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# MOTHER INDIA

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NOVEMBER 2022

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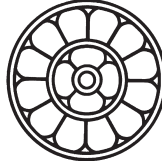
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# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

NOVEMBER 2022

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM  
PONDICHERRY  
INDIA



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



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# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXV

No. 11

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## ‘NEW EXPRESSIVE FORMS’

. . . Earth’s brooding wisdom spoke to her still breast;  
Mounting from mind’s last peaks to mate with gods,  
Making earth’s brilliant thoughts a springing-board  
To dive into the cosmic vastnesses,  
The knowledge of the thinker and the seer  
Saw the unseen and thought the unthinkable,  
Opened the enormous doors of the unknown,  
Rent man’s horizons into infinity.  
A shoreless sweep was lent to the mortal’s acts,  
And art and beauty sprang from the human depths;  
Nature and soul vied in nobility.  
Ethics the human keyed to imitate heaven;  
The harmony of a rich culture’s tones  
Refined the sense and magnified its reach  
To hear the unheard and glimpse the invisible  
And taught the soul to soar beyond things known,  
Inspiring life to greaten and break its bounds,  
Aspiring to the Immortals’ unseen world.  
Leaving earth’s safety daring wings of Mind  
Bore her above the trodden fields of thought  
Crossing the mystic seas of the Beyond  
To live on eagle heights near to the Sun.  
There Wisdom sits on her eternal throne.  
All her life’s turns led her to symbol doors  
Admitting to secret Powers that were her kin;  
Adept of truth, initiate of bliss,  
A mystic acolyte trained in Nature’s school,  
Aware of the marvel of created things  
She laid the secrecies of her heart’s deep muse  
Upon the altar of the Wonderful;  
Her hours were a ritual in a timeless fane;  
Her acts became gestures of sacrifice.  
Invested with a rhythm of higher spheres  
The word was used as a hieratic means  
For the release of the imprisoned spirit  
Into communion with its comrade gods.  
Or it helped to beat out new expressive forms  
Of that which labours in the heart of life,  
Some immemorial Soul in men and things,

Seeker of the unknown and the unborn  
 Carrying a light from the Ineffable  
 To rend the veil of the last mysteries.  
 Intense philosophies pointed earth to heaven  
 Or on foundations broad as cosmic Space  
 Upraised the earth-mind to superhuman heights.  
 Overpassing lines that please the outward eyes  
 But hide the sight of that which lives within  
 Sculpture and painting concentrated sense  
 Upon an inner vision's motionless verge,  
 Revealed a figure of the invisible,  
 Unveiled all Nature's meaning in a form,  
 Or caught into a body the Divine.  
 The architecture of the Infinite  
 Discovered here its inward-musing shapes  
 Captured into wide breadths of soaring stone:  
 Music brought down celestial yearnings, song  
 Held the merged heart absorbed in rapturous depths,  
 Linking the human with the cosmic cry;  
 The world-interpreting movements of the dance  
 Moulded idea and mood to a rhythmic sway  
 And posture; crafts minute in subtle lines  
 Eternised a swift moment's memory  
 Or showed in a carving's sweep, a cup's design  
 The underlying patterns of the unseen:  
 Poems in largeness cast like moving worlds  
 And metres surging with the ocean's voice  
 Translated by grandeurs locked in Nature's heart  
 But thrown now into a crowded glory of speech  
 The beauty and sublimity of her forms,  
 The passion of her moments and her moods  
 Lifting the human word nearer to the god's.  
 Man's eyes could look into the inner realms;  
 His scrutiny discovered number's law  
 And organised the motions of the stars,  
 Mapped out the visible fashioning of the world,  
 Questioned the process of his thoughts or made  
 A theorised diagram of mind and life.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, pp. 359-61)



## ‘THE FULFILMENT OF OUR INDIVIDUALITY’

He am I.

*Isha Upanishad.*<sup>1</sup>

It is an eternal portion of Me that has become the living being in a world of living beings. . . . The eye of knowledge sees the Lord abiding in the body and enjoying and going forth from it.

*Gita.*<sup>2</sup>

Two birds beautiful of wing, friends and comrades, cling to a common tree, and one eats the sweet fruit, the other regards him and eats not. . . . Where winged souls cry the discoveries of knowledge over their portion of immortality, there the Lord of all, the Guardian of the World took possession of me, he the Wise, me the ignorant.

*Rig Veda.*<sup>3</sup>

There is then a fundamental truth of existence, an Omnipresent Reality, omnipresent above the cosmic manifestation and in it and immanent in each individual. There is also a dynamic power of this Omnipresence, a creative or self-manifesting action of its infinite Consciousness-Force. There is as a phase or movement of the self-manifestation a descent into an apparent material inconscience, an awakening of the individual out of the Inconscience and an evolution of his being into the spiritual and supramental consciousness and power of the Reality, into his own universal and transcendent Self and source of existence. It is on this foundation that we have to base our conception of a truth in our terrestrial being and the possibility of a divine Life in material Nature. There our chief need is to discover the origin and nature of the Ignorance which we see emerging out of the inconscience of matter or disclosing itself within a body of matter and the nature of the Knowledge that has to replace it, to understand too the process of Nature’s self-unfolding and the soul’s recovery. For in fact the Knowledge is there concealed in the Ignorance itself; it has rather to be unveiled than acquired: it reveals itself rather than is learned, by an inward and upward self-unfolding. But first it will be convenient to meet and get out of the way one difficulty that inevitably arises, the difficulty of admitting that, even given the immanence of the Divine in us, even given our individual consciousness as a vehicle

1. Verse 16.

2. XV. 7, 10.

3. I. 164. 20, 21

of progressive evolutionary manifestation, the individual is in any sense eternal or that there can be any persistence of individuality after liberation has been attained by unity and self-knowledge.

This is a difficulty of the logical reason and must be met by a larger and more catholic enlightening reason. Or if it is a difficulty of spiritual experience, it can only be met by a wider resolving experience. It can indeed be met also by a dialectical battle, a logomachy of the logical mind; but that by itself is an artificial method, often a futile combat in the clouds and always inconclusive. Logical reasoning is useful and indispensable in its own field in order to give the mind a certain clearness, precision and subtlety in dealing with its own ideas and word-symbols, so that our perception of the truths which we arrive at by observation and experience or which physically, psychologically or spiritually we have seen, may be as little as possible obscured by the confusions of our average human intelligence, its proneness to take appearance for fact, its haste to be misled by partial truth, its exaggerated conclusions, its intellectual and emotional partialities, its incompetent bunglings in that linking of truth to truth by which alone we can arrive at a complete knowledge. We must have a clear, pure, subtle and flexible mind in order that we may fall as little as possible into that ordinary mental habit of our kind which turns truth itself into a purveyor of errors. That clarification the habit of clear logical reasoning culminating in the method of metaphysical dialectics does help to accomplish and its part in the preparation of knowledge is therefore very great. But by itself it cannot arrive either at the knowledge of the world or the knowledge of God, much less reconcile the lower and the higher realisation. It is much more efficiently a guardian against error than a discoverer of truth, — although by deduction from knowledge already acquired it may happen upon new truths and indicate them for experience or for the higher and larger truth-seeing faculties to confirm. In the more subtle field of synthetical or unifying knowledge the logical habit of mind may even become a stumbling-block by the very faculty which gives it its peculiar use; for it is so accustomed to making distinctions and dwelling upon distinctions and working by distinctions that it is always a little at sea when distinctions have to be overridden and overpassed. Our object, then, in considering the difficulties of the normal mind when face to face with the experience of cosmic and transcendental unity by the individual, must be solely to make more clear to ourselves, first, the origin of the difficulties and the escape from them and by that, what is more important, the real nature of the unity at which we arrive and of the culmination of the individual when he becomes one with all creatures and dwells in the oneness of the Eternal.

The first difficulty for the reason is that it has always been accustomed to identify the individual self with the ego and to think of it as existing only by the limitations and exclusions of the ego. If that were so, then by the transcendence of the ego the individual would abolish his own existence; our end would be to disappear and dissolve into some universality of matter, life, mind or spirit or else some indeterminate

from which our egoistic determinations of individuality have started. But what is this strongly separative self-experience that we call ego? It is nothing fundamentally real in itself but only a practical construction of our consciousness devised to centralise the activities of Nature in us. We perceive a formation of mental, physical, vital experience which distinguishes itself from the rest of being, and that is what we think of as ourselves in nature — this individualisation of being in becoming. We then proceed to conceive of ourselves as something which has thus individualised itself and only exists so long as it is individualised, — a temporary or at least a temporal becoming; or else we conceive of ourselves as someone who supports or causes the individualisation, an immortal being perhaps but limited by its individuality. This perception and this conception constitute our ego-sense. Normally, we go no farther in our knowledge of our individual existence.

But in the end we have to see that our individualisation is only a superficial formation, a practical selection and limited conscious synthesis for the temporary utility of life in a particular body, or else it is a constantly changing and developing synthesis pursued through successive lives in successive bodies. Behind it there is a consciousness, a Purusha, who is not determined or limited by his individualisation or by this synthesis but on the contrary determines, supports and yet exceeds it. That which he selects from in order to construct this synthesis, is his total experience of the world-being. Therefore our individualisation exists by virtue of the world-being, but also by virtue of a consciousness which uses the world-being for experience of its possibilities of individuality. These two powers, Person and his world-material, are both necessary for our present experience of individuality. If the Purusha with his individualising synthesis of consciousness were to disappear, to merge, to annul himself in any way, our constructed individuality would cease because the Reality that supported it would no longer be in presence; if, on the other hand, the world-being were to dissolve, merge, disappear, then also our individualisation would cease, for the material of experience by which it effectuates itself would be wanting. We have then to recognise these two terms of our existence, a world-being and an individualising consciousness which is the cause of all our self-experience and world-experience.

But we see farther that in the end this Purusha, this cause and self of our individuality, comes to embrace the whole world and all other beings in a sort of conscious extension of itself and to perceive itself as one with the world-being. In its conscious extension of itself it exceeds the primary experience and abolishes the barriers of its active self-limitation and individualisation; by its perception of its own infinite universality it goes beyond all consciousness of separative individuality or limited soul-being. By that very fact the individual ceases to be the self-limiting ego; in other words, our false consciousness of existing only by self-limitation, by rigid distinction of ourselves from the rest of being and becoming is transcended; our identification of ourselves with our personal and temporal individualisation

in a particular mind and body is abolished. But is all truth of individuality and individualisation abolished? does the Purusha cease to exist or does he become the world-Purusha and live intimately in innumerable minds and bodies? We do not find it to be so. He still individualises and it is still he who exists and embraces this wider consciousness while he individualises: but the mind no longer thinks of a limited temporary individualisation as all ourselves but only as a wave of becoming thrown up from the sea of its being or else as a form or centre of universality. The soul still makes the world-becoming the material for individual experience, but instead of regarding it as something outside and larger than itself on which it has to draw, by which it is affected, with which it has to make accommodations, it is aware of it subjectively as within itself; it embraces both its world-material and its individualised experience of spatial and temporal activities in a free and enlarged consciousness. In this new consciousness the spiritual individual perceives its true self to be one in being with the Transcendence and seated and dwelling within it, and no longer takes its constructed individuality as anything more than a formation for world-experience.

Our unity with the world-being is the consciousness of a Self which at one and the same time cosmicises in the world and individualises through the individual Purusha, and both in that world-being and in this individual being and in all individual beings it is aware of the same Self manifesting and experiencing its various manifestations. That then is a Self which must be one in its being, — otherwise we could not have this experience of unity, — and yet must be capable in its very unity of cosmic differentiation and multiple individuality. The unity is its being, — yes, but the cosmic differentiation and the multiple individuality are the power of its being which it is constantly displaying and which it is its delight and the nature of its consciousness to display. If then we arrive at unity with that, if we even become entirely and in every way that being, why should the power of its being be excised and why at all should we desire or labour to excise it? We should then only diminish the scope of our unity with it by an exclusive concentration accepting the divine being but not accepting our part in the power and consciousness and infinite delight of the Divine. It would in fact be the individual seeking peace and rest of union in a motionless identity, but rejecting delight and various joy of union in the nature and act and power of the divine Existence. That is possible, but there is no necessity to uphold it as the ultimate aim of our being or as our ultimate perfection.

Or the one possible reason would be that in the power, the act of consciousness there is not real union and that only in the status of consciousness is there perfect undifferentiated unity. Now in what we may call the waking union of the individual with the Divine, as opposed to a falling asleep or a concentration of the individual consciousness in an absorbed identity, there is certainly and must be a differentiation of experience. For in this active unity the individual Purusha enlarges its active experience also as well as its static consciousness into a way of union with this Self

of his being and of the world-being, and yet individualisation remains and therefore differentiation. The Purusha is aware of all other individuals as selves of himself; he may by a dynamic union become aware of their mental and practical action as occurring in his universal consciousness, just as he is aware of his own mental and practical action; he may help to determine their action by subjective union with them: but still there is a practical difference. The action of the Divine in himself is that with which he is particularly and directly concerned; the action of the Divine in his other selves is that with which he is universally concerned, not directly, but through and by his union with them and with the Divine. The individual therefore exists though he exceeds the little separative ego; the universal exists and is embraced by him but it does not absorb and abolish all individual differentiation, even though by his universalising himself the limitation which we call the ego is overcome.

Now we may get rid of this differentiation by plunging into the absorption of an exclusive unity, but to what end? For perfect union? But we do not forfeit that by accepting the differentiation any more than the Divine forfeits His oneness by accepting it. We have the perfect union in His being and can absorb ourselves in it at any time, but we have also this other differentiated unity and can emerge into it and act freely in it at any time without losing oneness: for we have merged the ego and are absolved from the exclusive stresses of our mentality. Then for peace and rest? But we have the peace and rest by virtue of our unity with Him, even as the Divine possesses for ever His eternal calm in the midst of His eternal action. Then for the mere joy of getting rid of all differentiation? But that differentiation has its divine purpose: it is a means of greater unity, not as in the egoistic life a means of division; for we enjoy by it our unity with our other selves and with God in all, which we exclude by our rejection of His multiple being. In either experience it is the Divine in the individual possessing and enjoying in one case the Divine in His pure unity or in the other the Divine in that and in the unity of the cosmos; it is not the absolute Divine recovering after having lost His unity. Certainly, we may prefer the absorption in a pure exclusive unity or a departure into a supracosmic transcendence, but there is in the spiritual truth of the Divine Existence no compelling reason why we should not participate in this large possession and bliss of His universal being which is the fulfilment of our individuality.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(The Life Divine, CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 380-86)*

## ‘THE SUPREME LAW OF COMMUNION WITH THY WILL’

**August 3, 1914**

All the being, this morning, is mute adoration and the immensity of Thy love fills its soul. . . .

The preparation and the work, the work and the preparation alternate and interpenetrate to such an extent that sometimes it becomes difficult to distinguish them; and their combination constitutes Thy divine life upon earth. What one must be, what one must do: the perfecting of Thy instrument and its utilisation go together; sometimes Thou wantest it to enrich itself and grow, to open all its doors on infinite horizons, to unite with the god it can manifest, to develop its power of conscious relation with the various worlds, and sometimes Thou wantest that, losing so to speak all consciousness of itself, it may be nothing but Thy force in action. And in the two is found the supreme law of communion with Thy will.

All the being, this morning, is mute adoration and the immensity of Thy love fills its soul.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 215)*



## A CONVERSATION OF 23 DECEMBER 1953

*If the mind “is incapable of finding knowledge”<sup>1</sup> what part of the being finds knowledge?*

One must enter the knowledge which belongs to the supramental region.

*But in order to bring it down?*

Every time something attracts this knowledge (something which is evidently ready to receive it), it comes.

*It does not come down into the mind, Sweet Mother?*

Yes, it descends into the mind. Into a higher part of the mind or rather into the psychic. One may have knowledge from the psychic — though it is of another kind and is not formulated as in the mind. It is a sort of inner certitude which makes you do the right thing at the right moment and in the right way, without necessarily passing through the reason or mental formation.

For instance, one may act with a perfect knowledge of what should be done, and without intervention — the least intervention — of the reasoning mind. The mind is silent: it simply looks on and listens in order to register things, it does not act.

*Here you have said: “Knowledge belongs to a much higher domain than that of the human mind, far above the region of pure ideas.”*

On Education, CWM, Vol. 12, p. 5

*Sweet Mother, what do you mean by “pure ideas”?*

We have already spoken about this once, and not so long ago. Pure ideas are those which are translated into numerous thoughts. One idea may give birth to many thoughts, and can be expressed in many different ways; and yet it remains what it is.

*Sometimes we look fixedly at a point; one forgets everything at that moment and if there is a noise one is disturbed. What is this state?*

1. On Education, CWM, Vol. 12, p. 5.

Concentration! It is exactly the very principle of concentration. Can you do it spontaneously?

*Yes, many times.*

Indeed, that's very good!

*Yes, Sweet Mother, but what I thought at that moment I cannot capture.*

Ah! . . . If you are suddenly pulled out from it, thought vanishes?

*Yes.*

That's because you enter a state of consciousness which is different from your ordinary state of consciousness and probably the link between the two is not established very well. That takes time. It is as though one had to build a bridge. Otherwise one takes a sudden jump to one side or the other, and then in jumping one forgets what was there. One leaves behind the experience one had. But if the thing is done methodically, that is, if every day one keeps a particular time for this, and meditates for ten or fifteen minutes in order to establish a contact between that and the outer life, well, after some time one succeeds and then one remembers, and this becomes very useful. It is very useful. And if your power of concentration is complete, then there is not a problem you cannot solve — I don't mean arithmetic problems (*laughter*), I mean problems about leading one's life, about decisions to be taken, psychological problems which need solving. There is not one that can resist this power of concentration.

And in fact it is very convenient to take a point: one looks steadily at the point, and so steadily that at a certain moment one becomes the point. One is no longer somebody looking at the point; one is the point. And then, if you continue with sufficient strength and quietness, without anything disturbing you, you may suddenly find yourself before a door which opens and you pass to the other side. And then you have the revelation.

Since when have you been doing this? This has always happened? Or is it recent?

*I don't know.*

You don't know? Perhaps you were doing it and were not aware of it!

*I didn't know.*

But you don't do it deliberately? It just comes upon you, takes hold of you?



Yes.

Ah! this is perhaps also one of the reasons why you don't remember.

(Another child) *Sweet Mother, when one passes into the region of knowledge, is it necessary to pass through the intermediary regions?*

Intermediary? But you see, if one does it by a methodical discipline, generally one is obliged to pass from one plane to another: one wakes up in a particular plane, and then there one enters a sort of sleep and wakes up in another plane, and so on. And if one does it this way, then one remembers, for one does it with one's conscious will and witnesses the working — these movements for quietening the being, precisely, in order to enter somewhere and see what is happening there, and the movement of taking notes of what is happening and preparing oneself for another higher opening, all this establishes conscious contact between the different parts of the being, and then one can have experiences without forgetting anything, and even at will.

But there are some rather uneducated people, for instance, who suddenly develop a faculty and have a direct experience somewhere in the higher mind or the psychic being or in some other part of the being. There are many reasons for this: it may be the result of former lives, it may be a phenomenon of consciousness of this life, it could be many things. In any case, for it to be fully useful, it should be done with the will to use it for one's progress and become conscious of the different parts of the being in order to be able to do what one ought to do to the best of one's ability. For instance, I have known people who were absolutely ignorant and uneducated but had a gift of vision, and a remarkable gift: they were put into trance and saw marvellously and described things — they knew how to see and describe all they saw whilst they were seeing it. But when they came out of that condition, they were absolutely ordinary beings without any education and intelligence. Yet that was a marvellous gift. That means there are beings who can make the greatest progress from the spiritual point of view, and even the intellectual, and who yet are apparently and in their outer life quite ordinary. There are others — I have known some who had an absolutely marvellous spiritual realisation, who lived constantly in the divine Presence and yet never had a vision in all their life! And they used to complain about it. . . . It is a question of temperament, destiny, and probably of the work one has to do, for evidently one can't do everything — physically it is impossible. Consequently one must choose.

