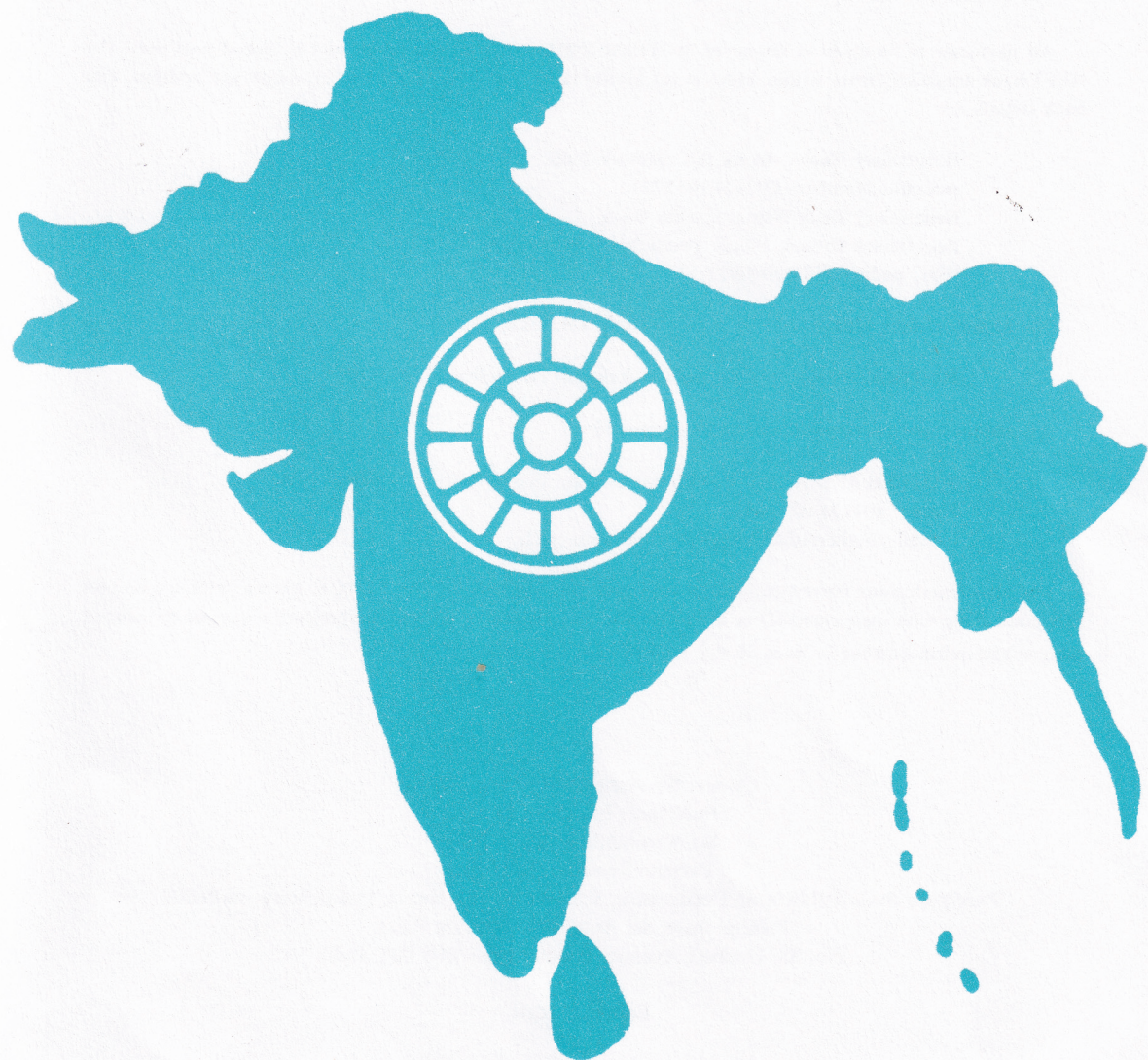


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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE



NOVEMBER 2023

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Owner: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Publisher: Manoj Das Gupta

Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Printer: Swadhin Chatterjee

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

Printed from: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press,
No. 38, Goubert Avenue, Pondicherry - 605 001, India

Editor: S. Ravi

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

Associate Editors: HEMANT KAPOOR & RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

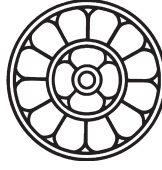
Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India: RNI No. 8667/63

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

NOVEMBER 2023

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. LXXVI

No. 11

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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Two corrections in the October 2023 issue:

p. 57 – ‘December-January 1927’, should be ‘December 1926 – January 1927’.

p. 58 – The Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust was formed in 1955 and not 1954 as mentioned.

BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJI

How hast thou lost, O month of honey and flowers,
The voice that was thy soul! Creative showers,
The cuckoo's daylong cry and moan of bees,
Zephyrs and streams and softly-blossoming trees
And murmuring laughter and heart-easing tears
And tender thoughts and great and the compeers
Of lily and jasmine and melodious birds,
All these thy children into lovely words
He changed at will and made soul-moving books
From hearts of men and women's honied looks.
O master of delicious words! the bloom
Of chompuk and the breath of king-perfume
Have made each musical sentence with the noise
Of women's ornaments and sweet household joys
And laughter tender as the voice of leaves
Playing with vernal winds. The eye receives
That reads these lines an image of delight,
A world with shapes of spring and summer, noon and night;
All nature in a page, no pleasing show
But men more real than the friends we know.
O plains, O hills, O rivers of sweet Bengal,
O land of love and flowers, the spring-bird's call
And southern wind are sweet among your trees:
Your poet's words are sweeter far than these.
Your heart was this man's heart. Subtly he knew
The beauty and divinity in you.
His nature kingly was and as a god
In large serenity and light he trod
His daily way, yet beauty, like soft flowers
Wreathing a hero's sword, ruled all his hours.
Thus moving in these iron times and drear,
Barren of bliss and robbed of golden cheer,
He sowed the desert with ruddy-hearted rose,
The sweetest voice that ever spoke in prose.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 34-35)

BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJI

(Continued from the issue of October 2023)

IV

His Versatility

Whenever a literary man gives proof of a high capacity in action people always talk about it as if a miracle had happened. The vulgar theory is that worldly abilities are inconsistent with the poetic genius. Like most vulgar theories it is a conclusion made at a jump from a few superficial appearances. The inference to be drawn from a sympathetic study of the lives of great thinkers and great writers is that except in certain rare cases versatility is one condition of genius. Indeed the literary ability may be said to contain all the others, and the more so when it takes the form of criticism or of any art, such as the novelist's, which proceeds principally from criticism. Goethe in Germany, Shakespeare, Fielding and Matthew Arnold in England are notable instances. Even where practical abilities seem wanting, a close study will often reveal their existence rusting in a lumber-room of the man's mind. The poet and the thinker are helpless in the affairs of the world, because they choose to be helpless: they sacrifice the practical impulse in their nature, that they may give full expression to the imaginative or speculative impulse; they choose to burn the candle at one end and [not] at the other, but for all that the candle has two ends and not one. Bankim, the greatest of novelists, had the versatility developed to its highest expression. Scholar, poet, essayist, novelist, philosopher, lawyer, critic, official, philologist and religious innovator, — the whole world seemed to be shut up in his single brain. At first sight he looks like a bundle of contradictions. He had a genius for language and a gift for law; he could write good official papers and he could write a matchless prose; he could pass examinations and he could root out an organised tyranny; he could concern himself with the largest problems of metaphysics and with the smallest details of word-formation: he had a feeling for the sensuous facts of life and a feeling for the delicate spiritualities of religion: he could learn grammar and he could write poetry.

What shall we say in the presence of this remarkable versatility? Over-borne by the pomp of it and the show, shall we set it down as an adjunct of intellectual kingliness? Yes, to have it is an adjunct of intellectual kingliness, but to give expression to it is an intellectual mistake. To give impartial expression to all your gifts is to miss your vocation. Bankim was never so far led astray as that. His province was literature, prose literature, and he knew it. His lyrics are enchanting,

but few; metaphysics he followed at the end of his life and law at the beginning; and he used scholarship and philology, simply as other great writers have used them, to give subtlety of suggestion and richness of word-colour to his literary style. Even in the province of prose literature, where he might have worked out his versatility to advantage, he preferred to specialise. He never stepped unpardonably out of his province, but he was occasionally led astray by this or that lure to allow small drains on his fund of energy; and so far as he did so, he sinned against his own soul. The one great and continuous drain was the tax put upon him by official drudgery. Under the morbid and wasteful conditions of middle-class life in India genius, when not born in the purple, has put before it, like the fair Rosamund of Norman romance, a choice between two methods of suicide, the Services and the Law. It must either take the poisoned bowl or the dagger. And in this limited circle of professions the Educational Service with its system of respites and remissions, and the Executive Service with its indirect rather than direct tax on the pure intellect, present, it may be, the points of least repulsion. But they are none the less a fearful drain because they are, under existing circumstances, necessary.

In this versatility Bankim was only a type of the intellectual Hindu. This gift, at once a blessing and a curse, is the most singular characteristic of those two Hindu races, which have the destinies of the country in their keeping. It is the evidence of our high blood, our patent of nobility among the nations; for it comes of the varied mental experience of our forefathers, of the nation's three thousand years of intellectual life. But it is at the same time a rock ahead, of which the Hindu genius has yet to pilot itself clear. To find your vocation and keep to it, that is not indeed a showy, but it is a simple and solid rule of life. We however prefer to give an impartial expression to all our gifts, forgetting that the mind is as mortal and as much subject to wear and tear as any perishable thing, forgetting that specialism is one condition of the highest accomplishment, forgetting that our stock of energy is limited and that what we expend in one direction, we lose in another. We insist on burning the candle at both ends. This spirit appears in our system of public instruction, the most ingeniously complete machine for murder that human stupidity ever invented, and murder not only of a man's body but of a man's soul, of that sacred fire of individuality in him which is far holier and more precious than this mere mortal breath. It appeared too with melancholy effects in the literary fate of Kashinath Telang. It was one reason why he, a man of such large abilities, the most considerable genius a highly intellectual people has produced, yet left nothing to which the world will return with unfailing delight. Telang, it is true, worked mainly in English, a language he had learned; and in a language you have learned, you may write graciously, correctly, pleasingly, but you will never attain to the full stature of your genius. But it was a yet more radical mistake that he, whose power was pre-eminently literary, as any eye trained to these things can see that it was, yet allowed it to run in every direction except the very one that nature had marked out for it. Bankim was more fortunate.

He wrote in his own beautiful mother tongue, his best work was literary and his immense originality would in any case have forced its way out. But one cannot think without a pang of the many delightful master-pieces he might have brought into his garner, if he had had leisure to work single-heartedly in the field of his richest harvests. The body of work he gave us in nearly forty years of intellectual activity amounts to ten novels, two critical works on religion and some scattered literature. Small in quantity, it is pure gold in quality. And it may be that in no case would he have written much. Nature gives us quartz profusely and mixed alloy in abundance, but pure gold only in rare parcels and infinitesimal portions.

