

# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE



SEPTEMBER 2020

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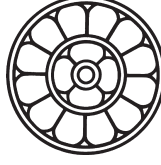
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXIII

No. 9

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## THE DEATH OF A GOD [1]

### THE EARTH VOICES

Arise now, tread out the fire!  
Scatter the ashes of a God through the stars.  
Forget to hope and aspire.  
Let us paint our prison, let us strengthen its bars.

Lo, now he is dead and the greatness that cumbered the world and Time's ways  
Has vanished like a golden shadow thrust out from the anguish of the ages;  
The glory and burden, the sunlight and the passion have left our days;  
Once more we can wear the grey livery of Death and gather in his wages.  
All that drew back from his splendour fleeing as ashamed from the light and the  
beauty and invincible sweetness  
Now returns vaunting their darkness and littleness, this fret of life's fever,  
its cruel and sad incompleteness.

\*

## THE DEATH OF A GOD [2]

Arise, tread out the fire,  
Scatter the ashes of a god through the stars!  
Forget to hope and aspire.  
He is dead and his greatness that cumbered the world has vanished like a golden  
shadow from the ages.  
The whip of glory, the splendid burden behind us are cast,  
Earth is free from fire and stress, left to the joy of her smallness, rid of his  
mighty spirit at last.  
All that is false and wry and little are freed to follow their nature once more.  
Close time's brilliant pages!  
Give back to man's life the old tables, its dull ease, its bowed greyness restore.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 665-66)

## THE INTERMEDIATE ZONE

All these experiences are of the same nature and what applies to one applies to another. Apart from some experiences of a personal character, the rest are either idea-truths, such as pour down into the consciousness from above when one gets into touch with certain planes of being, or strong formations from the larger mental and vital worlds which, when one is directly open to these worlds, rush in and want to use the sadhak for their fulfilment. These things, when they pour down or come in, present themselves with a great force, a vivid sense of inspiration or illumination, much sensation of light and joy, an impression of widening and power. The sadhak feels himself freed from the normal limits, projected into a wonderful new world of experience, filled and enlarged and exalted: what comes associates itself, besides, with his aspirations, ambitions, notions of spiritual fulfilment and Yogic siddhi; it is represented even as itself that realisation and fulfilment. Very easily he is carried away by the splendour and the rush, and thinks that he has realised more than he has truly done, something final or at least something sovereignly true. At this stage the necessary knowledge and experience are usually lacking which would tell him that this is only a very uncertain and mixed beginning; he may not realise at once that he is still in the cosmic Ignorance, not in the cosmic Truth, much less in the Transcendental Truth, and that whatever formative or dynamic idea-truths may have come down into him are partial only and yet further diminished by their presentation to him by a still mixed consciousness. He may fail to realise also that if he rushes to apply what he is realising or receiving as if it were something definitive, he may either fall into confusion and error or else get shut up in some partial formation in which there may be an element of spiritual Truth but it is likely to be outweighed by more dubious mental and vital accretions that deform it altogether. It is only when he is able to draw back (whether at once or after a time) from his experiences, stand above them with the dispassionate witness consciousness, observe their real nature, limitations, composition, mixture that he can proceed on his way towards a real freedom and a higher, larger and truer siddhi. At each step this has to be done. For whatever comes in this way to the sadhak of this Yoga, whether it be from Overmind or Intuition or Illumined Mind or some exalted Life-Plane or from all these together, it is not definitive and final; it is not the supreme Truth in which he can rest, but only a stage. And yet these stages have to be passed through, for the Supramental or the Supreme Truth cannot be reached in one bound or even in many bounds; one has to pursue a calm patient steady progress through many intervening stages without getting bound or attached to their lesser Truth or Light or Power or Ananda.

This is in fact an intermediary state, a zone of transition between the ordinary



consciousness in mind and the true Yoga knowledge. One may cross without hurt through it, perceiving at once or at an early stage its real nature and refusing to be detained by its half-lights and tempting but imperfect and often mixed and misleading experiences; one may go astray in it, follow false voices and a mendacious guidance, and that ends in a spiritual disaster; or one may take up one's abode in this intermediate zone, care to go no farther and build there some half-truth which one takes for the whole truth or become the instrument of the Powers of these transitional planes, — that is what happens to many sadhaks and Yogis. Overwhelmed by the first rush and sense of power of a supernormal condition, they get dazzled with a little light which seems to them a tremendous illumination or a touch of force which they mistake for the full Divine Force or at least a very great Yoga Shakti, or they accept some intermediate Power (not always a Power of the Divine) as the Supreme and an intermediate consciousness as the supreme realisation. Very readily they come to think that they are in the full cosmic consciousness when it is only some front or small part of it or some larger Mind, Life-Power or subtle physical ranges with which they have entered into dynamic connection. Or they feel themselves to be in an entirely illumined consciousness, while in reality they are receiving imperfectly things from above through a partial illumination of some mental or vital plane; for what comes is diminished and often deformed in the course of transmission through these planes; the receiving mind and vital of the sadhak also often understands or transcribes ill what has been received or throws up to mix with it its own ideas, feelings, desires, which it yet takes to be not its own but part of the Truth it is receiving because they are mixed with it, imitate its form, are lit up by its illumination and get from this association and borrowed light an exaggerated value.

There are worse dangers in this intermediate zone of experience. For the planes to which the sadhak has now opened his consciousness, — not as before getting glimpses of them and some influences, but directly, receiving their full impact, — send a host of ideas, impulses, suggestions, formations of all kinds, often the most opposite to each other, inconsistent or incompatible, but presented in such a way as to slur over their insufficiencies and differences, with great force, plausibility and wealth of argument or a convincing sense of certitude. Overpowered by this sense of certitude, vividness, appearance of profusion and richness the mind of the sadhak enters into a great confusion which it takes for some larger organisation and order; or else it whirls about in incessant shiftings and changes which it takes for a rapid progress but which lead nowhere. Or there is the opposite danger that he may become the instrument of some apparently brilliant but ignorant formation; for these intermediate planes are full of little Gods or strong Daityas or smaller beings who want to create, to materialise something or to enforce a mental and vital formation in the earth life and are eager to use or influence or even possess the thought and will of the sadhak and make him their instrument for the purpose. This is quite apart from the well-known danger of actually hostile beings whose sole purpose is to

create confusion, falsehood, corruption of the sadhana and disastrous unspiritual error. Anyone allowing himself to be taken hold of by one of these beings, who often take a divine Name, will lose his way in the Yoga. On the other hand, it is quite possible that the sadhak may be met at his entrance into this zone by a Power of the Divine which helps and leads him till he is ready for greater things; but still that itself is no surety against the errors and stumbling of this zone; for nothing is easier than for the powers of these zones or hostile powers to imitate the guiding Voice or Image and deceive and mislead the sadhak or for himself to attribute the creations and formations of his own mind, vital or ego to the Divine.

For this intermediate zone is a region of half-truths — and that by itself would not matter, for there is no complete truth below the Supermind; but the half-truth here is often so partial or else ambiguous in its application that it leaves a wide field for confusion, delusion and error. The sadhak thinks that he is no longer in the old small consciousness at all, because he feels in contact with something larger or more powerful, and yet the old consciousness is still there, not really abolished. He feels the control or influence of some Power, Being or Force greater than himself, aspires to be its instrument and thinks he has got rid of ego; but this delusion of egolessness often covers an exaggerated ego. Ideas seize upon him and drive his mind which are only partially true and by overconfident misapplication are turned into falsehoods; this vitiates the movements of the consciousness and opens the door to delusion. Suggestions are made, sometimes of a romantic character, which flatter the importance of the sadhak or are agreeable to his wishes and he accepts them without examination or discriminating control. Even what is true, is so exalted or extended beyond its true pitch and limit and measure that it becomes the parent of error. This is a zone which many sadhaks have to cross, in which many wander for a long time and out of which a great many never emerge. Especially if their sadhana is mainly in the mental and vital, they have to meet here many difficulties and much danger; only those who follow scrupulously a strict guidance or have the psychic being prominent in their nature pass easily as if on a sure and clearly marked road across this intermediate region. A central sincerity, a fundamental humility also save from much danger and trouble. One can then pass quickly beyond into a clearer Light where if there is still much mixture, incertitude and struggle, yet the orientation is towards the cosmic Truth and not to a half-illuminated prolongation of Maya and Ignorance.

I have described in general terms with its main features and possibilities this state of consciousness just across the border of the normal consciousness, because it is here that these experiences seem to move. But different sadhaks comport themselves differently in it and respond sometimes to one class of possibilities, sometimes to another. In this case it seems to have been entered through an attempt to call down or force a way into the cosmic consciousness — it does not matter which way it is put or whether one is quite aware of what one is doing or aware of

it in these terms, it comes to that in substance. It is not the Overmind which was entered, for to go straight into the Overmind is impossible. The Overmind is indeed above and behind the whole action of the cosmic consciousness, but one can at first have only an indirect connection with it; things come down from it through intermediate ranges into a larger mind-plane, life-plane, subtle physical plane and come very much changed and diminished in the transmission, without anything like the full power and truth they have in the Overmind itself on its native levels. Most of the movements come not from the Overmind, but down from higher mind ranges. The ideas with which these experiences are penetrated and on which they seem to rest their claim to truth are not of the Overmind, but of the higher Mind or sometimes of the illumined Mind; but they are mixed with suggestions from the lower mind and vital regions and badly diminished in their application or misapplied in many places. All this would not matter; it is usual and normal, and one has to pass through it and come out into a clearer atmosphere where things are better organised and placed on a surer basis. But the movement was made in a spirit of excessive hurry and eagerness, of exaggerated self-esteem and self-confidence, of a premature certitude, relying on no other guidance than that of one's own mind or of the "Divine" as conceived or experienced in a stage of very limited knowledge. But the sadhak's conception and experience of the Divine, even if it is fundamentally genuine, is never in such a stage complete and pure; it is mixed with all sorts of mental and vital ascriptions and all sorts of things are associated with this Divine guidance and believed to be part of it which come from quite other sources. Even supposing there is any direct guidance, — most often in these conditions the Divine acts mostly from behind the veil, — it is only occasional and the rest is done through a play of forces; error and stumbling and mixture of Ignorance take place freely and these things are allowed because the sadhak has to be tested by the world-forces, to learn by experience, to grow through imperfection towards perfection — if he is capable of it, if he is willing to learn, to open his eyes to his own mistakes and errors, to learn and profit by them so as to grow towards a purer Truth, Light and Knowledge.

The result of this state of mind is that one begins to affirm everything that comes in this mixed and dubious region as if it were all the Truth and the sheer Divine Will; the ideas or the suggestions that constantly repeat themselves are expressed with a self-assertive absoluteness as if they were Truth entire and undeniable. There is an impression that one has become impersonal and free from ego, while the whole tone of the mind, its utterance and spirit are full of vehement self-assertiveness justified by the affirmation that one is thinking and acting as an instrument and under the inspiration of the Divine. Ideas are put forward very aggressively that can be valid to the mind, but are not spiritually valid; yet they are stated as if they were spiritual absolutes. For instance, equality, which in that sense — for Yogic Samata is a quite different thing — is a mere mental principle, the claim to a sacred independence, the refusal to accept anyone as Guru, the opposition

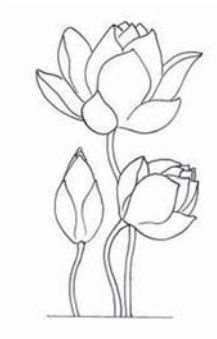
made between the Divine and the human Divine etc., etc. All these ideas are positions that can be taken by the mind and the vital and turned into principles which they try to enforce on the religious or even the spiritual life, but they are not and cannot be spiritual in their nature. There also begin to come in suggestions from the vital planes, a pullulation of imaginations romantic, fanciful or ingenious, hidden interpretations, pseudo-intuitions, would-be initiations into things beyond, which excite or bemuse the mind and are often so turned as to flatter and magnify ego and self-importance, but are not founded on any well-ascertained spiritual or occult realities of a true order. This region is full of elements of this kind and, if allowed, they begin to crowd on the sadhak; but if he seriously means to reach the Highest, he must simply observe them and pass on. It is not that there is never any truth in such things, but for one that is true there are nine imitative falsehoods presented and only a trained occultist with the infallible tact born of long experience can guide himself without stumbling or being caught through the maze. It is possible for the whole attitude and action and utterance to be so surcharged with the errors of this intermediate zone that to go farther on this route would be to travel far away from the Divine and from the Yoga.

Here the choice is still open whether to follow the very mixed guidance one gets in the midst of these experiences or to accept the true guidance. Each man who enters the realms of Yogic experience is free to follow his own way; but this Yoga is not a path for anyone to follow, but only for those who accept to seek the aim, pursue the way pointed out upon which a sure guidance is indispensable. It is idle for anyone to expect that he can follow this road far, much less go to the end by his own inner strength and knowledge without the true aid or influence. Even the ordinary long-practised Yogas are hard to follow without the aid of the Guru; in this which as it advances goes through untrodden countries and unknown entangled regions, it is quite impossible. As for the work to be done it also is not a work for any sadhak of any path; it is not, either, the work of the “impersonal” Divine — who, for that matter, is not an active Power but supports impartially all work in the universe. It is a training ground for those who have to pass through the difficult and complex way of this Yoga and none other. All work here must be done in a spirit of acceptance, discipline and surrender, not with personal demands and conditions, but with a vigilant conscious submission to control and guidance. Work done in any other spirit only results in an unspiritual disorder, confusion and disturbance of the atmosphere. In it too difficulties, errors, stumblings are frequent, because in this Yoga people have to be led patiently and with some field for their own effort, by experience, out of the ignorance natural to Mind and Life to a wider spirit and a luminous knowledge. But the danger of an unguided wandering in the regions across the border is that the very basis of the Yoga may be contradicted and the conditions under which alone the work can be done may be lost altogether. The transition through this intermediate zone — not obligatory, for many pass by a narrower but

surer way — is a crucial passage; what comes out of it is likely to be a very wide or rich creation; but when one founders there, recovery is difficult, painful, assured only after a long struggle and endeavour.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Letters on Yoga – III, CWSA, Vol. 30, pp. 296-303)*



## SOME LETTERS ON *THE RIDDLE OF THIS WORLD*

### *The Riddle of This World*

In reference to what Prof. Sorley has written on *The Riddle of This World*, the book of course was not meant as a full or direct statement of my thought and, as it was written to sadhaks mostly, many things were taken for granted there. Most of the major ideas — e.g. Overmind — were left without elucidation. To make the ideas implied clear to the intellect, they must be put with precision in an intellectual form — so far as that is possible with supra-intellectual things. What is written in the book can be clear to those who have gone far enough in experience, but for most it can only be suggestive.

10 April 1934

\*

All that was bowed and rapt lifting clasped hands out of pain and night,  
How hast thou filled with murmuring ecstasy, made proud and bright!  
Thou hast chosen the grateful earth for thy own in her hour of anguish and strife,  
Surprised by thy rapid feet of joy, O Beloved of the Master of Life.<sup>1</sup>

Your answer is not only fine poetry but it is a true explanation of the descent of the soul into the Ignorance. It is the adventure into the Night (the introduction of the Light, Joy, Immortality) to see whether they cannot be established there — so that there may be a new experience of the Divine and joy of the Divine through separation and union (or reunion) on a new basis. It is what I have hinted at in *The Riddle of This World*.

### Passages from *The Riddle of This World*

*In the Riddle you speak of a conversion inwards and a series of conversions upwards.<sup>2</sup> Does the upward conversion begin only after the inward conversion, i.e. the psychicisation of the lower nature, is complete?*

Not necessarily.

1. From “Lakshmi”, a Bengali poem by Dilip Kumar Roy, as translated by Sri Aurobindo. See Translations, CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 561. — Ed.

2. Sri Aurobindo, *The Riddle of This World* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1973), p. 5.

*Or do both kinds of work go on simultaneously?*

It differs with different people, but the upward conversions cannot go very far or cannot be secure if the lower nature is not psychicised — for there is then always the possibility of a big or even a decisive fall if there is something seriously unpsychic in the lower nature.

29 March 1935

\*

*What precisely is meant by the “intermediate zone” [pp. 35-45]? Has everyone to pass through it to reach the truth?*

The intermediate zone means simply a confused condition or passage in which one is getting out of the personal consciousness and opening into the cosmic (cosmic Mind, cosmic vital, cosmic physical, something perhaps of the cosmic higher Mind) without having yet transcended the human mind levels. One is not in possession of or direct contact with the divine Truth *on its own levels*, but one can receive something from them, even from the Overmind, indirectly. Only, as one is still immersed in the cosmic Ignorance, all that comes from above can be mixed, perverted, taken hold of for their purposes by lower, even by hostile Powers.

It is not necessary for everyone to struggle through the intermediate zone. If one has purified oneself, if there is no abnormal vanity, egoism, ambition or other strong misleading element, or if one is vigilant and on one's guard, or if the psychic is in front, one can either pass rapidly and directly or with a minimum of trouble into the higher zones of consciousness where one is in direct contact with the Divine Truth.

On the other hand the passage through the higher zones — higher Mind, illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind, is obligatory — they are the true Intermediaries between the present consciousness and the Supermind.

28 December 1933

\*

*About the intermediate zone, you wrote [in the preceding letter]: “One is not in possession of or direct contact with the divine Truth on its own levels.” Are the planes of Higher Mind or Intuition in direct contact with the truth?*

Yes — because it is there that one opens to the cosmic Truth (as opposed to the cosmic Ignorance) — the cosmic Divine etc. It is not the full power of the Truth — that one reaches only in the Supermind where one is in direct communion with the

Transcendent Reality; but it is still manifested Truth and not manifested Ignorance. This, of course, is when one can rise to those levels and stay there for a time at least or when the mind etc. are already so much changed that they can receive without perverting or distorting or misusing and diminishing too much. It is not so difficult once that is done to receive the Truth in consciousness — what is more difficult is to make it dynamic in its purity for life.

29 December 1933

\*

*You write in The Riddle of This World: "Very readily they come to think that they are in the full cosmic consciousness when it is only some front or small part of it or some larger Mind, Life-Power or subtle physical ranges with which they have entered into dynamic connection" [p. 37]. What is meant here by "larger Mind"?*

It means simply larger than the limited personal mind. It is a play of some combination of cosmic Mind-Forces but not the full cosmic Consciousness, not even the Cosmic Mind. It belongs usually to the Ignorance.

30 March 1934

\*

About polytheism, I certainly accept the truth of the many forms and personalities of the One which since the Vedic times has been the spiritual essence of Indian polytheism — a secondary aspect in the seeking for the one and only Divine. But the passage referred to by Professor Sorley (page 56 [*of the first edition*])<sup>3</sup> is concerned with something else — the little godlings and Titans spoken of there are supraphysical beings of other planes. It is not meant to be suggested that they are real Godheads and entitled to worship — on the contrary it is indicated that to accept their influence is to move towards error and confusion or a deviation from the true spiritual way. No doubt they have some power to create, they are makers of forms in their own way and in their limited domain, but so are men too creators of outward and inward things in their own domain and limits — and even man's creative powers can have a repercussion on the supraphysical levels.

10 April 1934

\*

3. "...for these intermediate planes are full of little Gods or strong Daityas..." *The Riddle of This World* (1973), p. 38.



*I have always believed that there was an existence after death akin to our existence in this world minus the physical body.*

The soul goes out in a subtle body.

*On the strength of certain phenomena that did not appear to me to be capable of being summarily dismissed, I further believed that after a period of confusion immediately following death, the recollections of the life just preceding returned, and persisted till rebirth.*

Only for a time, not till rebirth — otherwise the stamp could be so strong that remembrance of past births even after taking a new body would be the rule rather than the exception.

*I was also disposed to believe that in cases of pure and unalloyed attachment the relationships of one birth persisted in successive births, the number depending on the strength of attachment.*

This is possible, but not a law — as a rule the same relationship would not be constantly repeated — the same people often meet again and again on earth in different lives, but the relations are different. The purpose of rebirth would not be served if the same personality with the same relations and experiences were incessantly repeated.

*All these beliefs were shattered to pieces when someone drew my attention to certain statements of yours in the book The Riddle of This World [pp. 53-54, 58-60], in which I understood you to say that in the case of forms of life lower than man there is a complete annihilation of the ego on death.*

That is not the case.

*I further understood you to say that in the case of man, the ego persisted in a static condition of complete rest and carried with it (except in a very few exceptional cases) only the essence of the experiences and the inclinations gathered and acquired in the life just preceding.*

This is said not of the ego, but of the psychic being after it has shed its vital and other sheaths and is resting in the psychic world. Before that it passes through vital and other worlds on its way to the psychic plane.

*I would like to know whether it is possible to come into direct touch with those who have departed from this world.*

Yes, so long as they are near enough to the earth (it is usually supposed by those who have occult experience that it is for three years only) or if they are earth-bound or if they are of those who do not proceed to the psychic plane but linger near the earth and are soon reborn.

Universal statements cannot be easily made about these things — there is a general line, but individual cases vary to an almost indefinite extent.

[*Note by Sri Aurobindo to his secretary:*]

You will tell him that I do not carry on correspondence usually with people outside, but as his questions were from the book, I have asked you to give him my answers to his questions.

28 February 1938

\*

*“It is not to be denied, no spiritual experience will deny that this is an unideal and unsatisfactory world, strongly marked with the stamp of inadequacy, suffering, evil” [p. 61].*

That is when you look at what the world ought to be and lay stress on what it should be. The idealist’s question is why should there be pain at all, even if it is outweighed by the fundamental pleasure of existence. The real crux is why should inadequacy, limit and suffering come across this natural pleasure of life. It does not mean that life is essentially miserable in its very nature.

