

# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE



MAY 2020

*Owner:* Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

*Printer:* Swadhin Chatterjee

*Publisher:* Manoj Das Gupta

*Published from:* Publication Department, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 605 002

*And Printed from:* Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press,  
No. 38, Goubert Avenue, Pondicherry, 605001, India

Editor: S. Ravi

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India: RNI No. 8667/63

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

MAY 2020

PRICE: Rs. 30.00

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

#### INLAND

Annual: Rs. 200.00 (or 2 years – Rs. 400/-, 3 years Rs. 600/- etc.)

For 10 years: Rs. 1,800.00

Price per Single Copy: Rs. 30.00

#### OVERSEAS

Sea Mail: (valid for USA and Canada only)

Annual: \$35

For 10 years: \$350

Air Mail:

Annual: \$70

For 10 years: \$700

All payments to be made in favour of *Mother India*. Cheque should be sent by speed post only. For NEFT/bank transfers (from within India only) kindly inform us by email with full name and address. Our bank details are:

Beneficiary Name: SAAT A/C Mother India

Account Number: 0927101035721

Beneficiary Bank Name: Canara Bank

Beneficiary Branch Name: Pondicherry Muthialpet

IFSC code: CNRB0000927

For Money Orders please send to:

Mother India, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 605002

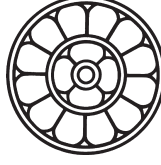
All cheques and correspondence to be addressed to:

MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605002, India

Phone: (0413) 2233642

E-mail: [motherindia@sriarobindoashram.org.in](mailto:motherindia@sriarobindoashram.org.in)

For all subscriptions correspondents should give their full address in BLOCK letters, with the correct PIN code along with their email id or telephone number. Current or past subscribers are requested to mention their subscription number in case of any inquiry.



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.



All Rights Reserved. No matter appearing in this journal or part thereof may be reproduced or translated without written permission from the publishers except for short extracts as quotations.

The views expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of the journal.

All correspondence to be addressed to:

MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605002, India

Phone: (0413) 2233642

e-mail: [motherindia@sriarobindoashram.org.in](mailto:motherindia@sriarobindoashram.org.in)

Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Founding Editor: K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)

Associate Editors: HEMANT KAPOOR & RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXIII

No. 5

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

---

### CONTENTS

#### *Sri Aurobindo*

THE OPENING LINES OF THE PLAY <i>ERIC</i> (Poem)	...	7
YOGA AND SKILL IN WORKS	...	10
THE DOCTRINE OF SACRIFICE	...	15
ON THE INTEGRATION OF THE FRENCH SETTLEMENTS IN INDIA, 1947-1950	...	18

#### *The Mother*

‘THOU SHINEST RESPLENDENT IN ALL THINGS’	...	28
A CONVERSATION OF 14 APRIL 1951	...	29

#### *Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)*

“A FREUDIAN’S MIDNIGHT MEDITATION” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO	...	32
---	-----	----

#### *Raman Reddy*

ON THE MANIFESTO OF THE FRENCH INDIA SOCIALIST PARTY	...	35
--	-----	----

#### *Asoka K. Ganguli*

SRI AUROBINDO: THE WORLD REDEEMER	...	46
-----------------------------------	-----	----

#### *Chitra Sen*

‘THEIR EARTHLY FOOD’ — THE MOTHER’S KITCHEN	...	56
---	-----	----

#### *Gautam Malaker*

SRI AUROBINDO, THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN — “LIFE OF PREPARATION AT BARODA” 1. Kindness and Compassion (Part 8)	...	69
--	-----	----



## THE OPENING LINES OF THE PLAY *ERIC*

### ERIC

Eric of Norway, first whom these cold fiords,  
Deep havens of disunion, from their jagged  
And fissured crevices at last obey,  
The monarch of a thousand Vikings! Yes,  
But how long shall that monarchy endure  
Which only on the swiftness of a sword  
Has taken its restless seat? Strength's iron hound  
Pitilessly bright behind his panting prey  
Can guard for life's short splendour what it won.  
But when the sword is broken or when death  
Proves swifter? All this realm with labour built  
Dissolving like a transitory cloud  
Becomes the thing it was, cleft, parcelled out  
By discord. I have found the way to join,  
The warrior's sword, builder of unity,  
But where's the way to solder? where? O Thor  
And Odin, masters of the northern world,  
Wisdom and force I have; some strength is hidden  
I have not; I would find it out. Help me,  
Whatever power thou art who mov'st the world,  
To Eric unrevealed. Some sign I ask.

### ASLAUG (*singing, outside*)

Love is the hoop of the gods  
Hearts to combine.  
Iron is broken, the sword  
Sleeps in the grave of its lord.  
Love is divine.  
Love is the hoop of the gods  
Hearts to combine.

**ERIC**

Is that your answer? Freya, mother of heaven,  
 Thou wast forgotten. The heart! the seat is there.  
 For unity is sweet substance of the heart  
 And not a chain that binds, not iron, gold,  
 Nor any helpless thought the reason knows.  
 How shall I seize it? where? give me a net  
 By which the fugitive can be snared. It is  
 Too unsubstantial for my iron mind.

**ASLAUG** (*singing, outside*)

When Love desires Love,  
     Then Love is born.  
 Nor golden gifts compel,  
 Nor even beauty's spell  
     Escapes his scorn.  
 When Love desires Love,  
     Then Love is born.

**ERIC** (*calling*)

Who sings outside? Harald! who sings outside?

**HARALD** (*entering*)

Two dancing-girls from Gothberg. Shall they come?

**ERIC**

Admit them.

*Harald goes out.*

From light lips and casual thoughts  
 The gods speak best as if by chance, nor knows  
 The speaker that he is an instrument  
 But thinks his mind the mover of his words. . . .

\* \* \*

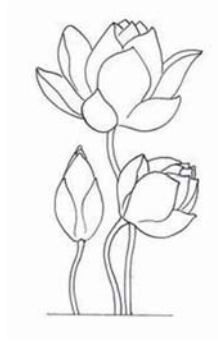
*(From Act III, Scene I)*

**ERIC**

Strength in the spirit, wisdom in the mind,  
Love in the heart complete the trinity  
Of glorious manhood.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Plays and Stories, CWSA, Vol. 4, pp. 533-35; 579)*



## YOGA AND SKILL IN WORKS

Yoga is skill in works.

*Gita*

Yoga, says the Gita, is skill in works, and by this phrase the ancient Scripture meant that the transformation of mind and being to which it gave the name of Yoga brought with it a perfect inner state and faculty out of which the right principle of action and the right spiritual and divine result of works emerged naturally like a tree out of its seed. Certainly, it did not mean that the clever general or politician or lawyer or shoemaker deserves the name of a Yogin; it did not mean that any kind of skill in works was Yoga, but by Yoga it signified a spiritual condition of universal equality and God-union and by the skill of the Yogic worker it intended a perfect adaptation of the soul and its instruments to the rhythm of the divine and universal Spirit in a nature liberated from the shackles of egoism and the limitations of the sense-mind.

Essentially, Yoga is a generic name for the processes and the result of processes by which we transcend or shred off our present modes of being and rise to a new, a higher, a wider mode of consciousness which is not that of the ordinary animal and intellectual man. Yoga is the exchange of an egoistic for a universal or cosmic consciousness lifted towards or informed by the supra-cosmic, transcendent Unnameable who is the source and support of all things. Yoga is the passage of the human thinking animal towards the God-consciousness from which he has descended. In that ascent we find many levels and stages, plateau after plateau of the hill whose summit touches the Truth of things; but at every stage the saying of the Gita applies in an ever higher degree. Even a little of this new law and inner order delivers the soul out of the great peril by which it had been overtaken in its worldward descent, the peril of the ignorance by which the unillumined intellect, even when it is keenest or sagest, must ever be bound and limited, of the sorrow and sin from which the unpurified heart, even when it wears the richest purple of aspiration and feeling, must ever suffer soil and wound and poverty, and of the vanity of its works to which the undivinisised will of man, even when it is most vehement and powerful or Olympian and victorious, must eternally be subject. It is the utility of Yoga that it opens to us a gate of escape out of the vicious circle of our ordinary human existence.

The idea of works, in the thought of the Gita, is the widest possible. All action of Nature in man is included, whether it be internal or external, operate in the mind or use the body, seem great or seem little. From the toil of the hero to the toil of the cobbler, from the labour of the sage to the simple physical act of eating, all is included. The seeking of the Self by thought, the adoration of the Highest by the emotions of the heart, the gathering of means and material and capacity and the use

of them for the service of God and man stand here on an equal footing. Buddha sitting under the Bo-tree and conquering the illumination, the ascetic silent and motionless in his cave, Shankara storming through India, debating with all men and preaching most actively the gospel of inaction are all from this point of view doing great and forceful work. But while the outward action may be the same, there is a great internal difference between the working of the ordinary man and the working of the Yogin, — a difference in the state of the being, a difference in the power and the faculty, a difference in the will and temperament.

What we do, arises out of what we are. The existent is conscious of what he is; that consciousness formulates itself as knowledge and power; works are the result of this twofold force of being in action. Mind, life and body can only operate out of that which is contained in the being of which they are forces. This is what we mean when we say that all things act according to their nature. The divine Existence is pure and unlimited being in possession of all itself, it is *sat*; whatever it puts forth in its limitless purity of self-awareness is truth of itself, *satya*; the divine knowledge is knowledge of the Truth, the divine Will is power of the Truth, the divine workings are words and ideas of the Truth realising themselves in manifold forms and through many stages and in infinite relations. But God is not limited or bound by any particular working or any moment of time or any field of space or any law of relation, because He is universal and infinite. Nor is He limited by the universe; for His infinity is not cosmic, but supracosmic.

But the individualised being is or acts as if he were so bound and limited, because he treats the particular working of existence that he is and the particular moment of time and field of space in which it is actually operating and the particular conditions which reign in the working and in the moment and in the field as if they were self-existent realities and the binding truth of things. Himself, his knowledge, his force and will, his relations with the world and his fellows, his need in it and his desire from them he treats as the sufficient truth and reality, the point of departure of all his works, the central fact and law of his universe. And from this egoistic error arises an all-vitiating falsehood. For the particular, the individual can have no self-existence, no truth, no valid force except in so far as it reflects rightly and relates and conforms itself justly to the universal, to the all-being, the all-knowledge, the all-will and follows its true drift towards self-realisation and vast delight in itself. Therefore the salvation of the individual lies in his universalising himself; and this is the lesson which life tries always to teach him but the obstinate ego is always unwilling to learn; for the universal is not any group or extended ego, not the family, community, nation or even all mankind, but an infinite far surpassing all these littlenesses.

Nor is the universalising of himself sufficient for liberation, although certainly it will make him practically more free and in his being nearer to the true freedom. To put himself in tune with the universal is a step, but beyond the universal and

directing and determining it is the supracosmic Infinity; for the universe also has no self-existence, truth or validity except as it expresses the divine Being, Knowledge, Will, Power, Delight of Him who surpasses all universe, so much that it can be said figuratively that with a petty fragment of His being and a single ray of His consciousness He has created all these worlds. Therefore the universalised mind must look up from its cosmic consciousness to the Supernal and derive from that all its sense of being and movement of works. This is the fundamental truth from which the Yogic consciousness starts; it helps the individual to universalise himself and then to transcend the cosmic formula. And this transformation acts not only on his status of being but on his active consciousness in works.

The Gita tells us that equality of soul and mind is Yoga and that this equality is the foundation of the Brahman-state, that high infinite consciousness to which the Yogin aspires. Now equality of mind means universality; for without universality of soul there may be a state of indifference or an impartial self-control or a well-governed equality of temperament, but these are not the thing that is meant. The equality spoken of is not indifference or impartiality or equability, but a fundamental oneness of attitude to all persons and all things and happenings because of the perception of all as the One. Such equality, it is erroneously thought, is incompatible with action. By no means; this is the error of the animal and the intellectual man who thinks that action is solely possible when dictated by his hopes, fears and passions or by the self-willed preferences of the emotion and the intellect justifying themselves by the illusions of the reason. That might be the fact if the individual were the real actor and not merely an instrument or secondary agent; but we know well enough, for Science and Philosophy assure us of the same truth, that the universal is the Force which acts through the simulacrum of our individuality. The individual mind, pretending to choose for itself with a sublime ignorance and disregard of the universal, is obviously working on the basis of a falsehood and by means of an error and not in the knowledge and the will of the Truth. It cannot have any real skill in works; for to start from a falsehood or half-truth and work by means of blunders and arrive at another falsehood or half-truth which we have immediately to change, and all the while to weep and struggle and suffer and have no sure resting-place, cannot surely be called skill in works. But the universal is equal in all and therefore its determinations are not self-willed preferences but are guided by the truth of the divine will and knowledge which is unlimited and not subject to incapacity or error.

Therefore that state of the being by which the Yogin differs from the ordinary man, is that by which he rises from the foundation of a perfect equality to the consciousness of the one existence in all and embracing all and lives in that existence and not in the walls of his body or personal temperament or limited mind. Mind and life and body he sees as small enough things which happen and change and develop in his being. Nay, the whole universe is seen by him as happening within himself, not in his small ego or mind, but within this vast and infinite self with which he is

now constantly identified. All action in the universe he sees as arising in this being, out of the divine Existence and under the stress of the divine Truth, Knowledge, Will and Power. He begins to participate consciously in its working and to see all things in the light of that divine truth and governance; and even when his own actions move on certain lines rather than others, he is not bound by them or shut to the truth of all the rest by his own passions and preferences, gropings and seekings and revolts. It is evident that such an increasing wideness of vision must mean an increasing knowledge. And if it be true that knowledge is power, it must mean also an increasing force for works. Certainly, it would not be so, if the Yogin continued to act by the light of his individual reason and imagination and will; for the intellect and all that depends on it can only work by virtue of rigid limitations and exclusive determinations. Accordingly, the continued activity of the unillumined intellect and its servants conflicts with the new state of consciousness and knowledge which arises out of this larger existence, and so long as they remain active, it cannot be perfect or assured; for the consciousness is being continually pulled down to the lower field of ego-habit by the claim of their narrow workings. But the Yogin ceases, progressively, to act by the choice of his intellectual or emotional nature. Another light dawns, another power and presence intervenes, other faculties awake in the place of the old human-animal combination.

As the state of being changes, the will and temperament must necessarily be modified. Even from an early stage the Yogin begins to subordinate his personal will or it becomes naturally subordinate to the sense of the supreme Will which is attracting him upward. Ignorantly, imperfectly, blunderingly it moves at first, with many recoils and relapses into personal living and personal action, but in time it becomes more in tune with its Source and eventually the personal will merges upward and all ways into the universal and infinite and obeys implicitly the transcendent. Nor does this change and ascension and expanding mean any annihilation of the will-power working in the individual, as the intellectual man might imagine; but rather it increases it to an immense forcefulness while giving it an infinite calm and an eternal patience. The temperament also is delivered from all leash of straining and desire, from all urge of passion and pain of wilful self-delusion. Desire, even the best, turns always to limitation and obscurity, to some eager exclusive choice and pressure, to some insistent exclusion of what should not be excluded and impatient revolt against the divine denials and withholdings. It generates anger and grief and passion and obstinacy, and these bring about the soul's loss of its divine memory or steadfast consciousness of itself and its self-knowledge and its equal vision of the truth of things. Therefore desire and its brood are incompatible with skill in works and their persistence is the sign of an imperfect Yoga.

Not only must the will and fundamental knowledge-view of things change, but a new combination of faculties take the place of the old. For if the intellect is not to do all our mental work for us or to work at all in its unillumined state and if the

will in the form of desires, wishes, intellectual preferences is not to determine and enforce our action, then it is clear that other powers of knowledge and will must awaken and either replace the intellect and the mental preference or illumine and guide the one and transform and dominate the other. Otherwise either the action may be nil or else its impulses mechanical and chaotic, even if the static being is blissfully enlarged; for they will well up indeed out of the universal and not the personal, but out of the universal in its lower formula which permits the erratic action of the heart and mind, while the old personal will and reason will not be there to impose some light and order on their ill-connected impulsions. Such faculties and new combination of faculties can and do emerge and they are illuminations and powers that are in direct touch and harmony with the light and power of the Truth; therefore in proportion as they manifest and take hold of their functions, they must increase the force, subtlety and perfection of the Yogin's skill in works.

But the greatest skill in works of Yoga is that which to the animal man seems its greatest ineptitude. For all this difficult attainment, the latter will say, may lead to anything you please, but we have to lose our personal life, abandon our personal objects, annul our personal will and pleasure and without these life cannot be worth living. Now the object of all skill in works must be evidently to secure the best welfare either of ourselves or of others or of all. The ordinary man calls it welfare to secure momentarily some transient object, to wade for it through a sea of grief and suffering and painful labour and to fall from it again still deeper into the same distressful element in search of a new transient object. The greatest cunning of Yoga is to have detected this cheat of the mind and its desires and dualities and to have found the way to an abiding peace, a universal delight and an all-embracing satisfaction, which can not only be enjoyed for oneself but communicated to others. That too arises out of the change of our being; for the pure truth of existence carries also in it the unalloyed delight of existence, they are inseparable in the status of the infinite. To use the figures of the Vedic seers, by Yoga Varuna is born in us, a vast sky of spiritual living, the divine in his wide existence and infinite truth; into that wideness Mitra rises up, Lord of Light and Love who takes all our activities of thought and feeling and will, links them into a divine harmony, charioteers our movement and dictates our works; called by this wideness and this harmony Aryaman appears in us, the Divine in its illumined power, uplifted force of being and all-judging effective will; and by the three comes the indwelling Bhaga, the Divine in its pure bliss and all-seizing joy who dispels the evil dream of our jarring and divided existence and possesses all things in the light and glory of Aryaman's power, Mitra's love and light, Varuna's unity. This divine Birth shall be the son of our works; and than creating this what greater skill can there be or what more practical and sovereign cunning?

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 119-26)*

## THE DOCTRINE OF SACRIFICE

The genius of self-sacrifice is not common to all nations and to all individuals; it is rare and precious, it is the flowering of mankind's ethical growth, the evidence of our gradual rise from the self-regarding animal to the selfless divinity. A man capable of self-sacrifice, whatever his other sins, has left the animal behind him; he has the stuff in him of a future and higher humanity. A nation capable of a national act of self-sacrifice ensures its future.

Self-sacrifice involuntary or veiled by forms of selfishness is, however, the condition of our existence. It has been a gradual growth in humanity. The first sacrifices are always selfish — they involve the sacrifice of others for one's own advancement. The first step forward is taken by the instinct of animal love in the mother who is ready to sacrifice her life for the young, by the instinct of protection in the male who is ready to sacrifice his life for his mate. The growth of this instinct is the sign of an enlargement in the conception of the self. So long as there is identification of self only with one's own body and its desires, the state of the *jiva* is unprogressive and animal. It is only when the self enlarges to include the mate and the children that advancement becomes possible. This is the first human state, but the animal lingers in it in the view of the wife and children as chattels and possessions meant for one's own pleasure, strength, dignity, comfort. The family even so viewed becomes the basis of civilisation, because it makes social life possible. But the real development of the god in man does not begin until the family becomes so much dearer than the life of the body that a man is ready to sacrifice himself for it and give up his ease or even his life for its welfare or its protection. To give up one's ease for the family, that is a state which most men have attained; to give up one's life for the honour of the wife or the safety of the home is an act of a higher nature of which man is capable in individuals, in classes, but not in the mass. Beyond the family comes the community and the next step in the enlargement of the self is when the identification with the self in the body and the self in the family gives way to the identification with the self in the community. To recognise that the community has a larger claim on a man than his family is the first condition of the advance to the social condition. It corresponds to the growth of the tribe out of the patriarchal family and to the perfection of those communal institutions of which our village community was a type. Here again, to be always prepared to sacrifice the family interest to the larger interest of the community must be the first condition of communal life and to give one's life for the safety of the community, the act of divinity which marks the consummation of the enlarging self in the communal idea. The next enlargement is to the self in the nation. The evolution of the nation is the growth which is most important now to humanity, because human selfishness, family

selfishness, class selfishness having still deep roots in the past must learn to efface themselves in the larger national self in order that the God in humanity may grow. Therefore it is that Nationalism is the *dharma* of the age, and God reveals himself to us in our common Mother. The first attempts to form a nationality were the Greek city, the Semitic or Mongolian monarchy, the Celtic clan, the Aryan *kula* or *jati*. It was the mixture of all these ideas which went to the formation of the mediaeval nation and evolved the modern peoples. Here again, it is the readiness to sacrifice self-interest, family interest, class interest to the larger national interest which is the condition of humanity's fulfilment in the nation and to die for its welfare or safety is the supreme act of self-consummation in the larger national ego. There is a yet higher fulfilment for which only a few individuals have shown themselves ready, the enlargement of the self to include all humanity. A step forward has been taken in this direction by the self-immolation of a few to humanitarian ideals, but to sacrifice the interests of the nation to the larger interest of humanity is an act of which humanity in the mass is not yet capable. God prepares, but He does not hasten the ripening of the fruit before its season. A time will come when this also will be possible, but the time is not yet. Nor would it be well for humanity if it came before the other and lesser identification were complete; for that would necessitate retrogression in order to secure the step which has been omitted. The advance of humanity is a steady progress and there is no great gain in rushing positions far ahead, while important points in the rear are uncaptured.