V

His Literary History

Bankim's literary activity began for any serious purpose at Khulna, but he had already trifled with poetry in his student days. At that time the poet Iswara Chandra Gupta was publishing two papers, the *Sangbad Prabhakar* and the *Sadhuranjan*, which Dwarkanath Mitra and Dinbandhu Mitra were helping with clever school-boy imitation of Iswara Chandra's style. Bankim also entered these fields, but his striking originality at once distinguished him from the mere cleverness of his competitors, and the fine critical taste of Iswara Chandra easily discovered in this obscure student a great and splendid genius. Like Madhu Sudan Dutt Bankim began by an ambition to excel in English literature, and he wrote a novel in English called *Rajmohan's Wife*. But, again like Madhu Sudan, he at once realised his mistake. The language which a man speaks and which he has never learned, is the language of which he has the nearest sense and in which he expresses himself with the greatest fulness, subtlety and power. He may neglect, he may forget it, but he will always retain for it a hereditary aptitude, and it will always continue for him the language in which he has the safest chance of writing with originality and ease. To be original in an acquired tongue is hardly feasible. The mind, conscious of a secret disability with which it ought not to have handicapped itself, instinctively takes refuge in imitation, or else in bathos and the work turned out is ordinarily very mediocre stuff. It has something unnatural and spurious about it like speaking with a stone in the mouth or walking upon stilts. Bankim and Madhu Sudan, with their overflowing originality, must have very acutely felt the tameness of their English work. The one wrote no second English poem after the *Captive Lady*, the other no second English novel after *Rajmohan's Wife*.

Bankim's first attempt of any importance was begun at Khulna and finished at Baruipur, the birthplace of some of his finest work. It was the *Durgesh Nandini*, a name ever memorable as the first-born child of the New Prose. At Baruipur he wrote also *Kopal Kundala* and *Mrinalini* and worked at the famous *Poison-Tree*. At

Barhampur, his next station, he began editing the *Bangadarshan*, a magazine which made a profound impression and gave birth to that increasing periodical literature of to-day, of which *Bharati*, the literary organ of the cultured Tagore family, is the most finished type. Since then Bankim has given us some very ripe and exquisite work, *Chandrashekhar*, *Krishna Kanta's Will*, *Debi Chaudhurani*, *Anandmath*, *Sitarām*, *Indira* and *Kamal Kanta*. Dating from his magistracy at Barhampur broken health and increasing weakness attended the great novelist to his pyre; but the strong unwearied intellect struggled with and triumphed over the infirmities of the body. His last years were years of suffering and pain, but they were also years of considerable fruitfulness and almost unceasing labour. He had been a sensuous youth and a joyous man. Gifted supremely with the artist's sense for the warmth and beauty of life, he had turned with a smile from the savage austerities of the ascetic and with a shudder from the dreary creed of the Puritan. But now in that valley of the shadow of death his soul longed for the sustaining air of religion. More and more the philosophic bias made its way into his later novels, until at last the thinker in him proved too strong for the artist. Amid his worst bodily sufferings he was poring over the *Bhagavadgita* and the *Vedas*, striving to catch the deeper and sacred sense of those profound writings. To give that to his countrymen was the strenuous aim of his dying efforts. A *Life of Krishna*, a book on the *Essence of Religion*, a rendering of the *Bhagavadgita* and a version of the *Vedas* formed the staple of his literary prospects in his passage to the pyre. The first realised themselves and the *Bhagavadgita* was three parts finished, but the version of the *Vedas*, which should have been a priceless possession, never got into the stage of execution. Death, in whose shadow he had so long dwelt, took the pen from his hand, before it could gather up the last gleanings of that royal intellect. But his ten masterpieces of fiction are enough. They would serve to immortalise ten reputations.

HIS PLACE IN LITERATURE

To assign Bankim's place in Bengali literature is sufficiently easy: there is no prose-writer, and only one poet who can compete with him. More difficulties enter into any comparison of him with the best English novelists; yet I think he stands higher than any of them, except one; in certain qualities of each he may fall short, but his sum of qualities is greater; and he has this supreme advantage over them all that he is a more faultless artist. In his life and fortunes, and sometimes even in his character, he bears a striking resemblance to the father of English fiction, Henry Fielding; but the literary work of the two men moves upon different planes. Philosophical culture, and deep feeling for the poetry of life and an unfailing sense of beauty are distinguishing marks of Bankim's style; they find no place in Fielding's. Again, Bankim, after a rather silly fashion of speaking now greatly in vogue, has

been pointed at by some as the Scott of Bengal. It is a marvellous thing that the people who misuse this phrase as an encomium, cannot understand that it conveys an insult. They would have us imagine that one of the most perfect and original of novelists is a mere replica of a faulty and incomplete Scotch author! Scott had many marvellous and some unique gifts, but his defects are at least as striking. His style is never quite sure; indeed, except in his inspired moments, he has no style: his Scotch want of humour is always militating against his power of vivid incident; his characters, and chiefly those in whom he should interest us most, are usually very manifest puppets; and they have all this shortcoming, that they have no soul: they may be splendid or striking or bold creations, but they live from outside and not from within. Scott could paint outlines, but he could not fill them in. Here Bankim excels; speech and action with him are so closely interpenetrated and suffused with a deeper existence that his characters give us the sense of their being real men and women. Moreover to the wonderful passion and poetry of his finest creations there are in English fiction, outside the Brontës and that supreme genius, George Meredith, no parallel instances. Insight into the secrets of feminine character, that is another notable concomitant of the best dramatic power, and that too Bankim possesses. Wade as you will through the interminable bog of contemporary fiction, you will meet no living woman there. Even novelists of genius stop short at the outside: they cannot find their way into the soul. Here Fielding fails us; Scott's women are a mere gallery of wax figures, Rebecca herself being no more than a highly coloured puppet; even in Thackeray the real women are only three or four. But the supreme dramatic genius has found out this secret of femineity. Shakespeare had it to any degree, and in our own century Meredith, and among ourselves Bankim. The social reformer, gazing, of course, through that admirable pair of spectacles given to him by the Calcutta University, can find nothing excellent in Hindu life, except its cheapness, or in Hindu woman, except her subserviency. Beyond this he sees only its narrowness and her ignorance. But Bankim had the eye of a poet and saw much deeper than this. He saw what was beautiful and sweet and gracious in Hindu life, and what was lovely and noble in Hindu woman, her deep heart of emotion, her steadfastness, tenderness and loveliness, in fact, her woman's soul; and all this we find burning in his pages and made diviner by the touch of a poet and an artist. Our social reformers might learn something from Bankim. Their zeal at present is too little ruled by discretion. They are like bad tailors very clever at spoiling the rich stuffs given over to their shaping but quite unable to fit the necessities of the future. They have passed woman through an English crucible and in place of the old type, which, with all its fatal defects, had in it some supreme possibilities, they have turned out a soulless and superficial being fit only for flirtation, match-making and playing on the piano. They seem to have a passion for reforming every good thing out of existence. It is about time this miserable bungling should stop. Surely it would be possible, without spoiling that divine nobleness of soul, to give it a wider culture and mightier channels! So we

