and seizes on every new development as a means of self-expression, then the nation wakes, lives and grows and whatever the revolutions and changes of political, social or intellectual forms and institutions, it is assured of its survival and aggrandisement.

The nineteenth century in India was imitative, self-forgetful, artificial. It aimed at a successful reproduction of Europe in India, forgetting the deep saying of the Gita — “Better the law of one’s own being though it be badly done than an alien *dharma* well-followed; death in one’s *dharma* is better, it is a dangerous thing to follow the law of another’s nature.” For death in one’s own *dharma* brings new birth, success in an alien path means only successful suicide. If we had succeeded in Europeanising ourselves we would have lost for ever our spiritual capacity, our intellectual force, our national elasticity and power of self-renovation. That tragedy has been enacted more than once in history, only the worst and most mournful example of all would have been added. Had the whole activity of the country been of the derivative and alien kind, that result would have supervened. But the life-breath of the nation still moved in the religious movements of Bengal and the Punjab, in the political aspirations of Maharashtra and in the literary activity of Bengal. Even here it was an undercurrent, the peculiar temperament and vitality of India struggling for self-preservation under a load of foreign ideas and foreign forms, and

it was not till in the struggle between these two elements the balance turned in the favour of the national *dharma* that the salvation of India was assured. The resistance of the conservative element in Hinduism, tamasic, inert, ignorant, uncreative though it was, saved the country by preventing an even more rapid and thorough disintegration than actually took place and by giving respite and time for the persistent national self to emerge and find itself. It was in religion first that the soul of India awoke and triumphed. There were always indications, always great forerunners, but it was when the flower of the educated youth of Calcutta bowed down at the feet of an illiterate Hindu ascetic, a self-illuminated ecstatic and “mystic” without a single trace or touch of the alien thought or education upon him that the battle was won. The going forth of Vivekananda, marked out by the Master as the heroic soul destined to take the world between his two hands and change it, was the first visible sign to the world that India was awake not only to survive but to conquer. Afterwards when the awakening was complete a section of the nationalist movement turned in imagination to a reconstruction of the recent pre-British past in all its details. This could not be. Inertia, the refusal to expand and alter, is what our philosophy calls *tamas*, and an excess of *tamas* tends to disintegration and disappearance. Aggression is necessary for self-preservation and when a force ceases to conquer, it ceases to live — that which remains stationary and stands merely on the defensive, that which retires into and keeps within its own *kot* or base, as the now defunct *Sandhya* used graphically to put it, is doomed to defeat, diminution and final elimination from the living things of this world. Hinduism has always been pliable and aggressive; it has thrown itself on the attacking force, carried its positions, plundered its treasures, made its own everything of value it had and ended either in wholly annexing it or driving it out by rendering its further continuation in the country purposeless and therefore impossible. Whenever it has stood on the defensive, it has contracted within narrower limits and shown temporary signs of decay.

Once the soul of the nation was awake in religion, it was only a matter of time and opportunity for it to throw itself on all spiritual and intellectual activities in the national existence and take possession of them. The outburst of anti-European feeling which followed on the Partition gave the required opportunity. Anger, vindictiveness and antipathy are not in themselves laudable feelings, but God uses them for His purposes and brings good out of evil. They drove listlessness and apathy away and replaced them by energy and a powerful emotion; and that energy and emotion were seized upon by the national self and turned to the uses of the future. The anger against Europeans, the vengeful turning upon their commerce and its productions, the antipathy to everything associated with them engendered a powerful stream of tendency turning away from the immediate Anglicised past, and the spirit which had already declared itself in our religious life entered in by this broad doorway into politics, and substituted a positive powerful yearning towards the national past, a still more mighty and dynamic yearning towards a truly national future. The Indian

spirit has not yet conquered the whole field of our politics in actuality, but it is there victoriously in sentiment; the rest is a matter of time, and everything which is now happening in politics, is helping to prepare for its true and potent expression. The future is now assured. Religion and politics, the two most effective and vital expressions of the nation's self having been nationalised, the rest will follow in due course. The needs of our religious and political life are now vital and real forces and it is these needs which will reconstruct our society, recreate and remould our industrial and commercial life and found a new and victorious art, literature, science and philosophy which will be not European but Indian.

The impulse is already working in Bengali art and literature. The need of self-expression for the national spirit in politics suddenly brought back Bengali literature to its essential and eternal self and it was in our recent national songs that this self-realisation came. The lyric and the lyrical spirit, the spirit of simple, direct and poignant expression, of deep, passionate, straightforward emotion, of a frank and exalted enthusiasm, the dominant note of love and Bhakti of a mingled sweetness and strength, the potent intellect dominated by the self-illuminated heart, a mystical exaltation of feeling and spiritual insight expressing itself with a plain concreteness and practicality — this is the soul of Bengal. All our literature, in order to be wholly alive, must start from this base and whatever variations it may indulge in, never lose touch with it. In Bengal, again, the national spirit is seeking to satisfy itself in art and, for the first time since the decline of the Moguls, a new school of national art is developing itself, the school of which Abanindranath Tagore is the founder and master. It is still troubled by the foreign though Asiatic influence from which its master started, and has something of an exotic appearance, but the development and self-emancipation of the national self from this temporary domination can already be watched and followed. There again, it is the spirit of Bengal that expresses itself. The attempt to express in form and limit something of that which is formless and illimitable is the attempt of Indian art. The Greeks, aiming at a smaller and more easily attainable end, achieved a more perfect success. Their instinct for physical form was greater than ours, our instinct for psychic shape and colour was superior. Our future art must solve the problem of expressing the soul in the object, the great Indian aim, while achieving anew the triumphant combination of perfect interpretative form and colour. No Indian has so strong an instinct for form as the Bengali. In addition to the innate Vedantism of all Indian races, he has an all-powerful impulse towards delicacy, grace and strength, and it is these qualities to which the new school of art has instinctively turned in its first inception. Unable to find a perfect model in the scanty relics of old Indian art, it was only natural that it should turn to Japan for help, for delicacy and grace are there triumphant. But Japan has not the secret of expressing the deepest soul in the object, it has not the aim. And the Bengali spirit means more than the union of delicacy, grace and strength; it has the lyrical mystic impulse; it has the passion for clarity and concreteness and as in our

literature, so in our art we see these tendencies emerging — an emotion of beauty, a nameless sweetness and spirituality pervading the clear line and form. Here too it is the free spirit of the nation beginning to emancipate itself from the foreign limitations and shackles.

No department of our life can escape this great regenerating and reconstructing force. There is not the slightest doubt that our society will have to undergo a reconstruction which may amount to revolution, but it will not be for Europeanisation as the average reformer blindly hopes, but for a greater and more perfect realisation of the national spirit in society. Not individual selfishness and mutually consuming struggle but love and the binding of individuals into a single inseparable life is the national impulse. It sought to fulfil itself in the past by the bond of blood in the joint family, by the bond of a partial communism in the village system, by the bond of birth and a corporate sense of honour in the caste. It may seek a more perfect and spiritual bond in the future. In commerce also so long as we follow the European spirit and European model, the individual competitive selfishness, the bond of mere interest in the joint-stock company or that worst and most dangerous development of co-operative Capitalism, the giant octopus-like Trust and Syndicate, we shall never succeed in rebuilding a healthy industrial life. It is not these bonds which can weld Indians together. India moves to a deeper and greater life than the world has yet imagined possible and it is when she has found the secret of expressing herself in these various activities that her industrial and social life will become strong and expansive.

Nationalism has been hitherto largely a revolt against the tendency to shape ourselves into the mould of Europe; but it must also be on its guard against any tendency to cling to every detail that has been Indian. That has not been the spirit of Hinduism in the past, there is no reason why it should be so in the future. In all life there are three elements, the fixed and permanent spirit, the developing yet constant soul and the brittle changeable body. The spirit we cannot change, we can only obscure or lose; the soul must not be rashly meddled with, must neither be tortured into a shape alien to it, nor obstructed in its free expansion; and the body must be used as a means, not over-cherished as a thing valuable for its own sake. We will sacrifice no ancient form to an unreasoning love of change, we will keep none which the national spirit desires to replace by one that is a still better and truer expression of the undying soul of the nation.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 61-66)

## IN EITHER CASE

*(Karmayogin, 26 March 1910)*

There are two movements of humanity, upward and downward, and both are irresistible. It may seem for a moment that the downward movement is arrested and an upward lift may for a while rejoice the hearts that are attached to a cause forsaken by God and Destiny. The majestic or impetuous rise of a religion, an idea, a nation may for a fleeting period be held back by main force and with a fierce and infinite labour the wheel may be driven back for the space of an inch or even two. But God cannot be deceived and God cannot be conquered by violence. Where He is the Charioteer, victory is certain and if He wheels back, it is only to leave ground which is no longer advantageous to Him and shift the conflict to terrain fixed beforehand for the victory. Often He forces His adversaries to drive Him from ground conquered and occupied in order that they may exhaust their strength on a position never meant to be permanently held and by their very triumph prepare a more decisive overthrow.

Minute minds fix themselves on details and say, “Here we have failed, there we have prevailed”; and if the record of defeats seems to be long and ill-balanced by doubtful successes, they grow discouraged and apprehend the ruin of their cause. So men deceive themselves as to the trend of events by not keeping their eyes open to the great stream of inevitable tendency which prevails over all backwashes and petty currents. And where defeat is predestined for a season, their want of faith leads to the very calamity which they apprehended. The eye of Faith is not one with the eye of Knowledge; — Faith divines in the large what Knowledge sees distinctly and clearly; but in the main thing Faith and Knowledge are one and the wisdom of the Lover is justified and supported by the wisdom of the Seer. Faith fights for God, while Knowledge is waiting for fulfilment, and so long as the latter is withheld, the former is necessary. For without indomitable Faith or inspired Wisdom no great cause can conquer.

We must look therefore to the great tendency of things and interpret in their light the minute events that are passing at the moment. Is the main tendency of things upward or downward? If it is downward, even then we must strive, for the man who abandons a cause which is right because it is denied success, is despicable, and he inflicts a wound on mankind in the present and the future. Great causes which are fought out boldly to the end are made sacred by courage and suffering and their resurrection and final victory is inevitable. Only those which are supported by cowards and meanly abandoned, are erased from the books of the future. The mediaeval movement of civic liberty in France and Italy failed and gave place to



Teutonic despotism, but it revived with a hundredfold force in the French Revolution and it was the impetuous rush earthwards of the souls that had fought for it hundreds of years before that shattered to pieces the once victorious feudal system. But if, as we are assured, the movement is upward, then we may persist in absolute confidence, sure that reverses in details are only meant to prepare and point the true way to victory.

Persistence does not imply persistence in methods that have proved to be infructuous or from which, though temporarily fruitful, God has withdrawn His sanction. We must remember that we are a nation not yet trained in the vaster movements of modern politics. Not only our rank and file, but our captains and our strategists need the training of events, the wisdom of experience to make them perfect. Fire, impetuosity, self-sacrifice, intellectual vigour, subtlety, wealth of ideas, fertility of resource to meet unexpected happenings, these have been given to us in abundance. But the perfect experience of the veteran in great battles, the acute political intelligence which comes of long familiarity with the handling of high affairs and national destinies, these are yet in us immature and in a state of pupillage. But God Himself is our master and teacher, for He would give to His chosen nation a faultless training and a perfect capacity. Only we must be ready to acknowledge our mistakes, to change our path, to learn. Then only shall we victoriously surmount all obstacles and move steadily, impetuously, but without stumbling or swerving, to our goal.

Moreover, we have weaknesses that are still rampant and uncorrected in our midst. It is our first duty to purge these out of our hearts with a merciless surgery. If the intellectual equipment is deficient, the spiritual equipment is also far from perfect. Our leaders and our followers both require a deeper sadhana, a more direct communion with the Divine Guru and Captain of our movement, an inward uplifting, a grander and more impetuous force behind thought and deed. It has been driven home to us by experience after experience, that not in the strength of a raw unmoralised European enthusiasm shall we conquer. Indians, it is the spirituality of India, the sadhana of India, *tapasya*, *jnanam*, *shakti* that must make us free and great. And these great things of the East are ill-rendered by their inferior English equivalents, discipline, philosophy, strength. *Tapasya* is more than discipline; it is the materialisation in ourselves by spiritual means of the divine energy creative, preservative and destructive. *Jnanam* is more than philosophy, it is the inspired and direct knowledge which comes of what our ancients called *drishti*, spiritual sight. *Shakti* is more than strength, it is the universal energy which moves the stars, made individual. It is the East that must conquer in India's uprising. It is the Yogin who must stand behind the political leader or manifest within him; Ramdas must be born in one body with Shivaji, Mazzini mingle with Cavour. The divorce of intellect and spirit, strength and purity may help a European revolution, but by a European strength we shall not conquer.

The movements of the last century failed because they were too purely intellectual and had not an enlightened heart behind them. Nationalism has striven to supply the deficiency; it has poured the inspirations of the heart into a swifter and more discerning intellectual activity. But Nationalism also has been defective; it has been Indian in sentiment and aspiration, European in practice and actuality. It has helped itself with the intellect, rejoicing in its own lightness, clearness, accuracy, shrewd insight, but it has not been sufficiently supported by inspired wisdom. It has attached itself to imaginations and idealisms, but has not learned to discern the deeper Truth and study the will of God. It has been driven by ardent and vehement emotions, but was defective in clear will-power and the pure energy that is greater and more impetuous than any passionate feeling. Either Nationalism will purify itself, learn a more sacred truth and command a diviner impulse, or it will have to abandon utterly its old body and get itself a new. The pressure of events seems to be pointing in the latter direction. But in either case defeat cannot be the end, victory must be the end.

In all the events of the last year and a half the voice of the divine Teacher can be heard crying to us, "Abandon that you may possess; do my will and know yourselves, purify yourselves, cease to follow your fancies." He that has ears, let him hear. Knowledge will not come without self-communion, without light from within, not even the knowledge of the practical steps that can lead to success. Every step that is taken in the light of a lower wisdom will fail until the truth is driven home.

The work that was begun at Dakshineswar is far from finished, it is not even understood. That which Vivekananda received and strove to develop, has not yet materialised. The truth of the future that Bijoy Goswami hid within himself, has not yet been revealed utterly to his disciples. A less discreet revelation prepares, a more concrete force manifests, but where it comes, when it comes, none knoweth.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 462-65)





# OBSERVATIONS ABOUT JAPAN<sup>1</sup>

## LEARNING FROM JAPAN

Let us learn from Japan how to awaken the national spirit among the people by a contemplation of the heroic deeds of our ancestors. Let us bear in mind that we have a debt to discharge not only towards our ancestors but also to our posterity. If such a noble ideal is steadily kept before our mental vision, we shall see that our nation will give birth to great philosophers, statesmen and generals.

(SABCL 27: 67)

### The example of Japan

There is no instance in history of a more marvellous and sudden up-surfing of strength in a nation than modern Japan. All sorts of theories had been started to account for the uprising, but now intellectual Japanese are telling us what were the fountains of that mighty awakening, the sources of that inexhaustible strength. They were drawn from religion. It was the Vedantic teachings of Oyomei and the recovery of *Shintoism* with its worship of the national Shakti of Japan in the image and person of the Mikado that enabled the little island empire to wield the stupendous weapons of western knowledge and science as lightly and invincibly as Arjun wielded the Gandiv.

(S6: 85-86)

### India's greater need of spiritual regeneration

India's need of drawing from the fountains of religion is far greater than was ever Japan's; for the Japanese had only to revitalise and perfect a strength that already existed. We have to create strength where it did not exist before; we have to change our natures, and become new men with new hearts, to be born again. There is no scientific process, no machinery for that. Strength can only be created by drawing it from the internal and inexhaustible reservoirs of the Spirit, from that Adya-Shakti of the Eternal which is the fountain of all new existence. To be born again means nothing but to revive the Brahma within us, and that is a spiritual process, — no effort of the body or the intellect can compass it.

(S6: 85)

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1. Readers need to bear in mind that the selections are from different articles, written at different times, in different contexts.

The letter "S" in the reference stands for the *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*.

Still, we think the young men of the New party would do well to follow the example of the Japanese as far as possible. We should be absolutely unsparing in our attack on whatever obstructs the growth of the nation, and never be afraid to call a spade a spade. Excessive good nature, *chakshu lajja* (the desire to be always pleasant and polite), will never do in serious politics. Respect of persons must always give place to truth and conscience; and the demand that we should be silent because of the age or past services of our opponents, is politically immoral and unsound. Open attack, unsparing criticism, the severest satire, the most wounding irony, are all methods perfectly justifiable and indispensable in politics. We have strong things to say; let us say them strongly; we have stern things to do; let us do them sternly. But there is always a danger of strength degenerating into violence and sternness into ferocity, and that should be avoided so far as it is humanly possible.

(S6: 309)

### **Ungrudging self-sacrifice**

Every act of the new Nationalism has been a call for suffering and self-sacrifice. Swadeshi was such a call, arbitration was such a call, national education was such a call, above all, passive resistance was such a call. None of these things can be secured except by a general readiness to sacrifice the individual and the family to the interests of the nation. Nowadays a new call is visibly forming, the call on the higher classes to sacrifice their privileges and prejudices, as the Japanese Samurai did, for the raising up of the lower. The spread of a general spirit of ungrudging self-sacrifice is the indispensable prelude to the creation of the Indian nation.

(S8: 140)

### **The New Nationalism**

The New Nationalism, I said in a former article, in this Review, is a negation of the old bourgeois ideals of the nineteenth century. It is an attempt to relegate the dominant bourgeois in us to his old obscurity, to transform the bourgeois into the Samurai and through him to extend the workings of the Samurai spirit to the whole nation. Or to put it more broadly, it is an attempt to create a new nation in India by reviving in spirit & action ancient Indian character, the strong, great and lofty spirit of old Aryavarta, and setting it to use and mould the methods and materials of modernity for the freedom, greatness and well-being of a historic and immortal people.

(S7: 1110)

## **Bushido**

The Japanese when they teach Bushido to their boys do not rest content with lectures or a moral catechism; they make them practise Bushido and govern every thought and action of their life by the Bushido ideal. This is the only way of inculcating a quality into a nation, by instilling it practically into the minds of its youth at school and College until it becomes an ingrained, inherent, inherited national quality. This is what we have to do with the modern ideal of patriotism in India. We have to fill the minds of our boys from childhood with the idea of the country, and present them with that idea at every turn and make their whole young life a lesson in the practice of the virtues which afterwards go to make the patriot and the citizen.

(S7: 455)

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When Indian nationality is a thing realised and the present unnatural conditions have been remedied, then indeed this active participation may be brought under restriction and regulation; for then the inherited habit of patriotism, the atmosphere of a free country and the practice and teaching of the Bushido virtues within the limits of home and school life will be sufficient. But before then to submit to restrictions is to commit national suicide.

(S7: 456)

## **Education of old Kshatriyas or the Japanese Samurai**

It is high time we abandoned the fat and comfortable selfish middle-class training we give to our youth and make a nearer approach to the physical and moral education of our old Kshatriyas or the Japanese Samurai.

(S6: 223)

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The Kshatriya was a Kshatriya not merely because he was the son of warriors and princes, but because he discharged the duty of protecting the country and preserving the high courage and manhood of the nation, and he had to cultivate the princely temperament and acquire the strong and lofty Samurai training which alone fitted him for his duties.

