

# MOTHER INDIA

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DECEMBER 2020

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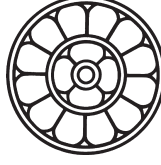
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXIII

No. 12

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## **‘THERE IN A HIDDEN CHAMBER CLOSED AND MUTE . . .’**

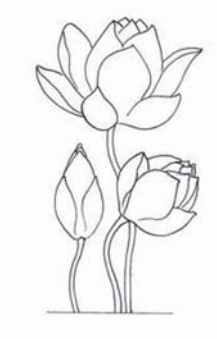
**(Lines from *Savitri*)**

. . . All that the Gods have learned is there self-known.  
There in a hidden chamber closed and mute  
Are kept the record graphs of the cosmic scribe,  
And there the tables of the sacred Law,  
There is the Book of Being's index page;  
The text and glossary of the Vedic truth  
Are there; the rhythms and metres of the stars  
Significant of the movements of our fate:  
The symbol powers of number and of form,  
And the secret code of the history of the world  
And Nature's correspondence with the soul  
Are written in the mystic heart of Life.  
In the glow of the spirit's room of memories  
He could recover the luminous marginal notes  
Dotting with light the crabbed ambiguous scroll,  
Rescue the preamble and the saving clause  
Of the dark Agreement by which all is ruled  
That rises from material Nature's sleep  
To clothe the Everlasting in new shapes.  
He could re-read now and interpret new  
Its strange symbol letters, scattered abstruse signs,  
Resolve its oracle and its paradox,  
Its riddling phrases and its blindfold terms,  
The deep oxymoron of its truth's repliques,  
And recognise as a just necessity  
Its hard conditions for the mighty work, —  
Nature's impossible Herculean toil  
Only her warlock-wisecraft could enforce,  
Its law of the opposition of the gods,  
Its list of inseparable contraries.  
The dumb great Mother in her cosmic trance  
Exploiting for creation's joy and pain  
Infinity's sanction to the birth of form,  
Accepts indomitably to execute

The will to know in an inconscient world,  
The will to live under a reign of death,  
The thirst for rapture in a heart of flesh,  
And works out through the appearance of a soul  
By a miraculous birth in plasm and gas  
The mystery of God’s covenant with the Night.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, BOOK 1, CANTO V: *The Yoga of the Spirit’s Freedom and Greatness*;  
CWSA, Vol. 33, pp. 74-75)





## THE COSMIC ILLUSION AND THE ANALOGY OF DREAM

The cosmic Illusion is sometimes envisaged — though that is not the accepted position — as something that has the character of an unreal subjective experience; it is then — or may be — a figure of forms and movements that arises in some eternal sleep of things or in a dream-consciousness and is temporarily imposed on a pure and featureless self-aware Existence; it is a dream that takes place in the Infinite. In the philosophies of the Mayavadins — for there are several systems alike in their basis but not altogether and at every point coincident with each other, — the analogy of dream is given, but as an analogy only, not as the intrinsic character of the world-illusion. It is difficult for the positive physical mind to admit the idea that ourselves, the world and life, the sole thing to which our consciousness bears positive witness, are inexistent, a cheat imposed on us by that consciousness: certain analogies are brought forward, the analogies especially of dream and hallucination, in order to show that it is possible for the experiences of the consciousness to seem to it real and yet prove to be without any basis or without a sufficient basis in reality; as a dream is real to the dreamer so long as he sleeps but waking shows it to be unreal, so our experience of world seems to us positive and real but, when we stand back from the illusion, we shall find that it had no reality. But it may be as well to give the dream analogy its full value and see whether our sense of world-experience has in any way a similar basis. For the idea of the world as a dream, whether it be a dream of the subjective mind or a dream of the soul or a dream in the Eternal, is often entertained and it powerfully enforces the illusionist tendency in human feeling and thinking. If it has no validity, we must definitely see that and the reasons of its inapplicability and set it aside well out of the way; if it has some validity, we must see what it is and how far it goes. If the world is an illusion, but not a dream illusion, that distinction too must be put on a secure basis.

Dream is felt to be unreal, first, because it ceases and has no farther validity when we pass from one status of consciousness to another which is our normal status. But this is not by itself a sufficient reason: for it may well be that there are different states of consciousness each with its own realities; if the consciousness of one state of things fades back and its contents are lost or, even when caught in memory, seem to be illusory as soon as we pass into another state, that would be perfectly normal, but it would not prove the reality of the state in which we now are and the unreality of the other which we have left behind us. If earth circumstances begin to seem unreal to a soul passing into a different world or another plane of consciousness, that would not prove their unreality; similarly, the fact that world-existence seems unreal to us when we pass into the spiritual silence or into some

Nirvana, does not of itself prove that the cosmos was all the time an illusion. The world is real to the consciousness dwelling in it, an unconditioned existence is real to the consciousness absorbed in Nirvana; that is all that is established. But the second reason for refusing credit to our sleep experience is that a dream is something evanescent without antecedents and without a sequel; ordinarily, too, it is without any sufficient coherence or any significance intelligible to our waking being. If our dreams were like our waking life an aspect of coherence, each night taking up and carrying farther a past continuous and connected sleep experience as each day takes up again our waking world-experience, then dreams would assume to our mind quite another character. There is therefore no analogy between a dream and waking life; these are experiences quite different in their character, validity, order. Our life is accused of evanescence and often it is accused too, as a whole, of a lack of inner coherence and significance; but its lack of complete significance may be due to our lack or limitation of understanding: actually, when we go within and begin to see it from within, it assumes a complete connected significance; at the same time whatever lack of inner coherence was felt before disappears and we see that it was due to the incoherence of our own inner seeing and knowledge and was not at all a character of life. There is no surface incoherence in life, it rather appears to our minds as a chain of firm sequences, and, if that is a mental delusion, as is sometimes alleged, if the sequence is created by our minds and does not actually exist in life, that does not remove the difference of the two states of consciousness. For in dream the coherence given by an observing inner consciousness is absent, and whatever sense of sequence there is seems to be due to a vague and false imitation of the connections of waking life, a subconscious mimesis, but this imitative sequence is shadowy and imperfect, fails and breaks always and is often wholly absent. We see too that the dream-consciousness seems to be wholly devoid of that control which the waking consciousness exercises to a certain extent over life-circumstances; it has the Nature-automatism of a subconscious construction and nothing of the conscious will and organising force of the evolved mind of the human being. Again the evanescence of a dream is radical and one dream has no connection with another; but the evanescence of the waking life is of details, — there is no evidence of evanescence in the connected totality of world-experience. Our bodies perish but souls proceed from birth to birth through the ages: stars and planets may disappear after a lapse of aeons or of many light-cycles, but universe, cosmic existence may well be a permanent as it is certainly a continuous activity; there is nothing to prove that the Infinite Energy which creates it has an end or a beginning either of itself or of its action. So far there is too great a disparateness between dream-life and waking life to make the analogy applicable.

But it may be questioned whether our dreams are indeed totally unreal and without significance, whether they are not a figure, an image-record or a symbolic transcript or representation of things that are real. For that we have to examine,

however summarily, the nature of sleep and of dream phenomena, their process of origination and their provenance. What happens in sleep is that our consciousness withdraws from the field of its waking experiences; it is supposed to be resting, suspended or in abeyance, but that is a superficial view of the matter. What is in abeyance is the waking activities, what is at rest is the surface mind and the normal conscious action of the bodily part of us; but the inner consciousness is not suspended, it enters into new inner activities, only a part of which, a part happening or recorded in something of us that is near to the surface, we remember. There is maintained in sleep, thus near the surface, an obscure subconscious element which is a receptacle or passage for our dream experiences and itself also a dream-builder; but behind it is the depth and mass of the subliminal, the totality of our concealed inner being and consciousness which is of quite another order. Normally it is a subconscious part in us, intermediate between consciousness and pure inconscience, that sends up through this surface layer its formations in the shape of dreams, constructions marked by an apparent inconsequence and incoherence. Many of these are fugitive structures built upon circumstances of our present life selected apparently at random and surrounded with a phantasy of variation; others call back the past, or rather selected circumstances and persons of the past, as a starting-point for similar fleeting edifices. There are other dreams of the subconscious which seem to be pure phantasy without any such initiation or basis; but the new method of psycho-analysis, trying to look for the first time into our dreams with some kind of scientific understanding, has established in them a system of meanings, a key to things in us which need to be known and handled by the waking consciousness; this of itself changes the whole character and value of our dream-experience. It begins to look as if there were something real behind it and as if too that something were an element of no mean practical importance.

But the subconscious is not our sole dream-builder. The subconscious in us is the extreme border of our secret inner existence where it meets the Inconscient, it is a degree of our being in which the Inconscient struggles into a half consciousness; the surface physical consciousness also, when it sinks back from the waking level and retrogresses towards the Inconscient, retires into this intermediate subconsciousness. Or, from another view-point, this nether part of us may be described as the antechamber of the Inconscient through which its formations rise into our waking or our subliminal being. When we sleep and the surface physical part of us, which is in its first origin here an output from the Inconscient, relapses towards the originating inconscience, it enters into this subconscious element, antechamber or substratum, and there it finds the impressions of its past or persistent habits of mind and experiences, — for all have left their mark on our subconscious part and have there a power of recurrence. In its effect on our waking self this recurrence often takes the form of a reassertion of old habits, impulses dormant or suppressed, rejected elements of the nature, or it comes up as some other not so easily recognisable, some peculiar disguised or

subtle result of these suppressed or rejected but not erased impulses or elements. In the dream consciousness the phenomenon is an apparently fanciful construction, a composite of figures and movements built upon or around the buried impressions with a sense in them that escapes the waking intelligence because it has no clue to the subconscious's system of significances. After a time this subconscious activity appears to sink back into complete incoherence and we speak of this state as deep dreamless sleep; thence we emerge again into the dream-shallows or return to the waking surface.

But, in fact, in what we call dreamless sleep, we have gone into a profounder and denser layer of the subconscious, a state too involved, too immersed or too obscure, dull and heavy to bring to the surface its structures, and we are dreaming there but unable to grasp or retain in the recording layer of subconsciousness these more obscure dream figures. Or else, it may be, the part of our mind which still remains active in the sleep of the body has entered into the inner domains of our being, the subliminal mental, the subliminal vital, the subtle-physical, and is there lost to all active connection with the surface parts of us. If we are still in the nearer depths of these regions, the surface subconscious which is our sleep-wakefulness records something of what we experience in these depths; but it records it in its own transcription, often marred by characteristic incoherences and always, even when most coherent, deformed or cast into figures drawn from the world of waking experience. But if we have gone deeper inward, the record fails or cannot be recovered and we have the illusion of dreamlessness; but the activity of the inner dream consciousness continues behind the veil of the now mute and inactive subconscious surface. This continued dream activity is revealed to us when we become more inwardly conscious, for then we get into connection with the heavier and deeper subconscious stratum and can be aware — at the time or by a retracing or recovering through memory — of what happened when we sank into these torpid depths. It is possible too to become conscious deeper within our subliminal selves and we are then aware of experiences on other planes of our being or even in supraphysical worlds to which sleep gives us a right of secret entry. A transcript of such experiences reaches us; but the transcriber here is not the subconscious, it is the subliminal, a greater dream-builder.

If the subliminal thus comes to the front in our dream consciousness, there is sometimes an activity of our subliminal intelligence, — dream becomes a series of thoughts, often strangely or vividly figured, problems are solved which our waking consciousness could not solve, warnings, premonitions, indications of the future, veridical dreams replace the normal subconscious incoherence. There can come also a structure of symbol images, some of a mental character, some of a vital nature: the former are precise in their figures, clear in their significance; the latter are often complex and baffling to our waking consciousness, but, if we can seize the clue, they reveal their own sense and peculiar system of coherence. Finally,

there can come to us the records of happenings seen or experienced by us on other planes of our own being or of universal being into which we enter: these have sometimes, like the symbolic dreams, a strong bearing on our own inner and outer life or the life of others, reveal elements of our or their mental being and life-being or disclose influences on them of which our waking self is totally ignorant; but sometimes they have no such bearing and are purely records of other organised systems of consciousness independent of our physical existence. The subconscious dreams constitute the bulk of our most ordinary sleep-experience and they are those which we usually remember; but sometimes the subliminal builder is able to impress our sleep consciousness sufficiently to stamp his activities on our waking memory. If we develop our inner being, live more inwardly than most men do, then the balance is changed and a larger dream consciousness opens before us; our dreams can take on a subliminal and no longer a subconscious character and can assume a reality and significance.

It is even possible to become wholly conscious in sleep and follow throughout from beginning to end or over large stretches the stages of our dream experience; it is found that then we are aware of ourselves passing from state after state of consciousness to a brief period of luminous and peaceful dreamless rest, which is the true restorer of the energies of the waking nature, and then returning by the same way to the waking consciousness. It is normal, as we thus pass from state to state, to let the previous experiences slip away from us; in the return only the more vivid or those nearest to the waking surface are remembered: but this can be remedied, — a greater retention is possible or the power can be developed of going back in memory from dream to dream, from state to state, till the whole is once more before us. A coherent knowledge of sleep life, though difficult to achieve or to keep established, is possible.

Our subliminal self is not, like our surface physical being, an outcome of the energy of the Inconscient; it is a meeting-place of the consciousness that emerges from below by evolution and the consciousness that has descended from above for involution. There is in it an inner mind, an inner vital being of ourselves, an inner or subtle-physical being larger than our outer being and nature. This inner existence is the concealed origin of almost all in our surface self that is not a construction of the first inconscient World-Energy or a natural developed functioning of our surface consciousness or a reaction of it to impacts from the outside universal Nature, — and even in this construction, these functionings, these reactions the subliminal takes part and exercises on them a considerable influence. There is here a consciousness which has a power of direct contact with the universal unlike the mostly indirect contacts which our surface being maintains with the universe through the sense-mind and the senses. There are here inner senses, a subliminal sight, touch, hearing; but these subtle senses are rather channels of the inner being's direct consciousness of things than its informants: the subliminal is not dependent on its senses for its

knowledge, they only give a form to its direct experience of objects; they do not, so much as in waking mind, convey forms of objects for the mind's documentation or as the starting-point or basis for an indirect constructive experience. The subliminal has the right of entry into the mental and vital and subtle-physical planes of the universal consciousness, it is not confined to the material plane and the physical world; it possesses means of communication with the worlds of being which the descent towards involution created in its passage and with all corresponding planes or worlds that may have arisen or been constructed to serve the purpose of the re-ascent from Inconscience to Superconscience. It is into this large realm of interior existence that our mind and vital being retire when they withdraw from the surface activities whether by sleep or inward-drawn concentration or by the inner plunge of trance.

Our waking state is unaware of its connection with the subliminal being, although it receives from it — but without any knowledge of the place of origin — the inspirations, intuitions, ideas, will-suggestions, sense-suggestions, urges to action that rise from below or from behind our limited surface existence. Sleep like trance opens the gate of the subliminal to us; for in sleep, as in trance, we retire behind the veil of the limited waking personality and it is behind this veil that the subliminal has its existence. But we receive the records of our sleep experience through dream and in dream figures and not in that condition which might be called an inner waking and which is the most accessible form of the trance state, nor through the supernormal clarities of vision and other more luminous and concrete ways of communication developed by the inner subliminal cognition when it gets into habitual or occasional conscious connection with our waking self. The subliminal, with the subconscious as an annexe of itself, — for the subconscious is also part of the behind-the-veil entity, — is the seer of inner things and of supraphysical experiences; the surface subconscious is only a transcriber. It is for this reason that the Upanishad describes the subliminal being as the Dream Self because it is normally in dreams, visions, absorbed states of inner experience that we enter into and are part of its experiences, — just as it describes the superconscient as the Sleep Self because normally all mental or sensory experiences cease when we enter this superconscience. For in the deeper trance into which the touch of the superconscient plunges our mentality, no record from it or transcript of its contents can normally reach us; it is only by an especial or an unusual development, in a supernormal condition or through a break or rift in our confined normality, that we can be on the surface conscious of the contacts or messages of the Superconscience. But, in spite of these figurative names of dream-state and sleep-state, the field of both these states of consciousness was clearly regarded as a field of reality no less than that of the waking state in which our movements of perceptive consciousness are a record or transcript of physical things and of our contacts with the physical universe. No doubt, all the three states can be classed as parts of an illusion, our experiences of them can be ranked together



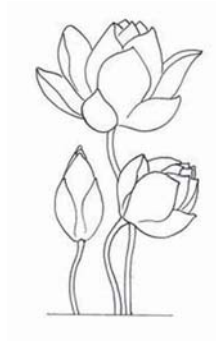
as constructions of an illusory consciousness, our waking state no less illusory than our dream state or sleep state, since the only true truth or real reality is the incommunicable Self or One-Existence (Atman, Adwaita) which is the fourth state of the Self described by the Vedanta. But it is equally possible to regard and rank them together as three different orders of one Reality or as three states of consciousness in which is embodied our contact with three different grades of self-experience and world-experience.