should have a race of women intellectually as well as emotionally noble, fit to be the mothers not of chatterers and money-makers, but of high thinkers and heroic doers.

Of Bankim's style I shall hardly trust myself to speak. To describe its beauty, terseness, strength and sweetness is too high a task for a pen like mine. I will remark this only that what marks Bankim above all, is his unfailing sense of beauty. This is indeed the note of Bengali literature and the one high thing it has gained from a close acquaintance with European models. The hideous grotesques of old Hindu Art, the monkey-rabble of Ram and the ten heads of Ravan, are henceforth impossible to it. The *Shakuntala* itself is not governed by a more perfect graciousness of conception or suffused with a more human sweetness than *Kopal Kundala* and the *Poison-Tree*.

VI

What He Did for Bengal

I have kept so far to Bankim's achievement looked at purely as literature. I now come to speak of it in the historic sense, of its relations to the Bengali language and potency over the Bengali race. Of this it is not easy to suggest any image without speaking in superlatives. I had almost said in one place that he created the language, and if one couples his name with Madhu Sudan Dutt's, the statement is hardly too daring. Before their advent the Bengali language, though very sweet and melodious, was an instrument with but one string to it. Except the old poet Bharatchandra, no supreme genius had taken it in hand; hence while prose hardly existed except in *Baital Pachisi* and some other tales about Vikramaditya, Bengali verse had very little to recommend it beyond a certain fatiguing sweetness. Virility, subtlety, scope, these were wanting to it. Then came Madhu Sudan and Bankim, and, like Terpander and Orpheus added fresh strings to the lyre. In Madhu Sudan's hands that nerveless and feminine dialect became the large utterance of the early Gods, a tongue epic and Titanic, a tongue for the storms and whirlwinds to speak in: he caught and studied his diction from the echo and rumour of the sea. All the stormiest passions of man's soul he expressed in gigantic language. We seem to hear Milton's Satan speaking in every line he wrote. But in Bankim's hands the Bengali language, before stammering and inarticulate, became a rich, musical and flexible organ vibrating to every human emotion and expressive of every beautiful or noble thought. I do not mean that there were no labourers in the field before Bankim and Madhu Sudan. The paths of the Gods are always prepared for them. Many daring minds were already at work, but they fell short of their high conception. Rammohan Ray, the great Vidyasagara, Okhay Kumar Dutt and the Bengali playwrights were all working bravely towards the same consummation. But Vidyasagara, though he had much in him of the scholar and critic, was nothing of an artist; Okhay Kumar's audience ran only to the subscribers of a single magazine; and the literary originality of the rest was not equal to their

audacity. None of them could transform and recreate with that sure and easy touch, which reveals the true maker of language.

Bankim moreover has this splendid distinction, that he more than anyone exalted Bengali from the status of a dialect to the majesty of a language. The immediate effect of English education had been to foster an indiscriminating love of things English and an unwise contempt for things Bengali. Among the rest the Bengali tongue was put by as an instrument hopelessly bad and unsatisfying; even Madhu Sudan in his youth neglected and forgot it. The strivings of Vidyasagara and Okhay Kumar Dutt were the strivings of a few far-sighted and patriotic men in a generation misled by false ideals. On that generation Madhu Sudan's first great poems, *Sharmishtha* and *Tilottama*, had a complex effect much of a piece with the sensation created by Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* in Elizabethan England or Hugo's *Hernani* in nineteenth century France. They took men's imaginations by storm with their splendour, passion and mighty imagery; by creating the Bengali blank verse they freed poetry from the facilities and prettinesses of the old rhymed stanza; by their magnificencies of style and emotion they brought new elements into Hindu literature, and they gave battle with their strange and fiery coloured music to the classic frigidity of the Sanscritists. They first sounded the note of Romanticism which still governs our literature. They revealed too those magnificent possibilities, latent in every Sanscritic language, which only wait for the magic touch of original genius to open out their store; and they set flowing that perennial fountain of gracious and noble poetry which is doing so much to bring beauty and high feeling into our lives and to produce a race of Bengalis braver and better than we. But at the same time they had to overcome a vast opposition. Lauded with rapturous enthusiasm by the cultured, they were anathematised by the pedants. All the Pandits, all the Sanscritists, all the fanatics of classicism, even the great Vidyasagara himself, then the intellectual dictator of Bengal, were startled out of their senses by these magnificent and mighty poems. *Tilottama* was a gauntlet thrown down by the Romantic school to the classical. Romanticism won: it was bound to win: it had on its side youth, fire, enthusiasm, the future, and the poems of an unexampled genius for its battle-cry. *Tilottama* had been the *casus belli*; that marvellous epic, the *Meghnad-badh*, was the *coup de grâce*. When Vidyasagara praised the *Meghnad-badh* as a supreme poem, the day of the Sanscritists was over. That cabal of Pandits which had shouted against Madhu Sudan, could only murmur weakly against Bankim; the conscience of the nation had passed out of their keeping. But still the victor's audience was small and went little beyond the class that followed him into battle, the geniuses, the literary men, the women, the cultured zamindars and those men of the stamp of Rajah Jyotindra Mohan Tagore, men of an extraordinary and original culture, who were then so common in Bengal, but are now almost obsolete. The great poet died with a limited audience and before the full consummation of his fame.