(S7: 683)

### **Part of the economy of vital Nature**

War and conquest are part of the economy of vital Nature, it is no use blaming this or that people for doing it — everybody does it who has the power and the chance. China who now complains was herself an imperialist and colonising country through all the centuries in which Japan kept religiously within her own borders. If it were not profitable, I suppose nobody would do it. England has grown rich on the plundered wealth of India. France depends for many things on her African colonies. Japan needs an outlet for her overabundant population and safe economic markets nearby. Each is pushed by forces that use the minds of rulers and peoples to fulfil themselves — unless human nature changes no amount of moralising will prevent it.

(S28: 436)

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That war in the past has, when subjected to an ideal, helped in this elevation, as in the development of knighthood and chivalry, the Indian ideal of the Kshatriya, the Japanese ideal of the Samurai, can only be denied by the fanatics of pacifism. When it has fulfilled its function, it may well disappear; for if it tries to survive its utility, it will appear as an unrelieved brutality of violence stripped of its ideal and constructive aspects and will be rejected by the progressive mind of humanity; but its past service to the race must be admitted in any reasonable view of our evolution.

(S19: 51-52)

### **Enormous value of national will-power**

In the history of China, no less than the history of Japan, we are likely to see the enormous value of national will-power using the moral outcome of a great and ancient discipline, even while breaking the temporary mould in which that discipline had cast society, thought and government. We in India have an ancient discipline much more powerful than the Chinese or Japanese; but where is the centre of sovereignty in India which will direct the national will-power to the right use of that discipline? Where even is the centre of national endeavour which will make up for the absence of such a Government? We have a Government manned by aliens, out of touch with and contemptuous of the sources of national strength and culture; we have an education empty of them which seeks to replace our ancient discipline by a foreign strength, instead of recovering and invigorating our own culture and turning it to modern uses; we have leaders trained in the foreign discipline who do not know or believe in the force that would, if made use of, revolutionise India more swiftly and mightily than Japan was or China is being revolutionised. It is this and

not internal division or the drag of old and unsuitable conditions that makes the work in India more difficult than in any other Asiatic country.

(S8: 266)

### **Facing serious problems**

We freely admit that the liberated nation would have to face many and most serious problems even as Turkey and Persia have to face such problems today, as Japan had to face them in the period of its own revolution. But to argue from these propositions to the refusal of self-government is to use a sophistry which can only impose on the minds of children.

(S8: 226-27)

### **Japan and industrial progress**

To enable us to take up these manufactures we need a system of industrial education, and for this we have to rely very largely on the assistance of Government. But we must remember that our position is not quite that of any European country in this respect, and that our best model would probably be Japan. Now, Japan, when she aimed at general, and particularly at industrial, progress, adopted three main lines on which her education was to run. These were, first to send a number of her young men abroad, and especially to Germany, for education; secondly to establish great colleges in Japan itself, the staff of which was at first composed of Europeans; and thirdly to employ the services of Europeans, in the initial stages of her manufactures, under whom her people were gradually trained in efficiency.

(S1: 710)

## **MONARCHY IN JAPAN**

### **Japanese nation and resurgence**

The East indeed is always more subjective than the West and we can see the subjective tinge even in its political movements whether in Persia, India or China, and even in the very imitative movement of the Japanese resurgence.

(S25: 39)

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Even adaptable Japan, after the first enthusiasm of acceptance, has retained all that is fundamental in her culture, and everywhere else the European current has met the

opposition of an inner voice and force which cries halt to its victorious impetus.  
(S25: 321)

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Japan with its great feudal order under the spiritual and secular headship of the Mikado and afterwards the double headship of the Mikado and the Shogun evolved one of the most vigorous and self-conscious nation-units the world has seen.  
(S25: 375-76)

### **The Mikado's role in modernising Japan**

The seeking for a king to centralise and assist their growth, despite all the strange comedies and tragedies which have accompanied it, becomes perfectly intelligible as a manifestation of the sense of the old necessity, not so truly necessary now but felt in the subconscious minds of these peoples. In the new formation of Japan into a nation of the modern type the Mikado played a similar role; the instinct of the renovators brought him out of his helpless seclusion to meet this inner need.  
(S25: 379)

### **Monarchic sentiment**

For in Asia kingship has been not only a material fact resting upon political needs and conditions, but a spiritual symbol and invested with a sacrosanct character. But in Asia no less than in Europe, monarchy has been a historical growth, the result of circumstances and therefore subject to disappearance when those circumstances no longer exist. The true mind of Asia has always remained, behind all surface appearances, not political but social, monarchical and aristocratic at the surface but with a fundamental democratic trend and a theocratic spirit. Japan with its deep-rooted monarchic sentiment is the one prominent exception to this general rule. Already a great tendency of change is manifest.  
(25: 467-68)

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At the two extremes of the Asiatic world in Japan and in Turkey the monarchy after the close of the war still preserved something of its old sacrosanct character and its appeal to the sentiment of the race. In Japan, still imperfectly democratised, the sentiment which surrounds the Mikado is visibly weakened, his prestige survives but his actual power is very limited, and the growth of democracy and socialism is bound to aid the weakening and limiting process and may well produce the same results as in Europe.  
(S25: 468)

## The Assassination of Prince Ito

A great man has fallen, perhaps the greatest force in the field of political action that the nineteenth century produced, the maker of Japan, the conqueror of Russia, the mighty one who first asserted Asia's superiority over Europe in Europe's own field of glory and changed in a few years the world's future. Some would say that such a death for such a man was a tragedy. We hold otherwise. Even such a death should such a man have died, in harness, fighting for his country's expansion and greatness, by the swift death in action which, our scriptures tell us, carry the hero's soul straight to the felicity of heaven. The man who in his youth lived in imminent deadly peril from the swords of his countrymen because he dared to move forward by new paths to his God-given task, dies in his old age by a foreign hand because, at the expense of justice and a nation's freedom, he still moved forward in the path of his duty. It is a difficult choice that is given to men of action in a world where love, strength and justice are not yet harmonised, and he who chooses in sincerity and acts thoroughly, whether he has chosen well or ill, gathers *punya* for himself in this world and the next. Then he was building a nation and he lived to do his work, for his death would not have profited. He was building an Empire when he died and by his death that Empire will be established. The soul of a great man, fulfilled in development but cut off in the midst of his work, enters into his following or his nation and works on a far wider scale than was possible to him in the body. Korea will gain nothing by this rash and untimely act, the greatest error in tactics it could have committed. The Japanese is the last man on earth to be deterred from his ambition or his duty by the fear of death, and the only result of this blow will be to harden Japan to her task. She has science, organisation, efficiency, ruthlessness, and she will grind the soul out of Korea until it is indistinguishable from Japan. That is the only way to perpetuate a conquest, to kill the soul of the subject nation, and the Japanese know it. A subject nation struggling for freedom must always attract Indian sympathy, but the Koreans have not the strength of soul to attain freedom. Instead of seeking the force to rise in their own manhood, they have always committed the unpardonable sin against Asiatic integrity of striving to call in a European power against a brother Asiatic. The Koreans have right on their side, but do not know how to awaken might to vindicate the right. The Japanese cause is wrong from the standpoint of a higher morality than the merely patriotic, but they believe intensely in their religion of patriotic duty and put all their might into its observance. It is not difficult to predict with which side the victory will lie.

Prince Hirobumi Ito was the typical man of his nation, as well as its greatest statesman and leader. He went ahead of it for a while only to raise it to his level. He had all its virtues in overflowing measure and a full share of its defects and vices. Absolutely selfless in public affairs, quiet, unassuming, keeping himself in the background unless duty called him into prominence, calm, self-controlled, patient,

swift, energetic, methodical, incapable of fear, wholly devoted to the nation — such is the Japanese, and such was Ito. As a private man he had the Japanese defects. Even in public affairs, he had something of the narrowness, unscrupulousness in method and preference of success to justice of the insular and imperial Japanese type. Added to these common characteristics of his people he had a genius equal to that of any statesman in history. The eye that read the hearts of men, the mouth sealed to rigid secrecy, the rare, calm and effective speech, the brain that could embrace a civilisation at a glance and take all that was needed for his purpose, the swift and yet careful intellect that could divine, choose and arrange, the power of study, the genius of invention, the talent of application, a diplomacy open-minded but never vacillating, a tireless capacity for work, — all these he had on so grand a scale that to change the world's history was to him a by-no-means stupendous labour. And he had the ancient Asiatic gift of self-effacement. In Europe a genius of such colossal proportions would have filled the world with the mighty bruit of his personality; but Ito worked in silence and in the shade, covering his steps, and it was only by the results of his work that the world knew him. Like many modern Japanese, Ito was a sceptic. His country was the God of his worship to whom he dedicated his life, for whom he lived and in whose service he died. Such was this great Vibhuti, who came down to earth in a petty family, an Eastern island clan, a nation apart and far behind in the world's progress, and in forty years created a nation's greatness, founded an Empire, changed a civilisation and prepared the liberation of a continent. His death was worthy of his life. For there are only two deaths which are really great and carry a soul to the highest heaven, to die in self-forgetting action, in battle, by assassination, on the scaffold for others, for one's country or for the right, and to die as the Yogin dies, by his own will, free of death and disease, departing into that from which he came. To Ito, the sceptic, the patriot, the divine worker, the death of the selfless hero was given.

(S8: 299-301)

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## Hirobumi Ito

Two types of souls are born among men. Those who manifest their innate divine nature through a slow process of progressive evolution are ordinary men. And those who are born as Vibhutis to help that process of evolution are a class apart. Accepting the character and mode of conduct of the nation, and the *zeitgeist* of the age in which they are born, they achieve ends which the ordinary people cannot attain, change the course of the world to some extent, and then return to their own respective occult worlds leaving immortal names in history. Their character and contribution are beyond man's praise and blame. Whether we praise or condemn them, they



have fulfilled the tasks given them by God, and the future of humanity, determined by their works, will speed on in the decreed course. Caesar, Napoleon, Akbar, Shivaji are such Vibhutis, Hirobumi Ito, the great man of Japan, belongs to this category and not one of the people I have just mentioned was superior to him in native qualities, genius, the greatness of his effort or in the future results he produced. Every one is aware of the pre-eminent position of Ito in history and in the tremendous progress of Japan. But all may not know that it was Ito who conceived the course, means and aim of that progress and achieved that great transformation single-handed, all the other great men were only his instruments. It was Ito indeed who conceived in his mind the unity, independence, education, army, navy, economic prosperity, commerce and politics of Japan and translated that dream into reality.

He was preparing the future Japanese empire. Whatever he did he achieved mostly from behind the scenes. The world learns immediately of what the Kaiser or Lloyd George is thinking or doing. But no one knew what Ito was thinking or doing — when his secret imagination and effort bore fruit, only then the world learnt with astonishment: this was being prepared so long. And yet what great effort, what wonderful genius is manifested in his achievement. If Ito had been used to publicise his great vision, the whole world would have laughed at him as a mad idealist given to fruitless dreams and bent upon achieving the impossible. Who would have believed that within fifty years, Japan would, maintaining its priceless independence, absorb western culture, become a very powerful nation like England, France and Germany, defeat China and Russia, spread Japanese trade and commerce and painting, and also induce admiration for the Japanese intelligence and fear of Japanese courage, capture Korea and Formosa, lay the foundation of a great empire, achieve the utmost progress in unity, freedom, equality and national education. Napoleon used to say: “I have banished the word ‘impossible’ from my dictionary”. Ito did not say but in fact did so. Ito’s achievement is greater than Napoleon’s. We should have no regret that the great man has been killed by a bullet of an assassin. It is a matter of gratification, of good fortune and something to be proud of that one who dedicated his life to Japan, whose one preoccupation and object of worship was Japan, has also sacrificed it for his country. “Slain thou shalt win heaven, victorious thou shalt enjoy the earth”. In the destiny of Hirobumi Ito we witness the attainment of both these fruits in the same life-tree.

*(Writings in Bengali, 239-40 — Translated from the original Bengali)*

## ART, AESTHETICS, POETRY

And throughout there is that dominant note which distinguishes Indian art from any other whether of the Occident or of the Orient. All characteristic Oriental art indeed seeks to go beyond the emotions and the senses; a Japanese landscape of snow and

hill is as much an image of the soul as a Buddha or a flame-haired spirit of the thunderbolt. Nature will not see herself there as in a mirror, but rather herself transformed into something wonderfully not herself which is yet her own deeper reality. But still there is a difference, and it seems to lie in this that other Oriental art, even though it goes beyond the external, usually remains in the cosmic, in the limits of Prakriti, but here there is a perpetual reaching beyond into something absolute, infinite, supernatural, the very ecstasy of the Divine. Even in work not of the best finish or most living inspiration there is this touch which gives it a greatness beyond its actual achievement; rarely indeed does the statuary fall into mere technique or descend entirely into the physical and external.

(S1: 581-82)

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Our future art must solve the problem of expressing the soul in the object, the great Indian aim, while achieving anew the triumphant combination of perfect interpretative form and colour. No Indian has so strong an instinct for form as the Bengali. In addition to the innate Vedantism of all Indian races, he has an all-powerful impulse towards delicacy, grace and strength, and it is these qualities to which the new school of art has instinctively turned in its first inception. Unable to find a perfect model in the scanty relics of old Indian art, it was only natural that it should turn to Japan for help, for delicacy and grace are there triumphant. But Japan has not the secret of expressing the deepest soul in the object, it has not the aim.

(S8: 64-65)

### **Aesthetic sense and art**

For Japan lives centrally in her temperament and in her aesthetic sense, and therefore she has always been rapidly assimilative; her strong temperamental persistence has been enough to preserve her national stamp and her artistic vision a sufficient power to keep her soul alive.

(S20: 18)

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A great oriental work of art does not easily reveal its secret to one who comes to it solely in a mood of aesthetic curiosity or with a considering critical objective mind, still less as the cultivated and interested tourist passing among strange and foreign things; but it has to be seen in loneliness, in the solitude of one's self, in moments when one is capable of long and deep meditation and as little weighted as possible with the conventions of material life. That is why the Japanese with their fine sense

in these things, — a sense which modern Europe with her assault of crowded art galleries and over-pictured walls seems to have quite lost, though perhaps I am wrong, and those are the right conditions for display of European art, — have put their temples and their Buddhas as often as possible away on mountains and in distant or secluded scenes of Nature and avoid living with great paintings in the crude hours of daily life, but keep them by preference in such a way that their undisputed suggestion can sink into the mind in its finer moments or apart where they can go and look at them in a treasured secrecy when the soul is at leisure from life. That is an indication of the utmost value pointing to the nature of the appeal made by Eastern art and the right way and mood for looking at its creations.

(S20: 271-72)

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Each manner of art has its own ideals, traditions, agreed conventions; for the ideas and forms of the creative spirit are many, though there is one ultimate basis. The perspective, the psychic vision of the Chinese and Japanese painters are not the same as those of European artists; but who can ignore the beauty and the wonder of their work? I dare say Mr. Archer would set a Constable or a Turner above the whole mass of Far Eastern work, as I myself, if I had to make a choice, would take a Chinese or Japanese landscape or other magic transmutation of Nature in preference to all others; but these are matters of individual, national or continental temperament and preference. The essence of the question lies in the rendering of the truth and beauty seized by the spirit. Indian sculpture, Indian art in general follows its own ideal and traditions and these are unique in their character and quality.

(S20: 296-97)

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It is not necessary to dilate on the decorative arts and crafts of India, for their excellence has always been beyond dispute. The generalised sense of beauty which they imply is one of the greatest proofs that there can be of the value and soundness of a national culture. Indian culture in this respect need not fear any comparison: if it is less predominantly artistic than that of Japan, it is because it has put first the spiritual need and made all other things subservient to and a means for the spiritual growth of the people. Its civilisation, standing in the first rank in the three great arts as in all things of the mind, has proved that the spiritual urge is not, as has been vainly supposed, sterilising to the other activities, but a most powerful force for the many-sided development of the human whole.

(S20: 313)

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And in all these instances, as in others like the art and poetry of Japan and of China, a more or less profoundly intuitive creation from the depths and expression through poetic delight of the soul of a people has been the secret of this effect and this power of creation or influence.

(S26: 265)

### **Perfections and absolutes**

Mind also has its own types of perfection and its own absolutes. What intrusion of Overmind or Supermind could produce philosophies more perfect in themselves than the systems of Shankara or Plato or Plotinus or Spinoza or Hegel, poetry superior to Homer's, Shakespeare's, Dante's or Valmiki's, music more superb than the music of Beethoven or Bach, sculpture greater than the statues of Phidias and Michael Angelo, architecture more utterly beautiful than the Taj Mahal, the Parthenon or Borobudur or St. Peter's or of the great Gothic cathedrals? The same may be said of the crafts of ancient Greece and Japan in the Middle Ages or structural feats like the Pyramids or engineering feats like the Dnieper Dam or inventions and manufactures like the great modern steamships and the motor car.

(S27: 72)

### **Perfect organisation**

Greek societies like the Spartan evidently considered themselves perfect and absolute in their own type and the Japanese structure of society and the rounding off of its culture and institutions were remarkable in their pattern of perfect organisation.

(S27: 73)

## **MEETING OF THE ORIENT AND THE OCCIDENT**

The European is essentially scientific, artistic and commercial; the Asiatic is essentially a moralist, pietist and philosopher. Of course the distinction is not rigid or absolute; there is much that is Asiatic in numbers of Europeans, and in particular races, notably the South Germans, the Celt and the Slav; there is much that is European in numbers of Asiatics, and in particular nations, notably the Arabs and the Japanese.

(S18: 347)

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But the art of Japan presented certain outward characteristics on which the European could readily seize. Japanese painting had already begun to make its way into Europe

even before the victories of Japan and its acceptance of much of the outward circumstances of European civilisation opened a broad door into Europe for all in Japan that Europe can receive without unease or the feeling of an incompatible strangeness. Japanese painting, Japanese dress, Japanese decoration are not only accepted as a part of Western life by the select few and the cultured classes but known and allowed, without being adopted, by the millions. Asiatic civilisation has entered into Europe as definitely though not so victoriously as European civilisation into Asia. It is only the beginning, but so was it only the beginning when a few scholars alone rejoiced in the clarity of Buddhistic Nihilism, Schopenhauer rested his soul on the Upanishads and Emerson steeped himself in the Gita. No one could have imagined then that a Hindu monk would make converts in London and Chicago or that a Vedantic temple would be built in San Francisco and Anglo-Saxon Islamites erect a Musulman mosque in Liverpool. It appears from a recent inquiry that the only reading, omitting works of fiction, which commands wide and general interest among public library readers is either scientific works or books replete with Asiatic mysticism. How significant is this fact when we remember that these are the two powers, Europe & Asia, the victorious intellect and the insurgent spirit, which are rising at this moment to do battle for the mastery of the unified world. Nevertheless it is not the public library reader, that man in the street of the literary world, but the increasing circle of men of culture and a various curiosity through whom the Orient & the Occident must first meet in a common humanity and the day dawn when some knowledge of the substance of [the] Upanishads will be as necessary to an universal culture as a knowledge of the substance of the Bible, Shankara's theories as familiar as the speculations of Teutonic thinkers and Kalidasa, Valmekie & Vyasa as near and common to the subject matter of the European critical intellect as Dante or Homer.

It is the difficulties of presentation that prevent a more rapid and complete commingling.