23 July 1935

\*

*Weber writes of Spinoza’s conception of God: “God is not the cause of the world in the proper and usual sense of the term, a cause acting from without and creating it once for all, but the permanent substratum of things, the innermost substance of the universe.”<sup>4</sup> Does this not find a parallel in the following lines from *The Riddle of This World*: “For it is not . . . a supracosmic, arbitrary, personal Deity himself altogether uninvolved in the fall who has imposed evil*

4. Alfred Weber, *History of Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, 1904), pp. 328-29.

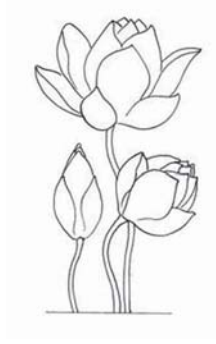
*and suffering on creatures made capriciously by his fiat” [pp. 65-66]. I wonder why Spinoza did not arrive at a convincing explanation of the problem of evil and misery.*

The European type of monism is usually pantheistic and weaves the universe and the Divine so intimately together that they can hardly be separated. But what explanation of the evil and misery can there be there? The Indian view is that the Divine is the inmost substance of the Universe, but he is also outside it, transcendent; good and evil, happiness and misery are only phenomena of cosmic experience due to a division and diminution of consciousness in the manifestation, but are not part of the essence or of the undivided whole-consciousness either of the Divine or of our own spiritual being.

6 October 1935

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 117-23)*



## “WHAT HAS TO BE DONE WILL BE DONE”

**July 5, 1914**

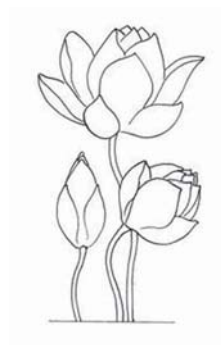
All that belongs to the outer, lower being which is still obscure, prostrates itself before Thee in a mute and fervent adoration, calling with all its strength Thy purifying action which will make it fit to manifest Thee fully.

And in this adoration is found perfect silence and perfect beatitude.

Thou repliest mercifully to the call: “What has to be done will be done. The necessary instruments will be prepared. Strive in the calm of certitude.”

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 193)*



## THE CHILDREN OF JAPAN

In my last letter<sup>1</sup> I spoke of the sense of duty which gave to the Japanese people a great self-constraint, but no joyful and free expansion. I must make an exception to this rule and this exception is in favour of the children.

We could quite well call Japan the paradise of children — in no other country have I seen them so free and so happy. After months of residence in Japan I have yet never seen a child beaten by a grown-up person. They are treated as if all the parents were conscious that the children are the promise and the glory of the future. And a wonderful thing is that, envired by so much attention, so much care, — indeed, such a devotion, they are the most reasonable, good and serious children I have ever met. When they are babies, tied up in an amusing fashion on their mothers' backs, with their wide open black eyes they seem to consider life with gravity and to have already opinions on the things they look at. You scarcely hear a child cry. When, for instance, he has hurt himself and the tears burst out of his eyes, the mother or the father has but to say a few words in a low voice, and the sorrow seems to be swept away. What are those magic words which enable children to be so reasonable? Very simple indeed: "Are you not a Samurai?" And this question is sufficient for the child to call to him all his energy and to overcome his weakness.

In the streets you see hundreds of children, in their charming bright "*kimono*",<sup>2</sup> playing freely, in spite of the "*kuruma*"<sup>3</sup> and the bicycles, at the most inventive and picturesque games, pleased with little, singing and laughing.

When older, but still very young, you may see them in the tram cars, dressed with foreign clothes, the student cap on the head, the knapsack on the back, proud of their importance, still prouder at the idea of all they are learning and will learn. For they love their studies and are the most earnest students. They never miss an opportunity of adding something to their growing knowledge; and when the work for the school leaves them some liberty they occupy it in reading books. The young Japanese seem to have a real passion for books. In Tokyo one of the main streets is nearly entirely occupied by secondhand book-sellers. From the beginning to the end of the year these shops are full of students, and it is not often novels they are seeking for!

They are, as a rule, very anxious to learn foreign languages and when they come to meet foreigners, though they are in general very timid, they make use of that acquaintance as much as they can to . . .<sup>4</sup>

1. "Impressions of Japan", see *Mother India*, June-July 2020.

2. Traditional wide-sleeved gown.

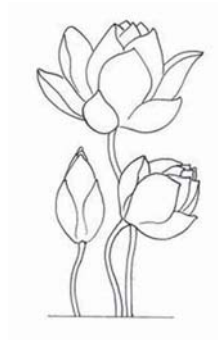
3. A word applied to many vehicles, here probably a carriage or a rickshaw.

4. This sentence was left incomplete.

A country where such are the children and so they are treated is a country still ascending the steps of progress and of mastery.

THE MOTHER

(*Words of Long Ago*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 2, pp. 155-56)



## TO THE WOMEN OF JAPAN

To speak of children to the women of Japan is, I think, to speak to them of their dearest, their most sacred subject. Indeed, in no other country in the world have the children taken such an important, such a primordial place. They are, here, the centre of care and attention. On them are concentrated — and rightly — the hopes for the future. They are the living promise of growing prosperity for the country. Therefore, the most important work assigned to women in Japan is child-making. Maternity is considered as the principal role of woman. But this is true only so long as we understand what is meant by the word maternity. For to bring children into the world as rabbits do their young — instinctively, ignorantly, machine-like, that certainly cannot be called maternity! True maternity begins with the conscious creation of a being, with the willed shaping of a soul coming to develop and utilise a new body. The true domain of women is the spiritual. We forget it but too often.

To bear a child and construct his body almost subconsciously is not enough. The work really commences when, by the power of thought and will, we conceive and create a character capable of manifesting an ideal.

And do not say that we have no power for realising such a thing. Innumerable instances of this very effective power could be brought out as proofs.

First of all, the effect of physical environment was recognised and studied long ago. It is by surrounding women with forms of art and beauty that, little by little, the ancient Greeks created the exceptionally harmonious race that they were.

Individual instances of the same fact are numerous. It is not rare to see a woman who, while pregnant, had looked at constantly and admired a beautiful picture or statue, giving birth to a child after the perfect likeness of this picture or statue. I met several of these instances myself. Among them, I remember very clearly two little girls; they were twins and perfectly beautiful. But the most astonishing was how little like their parents they were. They reminded me of a very famous picture painted by the English artist Reynolds. One day I made this remark to the mother, who immediately exclaimed: "Indeed, is it not so? You will be interested to know that while I was expecting these children, I had, hanging above my bed, a very good reproduction of Reynolds' picture. Before going to sleep and as soon as I woke, my last and first glance was for that picture; and in my heart I hoped: may my children be like the faces in this picture. You see that I succeeded quite well!" In truth, she could be proud of her success, and her example is of great utility for other women.

But if we can obtain such results on the physical plane where the materials are the least plastic, how much more so on the psychological plane where the influence of thought and will is so powerful. Why accept the obscure bonds of heredity and atavism — which are nothing else than subconscious preferences for our own trend

of character — when we can, by concentration and will, call into being a type constructed according to the highest ideal we are able to conceive? With this effort, maternity becomes truly precious and sacred; indeed with this, we enter the glorious work of the Spirit, and womanhood rises above animality and its ordinary instincts, towards real humanity and its powers.

In this effort, in this attempt, then, lies our true duty. And if this duty was always of the greatest importance, it certainly has taken a capital one in the present turn of the earth's evolution.

For we are living in an exceptional time at an exceptional turning point of the world's history. Never before, perhaps, did mankind pass through such a dark period of hatred, bloodshed and confusion. And, at the same time, never had such a strong, such an ardent hope awakened in the hearts of the people. Indeed, if we listen to our heart's voice, we immediately perceive that we are, more or less consciously, waiting for a new reign of justice, of beauty, of harmonious good-will and fraternity. And this seems in complete contradiction with the actual state of the world. But we all know that never is the night so dark as before the dawn. May not this darkness, then, be the sign of an approaching dawn? And as never was night so complete, so terrifying, maybe never will dawn have been so bright, so pure, so illuminating as the coming one. . . . After the bad dreams of the night the world will awaken to a new consciousness.

The civilisation which is ending now in such a dramatic way was based on the power of mind, mind dealing with matter and life. What it has been to the world, we have not to discuss here. But a new reign is coming, that of the Spirit: after the human, the divine.

Yet, if we have been fortunate enough to live on earth at such a stupendous, a unique time as this one, is it sufficient to stand and watch the unfolding events? All those who feel that their heart extends further than the limits of their own person and family, that their thought embraces more than small personal interests and local conventions, all those, in short, who realise that they belong not to themselves, or to their family, or even to their country, but to God who manifests Himself in all countries, through mankind, these, indeed, know that they must rise and set to work for the sake of humanity, for the advent of the Dawn.

And in this momentous, endless, many-sided work, what can be the part of womanhood? It is true that, as soon as great events and works are in question, the custom is to relegate women to a corner with a smile of patronising contempt which means: this is not your business, poor, feeble, futile creatures. . . . And women, submissive, childlike, lazy perhaps, have accepted, at least in many countries, this deplorable state of things. I dare to say that they are wrong. In the life of the future, there shall be no more room for such division, such disequilibrium between the masculine and the feminine. The true relation of the two sexes is an equal footing of mutual help and close collaboration. And from now, we must reassume our veritable



position, take again our due place and assert our real importance — that of spiritual former and educator. Indeed, some men, perhaps a little vainglorious of their so-called advantages, may despise the apparent weakness of women (although even this exterior weakness is not quite certain) but: “Do what he may, the superman will have to be born of woman all the same”, someone said very rightly.

The superman shall be born of woman, this is a big unquestionable truth; but it is not enough to be proud of this truth, we must clearly understand what it means, become aware of the responsibility it creates, and learn to face earnestly the task which is put before us. This task is precisely our most important share in the present world-wide work.

For that, we must first understand — at least in their broad lines — what are the means by which the present chaos and obscurity can be transformed into light and harmony.

Many means have been suggested: political, social, ethical, even religious. . . . Indeed, none of these seem sufficient to face with any reliable success the magnitude of the task to be done. Only a new spiritual influx, creating in man a new consciousness, can overcome the enormous mass of difficulties barring the way of the workers. A new spiritual light, a manifestation upon earth of some divine force unknown until now, a Thought of God, new for us, descending into this world and taking a new form here.

And here we come back to our starting point, to our duty of true maternity. For this form meant to manifest the spiritual force capable of transforming the earth's present conditions, this new form, who is to construct it if not the women?

Thus we see that at this critical period of the world's life it is no longer sufficient to give birth to a being in whom our highest personal ideal is manifested; we must strive to find out what is the future type, whose advent Nature is planning. It is no longer sufficient to form a man similar to the greatest men we have heard of or known, or even greater, more accomplished and gifted than they; we must strive to come in touch mentally, by the constant aspiration of our thought and will, with the supreme possibility which, exceeding all human measures and features, will give birth to the superman.

Once again Nature feels one of her great impulses towards the creation of something utterly new, something unexpected. And it is to this impulse that we must answer and obey.

Let us try first to discover where this impulse of Nature will lead us. And the best way for that is to look back on the lessons given to us by the Past.

We see that each progress of Nature, each manifestation of a new capacity and principle upon earth is marked by the appearance of a new species. In the same way, the progressive forms of the life of races, of peoples, of individuals, follow each other through the human cycles, ceaselessly inspired, fecundated, renewed by the efforts of the guides of humanity. And all these forms aim at the same goal, the

mysterious, the glorious goal of Nature.<sup>1</sup>

It is to this call of Nature that we must answer, to this magnificent, to this grandiose work that we must devote ourselves. Let us try to make as clear as we can the steps of our advance on this difficult and as yet unexplored path.

First of all we must be careful, in our attempt to conceive the future man or superman, not to adopt an actual type of man, perfecting or aggrandising him. To avoid as much as possible this mistake we should study the teachings of life's evolution.

*1. It seems that the following paragraphs from an earlier draft were intended for insertion here:*

Which is this goal? Toward what unexpected realisation of the future does Nature aim? What does she seek since her dark origins?

Each form that she creates is a fresh affirmation of that which through her will be born, of that which it is her mission to manifest.

Each species preparing the others, making them possible, bears witness to her untiring perseverance, is a proof of her solemn vow; in each one is a little more matter transfigured, announcing future dawns of intelligence. Through innumerable cycles how many paths has she had to follow in order to reach at last the cave of the anthropoid, the primitive man?

It is before him that will open the royal avenue leading to the palace of spirit. But how many races, how many generations will pass on the earth without discovering it, how many wrong paths will Nature follow in the footsteps of man. For, believing himself the masterpiece of the universe, he knows not that he has a further stage to pass through.

Could the idea of man be conceived, before he existed, in the obscure brain of even the nearest of his ancestors? Can the idea of the superman, before he exists, penetrate into the brain of man?

And yet, in every child of man which comes into the world, in every growing intelligence, in every effort of the emerging generations, in every attempt of human genius, Nature seeks the way which, once again, will lead her further.

Fifteen hundred million men since perhaps fifteen hundred centuries wander without finding this way.

Among the multitude of the ways over which all the efforts of their progress are scattered, in this domain as in all the others, only one is good: it is the way of synthetic perfections. Where to discover it?

And who among men dares to venture elsewhere than on the easy and well-beaten tracks? Who, knowing that there is another path which goes further, accepts to lose all in order to find it perhaps, to lose all in walking alone, in thinking alone, always apart among the others, not even certain of attaining what he seeks.

Try not to discover this one among the men who excel and shine, for these excel and shine only in being, somewhat more perfectly, similar to their own kind.

Precious stones also excel and shine among all the other stones, but the most beautiful gem is outside the series of chemical combinations from whence comes forth life. In the same way, ascending the series of forms, the most beautiful tree of the forest is outside the lines of evolution which lead the biological process up to the animal, up to man.

And once again, among men, the most admired, the most famous, the most artistic, the most learned, the most religious, may well find himself far off the way leading from man to superman.

Each race, each civilisation, each human society, each religion, represents a new attempt of Nature, one more effort adding to the long series of those she multiplied during countless time.

Now, as among all the animal forms there was one from which man was to come forth, so also, among the social and religious species, must one be born from which some day will come forth the superman.

For it is this which Nature seeks in all her successive attempts, from the first germination of life until man, until the God who shall be born of him.

In the multitude of men she seeks the possibility of the superman; and in each one of them, she aims towards the realisation of the divine.

We have already seen that the appearance of a new species always announces the manifestation on earth of a new principle, a new plane of consciousness, a new force or power. But, at the same time, while the new species acquires this formerly unmanifested power or consciousness, it may lose one or many of the perfections which were the characteristics of the immediately preceding species. For instance, to speak only of the last step of Nature's development, what are the greatest differences between man and his immediate predecessor, the ape? In the monkey we see vitality and physical ability reaching the utmost perfection, a perfection that the new species had to abandon. For man, there has been no more of that marvellous climbing up trees, somersaults over abysses, jumps from summit to summit, but in exchange he acquired intelligence, the power of reasoning, combining, constructing. Indeed with man it is the life of mind, of intellect which appeared on earth. Man is essentially a mental being; and if his possibilities do not stop there, if he feels in himself other worlds, other faculties, other planes of consciousness beyond his mental life, they are only as promises for the future, in the same way as the mental possibilities are latent in the monkey.

It is true that some men, very few, have lived in that world beyond, which we may call the spiritual; some have been, indeed, the living incarnations of that world on earth, but they are the exceptions, the forerunners showing the way to the race, leading it towards its future realisation, not the average man. But that which was the privilege of a few beings scattered through time and space, shall become the central characteristic of the new type which is to appear.

At present, man governs his life through reason; all the activities of the mind are of common use for him; his means of knowledge are observation and deduction; it is by and through reasoning that he takes his decision and chooses his way — or believes he does — in life.

The new race shall be governed by intuition, that is to say, direct perception of the divine law within. Some human beings actually know and experience intuition — as, undoubtedly, certain big gorillas of the forests have glimpses of reasoning.

In mankind, the very few who have cultivated their inner self, who have concentrated their energies on the discovery of the true law of their being, possess more or less the faculty of intuition. When the mind is perfectly silent, pure like a well-polished mirror, immobile as a pond on a breezeless day, then, from above, as the light of the stars drops in the motionless waters, so the light of the supermind, of the Truth within, shines in the quieted mind and gives birth to intuition. Those who are accustomed to listen to this voice out of the Silence, take it more and more as the instigating motive of their actions; and where others, the average men, wander along the intricate paths of reasoning, they go straight their way, guided through the windings of life by intuition, this superior instinct, as by a strong and unfailing hand.

This faculty which is exceptional, almost abnormal now, will certainly be quite common and natural for the new race, the man of tomorrow. But probably the

constant exercise of it will be detrimental to the reasoning faculties. As man possesses no more the extreme physical ability of the monkey, so also will the superman lose the extreme mental ability of man,<sup>2</sup> this ability to deceive himself and others.

Thus, man's road to supermanhood will be open when he declares boldly that all he has yet developed, including the intellect of which he is so rightly and yet so vainly proud, is now no longer sufficient for him, and that to uncase, discover, set free this greater power within, shall be henceforward his great preoccupation. Then will his philosophy, art, science, ethics, social existence, vital pursuits be no longer an exercise of mind and life for themselves, in a circle, but a means for the discovery of a greater Truth behind mind and life and the bringing of its power into our human existence. And this discovery is that of our real, because our highest self and nature.

However, that self which we are not yet, but have to become, is not the strong vital Will hymned by Nietzsche, but a spiritual self and spiritual nature. For as soon as we speak of supermanhood we must be careful to avoid all confusion with the strong but so superficial and incomplete conception of Nietzsche's superman.

Indeed, since Nietzsche invented the word superman, when someone uses it to speak of the coming race, willingly or not, it evokes at the same time Nietzsche's conception. Certainly, his idea that to develop the superman out of our present very unsatisfactory manhood is our real business, is in itself an absolutely sound idea; certainly, his formula of our aim, "to become ourselves", implying, as it does, that man has not yet found all his true self, his true nature by which he can successfully and spontaneously live, could not be bettered; nevertheless, Nietzsche made the mistake we said we ought to avoid: his superman is but a man aggrandised, magnified, in whom Force has become super-dominant, crushing under its weight all the other attributes of man. Such cannot be our ideal. We see too well at present whither leads the exclusive worshipping of Force — to the crimes of the strong and the ruin of continents.

No, the way to supermanhood lies in the unfolding of the ever-perfect Spirit. All would change, all would become easy if man could once consent to be spiritualised. The higher perfection of the spiritual life will come by a spontaneous obedience of spiritualised man to the truth of his own realised being, when he has become himself, found his own real nature; but this spontaneity will not be instinctive and subconscious as in the animal, but intuitive and fully, integrally conscient.

Therefore, the individuals who will most help the future of humanity in the new age, will be those who will recognise a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore the great need of the human being, an evolution or conversion of the present type of humanity into a spiritualised humanity, even as the animal man has been largely converted into a highly mentalised humanity.

2. *Alternative ending (from earlier draft)*: perhaps all of the power of reasoning; and, even, the organ itself may become useless, disappear little by little as the monkey's tail, which was of no use for man, disappeared from his physical body.

They will be comparatively indifferent to particular belief and form of religion, and leave men to resort to the beliefs and forms to which they are naturally drawn. They will only hold as essential the faith in the spiritual conversion. They will especially not make the mistake of thinking that this change can be effected by machinery and outward institutions; they will know and never forget that it has to be lived out by each man inwardly or it can never be made a reality.

And among these individuals, woman must be the first to realise this great change, as it is her special task to give birth in this world to the first specimens of the new race. And to be able to do this she must, more or less, conceive what will be the practical results of this spiritual conversion. For if it cannot be effected simply by exterior transformations, it can neither be realised without bringing forth such transformations.

These will certainly not be less in the moral and social domains than in the intellectual.

As religious beliefs and cults will become secondary, so also the ethical restrictions or prescriptions, rules of conduct or conventions will lose their importance.<sup>3</sup>

Actually, in human life, the whole moral problem is concentrated in the conflict between the vital will with its impulses and the mental power with its decrees. When the vital will is submitted to the mental power, then the life of the individual or of the society becomes moral. But it is only when both, vital will and mental power, are equally submissive to something higher, to the supermind, that human life is exceeded, that true spiritual life begins, the life of the superman; for his law will come from within, it will be the divine law shining in the centre of each being and governing life from therein, the divine law multiple in its manifestation but one in its origin. And because of its unity this law is the law of supreme order and harmony.

Thus the individual, no more guided by egoistical motives, laws or customs, shall abandon all selfish aims. His rule will be perfect disinterestedness. To act in view of a personal profit, either in this world or in another beyond, will become an unthinkable impossibility. For each act will be done in complete, simple, joyful

*3. This paragraph and the two which precede it replace the following passage of an earlier draft:*

But among these individuals woman, as we have already said, will have one special task to accomplish, that of giving birth in this world to the first specimens of the new race. And to be able to do this we must, more or less, conceive first in our thought the ideal of what the superman can be.

Of course, nothing is more difficult than to draw a picture of what will be the new race; it is an almost unrealisable attempt, and we shall certainly not try to enter into details; for we cannot ask of our mind to grasp with any certainty or accuracy this creation of the supermind, of the spirit.

But as we have already seen that the replacing of mental reason by intuitive knowledge will be one of the characteristic features of the future being, in the same way, morally and socially what can be the standard of the new race's life?

From the ethical point of view, for the individual of the new race there will certainly be no more restrictions or prescriptions, rules of conduct or conventions.

obedience to the divine law which inspires it, without any seeking for reward or results, as the supreme reward will be in the very delight of acting under such inspiration, of being identified in conscience and will with the divine principle within oneself.

And in this identification the superman will find also his social standard. For in discovering the divine law in himself he will recognise the same divine law in every being, and by being identified with it in himself he will be identified with it in all, thus becoming aware of the unity of all, not only in essence and substance but also in the most exterior planes of life and form. He will not be a mind, a life or a body, but the informing and sustaining Soul or Self, silent, peaceful, eternal, that possesses them; and this Soul or Self he will find everywhere sustaining and informing and possessing all lives and minds and bodies. He will be conscious of this Self as the divine creator and doer of all works, one in all existences; for the many souls of the universal manifestation are only faces of the one Divine. He will perceive each being to be the universal Divinity presenting to him many faces; he will merge himself in That and perceive his own mind, life and body as only one presentation of the Self, and all whom we, at present, conceive of as others will be to his consciousness his own self in other minds, lives and bodies. He will be able to feel his body one with all bodies, as he will be aware constantly of the unity of all matter; he will unite himself in mind and heart with all existences; in short, he will see and feel his own person in all others and all others in himself, realising thus true solidarity in the perfection of unity.