Bankim came into that heritage of peace which Madhu Sudan had earned. There

is, indeed, a curious contrast between these two builders of the Bengali language, so alike in their mission, but in their fortunes so dissimilar. Both were equipped with enormous stores of reading, both were geniuses of a vast originality, both had creative power, a fine sense for beauty, and a gift for emotion and pathos: both made the same false start. But here all likeness between them stops. One was the king of prose, the other the king of poetry; and their lives were of a piece with their writings. Madhu Sudan's is full of sound and passion, violence of heart, extravagance, intemperance, self-will, a life passing through grief, bitterness and anguish to a mournful and untimely doom. As we read the passage of that Titanic personality over a world too small for it, we seem to be listening again to the thunder-scene in *Lear*, or to some tragic piece out of Thucydides or Gibbon narrating the fall of majestic nations or the ruin of mighty kings. No sensitive man can read it without being shaken to the very heart. Even after his death Madhu Sudan's evil star followed him. Though a great poet among the greatest, he is read nowhere outside Bengal and the Panjab; and his name is not heard even in Bombay and Madras, provinces of his own native land. How different was it with Bankim, the genius of prose. His nature, with plenty of strength in it, was yet mild, calm and equable, clear and joyous, but not intemperate. Fortune's favourite to whom every door opened without keys, his life had in it that sedate maturity and august quiet, which, according to Epicurus, is the true attitude of the Gods, and which the Gods only give to those mortals, who, like themselves, have seen life steadily and seen it whole. And if his last years were stained with suffering, yet he died in the fruition of his greatness, amid the mourning of a nation which he had done much to create and whose imagination he had filled with so many beautiful thoughts and so many tender, passionate or glorious images.

Bankim's influence has been far-reaching and every day enlarges its bounds. What is its result? Perhaps it may very roughly be summed up thus. When a Mahratta or Gujerati has anything important to say, he says it in English; when a Bengali, he says it in Bengali. That is, I think, the fact which is most full of meaning for us in Bengal. It means besides other things less germane to literature, that, except in politics and journalism which is the handmaid of politics, English is being steadily driven out of the field. Soon it will only remain to weed it out of our conversation; and even to that wheel I am told that Babu Kali Prasunna Ghose has set his shoulder. However that may be, the works of this distinguished prose-writer are a remarkable proof of what I have just been saying. Not long ago anyone moving in that province of the mind which Babu Kali Prasunna has annexed, would have held it beneath the dignity of his subject to write in any medium but English. Work like Babu Kali Prasunna's marks an important stage in the great revolution of sentiment which our literary class has set going, the revolution of sentiment which promises to make the Bengalis a nation.

VII

Our Hope in the Future

But profound as have been its effects, this revolution is yet in its infancy. Visible on every side, in the waning influence of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, in the triumph of the Bengali language, in the return to Hinduism, in the pride of birth, the angry national feeling and the sensitiveness to insult, which are growing more and more common among our young men, it has nevertheless only begun its work and has many more fields to conquer. Calcutta is yet a stronghold of the Philistines; officialdom is honeycombed with the antinational tradition: in politics and social reform the workings of the new movement are yet obscure. The Anglicised Babu sits in the high place and rules the earth for a season. It is he who perorates on the Congress, who frolics in the abysmal fatuity of interpellation on the Legislative Council, who mismanages civic affairs in the smile of the City Corporation. He is the man of the present, but he is not the man of the future. On his generation, a generation servilely English and swayed by Keshab Chandra Sen and Kristo Das Pal, Bankim had little effect. Even now you will hear Anglicised Bengalis tell you with a sort of triumph that the only people who read Bengali books are the Bengali ladies. The sneer is a little out of date, but a few years ago it would not have been so utterly beside the mark. All honour then to the women of Bengal, whose cultured appreciation kept Bengali literature alive! And all honour to the noble few who with only the women of Bengal and a small class of cultured men to appreciate their efforts, adhered to the language our forefathers spoke, and did not sell themselves to the tongue of the foreigner! Their reward is the heartfelt gratitude of a nation and an immortal renown. Yes, the women of Bengal have always been lovers of literature and may they always remain so; but it is no longer true that they are its only readers. Already we see the embryo of a new generation soon to be with us, whose imagination Bankim has caught and who care not for Keshab Chandra Sen and Kristo Das Pal, a generation national to a fault, loving Bengal and her new glories, and if not Hindus themselves, yet zealous for the honour of the ancient religion and hating all that makes war on it. With that generation the future lies and not with the Indian Unnational Congress or the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. Already its vanguard is upon us. It has in it men of culture, men of talent, men of genius. Let it only be true to itself and we shall do yet more marvellous things in the future than we have done in the past. A Bengali may be pardoned who looking back to a splendid beginning and on to a hopeful sequel, indulges in proud and grandiose hopes.