(S12: 392-93)

### **One of the most curious phenomena**

In the East . . . the great revolutions have been spiritual and cultural; the political and social changes, although they have been real and striking, if less profound than in Europe, fall into the shade and are apt to be overlooked; besides, this unobtrusiveness is increased by their want of relief, the slow subtlety of their process and the instinctive persistence and reverence with which old names and formulas have been preserved while the thing itself was profoundly modified until its original sense remained only as a pious fiction. Thus Japan kept its sacrosanct Mikado as a cover for the change to an aristocratic and feudal government and has again brought him forward in modern times to cover and facilitate without too serious a shock the

transition from a mediaeval form of society into the full flood of modernism. In India the continued fiction of the ancient fourfold order of society based on spiritual idealism, social type, ethical discipline and economic function is still used to cover and justify the quite different, complex and chaotic order of caste which, while it still preserves some confused fragments of the old motives, is really founded upon birth, privilege, local custom and religious formalism. The evolution from one type of society to another so opposed to it in its psychological motives and real institutions without any apparent change of formula is one of the most curious phenomena in the social history of mankind and still awaits intelligent study.

(S13: 134)

### **China, Japan and India**

It is significant of the tendencies of the twentieth century that all its great and typical events should have occurred no longer as in the last few centuries in Europe, but in Asia. The Russo-Japanese war, the Chinese Revolution, the constitutional changes in Turkey & Persia and last but not most momentous the revival however indeterminate as yet of the soul of India, are the really significant events of the young century. In Europe except in its one Asiatic corner there has been no event of corresponding magnitude & importance. The abortive orgy of revolutionary fury in Russia, the growth of enormous strikes, the failure of the peace movement, the increase of legislation stamped with the pressure of a materialistic Socialism, although they may hold in themselves germs of greater things, are so far mere indistinct material symptoms of disorganisation & a disease vainly doctored with palliatives, not events of a definite movement of new birth & regeneration. The importance of this new tendency lies in the fact that great events in Europe, even when they are outwardly spiritual, have usually an intellectual or social trend & significance, but great events in Asia have even when they are outwardly intellectual, social or political a spiritual significance. Therefore when Asia once more becomes the theatre of the world's chief events, it is a sure sign that some great spiritual revolution, perhaps a great age of spirituality is preparing for humanity.

(S12: 394)

## **GUNAS AND NATIONAL EVOLUTION**

Japan with her periods of splendid and magnificently fruitful progress and activity when she is absorbing new thoughts and new knowledge, followed by periods of calm and beautiful conservation in which she thoroughly assimilates what she has absorbed and suits it to her system, — Japan with the unlimited energy and personality of her individuals finely subservient to the life of the nation is an instance of a

fundamentally rajaso-tamasic nation which has acquired by its assimilation of Indian and Chinese civilisation the immortalizing strength of sattwa.

(S17: 296)

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The farthest advance made by human evolution is the sub-rajaso-tamasic stage in which sattwa partially evolved tries to dominate its companions. Of this kind of community China, India and more recently Japan are the only known instances. In China the tamasic element is very strong; the passionate conservatism of the race, the aggregativeness of the Chinese character which seems unable to live to itself and needs a guild, an organization or some sort of collective existence to support it, the low physical and emotional sensibility which permits the survival of a barbarous and senselessly cruel system of punishment, are striking evidences of prevalent tamas. The rajasic element is weaker but evident enough in the religious, intellectual and, in one sense, political liberty allowed to the individual and in the union of Mongolian industry and inventiveness with the democratic individualism which allows every man the chance his individual capacity and energy deserve. Sattwa finds its place in the high place immemorially assigned to wisdom, learning and culture and in the noble and perfect Buddhist-Confucian system of ethics and ideal of life which regulates Chinese politics, society and individual life. In India on the other hand, as we shall perceive, we have an unique and remarkable instance of sattwic, rajasic, tamasic influences acting upon the community in almost equal degrees and working at high pressure side by side; tamasic constraint and conservatism governs the arrangement of daily life, rajasic liberty, progress and originality brilliantly abound in the affairs of the mind and spirit, a high sattwic ideal and spirit dominate the national temperament, humanise and vivify all its life, social polity, institutions and return almost periodically, a fresh wave of life and strength, to save the community when it appears doomed to decay and oblivion.

From sattwa springs the characteristic indestructibility which Chinese and Indian society, alone of historic civilizations, have evinced under the pressure of the ages and the shocks of repeated, even incessant national disaster. Sattwa is the principle of conservation. The passive tamasic organism perishes by decay of its unrepaired tissues or disintegrates under the shock of outward forces against which it has not sufficient elasticity to react. The restless rajasic organism dies by exhaustion of its too rapidly expended vitality and vigour. But sattwic spirit in the rajaso-tamasic body is the nectar of the gods which makes for immortality. China and India have suffered much for their premature evolution of the sattwic element; they have repeatedly undergone defeat and subjugation by the more restless and aggressive communities of the world, while Japan by keeping its rajasic energy intact has victoriously repelled the aggressor. At present both these great countries are under



temporary obscuration, they seem to be overweighted with tamas and passing through a process of disintegration and decay.

(S17: 297-99)

## RELIGION AND SOCIETY

### Separation of religious and spiritual claim from secular life

. . . a self-conscious and politically organised nation can have only one supreme and central authority admitted in its midst and that must be the secular power. The nation which has reached or is reaching this stage must either separate the religious and spiritual claim from its common secular and political life by individualising religion or else it must unite the two by the alliance of the State and the Church to uphold the single authority of the temporal head or combine the spiritual and temporal headship in one authority as was done in Japan and China and in England of the Reformation.

(S25: 377)

### Cult of Amitabha Buddha

. . . the Japanese cult of Amitabha Buddha which is a cult of bhakti.

(S29: 434)

### Discipline

Discipline itself is not something especially Western; in Oriental countries like Japan, China and India it was at one time all-regulating and supported by severe sanctions in a way that Westerners would not tolerate. Socially whatever objections we may make to it, it is a fact that it preserved Hindu religion and Hindu society through the ages and through all vicissitudes. In the political field there was on the contrary indiscipline, individualism and strife; that is one reason why India collapsed and entered into servitude. Organisation and order were attempted but failed to endure. Even in the spiritual life India has had not only the free wandering ascetic, a law to himself, but has felt impelled to create orders of Sannyasins with their rules and governing bodies and there have also been monastic institutions with a strict discipline. Since no work can be done successfully without these things — even the individual worker, the artist for instance, has to go through a severe discipline in order to become efficient — why should the Mother be held to blame if she insists on discipline in the exceedingly difficult work she has had put in her charge?

(S32: 577-78)



## Anger

But is it true that even anger which is of the lower vital and therefore close to the body, invariably produces these effects?<sup>2</sup> Of course the psychologist can't know that another man is angry unless he shows physical signs of it, but also he can't know what a man is thinking unless the man speaks or writes — does it follow that the state of thought cannot be “fancied” without its sign in speaking or writing? A Japanese who is accustomed to control all his “emotions” and give no sign (if he is angry the first sign you will have of it is a knife in your stomach from a calm or smiling assailant) will have none of these things when he is angry — not even the “ebullition” in the chest, — in its place there will be a settled fire that will burn till his anger achieves itself in action.

(S31: 270-71)

## Excellent habit

The Japanese have an excellent habit of keeping anger out of their speech and reserving all their strength for acts; they will express their disapproval of you with great plainness, indeed, but also with wonderful calmness and politeness. The Samurai used to rip up his enemy very mercilessly but also very politely; he did it as a duty, not out of passion. But of our emotional, sentimental race, so long accustomed to find its outlet in speech, nothing so heroic can be expected.

(S6: 308-09)

## Ancestor worship

The Pitriyan is supposed to lead to inferior worlds attained by the Fathers who still belong to the evolution in the Ignorance. By the Devayan one gets beyond the Ignorance into the light. The difficulty about the Pitris is that in the Puranas they are taken as the Ancestors to whom the tarpan is given — it is an old Ancestor worship such as still exists in Japan, but in the Veda they seem to be the Fathers who have gone before and discovered the supraphysical worlds.

(S28: 554)

2. *Physical effects such as flushing of the face, flaring of the nostrils, clenched teeth and “ebullition” in the chest. The correspondent had read a book on psychology in which the author suggested that one cannot “fancy” the state of rage without such visible signs of anger. — Ed.*

## WORLD FORCES

### A safe place?

It appears that there are some who think of Pondicherry as a safe place and this is one of their reasons for remaining. This may turn out to be a serious error. Pondicherry can be a safe place only if the Japanese think it not worth their attention because it has no military objectives and no importance as a port or an industrial centre. Even then bombs might fall by accident or mistake, as the town is well in the war-area. But there are local circumstances which might lead them to think it a place of capital importance from the military point of view and in that case it would be exposed to all the dangers and horrors of modern warfare, a place under military occupation and a field of battle. Those who elect to remain here, must dismiss all idea of an assured personal security. Either they should be those who prefer to die here rather than live elsewhere or, at the least, they must be prepared to face any eventuality, any risk, discomfort or suffering. These are not times when there can be a guarantee of safety or ease. It is a time of great ordeals, an hour for calm, patience and the highest courage. Reliance on the Divine Will should be there, but not the lower vital's bargain for a guaranteed or comfortably guarded existence.

(S36: 462-63)

### Subhas Chandra Bose

You will remember that both the Mother and I were very angry against Subhas for having brought the Japanese into India and reproached him with it as a treason and crime against the Motherland. For if they had got in, it would have been almost impossible to get them out. The Mother knows the Japanese nation well and was positive about that. Okawa, the leader of the Black Dragon (the one who shammed mad and got off at the Tokyo trial) told her that if India revolted against the British, Japan would send her Navy to help, but he said that he would not like the Japanese to land because if they once got hold of Indian soil they would never leave it, and it was true enough. If the Japanese had overrun India, and they would have done it if a powerful Divine intervention had not prevented it and turned the tables on them, they would have joined the Germans in Mesopotamia and the Caucasus and nothing could have saved Europe and Asia from being overrun. This would have meant the destruction of our work and a horrible fate for this country and for the world. You can understand therefore the bitterness of our feelings at that time against Subhas and his association with the Axis and the disaster to his country for which he would have been responsible. Incidentally, instead of being liberated in 1948, India would have had to spend a century or several centuries in a renewed servitude. When therefore the Mother heard that you were writing a book eulogising Subhas, she

disapproved strongly of any such thing issuing out of the Ashram and she wanted that you should be asked not to publish it. . . .

. . . Subsequently she met one of the chief lieutenants of Subhas, a man from Hyderabad who had been his secretary and companion in the submarine by which he came from Germany to Japan, and he recounted his daily talks in the submarine and strongly defended his action. From what he said it was evident although we still regarded Subhas's action as a reckless and dangerous folly, that the aspect of a crime against the country disappeared from it. Since then Mother modified her attitude towards Subhas; moreover, the war was receding into the past and there was no longer any room for the poignancy of the feeling it had raised and it was better that all that should be forgotten.

5 April 1947

(S35: 201-02)

### **War open to a number of broad chances<sup>3</sup>**

I think any of these things may one day become possible. Since the last year, new forces have come into the world and are now strong enough to act, which are likely to alter the whole face of the world. The present war is only a beginning not the end. We have to consider what are our chances & what we ought to do in these circumstances.

The war is open to a certain number of broad chances.

I. Those bringing about the destruction of the two Teutonic empires, German & Austrian.

This may happen either by an immediate German defeat, its armies being broken & chased back from Belgium & Alsace-Lorraine to Berlin, which is not probable, or by the Russian arrival at Berlin & a successful French stand near Rheims or Compiègne, or by the entry of Italy & the remaining Balkan states into the war & the invasion of Austro-Hungary from two sides.

II Those bringing about the weakening or isolation of the British power.

This may be done by the Germans destroying the British expeditionary force, entering Paris & dictating terms to France while Russia is checked in its march to Berlin by a strong Austro-German force operating in the German quadrilateral between the forts of Danzig, Thorn, Posen and Königsberg. If this happens Russia may possibly enter into a compact with Germany based on a reconciliation of the three Empires and a reversion to the old idea of a simultaneous attack on England and a division of her Empire between Germany & Russia.

3. Portion of letter to Motilal Roy of Chandernagore, dated 29 August 1914. [MI editorial note]

III. Those bringing about the destruction of British power.

This may happen by the shattering of the British fleet and a German landing in England.

In either of the two last cases an invasion of India by Germany, Russia or Japan is only a question of time, and England will be unable to resist except by one of three means.

- (1) universal conscription in England & the Colonies
- (2) the aid of Japan or some other foreign power
- (3) the aid of the Indian people.

The first is useless for the defence of India, in case III, & can only be applied in case II, if England is still mistress of the seas. The second is dangerous to England herself, since the ally who helps, may also covet. The third means the concession of self-government to India.

In case I, there will only remain four considerable powers in Europe & Asia, Russia, France, England, Japan — with perhaps a Balkan Confederacy or Empire as a fifth. That means as the next stage a struggle between England & Russia in Asia. There again England is reduced to one of the three alternatives or a combination of them.

Of course, the war may take different turns from the above, with slightly altered circumstances & results; the one thing that is impossible, is that it should leave the world as it was before. In any case, the question of India must rise at no very long date. If England adopts more or less grudgingly the third alternative, our opportunity arrives and we must be ready to take it — on this basis, continuance of British rule & cooperation until we are strong enough to stand by ourselves. If not, we must still decide how we are to prepare ourselves, so as not to pass from one foreign domination to a worse.

I want those of you who have the capacity, to consider the situation as I have described it, to think over it, enlarging our old views which are no longer sufficient, and accustom yourselves to act always with these new & larger conceptions in your minds. I shall write nothing myself about my views, just as yet, as that might prevent you from thinking yourselves.

Only, two things you will see obviously from it, first, the necessity of seizing on any opportunity that arises of organization or military training (not self-sacrificing charity, that has already been done); secondly, the necessity of creating an organisation & finding the means, if no opportunity presents itself. It will be necessary for someone from Bengal to come & see me before long, but that will probably not be till October or later.

I shall write to you before long farther on the subject, as also on other matters.

(S36: 219-21)

## Action upon the world forces

In his retirement Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action; for it is part of the experience of those who have advanced far in Yoga that besides the ordinary forces and activities of the mind and life and body in Matter, there are other forces and powers that can act and do act from behind and from above; there is also a spiritual dynamic power which can be possessed by those who are advanced in the spiritual consciousness, though all do not care to possess or, possessing, to use it, and this power is greater than any other and more effective. It was this force which, as soon as he had attained to it, he used, at first only in a limited field of personal work, but afterwards in a constant action upon the world forces. He had no reason to be dissatisfied with the results or to feel the necessity of any other kind of action. Twice however he found it advisable to take in addition other action of a public kind. The first was in relation to the second World War. At the beginning he did not actively concern himself with it, but when it appeared as if Hitler would crush all the forces opposed to him and Nazism dominate the world, he began to intervene. He declared himself publicly on the side of the Allies, made some financial contributions in answer to the appeal for funds and encouraged those who sought his advice to enter the army or share in the war effort. Inwardly, he put his spiritual force behind the Allies from the moment of Dunkirk when everybody was expecting the immediate fall of England and the definite triumph of Hitler, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the rush of German victory almost immediately arrested and the tide of war begin to turn in the opposite direction. This he did, because he saw that behind Hitler and Nazism were dark Asuric forces and that their success would mean the enslavement of mankind to the tyranny of evil, and a set-back to the course of evolution and especially to the spiritual evolution of mankind: it would lead also to the enslavement not only of Europe but of Asia, and in it India, an enslavement far more terrible than any this country had ever endured, and the undoing of all the work that had been done for her liberation. It was this reason also that induced him to support publicly the Cripps' offer and to press the Congress leaders to accept it. He had not, for various reasons, intervened with his spiritual force against the Japanese aggression until it became evident that Japan intended to attack and even invade and conquer India. He allowed certain letters he had written in support of the war affirming his views of the Asuric nature and inevitable outcome of Hitlerism to become public. He supported the Cripps' offer because by its acceptance India and Britain could stand united against the Asuric forces and the solution of Cripps could be used as a step towards independence. When negotiations failed, Sri Aurobindo returned to his reliance on the use of spiritual force alone against the aggressor and had the satisfaction of seeing the tide of Japanese victory, which had till then swept everything before it,

changed immediately into a tide of rapid, crushing and finally immense and overwhelming defeat. He had also after a time the satisfaction of seeing his previsions about the future of India justify themselves so that she stands independent with whatever internal difficulties.

Written 7 November 1946; revised and published 1948

(S36: 65-66)

### **Coils of the dragon**

As for the “spectator” and the coils of the dragon, it is the Chino-Japanese image for the world-force extending itself in the course of the universe and this expresses the attitude of the Witness seeing it all and observing in its unfolding the unrolling of the play of the Divine, Lila. It is this attitude that gives the greatest calm, peace, samata in face of the riddle of the cosmic workings. It is not meant that action and movement are not accepted but they are accepted as the Divine Working which is leading to ends which the mind may not always see at once, but the soul divines through all the supreme purpose and the hidden guidance.

Of course there is afterwards an experience in which the two sides of the Divine Whole, the Witness and the Player, blend together; but this poise of the spectator comes first and leads to that fuller experience. It gives the balance, the calm, the increasing understanding of soul and life and their deeper significances without which the full supramental experience cannot come.

(S30: 243)

### **TWO JAPANESE WORDS IN SAVITRI**

Untired of sameness and untired of change,  
Endlessly she unrolled her moving act,  
A mystery drama of divine delight,  
A living poem of world-ecstasy,  
A kakemono of significant forms,  
A coiled perspective of developing scenes,  
A brilliant chase of self-revealing shapes,  
An ardent hunt of soul looking for soul,  
A seeking and a finding as of gods.

(S33: 328)

\*

As one who spells illumined characters,  
 The key-book of a crabbed magician text,  
 He scanned her subtle tangled weird designs  
 And the screened difficult theorem of her clues,  
 Traced in the monstrous sands of desert Time  
 The thread beginnings of her titan works,  
 Watched her charade of action for some hint,  
 Read the Nō-gestures of her silhouettes,  
 And strove to capture in their burdened drift  
 The dance-fantasia of her sequences  
 Escaping into rhythmic mystery,  
 A glimmer of fugitive feet on fleeing soil.

(S33: 188-89)

Note:

**Kakemono:** A Japanese paper or silk wall hanging, usually long and narrow, with a picture or inscription on it and a roller at the bottom.

**Nō-gesture:** The gestures or movements of a classical drama of Japan, with music and dance performed in a highly stylised manner by elaborately dressed performers on an almost bare stage.

(From: *Lexicon of an Infinite Mind: A dictionary of words and terms in Savitri.*  
 Compiled by Narad)

## **“THE FORCE IS HERE”**

**July 6, 1914**

What plenitude in the perception! The entire individual being, modest, humble, surrendered, adoring, calm and smiling, feeling one with all beings, unable to make any difference of value, in perfect solidarity with all things, is kneeling down before Thee together with them all; and at the same time the formidable omnipotence of *Thy Force which is here*, ready for the manifestation, waiting, building the propitious hour, the favourable opportunity: the incomparable splendour of Thy victorious sovereignty.

*The Force is here.* Rejoice, O you who are waiting and hoping: the new manifestation is sure, the new manifestation is at hand.