But we must limit to these indispensable hints our description of the superman, and push no further our attempt to picture him, as we are convinced that any endeavour to be more precise would prove not only vain but useless. For it is not a number of imaginings, more or less exact, which can help us in the formation of the future type. It is by holding firm in our heart and mind the dynamism, the irresistible impetus given by a sincere and ardent aspiration, by maintaining in ourselves a certain state of enlightened receptivity towards the supreme Idea of the new race which wills to be manifested on earth, that we can take a decisive step in the formation of the sons of the future, and make ourselves fit to serve as intermediaries for the creation of those who shall save Humanity.<sup>4</sup>

THE MOTHER

(*Words of Long Ago*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 2, pp. 157-68)

4. *Alternate ending (from an earlier draft):* of the saviours of the world

*The earlier draft closes with the following additional paragraph:* For, in truth, saviours they will be, as each being of this new type will not live either for himself or for State or society, for the individual ego or the collective ego, but for something much greater, for God in himself and for God in the world.

## MORE ON JAPAN

### Prayers specific to Japan

*December 5, 1916*

Thou hast granted me the grace of Thy repose in which all individual limits are dissolved, in which one is in all and, more clearly still, all is in oneself. But the mind, merged in this divine ecstasy, cannot yet find any power of expression.

*(Factual notation of the experience)*

“Turn towards the earth.” The usual injunction was heard in the silence of the immutable identification. Then the consciousness became that of the One in all. “Everywhere and in all those in whom thou canst see the One, there will awake the consciousness of this identity with the Divine. Look. . . .” It was a Japanese street brilliantly illuminated by gay lanterns picturesquely adorned with vivid colours. And as gradually what was conscious moved on down the street, the Divine appeared, visible in everyone and everything. One of the lightly-built houses became transparent, revealing a woman seated on a tatami in a sumptuous violet kimono embroidered with gold and bright colours. The woman was beautiful and must have been between thirty-five and forty. She was playing a golden samisen. At her feet lay a little child. And in the woman too the Divine was visible.

(M1: 322)

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*April 1, 1917*

Thou hast shown to my mute and expectant soul all the splendour of fairy landscapes: trees at festival and lonely paths that seem to scale the sky.

But of my destiny Thou didst not speak to me. Must it be so veiled from me? . . .

Once more, everywhere I see cherry trees; Thou hast put a magical power in these flowers: they seem to speak of Thy sole Presence; they bring with them the smile of the Divine.

My body is at rest and my soul blossoms in light: what kind of a charm hast Thou put into these trees in flower?

O Japan, it is thy festive adorning, expression of thy goodwill, it is thy purest offering, the pledge of thy fidelity; it is thy way of saying that thou dost mirror the sky.



And now here is a magnificent country, of high mountains all covered with pines and richly tilled valleys. And the little pink roses this Chinese brings, are they a promise of the near future?

(M1: 363)

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*April 7, 1917*

A deep concentration seized on me, and I perceived that I was identifying myself with a single cherry-blossom, then through it with all cherry-blossoms, and, as I descended deeper in the consciousness, following a stream of bluish force, I became suddenly the cherry-tree itself, stretching towards the sky like so many arms its innumerable branches laden with their sacrifice of flowers. Then I heard distinctly this sentence:

“Thus hast thou made thyself one with the soul of the cherry-trees and so thou canst take note that it is the Divine who makes the offering of this flower-prayer to heaven.”

When I had written it, all was effaced; but now the blood of the cherry-tree flows in my veins and with it flows an incomparable peace and force. What difference is there between the human body and the body of a tree? In truth, there is none: the consciousness which animates them is identically the same.

Then the cherry-tree whispered in my ear:

“It is in the cherry-blossom that lies the remedy for the disorders of the spring.”

(M1: 364)

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*April 10, 1917*

My heart has fallen asleep down to the very depths of my being. . . .

The whole earth is in a stir and agitation of perpetual change; all life enjoys and suffers, strives, struggles, conquers, is destroyed and formed again.

My heart has fallen asleep down to the very depths of my being. . . .

In all these innumerable and manifold elements, I am the Will that moves, the Thought that acts, the Force that realises, the Matter that is put in motion.

My heart has fallen asleep down to the very depths of my being. . . .

No more personal limits, no more individual action, no longer any separative concentration creating conflict, nothing but a single and infinite Oneness.

My heart has fallen asleep down to the very depths of my being. . . .

(M1: 366)

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*Akakura: July 13, 1917*

One day I wrote:

“My heart has fallen asleep down to the very depths of my being. . . .” Merely asleep? I cannot believe it. I think it is completely hushed, perhaps for ever. From sleep one awakes, from this quietness there is no falling back. And since that day I have not observed any relapse. In place of something very intensely concentrated which for a long while was intermittently tumultuous, has come an immensity so vast and calm and untroubled, filling my being; or rather my being has melted into that; for how could that which is limitless be contained in a form?

And these great mountains with their serene contours which I see from my window, range after majestic range up to the very horizon, are in perfect harmony with the rhythm of this being, filled with an infinite peace. Lord, couldst Thou have taken possession of Thy kingdom? Or rather of this part of the kingdom, for the body is still obscure and ignorant, slow to respond, without plasticity. Will it be purified one day like the rest? And will Thy victory then be total? It matters little. This instrument is what Thou wantest it to be and its bliss is unalloyed.

(M1: 368)

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*Tokio: September 24, 1917*

Thou hast subjected me to a hard discipline; rung after rung, I have climbed the ladder which leads to Thee and, at the summit of the ascent, Thou hast made me taste the perfect joy of identity with Thee. Then, obedient to Thy command, rung after rung, I have descended to outer activities and external states of consciousness, re-entering into contact with these worlds that I left to discover Thee. And now that I have come back to the bottom of the ladder, all is so dull, so mediocre, so neutral, in me and around me, that I understand no more. . . .

What is it then that Thou awaitest from me, and to what use that slow long preparation, if all is to end in a result to which the majority of human beings attain without being subjected to any discipline?

How is it possible that having seen all that I have seen, experienced all that I have experienced, after I have been led up even to the most sacred sanctuary of Thy knowledge and communion with Thee, Thou hast made of me so utterly common an instrument in such ordinary circumstances? In truth, O Lord, Thy ends are unfathomable and pass my understanding. . . .

Why, when Thou hast placed in my heart the pure diamond of Thy perfect Felicity, sufferest Thou its surface to reflect the shadows which come from outside and so leave unsuspected and, it would seem, ineffective the treasure of Peace Thou hast granted me? Truly all this is a mystery and confounds my understanding.

Why, when Thou hast given me this great inner silence, sufferest Thou the tongue to be so active and the thought to be occupied with things so futile? Why? . . . I could go on questioning indefinitely and, to all likelihood, always in vain. . . .

I have only to bow to Thy decree and accept my condition without uttering a word.

I am now only a spectator who watches the dragon of the world unrolling its coils without end.

(M1: 369-70)

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*Oiwaké: September 3, 1919*

Since the man refused the meal I had prepared with so much love and care, I invoked the God to take it.

My God, Thou hast accepted my invitation, Thou hast come to sit at my table, and in exchange for my poor and humble offering Thou hast granted to me the last liberation. My heart, even this morning so heavy with anguish and care, my head surcharged with responsibility, are delivered of their burden. Now are they light and joyful as my inner being has been for a long time past. My body smiles to Thee with happiness as before my soul smiled to Thee. And surely hereafter Thou wilt withdraw no more from me this joy, O my God! for this time, I think, the lesson has been sufficient, I have mounted the Calvary of successive disillusionments high enough to attain to the Resurrection. Nothing remains of the past but a potent love which gives me the pure heart of a child and the lightness and freedom of thought of a god.<sup>1</sup>

(M1: 377)

1. An explanation by Nolini Kanta Gupta:

“I prepared the Feast”

It was a banquet I prepared for men. Instead of a life of misery and suffering, of obscurity and ignorance I brought to them a life of light and joy and freedom. I took all the pains the task demanded and when it was ready I offered it to mankind to partake of it. But man in his foolishness and pigheadedness rejected it, did not want it. He preferred to remain in his dark miserable hole. Now, what am I to do with my Feast? I cannot let it go waste, throw it to the winds. So I offered it to my Lord and laid it at his feet. He accepted it. He alone can enjoy it and honour it.

The Feast is that of Transformation, the Divine Life on earth. Man is not capable of it naturally, cannot attain it by his own effort or personal worth. It is the Divine who is to bring it down Himself. He is to manifest Himself and thus establish His own life here below. Then only will it be possible for the human creature to open to the urgency of the new beauty and offer his surrender.

It was not easy to prepare the Feast. I had to bear the full load of the cross and ascend the calvary. Jesus as he mounted to his destiny with the Cross on his back stumbled often and fell and rose again with bruised limbs to begin again the arduous journey. Even so, this being too had to go through many disillusionments and deceptions, many painful and brutal experiences. It was not a smooth and straight going, but a tortuous and dangerous ascent.

## **The same Force, the same Power**

To what you see you give the form of that which you expect to see. If the same being appeared simultaneously in a group where there were Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Shintoists, it would be named by absolutely different names. Each would say, in reference to the appearance of the being, that he was like this or like that, all differing and yet it would be one and the same manifestation. You have the vision of one in India whom you call the Divine Mother, the Catholics say it is the Virgin Mary, and the Japanese call it Kwannon, the Goddess of Mercy, and others would give other names. It is the same Force, the same Power, but the images made of it are different in different faiths.

(M3: 18)

## **Each of us has been born in many different countries**

If we go a little way within ourselves, we shall discover that there is in each of us a consciousness that has been living throughout the ages and manifesting in a multitude of forms. Each of us has been born in many different countries, belonged to many different nations, followed many different religions. Why must we accept the last one as the best? The experiences gathered by us in all these many lives in different countries and varying religions, are stored up in that inner continuity of our consciousness which persists through all births. There are multiple personalities there created by these past experiences, and when we become aware of this multitude within us, it becomes impossible to speak of one particular form of truth as the only truth, one country as our only country, one religion as the only true religion. There

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But at the end of the tunnel there is always the light. The calvary and the crucifixion culminated in the Resurrection: the divine Passion of Christ flowered into this supreme Recompense. Here too after all the dark and adverse vicissitudes lies the fulfilment of transformation. One must pass through the entire valley of death and rise to the topmost summit to receive and achieve the fullness of the glory. One must leave behind all the lower ranges of ignorance, the entire domain of human consciousness, come out of the imperfection man is made of; then only will he put on the divine nature as his own body and substance.

The Cross symbolises all the suffering and difficulty, the renunciation and self-denudation that the ascent to the Goal involves. The Calvary of the Christian legend means Ascension and Resurrection is Transformation in our sadhana. The Cross is also symbolic of the Transformed consciousness. It has three branches and represents the triple Divine, the Divine in his three modes of existence. The top branch, the vertical portion above the transverse line, stands for the supreme or transcendent Divine, one who is above manifestation; the middle — the transverse or horizontal branch stands for the expanse of the universal consciousness, the Cosmic Divine; and the bottom portion, the vertical line below the transverse stands for the individual Divine immanent or imbedded in the manifestation. You will note that the flower we call transformation has a form similar to the Cross.

(*Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 284)

are people who have been born into one country, although the leading elements of their consciousness obviously belong to another. I have met some born in Europe who were evidently Indians; I have met others born in Indian bodies who were as evidently Europeans. In Japan I have met some who were Indian, others who were European. And if any of them goes to the country or enters into the civilisation to which he has affinity, he finds himself there perfectly at home.

(M3: 81-82)

### **True art is intended to express the beautiful, but in close intimacy with the universal movement**

The mistake of the artist is to believe that artistic production is something that stands by itself and for itself, independent of the rest of the world. Art as understood by these artists is like a mushroom on the wide soil of life, something casual and external, not something intimate to life; it does not reach and touch the deep and abiding realities, it does not become an intrinsic and inseparable part of existence. True art is intended to express the beautiful, but in close intimacy with the universal movement. The greatest nations and the most cultured races have always considered art as a part of life and made it subservient to life. Art was like that in Japan in its best moments; it was like that in all the best moments in the history of art. But most artists are like parasites growing on the margin of life; they do not seem to know that art should be the expression of the Divine in life and through life. In everything, everywhere, in all relations truth must be brought out in its all-embracing rhythm and every movement of life should be an expression of beauty and harmony. Skill is not art, talent is not art. Art is a living harmony and beauty that must be expressed in all the movements of existence. This manifestation of beauty and harmony is part of the Divine realisation upon earth, perhaps even its greatest part.

For, from the supramental point of view beauty and harmony are as important as any other expression of the Divine. But they should not be isolated, set up apart from all other relations, taken out from the ensemble; they should be one with the expression of life as a whole.

(M3: 108-09)

### **True art is a whole and an ensemble**

True art is a whole and an ensemble; it is one and of one piece with life. You see something of this intimate wholeness in ancient Greece and ancient Egypt; for there pictures and statues and all objects of art were made and arranged as part of the architectural plan of a building, each detail a portion of the whole. It is like that in

Japan, or at least it was so till the other day before the invasion of a utilitarian and practical modernism. A Japanese house is a wonderful artistic whole; always the right thing is there in the right place, nothing wrongly set, nothing too much, nothing too little. Everything is just as it needed to be, and the house itself blends marvellously with the surrounding nature. In India, too, painting and sculpture and architecture were one integral beauty, one single movement of adoration of the Divine.

(M3: 109-10)

## Dance and religion

The dance was once one of the highest expressions of the inner life; it was associated with religion and it was an important limb in sacred ceremony, in the celebration of festivals, in the adoration of the Divine. In some countries it reached a very high degree of beauty and an extraordinary perfection. In Japan they kept up the tradition of the dance as a part of the religious life and, because the strict sense of beauty and art is a natural possession of the Japanese, they did not allow it to degenerate into something of lesser significance and smaller purpose. It was the same in India. It is true that in our days there have been attempts to resuscitate the ancient Greek and other dances; but the religious sense is missing in all such resurrections and they look more like rhythmic gymnastics than dance.

(M3: 111-12)

## Japanese art

*What is the difference between Japanese art and the art of other countries, like those of Europe, for example?*

The art of Japan is a kind of directly mental expression in physical life. The Japanese use the vital world very little. Their art is extremely mentalised; their life is extremely mentalised. It expresses in detail quite precise mental formations. Only, in the physical, they have spontaneously the sense of beauty. For example, a thing one sees very rarely in Europe but constantly, daily in Japan: very simple people, men of the working class or even peasants go for rest or enjoyment to a place where they can see a beautiful landscape. This gives them a much greater joy than going to play cards or indulging in all sorts of distractions as they do in the countries of Europe. They are seen in groups at times, going on the roads or sometimes taking a train or a tram up to a certain point, then walking to a place from where one gets a beautiful view. Then at this place there is a small house which fits very well into the landscape, there is a kind of small platform on which one can sit: one takes a cup of

tea and at the same time sees the landscape. For them, this is the supreme enjoyment; they know nothing more pleasant. One can understand this among artists, educated people, quite learned people, but I am speaking of people of the most ordinary class, poor people who like this better than resting or relaxing at home. This is for them the greatest joy.

And in that country, for each season there are known sites. For instance, in autumn leaves become red; they have large numbers of maple-trees (the leaves of the maple turn into all the shades of the most vivid red in autumn, it is absolutely marvellous), so they arrange a place near a temple, for instance, on the top of a hill, and the entire hill is covered with maples. There is a stairway which climbs straight up, almost like a ladder, from the base to the top, and it is so steep that one cannot see what is at the top, one gets the feeling of a ladder rising to the skies — a stone stairway, very well made, rising steeply and seeming to lose itself in the sky — clouds pass, and both the sides of the hill are covered with maples, and these maples have the most magnificent colours you could ever imagine. Well, an artist who goes there will experience an emotion of absolutely exceptional, marvellous beauty. But one sees very small children, families even, with a baby on the shoulder, going there in groups. In autumn they will go there. In springtime they will go elsewhere.

There is a garden quite close to Tokyo where irises are grown, a garden with very tiny rivulets, and along the rivulets, irises — irises of all possible colours — and it is arranged according to colour, organised in such a way that on entering one is dazzled, there is a blaze of colour from all these flowers standing upright; and there are heaps and heaps of them, as far as the eye can reach. At another time, just at the beginning of spring (it is a slightly early spring there), there are the first cherry-trees. These cherry-trees never give fruit, they are grown only for the flowers. They range from white to pink, to a rather vivid pink. There are long avenues all bordered with cherry-trees, all pink; they are huge trees which have turned all pink. There are entire mountains covered with these cherry-trees, and on the little rivulets bridges have been built which too are all red: you see these bridges of red lacquer among all these pink flowers and, below, a great river flowing and a mountain which seems to scale the sky, and they go to this place in springtime. . . . For each season there are flowers and for each flower there are gardens.

And people travel by train as easily as one goes from house to house; they have a small packet like this which they carry; in it they have a change of clothes, that's quite enough for them; on their feet they wear rope or fibre sandals; when these get worn out they throw them away and take others, for they cost nothing at all. All their life is like that. They have paper handkerchiefs, when they have used them they get rid of them, and so on — they don't burden themselves with anything. When they go by train, at the stations small meals are sold in boxes (it is quite clean, quite neat), small meals in boxes of white wood with little chop-sticks for eating; then, as all this has no value, when one has finished, one puts them aside, doesn't

bother about them or encumber oneself. They live like that. When they have a garden or a park, they plant trees, and they plant them just at the place where when the tree has grown it will create a landscape, will fit into a landscape. And as they want the tree to have a particular shape, they trim it, cut it, they manage to give it all the shapes they want. You have trees with fantastic forms; they have cut off the unnecessary branches, fostered others, contrived things as they liked. Then you come to a place and you see a house which seems to be altogether a part of the landscape; it has exactly the right colour, it is made of the right materials; it is not like a blow in your face, as are all those European buildings which spoil the whole landscape. It is just there where it should be, hidden under the trees; then you see a creeper and suddenly a wonderful tree: it is there at the right place, it has the right form. I had everything to learn in Japan. For four years, from an artistic point of view, I lived from wonder to wonder.

And in the cities, a city like Tokyo, for example, which is the biggest city in the world, bigger than London, and which extends far, far (now the houses are modernised, the whole centre of the city is very unpleasant, but when I was there, it was still good), in the outlying parts of the city, those which are not business quarters, every house has at the most two storeys and a garden — there is always a garden, there are always one or two trees which are quite lovely. And then, if you go for a walk . . . it is very difficult to find your way in Tokyo; there are no straight streets with houses on either side according to the number, and you lose your way easily. Then you go wandering around — always one wanders at random in that country — you go wandering and all of a sudden you turn the corner of a street and come to a kind of paradise: there are magnificent trees, a temple as truly beautiful, you see nothing of the city any longer, no more traffic, no tramways; a corner, a corner of trees with magnificent colours, and it is beautiful, truly beautiful. You do not know how you have reached there, you seem to have come by luck. And then you turn, you seek your way, you wander off again and go elsewhere. And some days later you want to come back to this very place, but it is impossible, it is as though it had disappeared. And this is so frequent, this is so true that such stories are often told in Japan. Their literature is full of enchantment. They tell you a story in which the hero comes suddenly to a magic place: he sees fairies, he sees marvellous beings, he spends exquisite hours among flowers, music; all is splendid. The next day he is obliged to leave; it is the law of the place, he goes away. He tries to come back, but never does. He can no longer find the place: it was there, it has disappeared! . . . And everything in this city, in this country, from beginning to end, gives you the impression of impermanence, of the unexpected, the exceptional. You always come to things you did not expect; you want to find them again and they are lost — they have made something else which is equally charming. From the artistic point of view, the point of view of beauty, I don't think there is a country as beautiful as that.

Now, I ought to say, to complete my picture, that the four years I was there I



found a dearth of spirituality as entire as could be. These people have a wonderful morality, live according to quite strict moral rules, they have a mental construction even in the least detail of life: one must eat in a certain way and not another, one must bow in a certain way and not another, one must say certain words but not all; when addressing certain people one must express oneself in a certain way; when speaking with others, one must express oneself in another. If you go to buy something in a shop, you must say a particular sentence; if you don't say it, you are not served: they look at you quizzically and do not move! But if you say the word, they wait upon you with full attention and bring, if necessary, a cushion for you to sit upon and a cup of tea to drink. And everything is like that. However, not once do you have the feeling that you are in contact with something other than a marvellously organised mental-physical domain. And what energy they have! Their whole vital being is turned into energy. They have an extraordinary endurance but no direct aspiration: one must obey the rule, one is obliged. If one does not submit oneself to rules there, one may live as Europeans do, who are considered barbarians and looked upon altogether as intruders, but if you want to live a Japanese life among the Japanese you must do as they do, otherwise you make them so unhappy that you can't even have any relation with them. In their house you must live in a particular way, when you meet them you must greet them in a particular way. . . . I think I have already told you the story of that Japanese who was an intimate friend of ours, and whom I helped to come into contact with his soul — and who ran away. He was in the countryside with us and I had put him in touch with his psychic being; he had the experience, a revelation, the contact, the dazzling inner contact. And the next morning, he was no longer there, he had taken flight! Later, when I saw him again in town after the holidays, I asked him, "But what happened to you, why did you go away?" — "Oh! You understand, I discovered my soul and saw that my soul was more powerful than my faith in the country and the Mikado; I would have had to obey my soul and I would no longer have been a faithful subject of my emperor. I had to go away." There you are! All this is authentically true.

(M4: 305-09)

### **Those stairs rising straight up into the sky**

The other day I spoke to you about those landscapes of Japan; well, almost all — the most beautiful, the most striking ones — I had seen in vision in France; and yet I had not seen any pictures or photographs of Japan, I knew nothing of Japan. And I had seen these landscapes without human beings, nothing but the landscape, quite pure, like that, and it had seemed to me they were visions of a world other than the physical; they seemed to me too beautiful for the physical world, too perfectly beautiful. Particularly I used to see very often those stairs rising straight up into the



sky; in my vision there was the impression of climbing straight up, straight up, and as though one could go on climbing, climbing, climbing. . . . It had struck me, and the first time I saw this in Nature down there, I understood that I had already seen it in France before having known anything about Japan.

