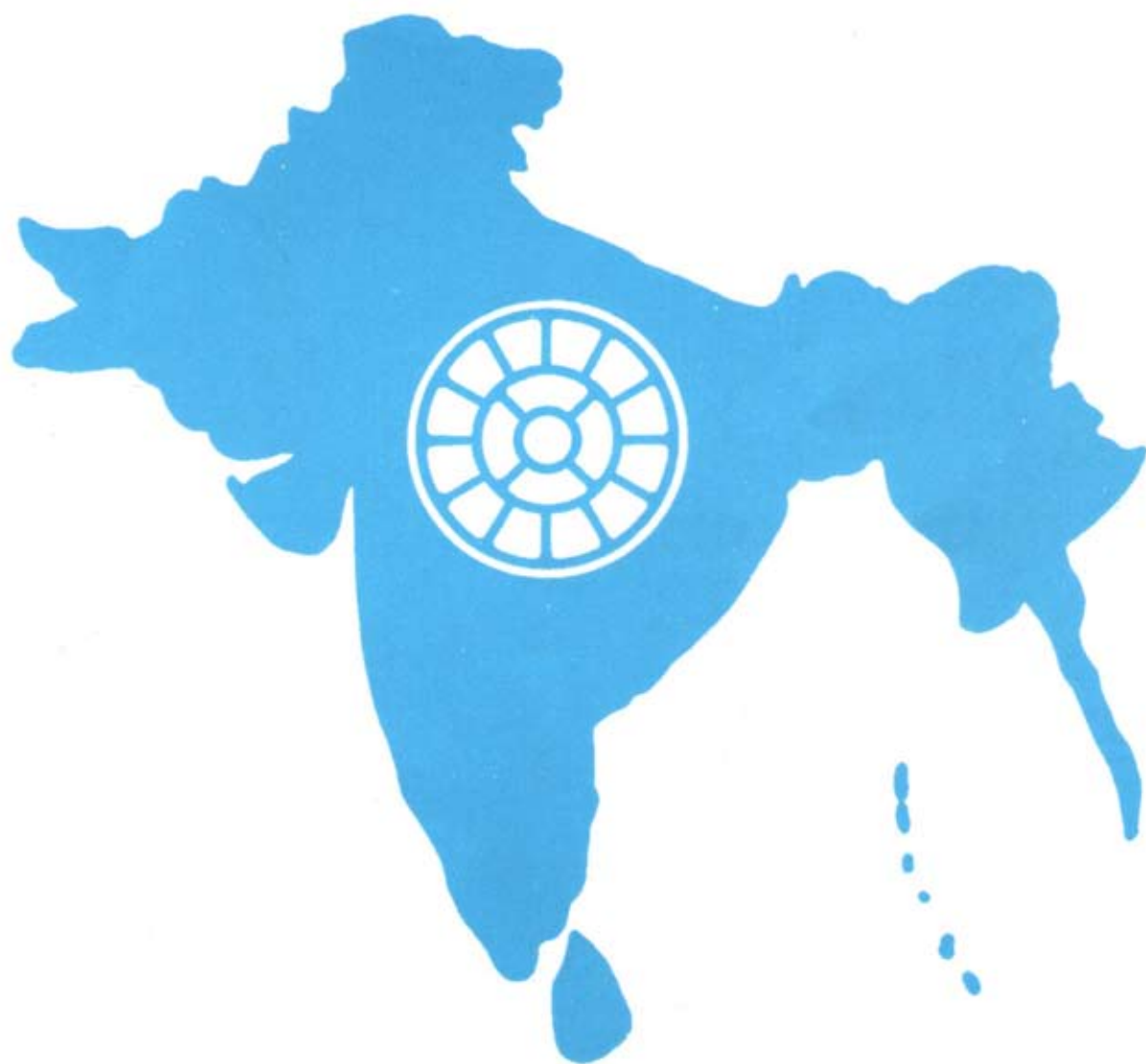


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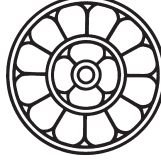
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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No. 11

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE MOTHER OF DREAMS

Goddess, supreme Mother of Dream, by thy ivory doors when thou standest,
Who are they then that come down unto men in thy visions that troop, group upon
group, down the path of the shadows slanting?
Dream after dream, they flash and they gleam with the flame of the stars still around
them;
Shadows at thy side in a darkness ride where the wild fires dance, stars glow and
glance and the random meteor glistens;
There are voices that cry to their kin who reply; voices sweet, at the heart they beat
and ravish the soul as it listens.
What then are these lands and these golden sands and these seas more radiant than
earth can imagine?
Who are those that pace by the purple waves that race to the cliff-bound floor of thy
jasper shore under skies in which mystery muses,
Lapped in moonlight not of our night or plunged in sunshine that is not diurnal?
Who are they coming thy Oceans roaming with sails whose strands are not made by
hands, an unearthly wind advances?
Why do they join in a mystic line with those on the sands linking hands in strange
and stately dances?
Thou in the air, with a flame in thy hair, the whirl of thy wonders watching,
Holdest the night in thy ancient right, mother divine, hyacinthine, with a girdle of
beauty defended.
Sworded with fire, attracting desire, thy tenebrous kingdom thou keepest,
Starry-sweet, with the moon at thy feet, now hidden now seen the clouds between in
the gloom and the drift of thy tresses.
Only to those whom thy fancy chose, O thou heart-free, is it given to see thy witchcraft
and feel thy caresses.
Open the gate where thy children wait in their world of a beauty undarkened.
High-throned on a cloud, victorious, proud I have espied Maghavan ride when the
armies of wind are behind him;
Food has been given for my tasting from heaven and fruit of immortal sweetness;
I have drunk wine of the kingdoms divine and have heard the change of music
strange from a lyre which our hands cannot master;
Doors have swung wide in the chambers of pride where the Gods reside and the
Apsaras dance in their circles faster and faster.

THE NEW NATIONALISM¹

What is Extremism?

The nicknames of party warfare have often passed into the accepted terminology used by serious politicians and perpetuated by history, and it is possible that the same immortality may await the designations of Moderate and Extremist by which the two parties now contending for the mind of the nation are commonly known. The forward party

The Heart of Nationalism

Nationalism; but what is Nationalism? The word has only recently begun to figure as an ordinary term of our politics and it has been brought into vogue by the new, forward or extreme party which, casting about for a convenient description of themselves, selected the name as the only one covering in a word their temper and their gospel. For there is a great deal in a name in spite of Shakespeare. A name attached to a political party or school of thought not only serves to show the temper and point of view of the giver, but it helps greatly to colour contemporary ideas about the party it seeks to exalt or disparage. The advanced men whom Anglo-Indian and Moderate unite in branding as Extremists, have always repudiated the misleading designation. At first they preferred to call themselves the New School; they now claim the style of Nationalists; a claim which has been angrily objected to on the ground that the rest of the Congress party are as good Nationalists as the forward party. [. . .] 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

1. Editorial title. Late 1907 or early 1908. The present text follows the manuscript exactly. Sri Aurobindo first wrote, on separate pages, two incomplete paragraphs, each with a heading meant to be the title of the piece. Then, on a third page, he began again, this time without any heading. As neither of the existing headings was selected as the final title, the editors have placed a general editorial title above them both. The “former article, in this Review” referred to in the first complete paragraph is undoubtedly “The Bourgeois and the Samurai”. The text of “The New Nationalism” was put in as evidence by the prosecution in the Alipore Bomb Trial. In the beginning of 1909 this piece and “The Morality of Boycott” were reproduced from the court transcripts by *Swaraj*, a fortnightly review published from London by Bipin Chandra Pal. The London text was later reproduced in the *Hindusthan Standard* and elsewhere. (Editorial Note in CWSA)

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. This is not, I am well aware, a description under which the ordinary Congress politician will recognize what he prefers to disparage as Extremism, but it will be well understood by those who are constant readers of the Nationalist journals in Bengal, whether the *Bande Mataram* or *New India* or vernacular journals like the *Yugantar*, the *Nabasakti* or the *Sandhya*.² Whatever their differences of temper, tone or style, however the methods they recommend may differ in detail, they are united by a common faith and a common spirit; a common faith in India, not in an Anglicised and transmogrified nation unrecognizable as Indians, but in India of the immemorial past, India of the clouded but fateful present, India leonine, mighty, crowned with her imperial diadem of the future; a common spirit of enthusiasm, hope, the desire to dare and do all things so that our vision of her future may be fulfilled greatly and soon. This is the heart of Nationalism. The ordinary Congress politician's ideas of Nationalism are associated with heated discussions in Committee and Congress, altercations at public meetings, unsparing criticisms of successful and eminent respectabilities, sedition trials, National Volunteers, East Bengal disturbances, Rawalpindi riots. To him the Nationalist is nothing more than an "Extremist", a violent, unreasonable, uncomfortable being whom some malign power has raised up to disturb with his *Swaraj* and *Boycott*, his lawlessness & his lathies the respectable ease and safety of Congress politics. He finds him increasing in numbers & influence with an alarming rapidity which it is convenient to deny but impossible to ignore. (It is the bourgeois view of the type destined to push him aside & supplant him and like all such views born of a panic fear & hatred, it is a caricature and not a description.)³ He has no clear idea of the aim and drift of Extremism. He imagines it to be our object to drive out the English and make India free by *Boycott* and the *lathie*, and, having thus erected a scarecrow to chuck stones at, he thinks himself entitled to dismiss the new party in his mind as a crowd of enthusiastic lunatics who talk nonsense and advocate impossibilities.

Nationalism cannot be so easily dismissed. A force which has shaken the whole of India, trampled the traditions of a century into a refuse of irrecoverable fragments and set the mightiest of modern Empires groping in a panic for weapons strong enough to meet a new and surprising danger, must have some secret of strength and therefore of truth in it which is worth knowing. To get at the heart of Nationalism we must first clear away some of the misconceptions with which its realities have been

2. The following sentence was written in the top margin of the manuscript page; its place of insertion was not marked:

Nationalism existed in India before it became definite and articulate in Bengal, but it is Bengal that gave it a philosophy, a faith, a method, a *mantra* and a battle-cry. (Editorial Note in CWSA)

3. Sri Aurobindo placed parenthesis marks on both sides of this sentence during revision. He apparently intended to move it elsewhere and to join the sentences before and after with a "but". (Editorial Note in CWSA)

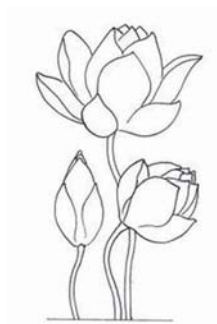
clouded. We must know what Nationalism is not before we ask what it is.

Extremism in the sense of unreasoning violence of spirit and the preference of desperate methods, because they are desperate, is not the heart of Nationalism. The Nationalist is no advocate of lawlessness for its own sake, on the contrary he has a deeper respect for the essence of law than anyone else, because the building up of a nation is his objective and he knows well that without a profound reverence for law national life cannot persist and attain a sound and healthy development. But he qualifies his respect for legality by the proviso that the law he is called upon to obey is the law of the nation, an outgrowth of its organic existence and part of its own accepted system of government. A law imposed from outside can command only the interested obedience of those whose chief demand from life is the safety of their persons and property or the timid obedience of those who understand the danger of breaking the law. The claim made by it is an utilitarian, not a moral claim. Farther the Nationalist never loses sight of the truth that law was made for man and not man for the law. Its chief function and reason for existence is to safeguard and foster the growth and happy flowering into strength and health of national life and a law which does not subserve this end or which opposes and contradicts this end, however rigidly it may enforce peace, order and security, forfeits its claim to respect and obedience. Nationalism refuses to accept Law as a fetish or peace and security as an aim in themselves; the only idol of its worship is Nationality and the only aim in itself it recognizes is the freedom, power and well-being of the nation. It will not prefer violent or strenuous methods simply because they are violent or strenuous, but neither will it cling to mild and peaceful methods simply because they are mild and peaceful. It asks of a method whether it is effective for its purpose, whether it is worthy of a great people struggling to be, whether it is educative of national strength and activity, and these things ascertained, it asks nothing farther. He does not love anarchy and suffering, but if anarchy and suffering are the necessary passage to the great consummation he seeks, he is ready to bear them himself, to expose others to them, till the end is reached. He will embrace suffering as a lover and clasp the hand of Anarchy like that of a trusted friend, — if so it must be; for it is not his temper to take the inevitable grudgingly or to serve or struggle with half a heart. If that is Extremism and fanaticism, he is an Extremist and a fanatic; but not for their own sake, not out of a disordered love for anarchy and turmoil, not in madness & desperation, but out of a reasoned conviction and courageous acceptance of the natural laws that demand this sacrifice in return for so great a promise. The same natural law by which a man who aspires to reach a difficult height, must clamber up the steep rocks and risk life and limb in arduous places, has decreed that men who desire to live as freemen in a free country must not refuse to be ready to pay toll for freedom with their own blood and the blood of their children, and still more the nation which seeks to grow out of subjection into liberty, must consent first to manure the soil with the tears of its women and the bodies of its sons. The Nationalist

knows what he asks from Fate and he knows the price that Fate asks from him in return. Knowing it, he is ready to drag down the nation with him into the valley of the shadow of Death, dark with night and mist and storm, sown thick and crude with perils of strange monsters and perils of morass and fire and flood, holding all danger & misery as nothing because beyond the valleys are the mountains of Beulah where the nation shall enjoy eternal life. He is ready to lead the chosen people into the desert for its long wanderings, though he knows that often in the bitterness of its sufferings it will murmur and rebel against his leadership and raise its hand to stone him to death as the author of its misery, for he knows that beyond is the promised land flowing with milk and honey which the Divine Voice has told him that those who are faithful, will reach and possess. If he embraces Anarchy, it is as the way to good government. If he does not shrink from disorder and violent struggle, it is because without that disorder there can be no security and without that struggle no peace, except the security of decay and the peace of death. If he has sometimes to disregard the law of man, it is to obey the dictates of his conscience and the law of God.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 1109-113)



THE MORALITY OF BOYCOTT¹

Ages ago there was a priest of Baal who thought himself commissioned by the god to kill all who did not bow the knee to him. All men, terrified by the power and ferocity of the priest, bowed down before the idol and pretended to be his servants; and the few who refused, had to take refuge in hills and deserts. At last a deliverer came and slew the priest and the world had rest. The slayer was blamed by those who placed religion in quietude and put passivity forward as the ideal ethics, but the world looked on him as an incarnation of God.

* * * *

A certain class of minds shrink from aggressiveness as if it were a sin. Their temperament forbids them to feel the delight of battle and they look on what they cannot understand as something monstrous and sinful. "Heal hate by love, drive out injustice by justice, slay sin by righteousness" is their cry. Love is a sacred name, but it is easier to speak of love than to love. The love which drives out hate, is a divine quality of which only one man in a thousand is capable. A saint full of love for all mankind possesses it, a philanthropist consumed with the desire to heal the miseries of the race possesses it, but the mass of mankind do not and cannot rise to that height. Politics is concerned with masses of mankind and not with individuals. To ask masses of mankind to act as saints, to rise to the height of divine love and practise it in relation to their adversaries or oppressors, is to ignore human nature. It is to set a premium on injustice and violence by paralysing the hand of the deliverer when raised to strike. The Gita is the best answer to those who shrink from battle as a sin and aggression as a lowering of morality.

* * * *

A poet of sweetness and love who has done much to awaken Bengal, has written deprecating the boycott as an act of hate. The saintliness of spirit which he would see brought into politics is the reflex of his own personality colouring the political ideals of a sattwic race. But in reality the boycott is not an act of hate. It is an act of

1. 1908. This essay was found in Sri Aurobindo's room at the time of his arrest on 2 May 1908. This circumstance suggests that it was meant to be published in the next or a forthcoming issue of *Bande Mataram*. It was transcribed and put in as evidence in the Alipore Bomb Trial, and reproduced from the court transcript in London in 1909 (see the note to "The New Nationalism"), and later in *Selections from the Bande Mataram*, in the *Hindusthan Standard*, and a number of other places. (Editorial Note in CWSA)

self-defence, of aggression for the sake of self-preservation. To call it an act of hate is to say that a man who is being slowly murdered, is not justified in striking out at his murderer. To tell that man that he must desist from using the first effective weapon that comes to his hand because the blow would be an act of hate, is precisely on a par with this deprecation of boycott. Doubtless the self-defender is not precisely actuated by feelings of holy sweetness towards his assailant, but to expect so much from human nature is impracticable. Certain religions demand it, but they have never been practised to the letter by their followers.

* * * *

Hinduism recognizes human nature and makes no such impossible demand. It sets one ideal for the saint, another for the man of action, a third for the trader, a fourth for the serf. To prescribe the same ideal for all is to bring about *varnasankara*, the confusion of duties, and destroy society and the race. If we are content to be serfs, then indeed boycott is a sin for us, not because it is a violation of love, but because it is a violation of the Sudra's duty of obedience and contentment. Politics is the field of the Kshatriya and the morality of the Kshatriya ought to govern our political actions. To impose on politics the Brahminical duty of saintly sufferance, is to preach *varnasankara*.

* * * *

Love has a place in politics, but it is the love for one's country, for one's countrymen, for the glory, greatness and happiness of the race, the divine *ananda* of self-immolation for one's fellows, the ecstasy of relieving their sufferings, the joy of seeing one's blood flow for country and freedom, the bliss of union in death with the fathers of the race. The feeling of almost physical delight in the touch of the mother soil, of the winds that blow from Indian seas, of the rivers that stream from Indian hills, in the sight of Indian surroundings, Indian men, Indian women, Indian children, in the hearing of Indian speech, music, poetry, in the familiar sights, sounds, habits, dress, manners of our Indian life, this is the physical root of that love. The pride in our past, the pain of our present, the passion for the future are its trunk and branches. Self-sacrifice, self-forgetfulness, great service and high endurance for the country are its fruit. And the sap which keeps it alive is the realisation of the Motherhood of God in the country, the vision of the Mother, the knowledge of the Mother, the perpetual contemplation, adoration and service of the Mother.

* * * *

Other love than this is foreign to the motives of political action. Between nation and nation there is justice, partiality, chivalry, duty but not love. All love is either individual, or for the self in the race or for the self in mankind. It may exist between individuals of different races, but the love of one race for another is a thing foreign to nature. When, therefore, the boycott as declared by the Indian race against the British is stigmatised for want of love, the charge is bad psychology as well as bad morality. It is interest warring against interest, and hatred is directed not really against the race but against the adverse interest. If the British exploitation were to cease tomorrow, the hatred against the British race would disappear in a moment. A partial *adhyaropa* makes the ignorant for the moment see in the exploiters and not in the exploitation the receptacle of the hostile feeling. But like all Maya it is an unreal and fleeting sentiment and is not shared by those who think. Not hatred against foreigners, but antipathy to the evils of foreign exploitation is the true root of boycott.

* * * *

If hatred is demoralising, it is also stimulating. The web of life has been made a mingled strain of good and evil and God works His ends through the evil as well as through the good. Let us discharge our minds of hate, but let us not deprecate a great and necessary movement because in the inevitable course of human nature, it has engendered feelings of hostility and hatred. If hatred came, it was necessary that it should come as a stimulus, as a means of awakening. When *tamas*, inertia, torpor have benumbed a nation, the strongest forms of *rajas* are necessary to break the spell, and there is no form of *rajas* so strong as hatred. Through *rajas* we rise to *sattwa*, and for the Indian temperament, the transition does not take long. Already the element of hatred is giving place to the clear conception of love for the Mother as the spring of our political actions.

* * * *

Another question is the use of violence in the furtherance of boycott. This is, in our view, purely a matter of policy and expediency. An act of violence brings us into conflict with the law and such a conflict may be inexpedient for a race circumstanced like ours. But the moral question does not arise. The argument that to use violence is to interfere with personal liberty involves a singular misunderstanding of the very nature of politics. The whole of politics is an interference with personal liberty. Law is such an interference, Protection is such an interference, the rule which makes the will of the majority prevail is such an interference. The right to prevent such use of personal liberty as will injure the interests of the race, is the fundamental law of society. From this point of view the nation is only using its primary right when it restrains the individual from buying or selling foreign goods.