If this is a true account of dream experience, dreams can no longer be classed as a mere unreal figure of unreal things temporarily imposed upon our half-unconsciousness as a reality; the analogy therefore fails even as an illustrative support for the theory of the cosmic Illusion. It may be said, however, that our dreams are not themselves realities but only a transcript of reality, a system of symbol-images, and our waking experience of the universe is similarly not a reality but only a transcript of reality, a series or collection of symbol-images. It is quite true that primarily we see the physical universe only through a system of images impressed or imposed on our senses and so far the contention is justified; it may also be admitted that in a certain sense and from one view-point our experiences and activities can be considered as symbols of a truth which our lives are trying to express but at present only with a partial success and an imperfect coherence. If that were all, life might be described as a dream-experience of self and things in the consciousness of the Infinite. But although our primary evidence of the objects of the universe consists of a structure of sense images, these are completed, validated, set in order by an automatic intuition in the consciousness which immediately relates the image with the thing imaged and gets the tangible experience of the object, so that we are not merely regarding or reading a translation or sense-transcript of the reality but looking through the sense-image to the reality. This adequacy is amplified too by the action of a reason which fathoms and understands the law of things sensed and can observe scrupulously the sense-transcript and correct its errors. Therefore we may conclude that we experience a real universe through our imaged sense-transcript by the aid of the intuition and the reason, — an intuition which gives us the touch of things and a reason which investigates their truth by its conceptive knowledge. But we must note also that even if our image view of the universe, our sense-transcript, is a system of symbol images and not an exact reproduction or transcription, a literal translation, still a symbol is a notation of something that is, a transcript of realities. Even if our images are incorrect, what they endeavour to image are realities, not illusions; when we see a tree or a stone or an animal, it is not a non-existent figure, a hallucination that we are seeing; we may not be sure that the image is exact, we may concede that other-sense might very well see it otherwise, but still there is something there that justifies the image, something with which it has more or less correspondence. But in the theory of Illusion the only reality is an indeterminable featureless pure Existence, Brahman, and there is no possibility of its being translated

or mistranslated into a system of symbol-figures, for that could only be if this Existence had some determinate contents or some unmanifested truths of its being which could be transcribed into the forms or names given to them by our consciousness: a pure Indeterminable cannot be rendered by a transcript, a multitude of representative differentiae, a crowd of symbols or images; for there is in it only a pure Identity, there is nothing to transcribe, nothing to symbolise, nothing to image. Therefore the dream analogy fails us altogether and is better put out of the way; it can always be used as a vivid metaphor of a certain attitude our mind can take towards its experiences, but it has no value for a metaphysical inquiry into the reality and fundamental significances or the origin of existence.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 435-45)





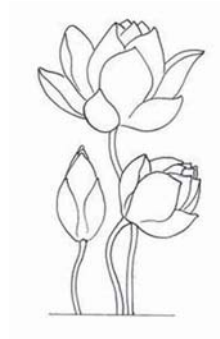
## FRAGMENTARY LIFE SKETCH<sup>1</sup>

Aurobindo was born on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1872, in Calcutta. His father, a man of great ability and strong personality, had been among the first to go to England for his education. He returned entirely Anglicised in habits, ideas and ideal, — so strongly that Aurobindo as a child spoke English and Hindustani only and learned his mother tongue only after his return from England. He was determined that his children should receive an entirely European upbringing. While in India they were sent for the beginning of their education to an Irish nuns' school in Darjeeling and in 1879 he took his three sons to England and placed them with an English clergyman and his wife with strict instructions that they should not be allowed to make the acquaintance of any Indian or undergo any Indian influence. These instructions were carried out to the letter and Aurobindo grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, her religion and her culture.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Autobiographical Notes, CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 15)*

1. Circa 1928



## INCOMPLETE LIFE SKETCH IN OUTLINE FORM<sup>1</sup>

Born 1872.

Sent to England for education 1879.

Studied at St Paul's School, London, and King's College, Cambridge.

Returned to India. February, 1893.

Life of preparation at Baroda 1893 – 1906

Political life — 1902 – 1910

[The “Swadeshi” movement prepared from 1902 – 5 and started definitely by Sri Aurobindo, Tilak, Lajpatrai and others in 1905. A movement for Indian independence, by non-cooperation and passive resistance and the organisation (under a national Council or Executive, but this did not materialise,) of arbitration, national education, economic independence, (especially handloom industry including the spinning-wheel, but also the opening of mills, factories and Swadeshi business concerns under Indian management and with Indian capital,) boycott of British goods, British law-courts, and all Government institutions, offices, honours etc. Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation movement was a repetition of the “Swadeshi”, but with an exclusive emphasis on the spinning-wheel and the transformation of passive resistance, (“Satyagraha”) from a political means into a moral and religious dogma of soul-force and conquest by suffering. The running of the daily paper, “Bande Mataram”, was only one of Sri Aurobindo's political activities.]<sup>2</sup>

Imprisonment —

Thrice prosecuted; first for sedition and acquitted

then in 1908 along with his brother

Barindra, (one of the chief leaders of the revolutionary movement) on a charge of conspiracy to wage war against the established Government. Acquitted after a year's detention as an under-trial prisoner, mostly in a solitary cell

last; in his absence in 1910, for sedition. This case also failed on appeal.

==

After 1909 carried on the political (Swadeshi) movement alone (the other leaders being in prison or in exile) for one year. Afterwards on receiving an inner intimation

1. Circa 1922

2. *The square brackets are Sri Aurobindo's.* — Editorial Note in CWSA.

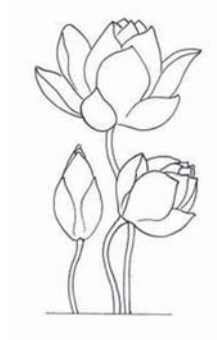
left politics for spiritual lifework. The intimation was that the Swadeshi movement must now end and would be followed later on by a Home Rule movement and a Non-cooperation movement of the Gandhi type, under other leaders.

Came to Pondicherry 1910.

Started the “Arya”. 1914

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Autobiographical Notes, CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 14-15)*



## SRI AUROBINDO: A LIFE SKETCH

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on August 15, 1872. In 1879, at the age of seven, he was taken with his two elder brothers to England for education and lived there for fourteen years. Brought up at first in an English family at Manchester, he joined St. Paul's School in London in [1884]<sup>1</sup> and in 1890 went from it with a senior classical scholarship to King's College, Cambridge, where he studied for two years. In 1890 he passed also the open competition for the Indian Civil Service, but at the end of two years of probation failed to present himself at the riding examination and was disqualified for the Service. At this time the Gaekwar of Baroda was in London. Aurobindo saw him, obtained an appointment in the Baroda Service and left England in [January],<sup>2</sup> 1893.

Sri Aurobindo passed thirteen years, from 1893 to 1906, in the Baroda Service, first in the Revenue Department and in secretariat work for the Maharaja, afterwards as Professor of English and, finally, Vice-Principal in the Baroda College. These were years of self-culture, of literary activity — for much of the poetry afterwards published from Pondicherry was written at this time — and of preparation for his future work. In England he had received, according to his father's express instructions, an entirely occidental education without any contact with the culture of India and the East.<sup>3</sup> At Baroda he made up the deficiency, learned Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages, assimilated the spirit of Indian civilisation and its forms past and present. A great part of the last years of this period was spent on leave in silent political activity, for he was debarred from public action by his position at Baroda. The outbreak of the agitation against the partition of Bengal in 1905 gave him the opportunity to give up the Baroda Service and join openly in the political movement. He left Baroda in 1906 and went to Calcutta as Principal of the newly-founded Bengal National College.

The political action of Sri Aurobindo covered eight years, from 1902 to 1910. During the first half of this period he worked behind the scenes, preparing with other co-workers the beginnings of the Swadeshi (Indian Sinn Fein) movement, till the agitation in Bengal furnished an opening for the public initiation of a more forward and direct political action than the moderate reformism which had till then

1. MS 1885. (Editorial note in CWSA)

2. MS February. (Editorial note in CWSA)

3. It may be observed that Sri Aurobindo's education in England gave him a wide introduction to the culture of ancient, of mediaeval and of modern Europe. He was a brilliant scholar in Greek and Latin. He had learned French from his childhood in Manchester and studied for himself German and Italian sufficiently to read Goethe and Dante in the original tongues. (He passed the Tripos in Cambridge in the first division and obtained record marks in Greek and Latin in the examination for the Indian Civil Service.) [*Sri Aurobindo's note*]

been the creed of the Indian National Congress. In 1906 Sri Aurobindo came to Bengal with this purpose and joined the New Party, an advanced section small in numbers and not yet strong in influence, which had been recently formed in the Congress. The political theory of this party was a rather vague gospel of Non-cooperation; in action it had not yet gone farther than some ineffective clashes with the Moderate leaders at the annual Congress assembly behind the veil of secrecy of the "Subjects Committee". Sri Aurobindo persuaded its chiefs in Bengal to come forward publicly as an All-India party with a definite and challenging programme, putting forward Tilak, the popular Maratha leader at its head, and to attack the then dominant Moderate (Reformist or Liberal) oligarchy of veteran politicians and capture from them the Congress and the country. This was the origin of the historic struggle between the Moderates and the Nationalists (called by their opponents Extremists) which in two years changed altogether the face of Indian politics.

The new-born Nationalist party put forward Swaraj (independence) as its goal as against the far-off Moderate hope of colonial self-government to be realised at a distant date of a century or two by a slow progress of reform; it proposed as its means of execution a programme which resembled in spirit, though not in its details, the policy of Sinn Fein developed some years later and carried to a successful issue in Ireland. The principle of this new policy was self-help; it aimed on one side at an effective organisation of the forces of the nation and on the other professed a complete non-cooperation with the Government. Boycott of British and foreign goods and the fostering of Swadeshi industries to replace them, boycott of British law courts and the foundation of a system of Arbitration courts in their stead, boycott of Government universities and colleges and the creation of a network of National colleges and schools, the formation of societies of young men which would do the work of police and defence and, wherever necessary, a policy of passive resistance were among the immediate items of the programme. Sri Aurobindo hoped to capture the Congress and make it the directing centre of an organised national action, an informal State within the State, which would carry on the struggle for freedom till it was won. He persuaded the party to take up and finance as its recognised organ the newly-founded daily paper, *Bande Mataram*, of which he was at the time acting editor. The *Bande Mataram*, whose policy from the beginning of 1907 till its abrupt winding up in 1908 when Aurobindo was in prison was wholly directed by him, circulated almost immediately all over India. During its brief but momentous existence it changed the political thought of India which has ever since preserved fundamentally, even amidst its later developments, the stamp then imparted to it. But the struggle initiated on these lines, though vehement and eventful and full of importance for the future, did not last long at the time; for the country was still unripe for so bold a programme.

Sri Aurobindo was prosecuted for sedition in 1907 and acquitted. Up till now an organiser and writer, he was obliged by this event and by the imprisonment or

disappearance of other leaders to come forward as the acknowledged head of the party in Bengal and to appear on the platform for the first time as a speaker. He presided over the Nationalist Conference at Surat in 1907 where in the forceful clash of two equal parties the Congress was broken to pieces. In May, 1908, he was arrested in the Alipur Conspiracy Case as implicated in the doings of the revolutionary group led by his brother Barindra; but no evidence of any value could be established against him and in this case too he was acquitted. After a detention of one year as undertrial prisoner in the Alipur Jail, he came out in May, 1909, to find the party organisation broken, its leaders scattered by imprisonment, deportation or self-imposed exile and the party itself still existent but dumb and dispirited and incapable of any strenuous action. For almost a year he strove single-handed as the sole remaining leader of the Nationalists in India to revive the movement. He published at this time to aid his effort a weekly English paper, the *Karmayogin*, and a Bengali weekly, the *Dharma*. But at last he was compelled to recognise that the nation was not yet sufficiently trained to carry out his policy and programme. For a time he thought that the necessary training must first be given through a less advanced Home Rule movement or an agitation of passive resistance of the kind created by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa. But he saw that the hour of these movements had not come and that he himself was not their destined leader. Moreover, since 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.

In February, 1910, he withdrew to a secret retirement at Chandernagore and in the beginning of April sailed for Pondicherry in French India. A third prosecution was launched against him at this moment for a signed article in the *Karmayogin*; in his absence it was pressed against the printer of the paper who was convicted, but the conviction was quashed on appeal in the High Court of Calcutta. For the third time a prosecution against him had failed. Sri Aurobindo had left Bengal with some intention of returning to the political field under more favourable circumstances; but very soon the magnitude of the spiritual work he had taken up appeared to him and he saw that it would need the exclusive concentration of all his energies. Eventually he cut off connection with politics, refused repeatedly to accept the Presidentship of the National Congress and went into a complete retirement. During all his stay at Pondicherry from 1910 to the present moment<sup>4</sup> he has remained more and more exclusively devoted to his spiritual work and his sâdhanâ.

In 1914 after four years of silent Yoga he began the publication of a philosophical monthly, the *Arya*. Most of his more important works, those published since in book form, the *Isha Upanishad*, the *Essays on the Gita*, and others not yet

4. This "Life Sketch" was written in 1930 and published in 1937. (Editorial note in CWSA)

published, the *Life Divine*, the *Synthesis of Yoga*, appeared serially in the *Arya*. These works embodied much of the inner knowledge that had come to him in his practice of Yoga. Others were concerned with the spirit and significance of Indian civilisation and culture, the true meaning of the Vedas, the progress of human society, the nature and evolution of poetry, the possibility of the unification of the human race. At this time also he began to publish his poems, both those written in England and at Baroda and those, fewer in number, added during his period of political activity and in the first years of his residence at Pondicherry. The *Arya* ceased publication in 1921 after six years and a half of uninterrupted appearance.

Sri Aurobindo lived at first in retirement at Pondicherry with four or five disciples. Afterwards more and yet more began to come to him to follow his spiritual path and the number became so large that a community of sâdhaks had to be formed for the maintenance and collective guidance of those who had left everything behind for the sake of a higher life. This was the foundation of the Sri Aurobindo Asram which has less been created than grown around him as its centre.

Sri Aurobindo began his practice of Yoga in 1905. At first gathering into it the essential elements of spiritual experience that are gained by the paths of divine communion and spiritual realisation followed till now in India, he passed on in search of a more complete experience uniting and harmonising the two ends of existence, Spirit and Matter. Most ways of Yoga are paths to the Beyond leading to the Spirit and, in the end, away from life; Sri Aurobindo's rises to the Spirit to redescend with its gains bringing the light and power and bliss of the Spirit into life to transform it. Man's present existence in the material world is in this view or vision of things a life in the Ignorance with the Inconscient at its base, but even in its darkness and nescience there are involved the presence and possibilities of the Divine. The created world is not a mistake or a vanity and illusion to be cast aside by the soul returning to heaven or Nirvâna, but the scene of a spiritual evolution by which out of this material Inconscience is to be manifested progressively the Divine Consciousness in things. Mind is the highest term yet reached in the evolution, but it is not the highest of which it is capable. There is above it a Supermind or eternal Truth-consciousness which is in its nature the self-aware and self-determining light and power of a Divine Knowledge. Mind is an ignorance seeking after Truth, but this is a self-existent Knowledge harmoniously manifesting the play of its forms and forces. It is only by the descent of this supermind that the perfection dreamed of by all that is highest in humanity can come. It is possible by opening to a greater divine consciousness to rise to this power of light and bliss, discover one's true self, remain in constant union with the Divine and bring down the supramental Force for the transformation of mind and life and body. To realise this possibility has been the dynamic aim of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Autobiographical Notes*, CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 5-10)

## **A GENERAL NOTE ON SRI AUROBINDO'S POLITICAL LIFE**

There were three sides to Sri Aurobindo's political ideas and activities. First, there was the action with which he started, a secret revolutionary propaganda and organisation of which the central object was the preparation of an armed insurrection. Secondly, there was a public propaganda intended to convert the whole nation to the ideal of independence which was regarded, when he entered into politics, by the vast majority of Indians as unpractical and impossible, an almost insane chimera. It was thought that the British Empire was too powerful and India too weak, effectively disarmed and impotent even to dream of the success of such an endeavour. Thirdly, there was the organisation of the people to carry on a public and united opposition and undermining of the foreign rule through an increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance.

At that time the military organisation of the great empires and their means of military action were not so overwhelming and apparently irresistible as they now are: the rifle was still the decisive weapon, air power had not developed and the force of artillery was not so devastating as it afterwards became. India was disarmed, but Sri Aurobindo thought that with proper organisation and help from outside this difficulty might be overcome and in so vast a country as India and with the smallness of the regular British armies, even a guerrilla warfare accompanied by general resistance and revolt might be effective. There was also the possibility of a great revolt in the Indian army. At the same time he had studied the temperament and characteristics of the British people and the turn of their political instincts, and he believed that although they would resist any attempt at self-liberation by the Indian people and would at the most only concede very slowly such reforms as would not weaken their imperial control, still they were not of the kind which would be ruthlessly adamant to the end: if they found resistance and revolt becoming general and persistent they would in the end try to arrive at an accommodation to save what they could of their empire or in an extremity prefer to grant independence rather than have it forcefully wrested from their hands.

In some quarters there is the idea that Sri Aurobindo's political standpoint was entirely pacifist, that he was opposed in principle and in practice to all violence and that he denounced terrorism, insurrection etc. as entirely forbidden by the spirit and letter of the Hindu religion. It is even suggested that he was a forerunner of the gospel of Ahimsa. This is quite incorrect. Sri Aurobindo is neither an impotent moralist nor a weak pacifist.

The rule of confining political action to passive resistance was adopted as the best policy for the National Movement at that stage and not as a part of a gospel of



Non-violence or pacific idealism. Peace is a part of the highest ideal, but it must be spiritual or at the very least psychological in its basis; without a change in human nature it cannot come with any finality. If it is attempted on any other basis (moral principle or gospel of Ahimsa or any other) it will fail, and even may leave things worse than before. He is in favour of an attempt to put down war by international agreement and international force, what is now contemplated in the "New Order", if that proves possible, but that would not be Ahimsa, it would be a putting down of anarchic force by legal force, and even then one cannot be sure that it would be permanent. Within nations this sort of peace has been secured, but it does not prevent occasional civil wars and revolutions and political outbreaks and repressions, sometimes of a sanguinary character. The same might happen to a similar world-peace. Sri Aurobindo has never concealed his opinion that a nation is entitled to attain its freedom by violence, if it can do so or if there is no other way; whether it should do so or not, depends on what is the best policy, not on ethical considerations. Sri Aurobindo's position and practice in this matter was the same as Tilak's and that of other Nationalist leaders who were by no means Pacifists or worshippers of Ahimsa.<sup>1</sup>

For the first few years in India, Sri Aurobindo abstained from any political activity (except the writing of the articles in the *Indu Prakash*) and studied the conditions in the country so that he might be able to judge more maturely what could be done. Then he made his first move when he sent a young Bengali soldier of the Baroda army, Jatin Banerji, as his lieutenant to Bengal with a programme of preparation and action which he thought might occupy a period of 30 years before fruition could become possible. As a matter of fact it has taken 50 years for the movement of liberation to arrive at fruition and the beginning of complete success. The idea was to establish secretly or, as far as visible action could be taken, under various pretexts and covers, revolutionary propaganda and recruiting throughout Bengal. This was to be done among the youth of the country while sympathy and support and financial and other assistance were to be obtained from the older men who had advanced views or could be won over to them. Centres were to be established in every town and eventually in every village. Societies of young men were to be established with various ostensible objects, cultural, intellectual or moral and those already existing were to be won over for revolutionary use. Young men were to be trained in activities which might be helpful for ultimate military action, such as riding, physical training, athletics of various kinds, drill and organised movement. As soon as the idea was sown it attained a rapid prosperity; already existing small groups and associations of young men who had not yet the clear idea or any settled programme of revolution began to turn in this direction and a few who had already

1. This and the preceding paragraph were inserted here when this note was first published in 1948. They incorporate, with some changes, most of a previously written note. — (Editorial note in CWSA)

the revolutionary aim were contacted and soon developed activity on organised lines; the few rapidly became many. Meanwhile Sri Aurobindo had met a member of the Secret Society in Western India, and taken the oath of the Society and had been introduced to the Council in Bombay. His future action was not pursued under any directions by this Council, but he took up on his own responsibility the task of generalising support for its objects in Bengal where as yet it had no membership or following. He spoke of the Society and its aim to P. Mitter and other leading men of the revolutionary group in Bengal and they took the oath of the Society and agreed to carry out its objects on the lines suggested by Sri Aurobindo. The special cover used by Mitter's group was association for lathi play which had already been popularised to some extent by Sarala Ghoshal in Bengal among the young men; but other groups used other ostensible covers. Sri Aurobindo's attempt at a close organisation of the whole movement did not succeed, but the movement itself did not suffer by that, for the general idea was taken up and activity of many separate groups led to a greater and more widespread diffusion of the revolutionary drive and its action. Afterwards there came the partition of Bengal and a general outburst of revolt which favoured the rise of the extremist party and the great nationalist movement. Sri Aurobindo's activities were then turned more and more in this direction and the secret action became a secondary and subordinate element. He took advantage, however, of the Swadeshi movement to popularise the idea of violent revolt in the future. At Barin's suggestion he agreed to the starting of a paper, *Yugantar*, which was to preach open revolt and the absolute denial of the British rule and include such items as a series of articles containing instructions for guerrilla warfare. Sri Aurobindo himself wrote some of the opening articles in the early numbers and he always exercised a general control; when a member of the sub-editorial staff, Swami Vivekananda's brother, presented himself on his own motion to the police in a search as the editor of the paper and was prosecuted, the *Yugantar* under Sri Aurobindo's orders adopted the policy of refusing to defend itself in a British Court on the ground that it did not recognise the foreign Government and this immensely increased the prestige and influence of the paper. It had as its chief writers and directors three of the ablest younger writers in Bengal, and it at once acquired an immense influence throughout Bengal. It may be noted that the Secret Society did not include terrorism in its programme but this element grew up in Bengal as a result of the strong repression and the reaction to it in that province.