*The Force is here.*

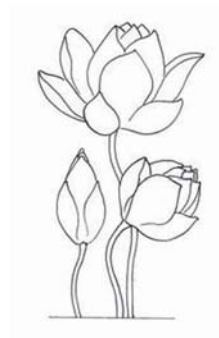
All nature exults and sings in gladness, all nature is at a festival: *The Force is here.*

Arise and live; arise and be illuminated; arise and battle for the transfiguration of all:

*The Force is here.*

THE MOTHER

(*Prayers and Meditations*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Vol. 1, p. 194)





## UNION WITH THE DIVINE CONSCIOUSNESS AND WILL

The force which, when absorbed in the Ignorance, takes the form of vital desires is the same which, in its pure form, constitutes the push, the dynamis towards transformation. Consequently, you must beware at the same time of indulging freely in desires, thinking them to be needs which must be satisfied, and of rejecting the vital force as positively evil. What you should do is to throw the doors of your being wide open to the Divine. The moment you conceal something, you step straight into Falsehood. The least suppression on your part pulls you immediately down into unconsciousness. If you want to be fully conscious, be always in front of the Truth — completely open yourself and try your utmost to let it see deep inside you, into every corner of your being. That alone will bring into you light and consciousness and all that is most true. Be absolutely modest — that is to say, know the distance between what you are and what is to be, not allowing the crude physical mentality to think that it knows when it does not, that it can judge when it cannot. Modesty implies the giving up of yourself to the Divine whole-heartedly, asking for help and, by submission, winning the freedom and absence of responsibility which imparts to the mind utter quietness. Not otherwise can you hope to attain the union with the Divine Consciousness and the Divine Will. Of course it depends on the path by which you approach the Divine whether the union with the Consciousness comes first or with the Will. If you go deep within, the former will naturally precede, whereas if you take a standpoint in the universal movement the latter is likely to be realised first; but it is not quite possible to make a cut and dried generalisation because the sadhana is a flexible and fluid thing and also because the Divine Consciousness and Will are very closely connected with each other, being two aspects of one single Being. Take note, however, that the merely external similarity of your thought or action does not prove that this union has been achieved. All such proofs are superficial, for the real union means a thorough change, a total reversal of your normal consciousness. You cannot have it in your mind or in your ordinary state of awareness. You must get clean out of that — then and not till then can you be united with the Divine Consciousness. Once the union is really experienced the very idea of proving it by the similarity of your thought and action with mine will make you laugh. People living together in the same house for years or coming in daily intimate contact with one another develop a sort of common mind — they think and act alike. But you cannot claim to be like the Divine by such merely mental contact; you must consent to have your consciousness entirely reversed! The genuine sign of the union is that your consciousness has the same quality, the same way of working as the Divine's and proceeds from the same supramental

source of Knowledge. That you sometimes happen to act in the external field as the Divine appears to act may be nothing save coincidence, and to demonstrate the union by such comparisons is to try to prove a very great thing by a very small one! The true test is the direct experience of the Divine Consciousness in whatever you do. It is an unmistakable test, because it changes your being completely. Evidently, you cannot at once be fixed in the Divine Consciousness; but even before it settles in you, you can have now and then the experience of it. The Divine Consciousness will come and go, but while the union lasts you will be as if somebody else! The whole universe will wear a new face and you yourself as well as your perception and vision of things will be metamorphosed. So long as you lack the experience you are inclined to look for proofs: proofs and results are secondary — what the union fundamentally means is that in your consciousness you know more than a human being. It is all to the good if, owing to your acquiring a pure, calm and receptive mind, you manage to think and act in accordance with my intentions. But you must not mistake a step on the way for the final goal. For the chief difference between the positive union and mental receptivity is that I have to formulate what I want you to carry out and put the formula into your pure and calm mind, whereas in the case of the actual union I need not formulate at all. I just put the necessary truth-consciousness in you and the rest automatically works out, because it is I myself who am then in you. . . . I dare say it is all rather difficult for you to imagine, the experience being well-nigh indescribable. It is, however, less difficult to imagine the union of the will with the Divine Will, for you can imagine a Will which is effective without struggle and victoriously manifest everywhere. And if all your will tends to unite with it, then there is something approaching a union. That is to say, you begin to lose your separate egoistic will and your being thirsts naturally to fulfil the Divine's behest and, without knowing even what the supreme Will is, wills exactly what the Divine wishes. But this means an unquestioning acceptance of the Higher Guidance. The energy in you which is deformed into vital desire but which is originally the urge towards realisation must unite with the Divine Will, so that all your power of volition mingles with it as a drop of water with the sea. No more then its own weaknesses and failings, but evermore the supreme quality of the Divine Will — Omnipotence!

THE MOTHER

*(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 133-35)*

## KNOWLEDGE BY UNITY WITH THE DIVINE — THE DIVINE WILL IN THE WORLD

Consciousness is the faculty of becoming aware of anything whatsoever through identification with it. But the divine consciousness is not only aware but knows and effects. For, mere awareness is not knowledge. To become aware of a vibration, for instance, does not mean that you know everything about it. Only when the consciousness participates in the divine consciousness does it get full knowledge by identification with the object. Ordinarily, identification leads to ignorance rather than knowledge, for the consciousness is lost in what it becomes and is unable to envisage proper causes, concomitants and consequences. Thus you identify yourself with a movement of anger and your whole being becomes one angry vibration, blind and precipitate, oblivious of everything else. It is only when you stand back, remain detached in the midst of the passionate turmoil that you are able to see the process with a knowing eye. So knowledge in the ordinary state of being is to be obtained rather by stepping back from a phenomenon, to watch it without becoming identified with it. But the divine consciousness identifies itself with its object and knows it thoroughly, because it always becomes one with the essential truth or law inherent in each fact. And it not only knows, but, by knowing, brings about what it wants. To be conscious is for it to be effective — each of its movements being a flash of omnipotence which, besides illumining, blazes its way ultimately to the goal dictated by its truth-nature.

Your ordinary consciousness is very much mixed up with unconsciousness — it fumbles, strains and is thwarted, while by unity with the Supreme you share the Supreme Nature and get the full knowledge whenever you turn to observe any object and identify yourself with it. Of course, this does not necessarily amount to embracing all the contents of the divine consciousness. Your movements become true, but you do not possess all the manifold riches of the Divine's activity. Still, within your sphere, you are able to see correctly and according to the truth of things — which is certainly more than what is called in yogic parlance knowledge by identity. For, the kind of identification taught by many disciplines extends your limits of perception without piercing to the innermost heart of an object: it sees from within it, as it were, but only its phenomenal aspect. For example, if you identify yourself with a tree, you become aware in the way in which a tree is aware of itself, yet you do not come to know everything about a tree for the simple reason that it is itself not possessed of such knowledge. You do share the tree's inner feeling, but you certainly do not understand the truth it stands for, any more than by being conscious of your own natural self you possess at once the divine reality which you secretly are. Whereas if you are one with the divine consciousness, you know —

over and above how the tree feels — what the truth behind it is, in short, you know everything, because the divine consciousness knows everything.

Indeed, there are many means of attaining this unity. It may be done through aspiration, or surrender, or some other method. Each followed with persistence and sincerity leads to it. Aspiration is the dynamic push of your whole nature behind the resolution to reach the Divine. Surrender, on the other hand, may be defined as the giving up of the limits of your ego. To surrender to the Divine is to renounce your narrow limits and let yourself be invaded by it and made a centre for its play. But you must bear in mind that the universal consciousness so beloved of Yogis is not the Divine: you can break your limits horizontally if you like, but you will be quite mistaken if you take the sense of wideness and cosmic multiplicity to be the Divine. The universal movement is after all a mixture of falsehood and truth, so that to stop there is to be imperfect; for, you may very well share the cosmic consciousness without ever attaining the transcendent Truth. On the other hand, to go to the Divine is also to attain the universal realisation and yet remain free of falsehood.

The real bar to self-surrender, whether to the Universal or to the Transcendent, is the individual's love of his own limitations. It is a natural love, since in the very formation of the individual being there is a tendency to concentrate on limits. Without that, there would be no sense of separateness — all would be mixed, as happens quite often in the mental and vital movements of consciousness. It is the body especially which preserves separative individuality by not being so fluid. But once this separateness is established, there creeps in the fear of losing it — a healthy instinct in many respects, but misapplied with regard to the Divine. For, in the Divine you do not really lose your individuality: you only give up your egoism and become the true individual, the divine personality which is not temporary like the construction of the physical consciousness which is usually taken for your *self*. One touch of the divine consciousness and you see immediately that there is no loss in it. On the contrary, you acquire a true individual permanence which can survive a hundred deaths of the body and all the vicissitudes of the vital-mental evolution. Without this transfiguring touch, you always go about in fear; with it, you gradually develop the power to make even your physical being plastic without losing its individuality. Even now, it is not entirely rigid, it is able to feel the conscious movements of others by a sort of sympathy which translates itself into nervous reactions to their joys and sufferings: it is also able to express your inner movements — it is well known that the face is an index and mirror to the mind. But only the divine consciousness can make the body responsive enough to reflect all the movements of the supramental immortality and be an expression of the true soul and, by being divinised, reach the acme of a supreme individuality which can even physically rise superior to the necessity of death and dissolution.

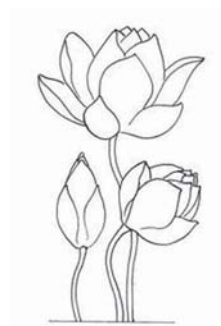
In conclusion, I should like to draw your attention to one point, for it very frequently obstructs true union. It is a great error to suppose that the Divine Will is

always acting openly in the world. All that happens is not, in fact, divine: the Supreme Will is distorted in the manifestation owing to the combination of lower forces which translate it. They are the medium which falsifies its impetus and gives it an undivine result. If all that happened were indeed the flawless translation of it, how could you account for the distortions of the world? . . . Not that the Divine Will could not have caused the cosmic Ignorance. It is omnipotent and all possibilities are inherent in it: it can work out anything of which it sees the secret necessity in its original vision. And the first cause of the world is, of course, the Divine, though we must take care not to adjudge this fact mentally according to our petty ethical values. But once the conditions of the cosmos were laid down and the involution into nescience accepted as the basis of a progressive manifestation of the Divine out of all that seemed its very opposite, there took place a sort of division between the Higher and the Lower. The history of the world became a battle between the True and the False, in which the details are not all direct representations of the Divine's progressive action but rather distortions of it owing to the mass of resistance offered by the inferior Nature. If there were no such resistance, there would be nothing whatever to conquer in the world, for the world would be harmonious, a constant passage from one perfection to another instead of the conflict which it is — a game of hazards and various possibilities in which the Divine faces real opposition, real difficulty and often real temporary defeat on the way to the final victory. It is just this reality of the whole play that makes it no mere jest. The Divine Will actually suffers distortion the moment it touches the hostile forces in the Ignorance. Hence we must never slacken our efforts to change the world and bring about a different order. We must be vigilant to co-operate with the Divine and not placidly think that whatever happens is always the best. All depends upon the personal attitude. If, in the presence of circumstances that are on the point of occurring, you take the highest possible attitude — that is to say, if you put your consciousness in contact with the highest consciousness within your reach — you can be absolutely certain that in such a case what happens is the best that can happen to you. But as soon as you fall from this consciousness and come down into a lower state, then it is evident that what happens cannot be the best, since you are not in your best consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo once said, "What happened had to happen, but it could have been much better." Because the person to whom it happened was not in his highest consciousness, there was no other consequence possible; but if he had brought about a descent of the Divine, then, even if the situation in general had been inevitable, it would have turned out in a different way. What makes all the difference is how you receive the impulsion of the Divine Will.

You must rise very high before you can meet this Will in its plenary splendour of authenticity; not before you open your lower nature to it can it begin to manifest in terms of the Truth. You must, therefore, refrain from applying the merely Nietzschean standard of temporary success in order to differentiate the Divine from

the undivine. For, life is a battlefield in which the Divine succeeds in detail only when the lower nature is receptive to its impulses instead of siding with the hostile forces. And even then the test is not so much external as internal: a divine movement cannot be measured by apparent signs — it is a certain kind of vibration that indicates its presence — external tests are of no avail, since even what is in appearance a failure may be in fact a divine achievement. . . . What you have to do is to give yourself up to the Grace of the Divine; for, it is under the form of Grace, of Love, that it has consented to uplift the universe after the first involution was established. With the Divine Love is the supreme power of Transformation. It has this power because it is for the sake of Transformation that it has given itself to the world and manifested everywhere. Not only has it infused itself into man, but also into all the atoms of the most obscure Matter in order to bring the world back to the original Truth. It is this descent that is called the supreme sacrifice in the Indian scriptures. But it is a sacrifice only from the human point of view; the human mind thinks that if it had to do such a thing it would be a tremendous sacrifice. But the Divine cannot really be diminished, its infinite essence can never become less, no matter what “sacrifices” are made. . . . The moment you open to the Divine Love, you also receive its power of Transformation. But it is not in terms of quantity that you can measure it; what is essential is the true contact; for, you will find that the true contact with it is sufficient to fill at once the whole of your being.

*(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 167-72)*



## **“DIVINE DARK” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO**

Sri Aurobindo —

Here is a short flight of mine, together with a somewhat parallel one by Harin which I found among his published works:

In the hidden face of my own mind  
With apocalypt-surprise<sup>1</sup> I see  
The deep dark burning misery<sup>2</sup>  
Of two ecstatic eyes grown blind!

Some fallen god plays counterpart  
To my earth-self with tortured bliss,  
A hieroglyphic star-abyss  
The dim perfection gnawing<sup>3</sup> his heart!

But sweeter thy remote distress  
Than joys the senses can recall,  
O mute and mystic<sup>4</sup> shadowfall  
Of fiery forgetfulness!

Harin's poem:

Put out the lamps and let their light  
Dwindle to its last feeble spark.  
It is the hour of inward night  
And all within my soul is dark.

Now, Lord, I fain would be alone  
Until this fiery darkness ends,  
Since of a sudden I have grown  
Beyond the need of kindly friends.

Veiled by the little lights of earth  
Your idle mocking laughter runs,  
But, know, my inner night is worth  
A myriad of your glittering suns.



Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

1. The hyphen only makes it heavy — better to erase it.
2. Too many epithets and not poetically effective or convincing — too “romantic” also.
3. *Pas joli*.
4. Don’t you think “mute mysterious” would be better here? The combination “mute and mystic” has a superficial and obvious half-impressiveness which is out of place here.

The whole difference between the two poems is that Harin’s is absolutely felicitous and spontaneous, not a word or a thought too much or too little, the thought just what had to be said, the phrase just what was needed to express, the rhythm one and whole and harmonious throughout, nowhere any sense of labour — in yours on the contrary the words seem often to cover the sense which itself is involved sometimes as if in search for itself and the expression is ambitious without a complete success, there is a sense of labour and straining; the rhythm too is of two distinct characters not welded together. However, it is probable that a few alterations would set things right. Lines 1. 2. 4. 5. 6. 9-10 are all right. Perhaps if lines 3 and 8 which in their present form are very poor and unconvincing were happily altered, the rest would go.

18 April 1933

\*

Sri Aurobindo —

The “pas-joli”-ness of “gnawing” did strike me, but after I had sent up the poem. I don’t know, however, if I would have actually deleted it. Again, I long vacillated between “mute mysterious” and “mute and mystic”, rejecting the former because I did not consider it clear and expressive enough, though certainly more refined. I agree now that you are right in favouring it. The defect of the over-adjectival “romantic” second line would never have dawned on me. It does need chastening and I am glad you drew my attention. But what I am puzzled about is why what I have believed to be the most felicitous line you don’t even mention among the “all right” ones — “A hieroglyphic star-abyss.” The high divine world from which the god-counterpart of my “earth-self” had fallen was to the experience of his heart now a “dim perfection” because he had lost the true intimate realisation of its myriad splendour: it appeared like a night whose stars were like hieroglyphics, glorious symbols of a lost knowledge, an illumination the key to the understanding and full enjoyment of which he had forgotten. A “fiery forgetfulness” this, for it retained still a poignant vaguely sublime feeling-glow of the starry divine world, which made the sorrow of such soulful forgetting sweeter than “all the joys the senses can recall”. I have tried to modify the poem below — with what success I wonder:



In the hidden face of my own mind  
 With apocalypt surprise I see  
 The grandeur<sup>1</sup>-haunted misery  
 Of two ecstatic eyes grown blind!

Some fallen god plays counterpart  
 To my earth-self with tortured bliss —  
 A hieroglyphic star-abyss  
 The dim perfection of his heart!

But sweeter thy remote distress  
 Than joys the senses can recall,  
 O mute mysterious shadowfall  
 Of fiery forgetfulness!

[*Amal's question in the margin:*]

1. Is “splendour” better, in spite of adding one more “s” to the rhythm?

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

1. No.

That is much better. It was precisely because the meaning of your poem needed a commentary that it was not satisfactory. As for the line “A hieroglyphic star-abyss”, it was entirely spoilt by what followed, for it could not be separated from it. An expression like that carries its value, becomes revealing and poetic only if it is fused with the thing it images in a complete and harmonious whole. Otherwise it becomes a conceit, brilliant or ingenious or bold or merely pompous, at the best not a true revealing image. That was what happened to the star-abyss when it became identified with a dim gnawing perfection and by implication became itself a gnawing star-abyss. The worst imitator of Donne could not have out-Donned or outdone that. As it now stands the line recovers all its rights — the image of the occult starry night fills the canvas thrown out there in the right hue and tone — and all is saved.

20 April 1933

\*

Sri Aurobindo —

This somewhat cryptic poem you have already seen, but as it reached its final form on a second attempt on my part I could not judge from your appreciation of its comparative improvement whether the result was just tolerable or really something more. Will you kindly look at it again?

In the hidden face of my own mind  
 With apocalypt surprise I see  
 The grandeur-haunted misery  
 Of two ecstatic eyes grown blind!

Some fallen god plays counterpart  
 To my earth-self with tortured bliss —  
 A hieroglyphic star-abyss  
 The dim perfection of his heart!

But sweeter thy remote distress  
 Than joys the senses can recall,  
 O mute mysterious shadowfall  
 Of fiery forgetfulness!

Sri Aurobindo's comment:  
 It is good.

26 August 1934

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(Version from *The Secret Splendour* —  
*Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna [Amal Kiran]*, 1993, p. 429)

### **DIVINE DARK**

In the hidden face of my own mind  
 With apocalypt surprise I see  
 The grandeur-haunted misery  
 Of two ecstatic eyes grown blind!

Some fallen god plays counterpart  
 To my earth-self with tortured bliss,  
 A hieroglyphic star-abyss  
 The dim perfection of his heart!

But sweeter your remote distress  
 Than joys the senses can recall,  
 O mute mysterious shadowfall  
 Of fiery forgetfulness!

AMAL KIRAN  
 (K. D. SETHNA)

## **‘THEIR EARTHLY FOOD’ — THE MOTHER’S KITCHEN**

*(Continued from the issue of September 2020)*

### **III**

#### **Sri Aurobindo’s meals**

Now we quote some pages from Nirodbaran’s book. Here we get a very interesting first-hand account of Sri Aurobindo’s lunch, as observed by one of his attendants and recorded by him.

The Mother had a wheeled dinner table made for Sri Aurobindo so he could take his meals sitting up in bed. She would lay the table herself, push it to the bed and serve the meals with her own hands. . . . At first Sri Aurobindo took three meals a day, the morning one being quite light. Champaklal and I used to be present at this time. . . . The morning meal however was stopped very soon, since it was too early for his appetite.

*(Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo, pp. 12-13)*

We continue our topic with some more excerpts from the same book:

He took one peppermint lozenge sometime before his meal. . . . Sometimes he had to wait for the arrival of his first and principal meal of the day. Still we hardly ever heard him express that his ‘stomach was getting unsteady’. The day’s second meal, supper, had to be quite light. Let me stress one thing at the very outset: in his whole tenor of life, he followed the rule laid down by the *Gita*, moderation in everything. This was his teaching as well as his practice. To look at the outward commonplaceness of life — eating, sleeping, joking, etc., and to make a leaping statement that here was another man like oneself, would be logical, but not true. Similarly in Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga, even a high experience must not disturb the normal rhythm of life. Naturally, I was extremely curious and so were the others, I believe, to see what kind of food he took; had he any preference for a particular dish and how much had he in common with our taste? We had to wait a long time while he regained his health, and could sit up and ‘enjoy’ a proper meal. As soon as people learnt about it, dishes from various *sadhikas* began to pour in as for the Deity in the temple. And just as the Deity does, so did he, or rather the Mother did on his behalf: only a little

from a dish was offered to him and all the rest was sent back as *prasād*. For his regular meal, there were a few devotees like Amiya, Nolina and Mridu selected by the Mother for their good cooking, which Sri Aurobindo specially liked. . . .