*When the body falls ill, do the mind and vital also fall ill?*

Not necessarily. Illness (I have explained this to you) comes usually from a dislocation between the different parts of the being, from a sort of disharmony. Well, it can very

well happen that the body has not followed a certain movement of progress, for instance, that it has remained behind, and that, on the other hand, the other parts of the being have progressed, and so that disequilibrium, that rupture of harmony creates the illness, and the mind may be in a very fine state and the vital also. There are people who have been ill for years — with terrible, incurable diseases — and who have kept their mental capacity marvellously clear and progressed mentally. There is a French poet (a very good poet) called Sully Prudhomme; he was mortally ill; and it was then that he wrote his most beautiful poems. He remained charming, amiable, smiling — amiable with everyone, and yet his body was going to pieces. That depends on people. There are others still — as soon as they feel the least bit ill, everything is upset from top to bottom — they are then good for nothing. For each one the combination is different.

*It is said there is a relation between the body and the mind. If the mind is not quite all right, then what?*

But certainly there is a relation between the body and the mind! There is even more than a relation: it is a very close tie, for most of the time it is the mind which makes the body ill. In any case, it is the principal factor.

*And if the body is not well?*

That depends on people, I told you. There are people — as soon as the least thing happens to their body, their mind is completely upset. There are others still who may be very ill and yet keep their mind clear. It is rarer and more difficult to see a mind that's upset and the body remaining healthy — it is not impossible but it is much rarer, for the body depends a great deal on the state of the mind. The mind (I have written it there in the book) is the master of the physical being. And I have said the latter was a very docile and obedient servant. Only one doesn't know how to use one's mind, rather the opposite. Not only does one not know how to use it, but one uses it ill — as badly as possible. The mind has a considerable power of formation and a direct action on the body, and usually one uses this power to make oneself ill. For as soon as the least thing goes wrong, the mind begins to shape and build all the catastrophes possible, to ask itself whether it could be this, whether it could be that, if it is going to be like that, and how it will all end. Well, if instead of letting the mind do this disastrous work, one used the same capacity to make favourable formations — simply, for example, to give confidence to the body, to tell it that it is just a passing disturbance and that it is nothing, and if it enters a real state of receptivity, the disorder will disappear as easily as it has come, and one can cure oneself in a few seconds — if one knows how to do that, one gets wonderful results.

There is a moment for choice, even in an accident. For instance, one slips and

falls. Just between the moment one has slipped and the moment one falls there is a fraction of a second. At that moment one has the choice: it may be nothing much, it may be very serious. Only, the consciousness must naturally be wide awake and one must be in contact with one's psychic being constantly — there is no time to make the contact, one must *be* in contact. Between the moment one slips and the moment one is on the ground, if the mental and psychic formation is sufficiently strong, then there is nothing, nothing will happen — nothing happens. But if at that moment, the mind according to its habit becomes a pessimist and tells itself: "Oh! I have slipped. . . ." That lasts the fraction of a second; that doesn't take even a minute, it is a fraction of a second; during a fraction of a second one has the choice. But one must be so awake, every minute of one's life! For a fraction of a second one has the choice, there is a fraction of a second in which one can prevent the accident from being serious, can prevent the illness from entering in. One always has the choice. But it is for a fraction of a second and one must not miss it. If one misses it, it is finished.

*One can make it afterwards? (laughter)*

No. Afterwards there is yet another moment. . . . One has fallen, one is already hurt; but there is still a moment when one can change things for the better or worse, so that it may be something very fugitive the bad effects of which will quickly disappear or something which becomes as serious, as grave as it can be. I don't know if you have noticed that there are people who never miss the opportunity of an accident! Every time there is the possibility of an accident, they have it. And never is their accident ordinary. Every time the accident can be serious, it is serious. Well, usually in life one says: "Oh! he is unlucky, he is unfortunate, indeed he has no luck." But all that is ignorance. It depends absolutely on the working of his consciousness. I could give you examples — only I would have to speak about certain people and I don't want to. But I could give you striking examples! And this — this is the sort of thing one sees all the time, all the time here! There are people who could have been killed and who come out of it unscathed; there are others for whom it was not serious, and it becomes serious.

But that does not depend on thought, on the working of the ordinary thought. They may apparently have thoughts as good as the others — it is not that. It is the second of the choice — people knowing how to react just in the right way at the right time. I could give you hundreds of examples. It is quite interesting.

This depends absolutely on character. Some have such an awakened consciousness, so alert, that they are not asleep, they are awake within. Just at the second it is required they call the help. Or they invoke the divine Force. But just at the second it is needed. So the danger is averted, nothing happens. They could have been killed: they come out of it absolutely unhurt. Others, on the contrary, as soon as they have the least little scratch, something gets dislocated in their being: a sort of fright or

pessimism or defeatism in their consciousness which automatically comes up — it was nothing, they had just twisted their leg and the next minute they break it. There is no reason for it. They could very well have not broken their leg.

There are others who climb up to a first floor on a ladder which gives way under them. They could have collapsed — they come out of that without the least hurt. How did they manage it? Apparently this seems wonderful, and still this is how things happen to them. They find themselves lying on the ground in an altogether fine state; nothing has happened to them. I could give you the names, I am telling you exact facts.

So, on what does this depend? It depends on whether one is sufficiently awake for the second of the choice to . . . And note that this is not at all mental, it is not that: it is an attitude of the being, it is the consciousness reacting in the right way. It goes quite far, very far, it is formidable, the power of this attitude. But as it is just a fraction of a second, it implies an altogether awakened consciousness which never sleeps, never enters the unconscious. For one does not know when these things are going to happen, isn't that so? Hence, one does not have the time to wake up. One must be awake.

I knew someone who, indeed, should have died and did not die because of this. For his consciousness reacted very fast. He had taken poison by mistake: instead of taking one dose of a certain medicine, he had taken twelve and it was a poison; he should have died, the heart should have stopped (it was many years ago) and he is still quite alive! He reacted in the right way.

If these things were narrated they would be called miracles. They are not miracles: it is an awakened consciousness.

*How were we saved the other day when working down there with the crane?²*

I suppose you ought to know!

*We know partly.*

Very partially, vaguely, a sort of impression “like that” — an impression, almost an attitude, but not knowledge. How that works, one would not be able to say!

*It was by Grace.*

2. A team of young Ashram disciples was trying to lift a tree-trunk into a truck with the help of a crane, when the crane broke apart, flying into pieces on all sides, but without hurting anyone. Then the tree-trunk half lifted in began rolling slowly, causing the truck to lean on one side threatening to crush several boys, when, without any apparent reason or any physical object to hold it back, the trunk suddenly stopped in its course.

But if you can explain to me how that works, it would be interesting for everybody. It would be very interesting to know who exactly had that wakeful consciousness, had faith and a sort of . . . something that answered automatically, and perhaps not consciously.

There are degrees, many degrees. Human intelligence is such that unless there is a contrast it does not understand. You know, I have received hundreds of letters from people thanking me because they had been saved; but it is very, very rarely that someone writes to thank me because nothing has happened, you understand! Let us take an accident, it is already the beginning of a disorder. Naturally when it is a public or collective accident, the atmosphere of each person has its part in the thing, and that depends on the proportion of defeatists and those who, on the contrary, are on the right side. I don't know if I have written this — it is written somewhere — but it is a very interesting thing. I am going to tell you. . . . People are not aware of the workings of Grace except when there has been some danger, that is, when there has been the beginning of an accident or the accident has taken place and they have escaped it. Then they become aware. But never are they aware that if, for instance, a journey or anything whatever, passes without any accident, it is an infinitely higher Grace. That is, the harmony is established in such a way that nothing can happen. But that seems to them quite natural. When people are ill and get well quickly, they are full of gratitude; but never do they think of being grateful when they are well; and yet that is a much greater miracle! In collective accidents, what is interesting is exactly the proportion, the sort of balance or disequilibrium, the combination made by the different atmospheres of people.

There was an aviator, one of the great “aces” as they are called of the First [World]War, and a marvellous aviator. He had won numerous battles, nothing had ever happened to him. But something occurred in his life and suddenly he felt that something was going to happen to him, an accident, that it was now all over. What they call their “good luck” had gone. This man left the military to enter civil aviation and he piloted one of these lines — no, not civil aviation: the war ended, but he continued flying military airplanes. And then he wanted to make a trip to South Africa: from France to South Africa. Evidently, something must have been upset in his consciousness (I did not know him personally, so I don't know what happened). He started from a certain city in France to go to Madagascar, I believe (I am not sure, I think it was Madagascar). And from there he wanted to come back to France. My brother was at that time governor of the Congo, and he wanted to get back quickly to his post. He asked to be allowed as a passenger on the plane (it was one of those planes for professional tours, to show what these planes could do). Many people wanted to dissuade my brother from going by it; they told him, “No, these trips are always dangerous, you must not go on them.” But finally he went all the same. They had a breakdown and stopped in the middle of the Sahara, a situation not very pleasant. Yet everything was arranged as by a miracle, the plane started again and

put down my brother in the Congo, exactly where he wanted to go, then it went farther south. And soon after, half-way the plane crashed — and the other man was killed. . . . It was obvious that this had to happen. But my brother had an absolute faith in his destiny, a certitude that nothing would happen. And it was translated in this way: the mixture of the two atmospheres made the dislocation unavoidable, for there was a breakdown in the Sahara and the plane was obliged to land, but finally everything was in order and there was no real accident. But once he was no longer there, the other man had all the force of his “ill-luck” (if you like), and the accident was complete and he was killed.

A similar incident happened to a boat. There were two persons (they were well-known people but I cannot remember their names now), who had gone to Indo-China by plane. There was an accident, they were the only ones to have been saved, all the others were killed, indeed it was quite a dramatic affair. But these two (husband and wife) must have been what may be called bringers of bad-luck — it is a sort of atmosphere they carry. Well, these two wanted to go back to France (for, in fact, the accident occurred on their way back to France), they wanted to return to France, they took a boat. And quite unexpectedly, exceptionally, right in the midst of the Red Sea the boat ran into a reef (a thing that doesn't happen even once in a million journeys) and sank; and the others were drowned, and these two were saved. And I could do nothing, you know, I wanted to say: “Take care, never travel with these people!”. . . There are people of this sort, wherever they are, they come out of the thing very well, but the catastrophes are for the others.

If one sees things from the ordinary viewpoint, one does not notice this. But the associations of atmosphere — one must take care of that. That is why when one travels in groups, one must know with whom one travels. One should have an inner knowledge, should have a vision. And then, if one sees somebody who has a kind of small black cloud around him, one must take care not to travel with him, for, surely an accident will occur — though perhaps not to him. Hence, it is quite useful to know things a little more deeply than in the altogether superficial way.

*(Looking at the child)* He looks as if he found life becoming very difficult in this way!

THE MOTHER

*(Questions and Answers 1953, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 5, pp. 397-408)*

## “A PATHWAY TOWARDS IMMORTALITY”

November 24, 1926, was the day on which Sri Aurobindo went into seclusion for concentrated Yogic work towards the creation of a new humanity. In the forefront he put, as *guru* and guide to his disciples, one whom he regarded as the spiritual Mother of the greater world that was to be. On this day, when the Mother’s genius of spiritual organisation took up the group of souls dedicated to the Aurobindonian ideal, the Ashram was conceived and set growing to be the nucleus-light of the divine Consciousness into which mankind was intended to be reborn. In the years that followed, this day was one of those few on which Sri Aurobindo, seated side by side with the Mother, used to give *darśan* to the hundreds who gathered in Pondicherry to pay them homage.

But since 1950 the Mother alone has been visible on this day as on others like it. For, Sri Aurobindo who had retired for twenty-four years from common outer contact with the world chose to retire still further and, on December 5, 1950, withdrew from even his body. Then followed those five days of magnificent mystery when he lay in state, with not a sign of decomposition, and men and women in their thousands filed past that picture of imperial repose which was yet to the deep-seeing soul the dynamo of a divine energy let loose on the earth. Also, to the deep-seeing soul, on every *darśan* day after the great withdrawal the Mother has never sat alone: Sri Aurobindo, conscious and alive though not in the corporeal sheath, has been there, unmistakably felt in the double intensity of spiritual light that the Mother’s bodily presence has manifested in Sri Aurobindo’s physical absence. It is as if the wonderful work that was his could be, after a certain point of progress, best done by packing the whole force of it into one form instead of two. Two can indeed be glorious company for revealing what the Upanishads have called “the Light by whose shining all this shineth”, but sometimes a solitude of one can be a more potent focus for setting aflame what the Vedas have termed “the darkness which is enwrapped within darkness”.

To get a glimmering of what happened on November 24 in 1926 and what lies behind the Mother’s apparent solitariness on the same date after 1950 and what Sri Aurobindo brought about on December 5 in that year, we must understand this Vedic phrase. While the Rishis saw an absolute and perfect Spirit that is all and more than all, a transcendent and a universal Godhead, at once personal and impersonal, while they saw also within all a divine dweller ever developing forms higher and higher, they did not fail to see that this development (which we now recognise as evolution) is often a most paradoxical story because the transcendent and universal and immanent Godhead has worked out the dynamics of our cosmos from a first foundation of gigantic unconsciousness, a vast welter of blind brute energy. Hidden in the energy

are all omniscience and omnipotence, but the secret divinity is formidably locked and breaks out by a most difficult process. Hence the rise of life and mind in a context of enormous randomness and devious waste, as though it were an emergence through layer on obstructive layer, through labyrinth on misleading labyrinth of gloom.

Yes, the Rishis recognised the immense obstruction at the roots of life and mind. They recognised too the necessity not only of ascending to the domains of knowledge and bliss beyond earth but also of disclosing in its full splendour the Sun, as they put it, lost in the Cave of Night. To bring about that disclosure, the cave-walls must be demolished. But how were the ancient barriers to be broken down? The question seems to have met with no positive answer. Hence the later Indian masters of Yoga read, in that irreducible opposition which introduced some ever-resistant element of the undivine into all our parts of nature, an enigmatic *māyā* which, being unconquerable, has to be evaded by a world-exceeding absorption of the inner being into an infinity that has no form, an eternity that has no movement. Even the less intransigent masters felt that ultimately the world was the field of a play, *līlā*, without a denouement, a play which could be inwardly ecstatic to a God-lover but never completely resolvable in its outward terms to God’s freedom and light and beatitude and immortality.

Sri Aurobindo harks back to the Vedic endeavour. Not only the Godhead above, around and within but also the Godhead below is the object of his Yoga. Unless the Godhead below is compassed and set free completely in the forms of evolution, there can be no overcoming of those resistant elements that have made mysticism a magnificent failure, the grandest human achievement that yet could not bring heaven to earth. Of course nothing else than mysticism can hope to build a perfect life fulfilling man to the innermost and the outermost. However, mysticism must open its eyes to the darkness enwrapped within darkness and find some means of irradiating it.

If the old spirituality fell short, it was because the means remained undiscovered. Sri Aurobindo’s teaching is that there must be in the infinite Divine the power that put forth the formula of a huge involution as the starting-point of an endless evolution and that in this power must reside the key to the irradiation of the Vedic darkness so that the Godhead may stand manifest in the very atoms of matter, secure in them as in its own home since matter would release in its own terms the Supreme Spirit crypted within it. This power he calls Supermind, Truth-Consciousness, Gnosis. To make the Supermind descend into earth-life, to carry it down into the Cave of Night and, by making the “Sun on the head of the Timeless” join the Sun immured below the feet of Time, render possible a perfect existence here and now, an existence no longer open to invasion from the nether glooms nor liable to slip down into their abyss: this is the epic of the Aurobindonian Yoga. Its uniqueness lies, on the one hand, in the full realisation of the hitherto unexplored and undynamised Supermind where the Truth is wide-awake and, on the other, in the full fathoming of the hitherto



evaded and untransformed “inconscience” of matter where the Truth is deep-asleep. This uniqueness leads us to look upon Sri Aurobindo as, in the most literal sense, the Scientist of the Spirit — one who in the light of the highest spiritual Knowledge grapples with the plane of matter, the basic sphere of Science, and asserts that, until the heart of matter’s mystery is spiritually entered and possessed, the Life Divine can never become for embodied souls an assured reality, an established and consolidated evolution. For evolution means not just the emergence of the higher from the lower: it means also the transformation of the lower by the higher, the integration of it into a richer value. To evolve is to climb to the top of the scale and then turn back to the bottom in order to master it with the peak’s puissance.

But the significance of mastery must be properly grasped. There is the old word *siddhi* doing duty for it in spiritual parlance. It is not sufficient, as ordinarily interpreted. For, it suggests a gripping and shaping of recalcitrant substance — the substance itself regarded as alien to the force that grips and shapes. Such *siddhi* can never have permanence inherent in it nor can it reach down to the very essence. Whatever it does is by way of sustained miracle and constitutes a splendid superimposition: it is not something natural, intrinsic, inevitable. The latter is possible only if the gripped and the shaped is not essentially different from the gripper and the shaper, but is the same being in a phenomenal form put out of the original Perfection for a particular process of self-loss and self-finding. The utter concealment, the absolute involution, comes as the last step of a graded devolution from the Supermind and serves as the first step of a graded evolution due to an expressive push upward from below by the hidden powers and an evocative pressure downward upon them and a progressive entry into them by the same powers — life, mind, Supermind — which have their planes above. What Sri Aurobindo, therefore, means by mastery of the black nadir of existence by the golden zenith is nothing super-imposed by a miraculous seizure: it is the Supreme coming into His own and fulfilling in evolutionary Time a figure of the perfect that He is in His Truth-Consciousness, His plane of creative archetypes which joins the eternal to the temporal. That is why Sri Aurobindo has said that the supramental manifestation is in the very logic of earthly things and is the final sense of the developing terrestrial nature. As such it will be intrinsically sustained, permanent — matter itself crystallising as Spirit.

However, the luminous crystallisation cannot take place without unprecedented labour on the part of those whose mission it is to turn the potentiality of it into actuality. The promise that the potential would be the actual as a result of his Yoga is the significance of November 24, 1926, when the towering ascent that Sri Aurobindo had accomplished was matched by the crossing of a critical point of descent. This day was the culmination of year on long year of travel along uncharted ways of the inner life — travel far beyond the goals of Nirvana, Moksha, Cosmic Consciousness, Krishna-realisation, union with the World-Creatrix which were reached before he withdrew from the political field of British India to Pondicherry in 1910. It is

known as the Day of Victory because it marked a decisive turn pregnant with the divinisation of material existence. But between the casting of the seed and the advent of flower and fruit there must again be a mighty passage through the unknown. And here the unknown was the penetration more and more of the Vedic darkness with the supramental Gnosis. All the old Yogas move out of the gloom of mortal ignorance into the Immortal's light. The Aurobindonian discipline alone wants the illumined soul not to pause there but to adventure into a gloom of which mortal ignorance is only an attenuated form — the abyss from which evolving life and mind have sprung and which must be conquered if life and mind are to be completely divinised, for, unless matter is also divinised, the embodied deity will always have feet that are fragile. The promise of Victory could grow a realised Triumph only by Sri Aurobindo's becoming at the same time a Pilgrim of Day and a Pilgrim of Night.