The public activity of Sri Aurobindo began with the writing of the articles in the *Indu Prakash*. These [nine]<sup>2</sup> articles written at the instance of K. G. Deshpande, editor of the paper and Sri Aurobindo's Cambridge friend, under the caption "New Lamps for Old" vehemently denounced the then congress policy of pray, petition and protest and called for a dynamic leadership based upon self-help and fearlessness.

2. 1948 edition seven. (Editorial note in CWSA)

But this outspoken and irrefutable criticism was checked by the action of a Moderate leader who frightened the editor and thus prevented any full development of his ideas in the paper; he had to turn aside to generalities such as the necessity of extending the activities of the Congress beyond the circle of the bourgeois or middle class and calling into it the masses. Finally, Sri Aurobindo suspended all public activity of this kind and worked only in secret till 1905, but he contacted Tilak whom he regarded as the one possible leader for a revolutionary party and met him at the Ahmedabad Congress; there Tilak took him out of the pandal and talked to him for an hour in the grounds expressing his contempt for the Reformist movement and explaining his own line of action in Maharashtra.

Sri Aurobindo included in the scope of his revolutionary work one kind of activity which afterwards became an important item in the public programme of the Nationalist party. He encouraged the young men in the centres of work to propagate the Swadeshi idea which at that time was only in its infancy and hardly more than a fad of the few. One of the ablest men in these revolutionary groups was a Mahratta named Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar who was an able writer in Bengali (his family had been long domiciled in Bengal) and who had written a popular life of Shivaji in Bengali in which he first brought in the name of Swaraj, afterwards adopted by the Nationalists as their word for independence, — Swaraj became one item of the fourfold Nationalist programme. He published a book entitled *Desher Katha* describing in exhaustive detail the British commercial and industrial exploitation of India. This book had an immense repercussion in Bengal, captured the mind of young Bengal and assisted more than anything else in the preparation of the Swadeshi movement. Sri Aurobindo himself had always considered the shaking off of this economic yoke and the development of Indian trade and industry as a necessary concomitant of the revolutionary endeavour.

As long as he was in the Baroda service, Sri Aurobindo could not take part publicly in politics. Apart from that, he preferred to remain and act and even to lead from behind the scenes without his name being known in public; it was the Government's action in prosecuting him as editor of the *Bande Mataram* that forced him into public view. And from that time forward he became openly, what he had been for sometime already, a prominent leader of the Nationalist party, its principal leader in action in Bengal and the organiser there of its policy and strategy. He had decided in his mind the lines on which he wanted the country's action to run: what he planned was very much the same as was developed afterwards in Ireland as the Sinn Fein movement; but Sri Aurobindo did not derive his ideas, as some have represented, from Ireland, for the Irish movement became prominent later and he knew nothing of it till after he had withdrawn to Pondicherry. There was moreover a capital difference between India and Ireland which made his work much more difficult; for all its past history had accustomed the Irish people to rebellion against British rule and this history might be even described as a constant struggle for

independence intermittent in its action but permanently there in principle; there was nothing of this kind in India. Sri Aurobindo had to establish and generalise the idea of independence in the mind of the Indian people and at the same time to push first a party and then the whole nation into an intense and organised political activity which would lead to the accomplishment of that ideal. His idea was to capture the Congress and to make it an instrument for revolutionary action instead of a centre of a timid constitutional agitation which would only talk and pass resolutions and recommendations to the foreign Government; if the Congress could not be captured, then a central revolutionary body would have to be created which could do this work. It was to be a sort of State within the State giving its directions to the people and creating organised bodies and institutions which would be its means of action; there must be an increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance which would render the administration of the country by a foreign Government difficult or finally impossible, a universal unrest which would wear down repression and finally, if need be, an open revolt all over the country. This plan included a boycott of British trade, the substitution of national schools for the Government institutions, the creation of arbitration courts to which the people could resort instead of depending on the ordinary courts of law, the creation of volunteer forces which would be the nucleus of an army of open revolt, and all other action that could make the programme complete. The part Sri Aurobindo took publicly in Indian politics was of brief duration, for he turned aside from it in 1910 and withdrew to Pondicherry; much of his programme lapsed in his absence, but enough had been done to change the whole face of Indian politics and the whole spirit of the Indian people, to make independence its aim and non-cooperation and resistance its method, and even an imperfect application of this policy heightening into sporadic periods of revolt has been sufficient to bring about the victory. The course of subsequent events followed largely the line of Sri Aurobindo's idea. The Congress was finally captured by the Nationalist party, declared independence its aim, organised itself for action, took almost the whole nation minus a majority of the Mohammedans and a minority of the depressed classes into acceptance of its leadership and eventually formed the first national, though not as yet an independent, Government in India and secured from Britain acceptance of independence for India.<sup>3</sup>

At first Sri Aurobindo took part in Congress politics only from behind the scenes as he had not yet decided to leave the Baroda service; but he took long leave without pay in which, besides carrying on personally the secret revolutionary work, he attended the Barisal Conference broken up by the police and toured East Bengal along with Bepin Pal and associated himself closely with the forward group in the Congress. It was during this period that he joined Bepin Pal in the editing of the

3. This sentence, unlike the final one in this "General Note" was not revised before publication in 1948. (From editorial note in CWSA)

*Bande Mataram*, founded the new political party in Bengal and attended the Congress session at Calcutta at which the Extremists, though still a minority, succeeded under the leadership of Tilak in imposing part of their political programme on the Congress. The founding of the Bengal National College gave him the opportunity he needed and enabled him to resign his position in the Baroda service and join the college as its Principal. Subodh Mullick, one of Sri Aurobindo's collaborators in his secret action and afterwards also in Congress politics, in whose house he usually lived when he was in Calcutta, had given a lakh of rupees for this foundation and had stipulated that Sri Aurobindo should be given a post of professor in the college with a salary of Rs. 150; so he was now free to give his whole time to the service of the country. Bepin Pal, who had been long expounding a policy of self-help and non-cooperation in his weekly journal, now started a daily with the name of *Bande Mataram*, but it was likely to be a brief adventure since he began with only Rs. 500 in his pocket and no firm assurance of financial assistance in the future. He asked Sri Aurobindo to join him in this venture to which a ready consent was given, for now Sri Aurobindo saw his opportunity for starting the public propaganda necessary for his revolutionary purpose. He called a meeting of the forward group of young men in the Congress and [they] decided then to organise themselves openly as a new political party joining hands with the corresponding group in Maharashtra under the proclaimed leadership of Tilak and to join battle with the Moderate party which was done at the Calcutta session. He also persuaded them to take up the *Bande Mataram* daily as their party organ and a *Bande Mataram* Company was started to finance the paper, whose direction Sri Aurobindo undertook during the absence of Bepin Pal who was sent on a tour in the districts to proclaim the purpose and programme of the new party. The new party was at once successful and the *Bande Mataram* paper began to circulate throughout India. On its staff were not only Bepin Pal and Sri Aurobindo but some other very able writers, Shyam Sundar Chakravarty, Hemendra Prasad Ghose and Bejoy Chatterji. Shyam Sundar and Bejoy were masters of the English language, each with a style of his own; Shyam Sundar caught up something like Sri Aurobindo's way of writing and later on many took his articles for Sri Aurobindo's. But after a time dissensions arose between Bepin Pal on one side and the other contributors and the directors of the Company because of temperamental incompatibility and differences of political view especially with regard to the secret revolutionary action with which others sympathised but to which Bepin Pal was opposed. This ended soon in Bepin Pal's separation from the journal. Sri Aurobindo would not have consented to this departure, for he regarded the qualities of Pal as a great asset to the *Bande Mataram*, since Pal, though not a man of action or capable of political leadership, was perhaps the best and most original political thinker in the country, an excellent writer and a magnificent orator: but the separation was effected behind Sri Aurobindo's back when he was convalescing from a dangerous attack of fever. His name was even announced without his consent in

*Bande Mataram* as editor but for one day only, as he immediately put a stop to it since he was still formally in the Baroda service and in no way eager to have his name brought forward in public. Henceforward, however, he controlled the policy of the *Bande Mataram* along with that of the party in Bengal. Bepin Pal had stated the aim of the new party as complete self-government free from British control but this could have meant or at least included the Moderate aim of colonial self-government and Dadabhai Naoroji as President of the Calcutta session of the Congress had actually tried to capture the name of Swaraj, the Extremists' term for independence, for this colonial self-government. Sri Aurobindo's first preoccupation was to declare openly for complete and absolute independence as the aim of political action in India and to insist on this persistently in the pages of the journal; he was the first politician in India who had the courage to do this in public and he was immediately successful. The party took up the word Swaraj to express its own ideal of independence and it soon spread everywhere; but it was taken up as the ideal of the Congress much later on at the [Lahore]<sup>4</sup> session of that body when it had been reconstituted and renovated under Nationalist leadership. The journal declared and developed a new political programme for the country as the programme of the Nationalist Party, non-cooperation, passive resistance, Swadeshi, Boycott, national education, settlement of disputes in law by popular arbitration and other items of Sri Aurobindo's plan. Sri Aurobindo published in the paper a series of articles on passive resistance, another developing a political philosophy of revolution and wrote many leaders aimed at destroying the shibboleths and superstitions of the Moderate Party, such as the belief in British justice and benefits bestowed by foreign government in India, faith in British law courts and in the adequacy of the education given in schools and universities in India and stressed more strongly and persistently than had been done the emasculation, stagnation or slow progress, poverty, economic dependence, absence of a rich industrial activity and all other evil results of a foreign government; he insisted especially that even if an alien rule were benevolent and beneficent, that could not be a substitute for a free and healthy national life. Assisted by this publicity the ideas of the Nationalists gained ground everywhere especially in the Punjab which had before been predominantly moderate. The *Bande Mataram* was almost unique in journalistic history in the influence it exercised in converting the mind of a people and preparing it for revolution. But its weakness was on the financial side; for the Extremists were still a poor man's party. So long as Sri Aurobindo was there in active control, he managed with great difficulty to secure sufficient public support for running the paper, but not for expanding it as he wanted, and when he was arrested and held in jail for a year, the economic situation of *Bande Mataram* became desperate: finally, it was decided that the journal should die a glorious death rather

4. 1948 edition Karachi. (From editorial note in CWSA)



than perish by starvation and Bejoy Chatterji was commissioned to write an article for which the Government would certainly stop the publication of the paper. Sri Aurobindo had always taken care to give no handle in the editorial articles of the *Bande Mataram* either for a prosecution for sedition or any other drastic action fatal to its existence; an editor of *The Statesman* complained that the paper reeked with sedition patently visible between every line but it was so skilfully written that no legal action could be taken. The manoeuvre succeeded and the life of the *Bande Mataram* came to an end in Sri Aurobindo's absence.

The Nationalist programme could only achieve a partial beginning before it was temporarily broken by severe government repression. Its most important practical item was Swadeshi plus Boycott; for Swadeshi much was done to make the idea general and a few beginnings were made, but the greater results showed themselves only afterwards in the course of time. Sri Aurobindo was anxious that this part of the movement should be not only propagated in idea but given a practical organisation and an effective force. He wrote from Baroda asking whether it would not be possible to bring in the industrialists and manufacturers and gain the financial support of landed magnates and create an organisation in which men of industrial and commercial ability and experience and not politicians alone could direct operations and devise means of carrying out the policy; but he was told that it was impossible, the industrialists and the landed magnates were too timid to join in the movement, and the big commercial men were all interested in the import of British goods and therefore on the side of the status quo: so he had to abandon his idea of the organisation of Swadeshi and Boycott. Both Tilak and Sri Aurobindo were in favour of an effective boycott of British goods — but of British goods only; for there was little in the country to replace foreign articles: so they recommended the substitution for the British of foreign goods from Germany and Austria and America so that the fullest pressure might be brought upon England. They wanted the Boycott to be a political weapon and not merely an aid to Swadeshi; the total boycott of all foreign goods was an impracticable idea and the very limited application of it recommended in Congress resolutions was too small to be politically effective. They were for national self-sufficiency in key industries, the production of necessities and of all manufactures of which India had the natural means, but complete self-sufficiency or autarchy did not seem practicable or even desirable since a free India would need to export goods as well as supply them for internal consumption and for that she must import as well and maintain an international exchange. But the sudden enthusiasm for the boycott of all foreign goods was wide and sweeping and the leaders had to conform to this popular cry and be content with the impulse it gave to the Swadeshi idea. National education was another item to which Sri Aurobindo attached much importance. He had been disgusted with the education given by the British system in the schools and colleges and universities, a system of which as a professor in the Baroda College he had full experience. He felt that it tended to dull and

impoverish and tie up the naturally quick and brilliant and supple Indian intelligence, to teach it bad intellectual habits and spoil by narrow information and mechanical instruction its originality and productivity. The movement began well and many national schools were established in Bengal and many able men became teachers, but still the development was insufficient and the economical position of the schools precarious. Sri Aurobindo had decided to take up the movement personally and see whether it could not be given a greater expansion and a stronger foundation, but his departure from Bengal cut short this plan. In the repression and the general depression caused by it, most of the schools failed to survive. The idea lived on and it may be hoped that it will one day find an adequate form and body. The idea of people's courts was taken up and worked in some districts, not without success, but this too perished in the storm. The idea of volunteer groupings had a stronger vitality; it lived on, took shape, multiplied its formations and its workers were the spearhead of the movement of direct action which broke out from time to time in the struggle for freedom. The purely political elements of the Nationalist programme and activities were those which lasted and after each wave of repression and depression renewed the thread of the life of the movement for liberation and kept it recognisably one throughout nearly fifty years of its struggle. But the greatest thing done in those years was the creation of a new spirit in the country. In the enthusiasm that swept surging everywhere with the cry of *Bande Mataram* ringing on all sides men felt it glorious to be alive and dare and act together and hope; the old apathy and timidity were broken and a force created which nothing could destroy and which rose again and again in wave after wave till it carried India to the beginning of a complete victory.

After the *Bande Mataram* case, Sri Aurobindo became the recognised leader of Nationalism in Bengal. He led the party at the session of the [district]<sup>5</sup> Conference at Midnapore where there was a vehement clash between the two parties. He now for the first time became a speaker on the public platform, addressed large meetings at Surat and presided over the Nationalist conference there. He stopped at several places on his way back to Calcutta and was the speaker at large meetings called to hear him. He led the party again at the session of the Provincial Conference at Hooghly. There it became evident for the first time that Nationalism was gaining the ascendant, for it commanded a majority among the delegates and in the Subjects Committee Sri Aurobindo was able to defeat the Moderates' resolution welcoming the Reforms and pass his own resolution stigmatising them as utterly inadequate and unreal and rejecting them. But the Moderate leaders threatened to secede if this was maintained and to avoid a scission he consented to allow the Moderate resolution to pass but spoke at the public session explaining his decision and asking the Nationalists to acquiesce in it in spite of their victory so as to keep some unity in the

5. 1948 edition Bengal Provincial. (From editorial note in CWSA)



political forces of Bengal. The Nationalist delegates, at first triumphant and clamorous, accepted the decision and left the hall quietly at Sri Aurobindo's order so that they might not have to vote either for or against the Moderate resolution. This caused much amazement and discomfiture in the minds of the Moderate leaders who complained that the people had refused to listen to their old and tried leaders and clamoured against them, but at the bidding of a young man new to politics they had obeyed in disciplined silence as if a single body.

About this period Sri Aurobindo had decided to take up charge of a Bengali daily, *Nava Shakti*, and had moved from his rented house in Scott's Lane, where he had been living with his wife and sister, to rooms in the office of this newspaper, and there, before he could begin this new venture, early one morning while he was still sleeping, the police charged up the stairs, revolver in hand, and arrested him. He was taken to the police station and thence to Alipore Jail where he remained for a year during the magistrate's investigation and the trial in the Sessions Court at Alipore. At first he was lodged for some time in a solitary cell but afterwards transferred to a large section of the jail where he lived in one huge room with the other prisoners in the case; subsequently, after the assassination of the approver in the jail, all the prisoners were confined in contiguous but separate cells and met only in the court or in the daily exercise where they could not speak to each other. It was in the second period that Sri Aurobindo made the acquaintance of most of his fellow-accused. In the jail he spent almost all his time in reading the Gita and the Upanishads and in intensive meditation and the practice of Yoga. This he pursued even in the second interval when he had no opportunity of being alone and had to accustom himself to meditation amid general talk and laughter, the playing of games and much noise and disturbance; in the first and third periods he had full opportunity and used it to the full. In the Sessions Court the accused were confined in a large prisoners' cage and here during the whole day he remained absorbed in his meditation attending little to the trial and hardly listening to the evidence. C. R. Das, one of his Nationalist collaborators and a famous lawyer, had put aside his large practice and devoted to the defence of Sri Aurobindo who left the case entirely to him and troubled no more about it; for he had been assured from within and knew that he would be acquitted. 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.