* * * *

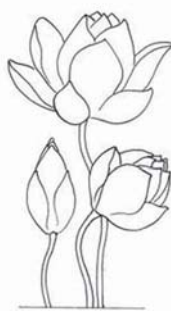
It may be argued that peaceful compulsion is one thing and violent compulsion another. Social boycott may be justifiable, but not the burning or drowning of British goods. The latter method, we reply, is illegal and therefore may be inexpedient, but it is not morally unjustifiable. The morality of the Kshatriya justifies violence in times of war, and boycott is a war. Nobody blames the Americans for throwing British tea into Boston harbour, nor can anybody blame similar action in India on moral grounds. It is reprehensible from the point of view of law, of social peace and order, not of political morality. It has been eschewed by us because it is unwise and carries the battle on to a ground where we are comparatively weak, from a ground where we are strong. Under other circumstances we might have followed the American precedent, and if we had done so, historians and moralists would have applauded, not censured.

* * * *

Justice and righteousness are the atmosphere of political morality, but the justice and righteousness of the fighter, not of the priest. Aggression is unjust only when unprovoked, violence unrighteous when used wantonly or for unrighteous ends. It is a barren philosophy which applies a mechanical rule to all actions, or takes a word and tries to fit all human life into it. The sword of the warrior is as necessary to the fulfilment of justice and righteousness as the holiness of the saint. Ramdas is not complete without Shivaji. To maintain justice and prevent the strong from despoiling and the weak from being oppressed is the function for which the Kshatriya was created. Therefore, says Sri Krishna in the Mahabharat, God created battle and armour, the sword, the bow and the dagger.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 1117- 21)



A FRAGMENT¹

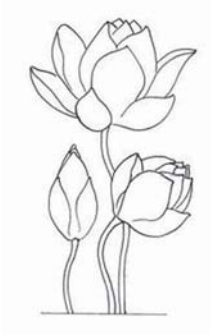
Mankind is of a less terrestrial mould than some would have him to be. He has an element of the divine which the practical politician ignores. The practical politician looks to the position at the moment and imagines that he has taken everything into consideration. He has indeed studied the surface and the immediate surroundings, but he has missed what lies beyond material vision. He has left out of account the divine, the incalculable in man, that element which upsets the calculations of the schemer and disconcerts the wisdom of the diplomat.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 7, p. 1122)

1. “A Fragment” has always been published as part of “The Morality of Boycott”, but it seems to be the incomplete opening of a separate piece.

1908. This piece was found along with “The Morality of Boycott” at the time of Sri Aurobindo’s arrest in May 1908. It was apparently written at the same time but left unfinished. (Editorial Note in CWSA)



THE BOURGEOIS AND THE SAMURAI¹

Two oriental nations have come powerfully under the influence of Western ideas and felt the impact of European civilization during the nineteenth century, India and Japan. The results have been very different. The smaller nation has become one of the mightiest Powers in the modern world, the larger in spite of far greater potential strength, a more original culture, a more ancient and splendid past and a far higher mission in the world, remains a weak, distracted, subject & famine-stricken people politically, economically, morally & intellectually dependent on the foreigner and unable to realise its great possibilities. It is commonly said that this is because Japan has assimilated Western Science and organization and even in many respects excelled its teachers; India has failed in this all-important task of assimilation. If we go a step farther back and insist on asking why this is so, we shall be told it is because Japan has “reformed” herself and got rid of ideas & institutions unsuited to modern times; while India clings obstinately to so much that is outworn and effete. Even if we waive aside the question whether the old Indian ideals are unfit to survive or whether all our institutions are really bad in themselves or unadaptable to modern conditions, still the explanation itself has to be explained. Why has Japan so admirably transformed herself? why has the attempt at transformation in India been a failure? The solution of problems of this kind has to be sought not in abstractions, not in machinery, but in men. It is the spirit in man which moulds his fate; it is the spirit of a nation which determines its history.

Describe the type of human character which prevails in a nation during a given period of its life under given conditions, and it is possible to predict in outline what the general history of the nation must be during that period. In Japan the dominant Japanese type had been moulded by the shaping processes of an admirable culture and when the Western impact came, Japan remained faithful to her ancient spirit; she merely took over certain forms of European social & political organization necessary to complete her culture under modern conditions and poured into these forms the old potent dynamic spirit of Japan, the spirit of the Samurai. It is the

1. Editorial title. 1906-07. This article was intended not for the *Bande Mataram*, but for a certain “Review”, presumably *The Modern Review* or another monthly journal. The notebook containing the manuscript was seized in May 1908 and never seen by Sri Aurobindo again. Four years after his passing, it and several other notebooks were rediscovered and restored to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The text was transcribed and published in *Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research* in 1978. It is complete in that it has a beginning, a middle and an end, but it was never prepared by the author for publication. As a result certain passages were not fully worked into the text. These passages have been inserted by the editors either in the text itself (if the point of insertion was sufficiently clear) or in footnotes. (Editorial Note in CWSA.) [So also the other footnotes in this piece.]

Samurai type which has been dominant in that country during the nineteenth century. In India the mass of the nation has remained dormant; European culture has had upon it a powerful disintegrating and destructive influence, but has been powerless to reconstruct or revivify. But in the upper strata a new type has been evolved to serve the necessities and interests of the foreign rulers, a type which is not Indian, but foreign — and in almost all our social, political, educational, literary & religious activities the spirit of this new & foreign graft has predominated & determined the extent & quality of our progress. This type is the bourgeois. In India, the bourgeois, in Japan, the Samurai; in this single difference is comprised the whole contrasted histories of the two nations during the nineteenth century.

What is the bourgeois? For the word is unknown in India, though the thing is so prominent. The bourgeois is the average contented middle class citizen who is in all countries much the same in his fundamental character & habits of thought, in spite of pronounced racial differences in temperament & self-expression. He is a man of facile sentiments and skin-deep personality; generally “enlightened” but not inconveniently illuminated. In love with his life, his ease and above all things his comforts, he prescribes the secure maintenance of these precious possessions as the first indispensable condition of all action in politics and society; whatever tends to disturb or destroy them, he condemns as foolish, harebrained, dangerous or fanatical, according to the degree of its intensity and is ready to repress by any means in his power. In the conduct of public movements he has an exaggerated worship for external order, moderation and decorum and hates over-earnestness and over-strenuousness. Not that he objects to plenty of mild & innocuous excitement; but it must be innocuous and calculated not to have a disturbing effect on the things he most cherishes. He has ideals and likes to talk of justice, liberty, reform, enlightenment and all similar abstractions; he likes too to see them reigning and progressing around him decorously and with their proper limitations. He wishes to have them maintained, if they already exist, but in moderation and with moderation; if they do not exist, the craving for them should be, in his opinion, a lively but still well-regulated fire, not permitted to interfere with the safety, comfort and decorum of life, — the means adopted towards acquiring them should be also moderate and decorous and as far as may be safe and comfortable. An occasional sacrifice of money, leisure and other precious things for their sake, he is always ready to meet; he has a keen zest for the reputation such sacrifices bring him and still more for the comfortable sense of personal righteousness which they foster. The bourgeois is the man of good sense and enlightenment, the man of moderation, the man of peace and orderliness, the man in every way “respectable”, who is the mainstay of all well-ordered societies. As a private man he is respectable; that is to say, his character is generally good, and when his character is not, his reputation is; he is all decorous in his virtues,

decent in the indulgence of his vices or at least in their concealment, often absolutely honest, almost always as honest as an enlightened self-interest will permit. His purse is well filled or at any rate not indecently empty; he is a good earner, a conscientious worker, a thoroughly safe & reliable citizen.² But this admirable creature has his defects and limitations. For great adventures, tremendous enterprises, lofty achievements, the storm and stress of mighty & eventful periods in national activity, he is unfit. These things are for the heroes, the martyrs, the criminals, the enthusiasts, the degenerates, geniuses, the men of exaggerated virtue, exaggerated ability, exaggerated ideas. He enjoys the fruit of their work when it is done, but while it is doing, he opposes and hinders more often than helps. For he looks on great ideals as dreams and on vehement enthusiasms as harebrained folly; he distrusts everything new & disturbing, everything that has not been done before or is not sanctioned by success & the accomplished fact; revolt is to him a madness & revolution a nightmare. Fiery self-annihilating enthusiasm, noble fanaticism, relentless & heroic pursuit of an object, the original brain that brings what is distant & ungrasped into the boundaries of reality, the dynamic Will and genius which makes the impossible possible; these things he understands as matters of history and honours them in the famous dead or in those who have succeeded; but in living & yet striving men they inspire him with distrust and repulsion. He will tell you that these things are not to be found in the present generation; but if confronted with the living originator, he will condemn him as a learned idiot; face to face with the living hero, he will decry him as a dangerous madman, — unless & until he sees on the head of either the crown of success & assured reputation.

He values also the things of the mind in a leisurely comfortable way as adorning and setting off his enlightened ease and competence. A little art, a little poetry, a little religion, a little scholarship, a little philosophy, all these are excellent ingredients in life, and give an air of decorous refinement to his surroundings. They must not be carried too far or interfere with the great object of life which is to earn money, clothe and feed one's family, educate one's sons to the high pitch of the B.A. degree or the respectable eminence of the M.A., marry one's daughters decently, rank high in service or the professions, stand well in the eye of general opinion and live & die decorously, creditably and respectably. Anything disturbing to these high duties, anything exaggerated, intense, unusual is not palatable to the bourgeois. He shrugs his shoulders over it and brushes it aside with the one word, "mad", or eccentric.³

2. The following sentence was written in the top margin of the manuscript. Its place of insertion was not marked, but it presumably was meant to be inserted here:

Of course there are exceptions, instances of successful & respected black guardism, but these are the small minority.

3. The following sentence was written in the top margin of the manuscript. Its place of insertion was not marked:

Such a type may give stability to a society; it cannot reform or revolutionize it. Such a type may make the politics of a nation safe, decorous and reputable. It cannot make that nation great or free.

(Such is the bourgeois and it was the bourgeois of the mildest & most inefficient type who reigned in India in the nineteenth century. It was the bourgeois which University education tended, perhaps sought to evolve; it was the bourgeois which the political social conditions moulded and brought to the front. In India the bourgeois; in Japan the Samurai, that one enormous difference explains the difference in the histories of the two countries during the second half of the last century.)⁴

It is undoubtedly this type which has dominated us in the nineteenth century. Of course the really great names, those that will live in history as creators & originators are men who went beyond this type; either they belonged to, but exceeded it or they departed from it. But the average, the determining type was the bourgeois. In Senate & Syndicate, in Legislative Council & District Board or Municipal Corporation, in Congress & Conference, in the services & professions, even in literature & scholarship, even in religion he was everywhere with his well regulated mind, his unambitious ideals, his snug little corner of culture, his “education” and “enlightenment”, his comfortable patriotism, his comfortable enlightenment, his easy solution of the old problem how to serve both God & Mammon, yet offend neither, his self-satisfaction, his decorous honesty, his smug respectability. Society was made after his model, politics moulded in his image, education confined within his limits, literature & religion stamped with the seal of the bourgeois.

The bourgeois as a distinct & well-evolved entity is an entirely modern product in India, he is the creation of British policy, English education, Western civilization. Ancient India, mediaeval India were not a favourable soil for his growth. The spirit of ancient India was aristocratic; its thought & life moulded in the cast of a high & proud nobility, an extreme & lofty strenuousness. The very best in thought, the very best in action, the very best in character, the very best in literature & art, the very best in religion and all the world well lost if only this very best might be attained, such was the spirit of ancient India. The Brahmin who devoted himself to poverty & crushed down every desire in the wholehearted pursuit of knowledge & religious self-discipline; the Kshatriya who, hurling his life joyously into the shock of chivalrous battle, held life, wife, children, possessions, ease, happiness as mere dust in the balance compared with honour & the Kshatriya dharma, the preservation of self-respect, the protection of the weak, the noble fulfilment of princely duty; the Vaishya, who toiling all his life to amass riches, poured them out as soon as amassed in self-forgetting philanthropy holding himself the mere steward & not the possessor of his wealth; the Shudra who gave himself up loyally to humble service, faithfully devoting his life to his dharma, however low, in preference to self-advancement & ambition; these were the social ideals of the age.

4. Sri Aurobindo placed parenthesis marks on both sides of this paragraph after writing it. He seems to have intended to move it elsewhere. – Ed.

The imagination of the Indian tended as has been well said to the grand & enormous in thought and morals. The great formative images of legend & literature to the likeness with which his childhood was encouraged to develop & which his manhood most cherished were of an extreme & lofty type. He saw Harischundra give up all that life held precious & dear rather than that his lips should utter a lie or his plighted word be broken. He saw Prahlada buried under mountains, whelmed in the seas, tortured by the poison of a thousand venomous serpents, yet calmly true to his faith. He saw Buddha give up his royal state, wealth, luxury, wife, child & parents so that mankind might be saved. He saw Shivi hew the flesh from his own limbs to save one small dove from the pursuing falcon; Karna tear his own body with a smile for the joy of making a gift; Duryodhan refuse to yield one inch of earth without noble resistance & warlike struggle. He saw Sita face exile, hardship, privation & danger in the eagerness of wifely love & duty, Savitri rescue by her devotion her husband back from the visible grip of death. These were the classical Indian types. These were the ideals into the mould of which the minds of men & women were trained to grow. The sense-conquering thought of the philosopher, the magnificent achievements of the hero, the stupendous renunciations of the Sannyasin, [the] unbounded liberality of the man of wealth, everything was exaggeration, extreme, filled with an epic inspiration, a world-defying enthusiasm. The bourgeois though he existed in the rough of course, as in all civilized societies he must exist, had no real chance of evolution; on such a height with so rare an atmosphere, he could not grow; where such tempests of self-devotion blew habitually, his warm comfortable personality could not expand.

The conditions of mediaeval India suited him little better, — the continual clash of arms, the unceasing stir & splendor & strenuousness of life, the fierceness of the struggle and the magnificence of the achievement, the ceaseless tearing down & building up which resulted from Mahomedan irruption and the action & reaction of foreign & indigenous forces, formed surroundings too restless & too flamboyant. Life under the Moguls was splendid, rich & luxurious, but it was not safe & comfortable. Magnificent possibilities were open to all men whatever their birth or station but magnificent abilities and an unshaken nerve & courage were needed to grasp them or to keep what had been grasped. There was no demand for the stable & easy virtues of the bourgeois. In the times of stress and anarchy which accompanied the disintegration of mediaeval India, the conditions were yet more unfavourable; character and morals shared in the general disintegration, but ability & courage were even more in demand than before and for the bourgeois there was no place vacant. (The men who figured in the revolutions in Bengal, the Deccan, the Punjab & the North were often, like their European allies & antagonists, men of evil character, self-seeking, unscrupulous & Machiavellian, but they were at least men.) It was not till mediaeval India breathed its last in the convulsions of 1857 that entirely new conditions reigned and an entirely new culture prevailed with an undisputed sway

wholly favourable to the rapid development of the bourgeois type and wholly discouraging to the development of any other.

This emergence and domination of the bourgeois was a rapid transformation, not unparalleled in history, for something of the same kind seems to have happened in the provinces of the Roman Empire under the Caesars, but astonishing in a people whose past history & temperament had been so supremely unPhilistine. That a society which had only a few decades ago prostrated itself before the naked ascetic and the penniless Brahmin, should now wear the monied man and the official as the tilak on its forehead, was indeed a marvellous revolution. But given the new conditions, nothing else could have happened. British rule necessitated the growth of the bourgeois, British policy fostered it, and the plant grew so swiftly because a forcing house had been created for his rapid cultivation and the soil was kept suitably shallow and the air made warm and humid for his needs. It was as in the ancient world when the nations accepted peace, civilisation and a common language at the cost of national decay, the death of their manhood and final extinction or age-long slavery. The Pax Britannica was his parent and an easy servitude nursed him into maturity.

For the first need of the bourgeois is a guaranteed and perfect security for his person, property and pursuits. Peace, comfort and safety are the very breath of his nostrils. But he gravitates to a peace for whose preservation he is not called on to wear armour and wield the sword, a comfort he has not to purchase by the discomfort of standing sentinel over his liberties, or a safety his own alertness and courage must protect from the resurgence of old dangers. The bourgeois in arms is not the true animal; the purity of his breed is sullied by something of the virtues and defects of the soldier. He must enjoy the fruits of peace and security he has not earned, without responsibility for their maintenance or fear of their loss. Such conditions he found in almost unparalleled perfection in British India. He was asked to stand as the head of a disarmed and dependent society, secured from external disturbance & tied down to a rigid internal tranquillity by the deprivation of all functions except those of breadwinner and taxpayer and to vouch himself to the world by a respectable but not remarkable education and achievement as the visible proof of England's civilising mission in India. Such conditions were to the bourgeois as the moisture & warmth of the hothouse to the orchid. He grew in them, rank & luxurious.

Then again, for his perfection and dominance, the society he lives in must honour his peculiar qualities above all others and the substantial rewards and covetable distinctions of life [be] reserved for them chiefly or for them alone. The British rule gave him this honour, showered on him these rewards & distinctions, and Indian society, more & more moulded by British ideas, followed as a society almost inevitably follows the lead of the rulers. Under the new dispensation of Providence there was no call for the high qualities of old, the Aryan or noble virtues which, whatever else failed or perished, had persisted in Indian character for thousands of years, since first the chariots rolled on the hither side of the Indus.

What need for the Rajpoot's courage, the robust manhood, the noble pride of the Kshatriya, when heroic and unselfish England claimed the right of shedding her blood for the safety of the land? What room for the gifts of large initiative, comprehensive foresight, wise aspiration which make the statesman, when a Bentinck or a Mayo, a Dufferin or a Curzon were ready & eager to take & keep the heavy burdens of Government out of the hands of the children of the soil? The princely spirit, the eagle's vision, the lion's heart, these were things that might be buried away with the memories of the great Indian rulers of the past. Happy India, civilised and cared for by human seraphs from over the sea, had no farther need for them. So from sheer inanition, from want of light, room and air, the Kshatriya died out of the soil which had first produced him and the bourgeois took his place. But if room was none for the soldier & the statesman, little could be found for the Brahmin, the sage or the Sannyasin. British rule had no need for scholars, it wanted clerks; British policy welcomed the pedant but feared, even when it honoured, the thinker, for the strong mind might pierce through shows to the truth and the deep thought teach the people to embrace great ideals and live and die for them; British education flung contempt on the Sannyasin as an idler and charlatan, and pointed with admiration to the strenuous seeker for worldly goods and success as the finest work of the creator. So Vyasa & Valmekie were forgotten for weavers of idle tales and Smiles and Sir Arthur Helps took their place as an instructor of youth, the gospel of Philistinism in its naked crudeness was beaten into the minds of our children when most malleable. Thus Ramdas was following Shivaji into the limbo of the unreturning past. And if God had not meant otherwise for our nation, the Sannyasin would have become an extinct type, Yoga been classed among dead superstitions with witchcraft & alchemy and Vedanta sent the way of Pythagoras & Plato. Nor was the old Vaishya type needed by the new dispensation. The Indian mechanic, engineer, architect, artist, craftsman got notice of dismissal; for to develop the industrial life of the country was no part of England's business in India. As she had taken the functions of government and war into her own hands, so she would take that of production. Whatever India needed, beneficent England with her generous system of free trade would supply and the Indian might sit at ease under his palm tree or, gladly singing, till his fields, rejoicing that Heaven had sent him a ruling nation so greedy to do him good. What was wanted was not Indian artisans or Indian captains of industry, but plenty of small shopkeepers and big middlemen to help conquer & keep India as a milch cow for British trade & British capital.