(M4: 318)

### **The experience is the same**

. . . for those who have the consciousness of the Divine, when they are in contact with the Divine, whoever they may be, whatever age, whatever country they may belong to, the experience is the same. Whereas if it were as you say, then Indians would see one of their divinities, Europeans one of theirs, the Japanese one of their own, and so on. Then it would no longer be a pure perception, there would already be an addition of their own mental formation. It is no longer the Thing in its essence and purity, which is beyond all form.

But one may have a perception, and a very concrete perception of the Divine Presence, yes. One may have a very personal contact with the Divine, yes. But not in this way. And it is inexpressible, except for those who have had the experience. If you do not have an experience, I could speak to you for hours about it, you would understand nothing; it escapes all explanation. It is only when one has the experience that one can understand.

(M5: 79)

### **Spirits of Death**

*It is said that there is a god of Death. Is it true?*

Yes, I call it the spirit of Death. I know it very well. And that is an extraordinary organisation. You do not know to what an extent it is organised.

I believe there are many of these spirits of death, I believe there are hundreds. I have met at least two of them. One I met in France and the other in Japan, and they were very different; which leads one to believe that probably in accordance with the mental culture, the education, the country and beliefs there should be different spirits. But there are spirits of all the manifestations of Nature: there are spirits of fire, spirits of air, of water, of rain, of wind; and there are spirits of death.

Each spirit of death, whatever it may be, has a claim to a certain number of deaths per day. Indeed it is a fantastic organisation; it is a kind of alliance between the vital forces and the forces of Nature. For example, if the spirit of death has decided: "That is the number of people to which I am entitled", let us say four or

five or six, or one or two persons, it depends on the day; it has decided that certain persons would die, it goes straight and settles down beside the person about to die. But if you happen to be conscious (not the person), if you see the spirit going to a person and you do not want him to die, then you can, if you possess a certain occult power, tell it: “No, I forbid you to take him.” It is a thing that has happened, not once but several times, in Japan and here. It was not the same spirit. That is what makes me say that there must be many.

— I don’t want him to die.

— But I have a right to one death!

— Go and find someone who is ready to die.

So I have seen several cases: sometimes it is just a neighbour who dies suddenly in place of the other, sometimes it is an acquaintance and sometimes it is an enemy. Naturally, there is a relation, good or bad, of neighbourhood (or anything else) which externally looks like chance. But it is the spirit who has taken *its* dead. The spirit has a claim to one death, it will have one death. You can tell it: “I forbid you to take this one”, and have the power of sending it away, and the spirit can do nothing but go away; but it does not give up its due and goes elsewhere. There is another death.

It is the same thing with fire. I saw the spirit of fire, particularly in Japan because fire is an extraordinary thing in that country. When a fire starts, some eighty houses burn: a whole quarter. It is something fantastic. The houses are of wood and they burn like match-boxes; you see a fire kindling and then all of a sudden, puff! . . . You have never seen a match-box catching fire? a flash! like that, a flash! one, two, three, ten, twenty houses burnt down before my eyes! . . . So there are spirits of fire. One day, I was in my bed. I was concentrating, looking at people. Suddenly I saw something like a cloud of flames drawing close to the house. I looked and I saw it was a conscious being.

— Eh! what are you here for?

— I have the right to burn the house, start a fire.

— That’s possible, I told it, but not here.

And it could not resist.

It is a question of who proves the stronger. I said: “No, here you can’t burn, that’s all!” Five minutes later I heard cries: “Ah! Ah!” Two or three houses farther away, a house had caught fire. It had gone there as I had forbidden it to come to my house. It had a claim to one house. There we are!

(M5: 135-37)

## All those who produce something artistic are artists

If you ask me, I believe that all those who produce something artistic are artists! A word depends upon the way it is used, upon what one puts into it. One may put into it all that one wants. For instance, in Japan there are gardeners who spend their time correcting the forms of trees so that in the landscape they make a beautiful picture. By all kinds of trimmings, props, etc. they adjust the forms of trees. They give them special forms so that each form may be just what is needed in the landscape. A tree is planted in a garden at the spot where it is needed and moreover, it is given the form that's required for it to go well with the whole set-up. And they succeed in doing wonderful things. You have but to take a photograph of the garden, it is a real picture, it is so good. Well, I certainly call the man an artist. One may call him a gardener but he is an artist. . . . All those who have a sure and developed sense of harmony in all its forms, and the harmony of all the forms among themselves, are necessarily artists, whatever may be the type of their production.

(M5: 324)

## Two versions

. . . I have heard two versions (but as I said, one was broad-minded and the other extremely orthodox) about the end of Sita; one said that Sita chose to be swallowed up in the earth to prove her innocence, whilst the very orthodox version said that it was just because she was not innocent that she was swallowed up! (*Laughter*)

*Flowers fell from the skies, didn't they?*<sup>2</sup>

Ah! that again is another story. . . . I heard the Ramayana from a man called Pandit, and he was the son of a pandit and had come to Paris to study Law. But he had remained orthodox, as orthodox as one could be, it was tremendous! And he had with him a Ramayana translated into English, with pictures, and he showed it to me. And he told me the story. And then, when he came to the end he told me that. So I said: "What do you mean?" He told me: "You understand, for an Indian, if a woman has lived even for a few hours in another man's house, she is impure. . . ." Oh! it is terrible . . . So, it was because she was impure that she was swallowed up. . . . I remember, he was quite short. He was from a Bombay family — not Bombay proper but from that side. He was a Gujarati. I believe he spoke Gujarati.

2. According to the texts, it seems, flowers fell from the skies after Sita's disappearance, proving her innocence.

And then the other version, I heard that from . . . that man was called Shastri. He was another pandit. He was in Japan.

(M5: 328-29)

### **The number of plants**

But the number of plants — nobody has ever known and nobody will probably ever know the number of different plants there are upon earth. Yet when a list is made of the number of plants men know and use, it is ridiculously small. I believe, when I was in Japan, the Japanese used to tell me that Europeans eat only three hundred and fifty types of different plants, whilst they use more than six hundred. That makes a considerable difference. They used to say: “Oh, how you waste your food! Nature produces infinitely more than you know; you waste all that.” Have you ever eaten (not here, but in Europe) bamboo sprouts? . . . You have eaten bamboo sprouts? You have eaten palm-tree buds? Coconut buds? — That, indeed, makes a marvellous salad, coconut buds. Only, this kills the tree. For a salad, one kills a tree. But when there is a cyclone, for instance, which knocks down hundreds of coconut trees, the only way of utilising the catastrophe is to eat all the buds and make yourself a magnificent dish. Haven’t you ever eaten coconut buds? As for me, I was not surprised, for I had eaten bamboo sprouts before they sprang up from the ground — somewhat like the asparagus. It is quite a classical dish in Japan. And their bamboos are much more tender than the bamboos here. Their bamboos are very tender and their sprouts are wonderful.

Still, that’s how it is. It seems in Europe one knows how to use only three hundred and fifty varieties of vegetables from the vegetable kingdom, whilst in Japan they use six hundred of them and more. But perhaps if people knew, they would not die of hunger, at least those who live in the countryside. *Voilà*.

(M5: 365)

### **The Japanese and the Chinese**

I don’t know if you know that China is a country where the most frightful tortures have been invented, unthinkable things. When I was in Japan I asked a Japanese, who liked the Chinese very much (which is very rare) and always spoke very highly about China, why this was so. He told me, “It is because all the peoples of the Far East, including the Japanese themselves, have a very blunted sensitivity. They feel very little; unless the suffering is extremely strong, they feel nothing. And so this has compelled them to use their intelligence to invent extremely acute sufferings.” Well, all these people who are unconscious, the more unconscious they are,

the more tamasic they are; the more blunted their sensibility, the more do they need strong sensations to feel something. And usually this is what makes people cruel, for cruelty gives very strong sensations. That kind of nervous tension obtained through suffering imposed upon somebody, that gives a sensation, and they need it in order to feel; otherwise they feel nothing. And that is why entire races are particularly cruel. They are very unconscious — vitally unconscious. They may not be unconscious mentally or otherwise, but they are unconscious vitally or physically — above all, physically.

(M6: 70-71)

### Determination

One must have a strong grip and an unshakable resolution. As in our Japanese story of the other day, that soldier who had a knife in his knee in order to make sure of not falling asleep . . . and when he felt very sleepy, he turned the knife in such a way that it hurt him still more. One must have something like that. This, *this* is determination: to know what one wants and to do it. There we are!

(M6: 243-44)

### Thinking in your stomach

But I can also tell you that when I was in Japan I met a man who had formed a group, for . . . It can't be said that it was for sadhana, but for a kind of discipline. He had a theory and it was on this theory that he had founded his group: that one can think in any part of one's being whatever if one concentrates there. That is to say, instead of thinking in your head, you can think in your chest. And he said that one could think here (*gesture*) in the stomach. He took the stomach as the seat of *prāṇa*, the vital force. He used certain Sanskrit words, you know, half-digested, and all that. . . . But still, this does not matter, he was full of goodwill and he said that most human miseries come from the fact that men think in their heads, that this makes the head ache, tires you and takes away your mental clarity. On the other hand, if you learn how to think here (*gesture indicating the stomach*), it gives you power, strength and calmness. And the most remarkable thing is that he had attained a kind of ability to bring down the mental power, the mental force *exactly* here (*gesture*); the mental activity was generated there, and no longer in the head. And he had cured a considerable number of people, considerable, some hundreds, who used to suffer from terrible headaches; he had cured them in this way.

I have tried it, it is quite easy, precisely because, as I told you a while ago, the mental force, mental activity is independent of the brain. We are in the habit of

using the brain but we can use something else or rather, concentrate the mental force elsewhere, and have the impression that our mental activity comes from there. One can concentrate one's mental force in the solar plexus, here (*gesture*), and feel the mental activity coming out from there.

That man used to say, "Haven't you noticed that all men who have great power have a big belly? (*Laughter*) — Because they concentrate their forces there, so this makes their stomach big!" He always used to give the example of Napoleon; and he said, "These people stand up quite straight, always straight with their head erect, never like this (*Mother bends the head forward*), never like this (*Mother bends the head to the right*), never like this (*Mother bends the head to the left*); always quite straight up but with all their force here (*pointing to the stomach*), and so this makes them very powerful!" And he always spoke of Napoleon. He used to say, "Napoleon, you see . . ." (*Mother shows that Napoleon had a big stomach.*) And he had a visit from Tagore when Tagore was in Japan and he told me, "Have you observed how Tagore stands quite upright, like this, with his head erect?" Then I told him, "But he doesn't have a big stomach!" He said to me, "It will come." (*Laughter*)

There were hundreds of people at his meetings. They would all sit on their knees as one does in Japan. He struck a table with a stick and everyone brought down his mental force to the stomach; and then they remained like that for . . . oh! at least half an hour. And after half an hour he struck the table a second time and they released their mental force and began chatting . . . not very much, for the Japanese do not chat much, but nevertheless they talk.

There now! But mark that there was something very true, in the sense that if ever you have a headache I advise you to do this: to take the thought-force, the mental force — and even if you can draw a little of your vital force, that too — and make it come down, like this (*gesture of very slowly sliding both hands from the top of the head downwards*). Well, if you have a headache or a congestion, if you have caught a touch of the sun, for instance, indeed if anything has happened to you, well, if you know how to do this and bring down the force here, like this, here (*showing the centre of the chest*), or even lower down (*showing the stomach*), well, it will disappear. It will disappear. You will be able to do this in five minutes. You can try, the next time you have a headache. . . . I hope you won't have a headache but the next time you have it, try this. Sit upright, like this (*movement showing an āsana posture*). The Japanese say you should sit on your heels — but that might disturb your meditation, sitting like that — they call it sitting at ease. The Indian fashion is like this (*gesture*), otherwise you must sit like this (*gesture*); this is harder when you are not accustomed to it.

So, sit quite at ease and then take all your force as though you were taking, you see . . . all the energy in your head, take it and then make it come down, down, down, like this, slowly, very carefully, right down here, down to the navel. And you will see that your headache will disappear. I have made the experiment many times. . . . It is a

very good remedy, very easy; there is no need to take pills or injections; it gets cured in this way. So there you are!

(M6: 310-12)

## Uniformity

In Japan I met Tolstoy's son who was going round the world for "the good of mankind's great unity". And his solution was very simple: everybody ought to speak the same language, lead the same life, dress in the same way, eat the same things. . . . And I am not joking, those were his very words. I met him in Tokyo; he said: "But everybody would be happy, all would understand one another, nobody would quarrel if everyone did the same thing." There was no way of making him understand that it was not very reasonable! He had set out to travel all over the world for that, and when people asked him his name he would say "Tolstoy" — now, Tolstoy, you know . . . People said, "Oh!" — some people didn't know that Tolstoy was dead — and they thought: "Oh! what luck, we are going to hear something remarkable" — and then he came out with that!

(M8: 105)

## On a Japanese boat

The first time I came to India I came on a Japanese boat. And on this Japanese boat there were two clergymen, that is, Protestant priests, of different sects. I don't remember exactly which sects, but they were both English; I think one was an Anglican and the other a Presbyterian.

Now, Sunday came. There had to be a religious ceremony on the boat, or else we would have looked like heathens, like the Japanese! There had to be a ceremony, but who should perform it? Should it be the Anglican or should it be the Presbyterian? They just missed quarrelling. Finally, one of them withdrew with dignity — I don't remember now which one, I think it was the Anglican — and the Presbyterian performed his ceremony.

It took place in the lounge of the ship. We had to go down a few steps to this lounge. And that day, all the men had put on their jackets — it was hot, I think we were in the Red Sea — they put on their jackets, stiff collars, leather shoes; neckties well set, hats on their heads, and they went with a book under their arm, almost in a procession from the deck to the lounge. The ladies wore their hats, some carried even a parasol, and they too had their book under the arm, a prayer-book.

And so they all crowded down into the lounge, and the Presbyterian made a speech, that is to say, preached his sermon, and everybody listened very religiously.



And then, when it was over, they all came up again with the satisfied air of someone who has done his duty. And, of course, five minutes later they were in the bar drinking and playing cards, and their religious ceremony was forgotten. They had done their duty, it was over, there was nothing more to be said about it.

And the clergyman came and asked me, more or less politely, why I had not attended. I told him, "Sir, I am sorry, but I don't believe in religion."

"Oh! oh! you are a materialist?"

"No, not at all."

"Ah! then why?"

"Oh!" I said, "if I were to tell you, you would be quite displeased, perhaps it is better for me not to say anything."

But he insisted so much that at last I said, "Just try to see, I don't feel that you are sincere, neither you nor your flock. You all went there to fulfil a social duty and a social custom, but not at all because you really wanted to enter into communion with God."

"Enter into communion with God! But we can't do that! All that we can do is to say some good words, but we have no capacity to enter into communion with God."

Then I said, "But it was just because of that I didn't go, for it doesn't interest me."

After that he asked me many questions and admitted to me that he was going to China to convert the "heathens". At that I became serious and told him, "Listen, even before your religion was born — not even two thousand years ago — the Chinese had a very high philosophy and knew a path leading them to the Divine; and when they think of Westerners, they think of them as barbarians. And so you are going there to convert those who know more about it than you? What are you going to teach them? To be insincere, to perform hollow ceremonies instead of following a profound philosophy and a detachment from life which lead them to a more spiritual consciousness? . . . I don't think it's a very good thing you are going to do."

Then he felt so suffocated, the poor man; he said to me, "Eh, I fear I can't be convinced by your words!"

"Oh!" I said, "I am not trying to convince you, I only described the situation to you, and how I don't quite see why barbarians should want to go and teach civilised people what they have known long before you. That's all."

And there, that was the end of it.

(M8: 147-49)



### **Why you do a thing in one way and not another?**

How many things in your life are done at least essentially in the same way as others. For instance, sleeping, moving and eating, and all sorts of things like that. Never have you asked yourselves why you do a thing in one way and not another. You wouldn't be able to say. If I asked you, "Why do you act in this way and not that?" you wouldn't know what to say. But it is quite simply because you were born in certain conditions and it is the habit to be like that in these conditions. Otherwise, if you had been born in another age and other conditions, you would act altogether differently without even realising the difference, it would appear absolutely natural to you. . . . For instance — a very, very small instance — in most Western countries and even in some Eastern ones, people sew like this, from right to left; in Japan they sew from left to right. Well, it seems quite natural to you to sew from right to left, doesn't it? That is how you have been taught and you don't think about it, you sew in that way. If you go to Japan and they see you sewing, it makes them laugh, for they are in the habit of sewing differently. It is the same thing with writing. You write like this, from left to right, but there are people who write from top to bottom, and others who write from right to left, and they do it most naturally. I am not speaking of those who have studied, reflected, compared ways of writing, I am not speaking of more or less learned people, no, I am speaking of quite ordinary people, and above all of children who do what is done around them, quite spontaneously and without questioning. But then, when by chance or circumstance they are faced with a different way, it is a tremendous revelation for them that things can be done in a different way from theirs.

And these are quite simple things, I mean the ones which strike you, but this is true down to the smallest detail. You do things in this way because in the place and environment in which you live they are done in this way. And you do not watch yourself doing them.

Indeed, the source was One, you see, and creation had to be manifold. And it must have represented quite a considerable labour to make this multiplicity conscious of being multiple.

And if one observes very attentively, if creation had kept the memory of its origin, it would perhaps never have become a diverse multiplicity. There would have been at the centre of each being the sense of perfect unity, and the diversity would — perhaps — never have been expressed.

(M9: 47-48)

## Uniformity 2

This reminds me of Tolstoy's son whom I met in Japan and who was going round the world in the hope of bringing about unity among men. His intentions were excellent, but his way of doing it seemed less happy! He said with an imperturbable seriousness that if everybody spoke the same language, if everybody dressed in the same way, ate in the same way and behaved in the same way, that would inevitably bring about unity! And when asked how he planned to realise this he said it would be enough to go from land to land preaching a new but universal language, a new but universal dress, and new but universal habits. That was all. . . . And that was what he intended to do!

*(Laughing)* Well, everyone in his own little field is like that. He has an ideal, a conception of what is true and beautiful and noble, and even divine, and this conception of his he wants to impose on others.

(M9: 55)

## Every event in life can be an opportunity for progress

In this way every event in life, great or small, can be an opportunity for progress. Even the most insignificant details can lead to revelations if you know how to profit from them. Whenever you are engaged in something which does not demand the whole of your attention, use it as an opportunity to develop your faculty of observation and you will see that you will make interesting discoveries. To help you to understand what I mean, I shall give you two examples. They are two brief moments in life which are insignificant in themselves, but still leave a deep and lasting impression.

The first example takes place in Paris. You have to go out into this immense city; here all is noise, apparent confusion, bewildering activity. Suddenly you see a woman walking in front of you; she is like most other women, her dress has nothing striking about it, but her gait is remarkable, supple, rhythmic, elegant, harmonious. It catches your attention and you are full of wonder. Then, this body moving along so gracefully reminds you of all the splendours of ancient Greece and the unparalleled lesson in beauty which its culture gave to the whole world, and you live an unforgettable moment — all that just because of a woman who knows how to walk!

The second example is from the other end of the world, from Japan. You have just arrived in this beautiful country for a long stay and very soon you find out that unless you have at least a minimum knowledge of the language, it will be very difficult for you to get along. So you begin to study Japanese and in order to become familiar with the language you do not miss a single opportunity to hear people talking, you listen to them carefully, you try to understand what they are saying; and then, beside you, in a tram where you have just taken your seat, there is a small

child of four or five years with his mother. The child begins to talk in a clear and pure voice and listening to him you have the remarkable experience that he knows spontaneously what you have to learn with so much effort, and that as far as Japanese is concerned he could be your teacher in spite of his youth.

In this way life becomes full of wonder and gives you a lesson at each step. Looked at from this angle, it is truly worth living.

(M12: 75-76)

## Myself and My Creed

I belong to no nation, no civilisation, no society, no race, but to the Divine.

I obey no master, no ruler, no law, no social convention, but the Divine.

To Him I have surrendered all, will, life, self; for Him I am ready to give all my blood, drop by drop, if such is His Will, with complete joy; and nothing in His service can be sacrifice, for all is perfect delight.

Japan, February 1920

(M13: 38)

## Birth of the Ashram

Sri Aurobindo was living in Pondicherry with four or five disciples from 1910 to 1920.

In 1914 the Mother came from France (with Paul Richard) and Sri Aurobindo began to edit the *Arya*, which continued up to January 1920.

In April 1920 the Mother came back from Japan and gradually, as the number of people increased, the Ashram was founded in 1926.

(M13: 105)

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*Although there is a certain charm and poetry in the fact that there is no formal date for the creation of our Ashram, could it be said from the occult point of view that the Ashram was born with the Mother's arrival?*

The Ashram was born a few years after my return from Japan, in 1926.

17 April 1967

(M13: 105)

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***(In the context of Auroville)***

There are no police. We have . . . we haven't found the word . . . a band of guards, a battalion of guards, something like the firemen in Japan, who are gymnasts and who do everything when there are accidents — anything, earthquakes — they do everything. They climb up into houses. Instead of police, there will be a kind of battalion of guards, who will go out regularly into the various parts of the town to see if they are needed.

(M13: 261-62)

**The teacher of beauty***(Message for the Sri Aurobindo Society, Osaka, Japan)*

Japan was in the physical world the teacher of beauty.

She must not renounce her privilege.

Blessings.

16 October 1972

(M13: 383)

**Remedy for the disorders of the spring**

*“It is in the cherry-blossom that lies the remedy for the disorders of the spring.”*

*(7 April 1917)*

*What does this mean?*

There are certain illnesses that people get particularly in Spring — boils, impurities of the blood, etc. — which the Japanese cure with teas made from cherry-blossoms. I did not know this when I had the experience.

11 February 1936

(M17: 183)

## **“POOL OF LONELINESSES” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO**

Sri Aurobindo —

May I know from what plane this poem derives and how you would appraise its quality? I hope the meaning is not obscure.