The national ego may easily mean nothing more than collective selfishness. I may be ready to sacrifice money and ease for the country in order to secure my wealth, fame or position and property which depend upon her security and greatness. I may be ready to sacrifice these and more for her because of the safety of the home and the hearth which her safety ensures. I may be ready to sacrifice much for her because her greatness, wealth, ease mean the greatness, wealth, ease of my community or my class. Or I may be ready to sacrifice everything to secure her greatness because of my pride in her and my desire to see my nation dominant and imperial. All these are forms of selfishness pursuing man into the wider life which is meant to assist in liberating him from selfishness. The curse of capitalism, the curse of Imperialism which afflict modern nations are due to this insistence. It is the source of that pride, insolence and injustice which affect a nation in its prosperity and by that fatal progression which the Greeks with their acute sense for these things so clearly demarcated, it leads from prosperity to insolence and outrage and from insolence and outrage to that *ate*, that blind infatuation, which is God's instrument for the destruction of men and nations. There is only one remedy for this pursuing evil and it is to regard the nation as a necessary unit but no more in a common humanity.

There are two stages in the life of a nation, first, when it is forming itself or new-forming itself, secondly, when it is formed, organised and powerful. The first is the stage when Nationalism makes rightly its greatest demands on the individual, in the second it should abate its demands and, having satisfied, should preserve

itself in Cosmopolitanism somewhat as the individual preserves itself in the family, the family in the class, the class in the nation, not destroying itself needlessly but recognising a larger interest. In the struggles of a subject nation to realise its separate existence, the larger interest can only be viewed in prospect and as a higher inspiration to a broadminded and generous patriotism. No sacrifice of the nation to the larger interest is possible, for the nation must exist before it can sacrifice its interests for a higher good.

We are at present in the first or formative stage, and in this stage the demand of Nationalism is imperative. It is only by the sacrifices of the individual, the family and the class to the supreme object of building up the nation that under such adverse circumstances Nationalism can secure the first conditions for its existence. Every act of the new Nationalism has been a call for suffering and self-sacrifice. Swadeshi was such a call, arbitration was such a call, national education was such a call, above all, passive resistance was such a call. None of these things can be secured except by a general readiness to sacrifice the individual and the family to the interests of the nation. Nowadays a new call is visibly forming, the call on the higher classes to sacrifice their privileges and prejudices, as the Japanese Samurai did, for the raising up of the lower. The spread of a general spirit of ungrudging self-sacrifice is the indispensable prelude to the creation of the Indian nation. This truth is not only evident from the very nature of the movement we have initiated, but it is borne out by the tests of history and experience to which we have been recently asked to refer in each individual case before the act of sacrifice is decided. It is by the appeal to history and experience that the Nationalist party has convinced the intellect, just as by its inspiring ideals and readiness to suffer, it has carried with it the heart of the nation. The demand that we should in every individual case go into a review of the whole question is excessive and impossible. It is enough if we are generally convinced of the utility and necessity of sacrifice and feel the individual call. It must be remembered that we cannot argue from the condition of a people formed, free and prospering to that of a people subject, struggling and miserable. In the first case the individual is not called to frequent acts of self-sacrifice, but only to those regularly demanded by the nation and to a general readiness for especial sacrifice in case of necessity, but in the second the necessity is a constant quantity. Nor is it a sound principle to demand in such circumstances an adequate value for every individual act of courage and self-denial. It would indeed be singular for the individuals of a subject nation asked for the price of their liberty to say to the Dispenser of Karma, "You shall give me so much in return for every individual sacrifice and we must know your terms beforehand. We will not trust you to the extent of a single pice worth of result for our sufferings." Not by such men or such a spirit have subject nations been delivered.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 137-41)

# ON THE INTEGRATION OF THE FRENCH SETTLEMENTS IN INDIA, 1947–1950

## 1. THE FUTURE UNION

### (A Programme)

In this period of epoch-making changes when India is achieving at this very moment a first form of freedom and the power to determine her own destiny, it behoves us in French India to consider our situation and make decisions for our own future which will enable us to live in harmony with the new India and the new world around us. At this juncture, we of the Socialist Party wish to define our own policy and the future prospects of the French Settlements as we envisage them.<sup>1</sup>

For a long time past we in these Settlements have watched with an eager sympathy the struggle that has been going on in British India for self-government and independence and, though we could not take part, have felt it as if it were part of our own destiny since the achievement of these things could not but herald or accompany our own passage from the state of dependence as a colony to the freedom and autonomy which all peoples must desire. India has achieved her freedom but as yet with limitations and under circumstances which it did not desire and which do not admit of a complete rejoicing at the victory; for it is not the united India for which we had hoped that has emerged, but an India parcelled out and divided and threatened with perils and difficulties and disadvantages which would not have been there but for the disunion and the internal quarrels which brought about this unhappy result. Among the leaders of the country who have reluctantly consented to the settlement made there is no enthusiasm over it but only a regretful acceptance and a firm determination to make the most of what has been won, overcome the difficulties and dangers and achieve for the country as great a position in the world and as much power and prosperity as is possible for a divided India. For our part we have received a promise of an autonomy which will make us a free people within the French Union, but this is as yet only a promise, or a declared policy and the steps have not yet been taken which would make it a practical reality. We have been demanding a fulfilment of this policy as rapid as possible and there is no real reason why it should not be carried out with something of the same speed that is marking developments in British India. There

1. Sri Aurobindo wrote (rather, dictated) this “programme” for the use of the French India Socialist Party, whose position on the issue of the integration of the French Settlements in India corresponded with his in some respects. It should not be taken as a definitive statement of his own opinion on the matter. The text was published in a manifesto issued by the party in June 1947. — Ed.

there have been complexities and differences which stood in the way of an easy and early solution, but there are none such here; we have been and are united in our demand and the change already decided can be and ought to be carried out at once.

But one complexity has begun to arise and threatens to increase if there is further delay in satisfying the aspirations of our people. The life of French India has had, since its inception, a dual character which points to two different possibilities for its future destiny if a third solution does not intervene which reconciles the two possibilities. On one side, we in French India are not in the essentials of our existence a separate people: we and those on the other side of the borders of the five Settlements are brothers, we are kith and kin, we have the same nationality, the same way and habits of life, the same religions, the same general culture and outlook, the same languages and literatures, the same traditions; we are Indians, belong to the same society, we do not feel separate, we have the same feeling of patriotism for our common country; our land is an intimate part of India. All this would push us naturally to desire to unite together and become parts of a single India. That feeling has not been absent in the past, but now it is becoming vocal and is the declared policy and demand of a number among us while others stand on the line between the two possibilities before us and have a natural inclination to prefer this solution; for it is difficult for any Indian not to look forward towards such a unification in the future. On the other hand, the history of the past two centuries has developed a certain individuality of the people of French India and made them a common entity amid the rest. French India has developed different institutions of its own, political, administrative, judicial, educational, it has its own industries, its own labour legislation and other differentiating characteristics. There is also the impress of the French language and French culture. All Asiatic countries have been developing a mixed intellectuality, public life and social ideas; our life is Asiatic in its basis with a structure at the top adopted from Europe. In British India this superstructure has been formed by the use of English as a common language of the educated classes and by the study of English political ideas and institutions and English literature: in French India the superstructure is French, it is the French language through which there has been communication and a common public life between the Bengalees, Tamils, Andhras and Malayalees who constitute the people of French India; we have been looking at the world outside through a study of the French language and French institutions and French literature. All this has made a difference; it has made it possible and natural for us to accept the offer made that we should become a free people within the French Union. But this solution can be durable only if there is some kind of close connection and even union with the rest of India industrial, economic and other, for we depend on the rest of India for our very food and the necessities of our life and our general prosperity and, if cut off from it, we could not even live. Apart from all feelings and sentiments this stark necessity demands an intimate co-operation between the new India and French India.

Under the push of a common Indian patriotism and the feeling of oneness with the rest of India some are putting forward the claim that we should join immediately whatever Indian Union emerges from the present embroilments without any other consideration of any kind. This is a rash and one-sided view of things which we cannot accept. In our political decisions we must take into account the developments in British India, but it would be erroneous to hold that in all political affairs we should imitate her. This would show on our part a lack of understanding of local conditions as well as an utter failure of creative thought so needed at a most critical and constructive period of the history of India. Some go so far as to propose a kind of self-extinction of each French territory by their merging in a suicidal way into the Indian Union. This would mean that our towns would become mostly small and unimportant mofussil towns in the mass of what has been British India and would lose their present status and dignity and vigour of their life and distinctive institutions and much loss and damage to existing popular interests might ensue. A drastic change and obliteration of this kind seems to us most undesirable; it would bring no enrichment of life or advantage to the rest of India and no advantage but rather impoverishment of life to French India. If French India is to enter the Indian Union, it should not be in this way but as an autonomous unit preserving its individual body and character. All should be done with due regard to its particular position and all decisions should be made according to the will of her elected representatives: we should also ascertain exactly our economic, social and administrative position so that any change should not affect adversely any section of the people. Moreover without having any precision about the future States of India and our place among them it would be utter folly to break our social, cultural, administrative and judicial structure without any concrete scheme to replace it. The existence of autonomous units with a vivid life and individuality of their own has always been a characteristic of our country, part of its polity and civilisation and one of the causes of its greatness and the variety and opulence of Indian culture. The unity of India is desirable but not a mechanical unification and that is indeed no part of the scheme envisaged by the leaders of India; they envisage a union of autonomous units with a strong centre. In seeking political unity and independence we must not go on thinking and working under subjection to imported Western and British notions of political and economic structure. It is patent through recent developments that a political and purely outward unity with a mechanical uniformity and centralisation would prove a failure. Whatever we decide let us preserve the principle peculiarly suited to the unique psychological and physical conditions of this great land and the life of its people which was to develop through numerous autonomous centres of culture and power.

But there are also other considerations which militate against any such hasty action as has been proposed; we must consider carefully the actual position and possibilities in India under the peculiar and very unsatisfactory arrangement that has been made. This arrangement has not been freely chosen by the people and their

leaders and does not create a free and united nation; it is a British plan accepted under the duress of circumstances as unavoidable in order to find a way out of the present state of indecision and drift and put an end to internal disorder and strife. It is not a definite solution; it seems rather like an opening of a new stage, a further period of trial and effort towards the true goal. What immediately emerges is not independence but the establishment of two British Dominions independent of each other and without any arrangement for harmonisation or common action; it is expected that within a year or so two independent Indias will be the result with different constitutions of their own animated by different and, it may well be, opposing principles and motives. It is hoped also that this division will be accepted by all as a final solution, both Indias settling down separately into a peaceful internal development, and that the fierce dissensions, violent and ruinous disturbances and sanguinary conflicts of recent times will finally disappear. But this is not certain; the solution has not been satisfactory to any party to the internal struggle and if the new States continue to be divided within themselves into communal camps led by communal bodies one of which will look outside the State to the other for inspiration and guidance and for the protection of the community, then tension will continue and the latent struggle may break out in disturbances, bloodshed and perhaps finally in open war. Into such a condition of things French India would not care to enter; among us communal dissensions have not been rife, all communities have lived amicably together and participated peacefully in a common public life; but if we entered into such a state of tension and continued conflict, the infection would inevitably seize us and there would be the same communal formations and the same undesirable features. We should be careful therefore not to make any such rash and hasty decisions as some propose but stand apart in our own separate status and wait for more certain developments. A closer relation with the new India is desirable and necessary, since we are Indians and French India a part of India intimately connected and dependent on the rest for her prosperity and for her very existence. But this need not take the form suggested or involve the obliteration of our separate status, a destruction of our past and its results and the loss of our individual existence. A reconciliation between the two elements of our existence and its historical development is desirable and possible.

It seems to be supposed by some that we have only to ask the new Indian Union for inclusion within it and this would automatically accomplish itself without any further difficulty; but things are not so simple as that. Undoubtedly the sentiment of the Indian people had in the past envisaged an India one and indivisible and the abolition of the small enclaves of foreign rule such as Portuguese and French India as imperative and inevitable. But circumstances have shaped differently; India one and indivisible has not emerged and the Indian Union which is nearest to it and with which alone a fusion would be possible, is not yet established, has still to affirm itself and find and confirm its strength in very difficult circumstances. In that process it is seeking to establish amicable relations with all foreign powers and is already in

such relations with France. It will desire no doubt either union or a closer relation with French India but it is not likely to be in a hurry to achieve it through a dispute or conflict with France. It could indeed use means of pressure without the use of military force which would make the existence of a separate French India not only difficult and painful but impossible, but it would be likely to prefer a settlement and a *modus vivendi* which would respect the wishes of the people of French India, create the necessary co-ordination of economic and other interests and would be consistent with agreement and friendly relations with the Government and people of France. If, using the right of self-determination, we in French India freely decided to remain as an autonomous people within the French Union, the Government of the Indian Union would certainly respect such a choice and might welcome an arrangement which would make French India not a thorn of irritation but a cultural link and a field of union and co-operation, and perhaps even a base for a standing friendship and alliance between France and India. In consideration of all these circumstances we are led to conclude that our best immediate course is to keep our individuality and concentrate on the development of our freedom as an autonomous people accepting the offer of France to concede to us that status within the French Union and on the basis of that formula to establish that closer relation and co-operation with the new India which would satisfy our sentiments and is imperative for our prosperity and even for our existence.

After due examination of all these considerations the Socialist Party puts forward the following programme and asks for the adhesion of all citizens of French India to implement it.

(1) French India to form an autonomous territory within the French Union.

(2) For this the present colonial system and its bureaucratic government must cease to exist, and this should be done as soon as possible. Neither the people nor any party are willing to remain subjected to the old system, only a few whose professional interests are bound up with the old state of things are in its favour, and any long continuance of it would be a severe strain on the feelings of the population and would encourage increasing adhesion to the party that favours immediate and complete severance of all ties with France and the precipitate merging of French India without any further consideration into whatever new India may emerge from the present situation.

(3) There should be an immediate transfer of powers to the French India Representative Assembly which should have the general direction of the country's affairs and the sole power of local legislation. The power of the Governor to govern by decrees should disappear.

(4) The administration to be responsible to the Assembly. A Governor should be appointed by the French Government in consultation with the Assembly who will be the link between France and French India and who will preside over the administration with the assistance of an executive council of ministers.

(5) The status of the population of French India should be that of a free self-governing people freely consenting to remain in the French Union and freely accepting such relations as are necessary for that Union.

In this free French India the present recognised institutions commercial, industrial and others will remain in vigour except in so far as they are legally modified by the Representative Assembly. The French language will continue as a means of communication between the different parts of French India and of discussion in the Assembly and of general administration. The educational system, the new University and the Colleges will be linked with the University and educational system in France. The links with French culture will be retained and enlarged but also, inevitably a much larger place will be given to our own Indian culture. It is to be hoped this autonomous French India will become a powerful centre of intellectual development and interchange and meeting place of European and Asiatic culture and [a] spiritual factor of the world unification which is making its tentative beginning as the most important tendency of the present day. Thus French India will retain its individuality and historical development but will at the same time proceed towards a larger future.

On the other side we propose as an important part of our programme the development of a closer unity with the rest of India. Already we have the standing arrangements by which the Indian Government has the control and bears the burden of Posts and Railways and we have also the Customs Union by which Customs barriers between British and French India were removed; the advantages and even the necessity of such a unification of the system of communications in view of the small size and geographical separation of the French Settlements are obvious. In the Customs Union some modifications might be desirable from our point of view, but the principle of it removing the handicap and the previous irritation and conflict caused by the existence of the Customs barriers must remain acceptable. But there is also needed for our economic future a co-ordination of the industry and commerce of the country and for that purpose an agreement and a machinery for consultation and co-ordination should be created.

We further propose that the artificial barriers separating us into two mutually exclusive nationalities should be laid open and an understanding arrived at by which the nationals of free India resident in French India should automatically have civic rights and the same should obtain for nationals of French India resident in the new free India. There should be facilities for any French Indian to occupy Government posts and join Indian armed forces and to get admission to educational institutions and have access to the opportunities for research and scientific training and knowledge available in India, while these things should be also available to all Indian nationals in French India. Thus the advantages of the University which it is proposed to establish in French India should be available to students belonging to the other parts of the country. Possibly even other arrangements might be made by which there should be closer participation in the political life of the country as a whole.

The final logical outcome of the dual situation of the French Indian people would be a dual citizenship under certain conditions through which French India could be in the French Union and participate without artificial barriers in the life of India as a whole. The present state of International Law is opposed to such a dual citizenship but it would be the natural expression of the two sides of our life situated as we are in India and having the same fundamental nationality, culture and religion and social and economic life but also united for a long time by cultural influences and a historical connection with France. It may well be that such arrangements might become a natural part of the development and turn towards greater unity between peoples and the breaking down of old barriers which began at San Francisco and a not unimportant step in the movement towards the removal of the old separatism, oppositions and incompatibilities which are the undesirable side of nationalism and towards international unity and the growth of a new world and one world which is the future of humanity.

We are of the opinion that if this programme is properly carried out with the approval of public opinion, it will assure our future evolution and progress without violence or strife. We would be able to take a fuller part in the total life of the Indian nation and be at the same time an instrument for the closer drawing together of nations and play a part in the international life of mankind.

We appeal to all progressive forces in France to favour this line of development so that the actual relation between ourselves which is now that of suzerainty and vassalage should be transformed into one of brotherhood and mutual understanding so that France and India should stand before the world as closely united.

We fervently appeal to all our brothers and sisters of Chandernagore, Yanon, Mahe, Karikal and Pondicherry, to the Tamilians, Malayalees, Andhras and Bengalees who for centuries past have lived together irrespective of caste and creed without any internal strife — which is our greatest achievement — not to sever our mutual connection but to show an example of unity transcending all compartmentalism or provincialism. Let us be united as before. When decisive steps have to be taken for the welfare of the country it is of no avail to be led by hasty moves and to propose rapid solutions from purely egoistic motives or idleness of thought.

We pray our brothers and sisters not to be led by the fallacies of those who want the continuance of French imperialistic administration or of those who under whatever specious pretences look forward to the prevalence of chaos and disorder.

Let us rise to the task that awaits us and build a strong front of the people to implement our scheme and with an upsurge transgressing all petty differences let us play our part and create a free and united people in a free India and help at the same time towards the creation of a united human world.

*Published June 1947*

\*

## 2. ON THE DISTURBANCES OF 15 AUGUST 1947 IN PONDICHERRY

To

The Editor

The Statesman, Calcutta

Dated, Pondicherry, the 20th August 1947.