Literature and learning are the provinces in which the Bengali is fitted to have kingship, and of the two literature rather than learning; but signs are not wanting that in other spheres also he may win laurels only less splendid. In painting and sculpture, in the plastic arts, the Hindu imagination has had no gift. The favourite

style is evidence of a debauched eye and a perverted taste. Yet even in this alien sphere a Bengali has been winning noble renown, and that too in Italy, the native land of painting, the land of Raphael, Da Vinci and Angelo, and among Italians, with whom artistic taste is an instinct. In religion too, the Bengali has the future in his hands. He was the first to revolt against the shortcomings of Hinduism, and he is the first who has attempted to give some shape to that New Hinduism, which is, one feels, his religious destiny. He has sojourned for some time in the religious thought of the foreigner, but he is now coming back to the creed of his fathers with strange and precious gifts in his hands. In politics he has always led and still leads. The Congress in Bengal is dying of consumption; annually its proportions shrink into greater insignificance; its leaders, the Bonnerjis and Banerjis and Lalmohan Ghoses have climbed into the rarefied atmosphere of the Legislative Council and lost all hold on the imagination of the young men. The desire for a nobler and more inspiring patriotism is growing more intense; and already in the Hindu revival and the rise of an Indigenous Trade Party we see the handwriting on the wall. This is an omen of good hope for the future; for what Bengal thinks tomorrow, India will be thinking tomorrow week. Even towards commerce and science, spheres in which he has been painfully helpless, the Bengali is casting wistful glances; but whether he will here as elsewhere ascend the ladder, can only be settled by experiment. He is almost too imaginative, restless and swayed by his feelings for paths in which a cold eye or an untroubled brain is the one thing needful. Nevertheless let Bengal only be true to her own soul, and there is no province in which she may not climb to greatness. That this is so, is largely due to the awakening and stimulating influence of Bankim on the national mind. Young Bengal gets its ideas, feelings and culture not from schools and colleges, but from Bankim's novels and Robindranath Tagore's poems; so true is it that language is the life of a nation.

Many are carrying on the great work in prose and poetry: Hemchandra, Nobin, Kamini Sen, Robindranath and Robindranath's sister, that flower of feminine culture in Bengal, Swarna Kumari Devi, and many more whose names it would take long to repeat; but another Bankim, another Madhu Sudan comes not again. Some are pointing to this as a sign of intellectual barrenness; but it is not so. Shakespeare and Milton came within the limits of a century! Since then there have been Keats, Wordsworth, Shelley, Tennyson, but not a second Shakespeare or Milton. Dante and Boccaccio came successively: since then there have been Berni, Boiardo, Alfieri, Tasso, but not a second Dante or Boccaccio. Such men come rarely in the lapse of centuries. Greece alone has presented the world an unbroken succession of supreme geniuses. There is nothing to prevent us Hindus, a nation created for thought and literature, from repeating that wonderful example. Greece is a high name, but what man has once done, man may again strive to do. All we need is not to tie ourselves down to a false ideal, not to load our brains with the pedantry of a false education, but to keep like those first builders a free intellect and a free soul. If we are careful to

do that, there is no reason why the creative impulse in Bengal should for a moment die out. But whatever else may perish or endure, Bankim's fame cannot die. Already it has overleaped the barrier between East and West; translations of his works are already appearing in English and German, and wherever they are read, they excite admiration, wonder and delight. O sage politicians, and subtle economists, whose heads run on Simultaneous Examinations and whose vision is bounded by Legislative Councils, what a lesson is here for you! Not in this way shall we exalt ourselves in the scale of nations, not in this way, O sages of the bench and sophists of the bar, but by things of which your legal wisdom takes little cognizance, by noble thoughts, by high deeds, by immortal writings. Bankim and Madhu Sudan have given the world three noble things. They have given it Bengali literature, a literature whose princelier creations can bear comparison with the proudest classics of modern Europe. They have given it the Bengali language. The dialect of Bengal is no longer a dialect, but has become the speech of Gods, a language unfading and indestructible, which cannot die except with the death of the Bengali nation, and not even then. And they have given it the Bengali nation; a people spirited, bold, ingenious and imaginative, high among the most intellectual races of the world, and if it can but get perseverance and physical elasticity, one day to be high among the strongest. This is surely a proud record. Of them it may be said in the largest sense that they, being dead, yet live. And when Posterity comes to crown with her praises the Makers of India, she will place her most splendid laurel not on the sweating temples of a place hunting politician nor on the narrow forehead of a noisy social reformer, but on the serene brow of that gracious Bengali who never clamoured for place or for power, but did his work in silence for love of his work, even as nature does, and just because he had no aim but to give out the best that was in him, was able to create a language, a literature and a nation.

(Concluded)

SRI AUROBINDO

(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 103-19)

THE NEXT STEP

(From the *Bande Mataram*, CALCUTTA, March 31st, 1908)

The condition of the poorer classes in this country is a subject which has till now been too much neglected, but can be neglected no longer if the blessing of God is to remain with our movement. The increasing poverty of the masses has been the subject of innumerable pamphlets, speeches and newspaper articles, but we are apt to think our duty done when we have proved that the poverty problem is there; we leave the solution to the future and forget that by the time the solution comes, the masses will have sunk into a condition of decay from which it will take the nation many decades to recover. We have been accustomed to deal only with the economical side of this poverty, but there is a moral side which is even more important. The Indian peasantry have always been distinguished from the less civilized masses of Europe by their superior piety, gentleness, sobriety, purity, thrift and native intelligence. They are now being brutalized by unexampled oppression; attracted to the liquor shops which a benevolent Government liberally supplies, bestialized by the example of an increasingly immoral aristocracy and gradually driven to the same habits of looseness and brutality which disgrace the European proletariats. This degeneration is proceeding with an alarming rapidity. In some parts of the country it has gone so far that recovery seems impossible. We have heard of districts in which the peasantry are so far reduced to poverty by the exactions of Zamindars, planters and police that the sturdier classes among them are taking to highway robbery and dacoity as the only possible means of livelihood. We have heard of villages where the liquor shop and the prostitute, institutions unknown twenty-five years ago, have now the mastery of the poorest villagers. Many of the villages in West Bengal are now well supplied with these essentials of Western civilization. The people ground down between the upper millstone of the indigo planter and the nether millstone of the Zamindar, are growing full of despair and look to violence as their only remedy. These conditions of the worst districts tend to become general and unless something is done to stem the tide of evil, it will sweep away the soul of India in its turbid current and leave only a shapeless monstrosity of all that is worst in human nature.