Thus all the great types which are nurtured on war, politics, thought, spirituality, activity & enterprise, the outgrowths of a vigorous and healthy national existence, the high fruits of humanity who are the very energy of life to a community, were discouraged and tended to disappear and in their place there was an enormous demand for the bourgeois qualities. The safe, respectable man, satisfied with ease and not ambitions of command, content with contemporary repute and not hankering

after immortality, the superficial man who unable to think profoundly could yet pose among his peers as intellectual, who getting no true culture, wore a specious appearance of education, who guiltless of a single true sacrifice for his country, yet bulked large as a patriot, found an undisputed field open to him. The rewards of life now depended on certain outward signs of merit which were purely conventional. An University degree, knowledge of English, possession of a post in Government service or a professional diploma, a Government title, European clothes or a sleek dress and appearance, a big house full of English furniture, these were the badges by which Society recognized its chosen. These signs were all purely conventional. The degree did not necessarily denote a good education nor the knowledge of English a wide culture or successful living into new ideas, nor the Government post administrative capacity, nor the diploma special fitness for the profession, nor the title any merit in the holder, nor the big house or fine dress a mastery of the art of social life, nor the English clothes, European grit, science and enterprise. They were merely counters borrowed from Europe, but universally taken, as they are not usually taken in Europe or any living nation, as a sufficient substitute for the reality. Wealth, success, and certain outward signs of a facile respectability had become to our new civilised & refined society the supreme tests of the man.

All these were conditions unusually favourable to a rank luxuriance of the bourgeois type, which thrives upon superficiality and lives by convention. The soil was suitably shallow, the atmosphere sufficiently warm & humid. The circumstances of our national life & the unique character of our education hastened & perfected the growth. Both were characterized by the false appearance of breadth covering an almost miraculous superficiality. Our old Indian life was secluded, but lofty & intense, like a pine-tree on the mountain-tops, like a tropical island in unvisited seas; our new life parted with the loftiness & intensity when it lost the isolation, but it boasted in vain of an added breadth, for it was really more provincial & narrow than the old, which had at least given room for the development of all our human faculties. The news of the world's life poured in on us through the foreign telegrams & papers, we read English books, we talked about economics and politics, science & history, enlightenment & education, Rousseau, Mill, Bentham, Burke, and used the language of a life that was not ours, in the vain belief that so we became cosmopolitans and men of enlightenment. Yet all the time India was as much & more outside the great life of the world than it was in the days of Mahomad Tughlak or Bahadur Shah. The number of men in educated India who had any vital conception or any real understanding & mastery of the great currents of life, thought & motive which sway the vast world outside, was always wonderfully small. It could not be otherwise; for the life of that world was not our life, nor was our life any part of the world's, any more than the days of a prisoner in a gaol or reformatory are part of the free activity of society. The thunder of great wars, the grand collision and struggle of world-moving ideas and mighty interests, the swift & strong currents of scientific discovery

and discussion, the intellectual change & stir, the huge & feverish pulsation of commercial competition from China to Peru, all this was to us as the scenes in the street to a man watching from his prison bars. We might take a deep & excited interest, we might almost persuade ourselves by the vividness of our interest that we were part of the scene, but if a voice within cried to us, "Out, out, you too into the battle & the struggle and the joy & stir of this great world's life," the cold iron of the window-bars and the hard stone of the prison walls stood between. The jailer might not jingle his keys obtrusively nor the warder flourish his baton, but we knew well they were there. And we really believed in the bland promise that if we conducted ourselves well, we should some day get tickets of leave. We read & thought but did not live what we read & thought. So our existence grew ever more artificial and unreal. The fighter and the thinker in us dwindled & the bourgeois flourished and grew.

Contentment with an artificial existence, the habit of playing with counters as if they were true coin of life, made the old rich flood of vitality, strong character, noble aspiration, excellent achievement run ever shallower & thinner in our veins. So we accepted and made the best of an ignoble ease.

Our education too had just the same pride in a false show of breadth and the same confined and narrow scope. In our schools & colleges we were set to remember many things, but learned nothing. We had no real mastery of English literature, though we read Milton & Burke and quoted Byron & Shelley, nor of history though we talked about Magna Charta & Runnymede, nor of philosophy though we could mispronounce the names of most of the German philosophers, nor science though we used its name daily, nor even of our own thought & civilisation though its discussion filled columns of our periodicals. We knew little & knew it badly. And even we could not profit by the little we knew for advance, for origination; even those who struggled to a wider knowledge proved barren soil. The springs of originality were fast growing atrophied by our unnatural existence. The great men among us who strove to originate were the spiritual children of an older time who still drew sap from the roots of our ancient culture and had the energy of the Mogul times in their blood. But their success was not commensurate with their genius & with each generation these grew rarer & rarer. The sap soon began to run dry, the energy to dwindle away. Worse than the narrowness & inefficiency, was the unreality of our culture. Our brains were as full of liberty as our lives were empty of it. We read and talked so much of political rights that we never so much as realized that we had none to call our own. The very sights & sounds, the description of which formed the staple of our daily reading, were such as most of us would at no time see or hear. We learned science without observation of the objects of science, words & not the things which they symbolised, literature by rote, philosophy as a lesson to be got by heart, not as a guide to truth or a light shed on existence. We read of and believed in English economy, while we lived under Indian conditions, and worshipped the free

trade which was starving us to death as a nation. We professed notions of equality, and separated ourselves from the people, of democracy, and were the servants of absolutism. We pattered off speeches & essays about social reform, yet had no idea of the nature of a society. We looked to sources of strength and inspiration we could not reach and left those untapped which were ours by possession and inheritance. We knew so little of life that we expected others who lived on our service to prepare our freedom, so little of history that we thought reform could precede liberty, so little of science that we believed an organism could be reshaped from outside. We were ruled by shopkeepers and consented enthusiastically to think of them as angels. We affected virtues we were given no opportunity of assimilating and lost those our fathers had handed down to us. All this in perfect good faith, in the full belief that we were Europeanising ourselves, and moving rapidly toward political, social, economical, moral, intellectual progress. The consummation of our political progress was a Congress which yearly passed resolutions it had no power to put in practice, statesmen whose highest function was to ask questions which need not even be answered, councillors who would have been surprised if they had been consulted, politicians who did not even know that a Right never lives until it has a Might to support it. Socially we have initiated a feeble attempt to revivify the very basis of our society by a few petty mechanical changes instead of a spiritual renovation which could alone be equal to so high a task; economically, we attained great success in destroying our industries and enslaving ourselves to the British trader; morally, we successfully compassed the disintegration of the old moral ideas & habits and substituted for them a superficial respectability; intellectually, we prided ourselves [on] the tricking out of our minds in a few leavings, scraps and strays of European thought at the sacrifice of an immense and eternal heritage. Never was an education more remote from all that education truly denotes; instead of giving the keys to the vast mass of modern knowledge, or creating rich soil for the qualities that conquer circumstance & survive, they made the mind swallow a heterogeneous jumble of mainly useless information; trained a tame parrot to live in a cage & talk of the joys of the forest. British rule, Britain's civilizing mission in India has been the record success in history in the hypnosis of a nation. It persuaded us to live in a death of the will & its activities, taking a series of hallucinations for real things and creating in ourselves the condition of morbid weakness the hypnotist desired, until the Master of a mightier hypnosis laid His finger on India's eyes and cried "Awake." Then only the spell was broken, the slumbering mind realized itself and the dead soul lived again.

But the education which was poison to all true elements of national strength and greatness, was meat & drink to the bourgeois. The bourgeois delights in convention, because truth is too hard a taskmaster and makes too severe a demand on character, energy & intellect. He craves superficiality, a shallow soil to grow in. For to attain depth requires time & energy which would have to be unprofitably

diverted from his chief business of making his individual way in the world. He cannot give up his life to his country, but if she will be grateful for a few of his leisure hours, he will give in those limits ungrudging service & preen himself on his public virtues. Prodigious charity would be uncomfortable & unwise, but if he can earn applause by parting with a fraction of his superfluities, he is always ready for the sacrifice. Deep scholarship would unfit him for his part in life, but if figuring in learned societies or writing a few articles and essays, an occasional book guiltless of uncomfortable originality, or a learned compilation prepared under his superintendence and issued in his name will make him a man of letters, he will court & prize that easily-earned reputation. The effort to remould society and rebuild the nation is too huge and perilous a task for a comfortable citizen, but he is quite prepared to condemn old & inconvenient institutions & superstitions and lend his hand to a few changes which will make social life more pleasant and comfortable. Superficiality, unreality of thought & deed thus became the stamp of all our activities.

Those who say that the new spirit in India which, before nascent & concealed, started to conscious life in the Swadeshi agitation and has taken Swadeshi, Swaraj and Self-help as its motto, is nothing new but a natural development of the old, are minds blinded by the habits of thought of the past century. The new Nationalism is the very antithesis, the complete and vehement negation of the old. The old movement sought to make a wider circle of activity, freer living-room and a more comfortable and eminent position for the bourgeois, to prolong the unnatural & evil conditions of which the subject nations died under the civilizing rule of Rome and which British rule has recreated for India; the new seeks to replace the bourgeois by the Samurai and to shatter the prison house which the nineteenth century made for our mother and build anew a palace for her glory, a garden for her pleasure, a free domain for her freedom & her pride. The old looked only to the power & interests of the educated, enlightened middle class, and shrank from the ignorant, the uneducated, the livers in the past, the outer unilluminated barbarian, drawing aside the hem of its robes lest it should touch impurity. The new overleaps every barrier; it calls to the clerk at his counter, the trader in his shop, the peasant at his plough; it summons the Brahmin from his temple and takes the hand [of] the Chandala in his degradation; it seeks out the student in his College, the schoolboy at his books, it touches the very child in its mother's arms & the secluded zenana has thrilled to its voice; its eye searches the jungle for the Santal and travels the hills for the wild tribes of the mountains. It cares nothing for age or sex or caste or wealth or education or respectability; it mocks at the talk of a stake in the country; it spurns aside the demand for a property qualification or a certificate of literacy. It speaks to the illiterate or the man in the street in such rude vigorous language as he best understands, to youth & the enthusiast in accents of poetry, in language of fire, to the thinker in the terms of philosophy and logic, to the Hindu it repeats the name of Kali, to the Mahomedan it spurs to action for the glory of Islam. It cries to all to come forth, to

help in God's work & remake a nation, each with what his creed or his culture, his strength, his manhood or his genius can give to the new nationality. The only qualification it asks for is a body made in the womb of an Indian mother, a heart that can feel for India, a brain that can think and plan for her greatness, a tongue that can adore her name or hands that can fight in her quarrel. The old shunned sacrifice & suffering, the new rushes to embrace it. The old gave a wide berth to the jail and the rods & scourges of Power; the new walks straight to meet them. The old shuddered at the idea of revolution; the new is ready to set the whole country in turmoil for the sake of an idea. The old bent the knee to Caesar and presented him a list of grievances; the new leaves his presence or dragged back to it, stands erect and defies him in the midst of his legions.

The initial condition of recovering our liberty meant a peril and a gigantic struggle from the very possibility of which we averted our eyes in a panic of bourgeois terror. It was safer & easier to cheat ourselves into believing in a contradiction and living a lie. Yet nothing could be more fatal, more insidiously destructive to the roots of manhood. It is far better to fall and bleed for ever in a hopeless but unrelenting struggle than to drink of that draught of death and lethe. A people true to itself, a race that hopes to live, will not comfort itself and sap its manhood by the opiate of empty formulas and specious falsehoods; it will prefer eternal suffering & disaster. For in truth, as our old thinkers used always to insist, the whole universe stands; truth is the root and condition of life and to believe a lie, to live in a lie, is to deliver oneself to disease and death. The belief that a subject nation can acquiesce in subjection and yet make true & vital progress, growing to strength in its chains, is a lie. The idea that mitigations of subjection constitute freedom or prepare a race for freedom or that anything but the exercise of liberty fits man for liberty, is another lie. The teaching that peace and security are more important and vital to man than liberty is a third lie. Yet all these lies and many others we believed in, hugged to our hearts and made the law of our thoughts throughout the nineteenth century. The result was stagnation, or a progress in weakness and disintegration.

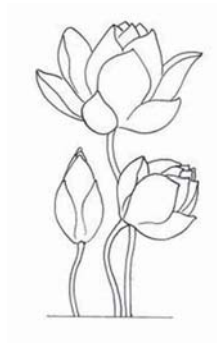
The doctrine that social & commercial progress must precede or will of themselves bring about political strength & liberty, is a fourth & very dangerous lie; for a nation is no aggregate of separable functions, but a harmony of functions, of which government and political arrangement is the oldest, most central and most vital and determines the others.

Our only hope of resurgence was in some such great unsealing of the eyes to the Maya in which we existed and the discovery of some effective mantra, some strong spiritual impulse which should have the power to renovate us from within. For good or for evil the middle class now leads in India, and whatever saving impulse comes to the nation, must come from the middle class, whatever upward movement begins, it must initiate and lead. But for that to happen the middle class must by a miracle be transfigured and lifted above itself; the natural breeding ground of the

bourgeois, it must become the breeding ground of the Samurai. It must cease in fact to be a middle class and turn itself into an aristocracy, an aristocracy not of birth or landed possessions, not of intellect, not of wealth and commercial enterprise, but of character and action. India must recover her faculty for self-sacrifice, courage and high aspiration. Such a transformation is the work which has been set before itself by the new Nationalism; this is at the back of all its enthusiasm, audacity & turbulence and provides the explanation of all that has shocked and alarmed the wise men and the elders in the movement in Bengal. The new Nationalism is a creed, but it is more than a creed; it is a method, but more than a method. The new Nationalism is an attempt at a spiritual transformation of the nineteenth century Indian; it is a notice of dismissal or at least of suspension to the bourgeois and all his ideas and ways and works, a call for men who will dare & do impossibilities, the men of extremes, the men of faith, the prophets, the martyrs, the crusaders, the [. . .] & rebels, the desperate venturers and reckless doers, the initiators of revolutions. It is the rebirth in India of the Kshatriya, the Samurai.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 7, 1091-108)



CONSERVATION AND PROGRESS

Mankind thinks naturally in extremes or else reconciles by a patchwork and compromise. Whether he makes a fetish of moderation or surrenders himself to the enthusiasm of the single idea, the human being misses always truth of vision and the right pitch of action because instead of seeing, feeling and becoming in obedience to his nature like other animate existences he tries always to measure things by a standard he has set up in his intelligence. But it is the character of his intelligence that it finds it an easy task to distinguish and separate but is clumsy in combining. When it combines, it tends to artificialise and falsify. It feels at ease in pursuing a single idea to its logical consequences and in viewing things from a single standpoint; but to harmonise different ideas in action and to view the facts from different standpoints is contrary to its native impulse; therefore it does that badly, with an ill grace and without mastery. Oftenest it makes an incongruous patchwork rather than a harmony. The human mind is strong and swift in analysis; it synthesises with labour and imperfectly and does not feel at home in its syntheses. It divides, opposes and, placed between the oppositions it creates, becomes an eager partisan of one side or another; but to think wisely and impartially and with a certain totality is irksome and disgusting to the normal human being.

All human action as all human thought suffers from these disabilities. For it is seduced by a trenchant idea which it follows without proper attention to collateral issues, to necessary companion ideas, to the contrary forces in operation, or else it regards these merely as enemies, brands them as pure falsehood and evil and strives with more or less violence to crush them out of existence. Then it sees other ideas which it attempts to realise in turn, either adding them to its past notions and possessions or else rejecting these entirely for the new light; it makes a fresh war and a new clearance and denies its past work in the interest of a future attainment. But it has also its repentances, its returns, its recalls and re-enthronings of banished gods and even of lifeless ghosts and phantoms to which it gives a temporary and false appearance of life. And on the way it has continually its doubts, scruples, hesitations, its portentous assumptions of a sage moderation and a gradual and cautious advance. But human moderation is usually a wiseacre and a botcher; it sews a patch of new velvet on old fustian or of new fustian on old velvet and admires its deplorable handiwork. And its cautious advance means an accumulation of shams, fictions and dead conventions till the burden of falsehood becomes too great for life to bear and a violent revolution is necessary to deliver the soul of humanity out of the immobilising cerements of the past. Such is the type of our progress; it is the advance of an ignorant and purblind but always light-attracted spirit, a being half-animal, half-god, stumbling forward through the bewildering

jungle of its own errors.

This characteristic of human mentality shows itself in the opposition we create between conservation and progress. Nothing in the universe can really stand still because everything there is a mould of Time and the very essence of Time is change by a movement forward. It is true that the world's movement is not in a straight line; there are cycles, there are spirals; but still it circles, not round the same point always, but round an ever advancing centre, and therefore it never returns exactly upon its old path and never goes really backward. As for standing still, it is an impossibility, a delusion, a fiction. Only the spirit is stable; the soul and body of things are in eternal motion. And in this motion there are the three determining powers of the past, future and present, — the present a horizontal and constantly shifting line without breadth between a vast realised infinity that both holds back and impels and a vast unrealised infinity that both repels and attracts.

The past is both a drag and a force for progress. It is all that has created the present and a great part of the force that is creating the future. For the past is not dead; its forms are gone and had to go, otherwise the present would not have come into being: but its soul, its power, its essence lives veiled in the present and ever-accumulating, growing, deepening will live on in the future. Every human being holds in and behind him all the past of his own race, of humanity and of himself; these three things determine his starting-point and pursue him through his life's progress. It is in the force of this past, in the strength which its huge conservations give to him that he confronts the unilluminated abysses of the future and plunges forward into the depths of its unrealised infinities. But also it is a drag, partly because man afraid of the unknown clings to the old forms of which he is sure, the old foundations which feel so safe under his feet, the old props round which so many of his attachments and associations cast their tenacious tendrils, but also partly because the forces of the past keep their careful hold on him so as to restrain him in his uncertain course and prevent the progress from becoming a precipitation.

The future repels us even while it irresistibly attracts. The repulsion lies partly in our own natural recoil from the unknown, because every step into this unknown is a wager between life and death; every decision we make may mean either the destruction or the greater fulfilment of what we now are, of the name and form to which we are attached. But also it lies in the future itself; for there, governing that future, there are not only powers which call us to fulfil them and attract us with an irresistible force but other powers which have to be conquered and do not desire to yield themselves. The future is a sphinx with two minds, an energy which offers itself and denies, gives itself and resists, seeks to enthrone us and seeks to slay. But the conquest has to be attempted, the wager has to be accepted. We have to face the future's offer of death as well as its offer of life, and it need not alarm us, for it is by constant death to our old names and forms that we shall live most vitally in greater and newer forms and names. Go on we must; for if we do not, Time itself will force

us forward in spite of our fancied immobility. And this is the most pitiable and dangerous movement of all. For what can be more pitiable than to be borne helplessly forward clinging to the old that disintegrates in spite of our efforts and shrieking frantically to the dead ghosts and dissolving fragments of the past to save us alive? And what can be more dangerous than to impose immobility on that which is in its nature mobile? This means an increasing and horrible rottenness; it means an attempt to persist on as a putrid and stinking corpse instead of a living and self-renewing energetic creature. The greatest spirits are therefore those who have no fear of the future, who accept its challenge and its wager; they have that sublime trust in the God or Power that guides the world, that high audacity of the human soul to wrestle with the infinite and realise the impossible, that wise and warrior confidence in its ultimate destiny which mark the Avatars and prophets and great innovators and renovators.

If we consider carefully we shall see that the past is indeed a huge force of conservation, but of conservation that is not immobile, but on the contrary offers itself as material for change and new realisation; that the present is the constant change and new actual realisation which the past desires and compels; and that the future is that force of new realisation not yet actual towards which the past was moving and for the sake of which it lived. Then we perceive that there is no real opposition between these three; we see that they are parts of a single movement, a sort of Trinity of Vishnu-Brahma-Maheshwara fulfilling by an inseparable action the one Deity. Yet the human mind in its mania of division and opposition seeks to set them at strife and ranges humanity into various camps, the partisans of the past, the partisans of the present, the partisans of the future, the partisans of all sorts of compromises between the three forces. Nature makes good use of the struggle between these partisans and her method is necessary in our present state of passionate ignorance and egoistic obstinacy; but none the less is it from the point of view of a higher knowledge a pitiable ignorant struggle.