Dear Sir,

There is no foundation [in]<sup>2</sup> fact for the rumour which we understand has been published in your columns that Satyagraha has been offered before Sri Aurobindo Ashram.<sup>3</sup> There was no Satyagraha of any kind. There was an attack on the Ashram in which one member was stabbed to death and others injured and Ashram buildings stoned. This would surely be a curious and unprecedented form of Satyagraha. The attack took place on August the 15th some hours after the Darshan, which was very successful and attended by thousands of people, was over. The attackers were mostly professional goondas of the town hired and organised for the purpose. We consider it as the result or culmination of a long campaign by a political party which has been making speeches and publishing articles and pamphlets against the Ashram and trying in all ways to damage it in the eyes of the public for the last two years. This was not on political grounds and the attack had nothing to do with the political question. The Ashram is a non-political body. But there are three sections of the people here who are violently opposed to the existence of the Ashram, the advocates of Dravidisthan, extreme Indian Catholics and the Communists. Everybody in Pondicherry without exception supports the right of self-determination for the people of French India and Sri Aurobindo has always been a firm supporter of that right for all peoples everywhere. Nobody here is for the “continuation of French rule”, but the people were prepared to accept the French proposal of a free and completely autonomous French India within the French Union. It was only when it appeared that the reforms offered by the French Government would fall short of what was promised that the cry arose for the immediate transfer of power and the merging of French India in the Indian Union. Sri Aurobindo, not being a citizen of French India, made no public declaration of his views, but privately supported the views set forth in a manifesto of the French India Socialist party demanding the end of colonial rule and a complete autonomy within the French Union accompanied by a dual citizenship and a close association with the Indian Union which should control Customs, Communications and a common system of Industry and Commerce.<sup>4</sup> There

2. MS or

3. This letter was dictated by Sri Aurobindo to his amanuensis, Nirodbaran, and sent over the signature of his secretary. — Ed.

4. The reference is to “The Future Union” [pp. 18-24 of this issue of Mother India], which was written by Sri Aurobindo. — Ed.

was therefore no ground or cause for any Satyagraha. I am writing this as an official contradiction on behalf of the Ashram under the instructions and with the full authority of Sri Aurobindo.

Your most sincerely  
The Secretary

Sri Aurobindo Ashram  
Pondicherry

\*

### 3. A LETTER TO SURENDRA MOHAN GHOSH

I had wired that I would write a letter of explanation, but I have been unable to do so because we could get no definite information on the points I have mentioned, not even the question of the alleged refusal to send the money order. It is now suggested that it may have been only a doubt due possibly to a mistaken impression that French territory in India was like France and other French territories a hard currency area subject to restrictions in this matter because of the difficulties created by the dollar exchange. But French India has been declared a soft currency area where the exchange is in rupees and in pounds; so this difficulty cannot arise. Up to now money orders are still coming in.

As to the food question, it is now stated that vegetables and fruit from Bangalore will be allowed to come in without hindrance and other food commodities which come under the mischief of the Customs will also be allowed subject to the taking out of a permit by the merchants. The rumour of prohibition was due to a panic among the merchants both of the Union and Pondicherry caused by the creation of the Customs line which comes into operation from today and the additional rumour of drastic measures to be taken to bring pressure on French India to join the Union. If things go well, there may be a difficulty of high prices but nothing worse.

At the same time there are signs of tension and we do not know what may develop from these. For instance, it is said that booking of goods of Pondicherry has been stopped on the Railway except for newspaper packages and perishable goods; equally it has been stated that the French authorities are forbidden a transit of local goods out of French India into the Union and have created a post to prevent their passage. That is all for the present. I suppose we shall get some clearer indications once the Customs are in vigour.

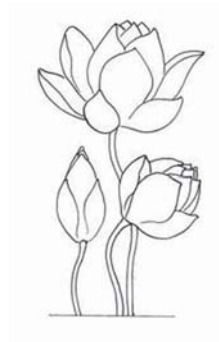
I shall write afterwards about our own threatened difficulties in French India itself, if they develop. But we badly need some reliable information as to what is likely to be the fate of French India. On the one side the French India municipalities

have fixed December for the proposed referendum. If there is a referendum, the voting will go by the usual methods and the result will be whatever the local Government here dictates and not a genuine plebiscite; there would be no chance of an accession to the Indian Union or a merger unless Goubert and Co would make, as they once tried, a bargain with the Government in Madras or in Delhi. On the other hand, it has been broadly hinted that there will be no plebiscite and the fate of French India will be determined by direct negotiations between the Governments in Paris and in Delhi. But when? We were once informed that it would be in April or June after the return of Baron as High Commissioner but the politicians here are resolute not to allow the return of Baron because he will [be] under the influence of the Ashram — just as Saravane, Counouma, André etc. are to be kept out of all positions of authority for the same reason and because they are supposed to be in favour of accession to the Indian Union.

1 April 1949

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Autobiographical Notes*, CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 481-94)



## ‘THOU SHINEST RESPLENDENT IN ALL THINGS’

**July 1, 1914**

We hail Thee, O Lord, with adoration and with joy, and give ourselves to Thee in a gift constantly renewed, so that Thy will may be accomplished upon earth and in all the places of this universe.

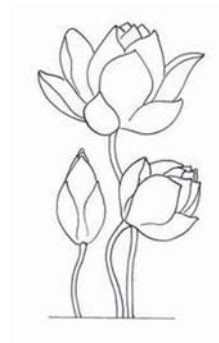
When we turn towards Thee the thought is mute but the heart exults; for Thou shinest resplendent in all things, and the least grain of sand may be an occasion for worship.

We bow down before Thee, we unite with Thee, O Lord, in a love that is limitless and full of an inexpressible beatitude.

Oh, grant this sovereign joy to all.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 191)*



## A CONVERSATION OF 14 APRIL 1951

Mother reads a question asked during her talk in 1929:

*“Is not surrender the same as sacrifice?”*

*Questions and Answers 1929 (4 August)*

Who is going to answer? What is the difference?

*Surrender comes spontaneously.*

I congratulate those whose surrender is spontaneous! It is not so easy. No, that is not the difference.

*Sacrifice diminishes the being.*

That is true, but why? One thing is so, so simple — it is the very meaning of the word. To sacrifice means to give up something to which one clings. To sacrifice one's life is to give up one's life to which one clings; otherwise it would not be a sacrifice, it would be a gift. If you use the word “sacrifice”, it means it is something which makes you suffer when you give it up. The word “sacrifice” is used at random, that is understood, but I am speaking of the true sense. One can sacrifice only what one holds dear. If one does not cling to it, it is not a sacrifice, it is a gift with all the joy of the giving. Surrender has no value if it is painful, if it is a sacrifice. Surrender must be truly a joyous offering (I am using the word *soumission* in the sense of surrender, but it is not quite surrender — surrender is between *soumission* and *abandon*). One gives up something, surrenders oneself, but without sacrifice.

*“In our Yoga there is no room for sacrifice. But everything depends on the meaning you put in the word. In its pure sense it means a consecrated giving, made sacred by offering to the Divine. But in the significance that it now bears, sacrifice is something that works for destruction; it carries about it an atmosphere of negation. This kind of sacrifice is not fulfilment; it is a deprivation, a self-immolation. . . . When you do anything with the sense of a compression of your being, be sure that you are doing it in the wrong way.”*

*Ibid.*

*Why does sacrifice have such a great value in religion?*

Many religions are founded upon the idea of sacrifice; for instance, all the Chaldean religions. The reforms of the Muslim religion also had a very strong tendency towards sacrifice. All the first adepts, the first faithful, paid with their life for changing their religion. In Persia, they were persecuted beyond all telling. There are even many writings in which the joys of sacrifice are praised highly — that is a Chaldean idea. But you should be on your guard; all depends upon the meaning given to the word. It is obvious that for him who sacrifices himself willingly, that is, who gives up his life voluntarily and with joy, it is no longer a sacrifice, by the very definition we have given to the word.

We also speak of the “sacrifice” of the Divine. But I have noticed that one calls it “sacrifice” when one understands that if obliged to do it oneself it would be very difficult! It would give you much pain, it would be very hard (*laughing*) so one speaks of sacrifice, but it is probable that for the Divine it was not painful and he did it willingly, with all the joy of self-giving.

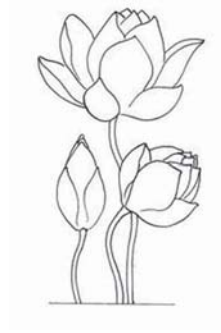
I knew Abdul Baha very well, the successor of Baha Ullah, founder of the Bahai religion; Abdul Baha was his son. He was born in prison and lived in prison till he was forty, I believe. When he came out of prison his father was dead and he began to preach his father’s religion. He told me his story and what had happened in Persia at the beginning of the religion. And I remember him telling me with what intense joy, what a sense of the divine Presence, of the divine Force, these people went to the sacrifice — it can’t be called “sacrifice”, it was a very joyful gift of their life. . . . He always spoke to me of someone who was, it appears, a very great poet and who had been arrested as a heretic because he followed the Bahai religion. They wanted to take him away to kill him — or burn him, hang him, crucify him, I don’t know what, the manner of death in vogue at the time — and, because he expressed his faith and said he would be happy to suffer anything for his faith and his God, people devised the plan of fixing small lighted candle-ends on his body, his arms, his shoulders. Naturally the candles melted with the hot wax all over, till the wick of the candle burnt the skin. It seems Abdul Baha was there when this man was tortured and as they came to the spot where he was to be killed, Abdul Baha went up to speak to him affectionately — and he was in an ecstasy of joy. Abdul Baha spoke to him of his sufferings; he replied, “Suffer! It is one of the most beautiful hours of my life . . .” This cannot be called a sacrifice, can it?

Generally, all those who have suffered tortures for their faith, that is, for their highest thought, their most sublime ideal, have always felt a kind of divine grace helping them and keeping them from suffering. Of course, outsiders call this a “sacrifice” (that is understandable, they have sacrificed their life), but one cannot use the word for what personally concerns them, because for them it was not a sacrifice, it was a joy. All depends on the inner attitude. Now, if for a single moment during the torture they had had the least idea, “Why am I being tortured?” they would have undergone unbearable suffering. A single passing thought suffices.

Almost all events — at least all the important circumstances of human life — may be looked at from two sides: from below or from above. If you see them from below, with the feelings of the ordinary man, you are terrified by the amount of suffering of all those who have preached a new religion or wished to set an example to humanity — they have all suffered, that is, they have all been persecuted by men. Generally speaking, with a very few exceptions, men do not like what is superior to them, and when they meet someone who is far above them (I am saying, apart from some exceptions), that makes them furious. They suffer an almost insurmountable annoyance in meeting something so infinitely higher than what they are. They have only one idea, to destroy it, and in fact that is what they have done. Throughout human history it has been thus. Those who have come with special abilities, a special grace, and have tried to make men come out of their ordinary rut, have been more or less persecuted, martyred, burnt alive, put on the cross. . . . The situation now is apparently a little better because now slightly more plausible reasons than those of old are needed to burn men — the habit of doing so is no longer there — but the feelings are not very different. The human race, generally, has a sort of rancour against what surpasses it; it feels humiliated, and men do not like to be humiliated.

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1950-1951*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 4, pp. 314-17)



## **“A FREUDIAN’S MIDNIGHT MEDITATION” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO**

Sri Aurobindo —

If you don’t mind, will you make a brief criticism of this, shall I say, “mystical phantasy”?

### **A FREUDIAN’S MIDNIGHT MEDITATION**

#### *First Phase*

Dumb echo of the Mother-Mystery  
Beyond the light of birth —  
Darkness divine, enveloping weary earth  
In vast felicity  
With thy impartial, sense-dissolving hue  
And slow, cool, sacred miracle of dew!  
Solemn perfection, stay  
Thy lofty season, lest the dawn disperse  
Too soon this indivisible universe  
Of calm and from thy star-impregnate womb  
Of paradisaal gloom  
I issue into the heart-searing day!

#### *Second Phase*

Foretaste of the death-sombre Destiny  
Whose far-eyed grace  
Haunts the child-dream of passionate pain  
Storming through time to fathom yet again  
The wondrous in-world whence life, wailing, strays!  
Ineffable power,  
Drunk with thy lonely, dim, prophetic mood  
My flesh wears like an aureole  
The beauty of the unborn hour  
When with immeasurable quietude  
Eternity  
Shall quench the futile wanderlust of my soul!

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

I have no criticism to offer, it is very well done.

I don’t know why it is called Freudian; it seems, so far as I can understand it, an agnosticisation of a semi-Christian-mystic materialised Buddhist-Adwaita Inconscience-subconscience-superconscience worship. Is that right? Probably not, — for as I am not in sympathy with the worship of Divine or Undivine Darkness, my penchant being for Light, I have probably not grasped the heart of this mystery.  
(undated)

---

(Version from *The Secret Splendour* —  
*Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna [Amal Kiran]*, 1993, p. 414)

## A FREUDIAN’S MIDNIGHT MEDITATION

### *First Phase*

Dumb echo of the Mother-mystery  
Beyond the light of birth —  
Darkness divine, enveloping weary earth  
In vast felicity  
With your impartial sense-dissolving hue  
And slow cool sacred miracle of dew!  
Solemn perfection, stay  
Your lofty season, lest the dawn disperse  
Too soon this indivisible universe  
Of calm and from your star-impregnate womb  
Of paradisaal gloom  
I issue into the heart-searing day!

### *Second Phase*

Foretaste of the death-sombre Destiny  
Whose far-eyed grace  
Haunts the child-dream of passionate pain  
Storming through time to fathom yet again  
The wondrous in-world whence life, wailing, strays!  
Ineffable power,

Drunk with your lonely dim prophetic mood  
My flesh wears like an aureole  
The beauty of the unborn hour  
When with immeasurable quietude  
Eternity  
Shall quench the futile wanderlust of my soul!

7.6.32

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

*Let us offer our work to the Divine; this is the sure means of progressing.*  
*The Mother*

(*Words of the Mother – II*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 14, p. 297)

## ON THE MANIFESTO OF THE FRENCH INDIA SOCIALIST PARTY

For those who are familiar with the history of the freedom movement of Pondicherry during the years 1946-1954, it would be rather surprising to know that Sri Aurobindo himself wrote the manifesto of the French India Socialist Party.<sup>1</sup> Why would Sri Aurobindo, who was one of the foremost leaders of the Indian revolutionary movement against the British, draft the manifesto of the very political party which blocked the merger of Pondicherry with the Indian Union? The French India Socialist Party was backed by the French Govt. in order to win the referendum by fraud for France by which Pondicherry could remain a French colony. The party was adept at electoral malpractice, which was the hallmark of elections in French India. It could effectively beat its opponents into meek submission and stuff the ballot boxes with its own votes, while the police looked the other way. That is why elections in Pondicherry were always won by the party that was supported by the French administration. Though the same party eventually betrayed the French Govt. in March 1954 when the merger with India could not be postponed anymore, its opportunistic leaders took advantage of the interim period of uncertainty to amass a personal fortune. This happened especially when the Customs Union lapsed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1949 and Pondicherry became a free port and a smuggler's den. All the more reason then why disciples and admirers of Sri Aurobindo would find it is so difficult to associate Sri Aurobindo, a revolutionary and a Mahayogi, with the drafting of the manifesto of this notorious party.

But the fact is that the French India Socialist Party began with a noble and lofty idealism, and in the beginning the politicians at its helm were public-spirited intellectuals and not those who became its leaders later on. Among the founding members of the party were Lambert Saravane, Padmanabhan Counouma and Dr. André, who were in close touch with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. They were honest statesmen rather than unscrupulous politicians who only serve their selfish ends. So when the question of granting autonomy to French India within the French Union came up after the Second World War, they naturally thought in terms of cultural collaboration than a physical confrontation with France for territorial rights. At this juncture, the French-educated élite of Pondicherry were suddenly faced with the hard choice of either breaking off from France in whose culture they had steeped themselves, or delinking themselves from India which was after all the foundation of their ethos. It should be noted that this happened with the educated élite of all the French colonies, be it Indochina or Madagascar or Algeria or the other African states, and it was they who led at first the freedom movement of their respective countries. Later when France did not deliver its post-war promise of granting the

1. Sri Aurobindo, "The Future Union", *Autobiographical Notes*, pp. 481-91 (see pp. 18-24 in this issue of *Mother India*).

people of the colonies the same rights as its metropolitan citizens, these moderate leaders were often replaced by more aggressive nationalist leaders who took recourse to violent and bloody means to wrest independence from France.

There was a surge of nationalist aspiration in the French colonies at the end of the Second World War which had left France in a devastated state. During the War, France was invaded by Germany and the Vichy Govt. had helplessly capitulated to it by signing an armistice in June 1940. The armistice gave it namesake authority over the south of France, the rest being occupied by the German army. Even this little authority was taken away as the war intensified and Hitler ordered his troops in November 1942 to cross the line of demarcation and take over all of France. It was in this distressful situation that De Gaulle declared his government in exile and organised the Free France movement first from London, and then from Algiers. The French colonies responded readily to his call and came to the rescue of vanquished France. Lakhs of young men, especially from the African colonies, enlisted themselves as soldiers and fought courageously on the side of the Allies to defeat Germany and liberate France. The Governor of Pondicherry, who was under British pressure, declared his support for De Gaulle in September 1940, and a thousand men from French India enlisted themselves and fought for the Allies on various war fronts.

After the War, not only did the colonies demand the freedom to manage their own affairs in return for their active participation in the War, but world conditions had considerably changed to make this possible. France and Britain, who had been the erstwhile superpowers, were now replaced by America and Russia who supported the right of self-determination of the subject people. Moreover, France and Britain were ravaged by the War and could hardly sustain further conflict with their own colonies. They in fact received American aid under the Marshall plan to rebuild their economy and infrastructure. It was in this context that the Fourth Republic of France declared a new policy of association and autonomy within the French Union for the colonies, without actually granting them independence. This invitation by metropolitan France for a relationship of equality and friendship attracted the moderate leaders of the French India Socialist Party, which was formed in April 1947 after it broke away from the National Democratic Front (NDF) led by Subbiah, head of the French India Communist Party. It was at this point of time, in June 1947, that Sri Aurobindo wrote for them the manifesto of their party.<sup>2</sup>

2. According to Counouma, Sri Aurobindo at first intended to revise a draft of the manifesto submitted to him by a few nationalist members of the French India Socialist Party. But later he entirely rewrote it. It should be noted that the content of the manifesto matches very much with what Baron (Governor of Pondicherry 1946-48) said in his speeches on several occasions prior to the writing of the manifesto in June 1947. For example, his press conference of 6 June, 1946 in Pondicherry has the same liberal and international perspective that the manifesto expresses — full autonomy for French India within the French Union, the establishing of a University in Pondicherry for the study of Indian and Western cultures, and Pondicherry becoming a link between India and France. The clear expression of dual citizenship is what distinguishes the manifesto finalised by Sri Aurobindo from the speeches and proposals of Baron and the French Overseas Ministry.

The manifesto that Sri Aurobindo wrote was indeed a perfect response to the post-war promise of the Fourth Republic to convert the French Empire into one vast nation of people endowed with equal rights without distinction of race or religion. The manifesto not only accepted the proposal of autonomy within the French Union, but took it one step higher by asking for a close association with the Indian Union to the extent of having dual citizenship for the people of French India, who would be able to occupy Government posts in India, have access to its educational institutions and even join the Indian armed forces. Vice versa, the same facilities in French India would be made available to Indian nationals residing there, and French India would thus set a unique example of international collaboration. It was surely an idealistic proposal far ahead of its times, but it should be noted that at that time (in 1946-47) it had the approval of the political dispensation of both India and France. Not only Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, was appreciative of the idea of having a window of French culture in Pondicherry within the larger framework of India, but François Baron, the Governor of French India, genuinely attempted to fulfil it and, in doing so, sometimes exceeded the limits of his administrative powers much to the consternation of his superiors in the Overseas Ministry of France. Baron even convinced Marius Moutet, the French Overseas Minister, who had endorsed the scheme from a tactical point of view. French India comprised a few territorial specks in the vast Indian subcontinent and was therefore hardly in a position to defend itself if the Indian Govt. decided to use force to evict the French. Pending the fierce conflict that was already raging at that time in the French colonies of Indochina, Algeria and Madagascar where the stakes were much higher, France simply could not afford to have further confrontation in such a precarious situation. At the same time, it did not want to abandon French India because it would set a wrong precedent to its other colonies. The only way to save its prestige and maintain its presence in the Indian subcontinent was therefore to have a cultural collaboration with India in the form of a University dedicated to the study of European and Indian culture in Pondicherry. A sum of 100 million francs was allotted by the French Overseas Ministry under F.I.D.E.S., a scheme for the economic and social development of its colonies started by the French Govt. after World War II. For once, culture seemed to have scored points over politics and was the better option for resolving political conflict.