When he came out from jail, Sri Aurobindo found the whole political aspect of the country altered; most of the Nationalist leaders were in jail or in self-imposed

exile and there was a general discouragement and depression, though the feeling in the country had not ceased but was only suppressed and was growing by its suppression. He determined to continue the struggle; he held weekly meetings in Calcutta, but the attendance which had numbered formerly thousands full of enthusiasm was now only of hundreds and had no longer the same force and life. He also went to places in the districts to speak and at one of these delivered his speech at Uttarpara in which for the first time he spoke publicly of his Yoga and his spiritual experiences. He started also two weeklies, one in English and one in Bengali, the *Karmayogin* and *Dharma*, which had a fairly large circulation and were, unlike the *Bande Mataram*, easily self-supporting. He attended and spoke at the Provincial Conference at [Hooghly]<sup>6</sup> in 1909: for in Bengal owing to the compromise at [Pabna]<sup>7</sup> the two parties had not split altogether apart and both joined in the Conference, though there could be no representatives of the Nationalist party at the meeting of the Central Moderate Body which had taken the place of the Congress. Surendra Nath Banerji had indeed called a private conference attended by Sri Aurobindo and one or two other leaders of the Nationalists to discuss a project of uniting the two parties at the session in [Lahore]<sup>8</sup> and giving a joint fight to the dominant right wing of the Moderates; for he had always dreamt of becoming again the leader of a united Bengal with the Extremist party as his strong right arm: but that would have necessitated the Nationalists being appointed as delegates by the Bengal Moderates and accepting the constitution imposed at Surat. This Sri Aurobindo refused to do; he demanded a change in that constitution enabling newly formed associations to elect delegates so that the Nationalists might independently send their representatives to the All-India session and on this point the negotiations broke down. Sri Aurobindo began however to consider how to revive the national movement under the changed circumstances. He glanced at the possibility of falling back on a Home Rule movement which the Government could not repress, but this, which was actually realised by Mrs. Besant later on, would have meant a postponement and a falling back from the ideal of independence. He looked also at the possibility of an intense and organised passive resistance movement in the manner afterwards adopted by Gandhi. He saw however that he himself could not be the leader of such a movement.

At no time did he consent to have anything to do with the sham Reforms which were all the Government at that period cared to offer. He held up always the slogan of "no compromise" or, as he now put it in his Open Letter to his countrymen published in the *Karmayogin*, "no co-operation without control". It was only if real political, administrative and financial control were given to popular ministers in an elected Assembly that he would have anything to do with offers from the British

6. 1948 edition Barisal. (From editorial note in CWSA)

7. 1948 edition Hooghly. (From editorial note in CWSA)

8. 1948 edition Benares. (From editorial note in CWSA)

Government. Of this he saw no sign until the proposal of the Montagu Reforms in which first something of the kind seemed to appear. He foresaw that the British Government would have to begin trying to meet the national aspiration half-way, but he would not anticipate that moment before it actually came. The Montagu Reforms came nine years after Sri Aurobindo had retired to Pondicherry and by that time he had abandoned all outward and public political activity in order to devote himself to his spiritual work, acting only by his spiritual force on the movement in India, until his prevision of real negotiations between the British Government and the Indian leaders was fulfilled by the Cripps' proposal and the events that came after.

Meanwhile the Government were determined to get rid of Sri Aurobindo as the only considerable obstacle left to the success of their repressive policy. As they could not send him to the Andamans they decided to deport him. This came to the knowledge of Sister Nivedita and she informed Sri Aurobindo and asked him to leave British India and work from outside so that his work would not be stopped or totally interrupted. Sri Aurobindo contented himself with publishing in the *Karmayogin* a signed article in which he spoke of the project of deportation and left the country what he called his last will and testament; he felt sure that this would kill the idea of deportation and in fact it so turned out. Deportation left aside, the Government could only wait for some opportunity for prosecution for sedition and this chance came to them when Sri Aurobindo published in the same paper another signed article reviewing the political situation. The article was sufficiently moderate in its tone and later on the High Court refused to regard it as seditious and acquitted the printer. Sri Aurobindo one night at the *Karmayogin* office received information of the Government's intention to search the office and arrest him. While considering what should be his attitude, he received a sudden command from above to go to Chandernagore in French India. He obeyed the command at once, for it was now his rule to move only as he was moved by the divine guidance and never to resist and depart from it; he did not stay to consult with anyone but in ten minutes was at the river ghat and in a boat plying on the Ganges, in a few hours he was at Chandernagore where he went into secret residence. He sent a message to Sister Nivedita asking her to take up the editing of the *Karmayogin* in his absence. This was the end of his active connection with his two journals. At Chandernagore he plunged entirely into solitary meditation and ceased all other activity. Then there came to him a call to proceed to Pondicherry. A boat manned by some young revolutionaries of Uttarpara took him to Calcutta; there he boarded the *Dupleix* and reached Pondicherry on April 4, 1910.

At Pondicherry, from this time onwards Sri Aurobindo's practice of Yoga became more and more absorbing. He dropped all participation in any public political activity, refused more than one request to preside at sessions of the restored Indian National Congress and made a rule of abstention from any public utterance of any

kind not connected with his spiritual activities or any contribution of writings or articles except what he wrote afterwards in the *Arya*. For some years he kept up some private communication with the revolutionary forces he had led through one or two individuals, but this also he dropped after a time and his abstention from any kind of participation in politics became complete. As his vision of the future grew clearer, he saw that the eventual independence of India was assured by the march of Forces of which he became aware, that Britain would be compelled by the pressure of Indian resistance and by the pressure of international events to concede independence and that she was already moving towards that eventuality with whatever opposition and reluctance. He felt that there would be no need of armed insurrection and that the secret preparation for it could be dropped without injury to the nationalist cause, although the revolutionary spirit had to be maintained and would be maintained intact. His own personal intervention in politics would therefore be no longer indispensable. Apart from all this, the magnitude of the spiritual work set before him became more and more clear to him, and he saw that the concentration of all his energies on it was necessary. Accordingly, when the Ashram came into existence, he kept it free from all political connections or action; even when he intervened in politics twice afterwards on special occasions, this intervention was purely personal and the Ashram was not concerned in it. The British Government and numbers of people besides could not believe that Sri Aurobindo had ceased from all political action and it was supposed by them that he was secretly participating in revolutionary activities and even creating a secret organisation in the security of French India. But all this was pure imagination and rumour and there was nothing of the kind. His retirement from political activity was complete, just as was his personal retirement into solitude in 1910.

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

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

Written 7 November 1946; revised and published 1948

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Autobiographical Notes, CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 47-66)*

## ‘GUIDE OUR STEPS, LEAD US TO VICTORY’

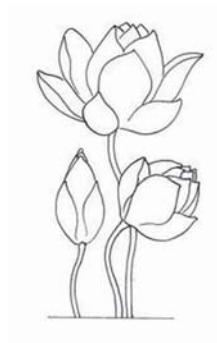
**July 8, 1914**

O Divine Force, supreme Illuminator, hearken to our prayer, move not away from us, do not withdraw, help us to fight the good fight, make firm our strength for the struggle, give us the force to conquer!

O my sweet Master, Thou whom I adore without being able to know Thee, Thou who I am without being able to realise Thee, my entire conscious individuality prostrates itself before Thee and implores, in the name of the workers in their struggle, and of the earth in her agony, in the name of suffering humanity and of striving Nature; O my sweet Master, O marvellous Unknowable, O Dispenser of all boons, Thou who makest light spring forth in the darkness and strength to arise out of weakness, support our effort, guide our steps, lead us to victory.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Vol. 1, p. 196)*



## **‘IF I COULD ONLY KNOW MY KNOWLEDGE, I ALREADY POSSESS EVERYTHING’**

**72 — The sign of dawning Knowledge is to feel that as yet I know little or nothing; and yet, if I could only know my knowledge, I already possess everything.**

Sri Aurobindo  
(*Thoughts and Aphorisms*, SABCL, Vol. 17, p. 87)

*In sleep one occasionally has a very accurate knowledge of what is going to happen, with an extraordinary precision in the material details, as if everything were already there complete down to the smallest details, on an occult plane. Is that correct? What is this plane of knowledge? Is there one or several? What should one do to gain access to it consciously in the waking state? And how is it that people who are serious, who have a divine realisation, sometimes make such gross mistakes in their predictions?*

But it is a whole world in itself! It is not one question, but twenty!

There are all kinds of premonitory dreams. There are premonitory dreams that are fulfilled immediately, that is to say, you dream in the night what will happen on the next day, and there are premonitory dreams that are fulfilled over varying lengths of time. And according to their position in time, these dreams are seen on various planes.

The higher we rise towards absolute certainty, the greater the distance is, because these visions belong to a region which is very close to the Origin and the length of time between the revelation of what is going to be and its realisation may be very great. But the revelation is certain, because it is very close to the Origin. There is a place — when one is identified with the Supreme — where one knows everything absolutely, in the past, the present, the future and everywhere. But usually people who go there forget what they have seen when they return. An extremely strict discipline is needed to remember. And that is the only place where one cannot make a mistake.

But the links of the chain of communication are not always all there and one very rarely remembers.

To come back to what I was saying, according to the plane on which one has seen, one can more or less judge the time that the vision will take to be fulfilled. And the immediate things are already realised, they already exist in the subtle physical and they can be seen there — they simply are, they exist there. They are only the reflection — not even a transcription — the reflection or projection of the image in



the material world which will appear on the next day or in a few hours. There you see the exact thing in all its details, because it already exists; so everything depends on the accuracy of the vision and the power of vision. If you have a power of vision that is objective and sincere, you see the thing accurately; if you add your own feelings and impressions to it, it is coloured by them. So accuracy in the subtle physical depends exclusively on the instrument, that is to say, on the one who sees.

But as soon as you enter a more subtle region, such as the vital — and even more so in the mental, but already in the vital there is a small margin of possibility — then there you can see roughly what is going to happen, but in detail it may be like this or like that; there are wills and influences that may possibly intervene and create a difference.

And this is because the original Will is reflected, so to say, in the various regions, and each region alters the organisation and the relation of the images. The world we live in is a world of images. It is not the thing itself in its essence, it is the reflection of the thing. One could say that we are, in our material existence, only a reflection, an image of what we are in our essential reality. And the modalities of these reflections bring in every error and falsification — what you see in the essence is perfectly true and pure and exists from all eternity; the images are essentially variable. And according to the degree of falsehood that enters into the vibrations, the degree of distortion and alteration increases. One could say that every circumstance, every event, every thing has a pure existence, which is the true existence, and a considerable number of impure or distorted existences, which are the existence of the same thing in the various domains of being. For example, in the intellectual domain, there is already a good deal of distortion; in the mental domain there is a considerable amount of distortion, and as all the emotional and sensorial domains come in, the distortions increase. And once you reach the material plane, it is most often unrecognisable. It is completely distorted — so much so that it is sometimes very difficult to know that this is the material expression of that — they are no longer very much alike.

It is a rather novel way of approaching the problem and it may be the key to many things.

Thus when you know someone well and you often see him physically, if you see him in the subtle physical, already there are things which become more marked, more visible, more outstanding, which you had not seen physically, because in the greyness of the material world they had merged with many other things on the same plane. There are characteristics or expressions of character which become outstanding enough to be quite visible, although they had not been physically apparent. When you look at a person physically, there is the complexion, the features, the expression; at the same moment, if you see this face in the subtle physical, you suddenly notice that one part of the face is one colour, another part another colour; that in the eyes there is an expression and a kind of light which were not at all visible; and that the



whole has quite a different appearance and, above all, gives a very different feeling, which to our physical eyes would seem rather extravagant, but which to the subtle vision is very expressive and revealing of the character, or even of the influences acting on this person. What I say here is the record of an experience that I had again a few days ago.

So according to the degree to which you are conscious and the extent to which you see, you perceive images, see events that are more or less near, and you see them more or less accurately. The only vision that is true and sure is the vision of the divine Consciousness. So the problem is to become aware of the divine Consciousness and to keep this consciousness in all details all the time.

Until then, there are all sorts of ways of receiving indications. The precise, accurate, familiar vision that certain people have may come from several sources. It may be a vision by identity with circumstances and things, when you are used to extending your consciousness all around you. It may be an indication given by a talkative being from the invisible world who amuses himself by informing you of what is going to happen; this happens very often. Then everything depends on the moral character of your “informant”; if he is amusing himself at your expense, he tells you all kinds of tales — and this is what happens most of the time to people who get information from entities. To lure people on, they may very often tell them things as they really will be, since they have a universal vision in some domain of the vital or of the mind; and then when they are quite sure that you will trust them, they may start telling you tales and you make a fool of yourself. This happens very often. You yourself should be in a higher state of consciousness than these individuals or entities or these little gods, as some people call them, and be able to verify from above what their statements are worth.

If you have a universal mental vision, you can see all mental formations. Then you see — and it is very interesting — how the mental world is organised to realise itself on the physical plane. You see the various formations, the way in which they approach and fight each other, combine together and organise themselves, the ones that prevail and gain influence and achieve a more complete realisation. Now if you really want to have a higher vision, you must rise above the mental world and see the original wills as they descend to express themselves. In this case, you may not possess all the details, but the central *fact*, the fact in its central truth, is indisputable, undeniable, absolutely correct.

Some people also have the power to predict things which already exist on earth, but at a distance, at a great distance, very far from the physical eyes. These are usually people who are capable of widening and extending their consciousness. They have a physical, but slightly more subtle vision, which depends on an organ that is more subtle than the purely material one — what might be called the life of this organ — and so, by projecting their consciousness with a will to see, they can see very well, they can see things: these things already exist, only they are not

within the field of our ordinary vision. People who have this capacity and who tell what they see, who are sincere and who are not bluffers, see in a way that is absolutely precise and exact. In fact, an important factor for those who predict or see, is their absolute sincerity. Unfortunately, because of people's curiosity, their insistence, the pressure they apply — which very few can resist — what happens, when there is something they do not see exactly and precisely, is that there is an almost involuntary faculty of inner imagination, which adds the little missing element. This is what causes the flaws in their predictions. Very few have the courage to say, "Oh no, I do not know about that, it eludes me." They do not even have the courage to say it to themselves. And then, just a touch of imagination, acting almost subconsciously, and they fill in the vision, the information — anything can happen. Very few people can resist that. I have known many, many clairvoyants, I have known many people who had a marvellous gift; very few of them would stop when they come to the end of their knowledge. Or else they would add some little detail. This is what always gives these faculties a rather doubtful quality. One must truly be a saint — a great saint, a great sage — and completely free, not at all influenced by other people. Naturally, I am not speaking of those who seek fame, because there they fall into the crudest traps; but even goodwill, the wish to make people happy, to please them, to help them, is enough to create a distortion.

*When events are already prepared in the subtle physical and you have a vision of them, is it too late to change things? Can one still act?*

I know of a very interesting example. There was a time when in the newspaper *Le Matin* — it was a long time ago, you must have been very young — every day there was a little cartoon of a boy pointing to something — a kind of page-boy dressed like that — and always showing the date or something — a little cartoon. Now the gentleman in this story was travelling and he was staying in a big hotel, I do not remember in which town, and one night or early in the morning, very early, he had a dream. He saw this page-boy pointing to his funeral carriage — you know, when they take people to the cemetery, in Europe — and inviting him to step into it! He saw that and then in the morning when he was ready, he left his room which was on the top floor, and there, on the landing, the same boy, dressed in the same way, was pointing out the lift for him to go down. That gave him a shock. He refused and said, "No thank you." The lift fell and crashed, killing the people inside.

He told me that after that he believed in dreams.

It was a vision. He saw the boy, but instead of the lift, the boy was showing him his hearse. So when he saw the same gesture, the same boy — like the cartoon, you see — he said, "No thank you, I'll walk down", and the machine — it was one of those hydraulic lifts — broke and fell. It was right at the top. It was crushed to a pulp.

My explanation is that an entity had forewarned him. The image of the page-boy seems to indicate that an intelligence, a consciousness had intervened; it does not seem to have been his own subconscious. Or it might be that his subconscious was aware and had seen in the subtle physical that this was going to happen. But why did his subconscious give him an image like that? I do not know. Perhaps something in the subconscious knew, because it was already there, it was already in the subtle physical. The accident already existed before it happened — the law of the accident.

Obviously, there is always, in every case, some difference, sometimes a few hours — but that is the maximum — sometimes a few seconds. And very often, things tell you that they are there, and it takes them sometimes a few minutes, sometimes a few seconds to come into contact with your consciousness. Constantly, constantly I know what is going to happen, and for things that are of absolutely no interest — there is no advantage in knowing it beforehand, it changes nothing; but it exists, it is all around you. If your consciousness is wide enough, you know all that, for example, that a certain person is going to bring you a parcel, things like that. And it is like that every day. Or that a certain person is about to arrive. It is because the consciousness is extended, so it contacts things.

But in that case we cannot say that it is a premonition, for it already exists, only the contact with our senses takes a few seconds to be realised, because there is a door or a wall or something that prevents us from seeing.

But several times I have had experiences like this. For example, once when I was walking in the mountains, I was on a path where there was only room for one — on one side the precipice, on the other sheer rock. There were three children behind me and a fourth person bringing up the rear. I was leading. The path ran along the edge of the rock; we could not see where we were going — and besides, it was very dangerous; if anyone had slipped, he would have been over the edge. I was walking in front when suddenly I saw, with other eyes than these — although I was watching my steps carefully — I saw a snake, there, on the rock, waiting on the other side. Then I took one step, gently, and indeed on the other side there was a snake. That spared me the shock of surprise, because I had seen and I was advancing cautiously; and as there was no shock of surprise, I was able to tell the children without giving them a shock, “Stop, keep quiet, don’t stir.” If there had been a shock, something might have happened. The snake had heard a noise, it was already coiled and on the defensive in front of its hole, with its head swaying — it was a viper. This was in France. Nothing happened, whereas if there had been any confusion or commotion, anything could have happened.

This kind of thing has happened to me very, very often — with snakes it happened to me four times. Once, it was completely dark, here, near the fishing village of Ariankuppam. There was a river and it happened just at the place where it flows into the sea. It was dark — the night had fallen very quickly. We were walking

along the road and just as I was about to put my foot down — I had already lifted my foot and I was going to put it down — I distinctly heard a voice in my ear: “Be careful!” And yet nobody had spoken. So I looked and saw, just as my foot was about to touch the ground, an enormous black cobra, which I would have comfortably stepped on — those people don’t like that. He streaked away and across the water — what a beauty, my child! His hood open, head erect above the water, he went across like a king. Obviously, I would have been punished for my impertinence.