I have become a secret pool  
Of lonelinesses mountain-cool,  
A dream-poise of unuttered song  
Lifted above the restless<sup>1</sup> throng  
Of human moods' dark pitchers wrought  
Of fragile<sup>2</sup> and of flawed thought.  
Now never more my tunes shall flow  
In moulds of common joy and woe;  
But seraph hands reveal white<sup>3</sup> jars  
Cut from the solitudes of stars  
And stoop across the sky to fill  
The perfect shapes of their calm will  
With musical obedience  
From my pellucid time-suspense;  
And in their crystalline control  
Of heaven-mooded ecstasy  
Carry<sup>4</sup> the waters of my soul  
Unto God's sacred thirst for me!

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

1. Is “intrusive” better than “restless”?
2. Would you advise “narrow” between “fragile” and “flawful” rather than “and of”? Or do you prefer the order of adjectives to be any of the following:

- 1) “flawful, narrow, fragile”
- 2) “flawful, fragile, narrow”
- 3) “narrow, fragile, flawed”
- 4) “fragile, flawed, narrow”

3. “wide”?
4. “Upbear” instead of “Carry”?

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

1. No.
2. No and no. Three adjectives are excessive here.
3. “wide” is better than “white” perhaps in this context.
4. No — Carry is much better.

It is a fine poem. It comes from the intuitive plane — belonging to the intuition proper which brings with it a sort of subdued inspiration — I mean inspiration of the more quiet, not the more vivid kind and a great felicity of language. The meaning is not obscure but deep enough to make one reflect before getting the whole of it.

9 October 1934

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*[In another letter, Amal adds this question and remark about the poem:]*

And, by the way, will you please advise about the choice of a title for the other poem? Its idea was that I have now ceased to let my inspiration flow into “the moulds of common joy and woe” and am letting only spiritual moods shape it as an offering to the Divine. Two titles I have thought of: “Consecration”, and “Pool of Lonelinesses”, the latter suggested by the first two lines:

I have become a secret pool  
Of lonelinesses mountain-cool.

Sri Aurobindo’s reply:  
The second is better.

Undated

\*

### POOL OF LONELINESSES

I have become a secret pool  
Of lonelinesses mountain-cool,  
A dream-poise of unuttered song  
Lifted above the restless throng  
Of human moods’ dark pitchers wrought  
Of fragile and of flawed thought.  
Now never more my tunes shall flow  
In moulds of common joy and woe;

But seraph hands reveal wide jars  
 Cut from the solitudes of stars  
 And stoop across the sky to fill  
 The perfect shapes of their calm will  
 With musical obedience  
 From my pellucid time-suspense;  
 And in their crystalline control  
 Of heaven-mooded ecstasy  
 Carry the waters of my soul  
 Unto God's sacred thirst for me!

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(From *The Secret Splendour* —  
*Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna [Amal Kiran]*, 1993, p. 73:)

The poetry of the illumined mind is usually full of a play of lights and colours, brilliant and striking in phrase, for illumination makes the Truth vivid — it acts usually by a luminous rush. The poetry of the Intuition may have play of colour and bright lights, but it does not depend on them — it may be quite bare; it tells by a sort of close intimacy with the Truth, an inward expression of it. The illumined mind sometimes gets rid of its trappings, but even then it always keeps a sort of lustrousness of robe which is its characteristic.

1934  
 [Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 23]

AMAL KIRAN  
 (K. D. SETHNA)

**Addendum:**

In Amal's *Inspiration and Effort — Studies in Literary Attitude and Expression* (1995, p. 52) we read: “I myself have spent a whole fortnight on tenterhooks for the sake of one noun [*‘Alchemy’ in line 14 of “Sky-Rims”*] and had to wait for over a year before a certain inspired line brought down in a sudden stream its complete context of an eighteen-lined poem [*“Pool of Lonelinesses”*].”

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

*(Continued from the issue of June-July 2020)*

### **II**

#### **The Mother’s Kitchen**

About the beginning of the ‘Mother’s Kitchen’, we have a mention in Nirodbaran’s book. He writes:

Food from the devotees, though tasty, was sometimes too greasy or spicy, and once it did not agree with him [Sri Aurobindo]. So a separate kitchen, known as the Mother’s Kitchen, was started for preparing only the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s food.

*(Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo, p. 51)*

When the kitchen in the Ashram compound was shifted to the new premises, Lila, who used to work with Tara in the kitchen in the Ashram, was given work in the Granary Department. She was a very good cook and now Dyuman asked her to join Tara again and work in a room on the first floor of ‘Datta House’ on rue de la Marine. Thus in 1944-45, the Mother’s Kitchen became operational. Nirmala and Suman too worked there. Bibha came regularly to arrange and decorate the prepared dishes to be sent to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Soon, some other younger girls i.e. Sushila, Kala, Maya joined this team. All cooking was naturally done in a clean and tidy environment, as was everything done in the Ashram. The Mother’s insistence was always on cleanliness. The cooking was done under the most hygienic conditions following the Mother’s own specific instructions. All vegetables were first washed in a mild solution of potassium permanganate.

Nirodbaran once asked Sri Aurobindo about it:

I wonder why the Divine is so particular about contagion, infection, etc. Is he vulnerable to the virus and the microbe?

Sri Aurobindo: And why on earth should you expect the Divine to feed himself on germs and bacilli and poisons of all kinds? Singular theology, yours!

*(Ibid., p. 52)*



Dishes prepared in the kitchen would be placed on trays, covered properly, and carried by Dyuman across the street to the Ashram main building.

Once the Mother’s Kitchen was established, food cooked by other individuals was gradually discontinued. Mridu, however, was an exception to this rule.

### **Gardens for some vegetables and fruits**

Now we see another phase of the growth of the Ashram. At that time not many varieties of vegetables were available here. Some locally grown ones were found in the market but the quality was not very satisfactory. Hence vegetables for the Mother’s Kitchen were procured mainly from Bangalore. In the mid-1940s the Mother used to give tomatoes to the members of the Ashram to be taken as raw fruit. These also came from Bangalore. To meet the needs of the moment, the activities of the Ashram expanded and new plots of land were acquired to develop into fruit and vegetable gardens. Soon the Ashram gardens started to produce different kinds of vegetables and fruits of very good quality.

Noren Singh was interested in taking up some garden work. In the 1940s Mother allotted him a small plot in front of the ‘Prosperity’ section on the western side of the Ashram building. Noren Singh recollects:

Jyotin-da was looking after that area and had wanted to grow some paddy for the Mother. So we struggled to grow that. You know the soil is not at all suitable for paddy. I used to carry 40-50 large watering cans full of water to this plot. We managed to grow a handful of paddy and offered that to the Mother. Next, I started to grow vegetables. We received some seeds of beans from the French Government. They grew very well and the quality was remarkable. They were so soft and buttery. I would go to my plot early in the morning, pluck the beans and wash them. I took them up to the first floor and waited for the Mother to return from the balcony where she had gone to give her darshan. When she returned I offered these to the Mother. The Mother was fond of artichokes, and asparagus. I tried to grow them but did not have much success with the artichokes. I grew some asparagus. Later, Abhay Singh grew good quality asparagus in the Nandanam garden. I had grown a very good quality of tomatoes. The Mother used to distribute these to others. After my vegetables were offered to the Mother, I had to carry a tray full of different vegetables from the Ashram building to the Mother’s new kitchen in Datta’s house.

Nirmal Das, a young sadhak, also grew vegetables. Samir Kanta Gupta (Ranjunda) used to help him in plucking and washing the vegetables, taking them to the Ashram and keeping them on the top step of the staircase leading to the Mother’s

room. There they were collected from there and sent to the Mother's Kitchen.

Other gardens such as the Ambabhikshu's and Jyotin-da's gardens, Rizière, Nandanam, also grew vegetables. Cazanove initially produced only paddy but later started growing vegetables too. However Le Faucheur, Manoranjan Ganguli's garden, grew wonderful flowers and he ventured also into producing vegetables, even such exotic ones as cauliflowers, coloured cabbages, lettuce etc. which were never grown locally. All these products of different gardens were offered to the Mother for her kitchen.

In the mid-1940s, the vegetables produced by the Ashram gardens would be brought to the Ashram. The vegetables would be kept in baskets in front of the narrow verandah on the northern side of the building, in front of Nirodbaran's room. The Mother would come down by the stairs beside Nirodbaran's room to see them at about 12 noon. This was known as the 'Vegetable Darshan' where some people would gather to get the Mother's darshan. The beautiful photo by Cartier Bresson, of the Mother wearing a gown and a veil fixed around her head, standing with a dish of flowers in her hand, was taken here. She would sometimes take the flowers and throw them, one by one, to each one present there. Some could catch the flower, some fumbled and could not, and it became a happy occasion for everyone there. Here is something interesting from Champaklal:

The Mother came to Sri Aurobindo's room with eye-cups for washing his eyes. She told him: "I went downstairs to see the vegetables. I had asked Dyuman to bring the vegetables that would be used this evening and tomorrow morning. I wanted to see for myself what quantity is being used for the whole day so that I can have a real idea of it after seeing."

The Mother looked at me and said: "Go and see; you also will get an idea." I went down and found several big baskets of nice shining brinjals. I found them very interesting. And picked up one of the baskets and carried it upstairs to Sri Aurobindo, not only so that he also got a real idea of the quantity of vegetables used in the Ashram but also to give a chance to the person who had grown them, as well as to the vegetables themselves to have Sri Aurobindo's darshan!

Sri Aurobindo was busy washing his eyes and had one eye over an eye-cup, but even so he looked at the basket with the other eye. I had thought of speaking to him later but as he went on looking I said: "There are four large baskets like this of brinjal and six of cucumber." And he laughed.

Mother: "You see, those who are grumbling that there are not enough vegetables will always grumble, for it is their nature."

*(Champaklal Speaks, p. 111)*

## The Mother’s Kitchen is shifted to its final location

In 1948, a building on rue Saint Gilles was altered and made into the Mother’s Kitchen. It is situated just opposite to the Ashram building to the north. Thus, the Mother’s Kitchen was shifted from Datta House to its final location in rue Saint Gilles. This house has been renovated and is now the ‘Grace’ office of the Ashram.

Sushila, one of the helpers in the Mother’s Kitchen told us that in the mid-forties the main cooking was done on primus (kerosene) stoves and there were quite a few of them in the kitchen. There was also provision to use fire-wood and coal *chulas*, these were used mainly for cleaning the vessels. There were also a few electrical appliances like electric ovens. Beaters, Mixies of different sizes were added later.

We get a detailed authentic report about this work from a recorded interview given by Tara and Suman of the Mother’s Kitchen. Here is the report:

*Q: Since when have you been cooking for them?*

Suman: Tara-ben came in 1930. Now she is 90 and I am running 84. At that time there used to be very few people. There used to be no servants and we had to do all our work. We used to go to the kitchen at 4 a.m. in the morning. Then, when the Mother would come to the balcony, we used to go out and have Her Darshan. The Ashram balcony is just opposite to the kitchen. Lila-di and Tara-ben were the main cooks and I was the errand boy, like — bring this, bring that, do this, do that — type of work.

*Q: What did you do so early in the kitchen?*

A: We had no servants or any other helpers. We used to cook for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and more because the Mother used to distribute to others working upstairs. Vegetables used to come early in the morning and we used to wash them quite a few times with water and potassium permanganate.

*Q: What kind of food you used to cook for them?*

A: Whatever came to our head. Not that we were great cooks or anything — she used to eat all that we prepared. We used to make the same food for both and send it to them. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo never ever said that they wanted to eat this or that. Whatever we prepared, they ate. But after Sri Aurobindo’s accident everything changed.

*Q: I have heard that Pavitra-da used to make the fruit juices.*

A: Yes, he used to do everything with fruits and the breakfast. At 9 o'clock the Mother used to take *pooda* for some years. Ma used to like *pooda*. It is like an omlette made with gram flour and we used to also make it with a variety of *dals* to make it rich. We used to put boiled cabbage and onion paste in it along with salt etc. and then shallow fry it on the pan like a *dosa*. Sri Aurobindo also used to take it.

In the morning at 9 a.m. we used to take it up to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Once Governor Baron came to visit the Mother and she gave him *pooda* and said that this preparation had no eggs. Baron would just not believe it. Then the Mother told him to see it for himself going to the kitchen. Baron came to the kitchen and just sat down in Indian style. Then Lila-di made the *pooda* and after seeing it and tasting it he believed it and appreciated it a lot.

After that by 12 noon we used to give them the lunch. We never made any *roti* — only rice preparations. Sometimes we used to make *pooris* on special occasions along with sweets.

*Q: Did Ma take rice in the afternoon?*

A: Yes, she took rice but no *dal*. She used to take vegetable soup and rice used to be made like *pulao*, she used to take it straight. Sri Aurobindo used to take everything. Sri Aurobindo used to eat *dal* but Ma didn't. Ma used to eat germinated *moong*. After it was germinated, Lila-di used to take the skin off and then boil it before serving her. And later when her health broke down, we used to make a paste of everything. She used to eat in very small quantity. We used to send everything but she used to take a little from those.

*Q: Did you use any spices or chilly?*

A: No, Lila-di used to take out the seeds of the chilly and just dip it in and take it out. Ma used to like the flavour. She used to like the smell of chillies too, and she used to like capsicum very much. Lila-di used to stuff capsicums for the Mother. She used to like those. Sometimes there was a stuffing of potatoes or mashed vegetables, or even rice, with different things. Paste of different vegetables used to be used or even capsicum used to be mashed as a filling inside capsicum itself! Other vegetables like cabbage or carrots or whatever used to be stuffed as a paste into the very same vegetables. Actually whatever came to our minds spontaneously — if Mother ever asked Lila-di to repeat the recipe Lila-di was unable to do it, as she would have made her own recipe at the time.

The Mother used to like *patudi dahi vadi*. To make that, we used gram *dal* powder and buttermilk and put *masala* etc., then boil it — then spread it on

plates or trays in thin layers. This was then cut into strips and these strips were rolled. We also prepared a curd paste like *khandavi* — seasoned. She used to like it a lot. For some time she had eaten *khandavi* everyday. She used to take lady’s finger paste also.

We used to make ice cream for them at 4 o’clock. For a few years we used to make quite a lot — to be precise about one litre as there was an electric mixie for the same amount of ice cream. Daily we used to make different flavours, sometimes almonds or *pista* etc. First Ma used to give Sri Aurobindo and then distribute to all others around him. Ma used to eat a little but Sri Aurobindo used to eat it and enjoy much more.

*Q: What did they eat at night?*

A: Pavitra-da used to make bread at night for them. Ma used to like white bread. (This was baked in the Ashram Bakery.) Vegetables used to be made in our kitchen. Sri Aurobindo used to eat handmade chapattis. The Mother never ate any non-veg at all. Sri Aurobindo used to eat non-veg, but after Ma came, it was stopped.

*Q: Did she like sweets?*

A: No, she didn’t like sweets much. Sri Aurobindo used to love to eat sweets a lot. And the Mother used to control and monitor his food. But if he wanted to eat the whole bowl of a certain sweet served for him, he used to block the bowl by placing his hand on it implying that he wanted to take the whole of it. Ma used to like fruit juices.

*Q: And what kind of sweets you used to make for Sri Aurobindo?*

A: *Payas*, *rasogolla*, *pantua* but he used to like all sweets. You know Amiyoda’s mother used to work in our kitchen. And she used to have a great hand in making sweets. She used to work with wonderful efficiency and neatness! We used to send the sweets but while Sri Aurobindo used to eat, Ma used to give to others. She herself was not fond of sweets. Moti-ben used to make *malpua* and Sri Aurobindo used to like them very much.

*Q: Did Ma not like any kind of foreign sweets, cakes etc.?*

A: Yes. She used to like fruit salads.

*Q: Did you put honey or sugar in that?*

A: We used to put cream in that. She also used to like jelly — coconut jelly.

*Q: How did you make that?*

A: We had to take out the coconut milk and then add the jelly to it and boil it.

*Q: Did you make sweets for Sri Aurobindo daily?*

A: Everything was eaten absolutely fresh. Nothing at all was eaten stale. Yes, we made sweets every day. For the Mother we always made cakes without eggs because she never ate eggs. I will tell you an interesting story. Once some one told Lila-di that Ma liked a cake made by Sahana-di. Now one day Lila-di made a normal cake with eggs and sent it to the Mother for her to eat. And then Lila-di got such a scolding from the Mother! The Mother said: "You have spoilt my cake!" She understood that it had eggs in it.

When we used to make cakes, sometimes she used to keep it for four days as she used to like it very much. I think in 1958 on her eightieth birthday or so we made a very big cake, (you might have seen it in the photo). All without eggs.

We have mentioned earlier that Bibha, one of the workers of the Mother's Kitchen, used to decorate the plates of cooked food which were sent for Sri Aurobindo's meals. She also remembered fondly the special cake that was prepared for the Mother's eightieth birthday. This cake was made of many layers with different fillings of fruits and almonds etc. and the surface was covered with cream. She decorated it with gold and silver foils, and made delicate designs out of pastes of almonds and other nuts. All night the kitchen workers sat up to decorate that cake which looked like a temple. It was put on a special plate brought by Dyumanbhai and three persons helped him to carry it to the Mother. Tara said, "The Mother liked the cake very much and she kept it upstairs with her for 8 days before she sent it to us."

Tara also gave us some new and interesting information:

Mother used to be extremely careful about the food not being seen. She wouldn't like anyone to see the food. No one, except those preparing or helping inside the kitchen, was allowed to look at the food. If by chance anyone came in, we used to immediately cover the food. If her food was any day prepared by someone else or anything given to her was made by anyone else, she used to immediately understand. Ma was very particular about food. If any day anyone had eyed or seen the food, the whole food would be returned to us. We didn't understand anything. Perhaps she would catch the vibration. It was a big

responsibility to cook for them. Mother told Lila-di that here there are no stone gods — here we have real gods. You taste everything before serving. Lila-di used to taste, others also used to taste and Ma used to say that all that you send me, I eat blindly.

### **Some extra items prepared for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother**

Bibha informs that for Sri Aurobindo some extra items such as cutlets, chops were prepared here. As he liked *papads*, these were specially prepared for him by the ladies working in the kitchen. Rice for him was prepared a little differently. Initially it was cooked in the usual way, then it would be passed through a sieve. The prepared dish resembled the usual rice dish but was much softer.

The items prepared in the kitchen were placed in serving dishes, beautifully decorated and arranged on different trays. The cooked dishes could be of different types as well. The contents and quantities in each would be different. The tray sent for Sri Aurobindo had, apart from the general items, some specially prepared for him. The Mother herself carried the tray to his room and was present during his meals. The tray for the Mother would likewise contain items for her. However all the bowls here were of a small size. She ate very little, tasting one spoon of one and half a spoon of another. The third category of trays were sent for Pranab and some others who had lunch with her. Here the quantity supplied would be much more.

At the allotted time, these trays would be carried across the street mainly by Ambu, and if needed the young girls of the kitchen would help him.

### **Fruits for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo**

Fruits always formed an important part of their daily diet. We attempted to find out from where these were supplied, how were they stored, and in what form were they served.

When Sri Aurobindo and the Mother lived in Library House there was a small garden in the front; and at the back of Library House where there is the ‘Prosperity’ and Fruit Room building now, there was a banana garden. I learnt from Barin that the front garden was under his charge and the banana garden was looked after by Mother and she took very great interest in it. Of course, there was a gardener for the manual work.

After I started working with Mother I saw why she was taking such a deep interest in the banana garden. Sri Aurobindo was taking these bananas with milk. A milk preparation with fully mashed bananas was served to him. Naturally Mother also gave it to some others.

The fruit was the green variety which in its raw form is used in making



vegetables and other dishes, especially here in the South.

(*Champaklal Speaks*, p. 60)

Fruits were offered to the Mother by devotees from all corners of the country. We mention here the names of a few of them: In the late 1920s Kashi-bhai sent fruits such as oranges, *chikoos* and nuts such as almonds, pistachios to the Mother. Kamala was given charge of taking care of these fruits. Everyday two pots of tomatoes of very good quality used to come from Bangalore. These also had to be washed. She washed, wiped and arranged the fruit in the big cupboards in her work-place. There was no cold room for keeping the fruits in those days. Every morning she opened the cupboards and checked each fruit. The Mother gave the name "Orderly Work" to this room on the first floor of Library House.

Gradually, as other new buildings were acquired (either rented or purchased) adjoining spaces if any were converted to gardens where flowers, vegetables or some fruits were grown and offered to the Mother. The fruits produced were guavas, custard apples, *ramphal*, mangoes, papayas, pomegranates and maybe some other fruits too.

In 1939-1944, Nolini Sen, a devotee, arranged to send fruits to the Mother regularly. He used to get different fruits from all over India during their particular fruiting seasons. He used to get mangoes from Lucknow and West Bengal, litchi, grapefruits, a special variety of large guavas from Allahabad. Packing boxes of fruits such as pink pomegranates, special grapes, special varieties of apples, pears etc. would also come from such far off places as the North West Frontier Province of the then undivided India.

Apart from the above-mentioned names there were many others who, when they visited the Ashram, would bring fruits of their choice from their places and offered these to the Mother.

Great care was taken to thoroughly clean the fruits received by the Mother. Noren Singh remembers:

Fruit distribution was done upstairs in the laboratory adjacent to Pavitra-da's bedroom. The Mother would arrange everything. She would put fruits, all washed, in each one's basket. Gradually when the work increased, Mother asked me one day, "Can you help Mrityunjoy?" who used to take care of the fruits offered to the Mother.

The fruits were washed thoroughly in potassium permanganate water and wiped properly. You know, some special papayas would come from Amba-bhikshu's Garden. A particular number 37, was written on the papayas. We knew that the papaya with this number was for Sri Aurobindo. All trees of the garden were numbered and 37 was the number of the tree meant for Sri Aurobindo.

As we have mentioned earlier, fruits used to be arranged in the baskets



and distributed by the Mother. The Fruit room at that time was upstairs, above the ‘Prosperity’ department. Later the Mother discontinued putting the fruits herself in the basket. She gave the work to Ravindra.