There was also local support from the French-educated élite of Pondicherry. Lambert Saravane, the most vocal advocate of the manifesto of the French India Socialist Party, had been elected deputy to the French National Assembly in November 1946. The other prominent members of the party were Padmanabhan Counouma, one of the highest paid government officials of Pondicherry, Dr. André of the General Hospital, Latchoumanassamy Reddiar, and Edouard Goubert who later became the undisputed leader of the party. In September 1947, all four were members of the six-member Governing Council of the newly formed Representative

Assembly of French India. Counouma was in charge of Finance and Education, Dr. André of Hygiene and Public Works, Latchoumanassamy of Agriculture, and Goubert of General Administration. When the Assembly met on 28 September, all the prominent members of the party were there to welcome Maurice Schumann who had just arrived in Pondicherry to quell a strong nationalistic movement in French India to merge with India. This session of the Assembly,<sup>3</sup> in which Lambert Saravane and Governor Baron were present, is of special interest to the admirers and disciples of Sri Aurobindo. There is perhaps no other Assembly session in the history of pre-independent or even perhaps post-independent India up to recent times in which Sri Aurobindo's name is uttered with so much reverence, and intellectual and spiritual culture given such an important place in public affairs. It should be mentioned that Governor Baron was himself a disciple of Sri Aurobindo. According to Maurice Schumann, Baron knelt down in front of Sri Aurobindo in the typical Indian fashion when both were granted the rare privilege of an interview with the Master. Baron also regularly sought advice from the Mother (Mira Alfassa) who had been given charge of the Ashram by Sri Aurobindo after he retired into seclusion for intensive sadhana on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 1926.

The Ashram at this time was in the midst of a dynamic phase of expansion under the supervision of the Mother with the setting up of a school for the children of those families who had sought refuge in Pondicherry during the War. A considerable stress was laid on physical education and various grounds were acquired for providing sports facilities to the children. On 13 October 1947, the Pondicherry Assembly decided to lease out for a period of thirty years what is now called the Tennis Ground on the beach road. Earlier in 1946, the Volleyball ground on the Canal road had been transferred to the Ashram by the president of the Pondicherry Municipality. The sports activities, initially meant for the children, had galvanised the entire Ashram community, and young children and old disciples vied with each other in a spirit of joyful participation. Mme. Carmen, wife of Governor Baron, was invited by the Mother to teach marching to the Ashram girls in French style with French commands, after which they participated for the first time in the route march of 13 July 1947 to celebrate the eve of the French Republic Day. This close association of the Ashram with the French Govt. reached its culmination when Maurice Schumann came to Pondicherry on 27 September 1947, paid homage to Sri Aurobindo on behalf of the French Govt. and requested him to be the head of the proposed University which was to be the dream-come-true-symbol of Franco-Indian collaboration.

Finally, even from the point of view of realpolitik, the French India Socialist Party had sufficient muscle power to survive in the rough and tumble of Pondicherry politics. This force was represented by Edouard Goubert and his henchmen who

3. The Representative Assembly of French India, 3rd Session, 28 September 1947.

took on the Communist Party workers of Subbiah, delivered blow for blow and terrorised them and the public at large with the tacit support of the French Police. In this matter Baron sided with them and gave them a free hand, for it served the immediate purpose of keeping French India within the French Union. He also applied the standard methods of realpolitik to win the referendum at any cost for France despite the Indo-French agreement of June 1948 to conduct the referendum in a free and fair manner. Meetings of pro-merger groups were restricted, propaganda against the French Govt. in the form of journals or pamphlets was banned, and even vehicles (including rickshaws and cycles) with loudspeakers were not allowed to move about. Indian leaders were prohibited to enter French India, voters' lists were deliberately not updated and even electoral wards were redrawn to ensure the victory of the French India Socialist Party. It was due to this double game and the political compulsions under which Baron acted in spite of the noble ideals he professed publicly, that the scheme for cultural collaboration failed and eventually backfired on the French Govt. It became a mere sham and strategy to prolong French rule than a genuine effort at international collaboration which it was originally meant to be.

But the failure and misuse of the scheme should not make us blind to the possibility of its practical fulfilment had the French Govt. acted in a wise manner and followed a "model of intelligent decolonisation", as Maurice Schumann himself said retrospectively in an interview taken in December 1988 by three members of Auroville International France. Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire (renamed Pavitra), a French disciple of Sri Aurobindo, who was living in the Ashram, was more critical of the French colonial policy in a letter to his parents on 22 July 1947:

Unfortunately, in France they do not seem to understand anything of the evolution of the outside world. There is no co-ordinated view of global problems, there does not seem to be a rational and decisive policy. It is a kind of alternation of letting things go and a bitter contemptuousness. Constantly one takes back with one hand what one gives with the other. We hope they do not again commit the mistake of Syria and of Lebanon, where they have lost everything by wishing to keep everything.<sup>4</sup>

Pavitra's assessment of the French colonial policy is so correct that one would wonder how he could keep track of world events in those days from a small corner of India. Modern French historians would agree with him and even be a little more critical about the failure of France to decolonise in a more dignified manner like the British did in India. The French Govt., especially the Ministry of Overseas, could

4. Pavitra (Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire), 'Itinéraire d'un enfant du siècle', p. 212; *Mother India*, May 2011, p. 402, translation emended.

never realise in time that the strong winds of nationalism that were blowing across the world would one day sweep them off their feet and force them to concede independence to its colonies one after another in a most humiliating manner.

So it happened in Pondicherry and the other towns of French India. First, the people of Chandernagore declared independence from the French administration on 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1947. Had not Gandhi intervened at Baron's request, the people of Chandernagore would have taken over the administration. Pondicherry was also in ferment. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August a long procession went around the town calling upon the French to quit Indian soil. The demonstrators encircled the police headquarters and 150 of them were arrested and released later. This was followed by a meeting of all the pro-merger parties on the 10<sup>th</sup> in which resolutions were passed for an immediate merger of Pondicherry with India. Similar resolutions were passed by the Bar Associations of Mahé, Karaikal and Pondicherry. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August the Ashram was attacked by a mob in the evening. Rioters pelted stones at the disciples and devotees who were inside the main Ashram compound, and one inmate on the street was fatally stabbed to death. The Secretary of the Ashram, Nolini Kanto Gupta, issued a public statement in *The Statesman* on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August regarding the attack.<sup>5</sup> I will go into a detailed explanation of this statement because it will clear some of the cobwebs of misunderstanding regarding Sri Aurobindo that are still floating about in the public domain even after 70 years.

First, Nolini denied the wrong report in *The Statesman* that there was a satyagraha in front of the Ashram. It was instead a vicious attack by professional goundas hired for the purpose by a political party that had been trying to damage the reputation of the Ashram for the last two years. The attack had nothing to do with the political question because the Ashram was a non-political body — by which we can now infer that the Ashram had been simply made a scapegoat in the political struggle in Pondicherry to merge with India. Half a century of Indian politics has made us indeed familiar with the use of violence against soft targets by unprincipled politicians to draw wider attention to the cause they espouse. Ironically, the same Ashram which was accused of not supporting the merger in 1947 became the target of looting and arson in January 1979 for supporting the merger of Pondicherry with Tamil Nadu, as proposed by the Janata Party which had come to power in Delhi.

Nolini explained the cause of the political turbulence of 1947:

Everybody in Pondicherry without exception supports the right of self-determination for the people of French India and Sri Aurobindo has always been a firm supporter of that right for all peoples everywhere. Nobody here is for the “continuation of French rule”, but the people were prepared to accept

5. Sri Aurobindo, “On the Disturbances of 15 August 1947 in Pondicherry”, *Autobiographical Notes*, pp. 491-92 (see pp. 25-26 in this issue of *Mother India*).

the French proposal of a free and completely autonomous French India within the French Union. It was only when it appeared that the reforms offered by the French Government would fall short of what was promised that the cry arose for the immediate transfer of power and the merging of French India in the Indian Union.<sup>6</sup>

So it was because of the failure of the French Govt. to deliver the post-war promise of granting “autonomy within the French Union” that the cry arose for an immediate merger with India, which means that the people of French India would have perhaps accepted political reforms had they been speedily implemented. One must keep in mind that India had become an independent nation only a few days earlier and was facing a host of difficulties, especially with regard to the integration of the princely states. One should not therefore make the mistake in hindsight of accusing the people of French India for being anti-national in 1947 when the political situation in India was very different from what it is now. Nolini then explained the political stand of Sri Aurobindo, who

not being a citizen of French India, made no public declaration of his views, but privately supported the views set forth in a manifesto of the French India Socialist party demanding the end of colonial rule and a complete autonomy within the French Union accompanied by a dual citizenship and a close association with the Indian Union which should control Customs, Communications and a common system of Industry and Commerce.<sup>7</sup>

The phrase regarding Sri Aurobindo’s support for “complete autonomy within the French Union” can easily be misunderstood if taken out of its context. It has to be qualified with the rest of the sentence “accompanied by a dual citizenship and a close association with the Indian Union”. Sri Aurobindo stood for an idealistic scheme to promote good international relations than merely to prolong French colonial rule. At this stage in his life he was no more the revolutionary patriot ready to face the gallows (as in 1909 during the Alipore Bomb case), but a Yogi with a universal vision and who conceived of human unity on a spiritual basis. He mentioned the same wish in his famous Independence Day message issued on 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1947:

an international spirit and outlook must grow up and international forms and institutions; even it may be such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship and a voluntary fusion of cultures may appear in the process of the change and the spirit of nationalism losing its militancy may find these things perfectly

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

compatible with the integrity of its own outlook. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.<sup>8</sup>

The French India Socialist Party which Sri Aurobindo privately supported had thus two contradictory movements which followed different courses right from its inception. On one side Baron and Saravane (assisted by Counouma, Dr. André and Lakshmanaswami Reddiar) tried to convince the French Overseas Ministry and the Indian Govt. of the viability of a cultural collaboration. On the other side Goubert let loose his goons on those who supported the merger with India, and French India witnessed unprecedented political violence, especially at the time of elections. In the beginning the violence could perhaps be justified because he was counteracting the determined workers of the Communist Party of French India led by Subbiah. But later when Goubert became the undisputed leader whom neither the pro-merger parties could touch nor the French Govt. could afford to displease, the violence became counterproductive to the very goal of remaining within the French Union. Moreover, it was sheer political ambition and monetary gain that motivated his actions. But because he was judged as the only politician who could deliver the desired result, or rather win the elections by hook or crook that the French Govt. supported him, and even the Indian Govt. backed him after he betrayed the French in March 1954.

Matters came to a head at the time of the municipal elections which were scheduled for 10<sup>th</sup> October 1948. The election of the municipal councillors was important because the modalities and date of the referendum was supposed to be decided by them. Prior to this date, the goons of the Socialist Party created an atmosphere of fear and threat to all those who supported the merger with India. Baron passed prohibitory orders on public meetings and processions, preventing the pro-merger parties from canvassing their political stand. Those who defied his orders were prosecuted. When a hundred students led by the French India Students' Congress took out a procession in Pondicherry on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1948, the French Police bundled them off into vans and released them 10 miles away from Pondicherry. The leaders of the Students' Congress, Paramel and Munussamy were prosecuted and removed to the Central Jail. In Karaikal Srikanta Ramanujan, the President of the Action Committee of the Karaikal National Congress, was also prosecuted under an obsolete Press Liberty Act of 1881. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August in Mahé, I. K. Kumaran was prosecuted and fined for organising a public meeting which was attended by political leaders from India. The situation in Mahé soon went out of control and became a full-blown revolt against the French administration, and a cruiser was sent there to rescue the Administrator.

8. Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes*, p. 477.

It was under these circumstances that irreconcilable differences arose in the Pondicherry Council of Administration between the two groups of Counouma and Goubert. The former desired to arrive at an understanding with the Indian Govt. which had already lodged numerous complaints with regard to the totally unfair electoral practices of the French administration. The latter (Goubert's group) insisted on holding the elections on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October as scheduled and gain a quick political victory at this opportune moment when the pro-merger parties were weak and suppressed. As the six members of the Council were equally divided in their opinion, Baron exercised his casting vote in favour of Goubert's group. This decision of Baron was crucial and, though it gave immediate political advantage to France, it destroyed in the long run the chance of fulfilling the international scheme that Sri Aurobindo had suggested for the future of French India. The municipal elections were then hurriedly held on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October, and as expected Goubert's men won all the seats through sheer fraud, manipulation and intimidation of the voters with the outright support of the administration. After the municipal elections Goubert became the undisputed leader of the French India Socialist Party and determined the course of Pondicherry politics until the very end of French rule in November 1954. The breakaway group of Counouma resigned from the Pondicherry Council of Administration on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1948, around the same time as the revolt in Mahé. They disassociated themselves henceforth from the French India Socialist Party, showing that they were not merely stooges of the French administration. Lambert Saravane, the deputy to the French National Assembly, reversed his stand from demanding autonomy for French India within the French Union with a close collaboration with India, to asking for autonomy within the Indian Union with a close association with France. The resignation of Counouma's group and the reversal of Saravane's political stand vindicate the political integrity of these founder members of the French India Socialist Party, who were under the spiritual influence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The notoriety that the French India Socialist Party later acquired in Pondicherry politics should not be thus associated with this group or Sri Aurobindo who had inspired them. Nor should Sri Aurobindo himself be blamed for the failure and misuse of a wonderful international scheme that might have succeeded had the French administration been a little more far-sighted and not yielded to the manipulations of opportunistic politicians.

I quote two letters written by Pavitra to his parents after the municipal elections. On 16 November 1948 he wrote:

We have had quite an eventful summer, politically speaking. No, things are not going as we would wish. The French administration has almost ruined a wonderful opportunity. It may seem to be successful for a while but, by her refusal to understand that the epoch of the colonies is past and that a new solution is the only chance of conserving the French culture and prestige here

(it is rather low since this last war, and goes down a little more with each stupidity), I am afraid that it may end up as in Syria or Lebanon, where similar mistakes have ruined France's predominant influence.<sup>9</sup>

He wrote another letter on 21<sup>st</sup> December 1948:

Here, for French India, the report is bad. A total political chaos reigns. In fact, for France in India, 1948 will have been the year of lost opportunities. Perhaps they will never be found!<sup>10</sup>

The next big crisis that Pondicherry had to face was due to the termination of the Customs Union between France and India. From 1 April 1949 a Customs cordon came around Pondicherry preventing the free passage of vehicles and goods to and from the surrounding Indian territory, leading to a general scarcity of essential items such as vegetables, fish, meat, rice and medicines. The situation became worse in May when strict rules were enforced by Mirza Ali Baig, the Indian Consul in Pondicherry, who had to validate the travel documents of all those who wanted to enter Indian territory from French India. A substantial relaxation of economic measures was however announced in June by the Indian Govt., which brought some relief to the people of French India. Two letters of Sri Aurobindo written during this period to Surendra Mohan Ghosh, a prominent Congress leader of Bengal, describe the practical difficulties of the Ashram which had to feed daily around 700 inmates, including a considerable number of children. I quote the last portion of the letter written of 1<sup>st</sup> April 1949 which mentions the state of political uncertainty of French India at this time:

I shall write afterwards about our own threatened difficulties in French India itself, if they develop. But we badly need some reliable information as to what is likely to be the fate of French India. On the one side the French India municipalities have fixed December for the proposed referendum. If there is a referendum, the voting will go by the usual methods and the result will be whatever the local Government here dictates and not a genuine plebiscite; there would be no chance of an accession to the Indian Union or a merger unless Goubert and Co would make, as they once tried, a bargain with the Government in Madras or in Delhi. On the other hand, it has been broadly hinted that there will be no plebiscite and the fate of French India will be determined by direct negotiations between the Governments in Paris and in Delhi. But when? We were once informed that it would be in April or June

9. Pavitra, 'Itinéraire d'un enfant du siècle', p. 223; translation in *Mother India*, June 2011, p. 479.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 224-25; translation in *Mother India*, June 2011, p. 481.

after the return of Baron as High Commissioner but the politicians here are resolute not to allow the return of Baron because he will [be] under the influence of the Ashram — just as Saravane, Counouma, André etc. are to be kept out of all positions of authority for the same reason and because they are supposed to be in favour of accession to the Indian Union.<sup>11</sup>

What can we make of Sri Aurobindo's political opinion from the above quote? He was certainly not supporting Goubert, for which he is often wrongly accused now in a kind of confused hindsight. His remark that "if there is a referendum the voting will go by the usual methods" means that the voting will be rigged and pro-merger groups will be intimidated as in the municipal elections of October 1948. A supporter of French colonial rule would never have passed such a remark on the electoral malpractices in Pondicherry. One could actually read a wish for an accession or a merger with India, and the fact that "Saravane, Counouma, André etc. are to be kept out of all positions of authority" because they were "supposed to be in favour of accession to the Indian Union" would support this conclusion. But then he indirectly expresses a wish for the return of Baron which the local politicians will not allow "because he will be under the influence of the Ashram".

*(To be concluded)*

RAMAN REDDY

11. Sri Aurobindo, "Letters to Surendra Mohan Ghosh (1)", *Autobiographical Notes*, pp. 492-94 (see pp. 26-27 in this issue of *Mother India*).

*I make no difference between work and yoga. Work itself is yoga if it is done in a spirit of dedication and surrender.*

*The Mother*

*(Words of the Mother – II, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 14, p. 298)*

## SRI AUROBINDO: THE WORLD REDEEMER

A flaming warrior from the eternal peaks  
Empowered to force the door denied and closed  
Smote from Death's visage its dumb absolute  
And burst the bounds of consciousness and Time.

(*Savitri* 21)

This is what Sri Aurobindo is and this his mission in this evolutionary world where life is so miserable, evil, almost an 'eternal hell'. For this life

There is no end to the world's stupendous march,  
There is no rest for the embodied soul.  
It must live on, describe all Time's huge curve.  
An Influx presses from the closed Beyond  
Forbidding to him rest and earthly ease,  
Till he has found himself he cannot pause.

(*Ibid.* 339)

The evolutionary movements of the earth must 'be pushed by a superconscient force' then alone can evolution reach its summit. In an illuminating verse regarding himself and the Mother as World Redeemers, the poet of *Savitri* chants of the highest divine plane from where they descended and with what mission:

For not for ourselves alone our spirits came  
Out of the veil of the Unmanifest,  
Out of the deep immense Unknowable  
Upon the ignorant breast of dubious earth,  
Into the ways of labouring, seeking men,  
Two fires that burn towards that parent Sun,  
Two rays that travel to the original Light.  
To lead man's soul towards truth and God we are born,  
To draw the chequered scheme of mortal life  
Into some semblance of the Immortal's plan,  
To shape it closer to an image of God,  
A little nearer to the Idea divine.

(*Ibid.* 720)

The incarnate dual Power shall open God's door,  
Eternal supermind touch earthly Time.

(*Ibid.* 705)

and,

The Might of all that never yet came down.

(*Ibid.* 314)

The supramental Truth-Force alone can redeem the world: "It is a question between the Divine and myself — whether it is the Divine Will or not, whether I am sent to bring that down or open the way for its descent or at least make it more possible or not",<sup>1</sup> says Sri Aurobindo.

Several redeemers came before Sri Aurobindo, but none sought to seek the supramental.

Hard is the world-redeemer's heavy task.

(*Ibid.* 448)

Altruism, philanthropy and service [*to suffering humanity*], Christian love or Buddhist compassion have not made the world a whit happier, they only give infinitesimal bits of momentary relief here and there, throw drops on the fire of world's suffering. . . . the essence of life, its general character remains the same for ever.<sup>2</sup>

Regarding the ugliness, evil and the spirit's degeneration spoiling the beauty, truth and delight of creation, Sri Aurobindo affirms that it is the perversity and resistance and 'hard economy' in the Inconscient's nature. The Inconscient, being what it is, will not allow any easy passage for emergence of a higher consciousness in evolution. The mighty prisoner within struggled for release:

Opponent of that glory of escape,  
The black Inconscient swung its dragon tail  
Lashing a slumbrous Infinite by its force  
Into the deep obscurities of form:

(*Ibid.* 79)

and the Inconscient

1. Sri Aurobindo: *On Himself*, pp. 143-44. [SABCL volumes used for this and others below]

2. Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, pp. 416-17.