The partisans of the future call themselves the party of progress, the children of light and denounce the past as ignorant, evil, a mass of errors and abuses; their view alone has the monopoly of the light, the truth, the good — a light, good and truth which will equally be denounced as error and evil by succeeding generations. The partisans of the present look with horror upon all progress as an impious and abominable plunge into error and evil and degeneration and ruin; for them the present is the culmination of humanity, — as previous “present” times were for all the preceding generations and as the future which they abhor will be for these unprogressive souls if they should then reincarnate; they will then defend it with the same passion and asperity against another future as they now attack it in the interests of the present. The partisans of the past are of two kinds. The first admit the defects of the present but support it in so far as it still cherishes the principles of the high, perfect, faultless, adorable past, that golden age of the race or community, and

because even if somewhat degenerate, its forms are a bulwark against the impiety of progress; if they admit any change, it is in the direction of the past that they seek it. A second kind condemn the present root and branch as degenerate, hateful, horrible, vicious, accursed; they erect a past form as the hope of a humanity returning to the wisdom of its forefathers. And to such quarrels of children the intellectuals and the leaders of thought and faith lend the power of the specious or moving word and the striking idea and the emotional fervour or religious ardour which they conceive to be the very voice and light and force of Truth itself in its utter self-revelation.

The true thinker can dispense with the éclat which attaches to the leader of partisans. He will strive to see this great divine movement as a whole, to know in its large lines the divine intention and goal in it without seeking to fix arbitrarily its details; he will strive to understand the greatness and profound meaning of the past without attaching himself to its forms, for he knows that forms must change and only the formless endures and that the past can never be repeated, but only its essence preserved, its power, its soul of good and its massed impulse towards a greater self-fulfilment; he will accept the actual realisations of the present as a stage and nothing more, keenly appreciating its defects, self-satisfied errors, presumptuous pretensions because these are the chief enemies of progress, but not ignoring the truth and good that it has gained; and he will sound the future to understand what the Divine in it is seeking to realise, not only at the present moment, not only in the next generation, but beyond, and for that he will speak, strive, if need be battle, since battle is the method still used by Nature in humanity, even while all the while he knows that there is more yet beyond beside which, when it comes to light, the truth he has seized will seem erroneous and limited. Therefore he will act without presumption and egoism, knowing that his own errors and those which he combats are alike necessary forces in that labour and movement of human life towards the growing Truth and Good by which there increases shadowily the figure of a far-off divine Ideal.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 127-32)

THE CONSERVATIVE MIND AND EASTERN PROGRESS

The arrival of a new radical idea in the minds of men is the sign of a great coming change in human life and society; it may be combated, the reaction of the old idea may triumph for a time, but the struggle never leaves either the thoughts and sentiments or the habits and institutions of the society as they were when it commenced. Whether it knows it or not, it has gone forward and the change is irretrievable. Either new forms replace the old institutions or the old while preserving the aspect of continuity have profoundly changed within, or else these have secured for themselves a period of greater rigidity, increasing corruption, progressive deterioration of spirit and waning of real force which only assures them in the future a more complete catastrophe and absolute disappearance. The past can arrive at the most at a partial survival or an euthanasia, provided it knows how to compromise liberally with the future.

The conservative mind is unwilling to recognise this law though it is observable throughout human history and we can easily cull examples with full hands from all ages and all climes; and it is protected in its refusal to see by the comparative rarity of rapid revolutions and great cataclysmal changes; it is blinded by the disguise which Nature so often throws over her processes of mutation. If we look casually at European history in this light the attention is only seized by a few conspicuous landmarks, the evolution and end of Athenian democracy, the transition from the Roman republic to the empire, the emergence of feudal Europe out of the ruins of Rome, the Christianisation of Europe, the Reformation and Renaissance together preparing a new society, the French Revolution, the present rapid movement towards a socialistic State and the replacing of competition by organised cooperation. Because our view of European history is chiefly political, we do not see the constant mutation of society and of thought in the same relief; but we can recognise two great cycles of change, one of the ancient races leading from the primitive ages to the cultured society of the Graeco-Roman world, the other from the semi-barbarism of feudal Christendom to the intellectual, materialistic and civilised society of modern times.

In the East, on the contrary, 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.

Our minds are apt to seize things in the rough and to appreciate only what stands out in bold external relief; we miss the law of Nature's subtleties and disguises. We can see and fathom to some extent the motives, necessities, process of great revolutions and marked changes and we can consider and put in their right place the brief reactions which only modified without actually preventing the overt realisation of new ideas. We can see for instance that the Sullan restoration of Roman oligarchy, the Stuart restoration in England or the brief return of monarchy in France with the Bourbons were no real restorations, but a momentary damming of the tide attended with insufficient concessions and forced developments which determined, not a return to the past, but the form and pace of the inevitable revolution. It is more difficult but still possible to appreciate the working of an idea against all obstacles through many centuries; we can comprehend now, for instance, that we must seek the beginnings of the French Revolution, not in Rousseau or Mirabeau or the blundering of Louis XVI, but in movements which date back to the Capet and the Valois, while the precise fact which prepared its tremendous outbreak and victory and determined its form was the defeat of the Calvinistic reformation in France and the absolute triumph of the monarchical system over the nobility and the bourgeoisie in the reigns of Louis XIII and Louis XIV. That double victory determined the destruction of the monarchy in France, the downfall of the Church and, by the failure of the nobles to lead faithfully the liberal cause whether in religion or politics, the disappearance of aristocracy.

But Nature has still more subtle and disguised movements in her dealings with men by which she leads them to change without their knowing that they have changed. It is because she has employed chiefly this method in the vast masses of the East that the conservative habit of mind is so much stronger there than in the West. It is able to nourish the illusion that it has not changed, that it is immovably faithful to the ideas of remote forefathers, to their religion, their traditions, their institutions, their social ideals, that it has preserved either a divine or an animal immobility both in thought and in the routine of life and has been free from the human law of mutation by which man and his social organisations must either progress or degenerate but can in no case maintain themselves unchanged against

the attack of Time. Buddhism has come and gone and the Hindu still professes to belong to the Vedic religion held and practised by his Aryan forefathers; he calls his creed the Aryan dharma, the eternal religion. It is only when we look close that we see the magnitude of the illusion. Buddha has gone out of India indeed, but Buddhism remains; it has stamped its giant impress on the spirit of the national religion, leaving the forms to be determined by the Tantricism with which itself had made alliance and some sort of fusion in its middle growth; what it destroyed no man has been able to restore, what it left no man has been able to destroy. As a matter of fact, the double cycle which India has described from the early Vedic times to India of Buddha and the philosophers and again from Buddha to the time of the European irruption was in its own way as vast in change religious, social, cultural, even political and administrative as the double cycle of Europe; but because it preserved old names for new things, old formulas for new methods and old coverings for new institutions and because the change was always marked in the internal but quiet and unobtrusive in the external, we have been able to create and preserve the fiction of the unchanging East. There has also been this result that while the European conservative has learned the law of change in human society, knows that he must move and quarrels with the progressist only over the right pace and the exact direction, the Eastern or rather the Indian conservative still imagines that stability may be the true law of mortal being, practises a sort of Yogic *āsana* on the flood of Time and because he does not move himself, thinks — for he keeps his eyes shut and is not in the habit of watching the banks — that he can prevent the stream also from moving on.

This conservative principle has its advantages even as rapid progress has its vices and its perils. It helps towards the preservation of a fundamental continuity which makes for the longevity of civilisations and the persistence of what was valuable in humanity's past. So, in India, if religion has changed immensely its form and temperament, the religious spirit has been really eternal, the principle of spiritual discipline is the same as in the earliest times, the fundamental spiritual truths have been preserved and even enriched in their contents and the very forms can all be traced back through their mutations to the seed of the Veda. On the other hand this habit of mind leads to the accumulation of a great mass of accretions which were once valuable but have lost their virtue and to the heaping up of dead forms and shibboleths which no longer correspond to any vital truth nor have any understood and helpful significance. All this putrid waste of the past is held to be too sacred to be touched by any profane hand and yet it chokes up the streams of the national life or corrupts its waters. And if no successful process of purification takes place, a state of general ill-health in the social body supervenes in which the principle of conservation becomes the cause of dissolution.

The present era of the world is a stage of immense transformations. Not one but many radical ideas are at work in the mind of humanity and agitate its life with

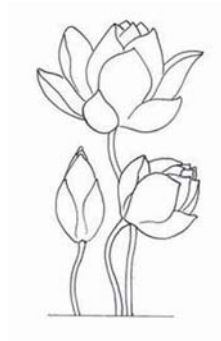
a vehement seeking and effort at change; and although the centre of the agitation is in progressive Europe, yet the East is being rapidly drawn into this churning of the sea of thought and this breaking up of old ideas and old institutions. No nation or community can any longer remain psychologically cloistered and apart in the unity of the modern world. It may even be said that the future of humanity depends most upon the answer that will be given to the modern riddle of the Sphinx by the East and especially by India, the hoary guardian of the Asiatic idea and its profound spiritual secrets. For the most vital issue of the age is whether the future progress of humanity is to be governed by the modern economic and materialistic mind of the West or by a nobler pragmatism guided, uplifted and enlightened by spiritual culture and knowledge. The West never really succeeded in spiritualising itself and latterly it has been habituated almost exclusively to an action in the external governed by political and economic ideals and necessities; in spite of the reawakening of the religious mind and the growth of a widespread but not yet profound or luminous spiritual and psychical curiosity and seeking, it has to act solely in the things of this world and to solve its problems by mechanical methods and as the thinking political and economic animal, simply because it knows no other standpoint and is accustomed to no other method. On the other hand the East, though it has allowed its spirituality to slumber too much in dead forms, has always been open to profound awakenings and preserves its spiritual capacity intact, even when it is actually inert and uncreative. Therefore the hope of the world lies in the re-arousing in the East of the old spiritual practicality and large and profound vision and power of organisation under the insistent contact of the West and in the flooding out of the light of Asia on the Occident, no longer in forms that are now static, effete, unadaptive, but in new forms stirred, dynamic and effective.

India, the heart of the Orient, has to change as the whole West and the whole East are changing, and it cannot avoid changing in the sense of the problems forced upon it by Europe. The new Orient must necessarily be the result either of some balance and fusion or of some ardent struggle between progressive and conservative ideals and tendencies. If therefore the conservative mind in this country opens itself sufficiently to the necessity of transformation, the resulting culture born of a resurgent India may well bring about a profound modification in the future civilisation of the world. But if it remains shut up in dead fictions, or tries to meet the new needs with the mind of the schoolman and the sophist dealing with words and ideas in the air rather than actual fact and truth and potentiality, or struggles merely to avoid all but a scanty minimum of change, then, since the new ideas cannot fail to realise themselves, the future India will be formed in the crude mould of the Westernised social and political reformer whose mind, barren of original thought and unenlightened by vital experience, can do nothing but reproduce the forms and ideas of Europe and will turn us all into halting apes of the West. Or else, and that perhaps is the best thing that can happen, a new spiritual awakening must arise from the depths

of this vast life that shall this time more successfully include in its scope the great problems of earthly life as well as those of the soul and its transmundane destinies, an awakening that shall ally itself closely with the renascent spiritual seeking of the West and with its yearning for the perfection of the human race. This third and as yet unknown quantity is indeed the force needed throughout the East. For at present we have only two extremes of a conservative immobility and incompetence imprisoned in the shell of past conventions and a progressive force hardly less blind and ineffectual because secondhand and merely imitative of nineteenth-century Europe, with a vague floating mass of uncertainty between. The result is a continual fiasco and inability to evolve anything large, powerful, sure and vital, a drifting in the stream of circumstance, a constant grasping at details and unessentials and failure to reach the heart of the great problems of life which the age is bringing to our doors. Something is needed which tries to be born; but as yet, in the phrase of the Veda, the Mother holds herself compressed in smallness, keeps the Birth concealed within her being and will not give it forth to the Father. When she becomes great in impulse and conception, then we shall see it born.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 133-39)



“THE FORCE IS HERE”

July 7, 1914

Peace, peace upon all the earth. . . .

Not the peace of an unconscious sleep or a self-satisfied inertia; not the peace of a self-forgetful ignorance and a dark, heavy indifference, but the peace of the omnipotent force, the peace of perfect communion, the peace of integral awakening, of the disappearance of all limitation and all darkness. . . .

Why torment oneself and suffer, why this bitter struggle and painful revolt, why this vain violence, why this unconscious, heavy sleep? Awake without fear, appease your conflicts, silence your disputes, open your eyes and your hearts: the Force is there; it is there, divinely pure, luminous, powerful; it is there as a boundless love, a sovereign power, an indisputable reality, an unmixed peace, an uninterrupted beatitude, the Supreme Benediction; it is self-existence, the endless bliss of infinite knowledge . . . and it is something more which cannot yet be told, but which is already at work in the higher worlds beyond thought as the power of sovereign transfiguration, and also in the unconscious depths of Matter as the Irresistible Healer. . . .

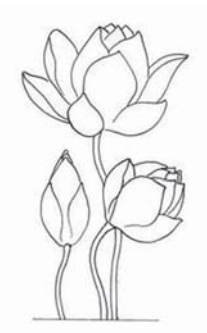
Listen, listen, O thou who wouldst know.

Look, thou who wouldst see, contemplate and live:

The Force is here.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 195)



A CONVERSATION OF 21 DECEMBER 1950

“O Consciousness, immobile and serene, Thou watchest at the confines of the world like a sphinx of eternity. And yet to some Thou confidest Thy secret. These can become Thy sovereign will which chooses without preference, executes without desire.”

The Mother
Prayers and Meditations,
10 November 1914

This immobile Consciousness is the “Mother of Dreams”,¹ the sphinx of eternity who keeps vigil on the confines of the world like an enigma to be solved. This enigma is the problem of our life, the very *raison d’être* of the universe. The problem of our life is to realise the Divine or rather to become once again aware of the Divine who is the Universe, the origin, cause and goal of life.

Those who find the secret of the sphinx of eternity become that active and creative Power.

To choose without preference and execute without desire is the great difficulty at the very root of the development of true consciousness and self-control. To choose in this sense means to see what is true and bring it into existence; and to choose thus, without the least personal bias for any thing, any person, action, circumstance, is exactly what is most difficult for an ordinary human being. Yet one must learn to act without any preference, free from all attractions and likings, taking one’s stand solely on the Truth which guides. And having chosen in accordance with the Truth the necessary action, one must carry it out without any desire.

If you observe yourself attentively, you will see that before acting you need an inner impetus, something which pushes you. In the ordinary man this impetus is generally desire. This desire ought to be replaced by a clear, precise, constant vision of the Truth.

Some call this the Voice of God or the Will of God. The true meaning of these words has been falsified, so I prefer to speak of “the Truth”, though this is but a very limited aspect of That which we cannot name but which is the Source and the Goal of all existence. I deliberately do not use the word God because religions have given this name to an all-powerful being who is other than his creation and outside it. This is not correct.

1. “The Mother of Dreams”, a poem by Sri Aurobindo.

However, on the physical plane the difference is obvious. For we are yet all that we no longer want to be, and He, He is all that we want to become.

How can we know what the divine Will is?

One does not know it, one feels it. And in order to feel it one must will with such an intensity, such sincerity, that every obstacle disappears. As long as you have a preference, a desire, an attraction, a liking, all these veil the Truth from you. Hence, the first thing to do is to try to master, govern, correct all the movements of your consciousness and eliminate those which cannot be changed until all becomes a perfect and permanent expression of the Truth.

And even to will this is not enough, for very often one forgets to will it.

What is necessary is an aspiration which burns in the being like a constant fire, and every time you have a desire, a preference, an attraction it must be thrown into this fire. If you do this persistently, you will see that a little gleam of true consciousness begins to dawn in your ordinary consciousness. At first it will be faint, very far behind all the din of desires, preferences, attractions, likings. But you must go behind all this and find that true consciousness, all calm, tranquil, almost silent.

Those who are in contact with the true consciousness see all the possibilities at the same time and may deliberately choose even the most unfavourable, if necessary. But to reach this point, you must go a long way.

Should preferences be neutralised or forgotten?

One should not have them!

When the mind becomes silent, when it stops judging, pushing itself forward with its so-called knowledge, one begins to solve the problem of life. One must refrain from judging, for the mind is only an instrument of action, not an instrument of true knowledge — true knowledge comes from elsewhere.

If one refrained from judging, one would arrive at an ever more precise knowledge of the Truth and nine-tenths of the world's misery would disappear.

The great disorder in the world would to a large extent be neutralised if the mind could admit that it does not know.

“When we have passed beyond enjoyings, we shall have Bliss. Desire was the helper, Desire is the bar.”

Sri Aurobindo,
Thoughts and Glimpses,
(SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 377)

. . . according to the stage where you are.

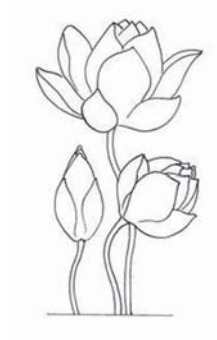
Naturally, I speak to those who sincerely want to become conscious of their true truth and to express it in their life. . . . I think this holds true for all who are here.

And I tell the teachers that they must teach more and more in accordance with the Truth; for if we have a school here, it is in order that it be different from the millions of schools in the world; it is to give the children a chance to distinguish between ordinary life and the divine life, the life of truth — to see things in a different way. It is useless to want to repeat here the ordinary life. The teacher's mission is to open the eyes of the children to something which they will not find anywhere else.

21 December 1950

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1950-1951, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 4, pp. 1-3)



THE SPHINX



'Oedipus and the Sphinx'

(*About the painting on the Gymnastics Competition Award Card of the J.S.A.S.A., the Department of Physical Education.*)

The Riddle of the World

If you can solve it, you will be immortal, but if you fail you will perish.

(M12: p. 289)

*

The serene and immobile consciousness watches at the boundaries of the world as a Sphinx of eternity and yet to some it gives out its secret.

We have, therefore, the certitude that what has to be done will be done, and that our present individual being is really called upon to collaborate in this glorious victory, in this new manifestation.

11-12 November 1954

(M15: 93)

*

The Writer:

With winged words I sought to capture the beauty and the truth that throb in our mortality. This panorama of creation that lies extended before our eyes — men and creatures, beings and things, scenes and happenings — and the other one equally extended in our feelings and perceptions, in our consciousness, they make a mysterious web, a Daedalus' complex. They cast their spell upon me and I heard their voice calling me to know, understand and seize, a voice sweeter and more compelling than any Aegean siren could command. The ring of that voice I sought to give to my words.

I aimed at uttering the mystery of things, I aimed at making the Sphinx speak out. What lies hidden, what lies sealed, what moves from its secrecy suns and stars and hearts, that I endeavoured to unveil and present in the broad light of day. The labour of things, mundane or supra-mundane, is a dumb and even confused pantomime; I offered speech and consciousness to them. Words appeared to me a most marvellous instrument, the instrument *par excellence*. It has just the consistency to embody and to express, neither so fluid as to be vague, nor so concrete as to be opaque. The word pertains to two worlds at once. It is of the material world and therefore can give a form of matter: and it is sufficiently immaterial to be in contact with subtle things, forces and vibrations, principles and ideas. It can materialise the immaterial, embody the disembodied; and above all, it can give the meaning of things, the precise sense enclosed in a form.

(M12: 477-78;

From the Mother's play, 'The Great Secret'.

The part of the Writer was written in collaboration with Nolini.)