I have had hundreds and hundreds of experiences like that; at the very last moment, not a second too soon, I was informed. And in the most varied circumstances. Once, in Paris, I was crossing the Boulevard Saint Michel. It was during the last weeks; I had decided that within a certain number of months I would achieve union with the psychic Presence, the inner Divine, and I no longer had any other thought, any other concern. I lived near the Luxembourg Gardens and every evening I used to walk there — but always deeply absorbed within. There is a kind of intersection there, and it is not a place to cross when one is deeply absorbed within; it was not very sensible. And so I was like that, I was walking, when I suddenly received a shock, as if I had received a blow, as if something had hit me, and I jumped back instinctively. And as soon as I had jumped back, a tram went past — it was the tram that I had felt at a little more than arm’s length. It had touched the aura, the aura of protection — it was very strong at that time, I was deeply immersed in occultism and I knew how to keep it — the aura of protection had been hit and that had literally thrown me backwards, as if I had received a physical shock. And what insults from the driver! I jumped back just in time and the tram went by.

I could tell scores of such stories, if I could remember them.

The protection may come from many different sources. Very often it was someone who informed me: a little entity, or some kind of being; sometimes it was the aura that protected me. And it was for all kinds of things. That is to say, life was seldom limited to the physical body — this is convenient, this is good. It is necessary, it increases your capacities. This is what the person who taught me occultism told me straightaway: “You are depriving yourself of senses which are most useful *even for the most ordinary life*.” And this is true, quite true. We can know infinitely more things than we usually do, simply by using our own senses. And not only from the mental point of view, but also from the vital and even the physical point of view.

*But what is the method?*

Oh, the method is very easy. There are disciplines. It depends on what you want to do.

It depends. For each thing there is a method. And the first method is to want it, to begin with, that is, to take a decision. Then you are given a description of all

these senses and how they work — that takes some time. You take one sense or several, or the one which is easiest for you to start with, and you decide. Then you follow the discipline. It is the equivalent of exercises for developing the muscles. You can even succeed in creating a will in yourself.

But for more subtle things, the method is to make for yourself an exact image of what you want, to come into contact with the corresponding vibration, and then to concentrate and do exercises — such as to practise seeing through an object or hearing through a sound,<sup>1</sup> or seeing at a distance. For example, once, for a long time, for several months, I was confined to bed and I found it rather boring — I wanted to see. I was in a room and at one end there was another little room and at the end of the little room there was a kind of bridge; in the middle of the garden the bridge became a staircase leading down into a very big and very beautiful studio, standing in the middle of the garden. I wanted to go and see what was happening in the studio, for I was feeling bored in my room. So I would remain very quiet, close my eyes and send out my consciousness, little by little, little by little, little by little. And day after day — I chose a fixed time and did the exercise regularly. At first you make use of your imagination and then it becomes a fact. After some time I really had the physical sensation that my vision was moving; I followed it and then I could see things downstairs which I knew nothing about. I would check afterwards. In the evening I would ask, “Was this like that? And was that like this?”

But for each one of these things you must practise for months with patience, with a kind of obstinacy. You take the senses one by one, hearing, sight, and you can even arrive at subtle realities of taste, smell and touch.

From the mental point of view it is easier, for there you are accustomed to concentration. When you want to think and find a solution, instead of following the deductions of thought, you stop everything and try to concentrate and concentrate, intensify the point of the problem. You stop everything and wait until, by the intensity of the concentration, you obtain an answer. This also requires some time. But if you used to be a good student, you must be quite used to doing that and it is not very difficult.

There is a kind of extension of the physical senses. Red Indians, for example, possess a sense of hearing and smell with a far greater range than our own — and dogs! I knew an Indian — he was my friend when I was eight or ten years old. He had come with Buffalo Bill, at the time of the Hippodrome — it was a long time ago, I was eight years old — and he would put his ear to the ground and was so clever that he knew how far away . . . according to the intensity of the vibration, he knew

1. Mother explained later: “To hear behind the sound is to come into contact with the subtle reality which is behind the material fact, behind the word or the physical sound or behind music, for example. One concentrates and then one hears what is behind. It means coming into contact with the vital reality which is behind the appearances. There can also be a mental reality, but generally, what lies immediately behind the physical sound is a vital reality.”

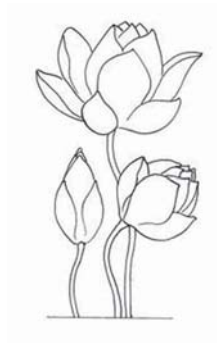
how far away someone's footsteps were. After that, the children would immediately say, "I wish I knew how to do that!"

And then you try. That is how you prepare yourself. You think you are playing but you are preparing yourself for later on.

27 February 1962

THE MOTHER

(*On Thoughts and Aphorisms*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 10, pp. 123-33)



## RECURRING DREAMS

*Mother, at night if one sees someone dying, and a few months later one sees again the same person dying, what does it mean? Is this person in danger?*

In a dream, one sees a person . . . and a few months later one sees him again? . . .

*Yes, dying.*

One sees a person dying and then some months later one sees him dying a second time, the same person! He is dead or alive?

*Alive.*

This is becoming disquieting, my child! I don't know; it depends absolutely upon the case.

It can be a spiritual death, it can be a vital death, it can be the death of something in the being which ought to disappear (and then it means a progress), it can be a premonition, it can be lots of things. Unless you have the context of your dream one can't explain it. But you should have what we could call a jurisprudence of your dreams. You have never compared the dream with the events which occur? . . . for example, hasn't it happened to you — I know it has — that you see someone dying and this person really dies? But you don't see him dying again a second time. If you see the same dream twice, it means one of two things: either that he has lost once more another state of being, you see, that he has entered a vital consciousness or later from this vital consciousness he has gone out to enter a psychic consciousness. It can be that. But then there are sure signs. The dream cannot deceive you, and it cannot be similar. Or it may be simply that there was something which was profoundly impressed in the thought, in the brain, and that in certain circumstances which can have many causes . . . yet in certain circumstances . . . this impression begins to be active again and gives you the same dream once more. If it is an identical dream, it can be this, just a cerebral phenomenon.

Many dreams are just phenomena of the brain, that is, of things which go into activity again under some stimulus or other and bring back the same pictures, sometimes exactly the same, sometimes with slightly different associations and connections; so there are differences.

At times some dreams are repeated, you know, often dreams which are lessons or indications, dreams which announce something to you or want to draw your attention to something or put you on your guard against something. Very often it



happens that they recur either at brief intervals or at a certain distance. And usually it means that the first time the impression was very faint, one doesn't remember it well. The third time or even after the second, one has a vague impression already: "Why! This isn't the first time", when one sees it. Then the third time it is clear, precise, absolute, and one remembers: "Ah, I have already seen this thrice!"

Usually these dreams are extremely interesting and give you precise indications: either about something to be done or something not to be done, or about precautions to be taken or perhaps about your relations with someone, what you should expect to receive from a person, how you should act towards him or in certain circumstances.

You see it is quite a small detail, a very small detail which recurs in this way; sometimes it comes immediately: one night, the second night, the third night; sometimes it takes weeks to recur.

*Sweet Mother, to profit by one's nights, to have good dreams, is it necessary that one should have done nothing very intellectual late at night, or that one should not eat too late at night or do anything external?*

This depends on each one; but certainly if you want to sleep quietly at night, you must not study till just before sleeping. If you read something which requires concentration, your head will continue to work and so you won't sleep well. When the mind continues working one doesn't rest.

The ideal, you see, is to enter an integral repose, that is, immobility in the body, perfect peace in the vital, absolute silence in the mind — and the consciousness goes out of all activity to enter into *Sachchidananda*. If you can do this, then when you wake up you get up with the feeling of an extraordinary power, a perfect joy. But it is not very, very easy to do this. It can be done; this is the ideal condition.

Usually it is not at all like this, and most of the time almost all the hours of sleep are wasted in some kind of disordered activities; your body begins to toss about in your bed, you give kicks, you turn, you start, you turn this way and that, and then you do this (*gesture*) and then this . . . So you don't rest at all.

*During the day we have no time, so we are compelled to prepare the lessons at night.*

Oh, there are always fifty thousand reasons for doing things! You must not at all introduce a moral question there. You can do your duty, and in an absolutely . . . unselfish way, and still it can prevent you from sleeping all the same.

Moral issues have nothing to do with the inner development. I am sorry to tell you this, but one goes one way, the other another. You can make yourself completely ill by doing something absolutely . . . how to put it? . . . unselfish, you see, which has nothing selfish about it, and you can be very healthy while being absolutely



selfish. That does not come in the way. It is not this kind of morality which is effective.

There is a great difference between having a moral conscience and a consciousness which is the expression of truth. But I must say that it is infinitely more difficult to have a consciousness which expresses the truth than to have a moral conscience, because any fool who knows the social rules and follows them has a moral conscience, while to have a consciousness of truth one must not be an idiot — in any case, it's the first condition!

*This is how I have been wasting my nights for more than a year!*

Yes. But don't you think that all these things are the result of a lack of organisation in your life? One lives from moment to moment, as things come, anyhow. Or else one makes some effort of mental organisation which does not at all correspond to the truth and therefore is thwarted every minute.

But if one organised his life in accordance with a higher principle of consciousness and without the groping one usually tries, that is, with a precise indication at every minute of what is to be done and how it is to be done, I think that one could so manage that things don't become awkwardly difficult. It is very good to be a good teacher, but perhaps it is not absolutely necessary to correct all the homework just at the time one is going to bed. I don't know, you see, because I was never a good teacher, so I never prepared the exercises for my students, never corrected the homework of my students. But still, it seems to me this ought to be quite possible.

Usually, instead of choosing one's work very carefully and taking exactly what one can do and doing it as well as one can, very often one takes too much. And in this too much there are many things which are at least partially useless, which could be considerably reduced, without harming the result (note that I am not making a general rule of it, it is only an experience I have); and when one is very attentive to the inner indication and refuses to be tossed by the waves that come from outside — these waves are of all kinds of movements arising from the wills of others or from a kind of routine of circumstances or from oppositions coming from forces which are not very favourable — so, instead of being pushed like that and moved by these things, if one receives a very clear, very precise inner indication and follows it without equivocating, you see, without any hesitation, a little strictly — indeed, if it doesn't please others, so much the worse for them — well, it happens that one becomes in a way the master of circumstances, that they are organised favourably, and that one does much more work in much less time.

There's a way of reducing the time necessary for doing things by increasing the concentration considerably. Some people can't do this for long, it tires them; but it's like weightlifting, isn't it, one can get accustomed to it. And then, if you can succeed in mastering this power of concentration and in making your mind absolutely

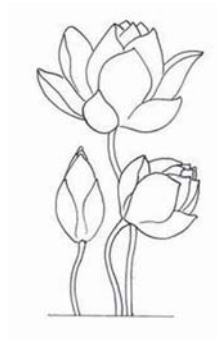
still — for this indeed is the first condition — and if in this quietude you concentrate it, concentrate, concentrate, concentrate on the point you want to make, on the work you have to do or the action you have to perform, well, you can . . . it comes like a kind of extremely quiet but all-powerful force of propulsion, and you go forward with one movement . . . without hesitation you can literally do in a quarter of an hour what would otherwise take one hour. And so this has the great advantage that it gives you time and that after this, instead of going from one activity to another, from one agitation to another, you can relax completely for some minutes and have a total rest. This gives you time to rest; and in this repose, naturally, as you are relaxed, all that could have been a little too tense is relaxed and put in order, and this puts you back in a condition in which you are once again able to make another concentration. Try!

There. That's all? No questions?

Then *au revoir*, my children.

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1955*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 7, pp. 122-26)



## THE MOST FORMIDABLE MEMORY ONE COULD IMAGINE

[Mother reads the beginning of her talk of 21 April 1929 about dreams and visions.]

*Often I have dreams about railways. I often miss the train . . .*

It is quite symbolical!

*. . . because I have too much luggage. I run after it and at times I succeed in catching up with it and jumping into the last coach.*

The train, the ship, and I suppose the aeroplane also are for those who do yoga, symbols of the way and of the Force that leads you — if you lose your time or if you have too much luggage or if you think of it too late, well, you miss the way and you must run hard to catch up.

There are lots of dreams like that which give a very precise indication of the state you are in.

*When I was in Calcutta, I dreamt that someone dressed in white came to my bedside, holding the flower you have called “New Creation” [the tuberose]. I did not know the meaning of the flower then. It was only after my coming here that I came to know it. The form I saw resembled you.*

Dreams are very interesting, specially if one knows how to use them.

*What is the nature of a sleep without dreams?*

If one succeeds in making the mind and vital silent, and in keeping the body well asleep, one can have a very still and quiet sleep, and then, if one can manage to get out of these forms and enter the higher worlds, one may reach the true repose of Sachchidananda.

*How is it that one meets and recognises in dream persons whom one is going to meet and recognise later on in ordinary life?*

There are many possibilities. But most often, it is that a communication has been established either on the mental or the vital plane or even on the subtle physical plane and it is this communication which brings about the meeting later — your

dream is not only a premonition but also a condition; there is an inner relation close enough to enable you to come into contact in sleep, and circumstances so arrange themselves that you meet physically afterwards. Sometimes it is only a premonition, but then the dream has a special quality — you see someone coming and he does come physically a little later.

Generally it is an already established relation; it is someone whom you meet, whom you frequent, whom you speak to, with whom you live some hours of the night. Then afterwards when you both meet you have the impression that you know each other very well. That's a fact, you already know each other, before having met physically.

*Are there not false visions?*

If you narrate something you have not seen, evidently that is a false vision! Also if you embellish, rearrange, change your vision when you report it, this too becomes a false vision. But if you tell in all simplicity what you have seen, what can there be false about it? Your interpretation may be false — you may say, “That means this” and you make a big blunder, but what you have seen, you have seen, and what you have not seen, you have not seen! This is something which always astounds me! . . . Have you seen it? If so, then you have! The explanation of what you have seen is another matter, but if you have seen something, you have seen it!

This question generally comes from those who have the habit of rearranging a little what they see. They see a tiny thing, perhaps, in a flash, and then willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously they arrange things, they add a little bit, add to it another, they give a little explanation, make the thing coherent and when it has become something that can stand on its own legs, they say, “I had this vision”, but it is not at all what they saw. . . . This is a kind of mental insincerity. It is spontaneous — when the mind sees one thing here, another thing there, yet a third elsewhere, this is very unpleasant for it. It fills up the holes, it says, “This leads to that”, “That is the cause of this”, and so on, and the mind is very happy because this is logical. What the mind adds in between the points of the vision may happen, by chance, to be true, but it may also be false.

Ask yourself rather whether you have a mind which keeps quiet, which is wholly sincere and objective, which says exactly what it has seen or whether you have one of those minds bubbling with activity which, as soon as it has seen something, adds to it its grain of salt, automatically, and makes out of it a big story; and so you are quite convinced that you have seen all that, but in fact you have not seen it at all. It is in this that one can say that visions are not sincere. But that is not the fault of the vision! What you have seen, you have seen; it is the fault of the interpretation or simply of the narration which was embellished. I have had admirable examples! — of people who had seen truly revealing things, but who understood

nothing about them. On the spur of the moment they recounted spontaneously what they had seen — in half an hour the story had become a little different, all the “holes” were filled up and finally the story stood well on its legs! The story was idiotic, it made no sense, whilst the few points they had seen were magnificent revelations.

*(Silence)*

The capacity for visions, when it is sincere and spontaneous, can put you in touch with events which you are not capable of knowing in your outer consciousness. . . . There is a very interesting fact, it is that somewhere in the terrestrial mind, somewhere in the terrestrial vital, somewhere in the subtle physical, one can find an exact, perfect, automatic recording of everything that happens. It is the most formidable memory one could imagine, which misses nothing, forgets nothing, records all. And if you are able to enter into it, you can go backward, you can go forward, and in all directions, and you will have the “memory” of all things — not only of things of the past, but of things to come. For everything is recorded there.

In the mental world, for instance, there is a domain of the physical mind which is related to physical things and keeps the memory of physical happenings upon earth. It is as though you were entering into innumerable vaults, one following another indefinitely, and these vaults are filled with small pigeon-holes, one above another, one above another, with tiny doors. Then if you want to know something and if you are conscious, you look, and you see something like a small point — a shining point; you find that this is what you wish to know and you have only to concentrate there and it opens; and when it opens, there is a sort of an unrolling of something like extremely subtle manuscripts, but if your concentration is sufficiently strong you begin to read as though from a book. And you have the whole story in all its details. There are thousands of these little holes, you know; when you go for a walk there, it is as though you were walking in infinity. And in this way you can find the exact facts about whatever you want to know. But I must tell you that what you find is never what has been reported in history — histories are always planned out; I have never come across a single “historical” fact which is like history. This is not to discourage you from learning history, but things are like that. Events have been quite different from the way in which they have been reported, and for a very simple reason: the human brain is not capable of recording things with exactitude; history is built upon memories and memories are always vague. If you take, for example, written memories, he who writes chooses the events which have interested him, what he has seen, noticed or known, and that is always only a very small portion of the whole. When the historian narrates, the same thing happens as with dreams where you take one point, then another, then another, and at last you can have an almost exact vision of what has taken place and with a little imagination

you fill up the gaps; but historians relate a continuous story; between the events or moments there are gaps which they fill up as best they can or rather as they wish, according to their mental, vital and other preferences. And that comprises the history you are made to learn. The same story, narrated in one language and in another, in one country or in another, you cannot imagine how comic it is! This is particularly true if one of the countries is interested because of its vanity, its prestige. And finally the two pictures presented to you are so different that you could believe that two different things were being spoken about. It is unbelievable. But I have noticed that even for altogether external, concrete facts where there is no question of evaluation, it is still the same thing. No human brain is capable of understanding a thing in its totality; even the most scholarly, the most learned, even the most sincere person does not see a subject — and especially many subjects — totally. He will say what he knows, what he understands, and all that he does not know, all that he does not understand is not there, and this absolutely changes everything.

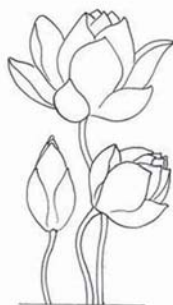
But if you can acquire this capability of entering into the terrestrial memory, I assure you it is worth the trouble. It is quite different from Yoga; it is not necessary to have a spiritual life for that, you must have a special ability.

For everything — I would repeat it to you eternally if I had the time — for everything, one must be absolutely sincere. If you are not sincere, you will begin by deceiving yourself and all your experiences will be worth nothing at all. But if you are sincere and by discipline (for it is not easy) you succeed in entering this mental memory of the world, you will make discoveries which are really worth the trouble.