Alarmed for her rule and full of fear and rage  
 She prowls around each light that gleams through the dark  
 Casting its ray from the spirit's lonely tent,  
 Hoping to enter with fierce stealthy tread  
 And in the cradle slay the divine Child.

(*Ibid.* 224)

This earthly life is

A new aesthesis of Inferno's art  
 That trained the mind to love what the soul hates,

(*Ibid.* 213)

and

A new philosophy theorised evil's rights,

(*Ibid.*)

It scrambled into the pit to dig for truth  
 And lighted its search with the subconscious's flares.

(*Ibid.* 214)

The World Redeemer has to present a procedure for changing the sufferings, miseries and ugliness of life and its mortality back again into 'That Marvel'. As the Mother opines:

I think always of Buddha and all of them: they go to get dissolved in the Lord and then there will be nothing.<sup>3</sup>

To them there is only one way out: Nirvana. The Buddhist solution is only one step taken, though a great one. But it is far beyond that that the true solution lies. Such 'half measures' like Nirvana will not suffice to redeem the world. "There is only one solution," says the Mother, "it is the direct contact of the physical with the Supreme."<sup>4</sup> Sri Aurobindo calls it 'a divine life in a divine body'. Escape into Nirvana is not the solution but a remedy for a time, partial. A partial cure and one might almost say, momentary. All the means (including Nirvana), of coming out of the

3. The Mother: *Notes on the Way*, p. 170.

4. The Mother: *Ibid.*

‘eternal hell’ of life, even to put an end to one’s life, is worth nothing. Regarding the futility of escape from life’s eternal hell, *Savitri* chants the World Redeemer’s (Sri Aurobindo’s) voice of light:

An exit is shown, a road of hard escape  
 From the sorrow and the darkness and the chain;  
 But how shall a few escaped release the world?  
 The human mass lingers beneath the yoke.  
 Escape, however high, redeems not life,  
 Life that is left behind on a fallen earth.  
 Escape cannot uplift the abandoned race  
 Or bring to it victory and the reign of God.  
 A greater power must come, a larger light.

(*Ibid.* 448)

The ‘philosophy of world-negation’ has been given a formulation of supreme power and value by Buddha. The thinking mind arrives at an illusion behind all human effort and terrestrial endeavour: “the illusion of his political and social gospels, the illusion of his ethical efforts at perfection, the illusion of philanthropy and service, the illusion of works, the illusion of fame, power, success, the illusion of all achievement.”<sup>5</sup>

. . . the thinking mind, unbuilding all its affirmations, discovers that all are mere mental constructions and there is no reality in them or else that the only reality is something beyond this existence, . . . all that is relative, all that is of time is [*to Nirvana*] a dream, a hallucination of the mind or a vast delirium, an immense cosmic Illusion, a delusive figure of apparent existence. The principle of negation prevails over the principle of affirmation and becomes universal and absolute. Thence arise the great world-negating religions and philosophies; thence too a recoil of the life-motive from itself and a seeking after a life elsewhere . . . or a will to annul life itself in an immobile Reality or an original Non-Existence.<sup>6</sup>

The theory of illusion as propounded by Buddhism, is ‘an escape, not a solution: a flight of the spirit is not a sufficient victory for the being embodied in this world of the becoming; it effects a separation from Nature, not a liberation and fulfilment of our nature’, says Sri Aurobindo.

5. Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, p. 416.

6. Sri Aurobindo: *Ibid.*, p. 145.

The Brahman, the supreme Reality, is That which being known all is known; but in the illusionist solution it is That, which being known, all becomes unreal and an incomprehensible mystery: in this other experience, the Reality being known, all assumes its true significance, its truth to the Eternal and Absolute.<sup>7</sup>

The Buddhists “supposed that it is only through a negation of individual and cosmos that we can enter into the Absolute.”<sup>8</sup> To Sri Aurobindo

the individual need only deny his own small separate ego-existence; he can approach the Absolute through a sublimation of his spiritual individuality taking up the cosmos into himself and transcending it; . . .<sup>9</sup>

But the nirvanic state as propounded by Buddha and the like contradicts the Upanishadic truth that ‘all this that is is Brahman’. The Buddhists took the step of unreality of things and refused reality to the Self on the ground that it was as much as the rest a construction of the mind. These limitations imposed on the Brahman arise from a narrowness of experience in the individual mind which concentrates itself on one aspect of the Unknowable and proceeds forthwith to deny and disparage all the rest. The nirvanic state is one ‘That made unreal the world and all life meant’:

In that absolute stillness bare and formidable  
There was glimpsed an all-negating Void Supreme  
That claimed its mystic Nihil’s sovereign right  
To cancel Nature and deny the soul.

(*Ibid.* 545)

Or,

Beings were not there, existence had no place,  
There was no temptation of the joy to be.

(*Ibid.* 549)

and

It effaced the ignorant world from its solitude  
And drowned the soul in its everlasting peace.

(*Ibid.* 550)

True solution of overcoming the ‘eternal hell’ in life, redeeming the world, is not attaining to Nirvana, that is only ‘a half measure although a great step to attain’. It is beyond that that the true solution lies. To Sri Aurobindo’s yogic experience only the supreme Consciousness, the supramental Truth-Consciousness has the power to transform this hideous and monstrous thing that is called this earthly life:

7. Sri Aurobindo: *Ibid.*, p. 470.

8. Sri Aurobindo: *Ibid.*, p. 476.

9. Sri Aurobindo: *Ibid.*

Content abide not with one conquered realm;  
 Adventure all to make the whole world thine,  
 To break into greater kingdoms turn thy force.  
 Fear not to be nothing that thou mayst be all;  
 Assent to the emptiness of the Supreme  
 That all in thee may reach its absolute.

(*Ibid.* 536)

Redemption of the earthly life is not possible by power of the nirvanic consciousness but by the supreme Consciousness, the supramental, which the World Redeemer must attain and bring that Truth-Force ‘upon the ignorant breast of dubious earth’, invoke ‘The Might of all that never yet came down’ —

To lead man’s soul towards truth and God we are born,  
 To draw the chequered scheme of mortal life  
 Into some semblance of the Immortal’s plan,  
 To shape it closer to an image of God,  
 A little nearer to the Idea divine.

(*Ibid.* 720)

. . . it [*Nirvana*] is an escape, not a solution: a flight of the spirit is not a sufficient victory for the being embodied in this world of the becoming; . . .<sup>10</sup>

### The Buddhists

supposed that it is only through a negation of individual and cosmos that we can enter into the Absolute. But in fact the individual need only deny his own small separate ego-existence; he can approach the Absolute through sublimation of his spiritual individuality taking up the cosmos into himself and transcending it; . . .<sup>11</sup>

says Sri Aurobindo.

Instead of the original and ultimate Consciousness which sees reality as a whole, we see active here (in *Nirvana*) a limited consciousness and either a partial and unfinished creation or a cosmic kinesis . . . all our illusions and errors arise from a limited separative awareness which creates unrealities or misconceives the Real. . . . It is the mystery not of an original Illusion, but of the origin of Ignorance and Inconscience. . . .<sup>12</sup>

10. Sri Aurobindo: *Ibid.*, p. 468.

11. Sri Aurobindo: *Ibid.*, p. 476.

12. Sri Aurobindo: *Ibid.*, pp. 480-81.

Sri Aurobindo's Supramental Yoga 'is not a Yoga of the world-shunning asceticism, but of divine life'. He raises some relevant points regarding Nirvana *vis-a-vis* his own Yoga of Transformation. These are:

1. Is illusion the sole or the highest Power which the Divine Consciousness or Superconsciousness possesses?
2. Is the Mayavadin's featureless Brahman that Perfect, that Complete — is it the very Highest?
3. Is there not or can there not be a higher than that highest, *parātparam*?<sup>13</sup>

Regarding his own Yoga Sri Aurobindo comments,

to reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my own Yoga. It threw me suddenly into a condition above and without thought, unstained by any mental or vital movement; there was no ego, no real world — only when one looked through the immobile senses, something perceived or bore upon its sheer silence a world of empty forms, materialised shadows without true substance. . . . I cannot say there was anything exhilarating or rapturous in the experience, as it then came to me . . . but what it brought was an inexpressible Peace, a stupendous silence, an infinity of release and freedom. I lived in that Nirvana day and night before it began to admit other things into itself or modify itself at all, and the inner heart of experience, a constant memory of it and its power to return remained until in the end it began to disappear into a greater Superconsciousness from above. . . . At an early stage the aspect of an illusionary world gave place to one in which illusion is only a small surface phenomenon with an immense Divine Reality behind it and a supreme Divine Reality above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow.<sup>14</sup>

A similar but poetic expression is given to Savitri's entry into nirvanic consciousness and transcending that to reach the superconscient state and from there 'emerge as someone and redeem the world'. This could be possible if one did not get dissolved wholly in nirvanic state as was the case with Buddha:

She was a point in the unknowable. . . .  
A memory of being still was there  
And kept her separate from nothingness:  
She was in That but still became not That.

13. See Sri Aurobindo: *On Himself*, pp. 100-01.

14. Sri Aurobindo: *Ibid.*, pp. 101-02.

This shadow of herself so close to nought  
 Could be again self's point d'appui to live,  
 Return out of the Inconceivable  
 And be what some mysterious vast might choose.  
 Even as the Unknowable decreed,  
 She might be nought or new-become the All,  
 Or if the omnipotent Nihil took a shape  
 Emerge as someone and redeem the world. . . .  
 Even now her splendid being might flame back  
 Out of the silence and the nullity,  
 A gleaming portion of the All-Wonderful,  
 A power of some all-affirming Absolute,  
 A shining mirror of the eternal Truth

(*Ibid.* 549-50)

If one did not dissolve himself wholly in nirvanic consciousness, any of the ways described in the above verse, could be achieved to redeem the world. This is how Sri Aurobindo achieved the status of the World Redeemer. To quote from his own writing:

Nirvana in my liberated consciousness turned out to be the beginning of my realisation, a first step towards the complete thing . . . I had no least idea about it before, no aspiration towards it, in fact my aspiration was towards just the opposite, spiritual power to help the world and to do my work in it, yet it came . . . It just happened and settled in as if for all eternity or as if it had been really there always. And then it slowly grew into something not less but greater than its first self.<sup>15</sup>

Thus did Sri Aurobindo transcend the nirvanic consciousness and reach the supreme Divine Superconsciousness, the Supramental, which Buddha could not do for he got dissolved in Nirvana. Yet Nirvana serves a great spiritual end and, as a path, can lead very high and far.

For what the mind with its perceptions and the vital with its desires have made of life in this world, is a very bad mess, and if there were nothing better to be hoped for, the shortest cut to an exit (nirvana) would be the best.<sup>16</sup>

15. Sri Aurobindo: *Ibid.*, p. 102.

16. Sri Aurobindo: *Ibid.*

But this path cannot redeem the world for earlier redeemers did not attempt to get into the great 'world failure's cause', the Inconscient. In Book VI, Canto 2, the poet gives in detail (Narad's speech) what the World Redeemer must do:

He must enter the eternity of Night  
And know God's darkness as he knows his Sun.  
For this he must go down into the pit,  
For this he must invade the dolorous Vasts. . . .  
He still must travel Hell the world to save.

*(Ibid. 450)*

Sri Aurobindo gives a perfect description of the World Redeemer:

One yet may come armoured, invincible;  
His will immobile meets the mobile hour;  
The world's blows cannot bend that victor head;  
Calm and sure are his steps in the growing Night;  
The goal recedes, he hurries not his pace,  
He turns not to high voices in the night;  
He asks no aid from the inferior gods;  
His eyes are fixed on his immutable aim.  
Man turns aside or chooses easier paths;  
He keeps to the one high and difficult road  
That sole can climb to the Eternal's peaks; . . .

*(Ibid. 449)*

Then

The superconscient beam shall touch men's eyes  
And the truth-conscious world come down to earth  
Invading matter with the Spirit's ray, . . .  
This mortal life shall house Eternity's bliss,  
The body's self taste immortality.  
Then shall the world-redeemer's task be done.

*(Ibid. 451)*

The true World Redeemer comes:

To lead man's soul towards truth and God . . .  
To draw the chequered scheme of mortal life  
Into some semblance of the Immortal's plan,

To shape it closer to an image of God,  
A little nearer to the Idea divine.

(*Ibid.* 720)

To make ‘a divine life in a divine body’ is, according to Sri Aurobindo, the only way that can transform the ‘eternal hell’ of this earthly life.

For this the silent Force came missioned down;  
In her the conscious Will took human shape:  
She only can save herself and save the world.

(*Ibid.* 461)

ASOKA K. GANGULI

*You must do the work as an offering to the Divine and take it as part of your Sadhana. In that spirit the nature of the work is of little importance and you can do any work without losing the contact with the inner presence.*

*The Mother*

(*Words of the Mother – II*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 14, p. 297)

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

‘Food’ is a very mundane subject, you say. Why bother with such a trivial aspect of life? We all know that what is important for us is to open to the divinity in the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Then why take up such a topic as ‘Food for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo’? Why give it such an importance? Both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have told us clearly that they gave no importance to their outward lives. The Mother had said:

Do not ask questions about the details of the material existence of this body; they are in themselves of no interest and must not attract attention.

(CWM, Vol. 13, p. 45)

Yet even such an apparently ordinary side of their life reveals to us some aspect of the divine. It is a very earthly subject indeed and yet while tracing the development of the food and the kitchen in the Ashram, we also came across such beautiful expressions of devotion among all those who worked for them. In Indian culture, the offering of food to the deity holds a sacred place. That is what is evident here also.

As we look at the development from early 1910, to the establishment of ‘The Mother’s Kitchen’ in 1944 we realise how it reflects at the same time the development of this special institution which we call the ‘Ashram’. We find that from a natural spontaneous way of living, under the tremendous financial hardship of the early days, food and cooking became more and more organised just like the other aspects of Ashram life under the Mother’s guidance, till the establishment of the common Dining Room of the Ashram and the separate unit known as ‘The Mother’s Kitchen’ where food for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo used to be prepared daily. It was set up initially in 1944 and then was shifted to its final location in 1948. We wanted to find out about the years prior to 1944 when this special kitchen was set up and also some of the later developments.

In the Ashram, the creation of most of the departments has followed a similar organic pattern: a few individuals start some work as their offering to serve the Mother and in course of time this activity gets organised into a full-fledged department. The same has happened here. We have attempted to trace this aspect of the Ashram life from the early records available to us and from oral reports of elderly inmates of the Ashram who were connected with this work. We have tried to link-up various inputs gathered from different sources and build up a chronological sequence of its growth.

## 1910-1914

It all started when a young man, Suresh Chakraborty, from far-off Calcutta, landed at Pondicherry station in the early hours of March 31, 1910. Suresh Chakraborty, not yet twenty years old, was one of the young followers of Sri Aurobindo. When in 1910 Sri Aurobindo suddenly decided to leave Calcutta, for some unknown destination, Suresh Chakraborty and one of his friends were living in a hostel. They did not know what to do. Then, all of a sudden he received Sri Aurobindo’s note, sent from Chandernagore, instructing him to go to Pondicherry and meet Srinivasachari, a nationalist leader, and arrange accommodation for Sri Aurobindo. That was the reason why Suresh travelled from Calcutta, which was then under British rule, to unknown Pondicherry which was under the French. Sri Aurobindo arrived in Pondicherry by a French boat on April 4, 1910. He was accompanied by Bijoy Nag. Sri Aurobindo and his two young companions were put up on the second floor of a house belonging to a wealthy businessman of Pondicherry, Shri Shankar Chettiar. The small rooms of this floor were not visible from the street in front of the house. That suited them well, as Sri Aurobindo wanted to remain incognito in Pondicherry. Let us go back in time for a glimpse of life in those days — what Sri Aurobindo and a handful of his young companions had to pass through. We also get an idea of the outer conditions of those years of his stay in Pondicherry. We are amazed at the way these young men, barely in their early twenties, went through such hardships quite unmindful of the ordeals of life.

We start our story with a few lines from Suresh Chakraborty regarding Sri Aurobindo’s food immediately after his arrival in Pondicherry, on April 4, 1910.

Let me give some examples of our food menu in Shri Chettiar’s house. . . . On the second floor of the house there was a kitchen in which four or five “ovens” (*chulhas*) were there for using wood fire. That was the custom then in Pondicherry. Bijoy and I used to cook there. Bijoy was the ‘*chef de cuisine*’, the main cook. I acted as his assistant. On the floor of the kitchen, rice would be served on spread banana leaves. There would also be some vegetables which were bought every day from the market. After Sri Aurobindo had had his meals Bijoy and I would have ours. . . . All through our stay of six months in this house, though other types of pulses and vegetables were available in the market, we consumed regularly these five items only: rice, *moong dal* (pulses), brinjal, red pumpkin and milk. . . .

Our daily routine was as follows: to serve morning tea about 6.30 to 7 a.m. in a silver tumbler to Sri Aurobindo. Bijoy and I would go for cooking at about 11 o’clock in the morning. Our cooking vessels consisted of one iron saucepan and a few saucepan-like clay vessels. The menu invariably was rice, *moong dal* with pieces of brinjal in it and a hotch potch of pumpkin. Brinjal in

*dal* was Bijoy's special invention. This was our menu for lunch.

Tea would be served to Sri Aurobindo about 4 p.m. In fact, surrounding conditions had as if no effect at all on Sri Aurobindo. I give you a small example. Shri Chettiar had given us a silver glass for our use. In this glass tea would be served morning and evening to Sri Aurobindo. Anyone who has ever used a metal container for a cup of hot tea knows very well how it is. But for six months Sri Aurobindo took tea, without making any comment whatsoever when he was taking hot tea out of that metal glass. We would then take about one and half litres of milk, put some rice and sugar and boil it and this was our item for the night. (From Suresh Chakraborty's 'Reminiscences')

Here again are a few relevant excerpts from Purani:

May 1910. At Pondicherry, he was thus living in practical solitude though in the midst of a town. He stayed in a room on the top floor of Shankar Chetty's house and used to come down only for his bath.

It was here that Sri Aurobindo fasted for twenty-three days. Moni and Bijoy were the two persons who knew about it. During the fast Sri Aurobindo did all his usual work regularly i.e. walking and meditation and writing, etc. And when he broke the fast he took the same quantity of food that he used to take before, i.e. he did not begin to take food gradually as people generally do. He suffered no diminution of mental or vital energy.

(A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, First edition, pp. 141-46)

Due to financial constraints Sri Aurobindo had to change his residence quite a number of times. Purani's narration continues:

In October 1910 Sri Aurobindo moved to rue Suffren, in the southern part of the town — a house belonging to one Sunder Chetty. He remained there till April 1911. [In October 1910] Saurin Bose, a cousin of Mrinalini Devi, came to Pondicherry. [And in November 1910] Nolini Kanta Gupta came to Pondicherry. In all there were four: Moni, Bijoy, Saurin and Nolini.

Up to April 1911 Sri Aurobindo remained in Sunder Chetty's rented house. After April 1911, Sri Aurobindo shifted [. . .] to Raghavan Chetty house in rue St. Louis where he stayed till 1912. There was great economic hardship during this period. In this year cooking was done by turns. All other members used to finish their bath and wait for lunch in the kitchen which was also the dining room. Sri Aurobindo used to take his bath last and come directly to the dining room. There were only two lamps in the house — a candle lamp in Sri Aurobindo's room and a small kerosene lamp in the kitchen. When dinner was ready at night the candle lamp was taken to the kitchen. Motilal Roy quotes a

letter of Sri Aurobindo: “The present position is that we have four annas cash with us.” (*Ibid.*)

During this year Sri Aurobindo gave Latin, Greek and French lessons to Moni and Nolini. Nolini Kanta Gupta had remarked many years later, that living through those outer hardships — with no certainty of a meal the next day, possessing only one multi-purpose mat which served as furniture, with no electricity connections etc. — had trained their vital being and made them fit to follow Sri Aurobindo’s path. Let us also recall that in spite of all this they continued regularly their intellectual pursuits and never missed their daily game of football! “Boys will be boys”!