The pilgrimage through occult regions of consciousness totally involved within matter is the stupendous sacrifice Sri Aurobindo was giving for decade on decade from the time the Victory had been promised, bearing — as a line of *Savitri* phrases it — “the fierce inner wounds that are slow to heal.”<sup>1</sup> Nothing save Divine Love in the supreme degree could support him in such a journey — Divine Love that throws itself out infinitely to lead the evolving world, sparing itself no struggle however dangerous, no self-immolation however exorbitant. A body that housed the illimitable power of the Supermind and could become permeated with the Light beyond this universe of death took upon itself not the mere task of an extraordinary individual transformation but the giant labour of being representative of all bodily life and hence accepting a universal responsibility so that the hope of an entire transformed mankind might result from its achievement. In a Yoga thus representative and responsible the greatest apparent advantages, the most striking personal benefits can be thrown away in a dire strategy of losing the immediate all to gain the ultimate all for the race. Understanding this, we have to view the events that occurred in the first week of December in 1950 — the attack by a fearful malady, uraemia, symbolic of the “inconscience” of the depths surging to drown the heights, the acceptance of it in spite of the Supermind's inherent ability to ward off all disease, the day-to-day aggravation on the one hand and on the other the response of the descending Supermind to the sacrifice being given by a leader of the evolution for the whole earth's sake, the deadly suffusion of the leader's body with the uprising poison and yet the lack of the least trace of discolouration and decay for over 111 hours in the tropical climate, the spectacle at once of death and of its transcendence, as though to proclaim in a convincing parable that through the aspect of defeat a triumph was being worked out in the future that lay with Sri Aurobindo behind the visible scene and, here before us, with his companion in the creation of a super-humanity: the Mother.

1. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 230.

We await the flaming up of that future from the tenebrous fuel offered to the imperishable Splendour by the strategic sacrifice of Sri Aurobindo. What marvels the flaming will lay bare none can fully gauge. But, if the words of one who incarnated the Truth-Consciousness can be believed, the flaming is certain, and the Mother's eyes are a mirror of the things to be. They bear ever brighter witness to the prophetic close of that poignantly profound sonnet written by the Master of the Supermind's everlasting Day:

I made an assignation with the Night;  
    In the abyss was fixed our rendezvous:  
In my breast carrying God's deathless light  
    I came her dark and dangerous heart to woo.

I left the glory of the illumined Mind  
    And the calm rapture of the divinised soul  
And travelled through a vastness dim and blind  
    To the grey shore where her ignorant waters roll.

I walk by the chill wave through the dull slime  
    And still that weary journeying knows no end;  
Lost is the lustrous godhead beyond Time,  
    There comes no voice of the celestial Friend,

And yet I know my footprints' track shall be  
A pathway towards Immortality.<sup>2</sup>

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

(First published in *Mother India*, November 1952; reprinted here from  
*The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 1992, pp. 85-90)

2. "The Pilgrim of the Night", *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 603.

# SIDDHI DAY — 24 NOVEMBER 1926

## PART I — A COMPILATION

### THE MOTHER'S ACCOUNT OF THE SIDDHI DAY

In 1926, I had begun a sort of overmental creation, that is, I had brought the Overmind down into matter, here on earth (miracles and all kinds of things were beginning to happen). I asked all these gods to incarnate, to identify themselves with a body (some of them absolutely refused). Well, with my very own eyes I saw Krishna, who had always been in rapport with Sri Aurobindo, consent to come down into his body. It was on November 24<sup>th</sup>, and it was the beginning of 'Mother'.

*Yes, in fact I wanted to ask you what this realisation of 1926 was.*

It was this: Krishna consented to descend into Sri Aurobindo's body — to be *fixed* there; there is a great difference, you understand, between incarnating, being fixed in a body, and simply acting as an influence that comes and goes and moves about. The gods are always moving about, and it's plain that we ourselves, in our inner beings, come and go and act in a hundred or a thousand places at once. There is a difference between just coming occasionally and accepting to be permanently tied to a body — between a permanent influence and a permanent presence.

These things have to be experienced.

*But in what sense did this realisation mark a turning point in Sri Aurobindo's sadhana?*

No, the phenomenon was important *for the creation*; he himself was rather indifferent to it. But I did tell him about it.

It was at that time that he decided to stop dealing with people and retire to his room. So he called everyone together for one last meeting. Before then, he used to go out on the verandah every day to meet and talk with all who came to see him . . . I was living in the inner rooms and seeing no one; he was going out onto the verandah, seeing everyone, receiving people, speaking, discussing — I saw him only when he came back inside.

After a while, I too began having meditations with people. I had begun a sort of 'overmental creation', to make each god descend into a being — there was an extraordinary upward curve! Well, I was in contact with these beings and I told Krishna (because I was always seeing him around Sri Aurobindo), "This is all very

fine, but what I want now is a creation on earth — you must incarnate.” He said, “Yes.” Then I saw him — I saw him with my own eyes (inner eyes, of course), join himself to Sri Aurobindo.

Then I went into Sri Aurobindo’s room and told him, “Here’s what I have seen.” “Yes, I know!” he replied. (*Mother laughs*) “That’s fine; I have decided to retire to my room, and you will take charge of the people. You take charge.” (There were about thirty people at the time.) Then he called everyone together for one last meeting. He sat down, had me sit next to him, and said, “I called you here to tell you that, as of today, I am withdrawing for purposes of sadhana, and Mother will now take charge of everyone; you should address yourselves to her; she will represent me and she will do all the work.” He hadn’t mentioned this to me! — (*Mother bursts into laughter*)

These people had always been very intimate with Sri Aurobindo, so they asked: “Why, why, why?” He replied, “It will be explained to you.” I had no intention of explaining anything, and I left the room with him, but Datta began speaking. (She was an English woman who had left Europe with me; she stayed here until her death — a person who received ‘inspirations’.) She said she felt Sri Aurobindo speaking through her and she explained everything: that Krishna had incarnated and that Sri Aurobindo was now going to do an intensive sadhana for the descent of the Supermind; that it meant Krishna’s adherence to the Supramental Descent upon earth and that, as Sri Aurobindo would now be too occupied to deal with people, he had put me in charge and I would be doing all the work.

This was in 1926.

It was only . . . (how can I put it?) a participation from Krishna. It made no difference for Sri Aurobindo personally: it was a formation from the past that accepted to participate in the present creation, nothing more. It was a descent of the Supreme, from . . . some time back, now consenting to participate in the new manifestation.

Shiva, on the other hand, refused. “No,” he said, “I will come only when you have finished your work. I will not come into the world as it is now, but I am ready to help.” He was standing in my room that day, so tall (*laughing*) that his head touched the ceiling! He was bathed in his own special light, a play of red and gold . . . magnificent! Just as he is when he manifests his supreme consciousness — a formidable being! So I stood up and . . . (I too must have become quite tall, because my head was resting on his shoulder, just slightly below his head) then he told me, “No, I’m not tying myself to a body, but I will give you *anything* you want.” The only thing I said (it was all done wordlessly, of course) was: “I want to be rid of the physical ego.”

Well, *mon petit* (*laughing*), it happened! It was extraordinary! . . . After a while, I went to find Sri Aurobindo and said, “See what has happened! I have a funny sensation (*Mother laughs*) of the cells no longer being clustered together! They’re going to scatter!” He looked at me, smiled and said, “*Not yet.*” And the

effect vanished.

But Shiva had indeed given me what I wanted!

“*Not yet,*” Sri Aurobindo said.

No, the time wasn’t ripe. It was too early, much too early.

*(silence)*

I had it two years ago. But now there is something else — things are different now.  
So, I still haven’t answered your questions.

*Oh, yes, you’ve answered all sorts of questions!*

(Conversation with a disciple on 2 August 1961)

\* \* \*

## SRI AUROBINDO ON THE SIDDHI DAY

(1)

*Today I shall request you to “stand and deliver” on a different subject. What is exactly the significance of the 24<sup>th</sup> of November? Different people have different ideas about it. Some say that the Avatar of the Supermind descended in you.*

Rubbish! whose imagination was that?

*Others say that you were through and through overmentalised.*

Well, it is not quite the truth, but nearer to the mark.

*I myself understood that on that day you achieved the Supermind.*

There was never any mention of that from our side.

*If you did not achieve the Supermind at that time, how was it possible for you to talk about it or know anything about it?*

Well, I am hanged. You can’t know anything about a thing before you have “achieved” it?

Because I have seen it and am in contact with it, O logical baby that you are!

But achieving it is another business.

*Didn't you say that some things were getting supramentalised in parts?*

Getting supramentalised is one thing and the achieved supramental is another.

*You have unnerved many people by the statement that you haven't achieved the Supermind.*

Good Lord! And what do these people think I meant when I was saying persistently that I was trying to get the supermind down into the material? If I had achieved it on Nov. 24 1926, it would have been there already for the last nine years, isn't it?

*Datta seems to have declared on that day that you had conquered sleep, food, disease and death. On what authority did she proclaim it then?*

I am not aware of this gorgeous proclamation. What was said was that the Divine (Krishna or the Divine Presence or whatever you like) had come down into the material. It was also proclaimed that I was retiring — obviously to work things out. If all that was achieved on the 24<sup>th</sup> [November] 1926, what on earth remained to work out, and if the Supramental was there, for what blazing purpose did I need to retire? Besides are these things achieved in a single day? If Datta said anything like that she must have been in a prophetic mood and seen the future in the present!

I have stood, but I have not delivered. I had time for standing a moment, but none for a delivery — however pregnant my mind or my overmind may be. But really what a logic! One must become thoroughly supramental first (achieve supermind) and then only one can begin to know something about supermind? Well! However if I have time one day, I will deliver — for evidently with such ideas about, an *éclaircissement* is highly advisable.

29 August 1935

*(Nirodbaran's Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, 1983 Ed., pp. 293-95)*

(2)

*I knew that Krishna is not the Supermind. But because some say it was the descent of the supramental light and some say it was the descent of Krishna, I asked you to make it clear to me. What I wanted to know was whether the 24<sup>th</sup> November was the descent of the supramental light or of Krishna's light. Why are we observing the 24<sup>th</sup> as a special day?*

It was the descent of Krishna into the physical.

*(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA 35: 273)*

(3)

*Some say November 24<sup>th</sup> is a day of victory. By that some mean that the Supermind (supramental consciousness) descended into the physical consciousness of Sri Aurobindo. Others say it was the coming down of Krishna into the physical consciousness. If it was the descent of Krishna, does that mean the descent of the supramental light?*

Krishna is not the supramental light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the Overmind Godhead preparing, though not itself actually bringing, the descent of Supermind and Ananda. Krishna is the Anandamaya, he supports the evolution through the Overmind leading it towards his Ananda.

*(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA 35: 272)*

(4)

[A disciple of Sri Aurobindo's wrote an article on the significance of the realisation of 24 November 1926, in which he quoted the following passage from *The Life Divine*:]

In order that the involved principles of Overmind and Supermind should emerge from their veiled secrecy, the being and powers of the super-science must descend into us and uplift us and formulate themselves in our being and powers; this descent is a *sine qua non* of the transition and transformation.<sup>1</sup>

[The disciple concluded:] *This is referred to in the Vedas as the birth of the gods in men, devānām janimāni; Sri Aurobindo regards it as indispensable for supramental realisation on earth. It was this that occurred on the 24th November, 1926, and it is only then that Sri Aurobindo started his Ashram, being sure that with the cooperation of the gods the supermind can descend upon earth.*

1. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 955-56.



What happened on the 24<sup>th</sup> November prepared the possibility of this descent and on that day he retired into seclusion and entered into deep and powerful meditation.

20 November 1950

*(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA 35: 273)*

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### A. B. PURANI'S ACCOUNT OF THE SIDDHI DAY

24<sup>th</sup> November 1926 — the Day of Siddhi

In order to understand the importance of this day it is necessary to go back to Sri Aurobindo's experiences in jail in 1908-1909 and link them up with his experience of 24 November 1926. We must also take it into consideration what Sri Aurobindo wrote about his own sadhana to Barin in 1920.

In the letter to Barin of April 1920 Sri Aurobindo described the stage of his yoga before he came to Pondicherry in 1910 as "preliminary or preparatory". That is to say it was a preliminary stage of the supramental yoga.

The Guru of the world who is within us then gave me the complete directions of my path — its complete theory, the ten limbs of the body of this Yoga. These ten years [1910-1920] He has been making me develop it in experience, and it is not yet finished. . . .

If we cannot rise above, that is, to the supramental level, it is hardly possible to know the last secret of the world and the problem it raises remains unsolved.

This is no easy change to make. After these fifteen years I am only now rising into the lowest of the three levels of the Supermind and trying to draw up into it all the lower activities. But when this Siddhi will be complete, then I am absolutely certain that God will through me give to others the Siddhi of the Supermind with less effort. Then my real work will begin. I am not impatient for success in the work. What is to happen will happen in God's appointed time. I have no impulse to make any unbalanced haste and rush into the field of work in the strength of the little ego. Even if I did not succeed in my work I would not be shaken. This work is not mine but God's. I will listen to no other call; when God moves me then I will move.

I do not want hundreds of thousands of disciples. It will be enough if I can get a hundred complete men, purified of petty egoism, who will be the

instruments of God.

If the unripe goes amid the unripe what can he do?<sup>2</sup>

These quotations clearly demonstrate that when Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry he was not groping for his path; his path was clear before him. After 1910 the charge of his yoga was taken over by the Divine and the path was revealed to him in ten limbs of the sadhana. He was all along conscious of the existence of the Supramental plane above the mind, and by 1920 he had succeeded in ascending to the lowest stratum of that consciousness and also in drawing up all the movements of his nature into it.

He was, besides, not impatient for action. He did not want to act from ignorant human instruments but from a Higher Consciousness. He had the confidence that if the Supramental descent could be established in its perfection, then other people would be able to profit by it with much less effort.

It was when the Tapasya for the Siddhi of the Supramental was going on that, fortunately, as if by a Divine dispensation, the Mother joined Sri Aurobindo intimately in the great spiritual work. From the beginning of 1926 the work of guiding the disciples already began to move towards the Mother. There were women disciples — three or four in number — staying in the Ashram who used to go to the Mother for meditation. From August 1926 the number of disciples going to the Mother increased. It was as if Sri Aurobindo was slowly withdrawing himself and the Mother was spontaneously coming out and taking up the great work of direction of the sadhaks' inner sadhana and of the organisation of the outer life of the Ashram. The meditations became more and more concentrated and intense. Sri Aurobindo's coming out for the evening sitting began getting later and later. The wonder of it was that no one felt anything unnatural in all these changes. The part of the disciples in the tremendous task of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother was insignificant, still they were the witnesses of the changes in the inner and outer atmosphere of the Ashram.

From the trend of the evening talks just before and after 15 August 1926 it was becoming clear that the importance of a link between the highest Supermind and mind was being emphasised. Sri Aurobindo called this link the Overmind. During the six years since the letter to Barin of 1920 it is evident that he had gone much further not only in the ascent towards and into the Higher Consciousness but also in bringing about its descent into Nature. Several times in the beginning of November 1926, the evening talks turned to the possibility of the descent of the Divine Consciousness and its process. From these evening conversations, therefore, the idea came to several disciples that such a descent might be near. There was the possibility of the descent of the Gods. In *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo has given a clear exposition of the overmind plane, overmind consciousness and overmind

2. *Bulletin*, August 1962.

Gods. I give here some quotations from the chapter which might be of help in the understanding of the descent that took place on 24 November 1926.

If we regard the Powers of the Reality as so many Godheads, we can say that the Overmind releases a million Godheads into action, each empowered to create its own world, each world capable of relation, communication and interplay with the others. There are in the Veda different formulations of the nature of the Gods: it is said they are all one Existence to which the sages give different names; yet each God is worshipped as if he by himself is that Existence, one who is all the other Gods together or contains them in his being; and yet again each is a separate Deity acting sometimes in unison with companion deities, sometimes separately, sometimes even in apparent opposition to other Godheads of the same Existence. In the Supermind all this would be held together as a harmonised play of the one Existence; in the Overmind each of these three conditions could be a separate action or basis of action and have its own principle of development and consequences and yet each keep the power to combine with the others in a more composite harmony. As with the One Existence, so with its Consciousness and Force. The One Consciousness is separated into many independent forms of consciousness and knowledge; each follows out its own line of truth which it has to realise. The one total and many-sided Real-Idea is split up into its many sides; each becomes an independent Idea-Force with the power to realise itself. The one Consciousness-Force is liberated into its million forces, and each of these forces has the right to fulfil itself or to assume, if needed, a hegemony and take up for its own utility the other forces. So too the Delight of Existence is loosed out into all manner of delights and each can carry in itself its independent fullness or sovereign extreme. Overmind thus gives to the One Existence-Consciousness-Bliss the character of a teeming of infinite possibilities which can be developed into a multitude of worlds or thrown together into one world in which the endlessly variable outcome of their play is the determinant of the creation, of its process, its course and its consequence.”<sup>3</sup>

[In the Overmind] each God knows all the Gods and their place in existence; each Idea admits all other ideas and their right to be; each Force concedes a place to all other forces and their truth and consequences; no delight of separate fulfilled existence or separate experience denies or condemns the delight of other existence or other experience. The Overmind is a principle of cosmic Truth and a vast and endless catholicity is its very spirit; its energy is an all-dynamism as well as a principle of separate dynamisms. . . .<sup>4</sup>

3. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 294-95.

4. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 297.

A feeling that the descent of the Higher Consciousness was about to take place grew in the minds of the many disciples either as a result of some indicative personal experience or owing to the general atmosphere. Many felt that great changes in the outer structure of the Ashram were about to occur. Instead of coming to the evening sitting at half-past four, the usual time, Sri Aurobindo came at six or seven, or eight o'clock. One day the record was two o'clock in the morning! It was evident that all his great energies were entirely taken up by the mighty task of bringing about the descent of the Higher Consciousness and that he did not want to lose or divert even a second of his time to anything else. Even though the work of maintaining an outer contact with the disciples was found useful it was becoming more and more difficult in view of the growing demand upon his time for the inner work. Those who do not know anything about his great mission can hardly understand how concentrated and sincere was his application for attaining perfection in his Divine task. In fact, people outside had already begun to be sceptical about any "practical" result of his vast efforts. Even those who had built high hopes upon his spiritual effort and were his genuine admirers began to be disappointed. Some even cherished, in their ignorance, the foolish belief that Sri Aurobindo had lost his way in the barren regions of the Absolute, the Para Brahman, or that he was entangled somewhere in the inscrutable coils of the Infinite! They believed that Sri Aurobindo had lost his hold on the earth, and that he had become either indifferent or deaf to the pressing and burning problems of suffering humanity. If it was not so, why did he not rush to the help of humanity that was suffering so much with the saving balm of his Divine help? When was such Divine help more needed than now?

But, in spite of the apparent contradictions, those who were fortunate enough to live in his vicinity knew very well that the Higher Power that he was bringing down was not only capable of but was actually producing practical results. His contact and identification with the Higher Power were so complete that he was able to put other people, whether near to him or far, in contact with it. There were almost daily instances of people being cured of physical illness by his help. Far from losing his way in the Absolute he was seeing his way more and more clearly every day and was feeling more and more the inevitability of the descent as a natural crown of the movement of evolution on earth. His disciples knew that there was no one on earth who had a deeper sympathy and feeling for humanity than the Master. The silent and solid help that was going out from him to humanity was glimpsed by them at times. They felt later, reading the line he wrote in *Savitri* about Aswapathy, "His spirit's stillness helped the toiling world", that it was so true of his own life. What after all is that "practicality" of which people speak so much? Claiming to solve problems, does it not really leave them either unsolved or half-solved while giving to the doer a false sense of satisfaction and self-complacency? In fact, the Supreme Master had such a firm grip over the earth that such illusionary satisfaction could never deceive him. For him *karmasu kausalam* (skill in action) consisted in acting

from a higher Truth-Consciousness. He did not want to begin outer action so long as the Higher Consciousness did not descend into the physical and even into the gross material consciousness. Only so could a new life, a life that manifests integrally the Divine, be embodied. In the fulfilment of the spiritual work that he had begun lies the ultimate solution of all human problems.