15 February 1951

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1950-1951*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 4, pp. 107-112)



## DREAMS AND EXTERIORISATIONS

*Sometimes, on waking up, one forgets everything, one forgets where one is. Why?*

It is because you have gone into the inconscient and lost all contact with the consciousness, and this takes a little time to be reestablished. Of course, it may happen that instead of going into the inconscient one goes into the superconscient, but this is not frequent. And the feeling is not the same because, instead of having this negative impression of not knowing who one is or where one is or what is what, one has a positive sensation of having risen into something other than one's ordinary life, of no longer being the same person. But when one has altogether lost contact with one's ordinary consciousness, generally it is that one has slept and been for a long time in the inconscient. Then the being is scattered, it is absorbed by this inconscient and all the pieces have to be put together again. Naturally, this is done much more quickly than at the beginning of existence, but the conscious elements have to be gathered up again and a cohesion re-formed to begin to know once more who one is.

*Sometimes in dreams one goes into houses, streets, places one has never seen. What does this mean?*

There may be many reasons for this. Perhaps it is an exteriorisation: one has come out of the body and gone for a stroll. They may be memories of former lives. Perhaps one has become identified with someone else's consciousness and has the memories of this other person. Perhaps it is a premonition (this is the rarest case, but it may happen): one sees ahead what one will see later.

The other day I spoke to you about those landscapes of Japan; well, almost all — the most beautiful, the most striking ones — I had seen in vision in France; and yet I had not seen any pictures or photographs of Japan, I knew nothing of Japan. And I had seen these landscapes without human beings, nothing but the landscape, quite pure, like that, and it had seemed to me they were visions of a world other than the physical; they seemed to me too beautiful for the physical world, too perfectly beautiful. Particularly I used to see very often those stairs rising straight up into the sky; in my vision there was the impression of climbing straight up, straight up, and as though one could go on climbing, climbing, climbing. . . . It had struck me, and the first time I saw this in Nature down there, I understood that I had already seen it in France before having known anything about Japan.

There are always many explanations possible and it is very difficult to explain



for someone else. For oneself, if one has studied very carefully one's dreams and activities of the night, one can distinguish fine nuances. I was saying I thought I had a vision of another world — I knew it was something which existed, but I could not imagine there was a country where it existed; this seemed to me impossible, so very beautiful it was. It was the active mind which interfered. But I knew that what I was seeing truly existed, and it was only when I saw these landscapes physically that I realised in fact that I had seen something which existed, but I had seen it with inner eyes (it was the subtle physical) before seeing it physically. Everyone has certain very small indications, but for that one must be very, very methodical, very scrupulous, very careful in one's observation and not neglect the least signs, and above all not give favourable mental explanations to the experiences one has. For if one wants to explain to oneself (I don't even speak of explaining to others), if one wants to explain the experience to oneself advantageously, to draw satisfaction, one does not understand anything any more. That is, one may mix up the signs without even noticing that they are mixed up. For instance, when one sees somebody in a dream (I am not speaking of dreams in which you see somebody unknown, but of those where you see somebody you know, who comes to see you) there are all sorts of explanations possible. If it is someone living far away from you, in another country, perhaps that person has written a letter to you and the letter is on the way, so you see this person because he has put a formation of himself in his letter, a concentration; you see the person and the next morning you get the letter. This is a very frequent occurrence. If it is a person with a very strong thought power, he may think of you from very far, from his own country and concentrate his thought, and this concentration takes the form of that person in your consciousness. Perhaps it is that this person is calling you intentionally; deliberately he comes to tell you something or give you a sign, if he is in danger, if he is sick. Suppose he has something important to tell you, he begins to concentrate (he knows how to do it, as everyone does not) and he enters your atmosphere, comes to tell you something special. Now if you are passive and attentive, you receive the message. And then, two more instances still: someone has exteriorised himself more or less materially in his sleep and has come to see you. And you become conscious of this person because (almost by miracle) you are in a corresponding state of consciousness. And finally, a last instance, this person may be dead and may come to see you after his death (one part of him or almost the whole of his being according to the relation you have with him). Consequently, for someone who is not very, very careful it is very difficult to distinguish these nuances, very difficult. On the other hand, quite often imaginative people will tell you, "Oh! I saw this person — he is dead." I have heard that I don't know how many times. These are people whose imagination runs freely. It is possible that the person is dead, but not because he has appeared to you! . . . One must pay great attention to the outer forms things take. There are shades very difficult to distinguish, one must be very, very careful. For oneself, if one is in the habit of

studying all this, one can become aware of the differences, but to interpret another's experiences is very difficult, unless he gives you in great detail all that surrounds the dream, the vision: the ideas he had before, the ideas he had later, the state of his health, the feelings he experienced when going to sleep, the activities of the preceding day, indeed, all sorts of things. People who tell you, "Oh! I had this vision, explain it to me!", that is childishness — unless it is someone whom you have followed very carefully, whom you yourself have taught how to recognise the planes, and whose habits, whose reactions you know; otherwise it is impossible to explain, for there are innumerable explanations for one single thing.

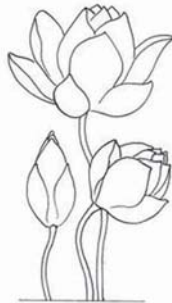
There are some very remarkable instances of exteriorisation. I am going to tell you two incidents about cats which occurred quite a long time ago in France. One happened very long ago, long before the war even. We used to have small meetings every week — quite a small number of friends, three or four, who discussed philosophy, spiritual experiences, etc. There was a young boy, a poet, but one who was rather light-minded; he was very intelligent, he was a student in Paris. He used to come regularly to these meetings (they took place on Wednesday evenings) and one evening he did not come. We were surprised; we had met him a few days before and he had said he would come — he did not come. We waited quite a long time, the meeting was over and at the time of leaving I opened the door to let people out (it was at my house that these meetings were held), I opened the door and there before it sat a big dark grey cat which rushed into the room like mad and jumped upon me, like this, mewing desperately. I looked into its eyes and told myself, "Well, these are so-and-so's eyes" (the one who was to come). I said, "Surely something has happened to him." And the next day we learnt that he had been assassinated that night; the next morning he had been found lying strangled on his bed. This is the first story. The other happened long afterwards, at the time of the war — the First [World] War, not the Second — the war of the trenches. There was a young man I knew very well; he was a poet and artist (I have already spoken about him), who had gone to the war. He had enlisted, he was very young; he was an officer. He had given me his photograph. (This boy was a student of Sanskrit and knew Sanskrit very well, he liked Buddhism very much; indeed he was much interested in things of the spirit, he was not an ordinary boy, far from it.) He had given me his photograph on which there was a sentence in Sanskrit written in his own hand, very well written. I had framed this photograph and put it above a sort of secretaire (a rather high desk with drawers); well, above it I had hung this photograph. And at that time it was very difficult to receive news, one did not know very well what was happening. From time to time we used to receive letters from him, but for a long time there had been nothing, when, one day, I came into my room, and the moment I entered, without any apparent reason the photograph fell from the wall where it had been well fixed, and the glass broke with a great clatter. I felt a little anxious, I said, "There is something wrong." But we had no news. Two or three

days later (it was on the first floor; I lived in a house with one room upstairs, all the rest on the ground-floor, and there was a flight of steps leading to the garden) I opened the entrance door and a big grey cat rushed in — light grey, this time — a magnificent cat, and, just as the other one had done, it flung itself upon me, like this, mewling. I looked into its eyes — it had the eyes of . . . that boy. And this cat, it turned and turned around me and all the time tugged at my dress and miaowed. I wanted to put it out, but it would not go, it settled down there and did not want to move. The next day it was announced in the papers that this boy had been found dead between two trenches, dead for three days. That is, at the time he must have died his photograph had fallen. The consciousness had left the body completely: he was there abandoned, because they did not always go to see what was happening between the trenches; they could not, you understand; he was found two or three days later; at that time probably he had gone out altogether from his body and wanted definitely to inform me about what had happened and he had found that cat. For cats live in the vital, they have a very developed vital consciousness and can easily be taken possession of by vital forces.

But these two examples are quite extraordinary, for they both came about almost in the same way, and in both instances the eyes of these cats had completely changed — they had become human eyes.

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1950-1951*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 4, pp. 317-22)



## **DISTINGUISHING THE ADVERSE FORCES FROM OTHER FORCES**

*Sometimes one cannot distinguish adverse forces from other forces.*

That happens when one is quite unconscious.

There are only two cases when this is possible: you are either very unconscious of the movements of your being — you have not studied, you have not observed, you do not know what is happening within you — or you are absolutely insincere, that is, you play the ostrich in order not to see the reality of things: you hide your head, you hide your observation, your knowledge and you say, “It is not there.” But indeed the latter I hope is not in question here. Hence it is simply because one has not the habit of observing oneself that one is so unconscious of what is happening within.

Have you ever practised distinguishing what comes from your mind, what comes from your vital, what comes from your physical? . . . For it is mixed up; it is mixed up in the outward appearance. If you do not take care to distinguish, it makes a kind of soup, all that together. So it is indistinct and difficult to discover. But if you observe yourself, after some time you see certain things, you feel them to be there, like that, as though they were in your skin; for some other things you feel you would have to go within yourself to find out from where they come; for other things, you have to go still further inside, or otherwise you have to rise up a little: it comes from unconsciousness. And there are others; then you must go very deep, very deep to find out from where they come. This is just a beginning.

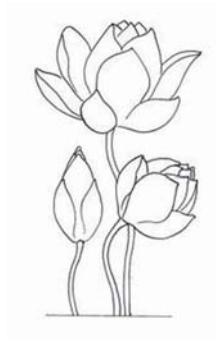
Simply observe. You are in a certain condition, a certain undefinable condition. Then look: “What! how is it I am like that?” You try to see first if you have fever or some other illness; but it is all right, everything is all right, there’s neither headache nor fever, the stomach is not protesting, the heart is functioning as it should, indeed, all’s well, you are normal. “Why then am I feeling so uneasy?” . . . So you go a little further within. It depends on cases. Sometimes you find out immediately: yes, there was a little incident which wasn’t pleasant, someone said a word that was not happy or one had failed in his task or perhaps did not know one’s lesson very well, the teacher had made a remark. At the time, one did not pay attention properly, but later on, it begins to work, leaves a painful impression. That is the second stage. Afterwards, if nothing happened: “All’s well, everything is normal, everything usual, I have nothing to note down, nothing has happened: why then do I feel like that?” Now it begins to be interesting, because one must enter much more deeply within oneself. And then it can be all sorts of things: it may be precisely the expression of an attack that is preparing; it may be a little inner anxiety seeking the progress that has to be

made; it may be a premonition that there is somewhere in contact with oneself something not altogether harmonious which one has to change: something one must see, discover, change, on which light is to be put, something that is still there, deep down, and which should no longer be there. Then if you look at yourself very carefully, you find out: "There! I am still like that; in that little corner, there is still something of that kind, not clear: a little selfishness, a little ill-will, something refusing to change." So you see it, you take it by the tip of its nose or by the ear and hold it up in full light: "So, you were hiding! you are hiding? But I don't want you any longer." And then it has to go away.

This is a great progress.

THE MOTHER

*(Questions and Answers 1953, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 5, pp. 101-03)*



## “MAYA” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

Some more blank verses:

### MAYA

The  
|| This }<sup>1</sup> scorching shadow masked as living light,  
A  
Earth's smile of painted passion, withers now!  
black  
But is there hollow on dark<sup>2</sup> ravenous hollow  
| With never a gold core of love divine?  
How pass then reveries of angelic wings  
|| Or sudden stabs of paradise through clay  
Revealing the blind heart of all desire?  
|| Surely some haloed beauty hides within  
|| The mournful spaces of unlustred limbs  
To call with secret eyes a perfect Sun  
Whose glory yearns across the drouth of hell!  
| Behind the false glow dreams the epiphany —  
But all a face of night implacable  
Save to the soul's virginity, the unknown  
|| White fire whose arms enclasp infinitude . . .

Again, I suppose, the poetic intelligence mostly. Please mark whatever lines are not a failure but have some force and originality. What impression does the whole poem make? Perhaps the thought is not quite clear, the language too compressed?

*[Amal's questions in the margins:]*

1. Would “A” be apposite here?
2. Is “black” better?

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

1. “A” is best.
2. Yes.

Exceedingly fine. I have marked the best lines. It is a very powerful poetic expression of the idea. It is the poetic intelligence, of course, but the last lines “the unknown White fire” etc. reach overhead. But the construction of these last three lines and therefore their exact meaning is a little obscure — no obscurity in the rest.

27 August 1937

[*Amal's suggestion:*]

I suggest “like” to replace “all” in line 3 from below. Will that make the idea clearer without diminishing the force of expression?

Sri Aurobindo's answer:

Yes, I think so.

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## MAYA

A scorching shadow masked as living light,  
 Earth's smile of painted passion, withers now!  
 But is there hollow on black ravenous hollow  
 With never a gold core of love divine?  
 How pass then reveries of angelic wings  
 Or sudden stabs of paradise through clay  
 Revealing the blind heart of all desire?  
 Surely some haloed beauty hides within  
 The mournful spaces of unlustred limbs  
 To call with secret eyes a perfect Sun  
 Whose glory yearns across the drouth of hell!  
 Behind the false glow dreams the epiphany —  
 But like a face of night implacable  
 Save to the soul's virginity, the unknown  
 White fire whose arms enclasp infinitude . . .

AMAL KIRAN  
 (K. D. SETHNA)



## THE JJB STORY

It was a cold and dark night in Samchi, Bhutan.

In the small room that served as the office of the Geological Survey of India, JJB sat and looked at the clock on the wall in front of him, behind the desk of his boss, PK, a Bengali devotee of the Mother, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. The clock struck 9.45 p.m., the hour when the generator would soon be switched off in minutes. Little did JJB know that within the next three minutes his life would take a violent U-turn, the like of which he would never have thought possible.

It was the 17th of November, 1973.

As he sat, watching the clock and waiting for his boss to return from the washroom, his mind wandered back to the past and retraced briefly his life which had brought him to this pass.

He had become a senior geologist having worked hard as a student. His father encouraged his studies and supported him. His grandfather, a staunch traditionalist and a worshipper of Narayan, was carrying forward the religious tradition of the family from the last twenty-five generations. The family had a *shaligram*, a representative image of Lord Vishnu, at home to which they offered pooja daily. But JJB was not interested in all these religious activities.

His father, JMB was a professor of Bengali literature in Calcutta University and in Jadavpur University after a stint in Gauhati. His grandfather, SB, came to know of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother but had no regard for them. As he was steeped in the orthodox outlook of the Hindu religious tradition, with its strait-jacketed views, he just could not find any sympathetic place for them, neither in his heart nor his mind. It was impossible for him to accept the fact that a foreigner and that too, a lady, could be a spiritual guru in India. And what was worse, he passed on his abhorrence of them to his grandson, JJB. It was this particular training received from his grandfather that had made JJB a die-hard non-believer and a communist with extreme Marxist views. Nor was he simply a neutral materialist, one who disliked religion, but was one who had a pronounced hatred for the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and its gurus.

In sharp contrast, his boss, PK was an ardent devotee of the Mother. A man of few words, he was an honest, straightforward person, maybe with a few oddities. No wonder he had a calendar picture of the Mother on the wall in his office. He refused to keep photos of the Prime Minister and the President in the office, something he was expected to do as a loyal servant of the Government of India. Because of his unconventional behaviour as an average Government servant, PK was considered an odd and cranky character. PK had kidney problems and had to frequent the bathroom every hour to relieve himself.

Now that his boss was in the bathroom, JJB's gaze went reluctantly but mechanically to the calendar picture of the Mother on the wall. He wondered why and how his boss, apparently and otherwise a sensible man, had become a devotee of the Mother.

As the clock showed the time as 9.45 p.m., his attention came back to the present from his reveries and he noticed that the lights were dimming — a clear signal from the operator of the generator, announcing the switching-off time. The office staff members were being put on alert to light the lanterns.

JJB was a proud man and he did not want anyone to imagine that he was a softie, a religious-minded person. As soon as he heard the bathroom door open, he hastily removed his gaze from the calendar picture of the Mother on the wall, unwilling to be caught looking at the picture! He wanted to maintain his unblemished image of a proud hardcore materialist.

The office of the Geological Survey of India in Samchi, Bhutan, was busy that day. The President of India was visiting Bhutan and the office had to make a presentation to him of the good work it was doing in that country. JJB had to work overtime with only the lanterns as source of light. He was alone in the office, preparing data for the presentation to the President of India, Shri V.V. Giri.

Accidentally, his eyes strayed and looked at the Mother's picture again. To his utter astonishment he saw that the image of the Mother was alive and was breathing! Was he dreaming or hallucinating? He looked again and again and he saw the Mother in the picture was clearly breathing. Could it be his imagination? Could it be the dim light playing tricks with his sight? Could it be a breeze from the window? He looked and saw that the window was firmly closed to avoid the winter cold of the mountains. Highly puzzled, he looked away and prepared to leave the office around 11.00 p.m. The strange experience haunted him for a long time.

JJB went home and slept, still rather confused about the strange phenomenon of the picture that had come alive. In the morning, he got up and his servant greeted him with a cup of steaming tea. He had the habit of keeping his small pocket transistor radio with him in the bed, so that in the morning he could hear the news. The radio announced the passing of the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry! This was stunning news, when placed in the context of his experience the previous night!

The news of death is normally not a reason for rejoicing. But JJB felt an exhilaration. It almost felt as if the Mother had intimated to him her passing; she seemed to have given him a personal message: "A change of life is now offered to you. You may be ready for an inner life. Grab the chance offered you and do not miss the opportunity." The story of Jagai and Madhai in Shri Chaitanya's life seemed to be repeated. Or was it that of Saul and Jesus?

Stunned, unbelieving, stupefied, he reviewed and questioned all his mental assumptions and realised the falsity of his materialistic suppositions. How could he not believe what he had "seen" with his own eyes?

In the morning, back in the office, when he announced the news of the Mother's passing to PK, his boss, the latter immediately packed his bags and left for Pondicherry after instructing JJB to look after the office.

The vast change in outlook turned his entire life completely in the opposite direction. From a materialist atheist, he was forced to become a believer. The transition to an ardent devotee took some time to be complete. The radical change was initiated and monthly offerings continued to flow from him to the Ashram.

The next year, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January 1974, a roll of calendars arrived by registered post from Sri Aurobindo Ashram for PK. JJB, in his new avatar, was now quite keen to receive at least a calendar with the Mother's picture. But he considered his boss to be a miser and thought it most unlikely for him to be generous enough to part with even a single calendar. As the packet was opened, he could see that there were several calendars in the roll. A rather strange thought struck him. "If I get one calendar from PK, then it will be a sign for me that the Mother has accepted me as a disciple and her child." And wonder of wonders, his boss looked at him and gave him one calendar. JJB now considered his initiation complete and his faith was vindicated.