At the beginning all of us would make it a point to be present during his meal and watch the function as well as the Mother's part in it. When the time was announced, water was brought for Sri Aurobindo to wash his hands, then he started eating with a spoon, and rarely with knife and fork. He would take off his ring, place it in Champaklal's hand and wash. Champaklal would put it back on his finger afterwards. Sometimes when he forgot to take off the ring, Champaklal caught hold of the hand before it was dipped in the water. Then the Mother would come, prepare and lay the table, push it herself up to Sri Aurobindo and arrange the various foods in bowls or glass tumblers, — in the order of savouries, sweets and fruit juices — everything having an atmosphere of cleanliness, purity and beauty. Then she would offer, one by one, the dishes to the silent Deity who would take them slowly and silently as if the eating was not for the satisfaction of the palate but an act of self-offering. Steadiness and silence were the characteristic stamps of Sri Aurobindo. *Dhīra*, according to him was the ideal of Aryan culture. Hurry and hustle were words not found in his dictionary. Be it eating, drinking, walking or talking — he did it always in a slow and measured rhythm, giving the impression that every movement was conscious and consecrated. The Mother would punctuate the silence with queries like "How do you like that dish?" or such remarks as, "This mushroom is grown here, this is special *brinjal* sent from Benaras, this is butter fruit." To all, Sri Aurobindo's reply would be, "Oh, I see! Quite good!" Typically English in manner and tone! His silence or laconic praise made us wonder if he had not lost all distinction in taste! Did *rasogolla*, bread and *brinjal* have the same taste in the Divine sense-experience? Making this vital point clear, he wrote in a letter: "Distinction is never lost, bread can not be as tasty as a *luchi*, but a yogi can enjoy bread with as much *rasa* as a *luchi* — which is quite a different thing." He had a liking for sweets, particularly for *rasogolla*, *sandesh* and *pantua*. We could see that clearly: after the Mother had banned all sweets from his menu for medical reasons, one day some *pantuas* found their way in by chance. The Mother could not send them back from the table. She asked him if he would take some. He replied, "If it is *pantua*, I can try." Since then this became a spicy joke with all of us. He enjoyed, as a matter of fact, all kinds of good dishes, European or Indian. But whatever was not to his taste, he would just touch and put away. The pungent preparations of the South could not however receive his blessings, except the *rasam*. When on his arrival in Pondicherry he was given *rasam*, he enjoyed it very much and said in our talks, "It has a celestial taste!" He was neither a puritan God nor an epicure; only, he had no hankering or attachment for anything. His meal ended with a

big tumbler of orange juice which he sipped slowly, looking after each sip to see how much was left, and keeping a small quantity as *prasād*. Once the entire juice had slightly fermented and after one or two sips he left it at the Mother’s prompting. We conspired to make good use of it as *prasād*, but Sri Aurobindo got the scent of our secret design and forewarned us! We had to check our temptation.

One thing that we noticed was that unless the Mother served him in this way, he would lose all distinction between different preparations and would not know which to take first and in which order. Very probably he would have gone half-fed. On one occasion we saw him eating a whole cooked green chilly before we could cry halt! Of course, what was one chilly for him who is said in the old days to have taken a lump of opium with impunity! We have also seen him finishing his meal somehow, if for some reason the Mother could not be present and Champaklal had to serve, instead. The story goes that once Mridu’s dish went back without being touched by Sri Aurobindo, and she raised a storm. Sri Aurobindo had to quiet her with the plea that the Mother being absent he did not know what he had taken or what he had not. . . .

We were rather surprised to notice that milk was excluded from his menu; so was it, we gathered, from the Mother’s, *à la Japonaise*! There was before the accident, however, a cow popularly called Sri Aurobindo’s cow. It was specially taken care of and brought with its calf during the Balcony Darshan for the Mother’s blessings. . . .

(*Ibid.*, pp. 48-53)

There was no fixed time for either the Mother’s or Sri Aurobindo’s meals. So,

. . . attending to Sri Aurobindo’s meal, his walking and his sleep became very complicated since these activities had to depend on the Mother’s round of work. I have said before that like life our daily routine was continually changing. The midday meal shifted from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. We had to be guided by her clock. . . .

(*Ibid.*, p. 58)

## The Mother's meals

We do not have any complete record about the Mother's meals.

Mother comes out of her room today at 6.05 a.m. to go down to the Balcony. Dyuman is standing in the long corridor near the boudoir with a glass of *lithine*<sup>1</sup> for her to drink. Then she takes one or two pills of Cachon — a French make, black in colour, something like the Japanese *Simsin* — and taking out another Cachon from the box, she places it on my palm. . . .

After the Balcony [*darshan*] . . . Mother goes upstairs, the doctor follows. I go behind them up to the landing. Mother and Dr. Sanyal go into her room. I come down and fetch one tray of breakfast. Dyuman brings up another.

(*Champaklal Speaks*, pp. 249-50)

This account by Champaklal has the date 28.1.1960.

There is also another mention of the Mother's breakfast time noted by Champaklal on 6.2.1953:

Mother told me: "From tomorrow I will have my breakfast early in the morning at 6.30. You must keep my soup ready. Otherwise it becomes 11 o'clock and I cannot take my regular food afterwards, if my breakfast is so late I cannot take lunch."

(*Ibid.*, pp. 222-23)

Here is what we gathered from a sadhika working in the Mother's Kitchen regarding her breakfast:

Q: At what time did you send the breakfast?

A: There was no particular time. Sometime in the morning, then at 9 a.m., and then at 12 noon. In the early morning we used to prepare a soup for the Mother. At 6 o'clock she used to take vegetable soup. Lila-di used to get up at 3 a.m. to cut the vegetables and go to the kitchen at 3.30 a.m. There was an electric oven in our kitchen. She used to keep the vegetables to be prepared as soup on that oven and return. It had to be boiled for 2 hours. There was no cooker in those days. Then Lila-di used to prepare the soup to take to the Mother by 6 a.m. The soup was a clear one. Vegetables like cabbage, carrots, tomatoes,

1. Lithine, as prepared in the Ashram dispensary with Mother's approval, was a compound consisting of prescribed quantities of lithinus carbonate, lithinus benzoate and sodium carbonate. Fixed quantities of this and powdered tartaric or citric acid, or fresh lime, added to 200ml of water made one dose. Its use was stopped in 1972.

cauliflower, beans, a little potato used to be boiled and then filtered. We used to use those vegetables but she used to be given the clear soup only. In the early morning Ma used to take something, a little that Pavitra-da used to make for the Mother along with the soup.

Pranab recollects:

In France, at bed-time, Mother used to prepare some coffee with milk and keep it covered on the window-sill. In the morning the coffee was completely frozen. Mother would have that coffee after waking up in the morning and then sit to meditate.

(Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, *I Remember . . .*, p. 53)

Mother used to enjoy eating bread and butter the most. She also liked *lychee*-juice very much. She did not like milk or mangoes. She could not bear the smell of jack-fruit or guavas. What she liked very much was common fruits, vegetables, greens, vegetable soups, mushrooms.

(*Ibid.*, p. 239)

From Champaklal we get to know:

This was before Mother’s second-floor apartment was built. At that time, on the southern side of Mother’s salon, under the window opening on the western side, there was an old Japanese seat, on which Mother sat when she worked or met people. . . . And for a period she also had her meals here with Pranab.

(*Champaklal Speaks*, p. 225)

Sometime in 1947, Pranab and Udar started to have their lunch with the Mother. Here is the full story about their lunch with the Mother:

It was the evening of 14<sup>th</sup> August in 1947. The local goondas attacked the Ashram and we faced up to it. During this time Udar and I set up a self-defence force made up of ashramites. In this work I often needed her advice or directions and so Mother permitted me to go and see her whenever I needed to. And from that time Udar and myself started eating with her in the evenings. Later Mother arranged for me to have lunch with her too. After some time Udar asked Mother if his wife Mona and his daughter Gauri could also join us for lunch and she agreed.

During this period Ali and Alice used to occasionally prepare some dishes for Mother and they would be present there during lunch. Ravindra-ji used to be present.

(Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, *I Remember . . .*, p. 218)

In the following passages we have gathered different aspects of her food, without trying to maintain any cohesive account regarding her meals.

The Mother relished macaroni. There was a cook here who had been to France and she alone among us could make it with a truly delicious taste. In the early years, I remember, olives and macaroni were practically the only food for her. Afterwards Dyuman tried his level best to find out what other dishes she liked and provided them.

(*Champaklal Speaks*, p. 57)

Bibha told us that the Mother liked mushrooms. When mushrooms were available this dish would be sent to her once a week. Here is an example of the way mushrooms were prepared for her: First the cut pieces of the mushrooms would be boiled. These would be ground into a paste, which was passed again through a sieve and served in a small bowl. Initially, mushrooms were procured from Kashmir. Soon, Ardhendu, one of our sadhak-scientists, produced very good quality mushrooms here. Later, some gardens also started to supply this item for the Mother. Pranab told us that sometimes the Mother received from abroad a few packets of special food preparations. Of these, the two preparations she liked were: one was caviar — a preparation of the eggs of a type of fish of the Caspian sea; and the other was Fagars, — a special type of mushroom called *truffle*, which grows underground.

Once the Mother decided not to eat anything but instead absorb from the atmosphere the energy needed for the body. She gave up food completely. She inhaled only the fragrance of fresh jasmines. From this she drew in a lot of energy.

But the human body as it is now needs some intake of food. After a few days she felt that lifting even a cup from the table seemed difficult. She understood that the body was getting feeble from within.

Mother asked Sri Aurobindo. And he replied: “You are looking weak.” And so the Mother resumed eating.

(Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, *I Remember . . .*, p. 55)

I would see the Mother so busy with work day and night that she never really managed either to eat or to rest in time. Very often by the time she sat down for lunch it would be afternoon and she dined well past midnight. As for rest or sleep? She had very little time left for that, this was the cause of her occasional ill health.

Once I told her, “Big government officers and dignitaries are very busy people in the midst of thousand things get time for food and rest. How come that you don’t?”



Mother answered: “I am not a government officer or a dignitary. I am Mother. How can you compare me with them?”

(*Ibid.*, pp. 221-22)

## **Chicken Soup for the Mother**

Tara who was working in the Mother’s Kitchen said:

Once Ma became rather unwell. Then Dr. Sanyal told Ma to take soup of tender chicken. He said that he would cook it and bring it. Then she said that if Sanyal cooked it at home and brought it for her, then she would not take it, meaning that it had to be cooked in her own kitchen.

At that time Manoranjan (Ganguli) used to have a poultry where chickens were available. Every morning a fresh chicken used to be brought to our kitchen and he used to cut and clean it here in front of Dr. Sanyal. Then Lila-di was taught by Dr. Sanyal how to cook it and then make the soup to take it to the Mother. Lila-di was made to taste it (someone who was a pure vegetarian!). Ma was told about it by Dr. Sanyal and she wrote to Lila-di a special letter in this regard.

Pranab recounts:

Towards the end of 1958, Mother fell seriously ill. Her body became very weak. Dr. Sanyal advised her to take some chicken soup. After a lot of effort I managed to persuade Mother to take chicken soup. She drank only the soup while I ate the chicken. Almost a month and a half later, it was rumoured that a fowl-pest was raging in the area so Mother’s chicken soup was stopped. After a lapse of many years, perhaps in 1967-68, Mother fell ill again, and the doctor once again advised her to take chicken soup. But this time too Mother refused. Then chicken-stocks were suggested to which Mother agreed. But these were not as nutritious. So what was to be done? After much deliberation we decided to give her “chicken-stock” cube without letting her know that it was prepared chicken soup. Mother was served the chicken soup after it was very finely strained. But however well it may be strained residue does collect at the bottom of the bowl. While drinking this soup Mother said in perfect innocence: “You see how well they prepare the stock that even then a few pieces of chicken meat are found at the bottom.”

Then Champaklal let the cat out of the bag: “Mother they’re serving you chicken soup in the name of chicken stock.” Mother exclaimed: “Is that so?” Then she gave us a good scolding and said: “From now on don’t serve me soup anymore.” We kept quiet after Mother’s scolding. In the afternoon she

raised the topic again as if to console us.

Champaklal said: "Whatever you may say, Mother, these chickens are really fortunate, they've all attained liberation!" Mother said: "Yes, I did hear a similar story. A Rishi once started a *yagna* to save the country from a severe drought. But someone had to immolate himself in order to make the *yagna* successful. A rabbit agreed and was thereby released from all suffering."

Very enthusiastically Champaklal volunteered: "Mother, then I want to be a chicken."

Mother smiled: "No, my child. I won't be able to eat such a big chicken!" The day closed with laughter all around."

(Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, *I Remember* . . . , pp. 14-15)

### A Doctor's observations regarding Mother's meals

Dr. Bisht, in the 1970's, used to be present on particular days of the week during her meals. Here are some excerpts from his book:

Unlike most of us who are slaves to our taste when we crave for a particular delicacy, the Mother was never choosy about any food. She ate to live and not like most of us who live to eat! Whatever was given to her, she took it without any expression on her face. When I restricted her salt intake, her food was cooked without salt. She ate it with relish. When someone advised (and I agreed) that bitter gourd (*karela*) could be good for her, being a good appetizer, she ate it with equal ease. I was told by "D" that the Mother always liked 'bitter' taste and in fact enjoyed it. I was very happy to learn this since I myself have always enjoyed bitter taste! I wonder if enjoying bitter food also enables one to face bitter things in life! This could be a good subject for research by gustatory gastroenterologists and psychologists! I have no knowledge about her earlier likes or dislikes but she was always obliging us by taking whatever we gave her. Gradually, however, her intake came down and despite our request, she took very little; but she never had a frown on her face. When asked, "How is it, Mother?" She always replied "*bon*" ("good" in French) and nodded her head.

Biological science mentions four basic tastes — salt, sour, sweet and bitter. Yet what a variety of tastes one experiences when one eats or drinks different foods! There was a special 'Mother's Kitchen' where they used to cook specially for her and the food was brought to her room around 7.00 p.m. This had almost become a routine. Dr. 'S' was invariably there sitting in a separate chair waiting and watching all those who were in regular attendance in the room. At that time, no visitor was allowed.

A variety of food was offered to the Mother. To make it easier for her to chew, the food was made a little pasty. There were many other different dishes

which were offered to her on different days, presumably to introduce variety. Never ever did she say that it was any different or that she did not like it. Like an innocent child, she ate everything that was offered to her. There was absolutely no indication of any like or dislike on her face.

As a doctor, I wondered: had aging made her lose all sense of taste? Normally unless there is some damage to the gustatory neuromechanism, the tongue retains the ability of taste till the end of one’s biological life. On the contrary, taste sharpens as age advances. No wonder the best tasters in the world are senior people!

The Mother, however, always responded with “*bon*” or a nod to everything that was offered to her. Like the seven colours of the rainbow when combined make a white beam of light Mother also made a perfect integration of all tastes into one single “*bon*” (good). I also feel this is an aspect of Integral Yoga, where all tastes are nothing but good!

(*Mother and Me*, pp. 30-31)

We end this topic with these few lines:

This was her daily routine through the year; one activity or another filled up every moment and, mind you, this continued till her 80<sup>th</sup> year! Where did she get all this energy from? Her body was frail, food and sleep were medically quite inadequate to cope with her super-abundant vitality. “Do you think I live on these frugal meals alone? One can draw any amount of energy from universal Nature,” she once said.

(Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 123)

(*To be concluded*)

*Compiled by* CHITRA SEN

## ROMEN PALIT: A CENTENNIAL TRIBUTE

Ramendra Kumar Palit, better known as Romen (or Romen-da to the younger ones) in the Ashram community, was born on 26 January 1920 in Kolkata. His father Rajani Palit was a Government official and a follower of Sri Aurobindo, one of the twenty-four disciples present in the Ashram on the evening of 24 November 1926 also known as ‘The Victory Day’.

Having lost his mother at the tender age of six and with no one in the family to look after him, young Romen was brought to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram by his father on 22 September 1929 (not November 1929 as Romen mistakenly notes in his reminiscences, ‘The Grace’ published in the book, *Breath of Grace*). But as children were not allowed to enter the Ashram main building in those days, Romen would have the Mother’s Darshan when she went for her evening drives. His very first personal contact with the Mother took place when he offered her a box of chocolates when she was on her way to S. Duraiswami’s house. On 24 November 1929 he had his first Darshan of Sri Aurobindo about which he later wrote: “. . . I felt a great vastness, a height in Sri Aurobindo which to my childish mind seemed as great as the Himalayas.”<sup>1</sup> Such was the impact of Sri Aurobindo’s Darshan that Romen instantaneously decided not to return to Kolkata. But following Sri Aurobindo’s advice of going back to his home town for a few months and returning to Pondicherry after learning some English so that he could converse with the Mother, Romen left the land of his dreams and returned to Pondicherry with his father only on 27 July 1930. Thus he became the first child to be admitted in the Ashram. But as there were none to look after him, Rani Nag, Bijoy Nag’s wife, took him under her wings with motherly affection. Gradually, he became everybody’s favourite, so much so that he became “a spoilt boy, undisciplined in habit, and erratic in temperament”.<sup>2</sup> In March 1932, the Mother changed his name from Ramendra to Romen and also provided him with accommodation in the month of May in a room in the Ashram main building which was used by her for meditation and pranam in the earlier days.

Romen, however, was not yet prepared to lead a spiritual life. During his adolescence, he would suffer from mood swings and depression. Fits of headache and poor health also troubled him. The Mother made special arrangements for butter, eggs and Ovaltine exclusively for him and would inquire daily about the quality of the food he was served. She would also make him flex his arms and say: “You must become strong, my child.” When Romen informed the Mother about a “nameless

1. M. P. Pandit (ed.) *Breath of Grace*, p. 94, Dipti Publications, 2011.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

sadness” and “lack of peace and energy” which he was suffering from, she wrote to him comforting letters to cool down his burning heart. Two of such letters are quoted here:

. . . all is not sad and gloomy, neither the trees, nor the sky, nor the sea; everything is full of the divine presence and is only too glad to speak to you of it. Shake off this childish depression and contemplate the Sun rising in your heart!<sup>3</sup>

You see, my child, the unfortunate thing is that you are too concerned about yourself. At your age I was exclusively occupied with my studies — finding things out, learning, understanding, knowing; that was my interest, even my passion. . . . It would be better for you to pay more attention to what you are doing and to do it well (painting or music), to develop your mind which is still very uncultivated and to learn the elements of knowledge which are indispensable to a man if he does not want to be ignorant and uncultured.<sup>4</sup>

In 1934, when Romen was fourteen, he had the unique experience of the psychic being coming to the forefront. This experience became the “basis of existence”, “support and aid” in all the trials and tribulations he faced. He realised that this momentous experience was

the Mother’s extended arm in my consciousness to rouse what was the most true, the most permanent in me. This altered all my life, my vision, and my valuation of things, persons, actions in general and my relation with the Mother in particular.<sup>5</sup>

But even this psychic experience did not free Romen from the restlessness he suffered from. Life outside the Ashram continued to lure him. His father too wanted him to go to England and prepare himself to appear for the Indian Civil Service examination. The Mother noticed his restlessness and asked him in November 1937 to go out and experience the ordinary life. But she told him very clearly that he must not get married. On 26 November Romen left Pondicherry. Having visited Chittagong (now in Bangladesh) and Maharashtra, he returned to Pondicherry two months later. During his absence, the Mother had renovated his room in the Ashram and welcomed him back with enthusiasm.