Days, months and years passed; but Sri Aurobindo did not seem at all in a hurry to begin his work. He was all along preparing the possibility of the descent of the Higher Power. The resistance of the powers of Ignorance against any such attempt is naturally immense. In one evening talk he said that he was engaged in the tremendous task of opening up the physical cells to the Divine Light and the resistance of the Inconscient was formidable. When one knows that all this Herculean labour was undertaken not for himself but for humanity, for making a new departure for man in the course of his evolution then one feels that the words he later used of Savitri, “The world unknowing, for the world she stood”, are so very apposite in his own case. It was therefore natural that when, by the grace of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the disciples also felt the nearness of the descent, their hearts should be full of expectant and concentrated enthusiasm.

From the beginning of November 1926 the pressure of the Higher Power began to be unbearable. Then at last the great day, the day for which the Mother had been waiting for so many long years, arrived on 24 November. The sun had almost set, and everyone was occupied with his own activity — some had gone out to the seaside for a walk — when the Mother sent round the word to all the disciples to assemble as soon as possible in the verandah where the usual meditation was held. It did not take long for the message to go round to all. By six o’clock most of the disciples had gathered. It was becoming dark. In the verandah on the wall near Sri Aurobindo’s door, just behind his chair, a black silk curtain with gold lace work representing three Chinese dragons was hung. The three dragons were so represented that the tail of one reached up to the mouth of the other and the three of them covered the curtain from end to end. We came to know afterwards that there is a prophecy in China that the Truth will manifest itself on earth when the three dragons (the dragons of the earth, of the mind region and of the sky) meet. Today on 24 November the Truth was descending and the hanging of the curtain was significant.

There was a deep silence in the atmosphere after the disciples had gathered there. Many saw an oceanic flood of Light rushing down from above. Everyone present felt a kind of pressure above his head. The whole atmosphere was surcharged with some electrical energy. In that silence, in that atmosphere full of concentrated expectation and aspiration, in the electrically charged atmosphere, the usual, yet on this day quite unusual, tick was heard behind the door of the entrance. Expectation rose in a flood. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother could be seen through the half-opened door. The Mother with a gesture of her eyes requested Sri Aurobindo to step out first. Sri Aurobindo with a similar gesture suggested to her to do the same. With a

slow dignified step the Mother came out first, followed by Sri Aurobindo with his majestic gait. The small table that used to be in front of Sri Aurobindo's chair was removed this day. The Mother sat on a small stool to his right.

Silence absolute, living silence — not merely living but overflowing with divinity. The meditation lasted about forty-five minutes. After that one by one the disciples bowed to the Mother.

She and Sri Aurobindo gave blessings to them. Whenever a disciple bowed to the Mother, Sri Aurobindo's right hand came forward behind the Mother's as if blessing him through the Mother. After the blessings, in the same silence there was a short meditation.

In the interval of silent meditation and blessings many had distinct experiences. When all was over they felt as if they had awakened from a divine dream. Then they felt the grandeur, the poetry and the absolute beauty of the occasion. It was not as if a handful of disciples were receiving blessings from their Supreme Master and the Mother in one little corner of the earth. The significance of the occasion was far greater than that. It was certain that a Higher Consciousness had descended on earth. In that deep silence had burgeoned forth, like the sprout of a banyan tree, the beginning of a mighty spiritual work. This momentous occasion carried its significance to all in the divine dynamism of the silence, in its unearthly dignity and grandeur and in the utter beauty of its every little act. The deep impress of divinity which everyone got was for him a priceless treasure.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother went inside. Immediately Datta was inspired. In that silence she spoke: "The Lord has descended into the physical today."

That 24 November should be given an importance equal to that of the birthdays of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is quite proper because on that day the descent of the Higher Power symbolic of the victory of their mission took place. The Delight consciousness in the Overmind which Sri Krishna incarnated — as Avatar — descended on this day into the physical rendering possible the descent of the Supermind in Matter.

Of this descent Sri Aurobindo wrote on several occasions afterwards. In October 1935 he wrote as follows:

It [the 24<sup>th</sup> November 1926] was the descent of Krishna into the physical.

Krishna is not the supramental light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the Overmind Godhead preparing, though not itself actually bringing, the descent of Supermind and Ananda. Krishna is the Anandamaya, he supports the evolution through the Overmind leading it towards his Ananda.<sup>5</sup>

5. *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 272-73.

The names of those disciples who were present on 24 November 1926:

(1) Bijoy Kumar Nag, (2) Nolini Kanta Gupta, (3) K. Amrita, (4) Moni (Suresh Chakravarty), (5) Pavitra (Philippe Barbier Saint-Hilaire), (6) Barindra Kumar Ghose, (7) Datta (Miss Hodgson), (8) K. Rajangam, (9) Satyen, (10) Purani, (11) Lilavati (Purani's wife), (12) Punamchand, (13) Champaben (Punamchand's wife), (14) Rajani Kanto Palit, (15) Dr. Upendra Nath Banerjee, (16) Champaklal, (17) Kanailal Ganguly, (18) Kshitish Chandra Dutt, (19) V. Chandrasekharam, (20) Pujalal, (21) Purushottam Patel, (22) Rati Palit, (23) Rambhai Patel, (24) Nanibala.

(A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* (2001), pp. 210-17)

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### HARADHAN BAKSHI'S ACCOUNT OF THE SIDDHI DAY

[7 to 8 P.M.] Just at seven we were called by Mirra Devi upstairs on the verandah. In twenty minutes Shri Mirra Devi and then Shri Aurobindo appeared and we all bowed down at their feet. Shri Aurobindo touched me on the head in a new way. In the meantime I had repented for my drawbacks and prepared myself to receive the truth that I thought was coming down. I also thought that it was a sort of collective Diksha. So I was open and receptive. At Shri Aurobindo's feet sat Shri Mirra Devi. He had one hand above Mirra Devi's head but not touching her physical body and with the other He blessed us. Shri Mirra Devi also blessed us.

There was a velvet screen hung on the wall (north) — dark blue with drawings of shining gold. I studied the hanging and had the impression that it was the luminous forces and beings coming down or rather bringing down the God and His Kingdom. There was one birdlike thing in gold — that resembled Garuda.

Then they went away and I opened myself widely to them to know their demands on me. I felt Sri Mirra Devi's touch on the heart and Shri Aurobindo's on the mind above.

My difficulties were not much awakened or obstructing at the moment, but they were there.

I prayed to Them to save me and accept me.

At length Basabadatta offered a prayer — “God come down; conquer pain and death and give us immortality.”

But the secret remained hidden and to be known. In the psychic I saw a group of sadhakas in circle consecrating to someone in the centre — but I could not see Him. At that time Shri Aurobindo and Shri Mirra Devi had gone in [10 P.M.]. At night I wanted an indication and became passive. The idea took form in my body and I found the One held a chakra in the index of the right hand and blessed with the other.

[But this may be due to my strong impression that Krishna is coming.]

### **Part of entry on 25 November 1926:**

I heard from Rajangam that yesterday Datta had said in her prayers that Shri Krishna had come.

Today Mirra Devi had told Dr. Babu that Shri Krishna had descended and conquered everything in the physical except a few obstacles that will be done by 15th August.

*(All India Magazine, November 2002, pp. 26-27)*

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## **NOLINI KANTA GUPTA'S ACCOUNT OF THE SIDDHI DAY**

**November 24, 1926**

Even before that date, for some time past, Sri Aurobindo had been more and more withdrawing into himself and retiring within. An external sign of this became visible to us as his lunch hour shifted gradually towards the afternoon. We used to have our meal together and the Mother too ate with us, at the Library House, in the room now used by Ravindra as the fruit-room. There used to be about eight or ten of us. On the previous day, Sri Aurobindo came down to lunch when it was past four. We would naturally wait till he came.

Then the great day arrived. In the afternoon, it was in fact already getting dark, all of us had gone out as usual. I was on the sea-front. Suddenly, someone came running at full speed and said to me, "Go, get back at once; the Mother is calling everybody." I had not the least idea as to what might be the reason. I came back running and went straight up, to the verandah facing the Prosperity room. Sri Aurobindo used to take his seat there in the evening for his talks with us or rather for answering our questions. As I came up, a strange scene met my eyes. Sri Aurobindo was seated in his chair, the Mother sat at his feet, both of them with their faces turned towards us. I looked round to see if all were present. Satyen was missing and I said, "Satyen has not come. Shall I call him in?" The Mother spoke out, "Yes, all, all." All were called in, everybody was now present. We took our seats before Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, both of whom were facing us. The whole scene and atmosphere had a heavenly halo.

Sri Aurobindo held his left hand above the Mother's head and his right hand



was extended to us in benediction. Everything was silent and still, grave and expectant. We stood up one by one and went and bowed at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. After a while, both of them went inside. And then, Datta who had been among us, suddenly exclaimed at the top of her voice, as though an inspired Prophetess of the old mysteries, “The Lord has descended. He has conquered death and sorrow. He has brought down immortality.”

From this time onwards, Sri Aurobindo went into retirement, that is to say, did not come out any more for his evening talks. The Mother made her appearance and it was with the Mother that we started our contacts. . . .

*(Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Volume 8, p. 203)*

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### **BARIN GHOSE’S ACCOUNT OF THE SIDDHI DAY**

All unknown to us the great day of Sri Aurobindo’s Siddhi was drawing near which was to change the way of living of the Ashram completely. One morning Sri Aurobindo specially called me upstairs and gave me a very delicate message to carry to all the sadhaks individually. He asked me to tell them that henceforth Sri Aurobindo would retire in complete isolation for intensive pursuit of Yoga. This was necessary if the great truth of divine transformation is at all to be realised quickly. Therefore everybody should come to the Mother Mirra and not to him with their difficulties in sadhana. She would come out and take charge of the entire Ashram and all its activities as the executive power, Sri Aurobindo supporting the whole fabric from behind.

Need I say that the entire community of sadhaks were taken by surprise and did not know how to take it? It would have been difficult for many of us to take kindly to the great change if that great event of his Siddhi had not intervened soon after his retirement and electrified the atmosphere.

One afternoon, Miss Hodgson came out in a state of great excitement and told me to go and call all the sadhaks together as something wonderful had happened and Sri Aurobindo wanted to bless them all. We gathered in the outer verandah upstairs in great suspense. After some time the Mother led out Sri Aurobindo. Poor mortals that we were in darkness and ignorance of the great height that he had scaled and the marvellous divine essence and aspect that he just then incarnated in his being! All we felt was a Sri Aurobindo in semi trance led out by the Mother and made with difficulty to sit down in his chair. The whole crowd of sadhaks fell prostrate before something they hardly understood and yet could not but worship in spontaneous adoration.

From next morning we missed Sri Aurobindo from our midst. He was lost to us physically but became a potent power, silent and ever present like the immutable God behind his creation. We felt him and his psychic touch and inspiration more tangibly now than when he was actively present among us. He became like a hidden dynamo transmitting experiences and radiating light more powerfully because of this mystery of seclusion. His retirement made the atmosphere tense and electric, his intensive pursuit of Yoga and one-pointed aspiration now must have to a great extent worked this miracle. A hidden impalpable Sri Aurobindo seemed to give freer play to the power of the Divine emanating through him. The physical sheath of man, a thing of the inconscient and very much of the dull unresponsive earth, perhaps retards more than conveys and expresses the Divine until it is transmuted into its essence.

Sri Aurobindo retired only to avoid the soiling touch of the mundane. The reins of control were virtually in his hands and nominally in that of the Mother. Every little incident was reported to him and the Mother consulted him at every step however trivial. He has been since then the *Supreme* — hidden behind his creation, building it up and guiding it through the Mother, utilising her wonderful power of organisation and grip on details.

(*All India Magazine*, November 2002, pp. 28-30)

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### REMINISCENCES OF JAYA DEVI (NONIBALA)

It was the month of Asvin in 1926. At the time of Sri Aurobindo's daily darshan I said: "Lord, the month of Asvin is here. Every year I celebrate Mahashtami puja. I am wondering what to do now; shall I return home or what?" "Why, won't there be puja here?" he asked. "Yes, it's possible: the worship of Shiva-Durga. If I can perform your worship and the Mother's, then perhaps I need not go from here. That is why I am wondering . . ."

"Well, you can do that."

On the day of Mahashtami Sri Aurobindo and the Mother sat in two chairs side by side. With the usual offering I performed the puja. I put garlands round both. Oh, it was as if Shiva and Durga had come down to accept the worship! It is impossible to describe all that I felt. It was ineffable, beyond thought. After the puja he left the room. The next day he asked: "You have to go now? You have done your puja." I said: "Yes, my Lord, it was a puja such as I had never thought of." "Well, well," he said.

In the old days the Mother did not leave the Ashram compound. She would

sit for meditation in an upper-storey room. There were about twelve or thirteen of us including Bijoy Nag, Rati Palit, Rajani, Monibabu, Upen, etc. — with whom the Mother would sit in meditation. There were then only two Gujarati girls, I happened to be the only Bengali girl.

One night I dreamt that I was floating in the air while an elephant, hoping to catch me, was prowling below. All the time Upen was as it were pushing me up. I seemed to roam about, as if I had been in a state of daze or stupor.

In the morning I went for darshan. As usual I sat holding the leg of the chair. Then I spoke of the previous night and asked: “Lord, why did I dream like that?” “You are on the upward way. But the natural body does not like you to escape like that and so it is pursuing you. Upen is putting you up. It is the body that is obstructing.” He said many other things as well, which I cannot now call to mind. . . .

November came along. A strange feeling of joy took possession of all the sadhaks present. The whole of Pondicherry was fragrant with incense, a great delight seemed to be at play. There was the feeling one has during the time of Durga Puja, but this was more intense. I told Bijoybabu and Barinda: “Brothers, I am feeling so happy inside. Such peace! Why is it like this?” “Indeed, sister,” answered Bijoybabu. “What feelings of peace and delight!” At the time of Sri Aurobindo’s darshan I said, “Lord, for the last few days I have been filled with such a sense of peace and delight. The whole of Pondicherry has a festive air, one incense and perfume everywhere. Why is it like this, Lord?”

Smiling, he said, “You are able to feel this?”

“Not only I but all the sadhaks are able to feel this great wave of peace and delight. We are dancing with an inner joy. Why, O lord?”

“Wait and see, there will be more delight to come,” he said.

On November 24 a little before evening all the sadhaks were asked to assemble. One after another we trooped to the upper hall. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother blessed us all with both hands. I was told: “Mahashakti, the Supreme Consciousness-Force, has descended into Sri Aurobindo.” I could myself see light and glory bursting out of his body.

Next day when I was carrying with me two garlands of tulsi leaves, I heard that Sri Aurobindo would not come out again but stay in his room. Disappointed, I placed the garlands on the door of his room and turned back. One chapter of our life was over.

(*All India Magazine*, November 2002, pp. 38-40;  
*Mother India*, August, November 1970, pp. 623-25)

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**CHAMPAKLAL'S NOTE ON THE SIDDHI DAY**

Siddhi Day  
24.11.1926

Datta spoke:  
Krishna the Lord has come.  
He has ended the hell of suffering.  
He has conquered pain.  
He has conquered death.  
He has conquered all.  
He has descended tonight  
Bringing Immortality and Bliss.

As each one made pranam to the Mother and she gave her blessing, Sri Aurobindo held his palm above hers in blessing. I was the only person to do pranam to both. It was a spontaneous movement; something in me rushed out and made me do it.

*(Champaklal Speaks, 2002 Ed., p. 70)*

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**RAJANGAM'S NOTE ON THE SIDDHI DAY**

24<sup>th</sup> November 1926 was indeed a glorious day. It was the day of the descent of Sri Krishna Consciousness into Sri Aurobindo. I still remember Datta (the Irish lady attending on the Mother) exclaiming as if in trance:

He has conquered Life.  
He has conquered Death.  
He has conquered All.  
Krishna the Lord has descended!

*(Breath of Grace, 2002 Ed., p. 87)*

## PART II

## RAJANI PALIT'S ACCOUNT OF THE SIDDHI DAY

24 NOVEMBER, 1926

On the 24<sup>th</sup> at about 4 p.m. I had gone to the Ashram and was meditating in Bejoy Nag's room (now the office-room of Prithwi Singh).<sup>1</sup> A great Power was trying to descend but it seemed to me that I should be broken into pieces — so intense was the pressure of the Higher Force over my head and so great the resistance in my head. The result was that I could not receive the Power, although I tried to do so.

At about 5 p.m., Amrita was called upstairs and he came down with the Mother's express direction that all the disciples were to assemble in the upstairs verandah for Sri Aurobindo's blessings.

As soon as I heard this I went to Barinda's room and told him that the long expected Descent must have taken place.

The Mother's wishes were communicated to all the disciples including those staying in the Guest House. But many had gone out to the sea-side for their evening stroll and some had gone to play football.

So messengers were sent to call them and, when all of us had assembled in the Ashram, we went upstairs<sup>2</sup> at about 6.30 p.m.<sup>3</sup> Those present were:

1. Amrita 2. Bejoy Nag 3. Barin Ghose 4. Champaben 5. Champaklal
6. Chandrasekhar 7. Datta, 8. Kanai Ganguly 9. Kshitish, 10. Lilabati
11. Moni, 12. Nolini Gupta 13. Nanibala 14. Pavitra 15. Pujalal
16. Punamchand 17. Purani 18. Purushottam 19. Rajangam 20. Rajani Palit
21. Rambhai 22. Rati Palit 23. Satyen 24. Upendra Bannerjee.<sup>4</sup>

On the wall, near the central door, was hung a black silk curtain with a Chinese Dragon in gold lace-work.<sup>5</sup>

The bent-wood chairs in which we used to sit for meditation etc., were all removed and replaced by mats spread on the floor.

Absolute silence prevailed and the verandah was full of Spiritual Light. Automatically we got into a state of meditation, waiting for the arrival of the Master.

A few minutes after, at about 7 p.m., the door behind the curtain opened and the Mother and the Master appeared — the Master with his majestic gait and the Mother in her queenly bearing. The Master was dressed in a silk dhoti and chaddar, and the Mother in a silk sari. The Master took his seat in his usual low cushioned chair and the Mother on his foot-rest which was placed on this day a little to the left.<sup>6</sup>

The Master looked absolutely grand, omniscient, omnipotent, *Samrāt*, as if Emperor of the Universe, head lion-like, eyes wide-open as if looking from far

beyond, detached yet supporting the entire universe; absolutely powerful, yet compassionate and kind to all, the supreme Godhead, absolutely *Svarāt*, one who had conquered himself entirely and had established his Ananda and light in every part and each cell of his body, from head to foot, his whole body radiating light and love and bliss to all creation.

The Mother was the embodiment of Love, Compassion, Purity, Beauty, Youth, Grace and Rhythm. She also looked majestic, her beaming eyes full of compassion for the earthly creation, Mother of the universe, Shakti of the Master.