*

Then the other arose and met that spirit robust,
 Who laboured; she now grew a shade who must
 Fade wholly away, yet to her fellow cried,
 "I pass, for thou hast laboured well and wide.
 Thou thinkest term and end for thee are not;
 But though thy pride is great, thou hast forgot
 The Sphinx that waits for man beside the way.
 All questions thou mayst answer, but one day
 Her question shall await thee. That reply,
 As all we must; for they who cannot, die.
 She slays them and their mangled bodies lie
 Upon the highways of eternity.
 Therefore, if thou wouldst live, know first this thing,
 Who thou art in this dungeon labouring."

(S2: 205;

From the poem, 'A Vision of Science')

*

I saw that a falsehood was planted deep
 At the very root of things
 Where the grey Sphinx guards God's riddle sleep
 On the Dragon's outspread wings.

(S2: 536;

From the poem, 'A God's Labour')

*

Always he met a veiled and seeking Force,
 An exiled goddess building mimic heavens,
 A Sphinx whose eyes look up to a hidden Sun.

(S33: 191;

Savitri, Bk II, Canto VI)

*

Above him he saw the flaming Hierarchies,
 The wings that fold around created Space,
 The sun-eyed Guardians and the golden Sphinx
 And the tiered planes and the immutable Lords.
 A wisdom waiting on Omniscience

Sat voiceless in a vast passivity;
 It judged not, measured not, nor strove to know,
 But listened for the veiled all-seeing Thought
 And the burden of a calm transcendent Voice.

(S33: 300;
Savitri, Bk II, Canto XV)

*

The eternal Darkness seeks him with her hands,
 Inscrutable Energies drive him and deceive,
 Immense implacable deities oppose.
 An inert Soul and a somnambulist Force
 Have made a world estranged from life and thought;
 The Dragon of the dark foundations keeps
 Unalterable the law of Chance and Death;
 On his long way through Time and Circumstance
 The grey-hued riddling nether shadow-Sphinx,
 Her dreadful paws upon the swallowing sands,
 Awaits him armed with the soul-slaying word:
 Across his path sits the dim camp of Night.

(S33: 336;
Savitri, Bk III, Canto IV)

*

His spirit's stature transcending pain and bliss,
 He fronts evil and good with calm and equal eyes.
 He too must grapple with the riddling Sphinx
 And plunge into her long obscurity.

(S34: 449;
Savitri, Bk VI, Canto II)

*

Chance, that vague shadow of an infinite possibility, must be banished from the dictionary of our perceptions; for of chance we can make nothing, because it is nothing. Chance does not at all exist; it is only a word by which we cover and excuse our own ignorance. Science excludes it from the actual process of physical law; everything there is determined by fixed cause and relation. But when it comes to ask why these relations exist and not others, why a particular cause is allied to a

particular effect, it finds that it knows nothing whatever about the matter; every actualised possibility supposes a number of other possibilities that have not actualised but conceivably might have, and it is convenient then to say that Chance or at most a dominant probability determines all actual happening, the chance of evolution, the stumblings of a groping inconscient energy which somehow finds out some good enough way and fixes itself into a repetition of the process. If Inconscience can do the works of intelligence, it may not be impossible that chaotic Chance should create a universe of law! But this is only a reading of our own ignorance into the workings of the universe, — just as prescientific man read into the workings of physical law the caprices of the gods or any other name for a sportive Chance whether undivine or dressed in divine glories, whether credited with a pliant flexibility to the prayers and bribes of man or presented with an immutable Sphinx face of stone, — but names only in fact for his own ignorance.

(S13: 333-34)

*

The Sphinx is a symbol of the eternal quest that can only be answered by the secret knowledge.

(S30: 182)

*

All our existence depends on that Existence, it is that which is evolving in us; we are a being of that Existence, a state of consciousness of that Consciousness, an energy of that conscious Energy, a will-to-delight of being, delight of consciousness, delight of energy born of that Delight: this is the root principle of our existence. But our surface formulation of these things is not that, it is a mistranslation into the terms of the Ignorance. Our I is not that spiritual being which can look on the Divine Existence and say, “That am I”; our mentality is not that spiritual consciousness; our will is not that force of consciousness; our pain and pleasure, even our highest joys and ecstasies are not that delight of being. On the surface we are still an ego figuring self, an ignorance turning into knowledge, a will labouring towards true force, a desire seeking for the delight of existence. To become ourselves by exceeding ourselves, — so we may turn the inspired phrases of a half-blind seer who knew not the self of which he spoke, — is the difficult and dangerous necessity, the cross surmounted by an invisible crown which is imposed on us, the riddle of the true nature of his being proposed to man by the dark Sphinx of the Inconscience below and from within and above by the luminous veiled Sphinx of the infinite Consciousness and eternal Wisdom confronting him as an inscrutable divine Maya. To exceed ego and be our true self, to be aware of our real being, to possess it, to possess a real delight

of being, is therefore the ultimate meaning of our life here; it is the concealed sense of our individual and terrestrial existence.

(S22: 712-13)

*

Thursday Jan 27th.

Today a great revival. A vertiginous rapidity of progress in many directions. The attack of obscurity, resistance of the universal inconstancy, refusal of the universal inertia, obstruction and conservatism of the material negation are beginning to lessen and even where they persist and intervene, cannot resist the progress. The past effects may still continue for a time, the future is not theirs. The four Powers that resisted now appear more clearly, — the Dragon of the nether foundations who preserves the old Law intact till the will of the Supreme is manifested, the Sphinx of the eternal questioning, the Night of the eternal negation, the Rock (stone Purusha, inert Shiva) of the eternal inertia. Still they are there, but a first victory has been assured against them.

(S11: 1261)

*

I would be obliged if you would tell me your opinion of the apostrophe of Caesar to the Sphinx in Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra. I find it very fine, but Dilip says he is not thrilled by it.

I am not thrilled by the speech either; it is a creation of the intellect, eloquent and on the surface. I do not see how you are going to manufacture a mystic out of Shaw with these scanty materials: he has a very clear and incisive intelligence, independent and unconventional rather than original and creative, but beyond the intellect he does not go. The speculative imaginations of which you speak and the feelings in the aesthetic vital which accompany them sometimes are common enough in men with some reach of mind, but they do not constitute either a mystic feeling or a mystic experience.

6 May 1932

(S27: 538)

*

[From Bernard Shaw's play *Caesar and Cleopatra*:]

[. . . The noise of the fugitives dies away. Dead silence. Suspense. Then the

blackness and stillness breaks softly into silver mist and strange airs as the windswept harp of Memnon plays at the dawning of the moon. It rises full over the desert; and a vast horizon comes into relief, broken by a huge shape which soon reveals itself in the spreading radiance as a Sphinx pedestalled on the sands. The light still clears, until the upraised eyes of the image are distinguished looking straight forward and upward in infinite fearless vigil, and a mass of colour between its great paws defines itself as a heap of red poppies on which a girl lies motionless, her silken vest heaving gently and regularly with the breathing of a dreamless sleeper, and her braided hair glittering in a shaft of moonlight like a bird's wing.

Suddenly there comes from afar a vaguely fearful sound [it might be the bellow of a Minotaur softened by great distance] and Memnon's music stops. Silence: then a few faint high-ringing trumpet notes. Then silence again. Then a man comes from the south with stealing steps, ravished by the mystery of the night, all wonder, and halts, lost in contemplation, opposite the left flank of the Sphinx, whose bosom, with its burden, is hidden from him by its massive shoulder.]

THE MAN:

Hail, Sphinx: salutation from Julius Caesar! I have wandered in many lands, seeking the lost regions from which my birth into this world exiled me, and the company of creatures such as I myself. I have found flocks and pastures, men and cities, but no other Caesar, no air native to me, no man kindred to me, none who can do my day's deed, and think my night's thought. In the little world yonder, Sphinx, my place is as high as yours in this great desert; only I wander, and you sit still; I conquer, and you endure; I work and wonder, you watch and wait; I look up and am dazzled, look down and am darkened, look round and am puzzled, whilst your eyes never turn from looking out — out of the world — to the lost region — the home from which we have strayed. Sphinx, you and I, strangers to the race of men, are no strangers to one another: have I not been conscious of you and of this place since I was born? Rome is a madman's dream: this is my Reality. These starry lamps of yours I have seen from afar in Gaul, in Britain, in Spain, in Thessaly, signalling great secrets to some eternal sentinel below, whose post I never could find. And here at last is their sentinel — an image of the constant and immortal part of my life, silent, full of thoughts, alone in the silver desert. Sphinx, Sphinx: I have climbed mountains at night to hear in the distance the stealthy footfall of the winds that chase your sands in forbidden play — our invisible children, O Sphinx, laughing in whispers. My way hither was the way of destiny; for I am he of whose genius you are the symbol: part brute, part woman, and part God — nothing of man in me at all. Have I read your riddle, Sphinx?

A DAY OF SUPRA-INTELLECTUAL LIGHT

Once again in the year came November 24, the day of *darshan* when people in their thousands gathered in Pondicherry to stand before Sri Aurobindo and before the Mother with whose radiant collaboration his world-work is done. February 21, April 24 and August 15 had been the other three days. Such occasions are most precious, for they serve periodically to rivet attention on the presence, in our midst, of a supra-intellectual light that can lead man to a divine fulfilment.

The typically modern mind is loth to admit any supra-intellectual light. Not that it has no sense of psychological mysteries and profundities. The subconscious, the “unconscious” — a domain beyond the intelligence and its neat patterns — a large mysterious region of strange urges and fantasies indicating some sort of racial commonalty — a basic more-than-individual wideness of desire and symbol and myth: this is the foundation of modern psychology. But there is little here of anything divine, anything perfect. An original or primitive chaos is this — crudely colourful and dynamic — out of which a precarious cosmos seems to emerge in our consciousness. But the fact that there is recognised a psychological “beyond” is of capital importance. Once we grant a secret storehouse whence the conscious mind is fed, we open up possibilities of finding not only the subconscious wideness but also some superconscious infinity. Already, side by side with the Freudian and Jungian explorations below the human mind’s small focus of selfhood, there has arisen a study of what is called the para-conscious: extra-sensory powers like telepathy and clairvoyance and precognition. This study suggests an actual superhuman mind-world independent of physical space and time. The path, therefore, is laid open for a yet more profound search, and the moment seems prepared for a comeback of the ancient verities — Inmost Soul, Cosmic Consciousness, Transcendental Divinity.

The Modern Mind and Mysticism

Yes, the path is laid open, but the modern mind does not easily turn its eyes in the direction of mysticism. There are three reasons for this. First, the obsession of the nineteenth century’s materialism still lingers subtly like an obstructive ghost, and is not sufficiently counteracted by the new domain of the subconscious which keeps our look fixed downward on some dark fantastically peopled sea of being on whose surface the physical mentality floats. So long as the truly spiritual is not revealed, so long as only a bewildering Below is seen and no illuminating Above, the materialist tendency is likely to continue. The second reason is the fascination of the new discovery. Such amazing vistas are disclosed that there is a move to find there the explanation of all things — even those that seem the most idealistic and the least

akin to the welter of the subconscious. Art, religion, morality — everything suggestive of some hidden flawlessness of beauty, truth and goodness is sought to be interpreted in terms of that welter. Art with its intimation of heavenly felicity becomes a camouflaged sexual desire, surviving from infancy, of returning to the warmth and security of the mother's womb, or else a development from the curious pleasure the child takes in producing the diverse forms of its own faeces. Religion becomes an imaginative compensation for thwarted instincts of sex and murder or a sublimated inability to outgrow the child's awed attitude towards its father or an escape-mechanism set up because of failure to face reality. Morality becomes merely a half-conscious half-unconscious fixation in us of the customs and regulations found by ancestral society to be convenient, a fixation coloured also by family "taboos" during our infancy leading to the "guilt" of hostility towards the parents and of forbidden sexual love for the mother or the father. Every chance of reducing to the lowest possible terms the finest features of life is exploited. Of course, a vague uneasiness yet remains — there is a sheer leap upwards, so to speak, in art, religion and morality, a feeling of the absolute and the perfect, a cry of something eternal within them which does not fit into the Freudian or even the Jungian scheme. But here comes the third reason why the modern mind is loth to be mystical in spite of several fresh signs of the para-conscious and the supra-intellectual, apart from the age-old idealism implicit in all art, religion and morality. These signs appear to be so much like changing cloud-shapes — uncertain, tenuous, remote. Nothing is there to lay hands on in a concrete manner. The brute manifestations or the subtle transmutations of the libido are evident. Where is the direct and convincing testimony to mysticism?

Here and there a man lives who has an intense ethical drive coupled with religious faith, and some of those who are struck by his passion for righteousness argue their way mentally to a Godhead by whose inspiration the drive towards moral absolutes appears to be born. The argument is sound enough, but the modern milieu does not allow it to reinforce sufficiently the inkling that has always been there of a divine Law sought through morality. So the argument stays ineffective. When we are confronted with the mystics in the old tradition, there are bound to be a few who, because of the overwhelming concreteness here of spiritual revelation with its spontaneous consequences of deep purity and vast pity, respond to them with a direct conviction that needs no argument. But these traditional mystics are other-worldly aspirants, travellers to some Nirvana or supra-terrestrial Heaven. They are, at best, looked upon by the typical modern mind as great but misguided visionaries, wonderful victims of holy hallucinations. A grievous error is this, and far more potentiality of even life-building is present in these mystics than in all our pseudo-scientific psychologists. But a certain truth also is wrapped up in the error, for the life-building itself that the traditional mystics effect is not for the sake of an absolute value inherent in life, not for a Godhead who will make earth the scene of

His own plenary manifestation: it is done as a grand preparation for what is ever above earth and what has ultimately to be reached by casting away life. Lacking in the splendid message of the traditional mystics is a full justification of the labour of history, the travail of time: a grip is wanting on the final truth within “our proud and angry dust” as well as on all that colourful confusion of the subconscious below our intelligence’s little perch. And the lacking justification, the wanting grip signify much more to the modern mind than it ever did in the past. The modern mind is heir to a century of extreme materialism: however it may outgrow or attenuate or transpose its legacy, a constant laying of weight upon this-worldliness, upon fulfilment here and now, cannot any longer be avoided. No mysticism that strains in the end to a supra-terrestrial consummation will go truly home today. Even if a master mystic is found with credentials enough to prove the existence of God and the possibility of realising the Infinite and the Eternal, he will not be followed wholeheartedly or considered satisfying for our needs, unless he can give earth a new force which will take up all our human endeavour and bring it sovereign fruition in terms of the Here and Now. Can the Heaven about which the Saints talk and which may even be unveiled to our inward gaze be brought down to create a luminous Kingdom of God amongst us? That is the crucial question.

Sri Aurobindo’s Message and Mission

To this question Sri Aurobindo gives an affirmative answer. And his answer is even more affirmative than the modern mind expects. For, this mind insists only on a change of the centre of gravity, as it were, a different orientation to the earth’s problem than that of even the most practical of the old Saints and Yogis, so that man’s outer being may not suffer the least neglect nor be baulked of rich development. Sri Aurobindo does much more than put full emphasis on the outer being’s possibilities and rights: he offers it a growth that will stagger the most this-worldly of progressives. In the special power of the Spirit, which he calls Supermind or Gnosis, he has discovered the creative and archetypal Truth-Consciousness whose gradual and resisted manifestation in a world with a seemingly undivine or anti-divine starting-point constitutes evolutionary nature. The Truth-Consciousness contains a divine mental, a divine vital, a divine physical: in short, a supreme original of every part of our complex being. The soul in us is a delegate of that Truth-Consciousness, and when it awakens, aspires to its origin and comes forth to influence and permeate mind, life-force and body it renders possible not just a partial enlightenment and purification of them but a total transformation, an entire divinisation by the descent of their archetypes from the Supermind. The Aurobindonian Yoga has some affinity to the philosophical vision of Plato who spoke of a realm of perfect “ideas” whose broken reflexes are the phenomenal world; it has a yet greater affinity to the spiritual realisation, in Upanishadic India, of the three sheaths of our being — the outer gross, the inner subtle and the higher causal, the last-named a flawless and

everlasting vehicle in which the functionings of the other two have their divine counterparts. But never before has philosopher or mystic spoken of the complete descent of the archetypal reality, the causal sheath, into the forms of gross as well as subtle nature and the consequent perfection of them in a manner beyond the rosiest dream of psychologist, biologist or physical-culturist. By a conscious possession of the Supermind, such as never was achieved in the past of mysticism, Sri Aurobindo found the integral intention and dynamic of the creative Infinite by which even our physical substance will in the long run admit a radical change and grow into the light, the rapture, the potency, the immortality of the Divine.

For nearly forty years Sri Aurobindo has worked in Pondicherry, taking up into his widening experience all that traditional mysticism has to give and elaborating in his Ashram of disciples who now number seven hundred his new Yoga that holds the prospect of man's utter fulfilment. When we say "utter" we mean the fulfilment not only of the individual man but also of man in his collectivity. Sri Aurobindo's aim is not the production of a few dazzling specimens of *homo supramentalis*. What he is doing is a rapid deliberate achievement of nature's own goal of evolution. Matter brings forth the Life involved in it; Life manifests the Mind that is latent; Mind is in travail of the secret supramental perfection that shall transform our whole existence as a race. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is for the creation of a new species: it is the effectuation of the next collective step beyond man. Of course the entire human race cannot be supramentalised: in fact, no evolutionary step of nature's affects all the members of the preceding stage, an expanding nucleus is formed of the next stage and a general progressive influence exerted on the rest. This is the character of evolution, and Sri Aurobindo is most eminently evolutive. His effort, therefore, satisfies not only the demand of the modern mind for earth-life's utmost development: it satisfies also the demand, no less modern, for the advancement of society, for collective progress, for a perfected civic life, for an ideal State. By a commonalty of supramental fulfilment which removes the impression of all freakishness, however grandiose, attending on purely individual and isolated triumphs of the Spirit, the Aurobindonian mysticism "caps, crowns and clinches" the ultra-concreteness of that all-round power of it which can marry the Spirit's empyrean to the abysm of Matter.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

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‘THEIR EARTHLY FOOD’ — THE MOTHER’S KITCHEN

(Continued from the issue of October 2020)

A few reminiscences and anecdotes have been added to conclude the report.

Some Reminiscences

Under this heading we present reminiscences and also anecdotes regarding food for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo

Saturday (30 May 1903) Cashmere, Srinagar

In the morning Sardesai dropped in and we went together to Dhond, where I arranged with Rajaram to mess with him; the dinner consisted of the usual Brahminic course, dal & rice, two chupatties with potatoes & greens and amthi, — the whole to be seasoned liberally by a great square of clarified butter at one side of the tray. Fortunately the dishes were not very pungent and, with this allowance, I have made myself sufficiently adaptable to be a Brahmin with the Brahmins.

(Sri Aurobindo, Autobiographical Notes, p. 16)

The following quotations are from *Reminiscences and Anecdotes of Sri Aurobindo* compiled by M. P. Pandit.

I hope your dinner at Dewas did not turn out like my first taste of Maratha cookery — when for some reason my dinner was *non est* and somebody went to my neighbour, a Maratha Professor, for food. I took one mouthful and only one. O God! Sudden fire in the mouth could not have been more surprising. Enough to bring down the whole of London in one wild agonising swoop of flame! (p. 96)

*

I fasted twice: once in Alipore jail for ten days and another time in Pondicherry for twenty-three days. At Alipore I was in full yogic activity and I was not taking any food, and was throwing it away in the bucket. Of course, the

Superintendent did not know it, only two warders knew about it and they informed others saying, "The gentleman must be ill; he will not live long." Though my physical strength was diminishing I was able to raise a pail of water above my head which I could not do ordinarily.