3. *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 2009, p. 132, Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir, Kolkata.

4. *Ibid.*, pp.132-33.

5. *Breath of Grace*, p. 97.

At that time, ‘Golconde’, the oldest dormitory of the Ashram, was under construction. Romen joined the construction work and proved his capabilities. But after a few months he again succumbed to the attractions of the external world which continued to overpower his heart and mind. He decided to go out once again. This time too the Mother gave him permission but repeated her instruction of not getting married. Romen left the Ashram on 4 September 1938 and returned on 20 February 1943, spending almost five years away from Pondicherry. He again left the Ashram on 7 March 1943 and returned to Pondicherry after three years on 1 April 1946 never to leave again. He returned as a “crushed individual” to quote his own words. When he went to the Mother after his return and made his obeisance, she said: “At last!” and blessed him with a rose which signified ‘Obedience’. Romen, then twenty-six, understood that he had been running after an illusory life all these years. Having passed through the bitter experiences of life, he realised that life in the Ashram under the spiritual aegis of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother offered “infinite possibilities” and that the Mother who had been so patient with him, wanted him to become her “true child, the child of Light.”<sup>6</sup> With the grace of the Mother, the “black curtain” which was drawn over Romen’s inner spiritual life was lifted for good.

Romen was first given a room in the building which houses the Ashram Press. Later he was allotted a room in a house which the Mother had named ‘Ashish’ (initially known as *Remplaçant* House). The Mother visited him in both the rooms as well as in the one which he had in the band quarters in the Sports Ground. He joined Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education at a fairly advanced age and completed his Higher Course with English Literature as his main subject in 1955. He rejoined the course and took up Sri Aurobindo’s major works and completed it in 1959. The other students who were much younger than him laughed behind his back. Though Romen was well aware of their sarcastic remarks he did not let any taunt disturb him for he knew that the Mother’s blessings were always with him. There was an element of eternal youth in him which made him declare with the least hesitation: “I . . . do not consider myself to be old as the horizons of my mind, life and body are still expanding.”<sup>7</sup> No wonder the Mother had greeted him on his fiftieth birthday on 26 January 1970 with the following words: “Hello! You are not growing old!”

When Romen was in his thirteenth year, he had put the following question to Sri Aurobindo: “Have I any disposition to poetry?”

Sri Aurobindo answered: “Too soon to say — you have to grow first — and learn rhythm and everything else before it can be said.”

Romen again asked Sri Aurobindo: “Do you think that poetry can be written by me — rather can you express poetry through me?”

6. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

Sri Aurobindo gave him an assuring reply: “Yes, in time it will come. You have a gift of expression.”

Sri Aurobindo’s assurance did not go in vain. He encouraged Romen in his attempts at verse-composition when he started writing poetry at the age of fifteen. Romen would visit Amal Kiran almost daily; following his request, Amal Kiran would revise and correct his poems which were sent to Sri Aurobindo for his perusal. Sri Aurobindo would also comment on Romen’s poems, point out the deficiencies of expression and discuss the finer elements in them. Thus, the Master showered his blessings on the young poet. However, after the physical departure of Sri Aurobindo, Romen was told by some of his friends that the Mother did not like poetry as Sri Aurobindo did. When Romen asked the Mother about it, she replied: “After all that Sri Aurobindo has done for poetry, how can I not like it?”

To encourage Romen in his poetical endeavours, the Mother published some of his poems under the title of *The Golden Apocalypse* in May 1953 ‘almost without’ Romen’s knowledge. About this particular anthology of his poems, Romen would later remark: “Had I any intention of publication I would have edited the work.”<sup>8</sup> *The Golden Apocalypse* happens to be Romen’s only published book. Although he has penned numerous beautiful poems in his career as a poet, covering a span of four decades including a series of long poems under the heading *Lotus-Flame* which was published year-after-year in *Sri Aurobindo Circle Annual* from 1951, his poems have not been collected together and published in book form. In the pages of the monthly journal, *Mother India*, he had published a study of Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost* as well as articles on Indians writing prose — especially novels — in English. His works are still scattered in the pages of the journals to which he contributed.

Romen’s early poems bear the influence of Amal Kiran who used to go through his work and correct them. In fact, *The Golden Apocalypse* was published under Amal Kiran’s ‘critical eye’.<sup>9</sup> The poems written in the 1940s are marked by the presence of a soul-touching simplicity. But after the *mahasamadhi* of Sri Aurobindo, Romen was blessed by a unique experience which, to quote his own words, “opened a new way of literary expression”. He also added: “I was promised aid in my poetical venture.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed his poems took a mystic and spiritual turn from the 1950s. After reading some of the poems written at that time, the Mother had remarked: “I have a very strong impression that Sri Aurobindo himself was behind this.” His later poems written in the 1960s and 1970s express his spiritual aspiration and the realisations he had on the path of sadhana. A careful study of his poems would also give a glimpse of his inner life about which only a few had a vague inkling. “Most

8. *Ibid.*

9. K. D. Sethna, ‘Romen’, *Mother India*, June 1986, p. 353.

10. *Breath of Grace*, p. 107.



Ashramites knew his serious concentrated face,”<sup>11</sup> recalls Amal Kiran while Supriyo Bhattacharya remarks: “Those who saw him in the 1970s [remarked] . . . that he was very warm, full of energy and his face was aglow with peace.”<sup>12</sup>

Romen was also quite an adept in playing the sitar and surbahar on which he played different *rāgas*. The Mother was quite fond of his music, especially his extempore compositions which were neither Indian nor Western. Not only did she listen to his music once a fortnight or once in three weeks but also presented him to various notable personalities who visited her. On one occasion when he was playing in Pavitra’s room before a group of Europeans, the Mother stood quietly behind the door and listened to his music. On another occasion, while Romen was performing before the Mother, she saw in a vision Romen seated on a platform on the bank of a river playing some instrument. She told Romen that he was a musician in his previous birth as well.

The Mother also encouraged Romen to draw and paint. She had arranged for the display of his paintings along with those of Krishnalal Bhatt, Anil Kumar Bhatta, Sanjiban Biswas and Nishikanto Roychowdhury in 1937. No wonder Amal Kiran has remarked that Sri Aurobindo was appreciative of the fact that Romen exemplified to a notable degree that extremely rare combination in art: poetry, music and painting.

Romen’s death on 5 May 1986 (which took place as a result of a sudden heart attack while he was working at Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education) at the age of sixty-six came as a shock to many. But some of his later poems reveal that he was gradually preparing himself to join the Mother in her work in the subtle world. To conclude from one of his poems written in 1977:

I would die and be reborn  
In thy light of day,  
My clinging fetters shorn —  
God-kissed my clay.

ANURAG BANERJEE

11. *Mother India*, June 1986, p. 353.

12. Supriyo Bhattacharya, ‘Sri Aurobindo and his Young Poet: Romen’, *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, 2009, p. 135.



## THE MOTHER'S TOUCH

Just writing this piece gives me goose bumps and fills my heart with ecstasy and bliss.

Whenever I am confronted with any difficulty, I play this event in my mind and draw the energy and balance to confront the obstacle. By the time the episode is re-run in my psyche, the predicament vanishes and tranquillity fills my heart. Whenever I recollect this happening all my remorse and apprehensions vacate the cave of my heart, creates a vacuum and immediately a tender presence, intoxicating and tranquillising, fills that space. An omnipresent *chetana* settles within and a sense of bliss overwhelms me. Emotions of gratitude and servitude embrace me while tears roll down my cheeks unabashedly.

Today, my wish is to share this touching, poignant experience and I offer it before the Mother's children.

I don't claim to be a philosopher or an elevated soul. Nevertheless, this simple interaction with the Mother elevated my spirits.

My parents migrated to Pondicherry on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1958. All of us had the privilege of receiving the Mother's calendar on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1959, and that's when our modest spiritual journey began. Thanks to the boundless grace of the Supreme Mother, the fourth generation in our family is leading a peaceful life within the spiritual consciousness and protective care of the Mother. For this we are ever grateful to her. My heart overflows with gratitude when I replay within me this event.

During the sixties, the Mother was accessible to one and all. The very first darshan of the Mother evoked in my grandma, a very religious Vaishnavite, an extraordinary adoration and devotion. She graduated from religiosity to spirituality. She visited the Ashram every evening and never missed a single darshan. In those days the Mother used to receive the devotees in the same place where her photo is now kept in the Meditation Hall. She sat on her majestic chair while the devotees stood solemnly in a queue waiting their turn to seek her blessings. I always accompanied my grandma during these occasions, to be close to the Supreme Mother. The Mother used to distribute handkerchiefs, flowers, napkins to gents and saris to ladies. Grandma and I had the privilege of receiving these from the Mother personally, touching her feet and being blessed by her. These were the most overwhelming moments of our lives. When we came in front of her, I used to see grandma melting before her in adoration like Mirabai before Krishna. She preserved these sacred gifts she received from the Divine Mother as treasures, keeping them in her little cupboard at home.

On one such darshan day grandma was unwell. She had cancer and could not

come out. I was reluctant to go without her. She cajoled me and advised me to go alone and seek Maa's blessings. I must have been six or seven years old, thin like a bamboo pole with darkish brown features, wearing over-sized shorts. Obediently, I ran to the Ashram, forgetting to wear my slippers and was just in time to join the line leading to the Supreme Mother. The queues then were not too long. From the time I joined the column, my thirsty eyes never left her kindly face. As I progressed towards her I felt the absence of my grandma. With mixed feelings I came and stood before the Divine. I just gazed at her with wide, pleading eyes. She looked at me with compassionate love and gave me a big smile. I felt myself quivering in the energy of her aura. Her penetrating eyes held my eyes in silence. Her tender gaze scanned my whole being, probing and exploring me. I felt a gentle and subtle energy which touched my mind, caressed my heart, leaving something soft and luminous in me.

Coming out of my stupor, I found Maa offering a handkerchief to me. She was distributing blue-bordered handkerchiefs on that day. I offered my pranams and accepted the prasad with adoring eyes but did not move on. Without budging, I stood in front of the Mother with a melancholic look. The Mother continued to smile at me and seeing me transfixed, whispered something in the ears of a bearded person standing by her chair. The gentleman asked me to move on. Overcome with some strange emotion, I blurted out, "My grandma is not well," and stood still. He conveyed the message to the Mother. The Mother of all mothers smiled compassionately and handed me another handkerchief. I felt the touch of her soft fingers. I retreated respectfully.

Once outside of the main gate, I ran all the way home to tell my grandma that Maa had given a kerchief for her too. Grandma took the sacred piece reverentially and kept it under her pillow. The all-knowing Mother understood the agony of my heart and blessed grandma in her unique and subtle way. This gesture of the Mother brought me yet closer to the Divine.

LALIT N. MODI

# **SRI AUROBINDO, THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN — “LIFE OF PREPARATION AT BARODA”**

*(Continued from the issue of September 2020)*

## **1. KINDNESS AND COMPASSION**

### **(Part 11)**

Sri Aurobindo has referred to his time at the Baroda State Service as, “Life of preparation at Baroda”. At Baroda Sri Aurobindo developed remarkable powers of concentration culminating in the practice of yoga which in turn deepened his calm and strengthened his willpower. These helped him endure a stressful and hazardous political life that finally resulted in him being imprisoned in the Alipore Bomb Case, on the grievous charge of conspiracy to wage war against the British government, an offence punishable by death.

The Alipore Bomb Trial commenced a year after he permanently left Baroda. Alluding to the efforts of the British government to secure a death-sentence against him in the trial, Sri Aurobindo remarked:

When I was arrested, my maternal grand-aunt asked Swami Bhaskaranand, “What will happen to our Aurobindo?” He replied, “The Divine Mother has taken him in Her arms; nothing will happen to him. But he is not *your* Aurobindo, He is the world’s Aurobindo, and the world will be filled with his perfume.”<sup>1</sup>

Dinendra Kumar Roy lived with Sri Aurobindo from 1898 to 1900, during which period he was greatly inspired and ennobled by him. Even after an eight-year separation, Roy’s affection for Sri Aurobindo never waned or wavered. Writing about the Alipore trial he expressed his anguish over the British government’s overzealous ill-treatment meted out to Sri Aurobindo:

That Shrijut Aurobindo Ghose would become so famous within such a short time and the entire police force of India would focus its searching eye on him, that the well-known barrister Norton Sahib would swallow — more effortlessly than he drank his champagne — thousands and thousands of rupees — the

1. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 544.

blood extracted from the poor Indian subjects — was beyond my imagination before the Bomb trial began.<sup>2</sup>

Despite Sri Aurobindo's goodness, he was destined to face almost insurmountable difficulties. Although Sri Aurobindo had no hand in the killing in the Alipore Bomb Case, he became the principal target of the British. In a public statement to the editor of *The Hindu* in 1911, Sri Aurobindo noted:

Even in the Alipur trial, beyond an unverified information and the facts that my brother was the leader of the conspiracy and frequented my house, there was no original ground for involving me in the legal proceedings.<sup>3</sup>

Tragically, despite his stature as a respected Nationalist leader, the British government tried to undermine his dignity during the entire year of his imprisonment. About his incarceration he notes:

At that time I had no idea that I happened to be the main target of suspicion and that according to the police I was the chief killer, the instigator and secret leader of the young terrorists and revolutionaries. I did not know that that day would mean the end of a chapter in my life, and that there stretched before me a year's imprisonment during which period all my human relations would cease, that for a whole year I would have to live, beyond the pale of society, like an animal in a cage.<sup>4</sup>

And about his direct involvement with the revolutionary movement, Sri Aurobindo later clarified to his disciples:

It is true that Barin used to consult me or Mullick for any advice. But the whole movement was in his hands. I had no time for it. I was busy with Congress politics and *Bande Mataram*. . . .

I was never in direct contact with the movement nor with the young men and didn't know them. Only in jail did I come in contact with them, especially Nolini, Bejoy, etc.<sup>5</sup>

Sri Aurobindo has referred to the Alipore Bomb Case as “the life-and-death game of a serious political case,”<sup>6</sup> and it is tragic that a person so selfless and

2. Manoj Das, 'Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi', *Mother India*, April 2012, p. 286.

3. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 269.

4. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 1.

5. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 502.

6. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 48.

compassionate, who had no hand in the assassination, should be the chief accused in the case and for a whole year had to live “like an animal in a cage”, with the constant threat of being sentenced to the gallows. One wonders why such a thing had to happen to a person like Sri Aurobindo. Was it the law of Karma that was working out its mechanical line? Or perhaps the Divine was working out something in him? But our understanding is not profound enough. Sri Aurobindo says:

A . . . possible and less outwardly mechanical line of Karma is suggested by the dictum that like creates like and in accordance with that law good must create good and evil must create evil. In the terms of a moral return or rather repayment to moral energies this would mean that by putting forth love we get a return of love and by putting forth hatred a return of hatred, that if we are merciful or just to others, others also will be to us just or merciful and that generally good done by us to our fellow-men will return in a recompense of good done by them in kind and posted back to our address duly registered in the moral post office of the administrative government of the universe. Do unto others as you would be done by, because then they will indeed so do to you, seems to be the formula of this moral device. If this were true, human life might indeed settle down into a very symmetrical system of a harmoniously moral egoism and a mercantile traffic in goodness that might seem fair and beautiful enough to those who are afflicted with that kind of moral aesthesis. Happily for the upward progress of the human soul, the rule breaks down in practice, the world-spirit having greater ends before it and a greater law to realise. The rule is true to a certain extent in tendency and works sometimes well enough and the prudential intelligence of man takes some account of it in action but it is not true all the way and all the time. . . .

Actually in the cosmic dispensation evil comes out of good and good out of evil and there seems to be no exact correspondence between the moral and the vital measures. All that we can say is that good done tends to increase the sum and total power of good in the world and the greater this grows the greater is likely to be the sum of human happiness and that evil done tends to increase the sum and total power of evil in the world and the greater this grows, the greater is likely to be the sum of human suffering and, eventually, man or nation doing evil has in some way to pay for it, but not often in any intelligibly graded or apportioned measure and not always in clearly translating terms of vital good fortune and ill fortune.<sup>7</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s work for the liberation of the nation included his scathing attacks on the British through his writings in the *Bande Mataram* journal. Ever since

7. CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 410-12.

these writings, the British government hounded Sri Aurobindo and an arrest warrant was issued against him in August 1907 in what is known as *Bande Mataram* sedition case. Although he was acquitted in September the British police kept a very close watch over him. About this sedition case, Sri Aurobindo notes: “After the *Bande Mataram* case, Sri Aurobindo became the recognised leader of Nationalism in Bengal.”<sup>8</sup> Since the British government considered Sri Aurobindo to be one of the most dangerous and influential leaders, he was put in solitary confinement at Alipore jail, apparently to mentally break him down. Instead, however, Sri Aurobindo found strength and also had an excess of sympathy towards victims of cruelty and torture:

Without turning me mad he [God] had enacted in my mind the gradual process towards insanity that takes place in solitary confinement, keeping my intelligence as the unmoved spectator of the entire drama. Out of this came strength, and I had an excess of kindness and sympathy for the victims of human cruelty and torture. I also realised the extraordinary power and efficacy of prayer.<sup>9</sup>

Instead of being psychologically crushed, Sri Aurobindo astonishingly reveals how solitary confinement widened his love:

The sentry that used to parade before the ‘six decree’ rooms, his face and footsteps often appeared dear to me like the welcome steps of a friend. . . . The solitary confinement at Alipore was a unique lesson in love. Before coming here even among people my affections had been confined to a rather narrow circle, and the closed emotions would rarely include birds and animals. . . . At Alipore I could feel how deep can be the love of man for all created things, how thrilled a man can be on seeing a cow, a bird, even an ant.<sup>10</sup>

Let alone Sri Aurobindo’s love for all living creatures, he also felt that inanimate objects were conscious, vibrating with a universal consciousness, and wanting to embrace him. As Sri Aurobindo was interned in a tiny cell that could barely accommodate a big bed, the kind jail doctor obtained permission for him to walk every day, which literally proved to be a breath of fresh air to the prisoner. Sri Aurobindo writes that “a spring of love for all creatures gushed from within” along with other *sattvic* emotions such as charity and kindness:

8. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 59.

9. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 44.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

. . . travelling to and fro I would recite the deeply moving, ageless, powerful mantras of the Upanishads, or watching the movements and activities of the prisoners I tried to realise the basic truths of the immanent Godhead, God in every form. In the trees, the houses, the walls, in men, animals, birds, metals, the earth, with the help of the *mantra*: All this is the Brahman (*sarvam khalvidam Brahma*). I would try to fix or impose that realisation on all of these. As I went on doing like this sometimes the prison ceased to appear to be a prison at all. The high wall, those iron bars, the white wall, the green-leaved tree shining in sunlight. It seemed as if these commonplace objects were not unconscious at all, but that they were vibrating with a universal consciousness, they loved me and wished to embrace me, or so I felt. Men, cows, ants, birds are moving, flying, singing, speaking, yet all is Nature's play; behind all this is a great pure detached Spirit rapt in a serene delight. Once in a while it seemed as if God Himself was standing under the tree, to play upon his Flute of Delight, and with its sheer charm to draw my very soul out. Always it seemed as if someone was embracing me, holding me on his lap. The manifestation of these emotions overpowered my whole body and mind, a pure and wide peace reigned everywhere. It is impossible to describe that. The hard cover of my life opened up and a spring of love for all creatures gushed from within. Along with this love such *sattvic* emotions as charity, kindness, *ahimsa*, etc., overpowered my dominantly *rajasic* nature and found an abundant release. And the more these qualities developed, the greater the delight and the deeper the sense of unclouded peace.<sup>11</sup>

This aspect of Sri Aurobindo's experience at Alipore jail, brings to mind two of his aphorisms:

The whole world is my seraglio and every living being and inanimate existence in it is the instrument of my rapture.<sup>12</sup>

Live for God in thy neighbour, God in thyself, God in thy country & the country of thy foeman, God in humanity, God in tree & stone & animal, God in the world & outside the world, then art thou on the straight path to liberation.<sup>13</sup>

In *Essays of Gita*, Sri Aurobindo writes of attaining universality through divine sympathy:

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

12. CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 483.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 446.

. . . This Godhead is one in all things that are, the self who lives in all and the self in whom all live and move; therefore man has to discover his spiritual unity with all creatures, to see all in the self and the self in all beings, even to see all things and creatures as himself, *ātmaupamyena sarvatra*, and accordingly think, feel and act in all his mind, will and living. This Godhead is the origin of all that is here or elsewhere and by his Nature he has become all these innumerable existences, *abhūt sarvāṇi bhūtāni*; therefore man has to see and adore the One in all things animate and inanimate, to worship the manifestation in sun and star and flower, in man and every living creature, in the forms and forces, qualities and powers of Nature, *vāsudevaḥ sarvam iti*. He has to make himself by divine vision and divine sympathy and finally by a strong inner identity one universality with the universe.<sup>14</sup>

In spite of Sri Aurobindo's benevolent nature, the British authorities considered him a dangerous revolutionary and the key suspect in the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy. The calm and gentleness of his aura at Alipore jail was such that even the penitentiary authorities slowly started showing acts of kindness towards him. Despite Sri Aurobindo's total taciturnity in jail, the chief medical officer of the jail, Dr. Daly, started visiting him regularly and showed immense sympathy. Sri Aurobindo notes:

During the period of my solitary confinement Dr. Daly and the Assistant Superintendent would come to my room almost every day and have a little chat. From the beginning, I do not know why I had been able to draw their special favour and sympathy. I did not speak much with them, but just answered only when they specifically asked something. If they raised any issue I either listened quietly or would stop after speaking a few words. Yet they did not give up visiting me. One day Dr. Daly spoke to me, "I have been able, through my Assistant Superintendent, to get the big boss to agree that every day, in the morning and evening, you will be allowed to take a walk in front of the decree. I do not like that you should be confined throughout the day in a small cell, it's bad for both body and mind." From that day on I would take a stroll every day in the morning and evening in the open space before the decree. . . . I enjoyed this very much.<sup>15</sup>

During the blistering summer Sri Aurobindo's overheated cell would become almost unbearable. Here again, Sri Aurobindo notes, Dr. Daly was helpful:

14. *Ibid.*, Vol. 19, pp. 343-44.

15. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 44.



It was then hot summer, in my little room the wind was almost forbidden to enter. But the fierce and blazing sunlight of May had free access to it. The entire room would burn like an oven. While being locked thus the only way to lessen one's irresistible thirst was the tepid water in the small tin enclosure. I would drink that water often, but this would not quench the thirst, rather there would be heavy sweating and soon after the thirst would be renewed. . . . Whether I was pleased or not with such erratic arrangements, the generous jail doctor found my water trouble unbearable. He made efforts to get an earthen pot for my use, but since the distribution was not in his hands he did not succeed for long; at last at his bidding the head-sweeper managed to discover an earthen pot from somewhere. Before that in course of my long battle with thirst I had achieved a thirst-free state.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the warm drinking water that did not quench one's thirst, Sri Aurobindo describes, at some length, the horrendous, tasteless, unhygienic food, sans any nutritional value that was served in jail. Here he notes:

I was luckier than the rest, this was because of the doctor's kindness. He had arranged a supply of milk from the hospital . . .<sup>17</sup>

Despite being the *bête noire* of the British government, Sri Aurobindo was the recipient of Dr. Daly's "special favour and sympathy"; on occasions the doctor was so anxious about Sri Aurobindo's health that he was overeager to help him. Sri Aurobindo notes:

Doctor Daly, though not as charitable as Mr. Emerson, was out and out a gentleman and a most judicious person. He had high praise for the quiet demeanour, cheerfulness and sense of obedience of the boys, and loved to exchange pleasantries with younger people and also discuss with the other accused problems of religion, politics and philosophy. The doctor was of Irish stock and had inherited many of the qualities of that liberal and sentimental race. There was no meanness or duplicity about him; once in a while, when angry, he might use a rough word or behave harshly, but on the whole he loved to help people. . . . Once I had a little temperature. It was then the rainy season; in the hospital's many-windowed huge verandah the moisture-laden wind played about freely, and yet I was unwilling either to go to the hospital or take medicine. . . . But the doctor was extremely anxious on my account, he explained to me with much eagerness the need to go to the hospital. And when

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

I had gone there he looked after me with *empressement* and saw that I had meals such as I might get at home. Fearing that by staying in the prison wards my health might suffer, during the rains he desired that I should be comfortably lodged in the hospital.<sup>18</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's gratitude to Dr. Daly for being sympathetic and helpful to him is noticeable. It is evident that the doctor had a high regard for his patient and the doctor, to quote Sri Aurobindo, "was out and out a gentleman and a most judicious person."<sup>19</sup>

Sri Aurobindo was one of the finest student-scholars in England; and during his career at Baroda generously gave away most of his money to others, as well as making several arduous sacrifices as a Nationalist leader. Sri Aurobindo could do without any help from others, yet in several instances he has expressed his gratitude to Dr. Daly. The Mother has given special emphasis on the virtue of gratitude. She has said:

The nobility of a being is measured by its capacity of gratitude.<sup>20</sup>

As we are narrating some of Sri Aurobindo's experiences in Alipore jail, let us briefly touch upon the Alipore Bomb Trial and how an old Cambridge classmate of his was to play a prominent part in it. The Alipore Bomb Case aroused the interest and concern of the public and was widely covered in many of the Indian newspapers right through the year-long trial. It is considered one of the most significant criminal cases during the Indian independence movement. At that early stage of the movement very few Indians could believe that there could be an organised attempt to overthrow the British government through a revolutionary movement. The courage and self-sacrificing spirit of the accused revolutionaries impressed the public and inspired hundreds. Veteran parliamentarian and central minister, Arun Chandra Guha, a participant in the independence movement writes: "All these arrests and particularly the arrest of Aurobindo greatly excited the public."<sup>21</sup> The trial was of such significance that it got coverage in the British Press in England. *The Times* of London reported on 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1908:

The Magistrate of Alipore today committed 30 of the 32 men charged in connection with the discovery of bombs in Mr. Aurobindo Ghose's garden at Maniktollah, to take their trial at the sessions. They include Mr. Aurobindo Ghose himself.<sup>22</sup>

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

20. *CWM*, Vol. 14, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 155.

21. Arun Chandra Guha, *First Spark of Revolution*, 1971, pp. 136-37.

22. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., pp. 80-81.

*The Times* featured a number of reports, reflecting on Sri Aurobindo's career, and his writings and essays that appeared in *Bande Mataram* and other publications.<sup>23</sup> That the trial intrigued the British Press can be assessed by the fact that just the hanging and cremation of Kanai and Satyendra — the assassins of the approver Narendra Nath Gossain — was reported in *The Times* of London on 12<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> November.<sup>24</sup>

The case was triggered when the two patriots, Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chakki, in an attempt to assassinate the infamous magistrate Kingsford at Muzzarfarpur, mistakenly killed two British ladies. On 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 1908, Sri Aurobindo was arrested from 48 Grey Street, the *Navashakti* office cum his home. Sri Aurobindo was residing at 23 Scott's Lane till he shifted to 48 Grey Street on 28<sup>th</sup> April. Sri Aurobindo was not involved in the killing, yet the Chief Secretary in tandem with the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal tried to trap Sri Aurobindo. That Sri Aurobindo was the protagonist of the Alipore Trial is more than evident when later in his judgment, the judge C. P. Beachcroft stated:

I now come to the case of Arabinda Ghose, the most important accused in the case. He is the accused, whom more than any other the prosecution are anxious to have convicted and but for his presence in the dock there is no doubt that the case would have been finished long ago.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the attempts of the British government to convict Sri Aurobindo many Englishmen recognised Sri Aurobindo as an erudite and cultured person. These Britishers, either directly or indirectly, were sympathetic to Sri Aurobindo's cause during the Alipore trial. When Sri Aurobindo's name was prominently splashed in front of the British public as the principal accused in the trial, his old headmaster of his school in London reportedly remarked:

. . . that of all the boys who passed through his hands during the last twenty-five or thirty years, Aravinda was by far and above the most richly endowed intellectual capacity.<sup>26</sup>

Once, while commenting about Mr. Drewett, his guardian in Manchester, Sri Aurobindo wrote about his school headmaster:

23. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor\\_vs\\_Aurobindo\\_Ghosh\\_and\\_others#Popular\\_perception](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor_vs_Aurobindo_Ghosh_and_others#Popular_perception).

24. See Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., pp. 85-87.

25. C. P. Beachcroft's Judgment in the Case of Arabinda Ghose at the Alipore Bomb Trial, Dated 6.5.1909, *Mother India*, August 1998, p. 541 (See Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*).

26. *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, p. 413 (article written by Bipin Chandra Pal and published in his journal *Svaraj* in 1909-10).

Drewett was an accomplished Latin scholar; he did not teach him Greek, but grounded him so well in Latin that the headmaster of St. Paul's school took up Aurobindo himself to ground him in Greek and then pushed him rapidly into the higher classes of the school.<sup>27</sup>

Following school, Sri Aurobindo's extraordinary abilities earned him a scholarship at King's College, Cambridge University. The celebrated don at King's College, Oscar Browning, was so impressed by the learning of this mere 17-year-old scholar that Sri Aurobindo admitted to a disciple:

. . . Oscar Browning, a scholar and writer of some contemporary fame, who expressed admiration for Sri Aurobindo's scholarship . . . expressed the opinion that his papers, for the Scholarship examination, were the best he had ever seen and quite remarkable.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, Sri Aurobindo had made a great name for himself at Cambridge. His classmate, Percy Mead, I.C.S., called him "a great classical scholar, who had well-nigh beaten all records in Latin and Greek," and added, "In fact he helped me materially in my studies."<sup>29</sup> Another Cambridge fellow-student said: "Fancy, Ghose a ragged revolutionary! He can with far greater ease write a big lexicon or compose a noble epic."<sup>30</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's brilliance and quiet charm at Cambridge University came to his help during this critical time of his life. He received the sympathy from two of its alumni during the Alipore Trial. Sri Aurobindo spoke of the first thus:

Another intimate English friend of mine, Ferrer, came to see me in the court when the trial was going on. We, the accused, were put into a cage for fear we should jump out and murder the judge. Ferrer was a barrister practising in Sumatra or Singapore. He saw me in the cage and was much concerned and couldn't conceive how to get me out. It was he who had given me the clue to the real hexameter in English. He read out a line which he thought was the best hexametrical line, and that gave me the swing of the metre as it should be in English.<sup>31</sup>

In a conversation at Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo revealed that the hexametrical line that Ferrer had read was from Arthur Hugh Clough — perhaps the line: "He like

27. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 27.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

29. *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, p. 125 (Article by Charu Chandra Dutt, 'My Friend and my Master').

30. *Ibid.*

31. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 97.

a god came leaving his ample Olympian chamber” — and this had led to the composition of *Ilion* at Pondicherry.<sup>32</sup>

The second alumnus, C. P. Beachcroft, providentially, was the judge who would be deciding his case. At Cambridge, Beachcroft had been a scholar at Clare College during the same two years that Sri Aurobindo was at King’s College. Both colleges are adjoining each other with the Cam river flowing through their back lawns but the layout and architecture of King’s is far more majestic. Curiously, at Cambridge, Beachcroft had stood second in Greek while Sri Aurobindo had stood first. They had both passed the open competitive examination for the I.C.S. held in 1890. The accused outscored the judge having stood eleventh whilst the latter was ranked thirty-sixth. In fact Sri Aurobindo “obtained record marks in Greek and Latin in the examination for the Indian Civil Service.”<sup>33</sup> Ironically, the Englishman beat the Bengali in Bengali by one mark. But Sri Aurobindo defeated Beachcroft quite convincingly in Sanskrit.<sup>34</sup>

The trial commenced before Mr. C. P. Beachcroft on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1908. Altogether 206 witnesses were examined and cross-examined at length.<sup>35</sup> The trial at the Sessions court closed on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1909, and there was a long spell of two months before the judgment was delivered. Meanwhile the Calcutta journal *Daily Hitavadi* wrote:

There are very few Bengalis who are held in such high respect as Aravind Ghose is. In education, talent, intelligence and character, he is honoured not only in Bengal, but in all India. Although he has many opponents in the field of political polemics, yet none is unwilling to give him the honour he deserves.<sup>36</sup>

The judgment was delivered on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1909 and Judge Beachcroft acquitted Sri Aurobindo. In his judgment, Beachcroft alluded to Sri Aurobindo’s popularity in India stating that during Sri Aurobindo’s tour in the Bombay Presidency in January and February 1908 “he was received with acclamation wherever he went”.<sup>37</sup> Such was his admiration for Sri Aurobindo’s writing abilities that he could not hold himself back in mentioning this in his judgment.

32. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 639.

33. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 13.

34. See Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, pp. 474-75.

35. See Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*, 1922, pp. 3-4.

36. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, pp. 459-60.

37. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, p. 70.

Sri Aurobindo noted:

. . . it must have been his admiration for my prose style to which he gave fervent expression in his judgment.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, in his judgment Beachcroft made references to two unpublished articles of Sri Aurobindo that were presented by the prosecution, i.e. ‘The Morality of Boycott’ referred to in the judgment as Exhibit 283 and ‘The New Nationalism’ referred as Exhibit 299-9. An excerpt of Beachcroft’s judgment first analyses the former article and then goes on to describe the latter:

He [Sri Aurobindo] writes: “The Gita is the best answer to those who shrink from battle as a sin & aggression as a lowering of morality” . . . “The morality of the Kshatriya justifies violence in terms of war, & boycott is a war. Nobody blames the Americans for throwing British tea into Boston harbor, nor can anybody blame similar action in India on moral grounds. It is reprehensible from the point of view of law, of social peace & order, not of political morality.” . . .

The argument of the whole article shortly is this. “To drive out that which is evil, violence is justifiable. We don’t hate the English, but we object to their exploiting the country, for the interests of the two nations must be different: and we can stop that exploitation by boycott. Boycott is not morally wrong for the ends at which it aims are the interests of the people. And that being so we should be morally justified in using force, if we were strong enough to do so.”

As a mere piece of philosophic writing there is no special harm in this. . . .

Ex 299-9 is a still more extraordinary article. I shall not quote from it, as the omission of any sentences would affect the whole. The gist of this is that the object of the nationalist is to build up the nation. The nationalist has a deep respect for the law because without it the nation cannot attain proper development. But the law must be in accordance with the wish of the nation. If it is not, it is utilitarian and not moral. And if immoral it should be broken. The nationalist is not afraid of anarchy & suffering. He welcomes them if the result is the building up of the nation.<sup>39</sup>

Beachcroft continues by praising the essay, ‘The New Nationalism’, and then supports Sri Aurobindo on both these articles:

38. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 13.

39. C. P. Beachcroft’s Judgment in the Case of Arabinda Ghose at the Alipore Bomb Trial, Dated 6.5.1909, *Mother India*, August 1998, pp. 546-47 (See Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*).

As an essay this article is a splendid piece of writing. The danger lies in the effect that it might have on ill balanced & impressionable minds. And that it is signed is perhaps the reason why it was not published. The fact that neither of these articles was published is again a point in Arabinda's favour.<sup>40</sup>

Mr. Beachcroft in his judgment also recapitulated what defence counsel Chittaranjan Das said of which we quote an extract:

His counsel argues that he is a Vedantist . . . the doctrine of Vedantism applied to the individual is to look for the godhead within oneself and so to realise what is best within oneself, so in the case of a nation, it can only grow by realising what is best within itself, that no foreigner can give it that salvation, which it can only attain by methods indigenous to the country. . . . If the law is unjust don't obey it, and take the consequences. Do not be violent, but if the law is unjust, you are not bound morally to obey it; refuse to obey it and suffer. He has been saying to the people, you are not cowards, believe in yourselves and attain salvation, not by assistance from outside, but through yourselves. And this, Mr. Das says, is the key of his case.<sup>41</sup>

Sri Aurobindo narrowly escaped being convicted, for on the methodology of the British controlling their subjects, Sri Aurobindo has written:

Now, according to the British legal system, the bringing out of truth of contending parties, complainant and defendant, is not the real purpose; to win the case by hook or by crook, is what it is really after.<sup>42</sup>

From his judgment we can ascertain Beachcroft assiduously studied Sri Aurobindo's essays in the *Bande Mataram*. In his long judgment he not only gave Sri Aurobindo the benefit of doubt but mentioned that there is no proof to his participation in the Alipore Bomb conspiracy. He concluded his verdict by stating:

In his favour we have the fact that he has in the columns of the *Bande Mataram* depreciated violence: there is such an article dated 28<sup>th</sup> May 1907. And so late as 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1908, there is an article saying that the national movement cannot be allowed to be driven inward & made an affair of a secret society as it would if outward expression were stopped. His connection with the conspiracy can

40. *Ibid.*, p. 547.

41. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 69.

42. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 52.



only be considered established if we find that while writing one thing he has been doing another.

Of course it is possible that a man might join a conspiracy to deprive the King of the sovereignty of British India, in which his share would be to preach discontent with the existing order of things and that he might be entirely ignorant of that branch of the conspiracy which concerned the collection of arms & ammunition. It is possible that Arabinda may have been in that position in this case, but in such a case it must be clearly shown that his preachings were part of such conspiracy, and in the present case it would be difficult to do that without showing some connection with the part which the garden plays in the case. Considering the circumstances of India it may be dangerous for a man to publish doctrines inconsistent with the existing order of things, in certain circumstances it might justify a charge of sedition. Whether such a charge could be laid at Arabinda's door does not now concern me. The point is whether his writings and speeches, which in themselves seem to advocate nothing more than the regeneration of his country, taken with the facts proved against him in this case are sufficient to show that he was a member of the conspiracy. And taking all the evidence together I am of the opinion that it falls short of such proof as would justify me in finding him guilty of so serious a charge.<sup>43</sup>

Beachcroft's restrained admiration for Sri Aurobindo was noticed by others. When the former acquitted the latter an editorial of 8<sup>th</sup> May, 1909, from the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* read:

The remarks of the trying judge himself very plainly indicated that he could not help entertaining a regard for this gifted man and was apparently very much relieved when he could see his way to find him not guilty. . . .