It was a very auspicious day, since on this day Sri Krishna, who is the Ananda-maya and who supports the evolution, descended into the physical. Sri Aurobindo embodied the Supreme Godhead on this day.

The Master held out his left hand a few inches above the head of the Mother and he blessed the disciples who had assembled with his right hand<sup>7</sup> as they bowed down to him and the Mother, one by one; some of the disciples bowed more than once.

There was absolutely no talk, no sound. Neither the Mother nor Sri Aurobindo spoke a word,<sup>8</sup> the atmosphere was charged with utter calmness and peace and bliss, perfect silence reigned throughout the function. Then after about half an hour or so, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother withdrew and went within.

Now Datta came out, inspired, and declared, “The Master has conquered death, decay, disease, hunger, and sleep.”<sup>9</sup> We were spellbound and unable to move for some time. We felt as if we had been transported to heaven. Then we came downstairs, probably one by one.

Regarding myself, I spoke to Barinda for a special interview with the Mother, since the Pressure was very great, more than I could bear.

The Mother saw me at about 9 p.m. and I bowed down to her and told Her about my difficulties. She assured me that it would be O.K. and blessed me.

Then there was the usual distribution of “Soup” by the Mother.

Sri Aurobindo “retired” either on the following day or one or two days after.

(*Mother India*, November-December 1962, pp. 27-28)

\* \* \*

### ANNOTATIONS BY THE COMPILER

1. Presently (in 2022) the book sales section of the Publications Department in the Ashram Main Building. (*Champaklal Speaks*, p. 42)

2. Nolini Kanta Gupta’s account has a more precise description of the place where the sadhaks assembled on the Siddhi Day — “the verandah facing the Prosperity

room. Sri Aurobindo used to take his seat there in the evening for his talks with us or rather for answering our questions.” The Prosperity room (called the ‘Stores’ in the late twenties and thirties) is the hall where the Mother distributed the monthly requirements of the sadhaks and sadhikas of the Ashram. The verandah in front (or rather south of it) is where Sri Aurobindo held his Evening Talks. Both the Prosperity room and the verandah are on the first floor of the Library House where Sri Aurobindo and the Mother stayed from October 1922 to February 1927. The verandah is what you see first on looking up from the main gate of the Ashram Main Building. In 1923, according to Champaklal’s description, “it was an open verandah, covered on three sides (east, west and south) with big curtains.” The louvered windows that we see now “were put in much later” — more precisely in 1930 (according to an old drawing), after the Library House was purchased in April 1929. A. B. Purani’s introduction to the *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* adds one more detail — the curtains were made of grass.

3. There is a difference of half an hour in Haradhan Bakshi’s diary notation, “Just at seven we were called by Mirra Devi upstairs on the verandah.” A. B. Purani writes, “By six o’clock most of the disciples had gathered.” Mark the words “most of the disciples” because that might account for the difference of time. Some time must have elapsed before all the disciples had gathered. In Nolini Kanta Gupta’s account, Satyen was found missing and he volunteered to call him.

4. The number of disciples was more than 24. In fact, Mother says in her account of the Siddhi Day that there were “about thirty people at the time”.

**Haradhan Bakshi**, — whose account of the Siddhi Day forms part of the diary notation of his sadhana during this period, is not mentioned at all in Rajani Palit’s list of the 24 disciples who were present on the Siddhi Day.

**Tirupati** — If we count the disciples who have been mentioned a little before and after the Siddhi Day by other disciples who were present on that day, then Tirupati, a Telugu disciple from Vizianagaram, is very likely to have been present. Tirupati is mentioned by Champaklal on 20.11.1926 (*Champaklal Speaks*, 2002, p. 70) and also by Haradhan on 01.12.1926 and a few more times after this date. Tirupati addressed Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in his letters as “Sri Aravindaya” and “Ma Mirra” as early as February 1926, that is, long before the others started addressing them with such veneration.

**Marie Potel** — Mme. Potel, a French disciple of the Mother who came to Pondicherry in March 1926 and left in March 1928, is also likely to have been present on the Siddhi Day. A letter of Sri Aurobindo to Mme. Potel refers to “the arrangement

of places” in the collective meditations conducted by the Mother shortly after the Siddhi Day. During these meditations, the Mother used to assign specific places to the disciples, depending upon the spiritual qualities or aspects they represented and aspired to embody. Mme. Potel was herself named “Ila” after the Vedic goddess and the quality attributed to her was “Revelation”. (CWSA 36: 402; read also the full account of the Siddhi Day by Nolini Kanta Gupta — *Collected Works*, Volume 8, pp. 204-06; Barin Ghose also mentions her as “a French lady” in his unpublished reminiscences.) According to Dyuman Patel, she lived in what is presently the south-west portion of the Ashram School, opposite the main gate of the Ashram Main Building. She donated her car to the Mother who used to go then for long drives to the country side in the evenings. Her husband Léon Potel was one of the three French citizens who were present (as required by French law) when Sri Aurobindo signed the sale deed of the Meditation House on 13 July 1927. (*History of the Ashram Main Building*, p. 25)

5. Haradhan Bakshi’s diary entry of 2 December 1926 records what the Mother told him about the significance of the dragons:

As to the hanging on the wall, it is a Chinese (and also Japanese) symbol of immortality. The cloth is from Japan. The legend is that when the 3 dragons meet — the dragon of the deep sea, the dragon of the earth and the dragon of the air — then immortality is achieved. In Chinese, the dragon is the symbol of the spirit. The thing of course went from India and was given this Chinese form. The legend goes that when the 4<sup>th</sup> dragon will come down, the dragon that nobody has seen, the same thing will happen — but that can’t come down unless immortality is achieved. The 4<sup>th</sup> dragon is the Supramental Spirit.

Regarding the placement of the curtain, or rather the wall hanging, Haradhan writes in his diary, “There was a velvet screen hung on the wall (north) — dark blue with drawings of shining gold.” Rajani Palit is more precise about its location — “On the wall, near the central door, was hung a black silk curtain with a Chinese Dragon in gold lace-work.” Purani adds more detail:

In the verandah on the wall near Sri Aurobindo’s door, just behind his chair, a black silk curtain with gold lace work representing three Chinese dragons was hung.

Where was then Sri Aurobindo’s chair placed? Pujalal says that Sri Aurobindo’s chair and table were “a little to the east of the middle door”. (*Breath of Grace*, p. 79) Though the year of Pujalal’s story is dated “1925 or 1926”, we could assume that it would have been somewhat the same on the Siddhi Day, except that “the small table



that used to be in front of Sri Aurobindo's chair was removed" on that day. (Purani) So were the chairs meant for the sadhaks removed and "replaced by mats spread on the floor." (Rajani Palit)

And if, according to Purani, the wall-hanging was "just behind" Sri Aurobindo's chair, it implies that his chair was facing south and the wall hanging was between the middle door and the easternmost door of the verandah.

6. The foot-rest "was placed on this day a little to the left" of Sri Aurobindo's chair means that it was usually in front of the chair on other days when Sri Aurobindo used it as a foot-rest. So on that day it was placed "a little to the left" of where it usually was on other days, and the Mother sat on it. This is confirmed by both Nolini Kanta Gupta and Haradhan Bakshi saying that the Mother sat at Sri Aurobindo's feet. It is also compatible with the Master holding out "his left hand a few inches above the head of the Mother" and blessing the disciples with his right hand, according to Rajani Palit and Nolini Kanta Gupta.

7. Rajani Palit's description matches with Nolini Kanta Gupta's version: "Sri Aurobindo held his left hand above the Mother's head and his right hand was extended to us in benediction." It is also corroborated by Haradhan Bakshi's diary notation: "At Sri Aurobindo's feet sat Sri Mirra Devi. He had one hand above Mirra Devi's head but not touching her physical body and with the other He blessed us. Sri Mirra Devi also blessed us." What is clear from all three versions is Sri Aurobindo's intention to henceforth entrust the spiritual responsibility of his disciples to the Mother with him supporting her from behind. What happened on the Siddhi Day can be thus considered the first joint Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to their disciples.

8. There is a major difference here between the Mother's and the disciples' accounts of the Siddhi Day. The Mother recounts in her conversation:

Then he [*Sri Aurobindo*] called everyone together for one last meeting. He sat down, had me sit next to him, and said, "I called you here to tell you that, as of today, I am withdrawing for purposes of sadhana, and Mother will now take charge of everyone; you should address yourselves to her; she will represent me and she will do all the work." He hadn't mentioned this to me! — (*Mother bursts into laughter*)

These people had always been very intimate with Sri Aurobindo, so they asked: "Why, why, why?" He replied, "It will be explained to you."

None of the disciples' accounts mention these words of Sri Aurobindo and this

interchange between the Master and his disciples. In fact, “perfect silence reigned on that day,” according to Rajani Palit. In the words of A. B. Purani, there was “Silence absolute, living silence — not merely living but overflowing with divinity.” Haradhan Bakshi, whose diary notation was written on that very day (the others wrote or spoke about it long afterwards), does not mention any instructions that Sri Aurobindo gave to his disciples on the Siddhi Day. How do we solve this apparently major difference between the Mother’s and the disciples’ accounts?

The differences can be overcome if we take the Mother’s account as an overview or an outline of the events relating to the Siddhi Day rather than a strictly chronological account. It is a conflation of the major events that happened on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 1926, and a little before and after it. As a matter of fact, this is what often happens when one recollects an important event that has happened long ago — one glosses over the precise sequence of events, keeping in view the larger picture that emerges from one’s memory, because that is indeed more important than the physical details and the exact time frame of the event.

So if the Mother says that Sri Aurobindo called the disciples and told them that he will withdraw for the purpose of sadhana and she will henceforth take charge of them, it need not necessarily mean that Sri Aurobindo himself said that to his disciples, but that he could have simply sent Barin Ghose, his younger brother, to convey the same to his disciples. This is what actually Barin writes in his account:

All unknown to us the great day of Sri Aurobindo’s Siddhi Day was drawing near which was to change the way of living of the Ashram completely. One morning Sri Aurobindo specially called me upstairs and gave me a very delicate message to carry to all the sadhaks individually. He asked me to tell them that henceforth Sri Aurobindo would retire to complete isolation for intensive pursuit of Yoga. This was necessary if the great truth of divine transformation is at all to be realised quickly. Therefore everybody should come to the Mother Mirra and not to him with their difficulties in sadhana. She would come out and take charge of the entire Ashram and all its activities as the executive power, Sri Aurobindo supporting the whole fabric from behind.

Haradhan Bakshi’s diary notes of 27 November 1926 confirm that Barin went around informing the disciples on behalf of Sri Aurobindo:

The gist of what Shri Aurobindo told Barinbabu to let us know is this: —  
2 p.m. (1) The power has descended into the unconscious means it has descended there but we will have to work out the thing in the unconscious by the help of that power.

(2) Mirra is my Shakti. She has taken charge of the new creation. You will get everything from Her, give consent to whatever She wants to do.

There is a secondary problem here: The fact that Barin informed Haradhan on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November goes against Barin's own account which says that Sri Aurobindo instructed him to inform the disciples *before* the Siddhi Day and that the Siddhi Day actually happened *after* Sri Aurobindo's retirement. I quote from his account:

Need I say that the entire community of sadhaks were taken by surprise and did not know how to take it? It would have been difficult for many of us to take kindly to the great change if that great event of his Siddhi **had not intervened** soon after his retirement and electrified the atmosphere. [*emphasis added*]

We could attribute this discrepancy to a dating error made by Barin due to the fact that he wrote about the Siddhi Day long afterwards — he finished writing his unpublished biography of Sri Aurobindo in November 1941. But even if we take his account to be true, it is difficult to combine it with Haradhan's account which should be considered more reliable because his diary notes were written on that very day. The only way to reconcile them is to make the implausible supposition that Barin began informing the disciples before the Siddhi Day and continued to do so until he apprised Haradhan on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November. But when there were so few disciples at that time, why should Barin take so many days to inform them, especially when the message he had to deliver was so important?

Coming back to the Mother's account of the Siddhi Day, let us note that the immediate reaction of the disciples was, "Why, why, why?" which matches with what Barin writes in his account — "the entire community of sadhaks were taken by surprise and did not know how to take it". We can of course assume that this hesitation to accept the Mother in Sri Aurobindo's absence was not there in all the disciples and that some of them such as Champaklal, Pavitra and Haradhan had already accepted the Mother as their spiritual guide even before the Siddhi Day. (*Champaklal Speaks* (2002), pp. 69-70; *The Mother Takes Charge of the Ashram* by Raman Reddy, *Mother India*, September to December 2005)

In any case, three things stand out in the Mother's account: (1) Sri Aurobindo had one last meeting with his disciples on the Siddhi Day; (2) he announced to his disciples that he would henceforth retire and give their spiritual charge to the Mother; (3) the disciples were astonished at the sudden changes that would affect their lives, because until then they had the benefit of the Master's daily darshan. Whether all this happened on the evening of the Siddhi Day exactly as narrated, is of secondary importance because we can presume that what was far more important to the Mother

was the occult and spiritual significance of the Siddhi Day than the precise narration of the outer events that happened on that day.

9. Sri Aurobindo makes fun of Rajani Palit's version of what Datta declared on the Siddhi Day in his correspondence with Nirodbaran:

*Datta seems to have declared on that day that you had conquered sleep, food, disease and death. On what authority did she proclaim it then?*

I am not aware of this gorgeous proclamation. What was said was that the Divine (Krishna or the Divine Presence or whatever you like) had come down into the material.

But Rajani Palit's version is supported by similar versions of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Champaklal and Rajangam, especially with regard to the Lord having "conquered death" or "brought down immortality". Haradhan has a slight variant — he says that Datta *prayed* to God for conquering death and immortality:

At length [Datta] offered a prayer — "God come down; conquer pain and death and give us immortality."

In any case, Sri Aurobindo's objection is with regard to the misconception that he had "conquered sleep, food, disease and death" on the Siddhi Day than to what actually Datta said. I quote further from the same letter to Nirodbaran:

If all that was achieved on the 24<sup>th</sup> [November] 1926, what on earth remained to work out, and if the Supramental was there, for what blazing purpose did I need to retire? Besides are these things achieved in a single day? If Datta said anything like that she must have been in a prophetic mood and seen the future in the present!

He clarified the same confusion between the descent of Krishna and the supramental descent to another sadhak in November 1935:

*I knew that Krishna is not the Supermind. But because some say it was the descent of the supramental light and some say it was the descent of Krishna, I asked you to make it clear to me. What I wanted to know was whether the 24<sup>th</sup> November was the descent of the supramental light or of Krishna's light. Why are we observing the 24<sup>th</sup> as a special day?*

It was the descent of Krishna into the physical.

(CWSA 35: 273)

Another letter to the same sadhak leaves no scope for confusion:

*Some say November 24<sup>th</sup> is a day of victory. By that some mean that the Supermind (supramental consciousness) descended into the physical consciousness of Sri Aurobindo. Others say it was the coming down of Krishna into the physical consciousness. If it was the descent of Krishna, does that mean the descent of the supramental light?*

Krishna is not the supramental light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the Overmind Godhead preparing, though not itself actually bringing, the descent of Supermind and Ananda. Krishna is the Anandamaya, he supports the evolution through the Overmind leading it towards his Ananda.

(CWSA 35: 272)

RAMAN REDDY

### **The Mother's Taking Charge of the Ashram**

*On what date in 1926 did Mother take up the work of the sadhana?*

Mother does not at all remember the exact date. It may have been a few days after 15<sup>th</sup> August. She took up the work completely when I retired.

17 May 1936

Sri Aurobindo

*(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA, Vol. 35. p. 29)*

## SAHANA'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO — III

(Continued from the issue of October 2022)

*Now . . . a number of letters from me and answers from Sri Aurobindo on different topics. They are much more numerous than what I have included in my original Bengali book. We had no personal contact with Sri Aurobindo except on the four occasions of the Darshan. Therefore all our external communications with him regarding sadhana and other incidental questions were made through these letters.*

*His answers used to carry his presence and the best way to speak about him is to present his correspondence. Some of the answers have been published in his collected works. Even so, I cannot resist the temptation of reproducing at least a few among the many written in his own hand. They carried his blessings and form a part of my most invaluable treasures.*

*It has not been possible always to publish an entire letter of his since it contained personal touches which were not meant to be shared with others. There are many answers without my questions because Sri Aurobindo would simply send his answers, keeping back our own notes. I have not taken the risk of reconstructing my questions by ransacking my memory of the past. There were several letters of mine which were written in exercise books. Sri Aurobindo's answers were given in their margins or in other available empty spaces. Most of the correspondence I am quoting has been taken from these exercise books. It dates to the years 1930-38. In 1930 the letters were few; the number went on increasing year by year, till the letters stopped completely after the accident to Sri Aurobindo's right leg on the night of 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1938. On a superficial reading, many of them may look repetitive, but each really carries a special import of its own.*

*I may add that even when I wrote to the Mother, the answers often came from Sri Aurobindo.*

Sahana

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*The tears shed for the Divine out of sheer Ananda or from love and devotion — do they have a mixture of the vital ego?*

It is only the ordinary vital emotions which waste the energy and disturb the concen-

tration and peace, that have to be discouraged. Emotion itself is not a bad thing, it is a necessary part of the nature, and psychic emotion is one of the most powerful helps to the sadhana. Psychic emotion, bringing tears of love for the Divine, or tears of Ananda ought not to be suppressed, it is only a vital mixture that brings disturbance in the sadhana. (21.3.31)

\*

*Mother, is the Ananda about which I have written to you this morning a vital Ananda?*

The Ananda you describe is evidently that of the inner vital when it is full of the psychic influence and floods with it the exterior vital also. It is the true Ananda and there is nothing in it of the old vital nature. When the psychic thus uses the vital to express itself, this kind of intense ecstasy is the natural form it takes. This intensity and the old vital excitement are two quite different things and must not be confused together. When there is the intensity with a pure and full satisfaction, content and gratitude leaving no room for claim, demand or depressing reaction, that is the true movement. (6.12.31)

\*

*What should be the true mutual relation among us? How to bring it about?*

What you must have with other sadhaks is a harmonious relation free from any mere vital attachment (indifference is not asked from you) and free from any indulgence in vital wrong movement of the opposite kind (such as dislike, jealousy or ill-will). It is through the psychic consciousness that you have found it possible to be in a true constant relation with the Mother and your aim is to make that the basis of all your life, action and feeling; all in you, all you feel, all you say and do, should be consistent with that basis. If all proceeds from that psychic union of your consciousness with the Mother, dedicating everything to her, then you will develop the right relation with others. (10.2.32)

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*Very often I see that I feel greatly disturbed in the face of a difficulty and fall into a condition from which rising seems impossible. But surprisingly enough I get back strength by your Grace and say to myself: "Since Mother and Sri Aurobindo have said so, I will surely succeed." With this inner urge I stand up and step forward, all fresh and fine. I have written to you what happened*

*this time and what experience I gained. I was shown almost miraculously how difficulties turn into opportunities if we accept them in the right way. What a joy it was!*

The attitude you have taken is the right one. It is this feeling and attitude which help you to overcome so rapidly the attacks that sometimes fall upon you and throw you out of the right consciousness. As you say, difficulties so taken become opportunities — the difficulty faced in the right spirit and conquered, one finds that an obstacle has disappeared, a fresh step forward has been taken. To question, to resist in some parts of the being increases trouble and difficulties — that was why an unquestioning acceptance and obedience to the direction of the Guru was laid down as indispensable in the old Indian Yoga — it was demanded not for the sake of the Guru, but for the sake of the shishya. (13.2.32)

\*

*Mother dear, can I practise tratak? I was doing a bit of looking at a bright star, but I, unlike Dilip, failed to see anything. Perhaps some time is needed for the vision to open.*

We do not consider it necessary for you to practise tratak. It may be useful to someone who has a strong predisposition — in Dilip for instance, in his development something was always trying to bring out this power of vision. But in your case you can wait for the vision to develop of itself or at any rate leave it till later. For you what is important is to carry on what has been begun till it is complete in all the parts of your nature. (28.2.32)

\*

*Mother mine, how sweet it is when you write so frankly about what you want of us. I have never tasted the joy of having no desire as I do now.*

*I have found out one thing, Mother. Please tell me if it is true that singing in the open air on the terrace causes a strain to the throat, often followed by a crack in the voice.*

Perhaps when you sing it is better to do it inside; for when singing in the open one is usually led to strain or force the voice. (4.4.32)

\*



*Mother, I feel such an unease when I do something without asking you beforehand. Whenever anybody wants me to do something, my automatic answer is: "I can't do or say anything without asking the Mother." There are many who don't like this. They say: "Why should everything be told to the Mother? We get to consider the word more important than the spirit." Is that so? I ask myself: "Am I being excessive? Is it all mental?"*

You are quite right in following what you feel about asking us in these matters. It is not mental or an exaggeration. (12.4.32)

\*

*Sweet Mother, I would like to tell you something. Yesterday, repeatedly I had an experience while discussing with D about sadhana. . . . It was like this: I often felt that it was not I who was speaking but someone was speaking through me. I myself was so surprised to hear what I was uttering. It was absolutely impossible for only me to speak so. I felt sure that something which was trying to express itself came out through me.*

Yes, it is true that something has been speaking through you. Be more and more careful to speak without the interference of the mind or the feeling and speech will become more and more clear. (4.5.32)

\*

*When I commit a fault, I repent and cause myself much pain. I don't know why I should feel so intensely.*

It is a certain excess and exaggeration somewhere in your vital. A greater constant calm and control in your vital — the whole of it — is necessary. For these movements do not help — they prevent a quick recovery and shake the nerves and the body and push to unreasoned action. (20.5.32)

\*

*Mother Beloved, I am always waiting for your directions. Why are you not correcting me, Mother? Sri Aurobindo has given me permission to take the course of following implicitly the directions given by you; so kindly do not forget, Mother Gracious, that I am eagerly waiting to have your directions.*

You can certainly put aside the mental or vital sense of responsibility and take the course of following implicitly the directions given you by the Mother — keeping however the need of psychic assent and a certain inner vigilance.