Every month, JJB started sending money orders to the Mother, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, one from him and one from his wife. The offerings were modest, in keeping with his middle-class standard. His two sons used to see this monthly routine and wanted to do the same. They begged their father to send some offering in their names also. JJB discouraged them and said that what was being sent was adequate enough. But the two boys insisted and told their father that if he was unwilling to make the offerings on their behalf, they would work at odd jobs and earn enough to make the offerings by themselves. The father, unwilling to let them earn money at their tender age, relented and started sending four money orders to the Ashram, every month.

At that time, Yu. B., the younger son was 7 years old and the elder boy, Ya. B. was aged 11. The routine of the offerings continued and the youngsters grew in faith with their parents. To cut a long story short, since it is a diversion, Yu. became a journalist with a successful career in the U.S. and Ya. became a professor of physics in Ahmedabad.

Yu. wanted to marry an American girl and Ya. too was keen to marry a Gujarati girl. In spite of strong opposition from the family, they insisted that they would marry only the girls that they had chosen. Their faith in Mother had grown to such an extent, that they both insisted on solemnising their marriage in Sri Aurobindo's room. They managed to do that, in spite of the vast distance separating Pondicherry and Gujarat and the U.S.A.

JJB had not only turned into an ardent disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, but had also passed on his own faith to his progeny. This was extremely satisfying and fulfilling for him.

Now to continue with JJB.

In 1981, JJB was posted in Jaipur, Rajasthan for geological work in that region. A collaboration agreement with Russia in the geological field, gave JJB a chance to visit that country. He was selected as one of five persons to go to Russia. But jealousy and office intrigues combined well to thwart this rare opportunity. Others were chosen and his name was deleted from the list and replaced by some other. When he was informed about the cancellation of his trip, he felt extremely disappointed and even angry with the Mother for having failed to support him. As he was in correspondence with Shri Dyuman-bhai, he shot off a letter of frustration and disappointment to him. The gist of his missive was that the Mother raises unnecessary and false hopes and gives you a ladder to climb to the top, and when you are near the summit, she pulls the ladder away. He was dejected, felt let down and cheated.

But suddenly he received a telegram from Dyuman-bhai which read: "You are flying. Inform flight time. Will pray to Mother for her blessings and your safety." Without taking it too seriously, he repaired back to the office after a field trip, in a black mood of depression. In the office, he was accosted by an office colleague, who asked him: "Have you packed your bags? You are taking the next flight to Russia."

This was too much for him. The Mother had not, after all, let him down. Why did his faith fail him? This was the flash point and his visits to the Ashram became regular after his visit to Russia. His association with Dyuman-bhai became firm and intimacy with him grew sufficiently to enable Dyuman-bhai to entrust Ashram work to him.

Notably, he was once asked to procure cows of a particular good breed from Gujarat for the Ashram Dairy Farm by the name of Gloria. Herein, once again, lies an interesting story of inner guidance. JJB, a geologist by training and profession, knew nothing about dairy science or cows or any animal. Even in spite of total ignorance in the field, he was guided almost miraculously at every step. He was able to complete successfully the task assigned to him. The cows were located almost miraculously, were purchased and ferried to Pondicherry by lorry.

JJB is now an avid reader of Sri Aurobindo's works and can quote long passages from *Savitri*.

That is the story of JJB.

There may be several doubts that may enter the mind of skeptics. Is it really possible for a photograph to come alive? Is it possible for an event in Pondicherry to have its effect in far away Bhutan? Do not the Arya Samajists insist that it is ignorance and foolishness to worship stone idols or any representative images of gods and goddesses? Some other religions hold similar views.

However, spiritual experience certainly does not limit itself to the petty mental ideas of ignorant men. Sri Aurobindo's experience on the banks of the Narmada river, during his sojourn in Baroda is worth recalling. He has immortalised it in his

sonnet entitled 'The Stone Goddess'<sup>1</sup>.

### The Stone Goddess

In a town of gods, housed in a little shrine,  
 From sculptured limbs the Godhead looked at me, —  
 A living Presence deathless and divine,  
 A Form that harboured all infinity.

The great World-Mother and her mighty will  
 Inhabited the earth's abysmal sleep,  
 Voiceless, omnipotent, inscrutable,  
 Mute in the desert and the sky and deep.

Now veiled with mind she dwells and speaks no word,  
 Voiceless, inscrutable, omniscient,  
 Hiding until our soul has seen, has heard  
 The secret of her strange embodiment,

One in the worshipper and the immobile shape,  
 A beauty and mystery flesh or stone can drape.

A question arises, did anyone else experience something similar, since the phenomenon was almost physical? Just as a radio can pick up the signals from a broadcasting station only if it is tuned to it, in spite of the fact that the signals are being dispersed in all directions, so too, only the receptive individual can experience these subtle but concrete waves, when he is tuned in to them.

We may recall a similar event in the life of Shri Champaklal-ji when he was in Gujarat. In the house of a devotee of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, Champaklal-ji felt strong vibrations emanating from a particular room. The vibrations were powerful enough to compel him to rise and go into that room to see for himself the origin of this stream flowing towards him. As he entered the room, he saw on the wall a picture of the Mother that was alive.

One may mention here the practice of *prana pratishtha* for stone images placed in newly-built or relocated temples due to developmental works, such as dams or broad highways. There are priests with sufficient occult knowledge to infuse a living presence into the newly-installed sculptured stone images.

It is often said of certain temples that the images of gods and goddesses are '*jagrat*'. There are other places of worship where there may not be a living presence.

1. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 608.

Another query could come to a skeptical mind. Can an event in Pondicherry be felt in far-away Bhutan? Can all phenomena be widespread, universally, or only some? The theory of the ‘Butterfly effect’ answers the question adequately, even without considering the spiritual truth of the unity of all existence.

It may also be noted that the more significant and spiritually great the event, the greater will be its impact. Let us recall the great meteor that streaked across the night sky, in a long dramatically brilliant fashion, when in April 1950, the great Adwaitin Shri Ramana Maharshi passed away and the Mother, looking up at the sky, remarked, “A great Soul has passed away.”

How could Ramana Maharshi’s death have caused a meteor to streak across the sky? What connection can there be between the two events?

That is the whole point. A Yogi whose consciousness is cosmic can cause events anywhere in the cosmos. Otherwise how can [could?] Mother and Sri Aurobindo help sadhaks in far-off Kolkata or Dubai? How can [could?] they dispense their grace to faithful adherents in order to destroy obstacles in their personal life?

How did Sri Aurobindo sitting silently in his first-floor room in the Ashram determine events in the Second World War? How did he help John Kelly,<sup>2</sup> an American soldier fighting in Europe during WW II repeatedly avoid bomb explosions? How did Sri Aurobindo give life-saving advice to Silviu Cracianas<sup>3</sup> in a Romanian jail? The law of Oneness in all the planes of existence ensures that this is not only feasible but very natural.

It is not only in things animate but in things inanimate also that we must see Narayana, experience Shiva, throw our arms around Shakti. When our eyes, that are now blinded by the idea of Matter, open to the supreme Light, we shall find that nothing is inanimate, but all contains, expressed or unexpressed, involved or evolved, secret or manifest or in course of manifestation, not only that state of involved consciousness which we call *annam* or Matter, but also life, mind, knowledge, bliss, divine force and being, — *prāṇa*, *manas*, *viñāna*, *ānanda*, *cit*, *sat*. In all things the self-conscious personality of God broods and takes the delight of his *guṇas*. Flowers, fruits, earth, trees, metals, all things have a joy in them of which you will become aware, because in all Sri Krishna dwells, *praviśya*, having entered into them, not materially or physically, — because there is no such thing, Space and Time being only conventions and arrangements of perception, the perspective in God’s creative Art, — but by *cit*, the divine awareness in his transcendent being.

2. See *The Light that Shone in the Dark Abyss* by Maggi Lidchi.

3. See *The Lost Footsteps* by Silviu Cracianas.

ईशा वास्यमिदं सर्वं यत् किञ्च जगत्यां जगत्।

“All this world and every object in this world of Prakriti has been created as a habitation for the Lord.”<sup>4</sup>

This is the story of the fortunate soul, JJB.

There are no doubt similar experiences, locked away in the secrecy of many a disciple’s heart, unwilling to share such sacred moments publicly.

Who knows, we may in the future, come to know many other similar events, even if anonymously!

RR

4. CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 78.

... once, for a long time, for several months, I was confined to bed and I found it rather boring — I wanted to see. I was in a room and at one end there was another little room and at the end of the little room there was a kind of bridge; in the middle of the garden the bridge became a staircase leading down into a very big and very beautiful studio, standing in the middle of the garden. I wanted to go and see what was happening in the studio, for I was feeling bored in my room. So I would remain very quiet, close my eyes and send out my consciousness, little by little, little by little, little by little. And day after day — I chose a fixed time and did the exercise regularly. At first you make use of your imagination and then it becomes a fact. After some time I really had the physical sensation that my vision was moving; I followed it and then I could see things downstairs which I knew nothing about. I would check afterwards. In the evening I would ask, “Was this like that? And was that like this?”

*The Mother*

(On Thoughts and Aphorisms, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 10, p. 132)



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

*(Continued from the issue of November 2020)*

## **1. KINDNESS AND COMPASSION**

(Part 13)

Biren Chandra Sen observed that in Alipore jail, although Sri Aurobindo was the leader of the revolutionaries, he was exceedingly humane:

Sri Aurobindo was nothing like the dreadful men we expected leaders to be. Though reserved, his manner was easy and natural. . . .

With nothing to do we made enough noise to disturb the entire jail but there was one man in our midst whom we could not disturb and who appeared like a ‘flame in still air that did not flicker’. . . .

But this man was not, for that reason, callous or unresponsive to things around him. He was extremely human and could even be party to, and enjoy, the devilries of youth.<sup>1</sup>

As a matter of interest, the 17-year-old Biren Chandra Sen was the youngest to be transported to the Andaman Cellular jail in the Alipore Bomb Case. He was in jail for 7 years and later in the 1960s settled in the Ashram. Once, when a disciple was discussing about several revolutionaries with the Mother, he mentioned that Biren Sen, like the others, was mercilessly tortured in the Andamans. He said: “Mother, he speaks very little. He is short . . . He looks so quiet and innocent, but he was very courageous and bold.” The Mother replied: “It is fortunate that he is a quiet man. In silence one finds the greatest power.”<sup>2</sup>

As examined earlier in the article, Sri Aurobindo’s nobility and self-sacrifice as a leader had caught the imagination of the youth, a fact testified by none other than Sir Stafford Cripps, amongst others. On 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 1909, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Karmayogin* about the significance of true leadership and this perhaps explains why the youth, like Biren Chandra Sen, were in awe of him:

1. Biren Chandra Sen, ‘Sri Aurobindo as I Remember Him’, *Mother India*, April 1964, p. 19.

2. Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 22.

The *Bengalee* insists however that individual life is quite as sacred *for its own purposes* as national life for its higher purposes, that the nation must get *adequate value* for each sacrifice that the individuals make, and that great men must protect themselves from danger because their removal at a critical moment may mean incalculable injury. We deny that individual life is as sacred as national life; the smaller cannot be so sacred as the greater, self cannot be so sacred as others, and to say that it is quite as sacred for its own purposes is to deify selfishness. Our lives are useful only in proportion as they help others by example or action or tend to fulfil God in man. It is not true that my ease is sacred, my safety is sacred, or my self-interest is sacred. This if anything is “a fatal doctrine”. We do not deny that sacrifice cannot be an end to itself; no one is so foolish as to advance any such proposition. But when the *Bengalee* argues that the individual must demand adequate value for every sacrifice he makes on the national altar, it shows a complete inability to appreciate the nature of sacrifice and the laws of politics. If we had acted in this Bania spirit, we should never have got beyond the point at which we stood four years ago. It is by unhesitating, wholehearted and princely sacrifices that nations effect their liberty. It has always been so in the past and the laws of nature have not altered and will not alter to suit the calculating prudence of individuals. A great man is valuable to the nation and he should guard himself but only so far as he can do so without demoralising his followers, ceasing from the battle or abdicating his right to leadership. He should never forget that he leads and the nation looks up to him as a fountain of steadfastness, unselfish service and courage. Expediency means national expediency, not individual expediency. Even so it must be the larger expediency which makes great sacrifices and faces great risks to secure great ends. Statesmanship is not summed up in the words prudence and caution, it has a place for strength and courage.<sup>3</sup>

After Sri Aurobindo's acquittal in the Alipore Bomb Case, he stayed at the house of his maternal uncle, Krishna Kumar Mitra, at College Square, which was also known as the *Sanjivini* office. Nolini Kanta Gupta and Bejoy Nag, who were both acquitted along with Sri Aurobindo, were young and jobless but they religiously visited Sri Aurobindo at this house every afternoon. And when Sri Aurobindo toured Assam for some political work, he took both of them along with him. Sri Aurobindo then launched two weekly papers, *Karmayogin* in English and *Dharma* in Bengali and encouraged Nolini Kanta Gupta to write in Bengali. Despite Sri Aurobindo not having any source of income, Nolini Kanta Gupta speaks of Sri Aurobindo's generosity and sense of fairness:

3. CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 89-90.

... he told me one day that he had decided to bring out two weekly papers, one in English and the other in Bengali. The premises were ready, the arrangements were practically complete and we could both of us come and stay there. He asked me if I had any practice in writing. I said that I had never written anything beyond college essays, but I could try. "Then get hold of an English newspaper tomorrow," he said, "pick out some of the important items of news, write them out in Bengali and bring them to me. I shall see." I did that the next day. He seemed to be pleased on seeing my writing and said that it might do. He gave me the task of editing the news columns of his Bengali paper *Dharma*. Half of it would be articles, etc., and the rest would be news. Needless to say, I accepted the offer. He added that for this work he would give me a stipend of ten rupees per month and that I should not take that amiss. For, he explained, this was for him a matter of principle as he did not consider it fair to exact work without giving its due reward. That was why he offered this token payment and I should accept it as part of my pocket-expenses. This was the first time I was going to earn any money.

So we came to stay at Shyampukur, on the *Dharma* and *Karmayogin* premises.<sup>4</sup>

Dinendra Kumar Roy wrote that there was no "meanness" or "selfishness" in Sri Aurobindo's heart but only a longing "to give himself in order to relieve others' suffering".<sup>5</sup> And indeed Sri Aurobindo has written:

Selfishness is the only sin, meanness the only vice, hatred the only criminality. All else can easily be turned into good, but these are obstinate resisters of deity.<sup>6</sup>

Even if people were mean and selfish, Sri Aurobindo helped them. He narrated to his disciples:

While I was residing at Baroda a Bengali Sannyasi came to see me and asked me to help him financially. I did so. But I found that the man was extremely rajasic, jealous and boastful and could not tolerate anyone greater than himself. He used to curse everybody who was greater than him. Once he went to see Brahmananda. He began to curse him because he was so great. Shortly after, Brahmananda died of the prick of a nail. The Sannyasi took all the credit

4. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol. 7, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 1978, pp. 391-92.

5. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, pp. 6-7 (Dinendra Kumar Roy's *Aurobindo Prasanga* – Translated from Bengali by Maurice Shukla).

6. CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 436.

himself! What might have happened was that Brahmananda's death was near and this man got the suggestion of it from the subtle planes.<sup>7</sup>

The incident of the Bengali sannyasi brings to mind an event that occurred in 1914 when Sri Aurobindo was staying at the Guest House at Rue Francois Martin, Pondicherry. A boy from the bakery used to drop the bread every afternoon on a table in the verandah whilst the inmates were taking their afternoon nap. The table had a drawer where some money used to be kept. Bejoy Nag noticed that the money was regularly missing from the drawer and was convinced that the money was being stolen by an outsider during their siesta. With the help of Amrita and another inmate he set a trap by forgoing their nap, instead hiding themselves behind doors and keeping an eye for the expected thief. When the baker boy came to deliver the bread he opened the drawer and pocketed a five-rupee note. On seeing this all the three inmates leapt on the boy and started showering him with blows. The boy cried out and repentantly admitted to have been stealing for the past few days. Sri Aurobindo came out of his room into the verandah, probably having heard the howls of the baker boy. He stood a while without a word. Amrita narrates,

Our raised fists dropped down of themselves and we stood still as though we had been the culprits. Sri Aurobindo forbade us to take the five-rupee note away from him and when we heard the order we felt as if a sentence had been passed upon us.<sup>8</sup>

This incident evokes the character of Bishop of Digne in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* when the starving convict Valjean was given food and shelter for a night by the Bishop. In the night Valjean steals the Bishop's silver and escapes, only to be later arrested by the police and brought to the Bishop to verify the theft. The Bishop astonishingly absolves Valjean and even tells the police that the stolen silver was a gift from him, thus allowing Valjean to keep the valuables. This gesture of kindness had such an impact on Valjean that he transformed himself into a most noble soul.

Let us digress a bit and touch upon Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and the protagonist of the book Jean Valjean. Sri Aurobindo was once asked: "When I said to Pavitra that *Les Misérables* was one of the great works of art he replied 'Faugh! What a shallow thing.' But I believe I heard from Amrita that you used to regard it as one of the world's great novels", he replied:

7. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 108.

8. See K. Amrita, *A Pilgrimage to Sri Aurobindo*, pp. 47-49.

It is not one of the masterpieces of “art”, but I regard it as the work of a powerful genius and certainly one of the great novels. It is certainly not philosophically or psychologically deep, but it is exceedingly vivid and powerful.<sup>9</sup>

And when the Bengali writer Buddhadev Bose “remarked that great literature could not be produced by people living in entire seclusion in Pondicherry”, Sri Aurobindo commented:

What a stupidly rigid principle! Can Buddhadev really write nothing except what he has seen or experienced? What an unimaginative man he must be! And how dull his stories must be and how limited.

I wonder whether Victor Hugo had to live in a convicts’ prison before he created Jean Valjean. Certainly one has to look at life, but there is no obligation to copy faithfully from life. The man of imagination carries a world in himself and a mere hint or suggestion from life is enough to start it going. It is recognised now that Balzac and Dickens created out of themselves their greatest characters which were not at all faithful to the life around them. Balzac’s descriptions of society are hopelessly wrong, he knew nothing about it, but his world is much more striking and real than the actual world around him which he misrepresented — even life has imitated the figures he made rather than the other way round.<sup>10</sup>

And in a lighter vein, when the attendants were sitting with Sri Aurobindo, one of them recounted:

Haradhan, when he used to work with the Mother, was asked by somebody, “Who are the advanced sadhaks here?” He replied, “I don’t know.” Then after he had been repeatedly pressed, he said, “I will tell you but you must not tell anybody else. There are only two advanced sadhaks here — you and I.”