We get a very touching picture from the writings of the well-known veteran Tamil author known by his pen-name ‘Va.Ra.’.

V. Ramaswamy came from Tanjore in 1911 to stay with Sri Aurobindo. He left for Tanjore in 1913. In his *Veteran Writer Recalls a Few Glimpses* he writes: “One fine morning, in Aurobindo’s house there was hardly any money for marketing. He asked us what things we had for cooking. Some rice, chillies, gingely oil and salt were there. The chillies were fried, the rice was cooked, and there was a grand dinner with the salt added thereto. You should have seen Aurobindo then! What a remarkable man! The man who could roll in wealth and command any convenience! He wanted to finish that day with that ‘hearty’ meal.”

(Shyam Kumari, *More Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, p. 13)

Life at Pondicherry in 1912-13 was hard when they were in Comty Street. Moni or Bijoy, or both, used to make a cup of tea for Sri Aurobindo in the morning. In the afternoon the food consisted of what was cooked in Shankar Chetty’s house. Usually there were: rice, vegetables, *rasam* and *sambar*. At night Sri Aurobindo used to take a cup of *payas* (a kind of milk pudding). In the later days at Comty Street, Moni and Bijoy bought eggs and prepared something for Sri Aurobindo.

When they moved to the hired house in rue Suffren, each of the four members of the household had to cook by turns. The situation of daily meals improved a little now and the daily routine was changed: in the morning tea, milk, sugar and a loaf of bread was given to all. The time for lunch was between 11.30 and 12.30. The food was 3 lbs of meat between five members, or a curry used to be prepared along with other food. Between three and four o’clock in the afternoon, a cup of tea was given only to Sri Aurobindo. At night fish, rice and one vegetable or curry used to be prepared. There was no servant. But, after 1914 a regular servant was engaged. (*Ibid.*, pp. 169-70)

We quote a few lines from Nolini Kanta Gupta's article recalling those times:

We did the cooking ourselves and each of us developed a speciality. I did the rice, perhaps because that was the easiest. Moni took charge of the dal (pulses) and Bijoy being the expert had the vegetables and the curry.

(*Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol. VII, p. 419)

In April 1913 Sri Aurobindo changed his residence from St. Louis Street to a house on Mission Street on a rent of Rs. 15 per month. The reason of the change was economic stress. In October 1913, Sri Aurobindo shifted to "Guest House" on 41, rue François Martin. There were now a few more young men staying with him. Here too, due to financial constraints, the group led a Spartan life.

### **The Mother's first visit in 1914**

The Mother visited Pondicherry for the first time in 1914. She stayed in Dupleix House, on Jawaharlal Nehru Street. During this year the Mother used to come everyday between 4 and 4.30 p.m. to Sri Aurobindo's house and bring sweets prepared from coconut. Moni and Nolini and others used to go to play football at 5 o'clock. The Mother used to prepare cocoa for Sri Aurobindo. Paul Richard used to come up and join them. Every Sunday there was a standing invitation to Sri Aurobindo and all the members of the house for dinner at the Mother's house. Sri Aurobindo used to go to the Mother's house (which was very near) at about 4.30 in the afternoon and the other members joined after coming from the football ground. The talks used to be prolonged up to 9 or 10 at night.

(A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 157)

Haradhan Bakshi of Chandernagore was now in Pondicherry, undergoing military training to join the armed forces in France in World War I. He used to visit the house and meet Sri Aurobindo. Haradhan had once visited Sri Aurobindo during his meal time.

He was grieved to see that Sri Aurobindo's lunch consisted of coarse boiled rice and some *dal* (lentils).

(Shyam Kumari, *Beautiful Vignettes*, p. 44)

### **The Mother's final arrival in 1920**

We had our first real cook only after the Mother's arrival, by which time our number had grown to ten or twelve. There was a cook who had something rather special about her; she had been to Paris and made quite a name there on

account of certain powers of foreseeing the future and other forms of occult vision which she possessed.

*(Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol. VII, p. 419)*

The Mother had already arrived for the second time, this time for good. She was at the Bayoud House where the Dowsetts [used to] . . . live. We were at the Guest House and I remember well how Sri Aurobindo used to call on her every Sunday and dine with her. We too would go along and have a share of the dinner. I need not add that the menu was arranged by the Mother herself and she supervised the cooking in person; she also prepared some of the dishes with her own hands. That is the reason why I say we were really lucky to have a share in those meals. At that time we could only appreciate the physical taste of the food we were served; today I realise what lay behind it.

*(Ibid., pp. 427-28)*

Here we recount another similar incident: D had heard that a great Cambridge scholar lived in Pondicherry. It was in 1915. He and his friends met Sri Aurobindo in Chettiar house and expressed their wish to learn from him. He received them graciously. For five years D came daily after his school and Sri Aurobindo gave him lessons in Latin, Greek, French and English. In 1920, when the Mother came back to Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo took them sometimes to the Mother’s house. Shyam Kumari writes:

Little did D or others of his group realise that the delectable egg-curry which he remembered till the end of his life was cooked by one who was the Divine Mother incarnate.

*(More Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, p. 22)*

By 1921 there was quite an improvement in their outward conditions. The daily diet became more regular. For breakfast all the members had tea, three slices of toast with butter. Dinner generally consisted of fish curry, rice, curd and bread.

T. K. Kodandarama Rao in his article ‘Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as I saw them 50 years back’ gives us a beautiful picture of life in the Ashram at that time. He writes:

In 1921, in the Guest House where the Master and we, — about ten disciples — were living, there was only one common lavatory and a common bare bathroom. The Master along with others made use of these. . . . Clad in a dhoti in all seasons of the year, he was equal to heat and cold. With regard to food, he was never punctilious about the taste or richness or delicacies of food. Whatever was given he tasted with equal *rasa* and often the cook employed

gave unwholesome and tasteless dishes, but the Master enjoyed all kinds of food without murmur.

The Mother was and is a personification of "Grace" . . . She was so kind and gracious to all. After the evening meditation and talks she used to serve cocoa to all before they departed, every evening. For dinner and supper, she led the Master to the Dining Room and attended to the needs of others.

*(Breath of Grace, pp. 46-47)*

### **Sri Aurobindo shifts to 9, rue de la Marine**

In October 1922 Sri Aurobindo and the Mother with Dutta and a few others shifted from the house at 41, rue François Martin to rue de la Marine, which now forms the southwest part of the main Ashram building. One of the rooms in this house where Amrita lived was turned later into a library and the whole house began to be known as Library House. Some inmates and visitors resided at 41, rue François Martin which came to be called the Guest House. On 8 February, 1927, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother moved to the first floor of 28, rue François Martin, the house that now forms the northeastern part of the Ashram main building. The new house, the last one that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother occupied, was called 'Meditation House'.

*(Champaklal Speaks, p. 45)*

The life of this group gets more organised. In 1922, we find that there was a dining room on the ground floor of the Library House. Later, this room was known as the 'Reading Room' and then it changed into the 'Fruit Room'. Sri Aurobindo would come down from his room on the first floor and have his meals with the other members of Library House: Nolini, Bijoy, Amrita, Moni and Barin Ghosh. Champaklal notes that:

it is specially interesting to me that everybody receives fruits from the very room where once Sri Aurobindo had his meals. *(Ibid., p. 42)*

The inmates of the Guest House and a few visitors who stayed there had their own cooking and dining arrangements. Purani managed the household affairs there.

When Dr. Rajangam settled here in 1923, he was in charge of purchases. He used to receive an allowance from Sri Aurobindo for procuring the monthly requirements of the community. He received Rs. 15/- per person as mess charge and Rs. 40/- for the rent of the house. *(Breath of Grace, p. 86)*

Champaklal who had joined the Ashram in 1923, records:

In the Library House, the Mother used to prepare some soup for Sri Aurobindo. Later she asked me to prepare that soup. She would take a cupful for Sri Aurobindo and leave some for me, after sipping it. One day it so happened that the cat,

Bushy, put her mouth in the cup meant for me. On seeing it, Mother quickly removed the top layer of the soup, herself took a mouthful (normally she used to take just a sip) and then told me: “Take it.” She expressed her love and grace in this way in order that I do not shrink from drinking that soup.

(*Champaklal Speaks*, p. 78)

### **A few people start preparing some dishes for Sri Aurobindo**

Dorothy Hodgson came to India with the Mother. She attended to the personal needs of the Mother, took care of the garments and linen used by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Datta was the name given to her by Sri Aurobindo. She loved cooking and prepared salads and also various types of vegetables according to her own recipes for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. We have the names of three other ladies who were here during the years 1922-1926. Champaben, Punamchand’s wife, came in 1923. Punamchand, in consultation with Purani, had obtained Sri Aurobindo’s permission to bring his wife to Pondicherry as he thought she would be of help in the kitchen. Lilavati Purani, Purani’s wife was here from 1924-1926. Jaya Devi (Dr. Upen Banerjee’s sister) arrived in 1926. She was the only Bengali lady here then. Some of these ladies present at that time prepared dishes for Sri Aurobindo and offered them to him.

### **Some of the dishes they prepared for Sri Aurobindo**

In Pujalal’s reminiscences of 1925-26, (*Breath of Grace*, p. 88), it is recorded that Lilavati-ben and Purani prepared some dishes for Sri Aurobindo’s midday meal. This was delivered to one of the inmates of Library House a little before Sri Aurobindo’s meals.

Jaya Devi records that once Barin Ghosh had told her that for a long time Sri Aurobindo had not tasted Bengali food. He requested Jaya Devi to cook something for Sri Aurobindo. For this purpose, Bijoy Nag procured a big *hilsa* fish from the market. But how to cook it? There were no utensils for cooking! So an aluminum pot was also purchased for this purpose. She prepared the dish. Sri Aurobindo sat with five disciples around him and as there was no serving dish, “I placed the whole pot near his plate,” remembers Jaya Devi. “He only smiled but did not say anything.” (*Mother India*, 1970)

Here is an interesting culmination to the above episode, which used to be recounted by Jaya Devi to her friends and to her relatives, “After Sri Aurobindo’s meal was over, I had asked Barin-da ‘How was the cooking, Dada?’ The reply I got was ‘Where did we get a chance to taste it? He had himself taken the entire fish! We tasted a little bit of the gravy only!’”

We have already come to know that before 1920 three young men, Nolini,

Suresh, and Bijoy managed the cooking and that in 1920, after the Mother's arrival, a proper cook was engaged in the Guest House. Champaklal records that cooking in Library House was done by an old pariah woman. "She was fair enough to be taken as a Brahmin. She was clean in her habits. She had worked as a cook in France. Her cooking was good. She would make delicious dishes with macaroni." This lady also helped Datta in preparing the soup (*Champaklal Speaks*, p. 48). Bala, son of the maid who worked for the Mother, was trained by Pavitra to work as a driver; he informed us that his grandmother used to cut vegetables for Datta and the young men.

At a certain time, Sri Aurobindo discontinued taking his meals in the dining area. The Mother had informed Bijoy to send Sri Aurobindo's meals to the first-floor room. Thus we may presume that Bijoy was still looking after the preparation of the food and Champaklal used to carry the food to Sri Aurobindo.

Milk was part of the daily diet of the inmates. Here are some interesting details about the care that was taken to safeguard the cleanliness of the milk for the inmates: 'Rosary House', adjacent to Library House was acquired in 1925, on rent; the cows were brought by that gate, washed and cleaned, then the milkmen would bring their cleaned cows to the courtyard of Library House for milking.

In the courtyard facing it (present reading room in the Ashram main building) was a thatched shed where the milkmen brought their cows supplying the milk required. Before milking, their udders used to be washed with a mild solution of potassium permanganate. In 1925 the Mother used to be present herself at the time of milking. Later she passed this work on to Amrita.

(Narayan Prasad, *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 23)

We get again a similar report from Champaklal:

An interesting feature those days was that the cows were brought by their owners to the customers' houses and milked in their presence . . . (in 1925) after the Mother was informed that the cows had been brought to the front courtyard, she would send a vessel downstairs with a cloth strainer to cover it and then herself come down and hold the strainer over the vessel.

(*Champaklal Speaks*, p. 42)

### **Where was the kitchen situated in those early years?**

We now have some idea regarding Sri Aurobindo's food. But where was the cooking done? Which room was used as the kitchen? On the southern corner of the courtyard of the Ashram building, there is a room which is now used as Gents' toilet. In an early photograph taken in 1929, one finds a small chimney on the roof of this room. Dyuman, when asked about the location of the kitchen in those early years, before

his arrival, said that he was not quite sure, but this room could have been the kitchen.

We get the first written record about the kitchen in Sahana’s article where she recounts:

Across Library House one stepped into a smaller courtyard. On the left of this there was a tiled hut used as the kitchen.

This was a small room of brick with a tiled roof which was situated a little to the south of the of the *Samadhi* in the present Ashram courtyard. This is where the

... cooking was done by maid-servants, but the food was served by the inmates. *Sadhikas* had not yet been engaged for this service which happened a year or two after my arrival in 1928.

(Sahana, *Breath of Grace*, p. 111)

The cooking which was done by paid maids was not always very palatable. So, some gentlemen volunteered to cook by turns to improve the condition. However, that was also not very successful. The manager of Dining Room requested the Mother that ladies could take over the job. But the Mother disapproved of the idea and her answer was most interesting.

Indian women have been in the kitchen for thousands of years. I will not have it so.  
(Shyam Kumari, *Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, p. 50)

Nolini Kanta Gupta writes:

I had, as I said, some practice in the work of the kitchen and I took it up again later on. For some time — we were fifty in all by then — I did some serving and in addition to cooking once a week. What kind of cooking was that? In those days, we used to have pudding, *payas*, for dinner three times a week. Ordinary rice pudding, fried rice pudding, and tapioca pudding. I did the tapioca. It was rather in the fitness of things that the hands that had once been used to making bombs should now do some sweets.

(*Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol. VII, p. 420)

Thus, we find there were in 1928 two kitchens in the Ashram building — one for general cooking in the courtyard on the ground floor and the other on the first floor of the building where Champaklal prepared soup.

We were told of an interesting episode, of the time when Sri Aurobindo was staying in the Library House. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo shifted in 1927 to their present residence in Meditation House. The Mother did not want Sri Aurobindo to be seen by

others as he walked from Library House down to the new building. So, Champa-ben's silk saris were held as curtains on either side of Sri Aurobindo for this purpose.

## Soup Ceremony

An interesting chapter in the Ashram's 'Food History' was the 'Soup Ceremony'. Every evening, at 8 p.m. the inmates would gather in the present Reception Room. The Mother would also be present there and after the collective meditation, each inmate received a bowl of soup from the Mother. It was called the 'Soup Ceremony'. Here are some details of this function from different *sadhakas*.

Narayan Prasad recollects:

The distribution of soup was started from 1927 in an open space known as Champaklal's terrace. Later it was shifted to the verandah of Prosperity hall. Afterwards it was shifted to the Divine Communion Room which is now used as Reception Room (in the main Ashram building). The *sadhakas* gathered and sat in their fixed places long before the coming of the Mother. The light was dim. . . . There is a deeper and inner meaning as to why it was introduced just after the great *siddhi* of November 1926 and it had its immediate effect upon those who could receive it but it is a pity that we could not assimilate the effect. Luckily for us, its significance was described by the Master himself: "The soup was instituted in order to establish a means by which the *sadhaka* might receive something from the Mother by an interchange in the material consciousness."

(Narayan Prasad, *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, pp. 63-64)

Sahana records:

The ceremony would last more than an hour and a profound silence charged with an intense inner glow was maintained all through. In that dim light it felt as if a glimpse of a new world, the reflection of a higher being, had fallen upon the consciousness and was spreading itself. Some other influence than the earthly became dense and perceptible. The inner and outer parts seemed to get crystallised in that condensed stillness and one's identity started fading away. I could not perceive where I was or where I had entered — unknown, unheard-of perceptions of the inner world would become distinct. Amidst all these things the Mother looked wonderfully charming and manifested divine moods. Her eyes did not appear at all like human eyes. And what a look. Piercing the bodily armour it could reach the innermost part, and see its very core. And her smile had no parallel, it cannot be compared either. She very often kept holding in her hand the soup-cup in a state of immobile trance. Then, as she returned to her physical consciousness, the distribution would begin again in an easy natural manner — as if nothing had happened in the interval.

(*At the Feet of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo*, pp. 10-11)

Amal Kiran’s notes on the same topic:

A few years after Tagore’s interview (with Sri Aurobindo in 1928) the Mother’s body again suffered — now a much more serious illness as a result of nearly four years of the physico-spiritual practice of what we knew as Soup-distribution. Every evening, at first in the upstairs verandah of the “Library House” (9, Rue de la Marine) and later in what is now the Reception Room downstairs in the same building, we used to sit in semi-darkness, meditating. The Mother would be in a chair in front of us. Champaklal would bring a big cauldron of hot soup and place it on a stool in front of her. He stood by while she went into a trance. After some minutes, with her eyes still shut, she would spontaneously stretch out her arms, and her palms were poised over the cauldron. She was transmitting the power of Sri Aurobindo into the soup. After a while her eyes opened and she withdrew her hands. Then the distribution started. Each of us went to her, bent down on our knees and gave her our enamel cup. Then with a ladle she poured the soup from the cauldron into our cups. Before handing each cup back she would again withdraw inward with eyes half shut and take a sip. Sometimes after the sip she was lost once more in a trance and we had to wait until she came out of it. When the time was rather long she gave a faint apologetic smile. The occult truth behind the ceremony was that she was putting something of her own spiritualised subtle-physical substance into the soup in our cups. This was naturally a strain on her which could be compensated only if something in our being went out to her in return. Unfortunately, the yogic traffic was often one-way. The consequence was a severe strain on the Mother’s body. This strain was the real cause of her illness.

(Amal Kiran, *Our Light and Delight*, p. 96)

This is a wonderful experience indeed which we of the present generation can only try mentally to visualise and feel the joy.

Champaklal’s records reveal more details:

It was during the period when Sri Aurobindo was attending to correspondence with the sadhaks. . . . Sri Aurobindo would sit in a chair covered with a deer-skin and the Mother on a small couch for this correspondence work; sometimes he would read out to her his replies. . . . This work grew so much in the first five years of the 1930s that Sri Aurobindo often had to spend the whole night in replying. After his accident in 1938, correspondence had to be restricted to a handful of sadhaks. . . . While they replied to the letters, I waited outside in the vestibule (where nowadays a life-size photo of the Mother is kept on *Darshan* days) with a flask of soup and a cup and saucer placed on a tray on a small cupboard. (I used to prepare the soup in the way Mother had taught me

and bring it when I came in the evening.) . . . After their work was over, Sri Aurobindo would come to where I was standing and wait till I poured the soup in the cup and put the cup on the saucer. Holding the saucer in both hands, he then carried it slowly and carefully inside to the Mother. It was a magnificent sight to see him doing this.

*(Champaklal Speaks, p. 93)*

### **Helpers to prepare the 'soup'**

We came to know some things about the work of preparing the soup. Bansidhar who came here in 1927 recalls that

The Mother used to distribute soup to all the sadhaks in the evening. Sri Aurobindo also took soup in his room. This soup was being prepared by Champaklal, but the work of cleaning and cutting the vegetables for making the soup for Sri Aurobindo was given to me. I may mention that the vegetables cooked for Sri Aurobindo and the sadhaks were purchased from Madras. Cabbage, leek, celery and carrots were being received in a parcel from Madras. A bill also came along with the parcel. I used to check the bill. Now there was a shop here where the shop keeper used to get all his vegetables from Bangalore. I found that the cabbages from Bangalore were cheaper than the cabbages from Madras. I told this to the Mother. Afterwards, under her instructions I used to go to the local bazaar every week and purchase all the vegetables needed. The vegetables were shown to the Mother, who examined them with great interest. The payment was done by Dyuman.

*(Advent, February 1994)*

We get some more information regarding this work. Kamala-ben came to the Ashram in 1928 and used to work in a small room on the first floor of the Library House. There used to be two almirahs in the small room on the first floor of Library House where she used to cut vegetables for the soup to be prepared by Champaklal. Towards the north of this small room, a door opens into quite a long room. Two small rooms are found in this hall. Mother had given names in 1929, to the first room as 'Flame' and the second as 'Water', where a water tap is present even now. Kamala-ben used to light an oven (*chulha*) in the first room every morning, for Champaklal's work. Later Dr. Rajangam also used this room as his kitchen where he used to prepare some soup for the Mother.