One thing only you must be careful about that there should be nothing inert or tamasic in this self-giving to the guidance and it should not be made by any part of the vital into a plea for not rejecting the suggestions of lower impulse and desire.

There are always two ways of doing the Yoga — one by the action of a vigilant mind and vital seeing, observing, thinking and deciding what is or is not to be done. Of course it acts with the Divine Force behind it, drawing or calling in that Force — for otherwise nothing much can be done. But still it is the personal effort that is prominent and assumes most of the burden.

The other way is that of the psychic being, the consciousness opening to the Divine, not only opening the psychic and bringing it forward, but opening the mind, the vital and the physical, receiving the Light, perceiving what is to be done, feeling and seeing it done by the Divine Force itself and helping constantly by its own vigilant and conscious assent to and call for the Divine working.

Usually there cannot but be a mixture of these two ways until the consciousness is ready to be entirely open, entirely submitted to the Divine's origination of all its action. It is then that all responsibility disappears and there is no personal burden on the shoulders of the sadhak. (24.5.32)

\*

*Mother, Sri Aurobindo once wrote to me: "If you wish to be free from people's expectations and the sense of obligation, it is indeed best not to take from anybody; for the sense of claim will be otherwise there. Not that it will be entirely absent even if you take nothing, but you will not be bound any longer." But when I do not accept what people want to give me, they are hurt, even offended, especially when they offer with love, affection or respect. Then it becomes difficult to refuse them. What should be done in such cases?*

The best thing is to keep the rule of not asking, of taking when it is given. It helps to gain mastery over desire and it is that mastery that is here the important thing. (27.5.32)

\*

*My constant and ardent aspiration is that Sri Aurobindo's Light may come into my mind. Tell me, dear Mother, if it will ever happen. Shall I be able to receive his Light?*

It can always come in the mind if you aspire patiently. But the basic condition, if you want that Light, is to get rid of all other mental influences. (29.5.32)

\*

*What is the meaning of “to get rid of all other mental influences”? Is it that I had better not read any other books than Sri Aurobindo's writings, or that I should not try to learn anything from hearing or by reading others?*

It is not a question of books or learning facts. When a woman loves or admires, her mind is instinctively moulded by the one she loves or admires and this influence remains after the feeling itself has gone or appears to be gone. This does not refer to X's influence merely. It is the general rule given to keep yourself free from any other admiration or influence. (30.5.32)

\*

*Mother, I have analysed and found one thing more, that is to say, I think I go for typing not merely to type but also to have an excuse to go to X's place. I am trying to stop all the old vital movements, it is not that I do not find it difficult, but I sincerely want to be changed. Was my analysis wrong?*

No, it was quite right. (2.6.32)

\*

*Sweet Mother, yesterday when I was writing to you, I saw thrice a strong blue light coming through the page as if from behind. I thought it must be Sri Aurobindo's Light — I felt so happy! Is it true that it was His Light?*

Yes. (2.6.32)

\*

*Sweet Mother, do you think what I feel about not going to X's place is a mental rule? I want to know it from you. As for myself I feel it to be a necessity, for it comes from within, that means I feel that this sort of relation must go now, I want to be sincere and true to you and true to myself and for that I want to try to take the resolution to give up all that stands in the way. So nowadays whatever I feel as a necessity, I want, at least, to try sincerely to do it seriously. Is this merely mental?*

It is not a mental rule, but, as you say, an inner necessity, but something mental moves in your outer attitude, because in the outer being and in the subconscious vital there is still something which is not overcome. That may give your way of doing it a rigidity which they feel. That was what we wanted to say, not in the least that the resolution did not come from your inner being or that it was merely a mental rule. (6.6.32)

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*Dear Mother, whatever I want to do or whatever resolution I take, comes to nothing eventually. Either an intricate problem or some obstacle appears and everything becomes a jumble and the resolution is lost. I don't seem to have found the right way. I may be giving too much importance to the outer ways of doing things. Do tell me, Mother, what I should do at every step. I will not try or think even of doing anything of my own accord. This idea is coming up again and again.*

The difficulty about meeting your demand that the Mother should plan out and fix a routine for you in everything which you must follow is that this is quite contrary to the Mother's way of working in most matters. In the most physical things you have to fix a programme in order to deal with time, otherwise all becomes a sea of confusion and haphazard. Fixed rules have also to be made for the management of material things so long as people are not sufficiently developed to deal with them in the right way without rules. But these things of which you write are different; they are concerned with your inner development, your sadhana. In fact, even in outward things the Mother does not plan with her mind and make a mental map and rule of what is to be done; she sees what is to be done in each case and organises and develops it according to the nature of each case. In matters of inner development and the sadhana it is still more impossible to map out a plan fixed in every detail and say "every time you shall step here, there, in this way or that line and no other." Things would become so tied up and rigid that nothing could be done; there would be no true and effective movement.

If the Mother asked you to tell her everything, it was not in order that she might give you directions in every detail which you must obey. It was in order first that there might grow up the complete intimacy in which you would be entirely open to her, so that she might pour more and more and continuously and at every point the Divine Force into you which would increase the Light in you, perfect your action, deliver and develop your nature. It is this that was important; all else is secondary, important only so far as it helps this or hinders. In addition it would help her to give wherever needed the necessary touch, the necessary direction, the necessary help or warning, not always by words, more often by a silent intervention and pressure. This is her

way of dealing with those who are open to her; it is not necessary to give express orders at every moment and in every detail. Especially if the psychic consciousness is open and one lives fully in that, it gets the intimation at once and sees things clearly and receives the help, the intervention, the necessary direction or warning. That was what was happening to a great extent when your psychic consciousness was very active, but there was a vital part in which you were not open and which was coming up repeatedly, and it is this that has created the confusion and the trouble.

Everything depends on the inner condition and the outward action is only useful as a means and a help for expressing or confirming the inner condition and making it dynamic and effective. If you do or say a thing with the psychic uppermost or with the right inner touch, it will be effective; if you do or say the same thing out of the mind or the vital or both, a wrong or mixed atmosphere, it may be quite ineffective. To do the right thing in the right way in each case and at each moment one must be in the right consciousness — it can't be done by following a fixed mental rule which under some circumstances might fit in and under others might not fit in at all. A general principle can be laid down if it is in consonance with the Truth, but its application must be determined by the inner consciousness seeing at each step what is to be done or not done. If the psychic is uppermost, if the being is entirely turned towards the Mother and follows the psychic, this can be increasingly done.

All depends therefore not on a mental rule to follow in practice, but in getting the psychic consciousness back and putting its light into this vital part and making that part turn wholly to the Mother. It is not that the question of your going too much to your S is of no importance, — it is of considerable importance — but to limit the contact is effective only as a means of helping your vital part to withdraw from this servitude to old movements. It is the same everywhere.

The kind of outward obedience you lay stress on, asking for a direction in every detail, is not the essence of surrender, although obedience is the natural fruit and outward body of surrender. Surrender is from within, opening and giving mind, vital, physical all to the Mother for her to take them as her own and recreate them in their true being which is a portion of the Divine; all the rest follows as a consequence. It would not then be necessary to ask her word and order outwardly in every detail, the being would feel and act according to her will; her sanction would be sought but as the seal of that inner unity, receptiveness of her will and obedience. (11.6.32)

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*Mother mine, I am feeling a little depressed for the attachments that live still in me; I know how little importance you give to these things, but I don't know why they have become so important to me. May I know? Am I giving them too much importance or is it going to be like this? Why cannot I take things in an easy way if it is so necessary? I am writing to you because I cannot forget*

*the thought about my attachments and that thought makes me feel I am so incapable and this sense of incapacity depresses me more.*

There is no reason to be gloomy and it does not help but rather hinders. See these things quietly with the full confidence that they will be removed as early as possible. (1.7.32)

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*I am feeling after a long time that the difficulties are as if fleeting away from me. I am not sure, of course, whether it is the vital's consolation to me or not, but I am feeling less responsible about myself. Pray tell me whether all this which is coming to me is true or the obstinate part of the vital is trying to baffle me with these satisfying answers.*

It is all right. If you develop the inward truth as you describe here, the outward will follow. (4.7.32)

*(To be continued)*

SAHANA

*(At the Feet of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo by Sahana,  
translated by Nirodbaran from the original Bengali)*

*A free heart is similarly a heart delivered from the gusts and storms of the affections and the passions; the assailing touch of grief, wrath, hatred, fear, inequality of love, trouble of joy, pain of sorrow fall away from the equal heart, and leave it a thing large, calm, equal, luminous, divine.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 24, pp. 703-04)*

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

(Part 30)

(Continued from the issue of October 2022)

## Section 3: A QUIET AND HUMBLE DISPOSITION

Suresh Chandra Samajpati (1870-1921) — a well known writer and editor in Bengal — was deeply impressed by Sri Aurobindo even prior to him becoming a political leader. It was he who had requested Dinendra Kumar Roy, in 1911, to write about his recollections of Sri Aurobindo at Baroda since hundreds of thousands of Bengalis were curious to know about the formative years of this noble and erudite personage. Samajpati felt that the youth and the future generations would be inspired to hear about Sri Aurobindo’s life. Although Roy knew that Sri Aurobindo preferred to be away from the limelight, he serialised his reminiscences, in 1911-12, in the Bengali journal *Sahitya*, which Samajpati edited. Roy writes in the preface:

. . . many things were said about him in various English and Bengali journals. Some time back I heard that a certain Mr. Palit had written his biography in order to spread his name in India and abroad. . . . I know that Aurobindo does not support such a public display. But there are many who are eager to know something about him. And I am sure that all those who are born as men in Bengal will be pleased and profoundly delighted to contemplate the story of Aurobindo’s life. This is the reason I have sat down after twelve long years to write about my personal contact with Aurobindo.<sup>1</sup>

In 1923 Dinendra Kumar Roy’s articles came out as a book, *Aurobindo Prasanga*. Roy’s statement that “I know that Aurobindo does not support such a public display,” brings to mind Sri Aurobindo’s visionary and groundbreaking articles in the *Indu Prakash*, written as a mere 21-year-old, where he kept himself in the background by writing these anonymously. When Dinendra Kumar Roy was in Baroda he was aware of these fiery pioneering pieces of political and psychological analysis where the ulterior motives of the British were exposed and the Congress leaders criticised for their servile attitude towards the British government. Roy writes about Sri Aurobindo’s reticence about these articles:

1. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 2006, pp. 1-2, (Dinendra Kumar Roy, *Aurobindo Prasanga* – Translated from Bengali by Maurice Shukla).

Before I went to Baroda, Aurobindo had contributed a number of articles to a Bombay periodical *Indu Prakash* criticising some errors of the Congress. Unable to refute his conclusive arguments, the blind followers of the Congress were highly upset with him. When reason is vanquished, anger takes over — this has always been man’s primary weakness. I was told that after the publication of these articles, one of the judges of the Bombay High Court, the late Mr. Ranade, met Aurobindo. Aurobindo had a discussion with him about these articles. Even the vastly experienced, learned and magnanimous Ranade could not with all his intelligence refute Aurobindo’s arguments! But he requested Aurobindo not to write such articles in the future. Such articles he feared, could damage the Congress. Aurobindo acceded to his request. After this he never criticised the Congress again in the *Indu Prakash*. I never asked Aurobindo about the substance of these articles.<sup>2</sup>

In his biography of Sri Aurobindo, Manoj Das writes:

Sri Aurobindo, even long after his withdrawal from politics would not care to utter a word about it or on any other activity that he considered as belonging to the surface of his life and hence unimportant. If at all he shed any light on such subjects, it was only when a categorical question was put to him on any of the earlier episodes in his life, or if his attention was drawn to some unfounded or exaggerated rumour or conception about him.<sup>3</sup>

Besides playing down his accomplishments, Sri Aurobindo would also be almost unmindful of his kindness to others. Dinendra Kumar Roy was stricken by a dangerously high Baroda fever from which, by his own admission, he would not have survived but for Sri Aurobindo nursing him. Obliquely referring to Sri Aurobindo’s humility, Roy remarked: “He never gave me a remote hint of all the sleepless nights he kept vigil over my sickbed.”<sup>4</sup>

Here is another instance. Charu Chandra Dutt once asked for a gift from Sri Aurobindo — his personal copy of the Gita. Sri Aurobindo made no reply.

However, the next time that they met he casually gave his own used copy of the Gita. Dutt, though, accepted the gift with a touch of nonchalance. It was only after Dutt settled in the Ashram that he realised the true inner significance of the gift when he noted:

But the real meaning of this giving and taking appeared to me forty years later. When, in 1908, I burnt all his letters and destroyed all books bearing his name,

2. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 43.

3. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, December 2012, p. 997.

4. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 144.



I managed to preserve this Gita, though it has in it some writing in Devanagari. The book is very old and the pages brittle. So we have never touched it except just to do a pranam occasionally. In 1946, one morning, I don't know why, I said to the Mother, “Ma mère, Sri Aurobindo gave me a copy of the Gita forty years ago. I want you to keep it.” Next morning I handed over the book to her. Soon after this, there came on a Darshan day. After the ceremony was over, at 5 P.M., Nirod came to our house carrying something inside his scarf. He called out from the gate, “What will you give me, Sir?” I replied, “Anything you desire.” He came forward and put the old Gita in my hand saying solemnly, “I am repeating Sri Aurobindo's words, Sir — ‘I gave you the Gita in 1906 and asked you to keep it. I give it to you again today and ask you to keep it.’” Thus he gave me the priceless book twice — once as my friend, the second time as my Lord and Master, showing clearly that both were same.<sup>5</sup>

Charu Chandra Dutt recounts another instance of Sri Aurobindo's unassuming ways:

In that remote age there was another thing, a very subtle thing that Aurobindo gave me. It is still with me, secretly installed in my heart. It was of great use to me at one time; but ever since the Master and the Mother have taken up abode in the recesses of my heart, its work has become secondary. Still, there it is, ever ready to help me. Let me explain more clearly. In those days I had a very strange faculty (not Yogic, because I knew no Yoga). If I sat still absentmindedly, especially in the dark or half dark, I felt clearly my blood coursing in my veins and arteries and consequently I could count quite easily the beating of my pulse. Still more strange was my power to look inside my thorax and abdomen and see clearly my internal organs — heart, lungs, liver, etc. I had only to concentrate for a little while to be able to do this. Aurobindo knew of this queer faculty of mine, but never encouraged me in any way. One day, in ordinary conversation, I said to him, “Aurobindo, why don't you give me some nice object on which I can concentrate more easily?” This time he did not say, “Not yet”, to put me off summarily. But he did not give any assurance either. He went back to Baroda in a couple of days. Soon afterwards, I had this peculiar experience. It was a dark drizzly evening. I was stretched in my long chair with my eyes closed. Suddenly my gaze turned inwards. I visualised not only the inside of my chest but saw clearly inside my heart, seated in Padmasan, an entrancing figure, all made of light, — a Yogi in meditation. The face was beautiful but resembled no face that I had ever known. That luminous image has been with me ever since, and, at all times, I have found it absolutely easy to be concentrated on it. Latterly the face of the image has sometimes got mixed

5. Charu Chandra Dutt, ‘My Friend and my Master’, *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, Eighth number, pp. 128-29.

up with the Master’s face, but not often. Aurobindo never admitted that he had given any such image to me. Whenever I questioned him, he replied in an offhand way, “O! That image of yours? I know nothing about it.” Of course, there is no longer any need for speculation. A direct path of approach has been opened up by the Mother in my heart.

It was at this same period that Aurobindo wrote to me once from Baroda, asking me, “When you sit in silent concentration (or absent-mindedly, as you call it), do you see any colours? One colour or many colours?” I replied, “Always one colour, a beautiful rosy light, but why this question?” There was no reply. When he came to me again, I chaffed him saying, “You had better not let me see any colour other than blood-red, Chief; otherwise your work is likely to suffer.” He mumbled in a preoccupied way, “My work! True.” Thus we met from time to time and again parted. But he knew always I was his devoted and faithful friend. For, as I came to realise in 1940, he had never really forsaken me.<sup>6</sup>

Barin Kumar Ghose felt that his brother Aurobindo was always “generous and loving” but because of his quiet and reserved nature this was only evident to a discerning observer.<sup>7</sup>

Later in the 1940s C. C. Dutt settled in the Ashram. Due to his bad knees a time came when during the pranam he found it difficult to place his forehead on Mother’s feet. A few days later darshan day arrived. C. C. Dutt writes:

I did not know if the Mother had told Sri Aurobindo anything. But I saw that he looked me all over from head to toe as I approached and, as I learnt from my wife and one or two others who were just behind, the Master’s eyes followed me as I walked away, as far as I was visible. From that day the stiffness on my knees went on decreasing rapidly. This sort of thing is happening constantly here as everyone knows. Call it miracle or not, as you like! I call it Divine Grace — the Grace of the Master and the Mother.<sup>8</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s demeanour brings to mind two of the Mother’s sayings: “Goodwill: of modest appearance, it makes no noise but is ever ready to be useful”;<sup>9</sup> and, “Benevolence makes life fragrant without attracting attention.”<sup>10</sup>

Incidentally, although C. C. Dutt was five years younger than Sri Aurobindo, a follower of his in revolutionary politics and later a disciple, Sri Aurobindo

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30.