We are convinced, of course, that India is destined to rise again, we await with confidence the coming of the *avatar* of strength who will follow the *avatar* of love, but in order that He may come, we must prepare the atmosphere, purify it by our own deeds of love, strength and humanitarian self-sacrifice. The educated classes are now the repositories of the hope of resurgence; it is in them that the spirit has entered, to them the masses look for guidance. Their duty is to be worthy of their mission, to bring hope, strength and light into the lives of their downtrodden countrymen.

We have so far been occupied with Swadeshi as the economical means of saving the people: we must now set ourselves to the restoration of the moral tone of the nation by ourselves setting an example of mercy, justice, self-denial, helpfulness and patient work for the people. The work is one for the young. It was they who made the Swadeshi movement a success and ensured its permanence; they also must set themselves to the task which now calls us and go to the succour of their suffering countrymen, point their spirits to the help which is to come, support them in their present sufferings, relieve them so far as possible and bind the educated class and the masses together by the golden bond of love and service. This is the next step in the development of the present movement. Swadeshi is fairly begun and will now go on of its own impetus; but when the work of which we speak is taken in hand, Swadeshi will receive a fresh impetus which will make it so irresistible that all the tyranny of the officials, all the police oppression, every obstacle and hindrance which man can interpose will be swept away like so much chaff, and all Bengal become the fortress of Swadeshi, its temple and its domain. This is the work to which the finger of God has been pointing us from the beginning of the present year by the success of the Ardhodaya Yog organization, by the call to the village which was the dominant note of the Pabna Conference, by signs and omens of many kinds which those who keep their eyes open will easily understand. We have now Samitis for spreading Swadeshi, Samitis for physical culture and self-defence, Samitis for the organization of meetings, festivals and other great occasions. All these are good, but we want now Samitis for giving help and light to the masses. The Anushilan Samiti has given a right direction to its activities when it undertook Famine Relief, but Famine Relief is a temporary work, one which needs an immense fund to be really effective, and only a united body of the leading men of Bengal could successfully cope with it. What our Samitis can do is to take up the work which we have indicated as a permanent part of their duties, put themselves in touch with the people, lead them to hope, inspire them with the spirit of self-help, organise them and make them ready for the coming of the *avatar*.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 985-87)

YOGA AND HYPNOTISM

When the mind is entirely passive, then the force of Nature which works in the whole of animate and inanimate creation, has free play; for it is in reality this force which works in man as well as in the sun and star. There is no doubt of this truth whether in Hinduism or in Science. This is the thing called Nature, the sum of cosmic force and energy, which alone Science recognises as the source of all work and activity. This also is the Prakriti of the Hindus to which under different names Sankhya and Vedanta agree in assigning a similar position and function in the Universe. But the immediate question is whether this force can act in man independently of man's individual will and initiative. Must it always act through his volition or has it a power of independent operation? The first real proof which Science has had of the power of action independent of volition is in the phenomena of hypnotism. Unfortunately the nature of hypnotism has not been properly understood. It is supposed that by putting the subject to sleep the hypnotist is able in some mysterious and unexplained way to substitute his will for the subject's. In a certain sense all the subject's activities in the hypnotic state are the results of his own volition, but that volition is not spontaneous, it is used as a slave by the operator working through the medium of suggestion. Whatever the hypnotist suggests that the subject shall think, act or feel, he thinks, acts or feels, and whatever the hypnotist suggests that the subject shall become, he becomes. What is it that gives the operator this stupendous power? Why should the mere fact of a man passing into this sleep-condition suspend the ordinary reactions of mind and body and substitute others at the mere word of the man who has said to him, "Sleep"? It is sometimes supposed that it is the superior will of the hypnotist which overcomes the will of the other and makes it a slave. There are two strong objections to this view. It does not appear to be true that it is the weak and distracted will that is most easily hypnotised; on the contrary the strong concentrated mind forms a good subject. Secondly, if it were the operator's will using the will of the subject, then the results produced must be such as the latter could himself bring about, since the capacities of the instrument cannot be exceeded by the power working through the instrument. Even if we suppose that the invading will brings with it its own force still the results produced must not exceed the sum of its capacity plus the capacity of the instrument. If they commonly do so, we must suppose that it is neither the will of the operator nor the will of the subject nor the sum of these two wills that is active, but some other and more potent force. This is precisely what we see in hypnotic performance.