*(To be continued)*

*Compiled by* CHITRA SEN

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

*(Continued from the issue of April 2020)*

## **1. KINDNESS AND COMPASSION**

### **(Part 8)**

In the last episode we had ascertained that Sri Aurobindo was the ultimate idealist. A snippet of a letter to a political leader reads, “I am an idealist to the marrow”.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter we shall further touch upon this aspect of Sri Aurobindo but also disclose how he introduced the aspect of love in his politics.

Sri Aurobindo was far more than “an amiable and cultured gentleman”. He was not only deeply concerned about the foreign domination and oppression of his beloved Motherland but was also sensitive to the sufferings of his countrymen. This was the principal reason he entered the political field and bore an enormous burden as a nationalist leader, in India’s freedom struggle. In this context, it is interesting to note what Sri Aurobindo had to say about Asutosh Chaudhuri, an educationist who chaired a couple of provincial Congress conferences in Bengal:

Mr. Chaudhuri is not a political leader with a distinct following in the country who are likely to carry out his ideas. . . . he has not the qualities of a politician — robustness, backbone, the ability to will a certain course of action and the courage to carry it out. He has intellectual sensitiveness, but not intellectual consistency. Suave, affable, pliable, essentially an amiable and cultured gentleman, he is unfit for the rough and tumble of political life, especially in a revolutionary period; no man who shrinks from struggle or is appalled by the thought of aggression can hope to seize and lead the wild forces that are rising to the surface in twentieth-century India.<sup>2</sup>

Sri Aurobindo was a true patriot, his idealism encompassed his love for his country and countrymen and shaped his political philosophy and actions. Apropos India’s freedom struggle he wrote in the *Bande Mataram*: “Without a great ideal there can be no great movement.”<sup>3</sup>

1. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 258.

2. *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, p. 524.

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, p. 348.

The Mother has explained why true patriots deeply love India:

Just as each individual has a psychic being which is his true self and which governs his destiny more or less overtly, so too each nation has a psychic being which is its true being and moulds its destiny from behind the veil: it is the soul of the country, the national genius, the spirit of the people, the centre of national aspiration, the fountainhead of all that is beautiful, noble, great and generous in the life of the country. True patriots feel its presence as a tangible reality. In India it has been made into an almost divine entity, and all who truly love their country call it “Mother India” (Bharat Mata) and offer her a daily prayer for the welfare of their country. It is she who symbolises and embodies the true ideal of the country, its true mission in the world.<sup>4</sup>

Alluding to Sri Aurobindo as a patriot and an idealist, the Mother remarked:

Sri Aurobindo always loved deeply his Motherland. But he wished her to be great, noble, pure and worthy of her big mission in the world. He refused to let her sink to the sordid and vulgar level of blind self-interests and ignorant prejudices.<sup>5</sup>

The nationalist leader Bipin Chandra Pal wrote:

His only care is for his country — the Mother as he always calls her. His only recognised obligations are to her. Nationalism, at the best a concern of the intellect, with some at the lowest a political cry, and an aspiration with others, is with Aravinda the supreme passion of his soul. Few, indeed, have grasped the full force and meaning of the Nationalist ideal as Aravinda has done . . .<sup>6</sup>

As early as 1893-94, as a mere 21-year-old, Sri Aurobindo’s love for India and his nobility of spirit shines through his writings in the *Indu Prakash*. A small extract reads:

. . . I again assert as our first and holiest duty, the elevation and enlightenment of the proletariat: I again call on those nobler spirits among us who are working erroneously, it may be, but with incipient or growing sincerity and nobleness of mind, to divert their strenuous effort from the promotion of narrow class-

4. CWM, Vol. 12, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., pp. 42-43.

5. *Ibid.*, Vol. 13, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 123.

6. Shree Krishna Prasad, ‘Sri Aurobindo: “The Prophet of Nationalism, the Lover of Humanity”’, *Mother India*, August 1969, p. 483.

interests, from silly squabbles about offices and salaried positions, from a philanthropy laudable in itself and worthy of rational pursuit, but meagre in the range of its benevolence and ineffectual towards promoting the nearest interests of the nation, into that vaster channel through which alone the healing waters may be conducted to the lips of their ailing and tortured country.<sup>7</sup>

Besides Bipin Chandra Pal, the other nationalist leaders knew of Sri Aurobindo's idealism, nobility and strength of character. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who knew Sri Aurobindo intimately, said: "None is equal to Aravinda in self-sacrifice, knowledge and sincerity,"<sup>8</sup> and Lala Lajpat Rai spoke of Sri Aurobindo being "the purest minded and the most intellectual of Bengal's gifted sons."<sup>9</sup> Sudhir Ranjan Das (1894-1977), a cousin of Chittaranjan Das who later became the 5<sup>th</sup> Chief Justice of India, was an admirer of Sri Aurobindo. He said that C. R. Das held Sri Aurobindo in high esteem and venerated him for his ideals.<sup>10</sup>

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes:

Sister Nivedita and others who watched Sri Aurobindo at close quarters could see that he was a man of God, that his Nationalism was really a new religion.<sup>11</sup>

From Japan in the Far East, Shumei Okawa, described as "the leading spirit of the pan-Asiatic movement in Japan", wrote an article, 'A Sage, Arabindo Ghosh', and stated, "Arabinda Ghosh is a great character whom modern India has produced, or rather only India can produce."<sup>12</sup>

In December 1907, Sri Aurobindo made it clear to Mrinalini Devi that his ideal in life far surpassed that of the common Bengali:

. . . unlike the ordinary Bengali, I cannot make the happiness of family and relatives my primary aim in life. Under these circumstances, there is no way out for you except to consider my ideal as your ideal and find your happiness in the success of my appointed work.<sup>13</sup>

In an article dated February 1908, titled 'Work and Ideal', he revealed that a living ideal has a great power:

7. CWSA, Vol. 6, p. 51.

8. Cited in Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 119.

9. Cited in Sujata Nahar, *Mother's Chronicles*, Book V, p. 378.

10. See S. R. Das, 'A Reminiscence of Sri Aurobindo', *Mother India*, January 1959, p. 51.

11. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 235.

12. *Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research*, December 1994, p. 240.

13. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 1993, p. 70.

But the work is nothing without the ideal, and will be fruitless if divorced from its inspiring force. . . . Let the truly inspiring word be uttered and it will breathe life into dry bones. Let the inspiring life be lived and it will produce workers by thousands. England draws her inspiration from the names of Shakespeare and Milton, Mill and Bacon, Nelson and Wellington. . . . theirs are the names which have made nationhood possible in England, which have supplied work and enterprise with its motive and sustaining force. England is commercially great because Adam Smith gave her the secret of free-trade. England is politically great because her national ideals have been bold and high . . . Wolfe had Gray's "Elegy" recited to him on his death bed, and said he would rather be the author of these lines than the captor of Quebec. These are the utterances of great workers and heroes, they have given the greatest credit to the givers of ideas and ideals, because they have felt in their own life where the inspiration for work comes from. Work without ideals is a false gospel.<sup>14</sup>

In many of the personalities in Indian legends, history and literature, Sri Aurobindo saw and appreciated extraordinary ideals and nobility that had influenced the character of Indians over the ages. He writes:

The imagination of the Indian tended as has been well said to the grand & enormous in thought and morals. The great formative images of legend & literature to the likeness with which his childhood was encouraged to develop & which his manhood most cherished were of an extreme & lofty type. He saw Harischundra give up all that life held precious & dear rather than that his lips should utter a lie or his plighted word be broken. He saw Prahlada buried under mountains, whelmed in the seas, tortured by the poison of a thousand venomous serpents, yet calmly true to his faith. He saw Buddha give up his royal state, wealth, luxury, wife, child & parents so that mankind might be saved. He saw Shivi hew the flesh from his own limbs to save one small dove from the pursuing falcon; Karna tear his own body with a smile for the joy of making a gift; Duryodhan refuse to yield one inch of earth without noble resistance & warlike struggle. He saw Sita face exile, hardship, privation & danger in the eagerness of wifely love & duty, Savitri rescue by her devotion her husband back from the visible grip of death. These were the classical Indian types. These were the ideals into the mould of which the minds of men & women were trained to grow. The sense-conquering thought of the philosopher, the magnificent achievements of the hero, the stupendous renunciations of the Sannyasin, [the] unbounded liberality of the man of wealth, everything was exaggeration, extreme, filled with an epic inspiration, a world-defying enthusiasm.<sup>15</sup>

14. CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 879-81.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 1096-97.

Sudhir Kumar Sarkar narrates an incident that reflects not only Sri Aurobindo's in-depth knowledge of Indian mythology, literature and culture but also his sensitive side, always understanding and comforting the doubts or weaknesses of others:

Seeing Sri Aurobindo absorbed in his work on the Mahabharata, I asked him one day, rather with a motive, "Do you really believe everything that is written in Mahabharata? I have heard that there is much in it that was added later." Sri Aurobindo seemed to be extremely surprised at the question, as if he never expected it from me. I felt very ashamed and my words became confused. But Sri Aurobindo seemed to understand and was pained at my feeling of embarrassment and went on to explain in his gentle and halting Bengali, so sweet to hear; the story of Vasuki supporting the earth on its head is as true as our existence — but the vision which revealed it has been lost to us. And the visions through which we observed the modern scientific world, which has evolved through a long process of action and counteraction, is not the whole of man's vision. . . . Behind the body of all creatures lies the subtle body of the great creative Energy in seed form. The subtle body becomes veiled upon taking this gross body. The ideas and beliefs of the Hindus were not false. We have now to regain that Vision. Because of our present state of ignorance, there is so much suffering and want, so much stress and anguish for awakening.<sup>16</sup>

Sri Aurobindo had spoken about India restoring "the tone of nobility which it has lost and bring back the ideals of the ancient Aryan gentleman."<sup>17</sup> In ancient India's rich spiritual and cultural heritage Sri Aurobindo saw the noblest of thoughts and actions, unique morals and unsurpassable ideals. An extract from one of his manuscripts of 1907-08 reads:

The spirit of ancient India was aristocratic; its thought & life moulded in the cast of a high & proud nobility, an extreme & lofty strenuousness. The very best in thought, the very best in action, the very best in character, the very best in literature & art, the very best in religion and all the world well lost if only this very best might be attained, such was the spirit of ancient India. The Brahmin who devoted himself to poverty & crushed down every desire in the wholehearted pursuit of knowledge & religious self-discipline; the Kshatriya who, hurling his life joyously into the shock of chivalrous battle, held life, wife, children, possessions, ease, happiness as mere dust in the balance compared with honour & the Kshatriya dharma, the preservation of self-respect, the protection of the weak, the noble fulfilment of princely duty; the Vaishya,

16. *A Spirit Indomitable*, edited by Mona Sarkar, 1989, pp. 91-92.

17. CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 975-76.

who toiling all his life to amass riches, poured them out as soon as amassed in self-forgetting philanthropy holding himself the mere steward & not the possessor of his wealth; the Shudra who gave himself up loyally to humble service, faithfully devoting his life to his dharma, however low, in preference to self-advancement & ambition; these were the social ideals of the age.<sup>18</sup>

Sri Aurobindo considered the Kshatriya dharma of “the protection of the weak” as one of his duties. He told Mrinalini Devi in 1905:

. . . helping others is *dharma*, to protect those who depend on you is great *dharma* . . .<sup>19</sup>

In ‘The Morality of Boycott’, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

To maintain justice and prevent the strong from despoiling and the weak from being oppressed is the function for which the Kshatriya was created. Therefore, says Sri Krishna in the Mahabharat, God created battle and armour, the sword, the bow and the dagger.<sup>20</sup>

Sri Aurobindo sensed he was a man of destiny who came to uplift the weak. In a letter of August 1905 to his wife, he wrote:

I know I have the strength to deliver this fallen race. . . .This feeling is not new in me, it is not of today. I was born with it, it is in my very marrow. God sent me to earth to accomplish this great mission.<sup>21</sup>

In a speech in Nasik in January 1908, Sri Aurobindo first quoted the Gita, “To save the pious, to punish the wicked, to protect religion I create myself in every age,” and then continued, “So said God.”<sup>22</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s courage, determination and strength of character in implementing his political ideology makes him truly a remarkable person. Furthermore his quiet demeanour and nobility adds another dimension to his personality. In a hymn, Sri Aurobindo evokes Mother Durga:

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 1095-96.

19. Sri Aurobindo, *Bengali Writings*, 1991, p. 351. [Translated from Bengali]

20. CWSA, Vol. 7, p. 1121.

21. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 82.

22. Extract from Bombay Presidency Police, Abstract of Intelligence, Vol. XXI of 1908 (*Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, p. 163).

Mother, give to our heart and mind a titan's strength, a titan's energy, to our soul and intelligence a god's character and knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

Besides being an idealist, Sri Aurobindo was, curiously, a leader who brought the element of love into the turbulence and turmoil of politics. No wonder Tilak's journal, *Mahratta*, called him a "sweet soul", whilst Lala Lajpat Rai hailed him as "a man of purity."<sup>24</sup> The respected nationalist Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya said: "In the wideness of his heart, he is great,"<sup>25</sup> Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary comrade, Charu Chandra Dutt, said that Sri Aurobindo's "outstanding quality was an infinite compassion",<sup>26</sup> and Sri Aurobindo's brother, the revolutionary, Barin, spoke about his "deep and charming personality."<sup>27</sup>

About the role of love in politics Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Bande Mataram*:

Love has a place in politics, but it is the love of one's country, for one's countrymen, for the glory, greatness and happiness of the race the divine *ananda* of self-immolation for one's fellows, the ecstasy of relieving their sufferings, the joy of seeing one's blood flow for country and freedom, the bliss of union in death with the fathers of the race.<sup>28</sup>

In a *Bande Mataram* article titled 'Unity by Co-operation', Sri Aurobindo writes of building centres that meet "the ideal of love and justice":

Of all the little bodies which we are trying to build up for the regeneration of the country, those are the true centres of strength which come nearest to the ideal of love and justice, which bind their members together in a close and affectionate unity, which form a league of brotherhood and mutual help . . .<sup>29</sup>

In a speech at Kishoregunj, on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1908, Sri Aurobindo tried to restore the lost sense of love and brotherhood amongst his countrymen:

Swaraj, finally, is impossible without unity. But the unity we need for Swaraj is not a unity of opinion, a unity of speech, a unity of intellectual conviction.

23. Sri Aurobindo, *Bengali Writings*, 1991, p. 3. [Translated from Bengali by Nolini Kanta Gupta, and seen by Sri Aurobindo]

24. Cited in Manoj Das, 'Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi', *Mother India*, December 2014, p. 1019 (Lajpat Rai, *India's Will to Freedom*, Ganesh & Co., Chennai, 1921).

25. Brahmabandhav Upadhyay, 'Aurobindo in Manasarovar' (translated from Bengali by Aniruddha Sircar), *Mother India*, June 2004, p. 518.

26. Charu Chandra Dutt, 'My Friend and my Master', *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, p. 123.

27. Cited in *Champaklal's Treasures*, edited by M. P. Pandit and Roshan, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 2008, p. 167.

28. *CWSA*, Vol. 7, pp. 1118-19.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 941.

Unity is of the heart and springs from love. The foreign organism which has been living on us, lives by the absence of this love, by division, and it perpetuates the condition of its existence by making us look to it as the centre of our lives and away from our Mother and her children. . . . The Zemindar felt that he was one with his tenants and could not justify his existence if they were suffering, so his first thought was to meet their wants and remove their disabilities. But now that we look to a foreign source for everything, this love for our countrymen, this habit of mutual assistance, this sense of mutual duty has disappeared. Each man is for himself and if anything is to be done for our brothers, there is the government to do it and it is no concern of ours. This drying up of the springs of mutual affection is the cause which needs most to be removed and the village Samiti is again the first condition of a better state of things. It will destroy the aloofness, the separateness of our lives and bring us back the sense of community, the habit of mutual assistance and mutual beneficence. It will take up the want of water and remove it. It will introduce arbitration courts and, by healing our family feuds and individual discords, restore the lost sense of brotherhood.<sup>30</sup>

Even the vexing problem of Hindu-Muslim unity, can be solved, wrote Sri Aurobindo in the *Karmayogin*, by “love” and “sympathy of the heart”:

Of one thing we may be certain, that Hindu-Mahomedan unity cannot be effected by political adjustments or Congress flatteries. It must be sought deeper down, in the heart and the mind, for where the causes of disunion are, there the remedies must be sought. We shall do well in trying to solve the problem to remember that misunderstanding is the most fruitful cause of our differences, that love compels love and that strength conciliates the strong. We must strive to remove the causes of misunderstanding by a better mutual knowledge and sympathy; we must extend the unfaltering love of the patriot to our Musulman brother, remembering always that in him too Narayana dwells and to him too our Mother has given a permanent place in her bosom; but we must cease to approach him falsely or flatter out of a selfish weakness and cowardice. . . . We shall make it a main part of our work to place Mahomed and Islam in a new light before our readers, to spread juster views of Mahomedan history and civilisation, to appreciate the Musulman’s place in our national development and the means of harmonising his communal life with our own, not ignoring the difficulties that stand in our way but making the most of the possibilities of brotherhood and mutual understanding. Intellectual sympathy can only draw

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 1050-51.

together, the sympathy of the heart can alone unite. But the one is a good preparation for the other.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, Chittaranjan Das had characterised Sri Aurobindo as the “lover of humanity.” In his closing argument while defending Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Bomb Trial he said:

My appeal to you is this, that long after the controversy will be hushed in silence, long after this turmoil and the agitation will have ceased, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed, not only in India but across distant seas and lands. Therefore I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the Bar of this Court, but before the Bar of the High Court of History.<sup>32</sup>

C. R. Das was no ordinary man. On his passing Sri Aurobindo sent a message:

Chittaranjan’s death is a supreme loss. Consummately endowed with political intelligence, constructive imagination, magnetism, driving force combining a strong will and an uncommon plasticity of mind for vision and tact of the hour, he was the one man after Tilak who could have led India to Swaraj.<sup>33</sup>

Alluding to Sri Aurobindo’s involvement in the aforementioned Alipore Bomb Case, Dinendra Kumar Roy writes:

It is totally unthinkable that a man like him whose honesty was beyond dispute, whose nature was generous, devout, compassionate, considerate of others’ pain, lacking in violence or hatred, that such a man could plot with bombs and be involved in a plan to kill human beings.”<sup>34</sup>

Roy adds, “I never heard him express a word of contempt for the formidable British government.”<sup>35</sup>

A similar observation was echoed by A. C. Bannerji, Bar-at-Law:

31. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 31.

32. Cited in Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., p. 215.

33. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 279.

34. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, pp. 42-43.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

I was on friendly terms with Aurobindo and met him on many occasions in private. We freely discussed public questions. To my knowledge, he never suggested recourse to violence; so far as I knew the man he was constitutionally incapable of doing so. He never suggested anything like it. I always thought him more a philosopher than a politician.<sup>36</sup>

As regards Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary activities, Dinendra Kumar Roy has apparently misunderstood him. When a statement was presented to Sri Aurobindo that he "did not believe in, nor did he like, violent revolution", he corrected it to:

This is incorrect. If Sri Aurobindo had not believed in the efficacy of violent revolution or had disliked it, he would not have joined the secret society whose whole purpose was to prepare a national insurrection. His historical studies had not taught him the lesson indicated here. On the contrary, he had studied with interest the revolutions and rebellions which led to national liberation, the struggle against the English in mediaeval France and the revolts which liberated America and Italy. He took much of his inspiration from these movements and their leaders, especially Jeanne d'Arc and Mazzini. In his public activity he took up non-cooperation and passive resistance as a means in the struggle for independence but not the sole means and so long as he was in Bengal he maintained a secret revolutionary activity as a preparation for open revolt, in case passive resistance proved insufficient for the purpose.<sup>37</sup>

Sri Aurobindo was a man of destiny. In a conversation with his disciples he explained the principle of *kartavya karma*:

I had myself got that nervous shrinking. Bipin Pal and I once went to Dakshineswar temple. There a great [animal] sacrifice was going on. I stood it all right but Pal was very much disturbed. I got rid of it completely in jail. Pity and nervous shrinking are weaknesses of the vital being. . . . When a thing is to be done then it is *kartavya karma*, as you know from the Gita. At that time if I am full of pity it is a weakness. If it is a question of driving out the British, you can't think of pity at the same time! You can't think of the loss of jobs of many persons or loss to British commerce.