7. See Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, May 2012, p. 348.

8. Charu Chandra Dutt, ‘My Friend and my Master’, *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, Eighth number, p. 133.

9. *CWM*, Vol. 14, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 186.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

considered him a great friend.<sup>11</sup> In 1906-07 Sri Aurobindo lived in Calcutta with C. C. Dutt’s brother-in-law’s family, Subodh Mullick, as an honoured and beloved guest. Dutt writes: “Our mother he addressed as mother and she addressed him either as Aurobindo or simply as Baba. It was indeed marvellous — a vastly learned man, a great political leader like him, dropping his formidable personality and becoming one with another family, in love and affection!”<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, in spite of his stature, Sri Aurobindo treated others respectfully and equally. Further he did not discriminate against the common man. At Baroda there was a young Maratha Brahmin by the name of Mr. Phadke who worked at the Dewan’s office. Though he was only a clerk he was close to Sri Aurobindo and often came to visit him.<sup>13</sup> Another visitor named Mangesh was considered a braggart and a rogue by Dinendra Kumar Roy, yet Sri Aurobindo used to receive him courteously. Many people came to converse with Sri Aurobindo or sought his advice because they respected him and knew he was loved and trusted by the Maharaja. Although it encroached on his time Sri Aurobindo received them all cordially.<sup>14</sup>

As a leader Sri Aurobindo treated the young revolutionaries as friends and equals, unreservedly talking, joking, eating and sleeping with them. This has been revealed lucidly by none other than his one time political attendant, Sudhir Sarkar, who was taken aback with Sri Aurobindo’s liberalness. In one instance Sri Aurobindo wrote to his friend Sundari Mohan Das stating that “My friend Sudhir Kumar is going to see you,” which compelled an embarrassed Sudhir Sarkar to protest. Expounding on the incident, Sudhir Sarkar writes:

I asked him point blank, “How do I become your friend? You, who are so much above me in learning, age, accomplishment and fame — in fact, in every respect. Rather it is proper I should venerate you, seek advice from you, be humble to you; instead I am described as your friend and equal. And that too while writing to someone who is much older than me, and higher in status!” But Sri Aurobindo brushed all this aside and would not let me go before convincing me thoroughly of my misconception. In his faltering Bengali which sounded so sweet in his English-accented tongue, he said, “Because our aims, our hopes, our aspirations are so much the same how can we be any other than friends? The difference you feel is due to the tradition of this country. At present, it has gone beyond limit and taken an exaggerated form which seems so unnatural.”<sup>15</sup>

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

12. Charu Chandra Dutt, ‘My Friend and my Master’, *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, Eighth number, p. 134.

13. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 2006, pp. 32-33.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

15. Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 1989, p. 91.

Sri Aurobindo’s other political attendant, Abinash Bhattacharya, writes: “I have looked upon him at different times as a brother, a friend and a companion.”<sup>16</sup> Abinash Bhattacharya writes of an incident that occurred around mid-1907:

Once in Calcutta, Aurobindo-babu stayed in Raja Subodh Mullick’s house. I went to see him every day. One day he told me: “Abinash, I can’t stay here — can you arrange something else?”

“Why? Are you having problems in regard to the food or lodging here?”

“Not that. It’s not a question of hospitality or food. The reason that I don’t want to stay here — the real difficulty of staying here — is that ordinary people cannot frequent me here so easily.”<sup>17</sup>

In October 1907 Abinash rented a house on Chaku Khansama Lane, where he, Barin, Sarojini, and others stayed with Sri Aurobindo for some time. Abinash, who was very much at ease with Sri Aurobindo’s tender and open-minded nature, reminisces:

I was fortunate enough to have lived together with Sri Aurobindo for a few days. I called him *Sejda* and addressed him as *tumi* [an informal or familiar form of the second person].<sup>18</sup>

Abinash writes that Sri Aurobindo was so broad-minded and simple that “Whenever I gave him a fond scolding, he broke out in laughter.”<sup>19</sup> Sometime in February 1908, they shifted to 23, Scott’s Lane, where Mrinalini Devi also joined them whilst Barin moved to the Maniktolla Gardens. There Sri Aurobindo was getting immersed in yoga causing Abinash Bhattacharya to get concerned that the revolutionary movement may lose momentum. Out of pique he brashly asked Sri Aurobindo: “*Sejda*, on the one hand you practise the austerities of yoga and on the other hand you sleep in one bed with your wife.” Instead of being offended at the impertinence of his attendant, Sri Aurobindo sweetly smiled and replied: “It is not simply by sharing a bed that *brahmacharya* [chastity in spiritual practice] is lost. To form a group of naked ascetics is not my intention. We have thirty-three lakhs of such ascetics in India. I want ‘*grihastha sannyasis*’ — men leading the full life in the world who when the need arises will renounce everything at the call of duty.”<sup>20</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s cousin, Sukumar Mitra too recalled that Sri Aurobindo was never offended. In 1951 Sukumar published an eight-part article on Sri Aurobindo

16. Abinash Bhattacharya, ‘Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, July 2012, p. 539.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 530.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 538.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 531.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 532.

in the Bengali magazine *Basumati*. He nostalgically recalls that during one of the puja holidays he found Auro-dada practising push-ups and knee-bending exercises. Although Sri Aurobindo was thirteen years older than him, Sukumar writes: “He used to treat me as though we were the same age and he always repaid me in kind my childish playfulness, so that often we would both roll in the dust. He was never annoyed, his dignity never offended.”<sup>21</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s absence of anger is another illustration of his humility. A disciple had once asked Sri Aurobindo, “Even in the absence of justifiable reasons why do people become angry?” He replied, “People do not get angry for reasons, but because of their ego.”<sup>22</sup>

The sense of being offended is also because of the ego. The Mother explains:

. . . I was asked if insult, the feeling of being insulted, and what is called in English “self-respect” (something corresponding a little to *amour-propre* in French) had any place in the sadhana. Of course, there is no place for it, it is well understood! But I have seen the movement, it was very clear, I have seen that without ego, when the ego is not there, there *cannot be* this sort of ruffle in the being.<sup>23</sup>

Another characteristic of Sri Aurobindo’s temperament was that he was immune from flattery and praise. Cognizant about Sri Aurobindo’s brilliance and his proximity to the Maharaja, Dinendra Kumar Roy told Sri Aurobindo that he could command a very high respect, if only he paid heed to the many people who wanted to wait on him. Sri Aurobindo laughingly replied: “One does not acquire happiness simply by respect, honour, skill and influence. Is there any joy to be derived from the flattery of selfish fools?”<sup>24</sup>

Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909), a well-known scholar, economic historian and writer, joined the I.C.S. in 1871 and retired in 1897 at the relatively young age of 49 during which time he rose to the position of Divisional Commissioner of Orissa, then the highest post held by an Indian in the British administration. In 1899, he was invited to be the President of the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress. A few years after Dutt retired from the I.C.S. the Maharaja of Baroda offered him the position of Councillor (virtually the same as Dewan) which he joined sometime around 1904. The correspondence between the Gaekwar and Dutt was handled by Sri Aurobindo.<sup>25</sup> Earlier, around 1899, Dutt, on the invitation of the Maharaja, visited Baroda and met Sri Aurobindo. Having heard of Sri Aurobindo’s poetic gifts he

21. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 73.

22. Nagin Doshi, *Guidance from Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. II, 1976, p. 131.

23. *CWM*, Vol. 11, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 54.

24. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 28.

25. See *CWSA*, Vol. 36, pp. 573-74.

expressed his desire to see his poems. Sri Aurobindo, with some hesitancy, disclosed his poems. Dinendra Kumar Roy narrates his surprise at Sri Aurobindo’s reaction to his interaction with Dutt:

Not merely the flattery of fools, even the praise of the wise and the intelligent failed to enthuse him. . . . I don’t think Mr. Dutt knew Aurobindo from earlier times, but he had heard of his poetic genius, and perhaps he had even read some of his poems. Mr. Dutt had just published in England a poetic translation of parts of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. When he heard that Aurobindo had translated certain parts of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, he expressed an eagerness to see the translations. Needless to say, Mr. Dutt was a distinguished writer in English literature. Many of his English writings are better than those of famous English writers. He was equally fluent in prose and verse, in novels and poetry. So when Mr. Dutt asked quite spontaneously to see Aurobindo’s poems, Aurobindo showed them to him, even if a little reluctantly. Mr. Dutt, discerning as he was in literary matters, was so impressed with Aurobindo’s poems that he later said: “Seeing your poems, I regret all the trouble I went to trying to translate the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*! Had I seen your poems earlier, I would have never published my own writings. It all seems like child’s play now.” Yet, Mr. Dutt’s *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* had received many appreciative reviews in English weeklies and magazines. But I did not see Aurobindo pleased even after such praise from Mr. Dutt. Aurobindo was always equal in happiness or sorrow, comfort or hardship, praise or criticism.<sup>26</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s literary appraisal, however, differed from Roy when he writes of Dutt: “For instance, his *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, though they are poor and commonplace poetry and do unpardonable violence to the spirit of the original, yet familiarised the average reader in England with the stories of the epics and thus made the way easy for future interpreters of the East to the West.”<sup>27</sup> However, on Dutt’s *Economic History of India* Sri Aurobindo was more complimentary: “Without the *Economic History* and its damning story of England’s commercial and fiscal dealings with India we doubt whether the public mind would have been ready for the Boycott. In this one instance it may be said of him that he not only wrote history but created it. But all his works, with the exception of the historical novels, were rather pieces of successful journalism than literature.”<sup>28</sup>

Like R. C. Dutt, Surendranath Banerji had passed the I.C.S. examination in 1871 (although he was dismissed in 1874 for making a serious judicial error) and served as the President of the Indian National Congress (not once but twice). Banerji

26. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 2006, pp. 28-29.

27. *CWSA*, Vol. 1, p. 679.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 678-79.

tried to use his charm to win over Sri Aurobindo by praise and flattery but he should have known better. Sri Aurobindo remarked: “Banerji had personal magnetism, was sweet-spoken and could get round anybody. He also tried to get round me by flattering, patting and caressing.”<sup>29</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s indifference to praise or criticism is reflected in another incident with a political leader that occurred in February 1926. A. B. Purani writes:

A letter from Subhas Chandra Bose to Dilip Kumar Roy that appeared in the *Prabartak* of Chandernagore was read out. Subhas remarked in it that though he had great respect for Vivekananda he considered Sri Aurobindo more *gabhīr* — deeper — than the former. He accepted Sri Aurobindo as a genius and a great Dhyani, but thought that too long remaining away from “active life” tends to one-sided development and may help some few to become Supermen, but for the generality of men he would prefer the path of service and work.

Sri Aurobindo heard the contents of the letter and was glad that it was short.<sup>30</sup>

In a letter to a disciple, Sri Aurobindo writes:

Any average man reacts like this — to be pleased when praised and offended when blamed. There is nothing strange about that. But it is absolutely essential for a sadhak to get over this weakness; he must remain unshaken by praise or criticism, honour or insult. But it cannot be easily done, it will take time.<sup>31</sup>

Even a Buddhist celebrity like Alexandra David-Néel — explorer, author of about 30 books and a friend of the Mother’s who in 1924 was the first woman to visit (incognito) the forbidden city of Lhasa — was not immune from praise. In November 1911 she came to Pondicherry to meet Sri Aurobindo and was so impressed that she profusely eulogised him. The Mother narrates an amusing incident about David-Néel:

Mme. David-Néel who is a militant Buddhist and a great Buddhistic luminary — when she came to India she went to meet some of those great sages or gurus — I shan’t give you the names, but she went to one who looked at her and asked her . . . for they were speaking of yoga and personal effort and all that . . . he looked at her and asked her, “Are you indifferent to criticism?” Then she answered him with the classical expression, “Does one care about a dog’s barking?” But she added to me when telling me the story, very wittily:

29. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 112.

30. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 146.

31. Sri Aurobindo, ‘Obstacles and Difficulties’, (Translated by Niranjan from the Bengali letters in “Patravali”), *Mother India*, December 1959, p. 8.

“Fortunately he did not ask me whether I was indifferent to compliments, because *that* is much more difficult!”<sup>32</sup>

The Mother, indeed, knew Alexandra David-Néel quite well. She said:

. . . once, very long ago, when I was still in Paris and used to see Mme. David-Néel almost every day, she, you see, was full of her own idea and told me, “You should not think of an action, it means attachment for the action; when you want to do something, it means that you are still tied to the things of this world.” Then I told her, “No, there is nothing easier. You have only to imagine *everything* that has been done before and all that will be done later and all that is happening now, and you will then realise that your action is a breath, like this, one second in eternity, and you can no longer be attached to it.” At that time I didn’t know the text of the Gita. I had not read it completely yet, you see . . . (*some words inaudible here*) . . . not this verse which I translate in my own way: “And detached from all fruit of action, act.” It is not like this, but still that’s what it means. This I did not know, but I said exactly what is said in the Gita.<sup>33</sup>

The Mother narrated another interesting incident that occurred during David-Néel’s perilous and thrilling adventure travel to Tibet. She was in a small group when they were crossing the tiger-infested dense forests in Indo-China. On one particular evening they had not reached their camp and her meditation time, which she always meticulously followed, arrived. So she told her companions to continue and she would join them when they reach camp. She was warned that some of the tigers were man-eaters who come out in the evening but she was adamant. After entering into meditation she felt an unpleasant presence. On opening her eyes, to her horror, she saw a man-eater right in front of her. So, like a good Buddhist, she said, “Well, if this is the way by which I shall attain Nirvana, very good. I have only to prepare to leave my body in a suitable way, in the proper spirit.” And she once more entered into an intense meditation. Time passed and nothing happened and after her meditation was over she opened her eyes only to find that the tiger had gone, impressed perhaps by her immobility. She then calmly made her way to camp to join her group.<sup>34</sup>

Someone once asked Sri Aurobindo about Alexandra David-Néel and her book *With Mystics and Magicians in Tibet*. He replied:

Her story about her travels is perfectly authentic. She came here once to Pondicherry and saw me on her way to the North — that was before the Mother came here. Mother knew her very well in Paris. Even before she went to Tibet

32. *CWM*, Vol. 7, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 388.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 392-93.

34. *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., pp. 53-54.



she was a Buddhist and deeply versed in Buddhism. As to the authenticity of all in this book (magic, mysticism) Mother cannot say as she has not read it. But she is not a woman with any imagination or invention and has a rather hard positive mind, — if there are any “travellers’ tales” she is more likely to have heard them than invented them.<sup>35</sup>

Sri Aurobindo has also noted: “The Tibetans indulge widely in occult processes; if you see the books of Madame David-Néel who has lived in Tibet you will get an idea of their expertness in these things.”<sup>36</sup>

Alexandra David-Néel came to Pondicherry in November 1911, specifically to meet Sri Aurobindo. In a letter dated 27 November, 1911, to her husband, she exults at meeting Sri Aurobindo:

I spent two wonderful hours reviewing the ancient philosophical ideas of India with a man of rare intelligence. He belongs to that uncommon category that I so much admire, the reasonable mystics. I am truly grateful to the friends who advised me to visit this man. He thinks with such clarity, there is such lucidness in his reasoning, such lustre in his eyes, that he leaves one with the impression of having contemplated the genius of India such as one dreams it to be after reading the noblest pages of Hindu philosophy. . . .

What a different atmosphere there was in that silent house in Pondicherry! Through it passed the breath of the things that are eternal. In the calm evening, seated by a window that looked out over the rather funereal gardens of this defunct city, it seemed as if we could see beyond life and death. . . .<sup>37</sup>

And in another letter to her husband dated 19 December, 1911, she writes:

. . . One of these days I’m going to write to that Hindu of Pondicherry I mentioned earlier. He has a keen power of analysis, and a critical turn of mind. . . . Calling his attention to the experiments he himself is conducting with careful and meticulous control, I will ask him: “Am I entering *samādhi*, am I really touching Nirvana, or is it just fatigue, or perhaps my sensations are being dulled by age? . . . Are my indifference, my beatitude, of a transcendental kind, or is it only torpor, the beginning of my decline?”. . . I imagine that the question will make him laugh, as he laughed so sweetly the day I told him, in regard to something similar: “One reaches a point where one no longer knows whether one is becoming prodigiously wise, or taking leave of one’s senses. . . .”<sup>38</sup>

35. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 183.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 385.

37. ‘Alexandra David-Néel’s Recollections’, *Mother India*, August 2009, p. 625 (Alexandra David-Néel, *Journal de Voyage: lettres à son mari [11 août 1904-27 décembre 1917]*, translated from French).

38. *Ibid.*, p. 626.

She further writes to her husband on 14 February, 1912:

... This morning I went to Government House [in Calcutta]. . . . Of course it was known, here too, that I had been to Pondicherry and seen Aurobindo Ghose. I had no idea he was such an important man. If I had known, I would have tried to make him speak on politics to see what sort of political ideas would germinate in the brain of a Vedantic mystic. But though I knew he had been involved in a political trial, I did not know the precise reason. This morning the private secretary to the Viceroy told me, “I think he considers our civilisation, our education and all our modern progress to be godless, and therefore condemns them.” This may very well be. Hindus look at the world from a different angle than we do. If our interview had not been limited to a few hours at twilight, in the monastic house in Pondicherry, I might have picked his brain and discovered where the cracks in our Western materialistic civilisation lie. . . . But it may be that I owe a beautiful memory to my being insufficiently informed about him — false and illusory, no doubt, like most beautiful memories: the vast empty room, the window open on the mauve sky of evening, and Aurobindo Ghose and I speaking of the supreme Brahman, the eternal existence, and for a moment crossing the threshold of the Beyond, where life and death cease, and living the dream of the Upanishads. . . .<sup>39</sup>

Despite Alexandra David-Néel being an adept Buddhist she, unlike Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, was not entirely above criticism. In 1965 the Mother told a disciple:

Oh, if you want to be amused, I have received a letter from Alexandra David-Néel. . . . You know that we had been corresponding and that she was the “great protector” of Tibetan lamas (one of them was her “son” and he died there, so she was feeling quite lonely). I told her that we had been put in contact with all those Tibetans<sup>40</sup> and I suggested she might take another one with her (because she had written to me about this). And I added that they would certainly be very glad to serve her in gratitude for the great intellectual progress they would be making with her — she never forgave me! Never forgave me. Because I wrote “intellectual” instead of “spiritual” (I consider she is quite incapable of making anyone progress spiritually, while intellectually, she is first-rate). And since that time, no more letters, nothing. The other day, I got a letter in which she writes, “Dear friend of the past, I have heard about the attack on the Ashram” (you should have read the letter, it was marvellous!), “and I hope that nothing untoward has happened to you. But now that the Ashram’s invulnerability has

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 626-27.

40. Mother has received several Tibetans since the invasion of Tibet.

been destroyed, attacks may recur, so I presume you will leave Pondicherry. . . .” (*Mother laughs*) I simply answered her, “Dear friend of always (*laughing*), do not worry, all is well. Above the forces of destruction, there is the divine Grace, which protects and mends,” and I simply put, “Yours very affectionately.” And I enclosed in the letter the message<sup>41</sup> of the 21<sup>st</sup>.

That woman is eating herself away. Every time I had the opportunity, I spoke to her about Buddha’s love; I told her, “But Buddha was full of love!” And that makes her blood boil!