At Pondicherry, while fasting I was in full mental and vital vigour. I was even walking eight hours a day and not feeling tired at all. (p. 53)

*

When I broke the fast, then also I did not observe the usual rule of people on long fasts, of beginning with a little food and so on. I began again with the same quantity as I used to take before. (p. 54)

*

I gave up meat-diet and found a great feeling of lightness and purification of the system. Meat is a *rajasic* food. Vivekananda recommends it to the Indians. It gives a certain force and energy in the physical. It was for that the *Kshatriyas* did not give up meat in India. From *tamas* you can pass to *rajas* and Vivekananda was not quite wrong. (p. 39)

*

Once in Calcutta I lived for a long time on rice and banana. It is a very good food. (*Ibid.*)

*

There is the *dravyaguna*. The particular nature of the food, as well as fixed ideas in our beings. But the removal of the idea from the mind alone does not free you from it. You must become conscious of the same idea in your vital being and remove it from there as well. The vital also has strong likes and dislikes like that. I have removed all such, fixed ideas from my being down to the physico-vital. And can now take any food whether hot or spiced, good or bad; I can now take the essential *rasa* out of any and every kind of food. In my case this desire for and the antipathy to certain kinds of food is still there in the atoms of my physical being. If that can be removed, then it may be possible that even a cup of poison will not affect me. (p. 58)

A. B. Purani

All the references here are from *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* (1st edition).

At Baroda (year 1895)

The routine of his daily life was as follows:

After morning tea Sri Aurobindo used to write poetry and continue up to 10 o'clock. Bath between 10 and 11 o'clock. Lunch at 11 o'clock — a cigar would be by his side even while he ate. He used to read journals while taking his meals. He took less of rice and more of bread. Once a day there was meat or fish.

There were intervals when he took to complete vegetarian diet. He was indifferent to taste. He found the Marathi food too hot (with chillies) and the Gujarati food too rich in ghee. Later, once he had a dinner at Tilak's consisting of rice, puri, legume (dal) and vegetables. He liked it for its "Spartan simplicity". (p. 63)

*

In those days he did not take any cooked food in the evening but used to take fruit — mostly plantains — and a cup of milk. This austere kind of life continued to the day he left Baroda (i.e. 1906).

Sri Aurobindo was very simple in his mode of living. He was not fastidious in his tastes. He did not care much for food or dress because he never attached any importance to them. He never visited the market for his clothes. At home he dressed in plain white *sadara* and *dhoti* and outside invariably in white drill suits. He never slept on a soft cotton bed — as most of us do — but on a bed of coir — coconut fibres — on which was spread a Malabargrass mat which served as a bedsheet. (p. 81)

*

He used to be absorbed in reading to the extent that he was at times oblivious of things around him. One evening the servant brought his meal and put the dishes on the table and informed him: "*Saab, khana rakha hai*" — "Master, the meal is served." He simply said, "*Achcha*" — "All right," without even moving his head. After about an hour the servant returned to remove the dishes and found to his surprise the dishes untouched on the table! He dared not disturb his master and so quietly came to me and told me about it. I had to go to his room and remind him of the waiting meal. He gave a smile, went to the table and finished his meal in a short time and resumed his reading. (A statement by S. J. R. N. Patkar, Advocate, Baroda, pp.73-74)

Champaklal

All the references here are from the book *Champaklal Speaks*.

Fulfilments

In my boyhood days whenever I read and thought about Sri Ramakrishna I felt a strong wish that I must be always close to a great spiritual personality like him. I had heard of Sri Aurobindo at that time but always discounted the possibility of closeness to him as I thought he was rather 'modern'. Years later when I came here to stay, things started happening. At that time permission was necessary to attend the Evening Talks. I have told you how happily it got arranged.

One day Sri Aurobindo suddenly stopped coming downstairs. Mother sent word to Bijoy to send Sri Aurobindo's food upstairs but asked him not to expect the dish back. Of her own accord she gave the dish to me as my lunch, after Sri Aurobindo had finished. And that continued as long as we were in Library House. (p. 63)

Sri Aurobindo's Dilemma

At that time there was no frigidaire with us. Mother had got a small wooden box made for me. A tumblerful of water was kept in a vessel which was put in this box and ice was placed in the vessel. Rajangam used to fetch the ice from the factory.

When Mother was ill I used to cool water in this way, pour it into a thermos flask and keep it ready for Sri Aurobindo to take it to Mother when he came to see her.

One day we had a new flask with a different kind of porcelain cup at the top. Sri Aurobindo took the flask as usual, but came out almost immediately and asked: "How to open this?" I showed him how to do it. The cup came out easily. He seemed surprised at this and went back with the flask, happy. (p. 84)

*

This was in the days Sri Aurobindo had his dinner around midnight.

After finishing the correspondence work in the salon Sri Aurobindo would go for his bath and Mother would retire after laying out his dinner on a table in her former room (the easternmost room of Meditation House; later Sri Aurobindo's bathroom and after his passing, my room). After his bath he came there for his dinner. While Sri Aurobindo ate I sat in the 'long passage'.

One day he came out in the middle of his meal and said: “Champaklal, come in.” I was wondering why he called me but followed him. Once inside, he said: “You know, this fan was steady; now it is rotating.” I did not know how to make it steady as I had not touched it before, nor had I ever used an electric fan. However, I observed it carefully and saw a button jutting out. Spontaneously my hand went there and I pressed the button and the fan stopped rotating.

Sri Aurobindo: “Oh, as simple as that!”

I was truly touched by his childlike simplicity. (pp. 84-85)

*

Sri Aurobindo was having his lunch. On seeing a bowl on the table, he asked me: “What is it?”

C: “Lemon pickles.”

Sri Aurobindo: “How is it to be taken? When is it to be taken?” I explained. Then he started taking it along with the vegetable.

At times he would ask what day of the week it was! When the answer was given, he would exclaim: “Ah . . . ah!” (p. 167)

*

The Mother asked me to lie down near Sri Aurobindo’s chair in the ‘long passage’ while she was taking her lunch in her room. (Sri Aurobindo’s chair is still in the same place. Mother called the room outside Sri Aurobindo’s room the ‘long passage’. . . .)

After Mother finished her lunch, she would come out and pass her apron three or four times over me as I lay on the floor, from one end of my body to the other. And when she would finally spread the apron over me, I would get up and she would give a big smile. Thereafter I would go into her room and take her spoons and forks to my room in Library House to wash. (p. 87)

*

(Before the accident in 1938)

In the salon, often till late in the night, Mother and Sri Aurobindo replied to letters from sadhaks. Then Mother retired and Sri Aurobindo went for his bath. Before retiring Mother would keep his dinner ready in that corner room. At the same time I would bring tea, milk and soup from my room and keep them also there for Sri Aurobindo’s dinner. While he ate, I cleaned and wiped the

bathroom; and after he finished I carried the dishes to my room in Library House for cleaning. (p. 101)

Sri Aurobindo: "Is Mother still in trance?"

C: "Yes."

Mother came at 12.34 at night for Sri Aurobindo's dinner. She informed him that she would not go downstairs today. Both Sri Aurobindo and Mother asked me to inform the people waiting for her that she was not going to come down. I did accordingly.

Things happened this way now and then. (p. 168)

*

It was 12.40 at night when Mother came to Sri Aurobindo's room, talked to him and went away. She came back at 12.50 and told me, "I suppose everyone must have gone. I don't think they are waiting for me."

I did not say anything. For I was surprised by Mother's statement. Surely people waiting for her would not just go away.

Then Mother went out, sent word downstairs asking people to go, and came back for Sri Aurobindo's dinner which started at 12.52 a.m. and lasted till 1.15 a.m. (p. 169)

*

Sri Aurobindo used to take a pastille after finishing his food. These pastilles came from France. But during war-time they were prepared here by Sujata according to the formula given by Pavitra. Sri Aurobindo used to take the pastille at different times. They were kept in a small square silver box. I would open the box, keep the lid in my hand and place the box in Mother's hands. She would stretch her hand to Sri Aurobindo. Today however Mother took one pastille from the box and put it in her own mouth instead of passing it to Sri Aurobindo. He looked at me and Mother, smiling. Suddenly Mother remembered and said, "Sorry." More than the word was her expression which was always worth observing and enjoying. (p. 177)

*

Mother told me: "For the last two days I have not been able to have food for want of time. Today also I could not. I want to eat now. Go and inform the

people that I won’t open the door before 1.30 p.m.” Accordingly, I went and informed the people.

This is typical of how things were going on in those days. (p. 178)

*

Nowadays Sri Aurobindo’s time for lunch is earlier than before. Today it was 11 a.m. when Mother came — very unusual. She brought with her one small dish with a small bowl on it. Some bread slices and a knife.

I started serving Sri Aurobindo. Mother sat on his cot — just in front of his table. She applied something to the bread. And as she was doing it, she told me: “Today I have no time to have food there. I shall have it here.” I said: “Yes, Mother, very good.” Sri Aurobindo smiled.

This was the first and the last time we saw them having food together. It was a rare event — from 11 to 11.29 a.m. (p. 209)

*

Dr. Agarwal wanted to treat Sri Aurobindo’s eyes. “You say you want to help Sri Aurobindo. Do you really think anybody can help him? As far as I know, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother avoid any help from doctors, as much as possible. You know that nowadays he spends most of his time on his cot. Only for a little while he sits in the chair nearby. He walks for hardly five to seven minutes, twice a day. And the interesting thing is that in spite of so little movement he is able to digest the food he takes; and that quantity of food is as much as any young man would normally take. His ways of working are quite different. Even at the time of the accident he took external help only to the extent he considered necessary. On occasions he would not do even what the doctor asked him to do; for example, he refused to tie a bandage on his leg. He knows perfectly well what to do or not to do and when.”

Later I narrated to Sri Aurobindo what I had said to Agarwal. Sri Aurobindo smiled and said: “You are right.” (p. 161)

M. P. Pandit

When Sri Aurobindo was in the Guest House, one day somebody had forgotten to put salt in one of the preparations. When the whole meal was over and the boys complained that there was no salt, one of them turned to Sri Aurobindo and asked, “How is it, Sir, you did not say that there was no salt?” He replied, “There is a Rasa in food without salt.”

(*An Early Chapter in The Mother’s Life*, p. 181)

Pranab

Many began sending Mother Swiss chocolates when the rumour became current that Mother was fond of chocolate. But in truth, Mother did not take any chocolate at all.

Mother would say: "It's good that people send me so much chocolate, like that, I can give to all of you!"

[Every afternoon at 4 o'clock Pranab waited for the Mother, near the staircase by the side of Nirod's room. Mother would come down and sit on a chair there. Dyumanbhai would place a cup of milk and a piece of chocolate for Pranab.]

That day . . . Mother was to go for a long drive after tennis. Dyumanbhai, as usual, appeared with the milk and chocolate. I drank the milk and put the piece of chocolate in my pocket, intending to eat it in some more opportune moment during the drive. . . . We used to be driven by Pavitra-da. I sat beside him and Mother sat behind. After some time, I quietly brought out the packet of chocolate and gave Pavitra-da a piece. Suddenly I felt Mother poking at my back like naughty girls do. I turned to look at her and with a sweet smile she put out her hand. I immediately broke a bit from my piece and placed it on her hand. And even as she continued smiling she put it in her mouth and began enjoying it happily.

(I Remember . . . , pp. 16-17)

Anecdotes

Nirodbaran

This incident recalls another which took place many years earlier. It concerns his early habit of smoking cigars. A cigar was almost always between his lips. Once Devdas Gandhi, son of Mahatma Gandhi, visited him and saw the inevitable cigar. He shot the question, "Why are you attached to smoking?" At once came the retort, "Why are you so attached to non-smoking?" This gives us a hint that Sri Aurobindo smoked, but without any real attachment and the proof came a few years later when the Mother began to take charge of household affairs and smoking was indulged in by all the inmates. She favoured non-smoking. Without the slightest hesitation Sri Aurobindo put aside his cigar. There was an end to an inveterate practice without the least fuss.

(Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo, pp. 13-14)

*

Mridu was a simple Bengali village widow. She, like the other ladies, called Sri Aurobindo her father, and took a great pride in cooking for him. Her ‘father’ also liked very much her *luchis*, she would boast, and these creations of hers have been immortalised by him in one of his letters to her. She was given to maniacal fits threatening suicide, and Sri Aurobindo would console her with, “If you commit suicide, who will cook *luchis* for me?” Her cooking got such a wide publicity that the house she lived in was named *Prasad*! (p. 51)

*

[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. On another occasion Sri Aurobindo’s meal being over earlier than usual, Mridu’s dish arrived late and was left untouched. As soon as she heard about it she began to wail in a most piteous manner as if she would bring down the whole Ashram by her lamentations. Dr. Manilal reported the fact to Sri Aurobindo and he asked, “How did she know about it?” I replied apologetically, “I told her.” He said softly, “These things should not be said.” Then added with smile. “But it is I who ought to lament for having missed her fine dish.” We all had a good laugh. (p. 54)

Jaya Devi (Dr. Upen Banerjee’s sister)

When Sri Aurobindo took his meals, it seemed that he was himself not eating. He was impassive, quiet and as if he was feeding someone else.

We quote a few lines from Sri Aurobindo’s *The Synthesis of Yoga*:

When we eat, we should be conscious that we are giving our food to that Presence in us: it must be a sacred offering in a temple and the mere physical need of self-gratification must pass away from us. (p. 126)

Bibha

(From her article in the Bengali magazine *Srinvantu*. This incidence was recounted by Sada to her. We feel this must have taken place before the Mother’s arrival in Pondicherry.)

Sri Aurobindo was in the 'Guest House'. Every evening Sada would go to meet him. There was a table in the hall in front of his room. That day Sri Aurobindo came, sat opposite to Sada, took up the newspaper and started reading it. He kept reading for quite some time while Sada sat quietly in front of him. When Sri Aurobindo looked up, he said, "Oh, you are here!" Sada used to often bring some tit-bits, some snacks for Sri Aurobindo. This day he had with him some small fried *pakodas* for Sri Aurobindo. On seeing this Sri Aurobindo asked him to take these to the young men who were with him. "Today there was no food, so they must be hungry!" he said. "But Babu," said Sada, "first you take some." Sri Aurobindo took one, and after tasting the *pakoda* said that it was very good. Sada took the few remaining ones to the young men. There were three of them, Suresh Chakraborty, Bijoy Nag and Saurin. After eating they said, "Oh! we feel so full. We do not need any other food today."

Does this incidence not remind us of the story in the Mahabharata, where, with the problem of feeding a host of disciples of the Muni Durvasa, who had arrived all on a sudden to where the Pandavas were staying, and Draupadi had already had her meal and so did not have anything to feed them. Draupadi prayed to Sri Krishna to save her from her predicament. Sri Krishna heard her call and appeared before her. He demanded some food for himself. Draupadi had just nothing. Then after lot of searching in her special *akshayapatra*, she found just one particle of rice in her vessel. She offered that to her Lord. Sri Krishna, on eating it said that he was satisfied. Lo and behold! The disciples who were bathing in the river prior to their meal felt so full and satisfied that they had no need of food any more and went away.

The following incident was recounted to Bibha by someone working upstairs with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. As per the Mother's instructions, everyday some bitter gourd preparation used to be sent with Sri Aurobindo's midday meal. The boiled bitter gourd along with a little boiled potato would be mashed and mixed. Bibha would give the mashed stuff shapes of different types of leaves and arrange that on a dish. Mother used to take Sri Aurobindo's food tray to him and be present during his meal. Once she had placed this bitter gourd dish in front of him. He quietly pushed it aside. The Mother brought it back again to its place. Again he removed it. The Mother quietly brought it back once again! It seems he commented to Champaklal something to this effect: "Can you tell me when there are such nice sweet dishes why do people need to take bitter gourd?" Obviously he was not that fond of bitter gourd. However he took everyday a little of this item.

To continue with Bibha's narration of another incident:

Sabtribala, a middle-aged widow from Chittagong had settled in the Ashram as an inmate. Once Sabtribala had received from her brother some good quality paddy, for preparing puffed rice. She prepared the puffed rice in her room; she had also prepared two pieces of fried brinjals. These she took to Nolini-da requesting him to take these to Sri Aurobindo. As Nolini-da could not quite follow her dialect he did not understand what her request was. What could he say to Sri Aurobindo? So Sabtribala herself wrote a note to Sri Aurobindo in her dialect, with her offering of the puffed rice and the fried brinjals, mentioning that she felt that Sri Aurobindo would accept it and also like it. “Doesn’t matter, you take my offering and my note to Babu,” she said. Later Sri Aurobindo sent her a note in Bengali, writing that he had eaten her puffed rice and brinjal and had relished taking them, *khub tripto holam*.

Lalita

Vaun Macpheeter (an American staying with his wife in the Ashram) grew some asparagus-shoots for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. When they were ready, Jeannette prepared and took them to the Mother who offered them to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo smiled and said, “I will have to take a magnifying glass to see what they are like,” and the Mother laughed. They were very tiny.
(*Mother India*, 1979)

Sehra

Mother: Why were you so late? You are always on time here.

Sehra: I was cooking for my guests.

Mother: Have you come straight from your cooking?

Sehra: Yes.

Mother: Oh, that’s why I can catch such a delicious smell. You must have prepared something very nice. It is so nice that I would like to eat it. I keep on smelling it. Yes, it is delicious. But you know, I can’t eat at present because my teeth are weak. When I get a new set of teeth — I mean not false, the real ones, then I’ll ask you to prepare some food for me.

(*Mother India*, 1979)

* * *

Food has an important place in man’s life, as without food the body cannot survive. Animals eat only when they are hungry. Very few men follow the motto, “Eat to live”, and take food to pacify their hunger. As in all his other activities, intake of food is under his vital desires or mental preferences. He may take food simply for

the pleasure of the palate. He celebrates important events with a feast. There are so many roadside vendors supplying delicious snacks, there are also many cafés, restaurants, hotels etc. to satisfy his desire. Nowadays he is becoming more and more health conscious so there are many special diets for him to choose from and he uses lot of energy and time on food. People here took so much care to prepare special dishes for Mother and Sri Aurobindo. We wonder what was the place they give to food. The following quotations throw some light on this question.

Amal Kiran gives us a beautiful, clear view of the Mother on this topic:

But though she (*the Mother*) never stopped attending to us she would rarely lose a chance to correct us. There was no compromising with small desires. At the beginning of my stay I was asked by the Mother to take up painting all the flowers she gave us from day to day. I procured some tubes of water-colour. She used to visit Lalita's room every week and I would be there to meet the Mother along with her. I took off the cap of one tube and, holding the open nozzle near my nose, said: "It has a most appetising smell." At once the Mother's smiling face changed. There was an expression of disgust. She said: "Don't talk to me of eating." In a flash I was made to understand her outlook on food.

She never advised fasting or cutting down whatever food was necessary. But she discounted all desire to satisfy greed. And greed meant for her not just the urge to gorge oneself with as much stuff as available. It meant also the lip-smacking turn of the consciousness towards even a single morsel. Nothing should be eaten with an appetite gloating on taste. Food which tastes good is to be cooked but from a sense of doing a thing well, from an application of the artistic feeling to the culinary operation and not in order to make the mouth water and the eyes dance with the expectation of enjoying delicacies. The approach to food as to everything else has to be calm and consecrated. Discrimination, yes, — but no like or dislike, resulting either in a move towards self-indulgence or in a reaction of recoil. The one mood in front of food has to be: "May it all go to the growth of the Divine within me!". . . .

The Mother did not encourage any kind of food-faddism. Cleanliness and restrained spicing were favoured, but too much preoccupation with one type of diet or another implied for her a lowered consciousness, an extreme externalisation of interest.

(*Our Light and Delight*, pp. 147-48)

Here is an answer by Sri Aurobindo to a question regarding food:

You should have no preference for food of a particular kind or taste. There is no truth in such preferences and demands. You have a body and you have to keep it in good condition. Lower quality or kind of food would be harmful for

the health of the body, therefore you should take good quality of food material. But “good food” means food necessary for the body — not what the tongue likes.