And the Judge further says that the evidence collected from all parts of the country to bring the charge home to Aurobindo Babu, was not only worthless, but a good portion of it was favourable to the accused! For instance, referring to the alleged incriminating speeches of Aurobindo Babu delivered in Bombay and elsewhere, the Judge observes: "The whole of this evidence might very well have been omitted as it proved nothing beyond the fact that he was received with acclamation wherever he went, a fact which the defence has never attempted to deny. So far as the speeches go, they help the defence more than the prosecution."<sup>44</sup>

43. C. P. Beachcroft's Judgment in the Case of Arabinda Ghose at the Alipore Bomb Trial, Dated 6.5.1909, *Mother India*, September 1998, p. 634 (See Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*).

44. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., pp. 90, 95-96.



During the trial, an interesting and mysterious incident occurred. Nolinikanto Sarkar, who had been in contact with Sri Aurobindo from an early age, narrates in his autobiography about receiving a long, brown envelope:

On opening the envelope we found that it contained only two type-written foolscap papers. There was no covering letter, no sender's name or address. These papers contained in serial order some legal points about the Alipore Bomb Case. At once we took the papers to the house of Mr. Chittaranjan Das, the barrister who was defending Sri Aurobindo.

On reading the document, Mr. Das appeared greatly astonished.  
 "Who has sent it?" he asked.

We answered, "There was no communication in the envelope. Only these two sheets. But what do they contain?"

"They contain everything. To get all these facts and legal points would have meant at least a week's hard work of searching through law books and going through all the evidence. Whoever has sent these papers is, without doubt, a very clever and highly qualified lawyer. But who is he?"

We returned to our office from Mr. Das' house and began to speculate. What we gathered from Das' words was that unless somebody was thoroughly conversant with the case it would not have been possible for him to obtain such vitally important information. The whole affair was strange. And stranger still was the fact that the sender, who was evidently our well-wisher, was unwilling to disclose his name! After much rumination we arrived at a conclusion — surely, Mr. Beachcroft himself had sent those papers. We were convinced of it.<sup>45</sup>

However, when a note about his days in England was sent to Sri Aurobindo, he replied:

But what is Beachcroft doing here? He butts in in such a vast and spreading parenthesis that he seems to be one of "these ancient languages" and in him too, perhaps, I got record marks! Besides, any ingenious reader would deduce from his presence in your note that he acquitted me out of fellow-feeling over the two "examinations" and out of university camaraderie, — which was far from being the case. I met him only in the I.C.S classes and at the I.C.S examinations and we never exchanged two words together. If any extralegal consideration came in subconsciously in the acquittal, it must have been his

45. Nolinikanto Sarkar, 'Between the Arrival and the Departure', *Mother India*, June 2004, pp. 516-17 (translated by Aniruddha Sircar from the original Bengali *Asa Jaoar Majhkhane*).

admiration for my prose style to which he gave fervent expression in his judgment. Don't drag him in like this — let him rest in peace in his grave.<sup>46</sup>

Interestingly Sri Aurobindo remarked to his disciples, “Beachcroft, who was my schoolmate, somehow couldn't believe that I was a revolutionary.”<sup>47</sup>

Beachcroft's acquittal of Sri Aurobindo is significant and should be seen in the light of what Sri Aurobindo has written about the Alipore Trial:

On the whole during this trial at every stage I could find, in the British legal system, how easily the innocent could be punished, sent to prison, suffer transportation, even loss of life. Unless one stands in the dock oneself, one cannot realise the delusive untruth of the Western penal code. It is something of a gamble with human freedom, with man's joys and sorrows, a lifelong agony for him and his family, his friends and relatives, an insult, a living death.<sup>48</sup>

Referring to the Alipore undertrials Sri Aurobindo had remarked, in a subsequent interview, that “everybody was under the impression that guilty or not guilty he was sure to be punished.”<sup>49</sup> Nolini Kanta Gupta too thought that he and all the other undertrials would be severely and unfairly punished:

When we were in prison we thought — we were the first batch of political prisoners accused of conspiracy and practically of rebellion *against the established government* — so we thought this was the end of our life's journey. One day we will be taken out and shot; court-trial and justice was a make believe and sham. Or if we were lucky enough we would be exiled to the Andamans — the notorious *kālāpāni*.<sup>50</sup>

It seems Sri Aurobindo appreciated judge Beachcroft for he later referred to him in an essay to demonstrate the contrast of the judge's liberalness to the sheer hypocrisy of the moderate Congress leader G. K. Gokhale. In the *Karmayogin* of 17<sup>th</sup> July, 1909, he writes:

. . . Mr. Gokhale hastens to justify the deportations by his emphatic approval of stern and relentless repression as the only possible attitude for the Government towards the ideal of independence even when its achievement is sought through

46. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 13.

47. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 97.

48. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 67.

49. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 110.

50. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., Vol. 5, p. 11.

peaceful means. Mr. Gokhale's phrase is bold and thorough; it includes every possible weapon of which the Government may avail itself in the future and every possible use of the weapons which it holds at present. On the strength of Mr. Gokhale's panegyric Lord Morley mocked at Mr. Mackarness and his supporters as more Indian than the Indians. We may well quote him again and apply the same ridicule, the ridicule of the autocrat, to Mr. Beachcroft, the Alipur judge, who acquitted an avowed apostle of the ideal of independence. Mr. Gokhale, at least, has become more English than the English. A British judge, certainly not in sympathy with Indian unrest, expressly admits the possibility of peaceful passive resistance and the blamelessness of the ideal of independence.<sup>51</sup>

And in a speech at Jhalakati on 19<sup>th</sup> June, 1909, Sri Aurobindo stated that his ideal of Indian independence has been vetted, by none other than judge Beachcroft:

The judge in the Alipore case said that the aspiration after independence and the preaching of the ideal of independence was a thing no Englishman could condemn.<sup>52</sup>

Later in 1911, Sri Aurobindo sent a public statement to the editor of *The Hindu*, where an excerpt referred to Beachcroft's judgment:

In the Alipur Case, after a protracted trial and detention in jail for a year, I was acquitted, the Judge condemning the document which was the only substantial evidence of a guilty connection.<sup>53</sup>

Besides the aforementioned Englishmen, Sri Aurobindo had his admirers even amongst the most esteemed British Parliamentarians. Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937) the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons from 1924 to 1929 and the first Labour Prime Minister for nine months in 1924 and then again from 1929 to 1931 had met Sri Aurobindo in Alipore jail and was deeply impressed by him and said: "He was far more of a mystic than a politician."<sup>54</sup> Months later, referring to the Alipore Trial, MacDonald said in the House of Commons that Sri Aurobindo had "been tried on an accusation that might have cost his life".<sup>55</sup>

51. CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 120-21.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

53. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 269.

54. R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. II, 1962, p. 198.

55. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 156.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> October 1909, on behalf of Sir Henry Cotton, Mr. Keir Hardie, the celebrated founder of the Labour Party, asked the Under Secretary of State whether his attention had been called to the fact that the speeches of Mr. Arabindo Ghose were laid before the court as evidence against him in the Alipore Conspiracy Case; that the judge who tried the case took those speeches into his consideration and declared in his judgment that those speeches in themselves seemed to advocate nothing more than the regeneration of the country. . . .<sup>56</sup>

Later when a warrant was issued against Sri Aurobindo in April 1910 in the *Karmayogin Case*, Mr. Keir Hardie declared in the House of Commons:

. . . the House may be reminded once again that Mr. Aurobindo Ghose has already been the victim of one very exhaustible trial. . . . Mr. Beachcroft, after a very lengthy and exhaustive trial, found that Mr. Aurobindo Ghose has not been guilty of any offence . . . Mr. Beachcroft described Mr. Aurobindo Ghose as “a man who seems to have an extraordinary hold over the affections of his countrymen.”

And he added these words: “It is freely admitted for Mr. Aurobindo Ghose that his ideal is independence but the attainment of it is to be reached by passive resistance and by educating the people to stand by themselves; and the counsel for the crown admits that there is nothing wrong in cherishing such an ideal, provided it is not sought by violent methods.”

Counsel was forced to admit on that occasion that the ideal of national independence which Mr. Aurobindo Ghose advocated was in itself neither seditious nor wrong, provided the methods taken to attain the ideal were not in themselves violent or criminal. The judge proceeded, after hearing all the evidence to say: “Now not a single article has been pointed to me (and this applied to the written articles and speeches made by Mr. Aurobindo Ghose) which suggests the use of violence.”<sup>57</sup>

Even a top bureaucrat, the Chief Secretary of Bengal, Sir Charles Allen, whilst referring to Sri Aurobindo’s speeches in a letter dated 29<sup>th</sup> July, 1909, admitted that “the language of the speeches is extremely eloquent.”<sup>58</sup>

Besides the Parliamentarians there were several English journalists who admired Sri Aurobindo and here we mention one on whom Sri Aurobindo has commented a few times. Henry Nevinston, author of numerous books and a respected correspondent

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-61.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

for the *Manchester Guardian*, arrived in India in late October 1907. Thereafter he was invited for breakfast by the Lt. Governor of Bengal, Sir Andrew Fraser. Nevinson was intrigued by Sri Aurobindo and considered him to be a patriot-hero and the most remarkable of the Extremist leaders. In a captivating narrative he encapsulates his impressions of Sri Aurobindo:

The Lt. Governor was not pleased, and he must have been still more annoyed when he heard from the Government spies that I had spent a great deal of the previous night in converse with Arabinda Ghose, the wisest and most attractive of the Extremist leaders.

Arabinda had been brought up in England, and complained he could not speak Bengali well enough to get to the hearts of his own people. . . . Intent eyes looked from his thin and clear-cut face, with a gravity which seemed immovable. Silence and gravity were his characteristics, and his deepest interest lay in religion or philosophy rather than in politics, as he afterwards showed by retiring to meditation in French Pondicherry, where he was visited by young Indians who listened to his words as to apostolic utterances almost divine. Even when I knew him I could describe him as possessed by that concentrated vision, the limited and absorbing devotion that mark the religious soul.

To him Nationalism was indeed a religion, surrounded by a mist of glory, like the halo that mediaeval saints beheld gleaming around the Holy Grail. He cared nothing whatever for political reforms or attempts to unite British and Indian in common prosperity. The worse the Govt. was, the better for the Nationalist cause. The Partition of Bengal was the greatest blessing that had ever happened for India. No other measure could have stirred Indian feeling so deeply, or helped so well to rouse the people from the lethargy of previous years, when, as he told me, “each generation had reduced Indians more and more to the condition of sheep and fatted calves.” Such was the man to whom I was naturally most attracted — the man who inspired official circles with the greatest alarm, because his influence, though least spoken of, was most profound.<sup>59</sup>

Having mentioned some of the English admirers of Sri Aurobindo let us move on to the shrewd and bombastic British government prosecutor, Mr. Eardley Norton, who was desperately trying to convict Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Trial. He observed that Sri Aurobindo “was treated with the reverence of a king wherever he had gone. As a matter of fact, he was regarded as the leader not merely of Bengal but of the whole country.”<sup>60</sup>

59. ‘Henry Nevinson on Sri Aurobindo in the Swadeshi Days’, *Mother India*, August 1980, p. 483.

60. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 55.

Mr. Norton's skill in sharp, perplexing cross-examinations made him a veritable terror to the witnesses, as he tried his earnest best to send Sri Aurobindo to the gallows or at least convict him to life imprisonment. Sri Aurobindo, however, was unfazed by Norton's intimidatory tactics and amusingly narrates:

The star performer of the show was the government counsel, Mr. Norton. Not only the star performer, but he was also its composer, stage manager and prompter — a versatile genius like him must be rare in the world. Counsel Mr. Norton hailed from Madras, hence it appeared he was unaccustomed and inexperienced in the common code and courtesy as it obtained among the barristers of Bengal. He . . . might have been incapable of tolerating opposition and contradiction, and was in the habit of punishing opponents. Such natures are known to be ferocious. . . . he certainly was the king among beasts at the Alipore court. It was hard to admire his depth of legal acumen which was as rare as winter in summer. But in the ceaseless flow of words and, through verbal quips, in the strange ability to transmute an inconsequential witness into something serious, in the brashness of making wild statements with little or no ground, in riding roughshod over witnesses and junior barristers and in the charming ability to turn white into black, to see his incomparable genius in action was but to admire him. . . . Of the national movement I was the alpha and the omega, its creator and saviour, engaged in undermining the British empire. As soon as he came across any piece of excellent or vigorous writing in English he would jump and loudly proclaim, Aurobindo Ghose! All the legal and illegal, the organised activities or unexpected consequences of the movement were the doings of Aurobindo Ghose! . . . He probably thought that if I were not caught within two years, it would be all up with the British empire. If my name ever appeared on any torn sheet of paper, Mr. Norton's joy knew no bounds. With great cordiality he would present it at the holy feet of the presiding magistrate. . . . Norton's other agony was that some of the witnesses too seemed so cussed that they had wholly refused to bear evidence in keeping with his fabricated plot. At this Norton would grow red with fury and, roaring like a lion, he would strike terror in the heart of the witness and cower him down.<sup>61</sup>

Subsequent to the judgment, an *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* report had this to say about Norton: "We are told, first, that if the prosecution were anxious to have any of the accused convicted, it was Aurobindo."<sup>62</sup>

61. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, pp. 51, 55-56.

62. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 92.

Curiously, Norton wrote the foreword of Bejoy Krishna Bose's *The Alipore Bomb Trial*. Although having a short-sightedness of an Englishman, he ironically praises Sri Aurobindo's abilities:

Arabinda Ghose had been a brilliant scholar in England. He had been head of St. Paul's and won a scholarship at King's College Cambridge. There he was a contemporary of Mr. Beachcroft, I.C.S., who tried him at Alipore and who had been Head of Rugby and had also won a scholarship at Cambridge. Both won honours at the University, and at the final examination for the Indian Civil Service Arabindo, the prisoner beat Beachcroft the Judge in — Greek!

To me it appeared a matter for regret that a man of Aurobindo's mental calibre should have been ejected from the Civil Service on the ground he could not, or would not, ride a horse. Capacity such as his would have been a valuable asset to the State. Had room been found for him in the Educational Service of India I believe he would have gone far not merely in personal advancement but in welding more firmly the links which bind his countrymen to ours.<sup>63</sup>

The Alipore Bomb Trial is still one of the most famous and sensational legal cases in Indian history. Sri Aurobindo's defence counsel, Chittaranjan Das, in his closing argument, had characterised Sri Aurobindo as the "lover of humanity."<sup>64</sup> Yet, ironically, Sri Aurobindo's self-sacrifice for his country led to a year's imprisonment where the prison conditions and facilities were appalling. Worse still, a large part of his incarceration was in solitary confinement where initially he "spent a few days in agony"<sup>65</sup> and shook "with the terror of being overcome by insanity".<sup>66</sup> He noted how his powers of meditation and God saved him from insanity:

. . . I had enough leisure to realise the enormity or dangerous potentiality of solitary confinement. I could understand why even firm and well-developed intellects break down in such a state of confinement and readily turn towards insanity. . . . Before imprisonment I was in the habit of sitting down for meditation for an hour in the morning and evening. In this solitary prison, not having anything else to do, I tried to meditate for a longer period. But for those unaccustomed it is not easy to control and steady the mind pulled in a thousand directions. Somehow I was able to concentrate for an hour and half or two, later the mind rebelled while the body too was fatigued. At first the mind was

63. Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*, 1922, pp. v-vi.

64. Cited in Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 215.

65. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 42.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 43.



full of thoughts of many kinds. Afterwards, devoid of human conversation and an insufferable listlessness due to absence of any subject of thought, the mind gradually lost its capacity to think. . . . In this uncertain, dull state I suffered an intense mental agony. . . . Had the mind now become so weak that the solitude of a few days could make me so restless? . . . According to the proverb, one who can stand solitude is either a god or a brute, it is a discipline quite beyond the power of men. . . . I could feel that even for one accustomed to the yogic life this discipline is not easy to acquire. I remember the terrifying end of the Italian regicide, Brecci. His cruel judges, instead of ordering him to be hanged, had given him seven years of solitary imprisonment. Within a year Brecci had gone mad. But he had endured for some time! Was my mental strength so poor? Then I did not know that God was having a game with me, through which He was giving me a few necessary lessons. First, He showed me the state of mind in which prisoners condemned to solitary cells move towards insanity, and turned me wholly against the inhuman cruelty of the western prison administration . . . His second purpose: it was to reveal and expose before my mind its own weakness so that I might get rid of it for ever. For one who seeks the yogic state, crowd and solitude should mean the same. Indeed, the weakness dropped off within a very few days, and now it seems that the mental poise would not be disturbed even by twenty years of solitude. . . .<sup>67</sup>

It is of interest to note that Sri Aurobindo later observed,

. . . the Divine subjects His Incarnations to the fiercest of ordeals . . .<sup>68</sup>

*(To be continued)*

GAUTAM MALAKER

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-42.

68. Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 1984, p. 418.





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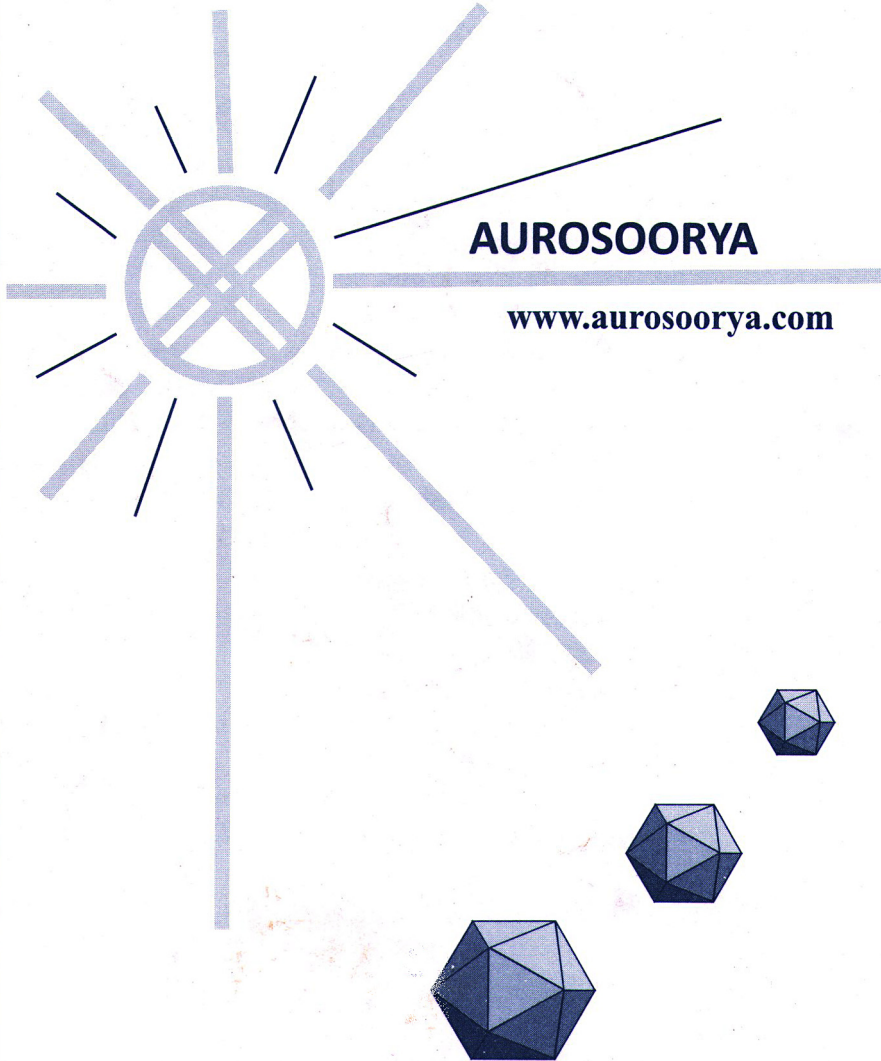
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