Well.<sup>42</sup>

As regards Alexandra David-Néel’s remark earlier made to the Mother in Paris about the difficulty to be “indifferent to compliments”, the Mother offers us a solution to overcome the weakness of succumbing to praise or criticism, namely to awaken the psychic fire within us:

One of the commonest demands of the vital is for praise. It hates to be criticised and treated as if it were of little importance. But it must be always prepared for rebuffs and stand them with absolute calm; nor must it pay attention to compliments, forgetting that each movement of self-satisfaction is an offering at the altar of the lords of falsehood. . . .

What, however, is of genuine worth is the opinion of the Truth. When there is somebody who is in contact with the Divine Truth and can express it, then the opinions given out are no mere compliments or criticisms but what the Divine thinks of you, the value it sets on your qualities, its unerring stamp on your efforts. It must be your desire to hold nothing in esteem except the word of the Truth; and in order thus to raise your standard you must keep Agni, the soul’s flame of transformation, burning in you. It is noteworthy how, when Agni flares up, you immediately develop a loathing for the cheap praise which formerly used to gratify you so much, and understand clearly that your love of praise was a low movement of the untransformed nature. Agni makes you see what a vast vista of possible improvement stretches in front of you, by filling you with a keen sense of your present insufficiency. The encomium lavished on you by others so disgusts you that you feel almost bitter towards those whom you would have once considered your friends; whereas all criticism comes as a welcome fuel to your humble aspiration towards the Truth. No longer do you feel depressed or slighted by the hostility of others. For, at least, you are able to ignore it with the greatest ease; at the most, you appreciate it as one more

41. Message of 21<sup>st</sup> February, 1965: “Above all the complications of the so-called human wisdom stands the luminous simplicity of the Divine’s Grace, ready to act if we allow It to do so.”

42. Mother’s conversation with a disciple on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 1965.

testimony to your present unregenerate state, inciting you to surpass yourself by surrendering to the Divine.<sup>43</sup>

Besides being indifferent to flattery and praise, Sri Aurobindo was impervious to prestige and honour. Sri Aurobindo was one of the most respected professors at Baroda College. Dinendra Kumar Roy notes:

Some of the professors of Baroda College were selected as Examiners for the Bombay University, but I never saw the name of the brilliant Aurobindo on the list of Examiners! Perhaps he never asked for this honour. Besides, Aurobindo did not have time to examine the university students' test-papers.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, from his student days in England and later during his service at Baroda, Sri Aurobindo did not give importance to getting recognition. K. M. Munshi, a student at Baroda College, writes that Sri Aurobindo “did not care for personal popularity.”<sup>45</sup>

Later in the selfless goal to liberate his country, Sri Aurobindo gave up his promising career at Baroda, despite the Maharaja's several desperate attempts to dissuade him. Unlike other political leaders, Sri Aurobindo tried to keep himself out of the glare of publicity, Suresh Chandra, a sub-editor in *Bande Mataram*, writes of Sri Aurobindo's temperament: “The ‘Chief’, the title by which he was known in the *Bande Mataram* Office, showed an instinct for journalism that was remarkable for one of his retiring and recluse habits.”<sup>46</sup>

However, after Sri Aurobindo's arrest in the *Bande Mataram* Sedition Case in August 1907, Hemendra Prasad Ghose, a writer for *Bande Mataram*, notes: “Though by temperament a recluse, Aurobindo was no longer able to avoid the attention of the people and soon came to be recognised as one of the most prominent leaders of the New Party.”<sup>47</sup>

Girijashankar Roychowdhury's Bengali biography of Sri Aurobindo also touches upon the case:

Till today Sri Aurobindo was the leader of Bengal, but in a week he grew renowned in the whole of India . . . Since the year 1902 he had been the founder of secret societies and was an unrevealed revolutionary. People knew Bipin Chandra as the editor of the *Bande Mataram*; Sri Aurobindo's name was undisclosed. But because of the case in the month of August 1907 his name

43. *CWM*, Vol. 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., pp. 137-38.

44. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 2006, pp. 25-26.

45. K. M. Munshi, *Swapnaadrashita*; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

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

47. Hemendra Prasad Ghose, ‘Reminiscences of Aurobindo Ghose’, *Orient Illustrated Weekly*, 27 February 1949; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

spread in all the provinces of India. Sri Aurobindo emerged on the contemporary political stage as an undisguised leader and in the role of a great actor. From an unrevealed revolutionary to a well-revealed leader — this was a great change indeed . . .<sup>48</sup>

In spite of his disinclination for fame, the sedition case forced Sri Aurobindo out in the open. He writes in the third person:

. . . he preferred to remain and act and even to lead from behind the scenes without his name being known in public; it was the Government’s action in prosecuting him as editor of the *Bande Mataram* that forced him into public view. And from that time forward he became openly, what he had been for sometime already, a prominent leader of the Nationalist party, its principal leader in action in Bengal and the organiser there of its policy and strategy.<sup>49</sup>

Elsewhere he has noted in the third person:

Sri Aurobindo was prosecuted for sedition in 1907 and acquitted. Up till now an organiser and writer, he was obliged by this event and by the imprisonment or disappearance of other leaders to come forward as the acknowledged head of the party in Bengal and to appear on the platform for the first time as a speaker.”<sup>50</sup>

On his acquittal in the aforesaid case, the *Indian Patriot* wrote that millions of his countrymen were at that moment doing homage to Sri Aurobindo by “pronouncing his name with reverence and gratitude”. It also noted his predisposition to quietly work for the country: “Mr. Aurobindo Ghose is no notoriety hunter, is no demagogue who wants to become prominent by courting conviction for sedition.”<sup>51</sup>

Here it must be mentioned that Bipin Pal was sent to jail for six months for refusing to give evidence against Sri Aurobindo in the *Bande Mataram* Sedition case. This was also alluded to by Beachcroft in the *Alipore Bomb Case*: “One word with reference to his connection with the meeting to welcome Bipin Chandra Pal on his release from jail. Whether his views agree with Bipin’s or not, there is nothing calling for comment in the fact that he joined in welcoming a man imprisoned for refusing to give evidence in a case in which Arabindo was the accused.”<sup>52</sup>

Bipin Chandra Pal was originally the editor but soon after Sri Aurobindo became

48. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, January 2014, p. 33.

49. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 52.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

51. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 244.

52. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, May 2016, p. 389.

the *de facto* editor. There was an attempt to replace Bipin Pal’s name as editor with Sri Aurobindo’s but Sri Aurobindo did not approve of it. About the editorship at *Bande Mataram*, Sukumar Sen, an affluent merchant close to the Mullick family and a share-holder in the Company which floated *Bande Mataram*, wrote:

Aurobindo and Bipin were appointed Joint Editors. . . . The Directors or most of them did not want the sole control of Bipin Chandra Pal. Most of them wanted Aurobindo in preference to Bipin. . . . Bipin refused to do anything with the paper unless he had sole control. I did not understand that at that time, but it transpired afterwards, in the course of a few days after the meeting. It was understood that Bipin would not come unless he had sole control after the resolution appointing Joint Editors. Aurobindo was offered the sole Editorship, but he would not take it. . . . I was chiefly concerned in getting Aurobindo’s name printed as Editor. I gave orders in an anticipation of getting his approval. He would not approve of it. He told me so and wrote a letter to Subodh, protesting against it. I saw the letter. In consequence of that his name was not published any more. I had his name published to further the interest of the paper.<sup>53</sup>

It was the 12<sup>th</sup> December 1906 issue of the *Bande Mataram* that had Sri Aurobindo’s name printed as editor. About this incident Sri Aurobindo writes:

Hemprasad Ghose and Shyamsundar Chakrabarti joined the editorial staff but they could not get on with Bepin Babu and were supported by the Mullicks. Finally Bepin Pal had to retire, I don’t remember whether in November or December, probably the latter. I was myself very ill, almost to death, in my father-in-law’s house in [Mott’s] Lane and did not know what was going on. They put my name as editor on the paper without my consent, but I spoke to the Secretary pretty harshly and had the insertion discontinued. I also wrote a strong letter on the subject to Subodh. From that time Bepin Pal had no connection with the *Bande Mataram*.<sup>54</sup>

Sri Aurobindo saw weaknesses in Bipin Pal’s leadership but he also saw wonderful qualities in Pal and thus was against his exclusion from *Bande Mataram*. He notes:

But after a time dissensions arose between Bepin Pal on one side and the other contributors and the directors of the Company because of temperamental incompatibility and differences of political view especially with regard to the

53. *Ibid.*, *Mother India*, January 2016, p. 37.

54. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, pp. 79-80.

secret revolutionary action with which others sympathised but to which Bepin Pal was opposed. This ended soon in Bepin Pal’s separation from the journal. Sri Aurobindo would not have consented to this departure, for he regarded the qualities of Pal as a great asset to the *Bande Mataram*, since Pal, though not a man of action or capable of political leadership, was perhaps the best and most original political thinker in the country, an excellent writer and a magnificent orator: but the separation was effected behind Sri Aurobindo’s back when he was convalescing from a dangerous attack of fever.<sup>55</sup>

*Bande Mataram* was perhaps the foremost revolutionary paper in the history of Indian media. Eminent Historian R. C. Majumdar noted: “Aravinda’s articles in the *Bande Mataram* put the Extremist Party on a high pedestal all over India.”<sup>56</sup>

In the international press the *Times* of London remarked that the *Bande Mataram* was edited with “a literary ability rare in the Anglo-native press . . .”<sup>57</sup> And curiously Theodore Roosevelt, President of the U.S.A. from 1901 till 1909, requested Lord Minto for a copy of the *Bande Mataram*. After perusing the journal he said it was “very interesting”.<sup>58</sup> Suresh Chandra Deb, a sub-editor at *Bande Mataram*, writes: “In August-September 1906 Sri Aurobindo’s writings showed the quality of a master that was an inspiration to thousands. And almost daily Reuter and the correspondents of the foreign Press used to cable the news and the views published in the *Bande Mataram* as reflecting the authentic feelings of the Indian people in their struggle for national self-respect which is *Swaraj*.”<sup>59</sup>

People were thinking that Bipin Pal was the editor and giving credit to him instead of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo, however, was unconcerned about it. During the *Bande Mataram* case the *Madras Standard* wrote:

Perhaps, very few outside Bengal have heard Mr. Arabinda Ghose so much so that even the London *Times* has persisted in saying that none but Mr. Bepin Chandra Pal could be the author of the able articles appearing in the *Bande Mataram*. . . . No English or Anglo-Indian paper, so far as we are aware, has failed to recognise the singular literary ability and originality of the leading articles in *Bande Mataram*, but many people attribute their authorship to Mr. Bepin Chandra Pal, not knowing who exactly was the power behind the paper.<sup>60</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s indifference to Bipin Pal getting credit for the articles written by him was something reminiscent of his fiery path-breaking articles in *Indu*

55. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

56. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Vol. V, p. 377.

57. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 223.

58. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, November 2013, p. 928.

59. Suresh Chandra Deb, ‘Sri Aurobindo as I Knew Him’, *Mother India*, November 2002, p. 947.

60. Anurag Banerjee, ‘Sri Aurobindo – The Prophet of Nationalism’, *Sraddha*, 21 February 2018, p. 110.

*Prakash* that would have been the envy of any writer or patriot, and yet were written anonymously.

However, sometime in 1909-10, in his journal *Svaraj*, which he was editing from London, Bipin Chandra Pal himself clarified:

This paper *Bande Mataram* — at once secured for itself a recognised position in Indian journalism. The hand of the master was in it from the very beginning. Its bold attitude, its vigorous thinking, its clear ideas, its chaste and powerful diction, its scorching sarcasm and refined witticism, were unsurpassed by any journal in the country, either Indian or Anglo-Indian. It at once raised the tone of every Bengali paper, and compelled the admiration of even hostile Anglo-Indian editors. Morning after morning, not only Calcutta but the educated community almost in every part of the country, eagerly awaited its vigorous pronouncements on the stirring questions of the day. It even forced itself upon the notice of the callous and self-centred British press. Long extracts from it began to be reproduced in the exclusive columns of the *Times* in London. It was a force in the country which none dared to ignore, however much they might fear or hate it; and Aravinda was the leading spirit, the central figure in the new journal. The opportunities that were denied him in the National College he found in the pages of the *Bande Mataram*, and from a tutor of a few youths he thus became the teacher of a whole nation.<sup>61</sup>

On Sri Aurobindo's passing, the former editor of *Statesman* of Calcutta, S. K. Ratcliffe, paid a glowing tribute to Sri Aurobindo in the *Manchester Guardian*:

We know Aurobindo Ghose only as a revolutionary nationalist and editor of a flaming newspaper which struck a ringing new note in Indian daily journalism.

It was in 1906, shortly after Curzon's retirement that Sri Aurobindo and his friends started *Bande Mataram* (Hail to the Mother). It . . . was full of leading and special articles written in English with brilliance and pungency not hitherto attained in the Indian press. It was the most effective voice of what we then called national extremism.<sup>62</sup>

Later, in 1936, statesman and philosopher Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), who later became the second President of India and a Bharat Ratna awardee, had stolen many of Sri Aurobindo's ideas and plagiarised several sentences en masse in his lecture that was later published in *The Hindu*. A disciple, thinking of deploring the theft by either writing to Radhakrishnan or informing the newspaper, brought this

61. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 200.

62. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2006, p. 90.



to the attention of his Guru. Sri Aurobindo’s magnanimous colourful answer read: “I don’t think it is worth while doing anything. The thefts are obvious, but if he wants to add some peacock plumes to his dun colours!”<sup>63</sup> A few days later Sri Aurobindo wrote to a disciple:

From the Yogic point of view one ought to be indifferent and without sense of ownership or desire of fame or praise. But for that one must have arrived at the Yogic poise — such a detachment is not possible without it. I do not mind Radhakrishnan’s lifting whole sentences and paragraphs from my writings at the World Conference as his own and getting credit for a new and quite original point of view.

But if I were eager to figure before the world as a philosopher, I would resent it. But even if one does not mind, one can see the impropriety of the action or take measures against its repetition, if one thinks it worth while.<sup>64</sup>

Earlier in 1934, Radhakrishnan wanted to introduce Sri Aurobindo to the Occident in his book and requested from him a philosophical article specifically aimed at the Western reader. He declined making it clear to Dilip Kumar Roy, who was acting as the intermediary, “Look here! Do these people expect me to turn myself again into a machine for producing articles? The times of *Bande Mataram* and *Arya* are over, thank God! I have now only the Ashram correspondence and that is ‘overwhelming’ enough . . .” On being informed that Sri Aurobindo was too occupied to contribute an article, Radhakrishnan did not relent and persisted. Dilip Kumar Roy then implored Sri Aurobindo, “Your name, Sir, is not yet known to the West and Radhakrishnan will give you wide publicity, fancy that!” Sri Aurobindo replied: “As to Radhakrishnan, I do not care whether he is right or wrong in his eagerness to get the contribution from me . . . I have no time.”<sup>65</sup> Finally matters came to such a pass that Sri Aurobindo had to personally write to Radhakrishnan:

I regret that you should have had to wait for the publication of your book on account of the contribution I could not write. . . .

I am entirely taken up by my present work which is exceedingly heavy and pressing . . . I hope therefore you will excuse me for not being able to comply with your request. I regret very much that I have to disappoint you, but it is not possible for me to avoid it.<sup>66</sup>

63. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 72.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

65. Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, Hari Krishna Mandir Trust, Pune, 2004, pp. 32-33.

66. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, pp. 444-45.

Radhakrishnan, though, later presented his book to Sri Aurobindo which was kept in an almirah along with the Collected Works of Shakespeare and Shelley, and other writers.<sup>67</sup>

Let us now revert back to the *Bande Mataram*. Sri Aurobindo did not openly speak about the true inner significance and impact of the journal. It was only many years later, when Gabriel E. Monod-Herzen, a scientist and professor who lived in the Ashram during the 1940s, submitted a manuscript of a biography that Sri Aurobindo, while correcting it, decided to write a separate note on his political life where a phrase reads:

The *Bande Mataram* was almost unique in journalistic history in the influence it exercised in converting the mind of a people and preparing it for revolution.<sup>68</sup>

And whilst clarifying a point to another disciple, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

And the second fact is that I do not care a button about my having my name in any blessed place. I was never ardent about fame even in my political days; I preferred to remain behind the curtain, push people without their knowing it and get things done. It was the confounded British Government that spoiled my game by prosecuting me [*in the Bande Mataram Sedition Case of August 1907*] and forcing me to be publicly known and a “leader”.<sup>69</sup>

(*To be continued*)

GAUTAM MALAKER

67. Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2000, p. 7.

68. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 56.

69. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 71.

*The crisis in which the Avatar appears, though apparent to the outward eye only as a crisis of events and great material changes, is always in its source and real meaning a crisis in the consciousness of humanity when it has to undergo some grand modification and effect some new development.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Essays on the Gita*, *CWSA*, Vol. 19, p. 168)

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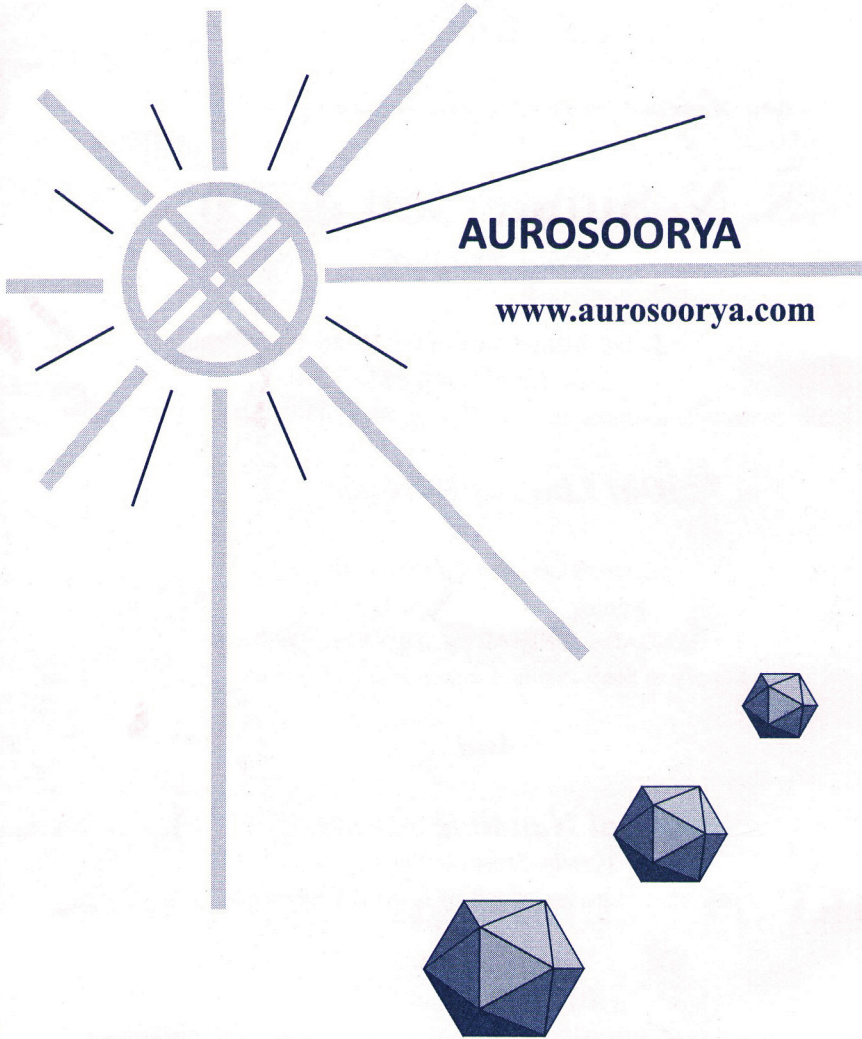
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