Fruits were served to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo as juices or made into pulp. At one time Champaklal used to extract three big jugs of orange juice for Sri Aurobindo. Some of this juice would be shared by others present.

We give here a few examples of the different preparations of some fruits served to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Fruits such as custard apples or *ramphal* were scooped out into a bowl; the seeds were removed with a fork, the pulp then would be sieved through a fine muslin cloth and kept in a small bowl. This was now ready for Sri Aurobindo’s use. This was prepared by Mrityunjy.

Kiran Kumari had a special knife for pineapples. When pineapples of the Singapore variety were offered to the Mother from Calcutta, they were treated first in salt water and washed properly. She would pare them into paper-thin slices, using her special knife. Mother liked this preparation. Much later the Mother asked her to prepare pineapples in a similar way as she wanted Pranab to taste them.

Mother liked avocados as also juice of litchi and pomegranates. There was a time when some flowers designated by her as special flowers had to be counted and their number written on a slip of paper would be submitted with the flowers offered. Now, pomegranate was a “special fruit”. So, prior to the extraction of the juice, Kiran Kumari and sometimes Dyuman had first to count the number of seeds. As was the custom with special flowers, here too, the number of good seeds was noted down on a paper along with another one where the number of the spoilt ones were also written and both would be submitted to the Mother. Then the juice would be prepared for her.

We have already mentioned that the Mother used to like fruit salads with coconut-milk jelly. But, she did not like fruits with a strong smell. She would ask Pranab to taste them and tell her how they were, so that she could then inform those who offered these fruits to her.

Lata Jauhar, at that time a student in her early teens, recounts her experiences of her work with Ravindra for preparing items with fruits and vegetables for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo:

I went to school and in the free periods I went to work in the Ashram with Ravindra-ji. Fruits and vegetables were not available in Pondicherry in those days. Some tomatoes, carrots etc. were coming from Bangalore once a week. These we washed in potassium permanganate, wiped and arranged in trays. Mother and Sri Aurobindo took a glass of carrot juice daily. There were no refrigerators then. The carrots had to be preserved for a whole week before the next lot arrived. For this, flat earthen pots were filled with moist earth and sand

and carrots were arranged underneath. The pot had to be watered like plants to keep these carrots fresh. With too much water they would rot inside. I learnt the correct dosages by practice. Even the earth had to be changed from time to time or else it would get putrid. There were no electric gadgets in those days. I used to crush the carrots in a stone mortar and squeeze out the juice from a muslin cloth and would thus fill up two small glasses: one for the Mother and the other for Sri Aurobindo. My father used to bring from Delhi a boxful of seedless grapes of Chaman, Afganistan. They were brought by air and as they are very delicate did not last long. These I used to peel, cut in two, take out the central thread and prepare two small bowls. Similarly I used to prepare two small bowls with *chikkus*, oranges or other fruits and carry these in a tray directly to the Mother. This is how I could see her all alone in the passage on her way to Sri Aurobindo. She always showed a lot of interest and praised the work. How happy I felt then. On weekends, I used to churn milk on a hand-machine for 40-45 minutes to prepare milk-cream and then butter. I did this work as long as Sri Aurobindo was there. After that gradually the arrangement changed.

(*Mother India*, November 2008)

Amita, in her early teens, a student in our newly formed school, was asked by Ravindra to do some work with him in this section. The cold room for keeping the fruits was situated on the northwest corner of the first floor of the Ashram building. It was constructed sometime in 1948.

I started carrying fruit bags and baskets in trays, from Ravindra-ji's room to Pujalal-ji's room opposite the Samadhi. Here there were wooden racks where these bags and baskets had to be placed in alphabetical order, so that people could pick up their fruits easily. As I had to place the bags in the right trays, it took me some time to come back to fetch the next tray. I had to carry all the trays down the wooden stairs from Ravindra-ji's room. One day my foot slipped and I fell on the ground. Ravindra-ji was very concerned. I was to go to the Mother shortly after and I told her about the mishap and the pain in the sternum and ribs. She asked me a few details about it. I was to give a display of 'lathi' in the Playground, my pain increased so I skipped the rehearsal but a few days later the final performance passed off well.

A few days later the fruit distribution started in its present location, in the Reading Room. Now Ravindra-ji placed the bags in the tray, according to their alphabetical order. This reduced my work considerably. I completed my work in such a way that I could open the fruit room door at 7 a.m.

Every morning at 6.30 a.m. I carried some fruit bags and baskets to the first floor in the corridor. On the northern side a green cloth roll was kept.

Mrityunjoy would spread it on the southern side of the corridor. I had to place these bags and baskets in one line. Champaklal would carry them and arrange these on the table near Mother’s chair. These were for some people to whom the Mother gave their fruits along with her blessings flowers.

Amita remembers further:

There were too many papayas that year — so, it was decided that after 11.30 a.m., when the school and the departments would close after their morning session, whole papayas or slices of papayas would be given to anyone who would like to have some fruit. I was asked by Ravindra-ji to distribute these to anyone who came. This was to be distributed from the small room beside Amrita’s office (now, on the northern side of the Mother’s couch). I used to stand at the door and the papayas were kept in a tray on a small table. It was a sacred place — the Meditation Hall — so, people came very quietly and I gave the fruit like giving ‘Prasad’ from the Mother. My mother, Ila Sen, had told me when she worked at the counter in the Dining Room, she was meditating all the time. She gave curds and bread and bananas according to the need. She said, “I give as food given by Mother for them.” That is how I learnt to do the fruit-room work which grew gradually in proportion.

*(To be continued)*

COMPILED BY CHITRA SEN

*Everybody must be made to understand clearly that this is not a sadhana of emotional and egoistic bhakti, but of surrender.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 543)*

# THE CHINESE BETRAYAL, EARLY WARNINGS UNHEEDED — LESSONS FROM SARDAR PATEL AND SRI AUROBINDO

## Prologue

On 28 March 1963, Sudhir Ghosh, the eminent Indian emissary of Gandhiji, and later of Jawaharlal Nehru, met with the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy in the White House and shared the ‘last testament’ of Sri Aurobindo [about the Chinese invasion of Tibet] that had appeared in *Mother India* on 11 November 1950 before Sri Aurobindo’s passing on 5 December 1950:

. . . the basic significance of Mao’s Tibetan adventure is to advance China’s frontiers right down to India and stand poised there to strike at the right moment and with the right strategy — unless India precipitately declares herself on the side of the Russian bloc. . . . We must burn it into our minds that the primary motive of Mao’s attack on Tibet is to threaten India as soon as possible.<sup>1</sup>

As Ghosh records:

The President read the words of Sri Aurobindo’s last testament several times over and said:

Surely there must be some typing mistake here. The date must have been 1960 and not 1950. You mean to say that a man devoted to meditation and contemplation, sitting in one corner of India, said this about the intentions of Communist China as early as 1950?<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, in his last letter to the Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, dated 7 November 1950, Sardar Patel, the then Home Minister wrote:

While our western and non-western threat to security is still as prominent as before, a new threat has developed from the north and north-east. Thus, for the first time, after centuries, India’s defence has to concentrate itself on two fronts

1. Republished in K. D. Sethna, *India and the World Scene*, p. 197.

2. Sudhir Ghosh, *Gandhi’s Emissary*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2008, pp. 277-78. First published in USA, by Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967. Indian edition published by Rupa & Co; this edition used for indicating the references; p. 314 for this passage. Also see, *Sri Aurobindo: A Contemporary Reader* by Sachidananda Mohanty, Routledge, 2008; rpt. 2016, pp. 221-22.

simultaneously. . . . In our calculations we shall now have to reckon with communist China in the north and in the north-east, a communist China which has definite ambitions and aims and which does not, in any way, seem friendly [*sic*] disposed towards us.

It is time we heeded the warnings of the two great statesmen-visionaries of India, issued in 1950. We must recover the spirit of strength and resilience they had urged for the defence of our motherland.

## **PART - 1**

### **The Crisis Today and National Amnesia**

It is often said that ‘those who forget history are condemned to repeat it’. The truth of this adage is seldom realised. With the killings of Indian soldiers by the People’s Liberation Army [PLA], and the brazen claims of China over the entire Galwan valley of Ladakh and other vital territories that historically belonged to India, we seem to have come full circle from the debacle of 1962 when the nation had been given a deadly body blow by Chinese aggression in the then NEFA (North-East Frontier Agency, now Arunachal Pradesh) and other areas currently under the gaze of Chinese expansionism. Despite the passage in time, history seems to repeat itself. What is the way out? Could some of the earlier missing narratives help in our understanding as a new India is emerging?

### **Axiomatic wisdom**

It has become near axiomatic in most circles today that war and even limited wars, can never be the answer to conflicts among nuclear-armed nations, and diplomacy and dialogues are the only effective antidotes to war. The former U.S. Ambassador to India John K. Galbraith, was fond of using President John F. Kennedy’s oft-cited phrase: “Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.” While self-blame may not be the answer, we can ill afford complacency and absence of genuine introspection, based on a sense of history that could take us out of the current impasse. In this context, it is worth recalling pages from Indian history dating back to 1950.

## **Sardar Patel's last letter to Pandit Nehru regarding the Chinese invasion of Tibet: November, 1950**

In his letter dated 7 November 1950 before his passing on 15 December of the same year, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the then Home Minister, wrote to the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, cautioning him and the nation about the looming threat from China which went beyond the Chinese invasion of Tibet. Citing evidence from Intelligence and showing a remarkable sense of geopolitical understanding, he held out a scenario that he thought would be catastrophic to the safety and security of the entire North East of India including Assam on account of Mao's design on Tibet as a first step in his expansionist plans.

[Source: <http://www.friendsoftibet.org/sardarpatel.html> accessed on 23.6.2020]

He wrote:

My Dear Jawaharlal,

Ever since my return from Ahmedabad and after the cabinet meeting the same day which I had to attend at practically 15 minutes' notice and for which I regret I was not able to read all the papers, I have been anxiously thinking over the problem of Tibet and I thought I should share with you what is passing through my mind.

Although not in the best of health, the Home Minister showed an amazing alertness of mind and political acumen. He cited essentially nine sound reasons as he saw them, including the appreciation of the military and intelligence position, an appraisal of the strength of our forces, the question of the Chinese entry into the U.N. especially in the context of its active participation in the Korean War, measurement of internal security in the border areas, improvement of our communication, road, rail, air and wireless, in these areas and with the frontier outposts, the future of our mission at Lhasa and the trading post of Gyangtse and Yatung and the forces which India had in operation in Tibet to guard the trade routes, and finally, the policies in regards to McMahon line.

Patel drew the following conclusions which seem to have been largely ignored given the subsequent course of events. His views and advice do not seem to have outlived his own times. He added significantly:

In the background of this, we have to consider what new situation now faces us as a result of the disappearance of Tibet, as we knew it, and the expansion of China almost up to our gates. Throughout history we have seldom been worried about our north-east frontier. The Himalayas have been regarded as an impenetrable barrier against any threat from the north. We had friendly

Tibet which gave us no trouble. The Chinese were divided. They had their own domestic problems and never bothered us about frontiers. In 1914, we entered into a convention with Tibet which was not endorsed by the Chinese. We seem to have regarded Tibetan autonomy as extending to independent treaty relationship. Presumably, all that we required was Chinese counter-signature.

Patel was pragmatic enough to note that the Chinese would have a radically different perception of boundary divisions based on colonial rule, especially agreements signed by the British with Tibet, Burma and the other political units of India's North East. He therefore argued that:

We can, therefore, safely assume that very soon they [*the Chinese*] will disown all the stipulations which Tibet has entered into with us in the past. That throws into the melting pot all frontier and commercial settlements with Tibet on which we have been functioning and acting during the last half a century. China is no longer divided. It is united and strong. All along the Himalayas in the north and north-east, we have on our side of the frontier a population ethnologically and culturally not different from Tibetans and Mongoloids. The undefined state of the frontier and the existence on our side of a population with its affinities to the Tibetans or Chinese have all the elements of the potential trouble between China and ourselves.

Patel was equally perceptive about the expansionist nature of international Communism. Soviet Union during World War II was a glaring example of this trend. He went on to declare:

Recent and bitter history also tells us that communism is no shield against imperialism and that the communists are as good or as bad imperialist as any other. Chinese ambitions in this respect not only covered the Himalayan slopes on our side but also include the important part of Assam. They have their ambitions in Burma also. Burma has the added difficulty that it has no McMahon line round which to build up even the semblance of an agreement. **Chinese irredentism and communist imperialism are different from the expansionism or imperialism of the western powers. The former has a cloak of ideology which makes it ten times more dangerous.** In the guise of ideological expansion lie concealed racial, national or historical claims. The danger from the north and north-east, therefore, becomes both communist and imperialist. [*Emphasis added*]

At this point, Patel made a distinction between the threat from Pakistan vis-à-vis the newly emerging threat from China. It is this new threat, a greater menace, that needs our attention, he argued:

While our western and non-western threat to security is still as prominent as before, a new threat has developed from the north and north-east. Thus, for the first time, after centuries, India's defence has to concentrate itself on two fronts simultaneously. Our defence measures have so far been based on the calculations of superiority over Pakistan. In our calculations we shall now have to reckon with communist China in the north and in the north-east, a communist China which has definite ambitions and aims and which does not, in any way, seem friendly [*sic*] disposed towards us.

After arguing out his case, in conclusion, Patel made the following urgent suggestions to Pandit Nehru:

These are some of the questions which occur to my mind. It is possible that a consideration of these matters may lead us into wider question of our relationship with China, Russia, America, Britain and Burma. This, however would be of a general nature, though some might be basically very important, i.e., we might have to consider whether we should not enter into closer association with Burma in order to strengthen the latter in its dealings with China. I do not rule out the possibility that, before applying pressure on us, China might apply pressure on Burma. With Burma, the frontier is entirely undefined and the Chinese territorial claims are more substantial. In its present position, Burma might offer an easier problem to China, and, therefore, might claim its first attention.

I suggest that we meet early to have a general discussion on these problems and decide on such steps as we might think to be immediately necessary and direct, quick examination of other problems with a view to taking early measure to deal with them.

Yours,

Vallabhbhai Patel

The political knowledge of the region and the astuteness of analysis that Patel demonstrated in the letter was simply masterly. As always, he was futuristic in his approach to the issues at hand and agonised about India's territorial integrity. To say that his views are dated and are to be seen in his context, would be to have blinkers on our eyes regarding the current crisis and the insufficiency of existing approaches.

It is not clear what steps, if any, Nehru and the Govt. of India took before or



after the passing of Patel on 15 December 1950, but later history would prove the folly of ignoring his basic warning to the nation. Despite the later adulation to the Sardar, his China warnings seem to have been missing in the policy domains. The role of the military and civilian top brass including the Defence Minister Mr V. K. Krishna Menon during the 1962 crisis has been well recorded and does not need any repetition here.

## PART - 2

### Sri Aurobindo's 'Last Testament' on the Invasion of Tibet: 11 November 1950

In an uncanny manner, in the same month of November, within a gap of only four days, on 11 November, 1950, another great Indian nationalist and world-visionary, Sri Aurobindo, sent out into the public domain, his last political testament through an approved editorial of his 'own paper' *Mother India* whose editor was K. D. Sethna. Sethna would later testify this fact as follows:

Not only were my editorials written under his inner inspiration: they were also sent to him for approval. Only when his 'Yes' was wired to us did we plunge into publication. There was such a rapport between him and the editorial office that when an acquaintance doubted whether the master had been truly represented, Sri Aurobindo, on being told of the misgiving, exclaimed: "Doesn't he know that *Mother India* is my paper?"<sup>3</sup>

### Abiding political interest till the very end

It is worth noting that unlike many other Indian spiritual thinkers, Sri Aurobindo never lost interest in the nation and the world from the political point of view. This is borne out by the many statements he made from time to time on national events, and the letters he wrote such as the letter to C. R. Das [1922]; Joseph Baptista [1920]; his Messages during World War II, [1940-43]; Messages to Stafford Cripps during the Cripps Mission, [1942]; the Wavell Plan [1945]; the Cabinet Mission Plan, [1946]; the Independence Day Message, [1947]; Message after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, [1948]; Letter on the Kashmir Problem [1949]; Message sent after the outbreak of the Korean War [1950]; Letter regarding the Nehru-Liaquat Pact and After [1950]; On the Communist Movement [1950]; and so on.

3. K. D. Sethna, *India and the World Scene*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Society, 1997. From the 'Introduction'.

## **Sudhir Ghosh shares Sri Aurobindo's 'Last Testament' with President John F. Kennedy**

On 28 March 1963, Sudhir Ghosh, the Indian Member of Parliament and famous emissary of Gandhiji and later of Jawaharlal Nehru, met with the President of the United States John F. Kennedy in the White House and shared the 'last testament' of Sri Aurobindo that had appeared in *Mother India* on 11 November 1950 before Sri Aurobindo's passing on 5 December 1950.

As Ghosh records in his memoir, the President read with attention Sri Aurobindo's 'testament':

. . . the basic significance of Mao's Tibetan adventure is to advance China's frontiers right down to India and stand poised there to strike at the right moment and with the right strategy — unless India precipitately declares herself on the side of the Russian bloc. . . . But to go over to Mao and Stalin in order to avert their wrath is not in any sense a saving gesture. It is a gesture spelling the utmost ruin to all our ideals and aspirations.<sup>4</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's views on totalitarian Communism was an established fact reflected in his letters and socio-political writings. Freedom, he declared, was indispensable for human progress.

What then is the way out in the crisis in Tibet? The editorial continued:

. . . the gesture that can save is to take a firm line with China, denounce openly her nefarious intentions, stand without reservation by the U.S.A. and make every possible arrangement consonant with our own self-respect to facilitate an American intervention in our favour and, what is still of greater moment, an American prevention of Mao's evil designs on India. Militarily, China is almost ten times as strong as we are, but India as the spearhead of an American defence of democracy can easily halt Mao's mechanised millions.<sup>5</sup>

After citing the reasons in political and military terms, the editorial raised the discourse to a higher moral and spiritual level; it saw the responsibility as civilisational and concluded in the following words:

4. Republished in K. D. Sethna, *India and the World Scene*, p. 197.

5. *Ibid.*

And the hour is upon us of constituting ourselves such a spearhead and saving not only our own dear country but also all South-East Asia whose bulwark we are. **We must burn it into our minds that the primary motive of Mao's attack on Tibet is to threaten India as soon as possible.**<sup>6</sup> [*Emphasis added*]

Ghosh continues:

The President read the words of Sri Aurobindo's last testament several times over and said: Surely there is a typing mistake here. The date must have been 1960, not 1950. You mean to say that a man devoted to meditation and contemplation, sitting in one corner of India, said this about the intentions of Communist China as early as 1950?'. . . He was somewhat shocked. 'So, there you are,' said the President. 'One great Indian, Nehru, showed you the path of non-alignment between China and America, and another great Indian, Aurobindo, showed you another way of survival. The choice is up to the people of India.'<sup>7</sup>

Earlier in the meeting Ghosh had shared with the President, Nehru's letter, and this is how Ghosh records the reaction of Kennedy who was frankly quite indignant:

The President read it slowly and carefully and ruefully remarked: 'He [*Nehru*] cannot sacrifice non-alignment, eh? Are the people of India non-aligned between Communist China and the United States? I don't believe that anybody in India is non-aligned between China and the United States — except of course the Communists and their fellow travellers.' Then something fell from his lips which was perhaps unintentional. He indignantly said that only a few months earlier when Mr Nehru was overwhelmed by the power of Communist China he made desperate appeal to him for air protection, and non-alignment or no non-alignment, the President had to respond. He added sarcastically that Mr Nehru's conversion lasted only a few days. He was impressed to see the speed with which the Prime Minister swung back to his original position with regard to the United States.<sup>8</sup>

Today as we keep wrestling with the question of the Chinese intrusions into the Indian territory, more than five decades down the line, and their growing demands and claims for our lands, it is worth recalling the two forgotten chapters from Indian history in 1950.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Sudhir Ghosh, *Gandhi's Emissary*, pp. 314-15.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 312-13.

## Epilogue: Nehru, Tibet, America and the India-China War of 1962

Despite being a watershed moment in the nation's history, the records of the 1962 War, seen from the Indian side, are safely locked up in classified files. The Top Secret T. B. Henderson Brooks and P. S. Bhagat Report (Henderson Brooks-Bhagat Report in short) is yet to see the light of day. (Excerpts from this top-secret review can be found at [www.indiandefencereview.com](http://www.indiandefencereview.com).) What we have instead is Neville Maxwell's somewhat erroneously titled *India's China War*, New Delhi: Natraj, 2013, which pins the blame unfairly on the Indian side for Nehru's forward policy. Apparently, the Chinese cited Maxwell's book in their favour when the U.S. National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger made a secret trip to China from Pakistan during July 9-11, 1971.

We may meanwhile read Bruce Riedel's excellent book based on the declassified documents from the US Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA]: *JFK's Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, the CIA and the Sino-Indian War*, Harper Collins, 2016, (first published in USA by Brookings Institution Press, 2015) to realise the prophetic nature of Sri Aurobindo's 'last testament' in *Mother India*, and Sardar Patel's early warnings. For, we learn, as indicated in the extracts from Ghosh and Bruce Riedel, cited above, that towards the end of the '62 War, Indian and American sides had hammered out a secret military agreement for providing American air cover and the supply of armaments to the Indian military during the 1962 crisis.

As Nehru argued in a top-secret message to Kennedy in 1962, (while asking effectively for roughly 350 combat aircraft and crews with matching personnel, radar and logistical support for the operations), the issue was "not merely the survival of India, but the survival of free and independent Government in the whole of this sub-continent or in Asia". He added that India would "spare no effort until the threat posed by Chinese expansionist and aggressive militarism to freedom and independence is completely eliminated."<sup>9</sup> However, the Chinese abruptly ended the war on 19 November and declared an armistice. They had launched attacks in the West (Aksai Chin) and East (Northeast Frontier Agency) on 20 October 1962. Despite the protests by Ayub Khan and Pakistan, the American logistical support to India continued especially with regard to the raising of the new Mountain Divisions of the Indian Army, a relationship that existed most fruitfully during the Kennedy Administration. More could have been expected had he continued in office and not been tragically assassinated.