(A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 168)

To a question: “Is it possible to do without food?” Sri Aurobindo’s answer was:

Yes, it is. When I did my fast of about 23 days while living in Chettiar’s house I very nearly solved the problem. I could walk eight hours a day as usual. I continued my mental work and Sadhana as usual and I found that I was not in the least weak at the end of 23 days. But the flesh began to grow less and I did not find a clue to replacing the very material reduced in the body.

(*Ibid.*, p. 142)

(Concluded)

Compiled by CHITRA SEN

This compilation is based on some interviews, some oral reports and a large amount of material taken from various published sources.

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

(Continued from the issue of October 2020)

1. KINDNESS AND COMPASSION

(Part 12)

Being an embodiment of compassion, Sri Aurobindo had an insight for spotting goodness in others. For besides the jail doctor, Dr. Daly, Sri Aurobindo was particularly impressed by two other staff members at Alipore jail. His reflections about his stay in Alipore jail indicate that he was very sensitive to the virtue of benevolence. In the Jail Superintendent, Mr. Emerson, Sri Aurobindo found a man of tremendous kindness and noted that he had “all the virtues of a Christian gentleman.” In a succinct description of Mr. Emerson, Sri Aurobindo writes:

If in any prison the prisoners’ suffering has been lessened, and the inhuman barbarity of the western prison system lightened through kindness and conscientiousness, then that good out of evil has happened in the Alipore Jail under Mr. Emerson. This has happened due to two main reasons: the extraordinary qualities of its Superintendent, Mr. Emerson, and the assistant doctor, Baidyanath Chatterji. One of them was an embodiment of Europe’s nearly vanquished Christian ideals, the other was a personification of the charity and philanthropy that form the essence of Hinduism. Men like Mr. Emerson do not come to this country often, they are getting rare even in the West. In him could be found all the virtues of a Christian gentleman. Peace-loving, just, incomparably generous, full of rectitude, simple, straight and disciplined even towards inferiors, he was by nature incapable of anything but polite conduct. Among his shortcomings were lack of energy and administrative efficiency, he would leave all the responsibility to the jailor, himself remaining an idler. I do not think this caused much harm. . . . If instead of delegating all the work to such a subordinate, Emerson himself had looked after the administration, there would have been the possibility of greater improvement and reform during his regime. The little that he himself looked after was no doubt done properly; it was due to his character that the prison had become a place only for severe punishment and not turned into a veritable hell. Even after he had been transferred, the effect of his good work did not wholly disappear. Even now

his successors have been obliged to keep sixty per cent of his humane measures intact.¹

In his Uttarpara speech, delivered after his acquittal, Sri Aurobindo spoke how God helped him in his time of crisis at Alipore jail and alluded to Mr. Emerson's consideration:

He turned the hearts of my jailers to me and they spoke to the Englishman in charge of the jail, "He is suffering in his confinement; let him at least walk outside his cell for half an hour in the morning and in the evening." So it was arranged, and it was while I was walking that His strength again entered into me.²

Nolini Kanta Gupta too has alluded to the kindness of Mr. Emerson. About his arrest in the Alipore Bomb Case, he writes:

We were taken to the lock-up at the Lal Bazar police station. There, they kept us for nearly two days and nights. This was perhaps the most trying time of all. We had no bath, no food, not even a wink of sleep. The whole lot of us were herded together like beasts and shut up in a cell. The police showed by their manner how rude and bitter they could be. Then, after having been through all this, we were taken to Alipore Jail one evening. There we were received with great kindness and courtesy by the gentleman in charge. He said, "Now there will be no more of that harassment by the police. You will find it quite comfortable here." And he had us served immediately with hot cooked rice. This was our first meal in three days, and it tasted so nice and sweet that we felt as if we were in heaven.³

On the aforesaid assistant doctor, Baidyanath Chatterji, Sri Aurobindo saw in him an excess of sympathy, "the quality most beloved of God":

I had never seen such a sympathetic soul before, nor do I expect to see it after; it was as if he had been born to help and do good to others. Whenever he heard of a case of suffering, to try to lessen it had become for him almost a natural and inevitable act. To the residents of this abode of misery, full of suffering, it was as if he was there to distribute the carefully collected celestial waters of bliss to these creatures of hell. The best way to remove any want, injustice or

1. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, pp. 33-35.

2. CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 6.

3. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, 1st Ed., 1978, p. 364.

needless suffering was to see that a report of it reached the doctor's ears. If its removal lay within his powers he would never rest without doing it. Baidyanathbabu harboured in his heart a deep love of the motherland, but as a government servant he was unable to express that emotion. His only failing was his excessive sympathy. Though in a prison administrator this may be looked upon as a defect, in terms of higher ethics this may be described as the finest expression of one's humanity and the quality most beloved of God. He did not discriminate between the ordinary prisoners and the '*Bandemataram*' convicts; whoever was sick, or ailing, he kept them in the hospital with the same care and would be unwilling to let them go till they had wholly come round. It was this fault of his that was the real reason for his loss of job. After the killing of Gossain the authorities suspected his attitude and wrongfully dismissed him.⁴

One is reminded of what the Mother has said:

Do good for the love of good and not in hope of a reward. Be good for the joy of being good and not for the gratefulness of others.⁵

The Mother has spoken of sensitivity as "one of the results of the refinement of the being",⁶ and such was Sri Aurobindo's sensitivity that he could see gentleness in ordinary people, even if they happened to be policing him:

. . . among the police there was as a rule more of kindness and sympathy than strict sense of responsibility — this was especially so with the Hindustani policemen. Some of course remained obstinate.⁷

Sri Aurobindo's appreciation of the common folk can be better understood in the light of this sentence of the Mother:

With our own perfection grows in us a generous understanding of others.⁸

And at a still deeper level:

And perhaps if one carried true perfection in oneself, one would discover it more often in others.⁹

4. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 37.

5. *CWM*, Vol. 15, 2nd Ed., p. 225.

6. *Ibid.*, Vol. 14, 2nd Ed., p. 176.

7. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 27.

8. *CWM*, Vol. 14, 2nd Ed., p. 273.

9. *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, 2nd Ed., p. 23.

It is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo had an insight and intuition in discerning the best in people and things. This capacity to constantly see goodness in others reflects a phrase he quoted in a letter to a disciple, “the quality of the object lies in the eye of the seer”.¹⁰ Approaching the matter from a wider perspective, Sri Aurobindo, in a conversation with his disciples, posed a question:

... does the quality of a thing depend on the object or on the subject? Take, for instance, beauty. When we call someone or something beautiful, is it because the object itself is beautiful or the subject sees it as such — that is, does beauty depend only on the psychological state of the subject and have nothing to do with the object?¹¹

Sri Aurobindo’s statement that “the quality of the object lies in the eye of the seer”, can be seen in its true light when we read an extract from his *Tales of Prison Life* where he writes that many look down upon Indians because of the squalor around their cities and towns whereas those who have a clear vision and are not self-righteous will see Indians in another dimension. In the midst of the appalling hygienic conditions in Alipore jail, Sri Aurobindo speaks of seeing God even in the hardened criminal:

The humanity of the Indian survives every loss. Fallen because of social abuses, crushed out because of loss of humanity, in the outer personality are the distortions of dark, dubious, shameful emotions, yet, within, the nearly vanished humanity seems to save itself in hiding, thanks to the inborn virtue of the Indians, it expresses itself time and again in their speech and act. Those who having seen the filth outside turn away their faces in contempt, only they can say that they have failed to find in them the least trace of humanity. But one who has given up the pride of holiness and looks at them with one’s own natural clear vision will never agree to such a view. After six months of imprisonment in the Buxar Jail, Sriji Bipinchandra Pal had seen God among the thieves and robbers, which he had openly confessed in a meeting at Uttarpara. In the Alipore Jail itself I too could realise this fundamental truth of Hinduism for the first time among the thieves, robbers and killers, in the human body I could realise the divine Presence.¹²

Indeed, the purity of love is hinted at in an aphorism, where even the most awful person is not excluded from one’s compassion:

10. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 51.

11. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 102.

12. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 83.

If thou canst not love the vilest worm and the foulest of criminals, how canst thou believe that thou hast accepted God in thy spirit?¹³

Sri Aurobindo's boundless compassion is again reflected in another writing of his:

The Gita puts it in that right place and perspective. It [*movement of Godhead*] must be based on the recognition of the divine self in all men and all creatures; it must be consistent with an equal heart to the great and the small, the eminent and the obscure manifestation. God must be seen and loved in the ignorant, the humble, the weak, the vile, the outcaste.¹⁴

At Alipore jail, Sudhir Kumar Sarkar felt that Sri Aurobindo had an aura of magnetism and love. He writes:

Whenever I came in contact with him, I felt a deep attraction towards him, a sympathy, such as one feels towards one's very own.¹⁵

And he adds:

I enjoyed sitting beside him and felt like touching him, but I dared not do so for fear of taunts from friends who had other views. But sometimes I would stealthily put my hands out and touch his soft body and feet.¹⁶

Then on the day of judgment of the Alipore Bomb Case he sought consolation from Sri Aurobindo and in turn received his sympathy and Grace. A deeply moved Sudhir Sarkar narrates:

At the end of one year, after the case had been fully heard, the court assembled to decide the date of pronouncing judgment. We were all present. Sri Aurobindo opened his mouth and spoke. He was talking about his realisations and Sadhana to Upen Bandyopadhyaya, Ullaskar Dutt and Nolini Kanta Gupta. He said "Vasudev Narayan has spoken to me, saying, 'I have much work still to be done through you. I will take you out of prison.'" We then, one after another, taking advantage of the opportunity, asked about our future. Vasudev had already told Sri Aurobindo that we would be given sentences, and that Ullas

13. CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 485-86.

14. *Ibid.*, Vol. 19, p. 375.

15. *A Spirit Indomitable*, edited by Mona Sarkar, pp. 100-01.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

and Barin would not be hanged. Getting this chance I asked, “How will I be able to bear the days in prison at this young age? If I become weak and falter, what shall I do?” Sri Aurobindo replied, “Think of me; I shall always be with you.” How deeply touching were those words! Out of jail, whenever in difficulty or danger, whenever in my helplessness I have been able to remember him, always I have seen that the difficulty has become a blessing, or if I have had to face it boldly, someone has always delivered me out of danger.

Later, during our life in exile, whenever the tyranny of the British Government tried to oppress us, we noticed how Sri Aurobindo’s Grace was always there to protect us. In the midst of endless abuses and suffering a heavenly cheerfulness wrapped us in its warm embrace, shielding us, comforting us.¹⁷

Barindra and Ullaskar received death sentences; while thirteen others were sentenced to transportation to Andamans for life and seven others were sentenced from 7 to 10 years. Seventeen undertrial prisoners, including Sri Aurobindo and Nolini Kanta Gupta, were acquitted. Following this, Chittaranjan Das appealed to the High Court on behalf of those who had been convicted, and as a result Barindra and Ullaskar had their death sentences commuted to transportation for life.

About the appeal in the High Court, Sri Aurobindo praised the English judge for his “courtesy, patience and fairness”:

In any case, the whole country must be grateful to Sir Lawrence Jenkins for the courtesy, patience and fairness with which he has heard the case and given every facility to the defence, an attitude which might with advantage be copied by certain civilian judges in and outside the High Court and even by certain Judges, not civilians, in other provinces.¹⁸

The British authorities were extremely unhappy that “the ringleader” of the whole movement was let off. No less a person than the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Andrew Fraser, had earlier sinisterly remarked that Sri Aurobindo “is regarded and spoken of by all as the disciples regard a great Master. He has been in the forefront of all, advising seditious writing and authorising murder.”¹⁹ The British bureaucracy were eager to appeal against Sri Aurobindo’s acquittal. However, Mr. Chapman, the Legal Remembrancer to the Bengal government, wrote to the Chief Secretary of Bengal, on 21st May 1909:

17. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

18. CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 333.

19. Georges Van Vrekhem, *The Mother*, 2000, p. 123.

Aurobindo is a hero of a spiritual type. Shall we gain much by getting him sentenced to imprisonment? He is then likely to develop into a myth. If we leave him loose now, he may be actually less dangerous. . . .

On the whole my advice is against an appeal.²⁰

Following Sri Aurobindo's acquittal numerous journals hailed his nobility and purity. The *Daily Hitabadi* referred to Sri Aurobindo as a "stainless man of genius",²¹ and the *Kāl* referred to Sri Aurobindo's "unimpeachable character and sterling qualities",²² whilst the *Basumati* called him a "great hero", who "is like a God".²³ The *Bangabandhu* wrote that Sri Aurobindo was a "great man . . . pure and stainless like the Homa [sacrificial] fire",²⁴ while *Purba Bangla* referred to "his sacred personality",²⁵ and *Jasohar* called him a "hero".²⁶

Even the far South was not unaware of Sri Aurobindo's captivating personality. A correspondent from Madras wrote after the acquittal:

The local weekly states that . . . his judgment has been received with universal satisfaction. Speaking of Aurobindo Ghose, the paper says that he had a very bright scholastic career, his private life is noted for unsullied purity, his writings always breathe a noble spirit, characterised by spiritual fervour still unknown in India. He is a man of such right-thinking nature and such a just and liberal soul that nobody would have believed his complicity with the plot.²⁷

Sister Nivedita's biographer, Lizelle Reymond, writes:

Aurobindo was now out of prison, and Nivedita had her school decorated . . . to celebrate his release. She found him completely transformed. His piercing eyes seemed to devour the tight-drawn skin-and-bones of his face. He possessed an irresistible power, derived from spiritual revelation that had come to him in prison . . .

With a mere handful of supporters — Nivedita among them — he launched an appeal and tried to rekindle the patriotic spark in the weakening society. His mission was now that of a *Yogin* sociologist.

20. Lt. Col. G. L. Bhattacharya, 'Stray Thoughts', *Mother India*, May 1974, p. 362.

21. *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, p. 313.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., p. 97.

24. Sujata Nahar, *Mother's Chronicles*, Book V, p. 496 (*Bangabandhu*, 18 May 1909).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 371.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 495.

27. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., pp. 104-05.

... He was already known as the ‘seer’ Sri Aurobindo ... For Nivedita he was the expression of life itself, the life of a new seed grown on the ancient soil of India, the logical and passionate development of all her Guru’s teaching.²⁸

Here it is important to note that Sister Nivedita was a friend and admirer of Sri Aurobindo. Referring to the year 1902, Sri Aurobindo has said, “I met Sister Nivedita first at Baroda ... It is in these days that we formed our friendship.”²⁹

Pertaining to Nivedita’s character and politics, Sri Aurobindo remarked:

She was one of the revolutionary leaders. She went about visiting places in India to come in contact with the people. She was open and frank and talked about her revolutionary plan to everybody. When she used to speak on revolution it was her very soul that spoke, her true personality used to come out. Yoga was yoga of course, but it was as if this work was intended for her: that was fire if you like. Her book *Kali the Mother* is very inspiring, but it is revolutionary and not non-violent.³⁰

Sri Aurobindo had a high opinion of Sister Nivedita. When asked, “How much is India indebted to Sister Nivedita?” “Indebted?” he replied, “There can be no measure of our indebtedness to Nivedita.”³¹

In a letter published on 18th May 1909 in the *Bengalee*, soon after his acquittal Sri Aurobindo publicly expressed his gratitude to his well-wishers and his countrymen:

Will you kindly allow me to express through your columns my deep sense of gratitude to all who have helped me in my hour of trial? Of innumerable friends known and unknown, who have contributed each his mite to swell my defence fund, it is impossible for me now even to learn the names and I must ask them to accept this public expression of my feeling in place of a private gratitude. Since my acquittal many telegrams and letters of congratulations have reached me and they are too numerous to reply to individually. The love which my countrymen have heaped upon me in return for the little I have been able to do for them, amply repays any apparent trouble or misfortune my public activity may have brought upon me. I attribute my escape to no human agency, but first of all to the protection of the Mother of us all who has never been absent from me but always held me in Her arms and shielded me from grief and

28. Cited in Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., p. 195.

29. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 99.

30. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, pp. 656-57.

31. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 552.

disaster, and secondarily to the prayers of thousands which have been going up to Her on my behalf ever since I was arrested. It is love of my country which led me into danger, it is also the love of my countrymen which has brought me safe through it.³²

Responding to Sri Aurobindo's letter, the *Bharat Mitra* wrote that it "shows the purity of his love for his country, like gold after it has undergone a fire test."³³

Sri Aurobindo was never one to forget any act of kindness extended to him. He writes about the third day in jail after his arrest in the Alipore Bomb Case:

For lunch I swallowed, with some effort, a few morsels of pulse and boiled rice. The effort proved too much and had to be given up. In the afternoon we had puffed rice. For three days this was our diet. But I must also add that on Monday the sergeant, of himself, gave me tea and toast.³⁴

Sri Aurobindo also acknowledges the goodwill of a stranger who had come to visit him before his arrest. About the first night in jail, he writes:

That night I had other visitors, all members of the police force. There was a mystery behind the visit, which till now I have failed to fathom. A month and a half before my arrest an unknown gentleman had come to see me. He said: "Sir, we have not met, but since I have great respect for you I am here to warn you of an impending danger. I would also like to know if you are familiar with anyone at Konnagar. Did you ever visit the place, and do you have a house there?" "No, I do not have any house there," I said. "But I have been there once and am known to some people there." "I will say nothing more," said the stranger, "but from now on you should not meet anyone from there. Some wicked people are conspiring against you and your brother, Barindra. Soon they will put you into trouble. Don't ask me anything more." I told him: "Sir, I am unable to understand how this incomplete information will help me, but since you come with friendly intentions, thank you very much. I do not wish to know anything more. I have complete faith in God. He will always protect me, and it is for me needless to make any attempt to be careful." I heard nothing about this afterward. That this stranger and well-wisher did not imagine things, I had proof the same night. An inspector and a few police officers came to pump out my connection with Konnagar. "Is your original home at Konnagar?" they asked. "Did you ever visit the place? When? And why? Has

32. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 263.

33. Sujata Nahar, *Mother's Chronicles*, Book V, p. 494.

34. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 10.

Barindra any properties there?” and other questions. I answered these mainly in order to get at the root of the mystery. The attempt was not a success, but from the questions as well as the manner of the police inquiry it appeared that they had come by some information which they were trying to verify. I guessed that just as in the Tai-Maharaj case there had been an attempt to prove Tilak as a hypocrite, liar, cheat and tyrant in which the Bombay Government had joined hands and wasted public money — similarly there were people interested in putting me into trouble.³⁵

On the fifth day of his imprisonment Sri Aurobindo and a small group were taken to the Alipore magistrate’s court. At the time of departure from the court, Sri Aurobindo narrates:

We again got into the carriage, when a gentleman came near me and said, “I have heard that they are planning solitary confinement for you and orders are being passed to that effect. Probably they will not allow anyone to see or meet you. If you wish to convey any information to your people, I shall do that.” I thanked him, but since what I wished to convey I had already done through my relative, I did not tell him anything more. I am mentioning this fact as an example of my countrymen’s sympathy and unsought kindness towards me.³⁶

Earlier we had examined how Sri Aurobindo in several instances acknowledged Dr. Daly’s kindness to him. At Alipore jail Sri Aurobindo was also moved and humbled by an innocent old man who was always concerned about Sri Aurobindo’s welfare.³⁷

Going back in time, to Sri Aurobindo’s student days in England, we note that he fondly recalled the kindness of two English ladies:

Before the war, it was quite decent living for £5. Our landlady was an angel. She came from Somerset and had settled in London — perhaps after she was widowed. She was long suffering and never asked us for money even if we did not pay for months and months. (We had two landladies — the other one also was very nice to us). I wonder how she managed. I paid her from my I. C. S. stipend.³⁸

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

37. See *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

38. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 113.