Shrinking is nervous in its nature, and pity is in the heart. It is an emotion.<sup>38</sup>

Sri Aurobindo has observed that:

36. Cited in Manoj Das, 'Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi', *Mother India*, January 2016, p. 38.

37. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 71.

38. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 410.

In the God-nature to which we have to rise there can be an adamantine, even a destructive severity but not hatred, a divine irony but not scorn, a calm, clear-seeing and forceful rejection but not repulsion and dislike. Even what we have to destroy, we must not abhor or fail to recognise as a disguised and temporary movement of the Eternal.<sup>39</sup>

Sri Aurobindo has also written that he

... 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.<sup>40</sup>

Here it is important to clearly differentiate between samata, pity and compassion. Sri Aurobindo lucidly explains:

By Samata, is meant a certain attitude of the whole being towards the world and its happenings. This world is full of so many things which are horrible and terrible. Samata means that one should be able to look at them from a certain poise without being perplexed or moved. It does not mean that one will go on killing others indiscriminately or out of a personal motive. That would be untruth. But it means that one must be able to look at things without being moved. What X calls "pity" is something quite different from "compassion" and both are different from Samata which is an attitude of the whole being. Pity and sentimentalism are results of nervous repulsion, some movement in the vital being. I myself, when I was young, could not read anything related to cruelty without feeling that repulsion and a feeling of hatred for those who practised it. I could not kill even a bug or a mosquito. This was not because I believed in Ahimsa but because I had nervous repulsion. Later, even when I had no mental objection, I could not harm anything because the body rejected the act. When I was in jail I was subjected to all sorts of mental tortures for the first fifteen days. I had to look upon scenes of all kinds of suffering and then the nervous repulsion passed away.

Compassion is something different. It comes from Above. It is a state of sympathy for the suffering of man and the suffering that is on earth and there is an idea of helping it as far as one can, whenever one can in his own way. It is not like pity. It is like the Gods who look upon human suffering from above, unmoved. That compassion can also destroy and it destroys with compassion as Durga does the Rakshasas. There can be no pity there. Many times the

39. CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 223.

40. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 48.

Rakshasa may come and ask you to save him, he may even ask you to transform him — as some beings asked the Mother in her vision — by your spiritual power. If you try that, all the power goes to the Rakshasa and you may become powerless. When these vital beings incarnate in men then the compassion would not prevent you from killing them.<sup>41</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's decision to sacrifice his career at Baroda to join the freedom struggle can be seen through the prism of an aphorism of his:

He who will not slay when God bids him, works in the world an incalculable havoc.<sup>42</sup>

In *The Synthesis of Yoga* Sri Aurobindo writes:

The passions, even the passion for good, misrepresent the divine nature. The passion of pity with its impure elements of physical repulsion and emotional inability to bear the suffering of others has to be rejected and replaced by the higher divine compassion which sees, understands, accepts the burden of others and is strong to help and heal . . .<sup>43</sup>

Sri Aurobindo loved his Motherland dearly. Eminent historian Dr. R.C. Majumdar wrote that Sri Aurobindo

. . . regarded patriotism as a form of devotion and expressly said that “to the new generations, the redemption of their motherland should be regarded as the true religion, the only means of salvation.”<sup>44</sup>

Noted Historian Tara Chand, writes of Sri Aurobindo's unparalleled devotion to his country: “His love of India was for him the utterly unreserved abandonment of the worshipper to God.”<sup>45</sup>

Yet, Sri Aurobindo did not loathe the British for exploiting his country. He wrote that he:

. . . never based his case for freedom on racial hatred or charges of tyranny or misgovernment, but always on the inalienable right of the nation to indepen-

41. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, pp. 306-07.

42. CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 455.

43. *Ibid.*, Vol. 23, pp. 353-54.

44. Cited in Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 209.

45. Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. 3, 1972, pp. 151-52.

dence. His stand was that even good government could not take the place of national government, — independence.<sup>46</sup>

On the Nationalist principle of Swadeshi and Boycott Sri Aurobindo clarified that:

. . . boycott is not an act of hate. It is an act of self-defence, of aggression for the sake of self-preservation. To call it an act of hate is to say that a man who is being slowly murdered, is not justified in striking out at his murderer.<sup>47</sup>

In ‘An Open Letter to My Countrymen’, published in *Karmayogin* in July 1909, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Our ideal of Swaraj involves no hatred of any other nation nor of the administration which is now established by law in this country. . . . They lie who say that this aspiration necessitates hatred and violence. Our ideal of patriotism proceeds on the basis of love and brotherhood and it looks beyond the unity of the nation and envisages the ultimate unity of mankind. But it is a unity of brothers, equals and freemen that we seek, not the unity of master and serf, of devourer and devoured.<sup>48</sup>

Even as late as 1923 Sri Aurobindo told Abinash Bhattacharya of the English:

I do not reproach or hate them. But I still want our fallen Mother India to rise once again, resplendent and glorious.<sup>49</sup>

In 1944 the internationally renowned weekly, London’s *Times Literary Supplement*, wrote an article on Sri Aurobindo where an extract read: “There is no doubt that he is a true patriot who would like to see his country free, happy and great; but he is no foe of Britain.”<sup>50</sup>

In 1905, Sri Aurobindo had compared the British government to a demon sitting on his mother’s breast sucking her blood.<sup>51</sup> Yet, during the Second World War, arguably Britain’s most perilous hour in history, Sri Aurobindo came to the

46. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 81.

47. *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, p. 1118.

48. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, pp. 152-53.

49. Abinash Bhattacharya, ‘Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, July 2012, p. 538.

50. Website: <http://savitri.in/blogs/light-of-supreme/sri-aurobindo-a-philosopher-of-modern-india-times-literary-supplement-1-july-1994>, accessed on 30th January 2020; See ‘Tributes to Sri Aurobindo from Celebrities’, *Mother India*, August 1997, p. 614.

51. See *Bengali Writings*, 1991, letter to Mrinalini, letter dated 30<sup>th</sup> August 1905, p. 353. [Translated from Bengali]

rescue of the British people by sending his spiritual and occult force to prevent Hitler invading England. Here one is reminded of two of Sri Aurobindo's aphorisms:

Thou thinkest the ascetic in his cave or on his mountaintop a stone and a do-nothing? What dost thou know? He may be filling the world with the mighty currents of his will & changing it by the pressure of his soul-state.<sup>52</sup>

The Theosophists are wrong in their circumstances but right in the essential. If the French Revolution took place, it was because a soul on the Indian snows dreamed of God as freedom, brotherhood and equality.<sup>53</sup>

Although Winston Churchill vehemently opposed the idea of Indian independence, Sri Aurobindo used him as an instrument to counter Hitler, as he was open to his force. When WWII commenced Sri Aurobindo was unhappy that Neville Chamberlain was Prime Minister. He told his disciples:

The Conservatives have to become dissatisfied with Chamberlain before they change him. The question is: whom will they put in his place? Among Labour and the Liberals there is no one except Lloyd George, but he is too old. Among the Conservatives, all except Churchill and Hore-Belisha are imbecile.<sup>54</sup>

On 8 May 1940 when it was imminent that Churchill would become Prime Minister, Sri Aurobindo said: "Churchill is in command of the War and everything is all right."<sup>55</sup>

Maggi Lidchi-Grassi's writes how Sri Aurobindo used Churchill as an instrument:

. . . though Sri Aurobindo himself never spoke of it. The Mother told the author of how Sri Aurobindo used to tell her of the words that he would put into the mouth of Churchill before the famous broadcasts, and certain passages were spoken by Churchill word for word. I have not found any written references to this in the texts written on Sri Aurobindo but his secretary Nirodbaran had heard of this, and Dyuman-bhai, present Managing Trustee of the Ashram, has confirmed it. He told me that certain passages in Churchill's speeches often were repetitions of words already spoken in Pondicherry. Anuben Purani tells me that her father A. B. Purani, one of the few people who saw Sri Aurobindo every day told her the same thing.

52. CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 460.

53. *Ibid.*

54. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2013, p. 615.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 625.

When the invasion of the Island seemed inevitable, no one will deny that it was Churchill's speeches that put heart into his nation and kept its spirit high. Relates Group Captain Douglas Bader, who rejoined the RAF in 1939 after losing both his legs in 1931, "We all waited for his voice on the radio. Everybody, in the air as well as on the ground, relied on this one man . . ." <sup>56</sup>

On being questioned how Churchill could be Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's instrument, when he had no intention of liquidating the British Empire, the Mother replied:

But leave all that to the Divine. Churchill is a human being. He is not a yogi aspiring to transform his nature. Today he represents the Soul of the Nation that is fighting against the Asuras. He is being guided by the Divine directly and his soul is responding magnificently. All concentration must be now to help the Allies for the victory that is ultimately assured, but there must be no looseness, not the slightest opening to the Asuras. After the battle is won, if Churchill's soul can remain still in front and he continues to be guided by the Divine, he will go very fast in the line of evolution. But generally on earth it doesn't happen like that. His human mind and vital will take the lead after the crisis is over, and then he will come down to the level of the ordinary human being, though of a higher order. <sup>57</sup>

On 17<sup>th</sup> July 1940, when a disciple mentioned "Churchill has made a very fine speech," Sri Aurobindo acknowledged by stating: "Yes, he was inspired." <sup>58</sup>

Here an aphorism of Sri Aurobindo comes to mind:

That which the liberated sees in his soul on its mountaintops, heroes and prophets spring up in the material world to proclaim and accomplish. <sup>59</sup>

When Churchill had a bout of pneumonia, A. B. Purani writes that Sri Aurobindo "bestowed such anxious care on the health of Churchill, listening carefully to the health bulletins!" <sup>60</sup>

Sri Aurobindo was open-minded, magnanimous and non-partisan in his attitude. In the midst of the Second World War he clarified to a disciple the rationale of backing the Allies, despite Britain ruling India over the past two centuries:

56. Maggi Lidchi-Grassi, *The Light that Shone into the Dark Abyss*, 1994, pp. 77-78.

57. Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2000, pp. 128-29.

58. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2013, p. 808.

59. CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 460.

60. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 229.

What we say is not that the Allies have not done wrong things, but that they stand on the side of the evolutionary forces. . . .What you speak of is the dark side. All nations and governments have been that in their dealings with each other, — at least all who had the strength and got the chance. I hope you are not expecting me to believe that there are or have been virtuous governments and unselfish and sinless peoples? But there is the other side also. You are condemning the Allies on grounds that people in the past would have stared at, on the basis of modern ideals of international conduct; looked at like that all have black records. But who created these ideals or did most to create them (liberty, democracy, equality, international justice and the rest)? Well, America, France, England — the present Allied nations. They have all been imperialistic and still bear the burden of their past, but they have also deliberately spread these ideals and spread too the institutions which try to embody them. . . . (What about the others? Hitler, for example, says it is a crime to educate the coloured peoples, they must be kept as serfs and labourers.) England has helped certain nations to be free without seeking any personal gain; she has also conceded independence to Egypt and Eire after a struggle, to Iraq without a struggle. She has been moving away steadily, if slowly, from imperialism towards co-operation; the British Commonwealth of England and the Dominions is something unique and unprecedented, a beginning of new things in that direction: she is moving in idea towards a world-union of some kind in which aggression is to be made impossible; her new generation has no longer the old firm belief in mission and empire; she has offered India Dominion independence . . . All that is what I call evolution in the right direction — however slow and imperfect and hesitating it may still be.<sup>61</sup>

On three instances Sri Aurobindo, despite a paucity of financial resources in the Ashram, contributed to the Allied War Fund. In September 1940 he explained to the Governor of Madras that these contributions were:

. . . an expression of our entire support for the British people and the Empire in their struggle against the aggressions of the Nazi Reich and our complete sympathy with the cause for which they are fighting.

We feel that not only is this a battle waged in just self-defence and in defence of the nations threatened with the world-domination of Germany and the Nazi system of life, but that it is a defence of civilisation and its highest attained social, cultural and spiritual values and of the whole future of humanity. To this cause our support and sympathy will be unswerving whatever may happen; we look forward to the victory of Britain and, as the eventual result,

61. CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 464-65.

an era of peace and union among the nations and a better and more secure world-order.<sup>62</sup>

Nolini Kanta Gupta writes that it was Sri Aurobindo's Shiva-like presence and intervention that saved humanity in the Second World War:

It was the invasion of the asuric forces upon earth to destroy humanity and human civilisation and prevent the advent of that truth which Sri Aurobindo was preparing to bring down. Sri Aurobindo opposed that mighty onrush with his will and divine strength. He broke the hostile downward-speeding force by taking it into himself, even like God Shiva who swallowed poison and harboured it in his throat to release immortality for the Gods. The subtle attack left in him a bruised body and to man a saved world.<sup>63</sup>

And in a letter, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Ours is a sadhana which involves not only devotion or union with the Divine or a perception of him in all things and beings, but also action as workers and instruments and a work to be done in the world, a force to be brought on the world, under difficult conditions; then one has to see one's way and do what is commanded and support what has to be supported, even if it means war and strife carried on whether through chariots and bows and arrows or tanks and cars and American bombs and aeroplanes, in either case a *ghoram karma*: the means and times and persons differ, but it does not seem to me that Nolini is wrong in seeing in it the same problem as in Kurukshetra. As for war, violence, the use of force to maintain freedom for the world, for the highest values of human civilisation, for the salvation of humanity from a terrible fate, etc., the old command rings out once again after many ages for those who must fight or support this battle for the right . . .<sup>64</sup>

Love is a virtue that is intrinsic in the Indian character, a trait which Sri Aurobindo epitomised. Sri Aurobindo has revealed that the Indian psyche is magnanimous:

But if the English mind would take the first step and try to see things from the Indian's standpoint — see their mind and act accordingly, all difficulties might be solved. The Indian mind has not the Irish memory for past wrongs and

62. *Ibid.*, p. 453.

63. *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 13.

64. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 219.

discords, it forgives and forgets easily. Only it must be made to feel that the approach on the other side is frank and whole hearted. If it once felt that, every difficulty would be solved.<sup>65</sup>

Politics often gets embroiled in the dark shadows of deviousness and deceit but Sri Aurobindo's character was so strong that he never compromised with his integrity. Nirodbaran writes:

Sri Aurobindo has said to us, quoting C. R. Das's opinion that "the political field is a rendezvous of the worst kind of criminals," and that field, when Sri Aurobindo worked in it, he raised to a level of sincerity and integrity, at least in his own example, even if others didn't always follow. He shunned crookedness, duplicity, lust for power and all the other vices of political life. Sri Aurobindo's "soul was like a star and dwelt apart", and he raised the political consciousness of at least some people to his own level and he did it all because he was through and through sincere — "Sincerity," Carlyle has said, "is the greatest virtue of a great man," and all of you know very well the Mother's emphasis on sincerity. In all the political disputes and negotiations, some of which are reflected in his speeches, there was never a tinge of meanness, of duplicity or crookedness that is so common, even so much courted by the politicians. Thus he acquired the esteem of all and sundry, friends and foes. The young students loved him, the young revolutionaries adored him, and all the others respected him for his integrity, for his sincerity, for his self-sacrifice.<sup>66</sup>

Nirodbaran then adds:

In all these examples you see that he was a gentleman and I don't need to multiply instances. I can say, again slightly adapting a verse from *Savitri*:

All in him pointed to a nobler kind.<sup>67</sup>

*(To be continued)*

GAUTAM MALAKER

65. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 253.

66. Nirodbaran, 'Sri Aurobindo – Perfect Gentleman', *Mother India*, August 1970, pp. 408-09.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 409.



*an honest business for honest people*

## **S. N. Sunderson & Co.**

Serving since 19262

**1, Deshbandhu Gupta Road**

**New Delhi - 110 055**

E-mail: [contact@snsunderson.com](mailto:contact@snsunderson.com) Phone: (011) 43750060/ 23612776

### ***Our Lines of Business:***

#### ***Limestone and Dolomite***

Mining and Manufacturing at

KAHANGAON & NIWAR (MADHYA PRADESH)

Supply to Steel Plants, Cement Plants, Lime etc.

***And***

#### ***Coal Handling Agents***

(Coal – Steam & Slack)

For Power Houses, Industries & other Consumers

#### ***Branches at:***

**Katni, Kahangaon, Niwar, Kolkata, Ramgarh, Asansol, Dhanbad,  
Singrauli, Anpara, Ranchi, Patna, Ray-Khelari, Manendragarh,  
Bilaspur, Nagpur, Lucknow, Guwahati and Puducherry**

**Completed 94 years on Basant 2020**

SSP/PY/50/2018/2020

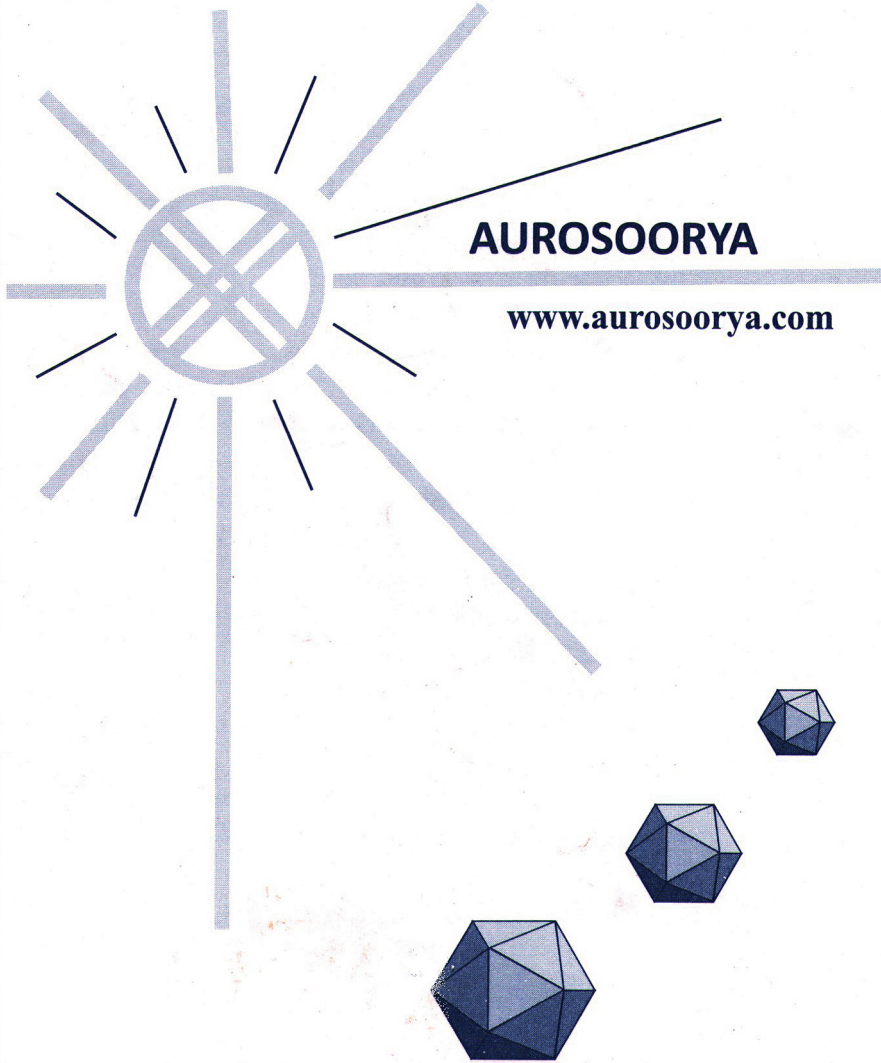
RNI 8667/63

Licensed to Post without Prepayment under

No. TN/PMG/(CCR)/WPP 80/2018-20

Valid from January 2018 to 31.12.2020

*The Birth of Suns is the Dawn of Creativity...*



**Deep Order Technologies: Advanced  
Analytics To Map and Change Deep Order**

**[www.deepordertechnologies.com](http://www.deepordertechnologies.com)**