Sri Aurobindo then responded:

This instance of two reminds me of a joke about Hugo. Balzac is supposed to have told a friend, “There are only two men who know how to write French — myself and Hugo.” When this was repeated to Hugo, he said, “But why Balzac?”

There is also the story of a Calvinist lady. The Calvinists have the doctrine that people are predestined to go to either heaven or hell. She was asked whether

9. CWSA, Vol. 27, pp. 549-50.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-12.

she knew where the congregation to which she belonged would go. She said, “All will go to hell, except myself and the minister — and I have doubts even about the minister.”<sup>11</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s kindness to all and sundry evokes what he later wrote to a disciple: “Don’t you know that the Divine smiles equally on the wicked and the good together?”<sup>12</sup> And when Sri Aurobindo was asked: “. . . since in our stumblings and gropings the Divine here may have a soft corner for some, and not perhaps for others to the same extent”, he clarified:

All that is rather beside the point. There is a universal divine love that is given equally to all — but also there is *a special relation* with each man — it is not a question of more or less, though it may appear so. But even that less or more cannot be judged by human standards. The man who gets a blow may, if he has a certain relation, feel it as a divine caress; he may even say, erecting his own standard, “She loves me more than others, because to others she would not give that blow, to me she felt she could give it,” and it would be quite as good a standard as the kind treatment one — as standards go. But no standards apply. For in each case it is according to the relation. The cause of the relation? It differs in each case.<sup>13</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s nobility of heart and compassion for human beings is reflected universally in his writings. In one instance he discloses:

He who has done even a little good to human beings, though he be the worst of sinners, is accepted by God in the ranks of His lovers and servants. He shall look upon the face of the Eternal.<sup>14</sup>

And once, when an errant Ashramite was planning to leave the Ashram, a disciple asked, “But these kinds of people, will they ever realise the Divine?” Sri Aurobindo replied:

Everyone will arrive at the Divine.<sup>15</sup>

There is a depth and quiet intensity in Sri Aurobindo’s kindness. This can also be somewhat gauged in his literary writings during the Baroda and post-Baroda

11. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 182.

12. Nirodbaran, *Sri Aurobindo’s Humour*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., p. 47.

13. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 445.

14. *Ibid.*, Vol. 12, p. 495.

15. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 550.

period in Bengal. For instance his Bengali essay, ‘The Ideal of Forgiveness’, — published as ‘*Kshamar Adarsha*’ in *Dharma* in February 1910 — a rendition of Rishi Vashistha’s encounter with Vishwamitra, is unparalleled in terms of its conception and imagination on the theme of love and compassion. Sri Aurobindo writes that Vishwamitra murdered all hundred sons of Rishi Vashishta, yet Vashishta, despite his wife’s protests, never stopped loving him. Later Vashishta tried to help Vishwamitra but the latter’s anger again resurfaced. In spite of that Vashishta fulfilled Vishwamitra’s ardent wish of gifting him the most precious spiritual realisation — knowledge of Brahman. In the article Sri Aurobindo makes us aware not only of India’s rich spiritual heritage where great souls like Vashishta were born but he also offers us hope for the future by revealing, at the end of the essay, that we are entering a new evolutionary epoch as great Rishis like Vashishta have taken birth in India again.<sup>16</sup>

Earlier in the year 1899 Sri Aurobindo had written the poem ‘Love and Death’; it touches upon the theme of selfless love where the hero of the poem, Ruru, sacrificed half the time-span of his life in order to bring his beloved, Priyumvada, back to life after her premature death. Commenting about the poem Manoj Das writes:

It is the mysterious flower the god of Love gives to Ruru that enables the hero to enter the nether world and find Priyumvada’s soul and bring her back to her life on earth. But that he succeeds in doing by paying as price half of his own longevity. Though it was still a bargain with Death, the irreplaceable function of the supreme power of Love in the occult adventure for the conquest of death — a truth to be vivified in the epic *Savitri*, has already been visualised in it.<sup>17</sup>

And in a letter to his brother Manmohan, Sri Aurobindo writes:

This Ruaru, later, became a great Rishi like his fathers, but in his youth he was engrossed with his love for a beautiful girl whom he had made his wife . . . Their joy of union was not yet old when Priyumvada perished, like Eurydice, by the fangs of a snake. Ruaru inconsolable for her loss, wandered miserable among the forests that had been the shelter and witnesses of their loves, consuming the universe with his grief, until the Gods took pity on him and promised him his wife back, if he sacrificed for her half his life. To this Ruaru gladly assented and, the price paid, was reunited with his love. . . .

16. See Sri Aurobindo, ‘Ideal of Forgiveness’, (translation from Bengali of Sri Aurobindo’s ‘*Kshamar Adarsha*’ by Arabinda Basu, *The Chariot of Jagannatha*, 2014, p. 23).

17. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, July 2012, p. 511.



Ruaru and Priyumvada are also types and ideals; love in them, such is the idea, finds not only its crowning exaltation but that perfect *idea* of itself of which every existing love is a partial and not quite successful manifestation. Ideal love is a triune energy, neither a mere sensual impulse, nor mere emotional nor mere spiritual. These may exist, but they are not love. By itself the sensual is only an animal need, the emotional a passing mood, the spiritual a religious aspiration which has lost its way. Yet all these are necessary elements of the highest passion. Sense impulse is as necessary to it as the warm earth-matter at its root to the tree, emotion as the air which consents with its life, spiritual aspiration as the light and the rain from heaven which prevent it from withering. My conception being an ideal struggle between love and death, two things are needed to give it poetical form, an adequate picture of love and adequate image of Death. The love pictured must be on the ideal plane, and touch therefore the farthest limit of strength in each of its three directions. The sensual must be emphasised to give it firm root and basis, the emotional to impart to it life, the spiritual to prolong it into infinite permanence. And if at their limits of extension the three meet and harmonise, if they are not triple but triune, then is that love a perfect love and the picture of it a perfect picture. Such at least is the conception of the poem; whether I have contrived even faintly to execute it, do you judge.<sup>18</sup>

Sri Aurobindo ends the letter on a touching note, offering his poem ‘Love and Death’ as a token of gratitude to Manmohan:

Will you accept this poem as part-payment of a deep intellectual debt I have been long owing to you? Unknown to yourself, you taught and encouraged me from my childhood to be a poet. From your sun my farthing rush-light was kindled, and it was in your path that I long strove to guide my uncertain and faltering footsteps.<sup>19</sup>

Right since their days in England, Manmohan encouraged Sri Aurobindo to write poetry, which Sri Aurobindo acknowledged by telling his attendants: “But I dare say my brother stimulated me to write poetry.”<sup>20</sup> And the reader will recall that once Manmohan told his younger brother: “Aurobindo, you forget that you are a born poet and must not drift into politics. Politics is not your mission in life. Your mission is poetry.”<sup>21</sup>

18. CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 129-30, 132.

19. *Ibid.*, p.137.

20. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 241.

21. Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerji, ‘Some Reminiscences of Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, December 1963, p. 21.

‘Love and Death’ runs to about a thousand lines. Sri Aurobindo discloses:

The poem itself was written in a white heat of inspiration during 14 days of continuous writing — in the mornings only of course, for I had to attend office the rest of the day and saw friends in the evening. I never wrote anything with such ease and rapidity before or after.<sup>22</sup>

When a disciple wrote to Sri Aurobindo: “By the way, the copy of your *Love and Death* is ready to go to England. I wonder how the critics will receive the poem”, he replied:

You expect . . . *Love and Death* to make a sensation in England — I don’t expect it in the least: I shall be agreeably surprised if it gets more than some qualified praise, and if it does not get even that, I shall be neither astonished nor discomfited. I know the limitations of the poem and its qualities and I know that the part about the descent into Hell can stand comparison with some of the best English poetry; but I don’t expect my contemporaries to see it. If they do, it will be good luck or divine grace, that is all.<sup>23</sup>

A disciple asked the Mother: “I have been reading Sri Aurobindo’s ‘Love and Death’. Do such vast regions of eternal night and sorrow as described there really exist? And do we go there after death? They seem to be like hell, with all their sorrow, gloom, darkness and the roaring rivers. Which part of the being goes there and why?” She replied:

The vital world is mostly like that and those who live exclusively in the physical and the vital go there after death . . . But there is the Grace! . . .<sup>24</sup>

And when the disciple asked: “In ‘Love and Death’ are Ruru and Priyumvada the first forms of Savitri and Satyavan?”, she replied: “Sri Aurobindo told me nothing about that.”<sup>25</sup>

At Baroda Sri Aurobindo’s creative genius on the theme of compassion again came to the fore with his poetic play *Perseus the Deliverer*. His conception of the heroine, the Syrian Princess Andromeda, epitomising empathy, love and compassion, is so sublime that it is worth reproducing some verses from the play.

Just after the play commences, a fatal ship-wreck occurs off the coast of Syria. When Diomedes, an attendant of Princess Andromeda, speaks of the excitement of

22. CWSA, Vol. 27, pp. 219-20.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 361.

24. CWM, Vol. 17, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 285.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

seeing a sinking foreign ship, where men shrieked whilst their bodies were torn apart on savage sharp rocks, soft-hearted Andromeda admonishes Diomedes and laments at their fate, despite them being foreign adversaries:

O do not tell me any more! How had you heart  
To look at what I cannot bear to hear?  
For while you spoke I felt as if the rocks  
Were tearing my own limbs and the salt surge  
Choking me.<sup>26</sup>

Andromeda continues:

Alas, the unhappy men, the poor drowned men  
Who had young children somewhere whom they loved!  
How could you watch them die? Had I been a god,  
I would not let this cruel thing have happened.<sup>27</sup>

Andromeda's attendants mock her — note the princess' magnanimity in treating her attendants like her friends — for showing sympathy to barbaric foreigners. Yet Andromeda remains undeterred:

And these men were not brothers?  
They too had sisters who will feel as I should  
If my dear brother were to die so wretchedly.<sup>28</sup>

As events unfold the ship-wreck had two survivors, both Babylonian merchants, who were captured by the Syrians. As per local custom, foreigners were to be sacrificed on the altar to the Sea-god, Poseidon, so as to appease him. Andromeda, eager to save them, asks her doting father, Cepheus, the King of Syria:

I want the Babylonians who were wrecked  
In the great ship today, to be my slaves,  
Father.<sup>29</sup>

26. CWSA, Vol. 3, p. 357.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 358.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*, p. 386.

Cepheus emphatically tells his daughter that the foreigners belong to Poseidon and it is impossible for him to fulfil her wish. Yet Andromeda is steadfast in her stance:

Father, you'll understand this once for all, —  
I will not let the Babylonians die, . . .<sup>30</sup>

Later when Diomedes is convinced that Andromeda intends to sacrifice her life, she blurts out:

What! you will kill yourself, and for two strangers  
You never saw? You are no human maiden  
But something far outside mortality,  
Princess, if you do this.

Andromeda defiantly replies:

I shall not need.  
You threaten me with the fierce people's tearings,  
And shall I not be torn when I behold  
My fellows' piteous hearts plucked from their bosoms  
Between their anguished shrieks? I shall fall dead  
With horror and with pity at your feet:  
Then you'll repent this cruelty.<sup>31</sup>

One of the Babylonians, Tyrnaus, is finally saved by the hero of the play, Perseus. The other, called Smerdas, still bound in chains, is selfish and cunning. Yet Andromeda, at the risk of earning Poseidon's dreadful wrath, frees Smerdas. She expresses her empathy for all living beings, fair or foul:

Alas, poor human man!  
Why, we have all so many sins to answer,  
It would be hard to have cold justice dealt us.  
We should be kindly to each other's faults  
Remembering our own. Is't not enough  
To see a face in tears and heal the sorrow,  
Or must we weigh whether the face is fair  
Or ugly? I think that even a snake in pain

30. *Ibid.*, p. 388.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 403.

Would tempt me to its succour, though I knew  
That afterwards 'twould bite me! . . .<sup>32</sup>

After being rescued by Andromeda, Smerdas gripes about his sunken riches, yet she arranges for Smerdas and Tyraus (the other Babylonian captive) a secret refuge and an escape plan, at a considerable risk of raising the lethal fury of Poseidon's priest Polydaon. Before Polydaon arrives and gets to know of their escapade Andromeda urgently asks them to leave; but not before a moved and grateful Tyraus exclaims:

Not before I kneel  
And touch thy feet with reverent humble hands,  
O human merciful divinity,  
Who by thy own sweet spirit moved, unasked,  
Not knowing us, cam'st from thy safe warm chamber  
Here where Death broods grim-visaged in his home,  
To save two unseen, unloved, alien strangers,  
And being a woman feared not urgent death,  
And being a child shook not before God's darkness  
And that insistent horror of a world  
O'ershadowing ours. O surely in these regions  
Where thou wert born, pure-eyed Andromeda,  
There shall be some divine epiphany  
Of calm sweet-hearted pity for the world,  
And harsher gods shall fade into their Hades.<sup>33</sup>

Subsequently Smerdas is traced and recaptured by the Syrians. He pleads to Andromeda to save him again. Andromeda implores the captors that he be set free. When questioned about her grave contravention of local customs, Andromeda replies:

Because I would not have their human hearts  
Mercilessly uprooted for the bloody  
Monster you worship as a god! because  
I am capable of pain and so can feel  
The pain of others!<sup>34</sup>

Afterwards an ungrateful Smerdas, lured with the temptation of gold and being released, betrays Andromeda by telling Polydaon that she helped him escape.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 418.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 420.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 438.

Polydaon accuses her of an unpardonable sacrilege and as a result she is taken to the sea-shore to be offered as a sacrifice to the sea-monster.

En route Phineus, King of Tyre, who wants to marry Andromeda, approaches her and offers to save her from her own people, who are violently driving her towards the altar. A dialogue follows:

PHINEUS

Sweet rose,  
I come to save thee. I will carry thee,  
My bride, far from these savage Syrian tumults  
To reign in loyal Tyre. Thou art safe.

ANDROMEDA (*sorrowfully*)

Safe!  
My father and my mother are not safe  
Nor Iolaus [*her brother*]: nor is Syria safe.  
Will you protect my people, when the god,  
Not finding me, his preferable victim,  
Works his fierce will on these?

PHINEUS

Thou car'st for them?  
They have o'erwhelmed thee with foul insult, bound thee,  
Threatened thy lovely limbs with rascal outrage  
And dragged to murder!<sup>35</sup>

To this Andromeda counters, "But they are my people" and then tells her captor to take her to the sea-shore to be sacrificed.

To save the city from the wrath of Poseidon, Andromeda is chained to a cliff on the seaside and offered to the sea-monster as a sacrifice. Although in deep anguish, she says:

My fellowmen have cast me out: they have bound me  
Upon thy rocks to die. These cruel chains  
Weary the arms they keep held stiffly out  
Against the rough cold jagged stones.

. . .

35. *Ibid.*, p. 479.

I thought to save two fellowmen: I have slain  
A hundred by their rescue. I have failed  
In all I did and die accursed and hated.

...

But I have done what my own heart required of me,  
And I repent not. Even if after death  
Eternal pain and punishment await me  
And gods and men pursue me with their hate,  
I have been true to myself and to my heart,  
I have been true to the love it bore for men,  
And I repent not.<sup>36</sup>

The drama ends with Perseus the hero of the play coming to rescue Andromeda from the altar by slaying the sea-monster, after which they both get engaged. Andromeda then asks Perseus for a wish which he accedes to:

Then this I ask that thy great deeds may leave  
Their golden trace on Syria. Let the dire cult  
For ever cease and victims bleed no more  
On its dark altar. Instead, Athene's name  
Spread over all the land and in men's hearts.  
Then shall a calm and mighty Will prevail  
And broader minds and kindlier manners reign  
And men grow human, mild and merciful.<sup>37</sup>

Andromeda's empathy for people is unfathomable and heavenly. Sri Aurobindo's imagination in creating such an angelic heroine makes the play vibrant and fascinating. *Perseus the Deliverer* was first published in the weekly *Bande Mataram* in 1907, and in *Collected Poems and Plays* in 1942. Sri Aurobindo revised the text and added a new ending.<sup>38</sup>

About Andromeda, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes:

When one at last closes *Perseus the Deliverer* . . . one particular face and gesture stands out especially radiant, — sun-curled Andromeda defying man and god alike, and releasing Chaldean Smerdas. Pity is nobler than revenge, charity diviner than justice.<sup>39</sup>

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 483-84.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 526-27.

38. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, pp. 1002-03 and publisher's note.

39. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5<sup>th</sup> (revised) Ed., 2006, p. 129.



Iyengar also states:

. . . in Sri Aurobindo's plays too the new force (compassion, love) has to emerge triumphant as an imperative of the evolutionary march. A "king-idea" and a "master act" — Andromeda's — can start the chain-reaction that ensures and encompasses a decisive evolutionary change, taking humanity to a new stage in the growth of consciousness.<sup>40</sup>

Mr A. B. Clark, the principal of the Baroda College, had remarked: "If Joan of Arc heard heavenly voices, Aurobindo probably sees heavenly visions."<sup>41</sup> Was Andromeda one of Sri Aurobindo's "heavenly visions"?

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar further states:

In *Perseus the Deliverer*, the kernel of the action lies, not in Andromeda's passive sufferance as in the earlier renderings of the myth, but in her active defiance of the powers of evil. And, in a way, she was the beginning of the road that was to take Sri Aurobindo ultimately to *Savitri*.<sup>42</sup>

As early as 1898-99, Dinendra Kumar Roy writes of an incident where Sri Aurobindo "opened the *Mahabharata*, and started working on a poem based on the episode of Savitri and Satyavan."<sup>43</sup> Were the seeds for Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri* sown in Baroda? Here too the poem, amongst many other things, illustrates the power of Love to alter Fate, or rather here Love has reached its culmination. A verse in *Savitri* reads:

. . .  
To take all beings into his saviour arms,  
Drawing to his pity the rebel and the waif  
To force on them the happiness they refuse.<sup>44</sup>

(*To be continued*)

GAUTAM MALAKER

40. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

43. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, p. 11.

44. CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 123.

## A CORRECTION

In the study of mine, ‘The Mother’s Four-Year Stay in Japan — A Research Note’, published in *Mother India* June-July 2020, there is one error, and I would like to correct it with my apology.

In the article, I wrote: “Like Madame Kobayashi, Ohkawa visited the Mother in Pondicherry later.” (p. 114) But this is not correct. He intended to go to India, but his poor health did not allow him to do so.

I’m grateful if you publish this correction of mine in the forthcoming issue of your journal.

TOSHIO AKAI



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