Sri Aurobindo also acknowledges the help James Cotton, a friend of his father's, extended to him and his brothers during their stay in England. He told his disciples:

It was . . . James Cotton, who knew my brother (and was being helped by him in his work) [and] who introduced me to the Gaekwad because he took interest in us."³⁹

Sri Aurobindo also expressed his appreciation for Mr. Drewett, his guardian at Manchester, for grounding him in Latin and for the headmaster of St. Paul's school for coaching him in Greek and then rapidly promoting him to the higher classes of the school.⁴⁰

Then at Uttarpara, soon after his acquittal, Sri Aurobindo publicly voiced his gratitude to Chittaranjan Das for being his defence counsel:

You have all heard the name of the man who put away from him all other thoughts and abandoned all his practice, who sat up half the night day after day for months and broke his health to save me, — Srijut Chittaranjan Das.⁴¹

And when in 1923 Chittaranjan Das sent a wire to Sri Aurobindo asking for a message for his Calcutta paper *Forward*, Sri Aurobindo gave due consideration and dictated the following reply:

Such a message at present would amount to a public announcement and I do not like to make any pronouncement at present. It must be done at the proper time, because it would set in motion forces in opposition. Besides, there are other papers that have demanded similar messages and I would not know how to refuse them if I make up my mind to send you one. Again, if I put myself out like that, it would interfere with the silent support which I am giving you. I am acting in a particular way, and if I create directly a field then the two would mutually interfere. I do not at present want to act on the physical plane as it would evoke opposition.⁴²

In 1926 Sri Aurobindo spoke to his disciples about the inertia or *tamas* that had gripped India. In this context, he expressed a high opinion of Chittaranjan Das:

39. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

40. See CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 27.

41. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, pp. 7-8.

42. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, pp. 121-22.

It is the result of various causes. It was already settling — I mean, the forces of disintegration and inertia — before the British came. And after their coming the whole Tamas has settled like a solid block. There must be some awakening before something substantial can be done. Otherwise, India has got very good men; you had Tilak, Das, Vivekananda — none of them an ordinary man and yet you see the Tamas there.⁴³

In another instance Sri Aurobindo said that Chittaranjan Das “was always a very strong man.”⁴⁴

Let us briefly delve into the theme of gratitude, for it is an essential virtue of a gentleman. We begin with a statement of the Mother:

It takes nobility of character not to resent someone who does you good.⁴⁵

The idea is expounded in a letter Sri Aurobindo wrote to a disciple who had expressed deep hurt at the ingratitude he received from his relative:

Your surprise at your cousin X’s behaviour shows that you do not yet know what kind of thing is the average human nature. Did you never hear of the answer of Vidyasagar when he was told that a certain man was abusing him: “Why does he abuse me? I never did him a good turn (*upakāra*).” The unregenerate vital is not grateful for a benefit, it resents being under an obligation. So long as the benefit continues, it is effusive and says sweet things, as soon as it expects nothing more it turns round and bites the hand that fed it. Sometimes it does that even before, when it thinks it can do it without the benefactor knowing the origin of the slander, fault-finding or abuse. In all these dealings of your uncles and cousins with you there is nothing unusual, nothing, as you think, peculiar to you. Most have this kind of experience, few escape it altogether. Of course, people with a developed psychic element are by nature grateful and do not behave in this way.⁴⁶

On the theme of gratitude we reproduce some quotes of philosophers or saints. Buddha remarked:

A noble person is mindful and thankful of the favours he receives from others.⁴⁷

43. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 379.

45. *CWM*, Vol. 15, 2nd Ed., p. 60.

46. *CWSA*, Vol. 31, p. 250.

47. Website: <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-20/edition-1/gratitude-parent-all-virtues>; dated 23.11.2019.

And Cicero, whom Sri Aurobindo ranked amongst the great prose stylists, said:

Gratitude is not only the greatest of the virtues, but the parent of all of the others.⁴⁸

Thiruvalluvar, the ancient Tamil poet-saint, writes:

It is not right to forget the help rendered by someone; it is virtuous to forget any harm, the moment it is done.⁴⁹

Earlier we had described how Sri Aurobindo could see or feel the divine presence in people, living creatures and things. The Mother has remarked how one is filled with a sense of gratitude and joy if one is aware of the Divine existence. The Mother writes:

That kind of sense of gratitude that the Divine exists; that feeling of a marvelling thankfulness which truly fills you with a sublime joy at the fact that the Divine exists, that there is something in the universe which is the Divine, that it is not just the monstrosity we see, that there is the Divine, the Divine exists. And each time that the least thing puts you either directly or indirectly in contact with this sublime Reality of divine existence, the heart is filled with so intense, so marvellous a joy, such a gratitude as of all things has the most delightful taste.

There is nothing which gives you a joy equal to that of gratitude. One hears a bird sing, sees a lovely flower, looks at a little child, observes an act of generosity, reads a beautiful sentence, looks at the setting sun, no matter what, suddenly this comes upon you, this kind of emotion — indeed so deep, so intense — that the world manifests the Divine, that there is something behind the world which is the Divine.⁵⁰

Sri Aurobindo saw godliness in common people, far lower in stature, education and culture than him. Sri Aurobindo puts us to sheer shame by his humility by stating that an old uneducated peasant “had a heart a thousand times nobler than mine”. He adds that his “pride of learning and forbearance was completely shattered” by this man. If that was not enough, Sri Aurobindo further states that he “would feel ashamed” by the humility of this peasant. In a touching commentary Sri Aurobindo writes:

48. *Ibid.*

49. Website: <https://thirukkural133.wordpress.com/2011/11/26/chapter-11-gratitude/>; dated 23.11.2019.

50. *CWM*, Vol. 8, 2nd Ed., p. 40.

Let me speak of an innocent person at Alipore. As an accused in a dacoity case he had been sentenced to ten years' rigorous imprisonment. A cowherd by profession, uneducated, without anything to do with reading or writing, his only support was his faith in God and patience worthy of an Aryan and other noble qualities. Faced with this old man's attitude towards life, my pride of learning and forbearance was completely shattered. There was a serene and simple friendliness written in the old man's eyes, his talk was full of amiability and friendliness. At times he would speak of his sufferings, even though he was innocent of the charges, and speak of his wife and children. He even wondered when God would bring him release so that he could meet them; but never did I find him depressed or restless. Waiting for God's Grace, he spent his days quietly doing his duties in the prison. His efforts and thoughts were not concerned about himself, but about the well-being of others. His sense of kindness and sympathy for the unfortunate frequently came out in his speech, serving others was the law of his being. The noble qualities were further set off by his humility. Knowing that he had a heart a thousand times nobler than mine, I would feel ashamed at his humility; to accept the old man's service embarrassed me, but he would not be deterred so easily. He was all the time anxious about my comfort. As with me, so with the others, his kindly attention and humble service and respect seemed to be much greater especially for the innocent and miserable ones. Yet on his face and in his conduct there glowed a natural serene gravity and majesty.⁵¹

Sri Aurobindo then continues his narration and reveals that the future of the Indian Aryan race lies not only with the educated youth but also equally with the illiterate villager of whom this noble cowherd was one example:

He had a great love for the country, too. I shall always remember the white-whiskered serene visage of this old convict full of kindness and generosity. Even in these days of decline among the Indian peasantry — whom we describe as uneducated, "small people" (*chhotolok*) — may be found such representatives of the Indian race. India's future is hopeful only because of this. The educated youth and the unlettered peasantry, the future of India lies with these two classes. The future Aryan race will be a blend of the two.⁵²

The uneducated peasant brings to mind what Mother has said on the faculty of gratitude:

51. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, pp. 84-85.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

And then there are those who have an innate faculty of gratitude, those who have an ardent need to respond, respond with warmth, devotion, joy, to something which they feel like a marvel hidden behind the whole of life, behind the tiniest little element, the least little event of life, who feel this sovereign beauty or infinite Grace which is behind all things.

I knew people who had no knowledge, so to say, of anything, who were hardly educated, whose minds were altogether of the ordinary kind, and who had in them this capacity of gratitude, of warmth, which gives itself, understands and is thankful.

Well, for them, the contact with the psychic was very frequent, almost constant and, to the extent that they were capable of it, conscious — not very conscious but a little — in the sense that they felt that they were carried, helped, uplifted above themselves.⁵³

Sri Aurobindo's admiration for innumerable fellow prisoners, and the jail authorities can be seen in the perspective of what the Mother has written:

Sometimes, when one sees a generous act, hears of something exceptional, when one witnesses heroism or generosity or greatness of soul, meets someone who shows a special talent or acts in an exceptional and beautiful way, there is a kind of enthusiasm or admiration or gratitude which suddenly awakens in the being and opens the door to a state, a new state of consciousness, a light, a warmth, a joy one did not know before.⁵⁴

In another instance, Sri Aurobindo observed extraordinary nobility in two other fellow prisoners, the brothers, Nagendranath and Dharani, although they lacked a rounded education:

The manner in which, quietly and contentedly they too suffered this sudden mishap, this unjust punishment, was astounding. I could never find in them the slightest anger or censure or annoyance over those for whose fault they had to pass their youth in a hellish prison. They were devoid of the glory of modern education, a knowledge of western languages and familiarity with western learning. The mother-tongue was their only stay, but amongst the English-educated group I have found few men of comparable calibre. Instead of complaining to either man or God, both of them had accepted the punishment with a smile. Both the brothers were *sadhaks* but their natures were different. Nagendra was steady, grave, intelligent. He was very fond of godly conver-

53. *CWM*, Vol. 7, 2nd Ed., p. 418.

54. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, 2nd Ed., p. 405.

sation and religious topics. When we had been kept in solitary confinement the jail authorities had permitted us, at the end of the day's labour, to read books. Nagendra who had asked for the Gita had been given the Bible instead. In the witness box he would tell me of his feelings on reading the Bible. Nagendra hadn't read the Gita but I noticed with surprise that, instead of speaking about the Bible, he was expressing the inner sense of the Gita's verse — once in a while it even appeared as if the sublime and divine statements of Krishna at Kurukshetra were coming out of the same lotus lips of Vasudeva in the Alipore dock. Without reading the Gita, to be able to realise in the Bible the spirit of equality, renunciation of the desire for fruit, to see the Divine in all things, etc., is the index of a not negligible inner life or spiritual capacity, *sadhana*. Dharani was not as intelligent as Nagendra, but he was obedient and tender by nature, temperamentally a devotee. He was always immersed in the contemplation of divine Motherhood, and looking at the Grace that shone on his face, his innocent laughter and gentle devotional attitude, it was hard to realise that we were confined in a jail. Knowing these men, who can say that the Bengali is low and despicable? This power, this manhood, this sacred fire is only hidden amidst the ashes.

They are both innocent. Imprisoned without any fault of their own, by their own qualities or by virtue of their training they had been able to reject the supremacy of external joys and sorrows and succeeded in preserving the freedom of their inner life.⁵⁵

Sri Aurobindo has subsequently written:

In my view, a man's value does not depend on what he learns or his position or fame or what he does, but on what he is and inwardly becomes . . .⁵⁶

Sri Aurobindo was a man of few words, so the praise or approval accorded by him to his fellow prisoners and others is worth its weight in gold. It is also interesting to note how he has meticulously recorded his observations.

Following his release from Alipore jail, the people wanted to hear Sri Aurobindo speak. On 30th May, 1909, Sri Aurobindo was invited to Uttarpara and in his speech revealed his experiences with Sri Krishna:

I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell, but it was not the tree, I knew

55. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, pp. 85-87.

56. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 12.

it was Vasudeva, it was Srikrishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Srikrishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover. This was the first use of the deeper vision He gave me.⁵⁷

Astonishingly, a God-realised soul like him, expresses the sentiment that the kindness of the criminals in Alipore jail put him to shame. His speech continues:

I looked at the prisoners in the jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies. Amongst these thieves and dacoits there were many who put me to shame by their sympathy, their kindness, the humanity triumphant over such adverse circumstances.⁵⁸

Indeed, Sri Aurobindo reveals in one of his aphorisms:

The next greatest rapture to the love of God, is the love of God in men; there, too, one has the joy of multiplicity.⁵⁹

And in *Essays on the Gita*, Sri Aurobindo writes:

The liberated eye does not lay undue stress on the perversion and imperfection, but is able to see all with a complete love and charity in the heart, a complete understanding in the intelligence, a complete equality in the spirit.⁶⁰

The Mother has said:

Sri Aurobindo always reminds us of the fact that the Divine is everywhere and in everything, and asks us to practise a true compassion, as is so beautifully expressed in this aphorism . . . “Examine thyself without pity, then thou wilt be more charitable and pitiful to others.”⁶¹

57. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 6.

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

59. *Ibid.*, Vol. 12, p. 483.

60. *Ibid.* Vol. 19, p. 373.

61. *CWM*, Vol. 13, 2nd Ed., p. 144.

Sri Aurobindo's magnanimity in underplaying himself, whilst admiring the imprisoned revolutionaries, other convicts, and the jail authorities including the policemen can be viewed through the prism on what the Mother has said of generosity:

I shall not speak here of material generosity which naturally consists in giving others what one has. But even this virtue is not very widespread, for as soon as one becomes rich one thinks more often of keeping one's wealth than of giving it away. The more men possess, the less are they generous.

I want to speak of moral generosity. To feel happy, for example, when a comrade is successful. An act of courage, of unselfishness, a fine sacrifice have a beauty in them which gives you joy. It may be said that moral generosity consists in being able to recognise the true worth and superiority of others.⁶²

Sri Aurobindo had bad will towards none, not even the British government who were trying to sentence him to death or transport him for life to the god-forsaken Andamans. In response to the British vengeance of putting him in solitary confinement, Sri Aurobindo amazingly remarked:

I have also watched this strange contradiction in my life that however much good my well-intentioned friends might do for me, it is those who have harmed me — whom shall I call an enemy, since enemy I have none? — my opponents have helped me even more. They wanted to do me an ill turn, the result was I got what I wanted. The only result of the wrath of the British Government was that I found God.⁶³

An aphorism reads:

Forgiveness is praised by the Christian and the Vaishnava, but for me, I ask, "What have I to forgive and whom?"⁶⁴

Furthermore, on several instances Sri Aurobindo has praised the English for some of their qualities, i.e. "their devotion to duty",⁶⁵ or having "a certain liberality and common sense",⁶⁶ or stating that unlike America and France, corruption hardly exists in England.⁶⁷ During the Second World War, Sri Aurobindo appreciated that

62. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, p. 30.

63. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 2.

64. CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 425.

65. See Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., pp. 225-26.

66. See A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 211.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 694.

England defended itself against Nazi Germany and said, “They have a great tenacity.”⁶⁸ And Churchill’s resistance to the Indian independence struggle did not colour Sri Aurobindo’s opinion of Churchill’s ability, and even used him as an instrument in the Second World War to neutralise Hitler. When Churchill became Prime Minister, Sri Aurobindo said: “Churchill is in command of the war and everything is all right,”⁶⁹ and later revealed, “Churchill is the second great man given by his family to England at times of crises.”⁷⁰

Sri Aurobindo’s statement “whom shall I call an enemy, since enemy I have none?” brings to mind what he has written in *The Synthesis of Yoga*:

The Lord is there equally in all beings, we have to make no essential distinctions between ourselves and others, the wise and the ignorant, friend and enemy, man and animal, the saint and the sinner. We must hate none, despise none, be repelled by none; for in all we have to see the One disguised or manifested at his pleasure. He is a little revealed in one or more revealed in another or concealed and wholly distorted in others according to his will and his knowledge of what is best for that which he intends to become in form in them and to do in works in their nature. All is ourself, one self that has taken many shapes. . . . Even what we have to destroy, we must not abhor or fail to recognise as a disguised and temporary movement of the Eternal.⁷¹

About his sojourn in Alipore jail and its consequence, Sri Aurobindo has written that

. . . his twelve months’ detention in the Alipur Jail, which had been spent entirely in the practice of Yoga, his inner spiritual life was pressing upon him for an exclusive concentration. He resolved therefore to withdraw from the political field, at least for a time.⁷²

About Sri Aurobindo’s retirement, A. B. Purani writes:

His outward non-participation in public life was construed by many as lack of love for humanity.

But those who knew him during the days of the national awakening — from 1900 to 1910 — could not have these doubts.⁷³

68. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2013, p. 616.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 625.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 946.

71. CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 223.

72. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 8.

73. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 2.

It was in Alipore jail that Sri Aurobindo realised that he had a larger role to play than for the service and liberation for his country; now his concern was for “the whole future of humanity.” He writes:

During this period his view of life was radically changed; he had taken up Yoga with the original idea of acquiring spiritual force and energy and divine guidance for his work in life. But now the inner spiritual life and realisation which had continually been increasing in magnitude and universality and assuming a larger place took him up entirely and his work became a part and result of it and besides far exceeded the service and liberation of the country and fixed itself in an aim, previously only glimpsed, which was world-wide in its bearing and concerned with the whole future of humanity.⁷⁴

Later in 1926, Sri Aurobindo remarked to his disciples:

It is impossible to change humanity by political machinery — it can’t be done.⁷⁵

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

74. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 61.

75. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 208.



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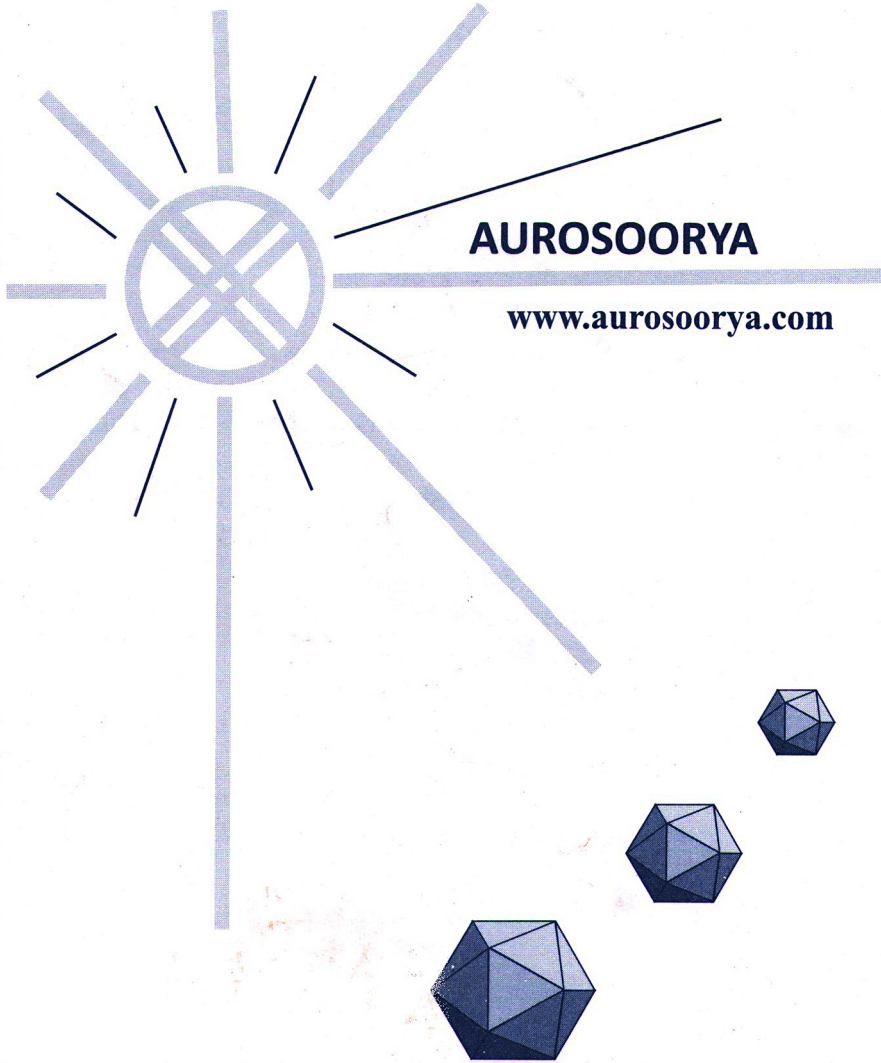
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