It is time we reminded ourselves of the prophetic words of Sardar Patel and Sri Aurobindo as we face renewed threats from across the Himalayas. It is true the

9. U.S. Department of State Outgoing Telegram for American embassy, New Delhi 2167, November 19, 1962. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum: India; subjects: Nehru correspondence, November 1962: 11-19. Quoted in Riedel, p. 138.

situation today is different from the one in 1950 or 60s. And yet the validity of the lesson remains: the firmness with which both spoke regarding national security has not lost its relevance. Even as we seek to avoid war and seek all avenues, diplomatic, political, economic, administrative and logistic; we must come together with like-minded groups and nations, establish partnership in the neighbourhood, across the Atlantic, the EU, the Asia Pacific regions, and the UN. Indeed, we must stand firm and resolute on our borders and recall the words of Sri Aurobindo to defend the nation with utmost strength and resilience.

As one of the editorials (*Mother India*: 22 July, 1950) approved by Sri Aurobindo in a related context had said:

There are certain values that have to be upheld and no dread of consequences should unnerve us. . . .

But, if we are brave and far-seeing, there may not be this war . . .<sup>10</sup>

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

The views expressed above are personal.

This article has been featured earlier, in somewhat varying forms, on several websites:

[www.tibetpolicy.net](http://www.tibetpolicy.net)  
<https://www.thequint.com>  
<https://in.news.yahoo.com>  
<http://overmanfoundation.org>  
<http://canaraytrap.in>

10. Republished in K. D. Sethna, *India and the World Scene*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Society, 1997, p. 250.

*God, the world Guru, is wiser than thy mind; trust Him and not that eternal self-seeker & arrogant sceptic.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 488)

## *Addendum* **A FEW QUOTES**

### ***From Sri Aurobindo's Independence Message: 15 August 1947***

The first of these dreams was a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India. India today is free but she has not achieved unity. At one moment it almost seemed as if in the very act of liberation she would fall back into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. But fortunately it now seems probable that this danger will be averted and a large and powerful, though not yet a complete union will be established. Also, the wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly has made it probable that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fissure. But the old communal division into Hindus and Muslims seems now to have hardened into a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that this settled fact will not be accepted as settled for ever or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. India's internal development and prosperity may be impeded, her position among the nations weakened, her destiny impaired or even frustrated. This must not be; the partition must go. Let us hope that that may come about naturally, by an increasing recognition of the necessity not only of peace and concord but of common action, by the practice of common action and the creation of means for that purpose. In this way unity may finally come about under whatever form — the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India's future.

(CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 478-79)

### ***From a talk of Surendra Mohan Ghosh***

Now the next point in the Russia-China rift. It related to my last interview with Sri Aurobindo, in [November] 1950. I met him, as usual, and on the last day he said to me, "You didn't ask me anything about China" — and really I hadn't mentioned anything about China. It had been in turmoil, the communists had come to power under Mao Tse-tung, and Chiang Kai-shek had been driven out. I could not make up my mind about the importance of what had happened there. So I told him, "Sir, I cannot make up my mind about it." He said, "Keep a very keen, careful eye on

China. There are certain forces which might divide China and Russia. Keep a keen eye. There are forces at work, still very subtle, and if they come to the surface, China will be disintegrated one day." I listened. Then he asked me, "Have you read the articles on Tibet, that have come out in *Mother India*?" "No, Sir." "Read them, they are not written by me but they were written on my instruction and I have corrected them."

A talk to the students of SAICE

### *From the Karmayogin*

## GREAT CONSEQUENCES

The events that sway the world are often the results of trivial circumstances. When immense changes and irresistible movements are in progress, it is astonishing how a single event, often a chance event, will lead to a train of circumstances that alter the face of a country or the world. At such times a slight turn this way or that produces results out of all proportion to the cause. It is on such occasions that we feel most vividly the reality of a Power which disposes of events and defeats the calculations of men. The end of many things is brought about by the sudden act of a single individual. A world vanishes, another is created almost at a touch. Certainty disappears and we begin to realise what the *pralaya* of the Hindus, the passage from one age to another, really means and how true is the idea that it is by rapid transitions long-prepared changes are induced. Such a change now impends all over the world, and in almost all countries events are happening, the final results of which the actors do not foresee. Small incidents pass across the surface of great countries and some of them pass and are forgotten, others precipitate the future.

(Volume I - Feb. 26, 1910 - No. 34)

(SABCL, Vol. 2, p. 406)

### An Aphorism

**No. 121:** The love of inaction is folly and the scorn of inaction is folly; there is no inaction. The stone lying inert upon the sands which is kicked away in an idle moment, has been producing its effect upon the hemispheres.

(CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 437)

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

*(Continued from the issue of June-July 2020)*

## **1. KINDNESS AND COMPASSION**

### **(Part 10)**

We continue with the theme of Sri Aurobindo being a striking example of nobility in the tumultuous and ruthless field of politics. On 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1907, the eve of the Surat Congress conference, a large contingent of Bengal Nationalists boarded the Bombay Mail from Howrah station. In contrast to the Secretary of the Congress Moderate Party, J. Ghosal, who travelled first class, attired in western clothes, Sri Aurobindo smilingly sat in a third class carriage, in a simple Indian dress. On the train journey Sri Aurobindo had no bedding whatsoever, sleeping on the hard board, using his arm as a pillow. *En route*, from Kharagpur to Surat, a thousand miles journey, enthusiastic crowds had lined the railway platforms to cheer. At the several stations where the train stopped, the public wanted a glimpse of their unassuming erudite leader and came to offer garlands, sweets and tea, but most missed the darshan as the people did not expect him to be sitting in the lowest class.

The next day Sri Aurobindo broke his journey at Nagpur for a few hours. At the station a sea of eager faces gave him a grand welcome with cries of “Bande Mataram” ringing in the air. The horses of his carriage were unharnessed and the crowds themselves pulled it to the venue where Sri Aurobindo delivered a speech to a packed house. Resuming its journey, the train stopped at Amraoti, the home town of the Nationalist leader Kharpade, where a big reception led by him welcomed Sri Aurobindo with garlands and chants of “Bande Mataram”. Once again Sri Aurobindo delivered a speech. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> they reached Bombay where they had to change trains for Surat. A meeting was arranged on Bombay’s beach where Sri Aurobindo addressed a very large crowd. Sri Aurobindo’s sublime presence led to an awakening of the people so much that Barindra Kumar Ghose remarked: “It was a sight for the Gods to see.”<sup>1</sup> He narrates Sri Aurobindo’s bearing during the train journey:

Aurobindo the new idol of the nation was hardly known then by his face, and at every small and big station a frantic crowd rushed about in the station platform looking for him in the first and second class carriages, while all the time

1. Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research, December 1980, pp. 218-19.



Aurobindo sat unobserved in a third class compartment. By the time this fact became known and he was found out, the train was about to start. In these days of style, luxury and easy leadership, no one could imagine that Aurobindo, nurtured and educated in England and a high official of His Highness the Gaikwad's service, who could leap into an all-India fame in such a short time — would dream of travelling third class. J. Ghosal felt small in contrast and tried again and again to invite Aurobindo into his first class carriage and keep him there to save his face.

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

We detrained in Bombay; there a meeting was arranged on the sea beach. We could hardly walk to the place through the living streams converging through the streets and lanes towards the chosen spot, automatically stopping all vehicular traffic for a time. It was a sight for the Gods to see: the awakening of a whole nation from its age-long sleep and inertia into conscious life of flaming aspiration.<sup>2</sup>

Of the same train journey, Suresh Chandra Deb writes:

I was one of the Bengal delegates who accompanied Sri Aurobindo and Shyam Sundar Chakravarty to Surat. All of us travelled “3<sup>rd</sup> Class”. On reaching Surat we were housed in a Dharmasala; we spread our beddings over carpets. Sri Aurobindo and Shyam Sundar had cots to distinguish their position. We took the same vegetarian food arranged on behalf of the New Party's Conference.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed at Surat, both Sri Aurobindo and Tilak sheltered themselves in the simple lodgings of a Dharmasala. From morning to past midnight they worked and received an unending stream of visitors. The Nationalists believed in “democracy and equality” irrespective of caste, colour, province or economic privilege. Sri Aurobindo illustrated this ideal of the Nationalists by recalling:

2. *Ibid.*

3. Suresh Chandra Deb, ‘Sri Aurobindo as I Knew Him’, *Mother India*, November 2002, p. 948.

I was one of the extremists, in whose view democracy and equality between the rich and the poor formed a chief ingredient of nationalism. I remembered that, thinking it our duty to turn the theory into practice, we had travelled together, on our way to Surat, in the same third class. In the camp the leaders, instead of making separate arrangements, would sleep in the same room along with the others. Rich, poor, brahmins, businessmen, shudra, Bengali, Maratha, Punjabi, Gujarati, we all stayed, slept, ate together with a wonderful feeling of brotherhood. We slept on the ground, ate the normal fare, made of rice-pulse-curd, in every way it was superlatively *swadeshi*. The “foreign returned” from Bombay and Calcutta and the Brahmin-born Madrasi with his tilak (head mark) had become one body.<sup>4</sup>

On 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1907, the eve of the Surat Congress, the Nationalists’ Conference was held where Sri Aurobindo was asked to preside. Suresh Chandra Deb was charmed by Sri Aurobindo’s sweet serene conduct during this meeting. He writes:

Sri Aurobindo presided over this Conference. He was no orator. But the Conference hung on his words limpid and flowing, instinct with a new meaning . . . Even during this Conference Sri Aurobindo appeared as a soul that dwelt apart from the tumult and shouting of politics . . .

During those tumultuous days at Surat, he had been his own self, unaffected by them, in-drawn generally to a world of which we know little.<sup>5</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s calm, nobility and generosity of spirit in the turmoil and strife of the political arena was frequently noticed. At the Hooghly District Congress Conference in September 1909, the Moderates were led by Surendranath Banerjee with whom Sri Aurobindo had strong political differences. An incident occurred in the Conference which not only made a deep impression on Dr. V. V. Athalye but also impacted his life. He records:

The leader of the Extremists was Aurobindo Ghose. One incident of this occasion stands out for its great sublimity, and is worth remembering. . . . Aurobindo’s colleagues were making forceful speeches, exhorting him to trounce the Moderates in that Conference, by any and every means. Aurobindo would not agree to this improper method. Seeing that he was not coming around, Paranjpe broke in: “Aurobindo Babu, you don’t know politics. You must bring down the Moderates by any means fair or foul, by hook or crook.” The

4. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 21.

5. Suresh Chandra Deb, ‘Sri Aurobindo as I Knew Him’, *Mother India*, November 2002, pp. 948-49.

Maharashtrian workers in the field of politics have an over-high opinion of their own political sagacity!

“What are these Bengalis after all? Just simpletons who hold the Marathas in dread: such is their past.” This, in effect, was the tone of Paranjpe’s remark to Aurobindo.

Aurobindo was very calm. After everybody had spoken, he said, “No, I shall never agree to that. Do you have any idea what great work Surendranath Banerji and his Moderate party have done in Bengal politics? We are standing on their shoulders and because of that we appear tall. Besides this, whatever be anybody’s work, I shall not be a party to bringing about their downfall by foul means. We shall fully respect the Moderate Party and place before the Conference, in clear terms, our stand of Independence. If our ideal is sacred and lofty and just, the Conference cannot but give its verdict in our favour. If you do not accept this policy I shall withdraw from this Conference.”

The sublimity of Aurobindo’s advice was so effective that his colleagues and Paranjpe shut up as if they had been slapped in the face. The Conference was conducted in accord with Aurobindo’s policy and the votaries of Independence had a victory over the Moderates by straightforward methods.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Athalye then concludes:

Aurobindo’s noble yet powerful stand made a great impression on me. In my later life, on many occasions, this teaching has kept me watchful.<sup>7</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s consideration to Surendranath Banerjee at the Hooghly Conference is significant since he considered him to be a pseudo Nationalist leader; in April 1907 he said of him: “This veteran leader is a declared opportunist, who believes, as he has himself said, in expediency more than in principles.”<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly, by stressing on principles, here again Sri Aurobindo’s idealism comes to the fore. Despite his serious reservations about Surendranath Banerjee’s political ideology, Sri Aurobindo in his magnanimity recognised his contribution to Moderate politics. One is reminded of what the Mother once said:

. . . what we should look for in every man, if we do not want to judge him too unjustly, is what is best in him.<sup>9</sup>

6. Dr. V. V. Athalye, ‘*Atma-Vritta*’, 1958, (translated from Marathi by J. S. Kuppaswamy), *Mother India*, August 1972, p. 503.

7. *Ibid.*

8. CWSA, Vol. 6, p. 334.

9. CWM, Vol. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 227.

Furthermore, Sri Aurobindo's demeanour at the Hooghly Conference, and indeed right through his political career, reminds us of a couple of statements from the Mother:

Nobility: the incapacity for any pettiness either of sentiments or of action.<sup>10</sup>

Aristocracy: incapable of baseness and pettiness, it asserts itself with dignity and authority.<sup>11</sup>

Sri Aurobindo had noted about himself that "from early childhood there was a strong hatred and disgust for all kinds of cruelty and oppression".<sup>12</sup> He would not only be affected by the sight of human cruelty or coercion but he would also exercise his willpower to bring relief to the oppressed. In a letter dated 30<sup>th</sup> August, 1905, Sri Aurobindo reveals to Mrinalini Devi that God had endowed him with an innate strength to liberate his countrymen from suffering and subjugation. His zeal to fulfil his mission, his unparalleled sense of self-sacrifice and his empathy for his countrymen is echoed right through the letter from which we quote an extract:

I think you have understood by now that the man with whose fate yours has been linked is a man of very unusual character. Mine is not the same field of action, the same purpose in life, the same mental attitude as that of the people of today in this country. I am in every respect different from them and out of the ordinary. Perhaps you know what ordinary men say of an extraordinary view, an extraordinary endeavour, an extraordinary ambition. To them it is madness; only, if the mad man is successful in his work then he is called no longer a madman but a great genius. But how many are successful in their life's endeavour? Among a thousand men there are five or six who are out of the ordinary and out of the five or six one perhaps successful. Not to speak of success I have not yet even entirely entered my field of work. . . .

The founders of the Hindu religion understood this very well. They loved extraordinary characters, extraordinary endeavours, extraordinary ambitions. Madman or genius, they respected the extraordinary man. But all this means a terrible plight for the wife, and how could the difficulty be solved? The sages fixed upon this solution; they told the woman, "Know that the only mantra for womankind is this: 'The husband is the supreme guru.' The wife shares the Dharma [law of conduct] of her husband. She must help him, counsel him, encourage him in whatever work he accepts as his Dharma. She should regard

10. *Ibid.*, Vol. 14, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 176.

11. *Ibid.*

12. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 26.

him as her god, take joy in his joy, and feel sorrow in his unhappiness. It is for a man to choose his work; the woman's part is to give help and encouragement."

Now, the point is this. Are you going to choose the path of the Hindu religion or follow the ideal of the new culture? . . .

I have three madnesses. The first one is this. I firmly believe that the accomplishments, genius, higher education and learning and wealth that God has given me are His. I have a right to spend for my own purposes only what is needed for the maintenance of the family and is otherwise absolutely essential. The rest must be returned to God. If I spend everything for myself, for my pleasure and luxury, I am a thief. The Hindu scriptures say that one who receives wealth from God and does not give it back to Him is a thief. So far, I have given two annas to God and used the other fourteen annas for my own pleasure; this is the way I have settled the account, remaining engrossed in worldly pleasures. Half my life has been wasted — even the beast finds fulfilment in stuffing his own belly and his family's and catering to their happiness.

I have realised that I have been acting all this time as an animal and a thief. Now I realise this and am filled with remorse and disgusted with myself. No more of all this. I renounce this sin once and for all. What does giving to God mean? It means to spend on good works. The money I gave to Usha or to Sarojini causes me no regret. To help others is a sacred duty; to give protection to those who seek refuge is a yet greater sacred duty. But the account is not settled by giving only to one's brothers and sisters. In these dark days the whole country is seeking refuge at my door. I have three hundred million brothers and sisters in this country. Many of them are dying of starvation and the majority just manage to live, racked by sorrow and suffering. They too must be helped.

What do you say, will you come along with me and share my ideal in this respect? We will eat and dress as ordinary men, buying only what is truly needed and offering the rest to God: this is what I propose to do. My purpose can be fulfilled, once you give your approval, once you are able to accept the sacrifice. You have been saying, "I have made no progress." Here I have shown you a path towards progress. Will you take this path? . . .

My second madness has only recently seized me. It is this: by whatever means I must have the direct vision of God. . . .

My third madness is that while others look upon their country as an inert piece of matter — a few meadows and fields, forest and hills and rivers — I look upon my country as the Mother. I adore Her, I worship Her as the Mother. What would a son do if a demon sat on his mother's breast and started sucking her blood? Would he quietly sit down to his dinner, amuse himself with his wife and children, or would he rush out to deliver his mother? I know I have the strength to deliver this fallen race. It is not physical strength, — I am not

going to fight with sword or gun, — but the strength of knowledge. The power of the Kshatriya is not the only one; there is also the power of the Brahmin, the power that is founded on knowledge. 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. The seed began to sprout when I was fourteen; by the time I was eighteen the roots of the resolution had grown firm and unshakable. After listening to what my aunt said, you formed the idea that some wicked people had dragged your simple and innocent husband onto the bad path. But it was the innocent husband of yours who brought these people and hundreds of others onto that path — be it bad or good — and will yet bring thousands and thousands of others onto that same path. I do not say that the work will be accomplished during my lifetime, but it certainly will be done. . . .

Will you remain like this for ever: “I shall put on fine clothes, have nice things to eat, laugh and dance and enjoy all the pleasures”? Such an attitude cannot be called progress. At the present time the life of women in this country has taken this narrow and contemptible form. Give up all this and follow after me. We have come to do God’s work; let us begin it.<sup>13</sup>

In the earlier articles we had discovered that much of Sri Aurobindo’s actions and writings in the political field was akin to that of a Kshatriya. His self-sacrifice, courage and high ideals as indicated in the above letter are embodied in a passage of *Essays on the Gita*:

What is the true object of the Kshatriya’s life and his true happiness? Not self-pleasing and domestic happiness and a life of comfort and peaceful joy with friends and relatives, but to battle for the right is his true object of life and to find a cause for which he can lay down his life or by victory win the crown and glory of the hero’s existence is his greatest happiness. “There is no greater good for the Kshatriya than righteous battle, and when such a battle comes to them of itself like the open gate of heaven, happy are the Kshatriyas then. If thou doest not this battle for the right, then hast thou abandoned thy duty and virtue and thy glory, and sin shall be thy portion.” He will by such a refusal incur disgrace and the reproach of fear and weakness and the loss of his Kshatriya honour. For what is worst grief for a Kshatriya? It is the loss of his honour, his fame, his noble station among the mighty men, the men of courage and power; that to him is much worse than death. Battle, courage, power, rule, the honour of the brave, the heaven of those who fall nobly, this is the warrior’s ideal. To lower that ideal, to allow a smirch to fall on that honour, to give the example of a hero among heroes whose action lays itself open to the reproach

13. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, pp. 79-83.

of cowardice and weakness and thus to lower the moral standard of mankind, is to be false to himself and to the demand of the world on its leaders and kings.<sup>14</sup>

And the Mother had said:

Heroism:

- (1) To do always what is most beautiful and most noble.
- (2) To act always from the height of one's consciousness.<sup>15</sup>

Some may find a contradiction between Sri Aurobindo, the definitive gentleman and Sri Aurobindo, the revolutionary. But in a letter Sri Aurobindo clarifies to a disciple:

No doubt hatred and cursing are not the proper attitude. It is true also that to look upon all things and all people with a calm and clear vision, to be uninvolved and impartial in one's judgments is a quite proper Yogic attitude. A condition of perfect samata can be established in which one sees all as equal, friends and enemies included, and is not disturbed by what men do or by what happens. The question is whether this is all that is demanded from us. If so, then the general attitude will be one of a neutral indifference to everything. But the Gita, which strongly insists on a perfect and absolute samata, goes on to say, "Fight, destroy the adversary, conquer."<sup>16</sup>

During his days in Alipore jail Sri Aurobindo studied the Gita. After his release from Alipore prison, he wrote:

The main principle of the Aryan discipline is the sattwic temperament. He who is sattwic is pure; normally all human beings are impure. This impurity is nourished and increased by the predominance of Rajas and the great density of Tamas. The impurity of mind is of two kinds. First, inertia or impurity due to lack of inclination to work; this is produced by Tamas. Secondly, excitement or impurity due to wrong impulses; this is caused by Rajas. . . .

The means to rouse Sattwa is the spiritual temperament — to renounce selfish interests and deploy all one's energies for the good of others — to make the whole of life a great and pure sacrifice by surrendering oneself to the Divine. . . .

14. CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 65.

15. CWM, Vol. 14, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 168.

16. CWSA, Vol. 29, pp. 131-32.



I have already said that one of the means of increasing Sattwa is to devote all one's powers to the good of others. And there is plenty of evidence of this spirit in our political awakening. But it is difficult to maintain this spirit. It is difficult for the individual, more so for the nation. Selfish interest, unnoticed, gets mixed up with the good of others and if our understanding is not very pure, we may fall into such a delusion that we may seek only our own selfish ends in the name of service to others and thus sacrifice the good of our fellow-beings, our country and humanity and yet not detect our mistake. Service to God is another means of increasing Sattwa.<sup>17</sup>

We see that a sattwic man is pure; similarly, we could say that the basis of a gentleman is to have a sattwic temperament.

However, an introspective Sri Aurobindo cautions:

But even in that path good may turn into its opposite. There may gather in us sattwic apathy towards works after we have achieved the joy of nearness to God. We may turn our back to the service of our distressed land and humanity. This is the bondage of the sattwic temperament. Just as there is rajasic egoism, so also there is sattwic egoism. Just as sin binds men, so does virtue. There cannot be complete freedom unless we surrender ourselves to God, being fully free from desire and giving up egoism.<sup>18</sup>

One of the stark realities of pre-independence India that struck Sri Aurobindo was its starvation and poverty. At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century India's share of the world economy was 23 per cent and by the time the British departed India, it had dropped to just over 3 per cent.<sup>19</sup> Sri Aurobindo observed that in order to justify their rule in India, the British pretended to be a "benevolent conqueror".<sup>20</sup>

Formerly, ancient India with its enormous wealth was supreme amongst all countries. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The acceptance of poverty is noble & beneficial in a class or an individual, but it becomes fatal and pauperises life of its richness & expansion if it is perverted into a general or national ideal. Athens, not Sparta, is the progressive type for mankind. Ancient India with its ideal of vast riches & vast spending was the greatest of nations; modern India with its trend towards national asceticism has finally become poor in life & sunk into weakness & degradation.<sup>21</sup>

17. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, pp. 89, 92-93.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

19. See Shashi Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness – The British Empire in India*, 2016, p. 4.

20. See CWSA, Vol. 6, p. 362.

21. *Ibid.*, Vol. 12, p. 448.



Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) tried to make Indians aware that British exploitation was the cause of rapidly increasing poverty. His book, *Poverty and the Un-British rule in India*, highlighted the drain of India's wealth into Britain. In appreciation of Naoroji, Sri Aurobindo wrote on 26 December 1906:

And one thing distinguished him above most of his fellows that while they wasted themselves on things petty and unreal, he seized on one great fact and enforced it in season and out of season on all who could be got to listen, — the terrible poverty of India and its rapid increase under British rule. It was necessary that a persistent voice should din this into the ears of the people; for . . . this one central all-important reality was in danger of being smothered out of sight. It was necessary for the nation but to realise its increasing poverty under British rule; only then could it take the next step and take to heart the fact that British rule and increasing poverty stood in the relation of cause and effect; last of all comes the inevitable conclusion that the effect could only be cured by the removal of the cause, in other words by the substitution of autonomy in place of a British or British-controlled Government. Mr. Naoroji's was the persistent voice that compelled the nation to realise the first two of these fundamental truths; Mr. Romesh Dutt and others powerfully assisted the result, but it was Mr. Naoroji who first forced the question of Indian poverty into prominence, and for this India owes him a debt of gratitude deeper than that due to any other of our older politicians dead or living.<sup>22</sup>

In order to stir his countrymen to fight for independence, Sri Aurobindo laid bare the sheer selfish commercial motives of England. In August 1907 he wrote:

Nobody really expects them to help the development of indigenous industry at the expense of British commerce merely because the millions of India are starving and ground down with poverty and miserable and discontented.<sup>23</sup>

Intermittent famines in India, due to weak monsoons, British government inaction and exporting food grains and other agricultural commodities, led to 60 million deaths (about 20% of the population) in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>24</sup> In December 1907 Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Secondly the Government has been charged with "propagating famine and plague". We note therefore that it is sedition to say that the economic conditions created and perpetuated by the present system of government are responsible

22. *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, pp. 203-04.

23. *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, p. 626.

24. See website: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Famine\\_in\\_India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Famine_in_India).

for famine and poverty and the diseases which thrive on poverty! Thirdly, the Government is seditiously charged with draining the resources of India for the benefit of England.<sup>25</sup>

On England's "competitive system of commerce", Sri Aurobindo remarks:

It has been written large for us in ghastly letters of famine, chronic starvation and misery and a decreasing population. . . . Industry can only become again beautiful if poverty and the struggle for life are eliminated from society . . .<sup>26</sup>

Sri Aurobindo and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the principal policy framers of the Swadeshi movement, stressed on the boycott of British goods. Sri Aurobindo wanted economic independence, "especially handloom industry including the spinning-wheel, but also the opening of mills, factories and Swadeshi business concerns under Indian management and with Indian capital".<sup>27</sup>

In October 1905, Sri Aurobindo wrote to Mrinalini Devi that it would be beneficial if the Indian middle class "goes into business on its own."<sup>28</sup>

"The only possible method of stopping the drain," wrote Sri Aurobindo, "is to establish a popular government which may be relied on to foster and protect Indian commerce and Indian industry conducted by Indian capital and employing Indian labour."<sup>29</sup>

Both Sri Aurobindo and Tilak "were for national self-sufficiency in key industries, the production of necessities and of all manufactures of which India had the natural means".<sup>30</sup> This was one of the reasons why Sri Aurobindo resolutely insisted on Indian independence.

Sri Aurobindo has never concealed his opinion that a nation is entitled to attain its freedom by violence, if it can do so or if there is no other way; whether it should do so or not, depends on what is the best policy, not on ethical considerations. Sri Aurobindo's position and practice in this matter was the same as Tilak's and that of other Nationalist leaders who were by no means Pacifists or worshippers of Ahimsa."<sup>31</sup>

About the strategy of the Swadeshi leaders to eradicate poverty, Sri Aurobindo later commented:

25. CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 774-75.

26. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, pp. 248-49.

27. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 14.

28. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 1993, p. 66.

29. CWSA, Vol. 6, p. 271.

30. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 58.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

We were quite aware of the poverty of India and its fallen condition, but we did not try to cure the poverty by Khaddar and Hindi prachar. We advocated the creation of an industrial India . . .<sup>32</sup>

In a conversation about mechanisation, Sri Aurobindo said: “Big machines are bound to come. The poverty of the people can only be removed by large-scale production”. And he added, “It is the tendency of Indians towards poverty which is really responsible for their cry against machinery.” Sri Aurobindo further added, “Let her first acquire wealth. Without wealth they cannot expect to make any progress.”<sup>33</sup>

About the scourge of poverty, Sri Aurobindo has written:

The existence of poverty is the proof of an unjust & ill-organised society, and our public charities are but the first tardy awakening in the conscience of a robber.<sup>34</sup>

When a disciple told Sri Aurobindo that several places feed the poor as spiritual work, he replied:

I see no idea in that. What is the use of feeding people for one day, when they have to fast all the year round? You can satisfy your conscience that you have done something for the poor, I suppose. If you could find out the cause of poverty and try to remove that, then it would be some real work. . . .

If you give the people education — by education I mean proper education — not the modern type — and the means, then the problem could be solved. People in England or France have not this kind of poverty as we have in India. That is because of their education — they are not so helpless.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, Sri Aurobindo wanted to eliminate the curse of poverty from its roots. The Mother once said:

As for the poor, Sri Aurobindo says that to come to their help is good, provided that it is not a vain ostentation of charity, but that it is far nobler to seek a remedy for poverty so that there may be no poor left on earth.<sup>36</sup>

An aphorism of Sri Aurobindo reads:

32. Ibid., Vol. 35, p. 19.

33. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, pp. 298-99.

34. CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 447.

35 A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, pp. 674-75.

36. CWM, Vol. 10, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 266.

Help the poor while the poor are with thee; but study also & strive that there may be no poor for thy assistance.<sup>37</sup>

But Sri Aurobindo has cautioned:

Do not dream that when thou hast got rid of material poverty, men will even so be happy or satisfied or society freed from ills, troubles & problems. This is only the first & lowest necessity. While the soul within remains defectively organised, there will always be outward unrest, disorder & revolution.<sup>38</sup>

The Mother was once asked, “Will a day come when there will be no more poor people and no more suffering in the world?” She replied:

That is absolutely certain for all those who understand Sri Aurobindo’s teaching and have faith in him.

It is with the intention of creating a place where this can come about that we want to establish Auroville.

But for this realisation to be possible, each one of us must make an effort to transform himself, for most of the sufferings of men are the result of their own mistakes, both physical and moral.<sup>39</sup>

Sri Aurobindo was concerned about his suffering countrymen. In September 1909, he prophesied to the Tamil nationalist weekly, *India*, that help is forthcoming, not only to India but to humanity at large:

Since 1907, we are living in a new era which is full of hope for India. Not only India, but the whole world will see sudden upheavals and revolutionary changes. The high will become low and the low high. The oppressed and the depressed shall be elevated. The nation and humanity will be animated by a new consciousness, new thought and new efforts will be made to reach new ends. Amidst these revolutionary changes India will become free.<sup>40</sup>

Besides the country folk and the masses, Sri Aurobindo’s experience at Alipore jail also made him sensitive to the sufferings of the prisoners and convicts. Immediately after his arrest he was put into solitary confinement, a mental torture that is meant to break the spirit of a prisoner. During this period, Sri Aurobindo

37. CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 447.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 448.

39. CWM, Vol. 10, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 268.

40. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 112.

understood why a detainee goes mad in isolation, and prayed to God to prevent his “loss of intelligence”. He writes that God

. . . showed me the state of mind in which prisoners condemned to solitary cells move towards insanity, and turned me wholly against the inhuman cruelty of the western prison administration, so that I might, to the best of my ability, turn my countrymen and the world from these barbarous ways to the path of more humane prison organisation. This was the first lesson. I remembered, fifteen years back, after return home from England, I had written some bitterly critical articles in the *Induprakash*, of Bombay, against the petitionary ethics of the then Congress. Seeing that these articles were influencing the minds of the young, the late Mahadeo Govind Ranade had told me, when I met him, for nearly half an hour, that I should give up writing these articles, and advised me to take up some other Congress work. He was desirous of my taking up the work of prison reform. I was astonished and unhappy at the unexpected suggestion and had refused to undertake that work. I did not know then that this was a prelude to the distant future and that one day God himself would keep me in prison for a year and make me see the cruelty and futility of the system and the need for reform. Now I understand that in the present political atmosphere there was no possibility of any reform of the prison system, but I resolved before my conscience to propagate and argue in its favour so that these hellish remnants of an alien order were not perpetuated in a self-determining India.<sup>41</sup>

About the British prison system, Sri Aurobindo adds:

If there is any place where the Indian character may be looked upon with eyes of contempt, if it is possible to see it at its worst, lowest and most hateful state, then Alipore Jail is that place, imprisonment at Alipore is that inferior and degenerate state. In such a place I spent twelve months. . . . The British prison is not a place for reform of character; on the contrary, for the ordinary convict it is but an instrument for the degradation of character and manhood. They remain the thieves and robbers that they had been before being sent to gaol; they continue to steal even in the prison, in the midst of the strict prohibitory rules they manage to indulge in addiction, continue to cheat.<sup>42</sup>

However, Sri Aurobindo’s attitude towards the typical criminal convict was always humane and considerate. He writes in *The Human Cycle*:

41. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 41.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

In dealing with the criminal the most advanced societies are no longer altogether satisfied with regarding him as a law-breaker to be punished, imprisoned, terrified, hanged or else tortured physically and morally, whether as a revenge for his revolt or as an example to others; there is a growing attempt to understand him, to make allowance for his heredity, environment and inner deficiencies and to change him from within rather than crush him from without.<sup>43</sup>

An aphorism of Sri Aurobindo reads:

To feel & love the God of beauty and good in the ugly and the evil, and still yearn in utter love to heal it of its ugliness and its evil, this is real virtue and morality.<sup>44</sup>

In Alipore jail, Sri Aurobindo saw the stark difference between Aryan and modern education, and Indian and European culture. Even those who were convicted of serious crimes had elements of Aryan culture like kindness, sympathy etc. Sri Aurobindo writes:

But the virtues of the national character came out even among the real offenders. I stayed in Alipore for twelve months, and excepting one or two all the convicts, the thieves, the dacoits and the murderers with whom we had come in contact, we received from all and sundry good behaviour and helpfulness. Rather it was among those spoilt by modern education that these qualities seemed to be lacking. Modern education may have many virtues to recommend itself, but civility and selfless service form no part of these. The kindness and sympathy that are such valuable elements of an Aryan education, I found that even among the thieves and robbers. The sweeper, the cleaner, the water man, they all had to share, for no fault of their own, part of the misery and hardship of our solitary confinement, but they never expressed to us their anger or annoyance on that score. At times they ventilated their distress before the native jailors, but they would also cheerfully pray for our release from detention. . . . Those who vaunt about western culture, I would like to ask them: Is this self-control, charity, generosity, gratitude, godly love for others to be found among the lower order of criminals, the thieves and robbers of England? In fact, Europe is the land of enjoyment, India of sacrifice. The Gita describes two kinds of creatures — *deva* and *asura*. The Indian is intrinsically of the *deva* kind, the westerner of the *asura*. But in this age of deep darkness (*ghor kali*) because of

43. CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 45.

44. *Ibid.*, Vol. 12, p. 428.

the disappearance of Aryan education, due to the predominance of inertia, in our national decline, we are acquiring the inferior qualities of the *asura* while the westerners, because of their national progress and the evolution of manhood are acquiring the qualities of the *deva*. But in spite of this in their *deva* qualities something of the *asura* and in our *asuric* qualities something of the *deva* can be imperfectly glimpsed. Even the best among them cannot wholly get rid of the *asuric* qualities. When one compares the inferior specimens of both cultures, the truth comes out quite strikingly.

There is much to be written on this topic, but I forbear for fear of the lengthiness of the article. But while I was in the prison those persons in whose bearing I have found this inner freedom, they are the prototypes of the godward emotions, *devabhava*. I have an idea of writing in future an article on this subject.<sup>45</sup>

Earlier we had stated that Sri Aurobindo epitomised the Aryan gentleman. He has said that there is nothing in human speech that has a nobler history than the word Aryan. And of the Aryan people Sri Aurobindo writes:

For in the Veda the Aryan peoples are those who had accepted a particular type of self-culture, of inward and outward practice, of ideality, of aspiration. The Aryan gods were the supraphysical powers who assisted the mortal in his struggle towards the nature of the godhead. All the highest aspirations of the early human race, its noblest religious temper, its most idealistic velleities of thought are summed up in this single vocable.

In later times, the word Arya expressed a particular ethical and social ideal, an ideal of well-governed life, candour, courtesy, nobility, straight dealing, courage, gentleness, purity, humanity, compassion, protection of the weak, liberality, observance of social duty, eagerness for knowledge, respect for the wise and learned, the social accomplishments. It was the combined ideal of the Brahmana and the Kshatriya. Everything that departed from this ideal, everything that tended towards the ignoble, mean, obscure, rude, cruel or false, was termed un-Aryan. There is no word in human speech that has a nobler history.<sup>46</sup>

On Aryan culture, Sri Aurobindo has also spoken about “the divine tenderness of the Hindu nature, always noble, forbearing & gentle”.<sup>47</sup>

45. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, pp. 87-88.

46. CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 441.

47. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 191.

And during his stay in Alipore jail, which he has amusingly referred to as the “Alipore government hotel”,<sup>48</sup> Sri Aurobindo learnt a bit more about the character of Indians:

Thanks to my experience of these twelve months I have been able to return to the world of action with tenfold hope, with a fixed notion about Indian superiority, with redoubled respect for human character, the future progress and well-being of the motherland and the human race. This is not due to my inherent optimism or any excessive trust. Srijut Bipinchandra Pal had felt the same way in the Buxar Jail; in the Alipore Jail, Dr. Daly, who had served there earlier, supported this view. Dr. Daly was a generous and wise person, experienced in the ways of men, the worst elements of human nature were present to him every day, yet he used to tell me: “The more I see and hear of Indian gentlemen or the poor folk, men who are distinguished in society or the convicts in a prison, I am convinced that in quality and character you are much superior to us. Looking at these lads has further confirmed me in my judgment. Who can judge from their behaviour, character and other high qualities that they are anarchists or assassins? Instead of finding in them cruelty, wildness, restlessness or impropriety I find the opposite virtues.”<sup>49</sup>

About Dr. Daly, Sri Aurobindo later told his disciples:

The Irish doctor who was in Alipore jail could not imagine how the young men who were so gentle and attractive could be revolutionaries.<sup>50</sup>

Let alone Dr. Daly, even a convict at Alipore jail was moved by the nobility of these revolutionaries imprisoned in the Alipore Bomb Case — of whom Sri Aurobindo was the leader. Sri Aurobindo recounts:

A Mohammedan convict used to love the accused like his own children and at the time of parting he could not restrain himself from shedding tears. Pointing out their suffering and humiliation as the price of patriotism, he would tell others and express his sorrow by saying, “Look, these are gentlemen, sons of the rich, and this their suffering is because they have tried to help the poor and the distressed.”<sup>51</sup>

48. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 20.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

50. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 206.

51. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 87.



Sri Aurobindo had a calm, detached presence and though he was quiet, his sensibilities enabled him to connect with the common man. He was always receptive to gentleness, kindness, humility and other noble traits in people. In the *Bande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo wrote about the nobility of the poor village farmers:

The Indian peasantry have always been distinguished from the less civilized masses of Europe by their superior piety, gentleness, sobriety, purity, thrift and native intelligence.<sup>52</sup>

Sri Aurobindo also felt the Indian masses were more civilised than their European counterparts:

I have come in contact with the Indian masses and found them better than the Europeans of the same class. They are superior to the European working-class. The latter may be more efficient but that is due to other reasons. The Governor here remarked during riots that the labourers are very docile and humble; only when they take to drink they become violent. . . . I found even the ordinary criminal quite human and better than his counterpart in Europe.<sup>53</sup>

Sri Aurobindo was responsive to the sufferings not only of his countrymen but to others too. Let us momentarily fast forward to the uncertain months prior to the Second World War. In February 1939, Sri Aurobindo expressed his concern about the world conditions to his disciples:

The problem is to save the world from domination by the Asuric Forces. It would be awful to be ruled by the Nazis and the Fascists. Their domination will let loose on mankind what are called the Four Powers of Hell — obscurantism, falsehood, suffering and death. Suffering and death mean the horrors of war.<sup>54</sup>

Sri Aurobindo has written:

The Divine is being, consciousness and delight, and in the world all throws itself out and finds itself again by energy of being, energy of consciousness and energy of delight; this is a world of the works of the divine Shakti. That Shakti shapes herself here in innumerable kinds of beings and each of them has its own characteristic powers of her force. Each power is the Divine himself

52. CWSA, Vol. 7, p. 985.

53. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 206.

54. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 232.

in that form, in the lion as in the hind, in the Titan as in the God, in the inconscient sun that flames through ether as in man who thinks upon earth. The deformation given by the gunas is the minor, not really the major aspect; the essential thing is the divine power that is finding self-expression. It is the Godhead who manifests himself in the great thinker, the hero, the leader of men, the great teacher, sage, prophet, religious founder, saint, lover of man, the great poet, the great artist, the great scientist, the ascetic self-tamer, the tamer of things and events and forces. The work itself, the high poem, the perfect form of beauty, the deep love, the noble act, the divine achievement is a movement of godhead; it is the Divine in manifestation.<sup>55</sup>

*(To be continued)*

GAUTAM MALAKER

55. CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 374.

*If you have the consciousness of an animal, you will love like an animal. If you have the consciousness of an ordinary man, you will love like an ordinary man. If you have the consciousness of an élite being, you will love like an élite being, and if you have a god's consciousness, you will love like a god. It is simple! That's what I have said. And so, if by an effort for progress and inner transformation, by aspiration and growth, you pass from one consciousness to the other and your consciousness becomes vaster and vaster, well, the love you experience will be vaster and vaster.*

*The Mother*

*(Questions and Answers 1954, CWM, Vol. 6, p. 103)*



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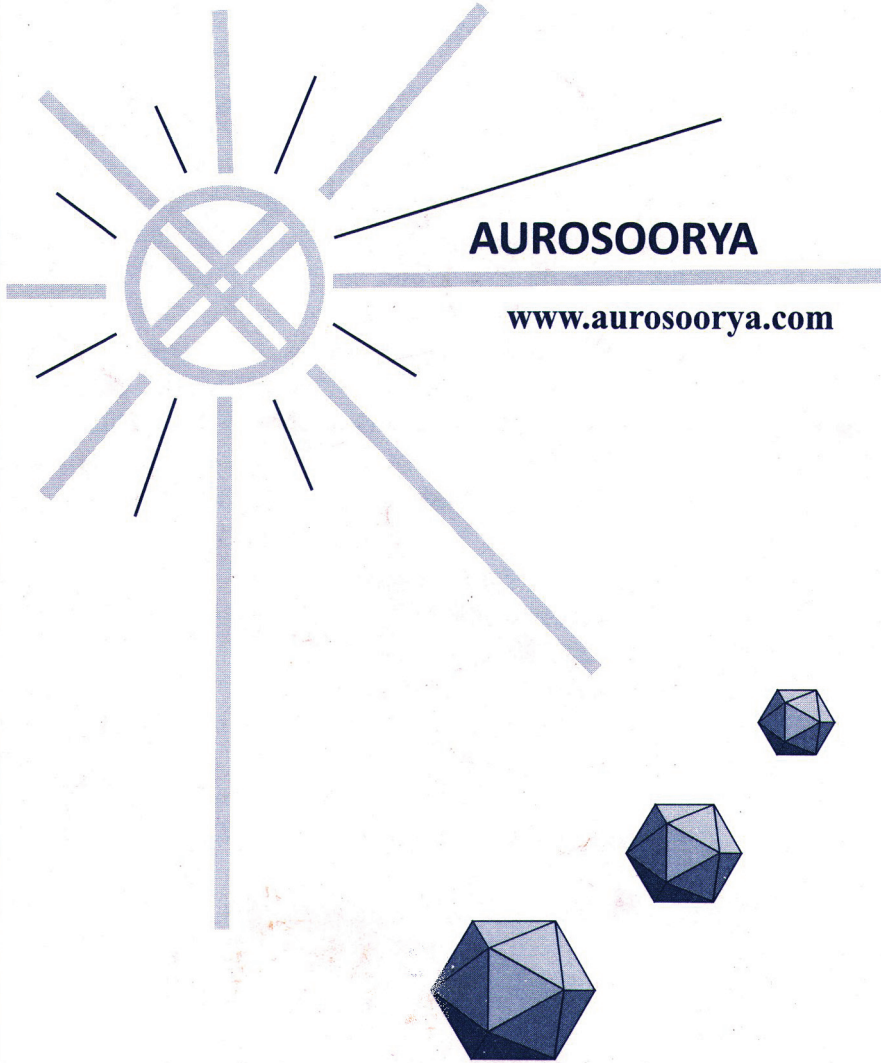
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