What is this force that enables or compels a weak man to become so rigid that strong arms cannot bend him? that reverses the operations of the senses and abrogates pain? that changes the fixed character of a man in the shortest of periods?

that is able to develop power where there was no power, moral strength where there was weakness, health where there was disease? that in its higher manifestations can exceed the barriers of space and time and produce that far-sight, far-hearing and far-thinking which shows mind to be an untrammelled agent or medium pervading the world and not limited to the body which it informs or seems to inform? The European scientist experimenting with hypnotism is handling forces which he cannot understand, stumbling on truths of which he cannot give a true account. His feet are faltering on the threshold of Yoga. It is held by some thinkers, and not unreasonably if we consider these phenomena, that mind is all and contains all. It is not the body which determines the operations of the mind, it is the mind which determines the laws of the body. It is the ordinary law of the body that if it is struck, pierced or roughly pressed it feels pain. This law is created by the mind which associates pain with these contacts, and if the mind changes its *dharmā* and is able to associate with these contacts not pain but insensibility or pleasure, then they will bring about those results of insensibility or pleasure and no other. The pain and pleasure are not the result of the contact, neither is their seat in the body; they are the result of association and their seat is in the mind. Vinegar is sour, sugar sweet, but to the hypnotised mind vinegar can be sweet, sugar sour. The sourness or sweetness is not in the vinegar or sugar, but in the mind. The heart also is the subject of the mind. My emotions are like my physical feelings, the result of association, and my character is the result of accumulated past experiences with their resultant associations and reactions crystallising into habits of mind and heart summed up in the word, character. These things like all the rest that are made of the stuff of associations are not permanent or binding but fluid and mutable, *anityāḥ sarvasaṃskārāḥ*. If my friend blames me, I am grieved; that is an association and not binding. The grief is not the result of the blame but of an association in the mind. I can change the association so far that blame will cause me no grief, praise no elation. I can entirely stop the reactions of joy and grief by the same force that created them. They are habits of the mind, nothing more. In the same way though with more difficulty I can stop the reactions of physical pain and pleasure so that nothing will hurt my body. If I am a coward today, I can be a hero tomorrow. The cowardice was merely the habit of associating certain things with pain and grief and of shrinking from the pain and grief; this shrinking and the physical sensations in the vital or nervous man which accompany it are called fear, and they can be dismissed by the action of the mind which created them. All these are propositions which European Science is even now unwilling to admit, yet it is being proved more and more by the phenomena of hypnotism that these effects can be temporarily at least produced by one man upon another; and it has even been proved that disease can be permanently cured or character permanently changed by the action of one mind upon another. The rest will be established in time by the development of hypnotism.

The difference between Yoga and hypnotism is that what hypnotism does

for a man through the agency of another and in the sleeping state, Yoga does for him by his own agency and in the waking state. The hypnotic sleep is necessary in order to prevent the activity of the subject's mind full of old ideas and associations from interfering with the operator. In the waking state he would naturally refuse to experience sweetness in vinegar or sourness in sugar or to believe that he can change from disease to health, cowardice to heroism by a mere act of faith; his established associations would rebel violently and successfully against such contradictions of universal experience. The force which transcends matter would be hampered by the obstruction of ignorance and attachment to universal error. The hypnotic sleep does not make the mind a tabula rasa but it renders it passive to everything but the touch of the operator. Yoga similarly teaches passivity of the mind so that the will may act unhampered by the *saṁskāras* or old associations. It is these *saṁskāras*, the habits formed by experience in the body, heart or mind, that form the laws of our psychology. The associations of the mind are the stuff of which our life is made. They are more persistent in the body than in the mind and therefore harder to alter. They are more persistent in the race than in the individual; the conquest of the body and mind by the individual is comparatively easy and can be done in the space of a single life, but the same conquest by the race involves the development of ages. It is conceivable, however, that the practice of Yoga by a great number of men and persistence in the practice by their descendants might bring about profound changes in human psychology and, by stamping these changes into body and brain through heredity, evolve a superior race which would endure and by the law of the survival of the fittest eliminate the weaker kinds of humanity. Just as the rudimentary mind of the animal has been evolved into the fine instrument of the human being so the rudiments of higher force and faculty in the present race might evolve into the perfect *buddhi* of the Yogin.

Yo yacchraddhaḥ sa eva saḥ. According as is a man's fixed and complete belief, that he is, — not immediately always but sooner or later, by the law that makes the psychical tend inevitably to express itself in the material. The will is the agent by which all these changes are made and old *saṁskāras* replaced by new, and the will cannot act without faith. The question then arises whether mind is the ultimate force or there is another which communicates with the outside world through the mind. Is the mind the agent or simply the instrument? If the mind be all, then it is only animals that can have the power to evolve; but this does not accord with the laws of the world as we know them. The tree evolves, the clod evolves, everything evolves. Even in animals it is evident that mind is not all in the sense of being the ultimate expression of existence or the ultimate force in Nature. It seems to be all only because that which is all expresses itself in the mind and passes everything through it for the sake of manifestation. That which we call mind is a medium which pervades the world. Otherwise we could not have that instantaneous and electrical action of mind upon mind of which human experience is full and of which the new phenomena of

hypnotism, telepathy etc. are only fresh proofs. There must be contact, there must be interpenetration if we are to account for these phenomena on any reasonable theory. Mind therefore is held by the Hindus to be a species of subtle matter in which ideas are waves or ripples, and it is not limited by the physical body which it uses as an instrument. There is an ulterior force which works through this subtle medium called mind. An animal species develops, according to the modern theory, under the subtle influence of the environment. The environment supplies a need and those who satisfy the need develop a new species which survives because it is more fit. This is not the result of any intellectual perception of the need nor of a resolve to develop the necessary changes, but of a desire, often though not always a mute, inarticulate and unthought desire. That desire attracts a force which satisfies it. What is that force? The tendency of the psychical desire to manifest in the material change is one term in the equation; the force which develops the change in response to the desire is another. We have a will beyond mind which dictates the change, we have a force beyond mind which effects it. According to Hindu philosophy the will is the Jiva, the Purusha, the self in the *ānandakoṣa* acting through *viññāna*, universal or transcendental mind; this is what we call spirit. The force is Prakriti or Shakti, the female principle in Nature which is at the root of all action. Behind both is the single Self of the universe which contains both Jiva and Prakriti, spirit and material energy. Yoga puts these ultimate existences within us in touch with each other and by stilling the activity of the *saṁskāras* or associations in mind and body enables them to act swiftly, victoriously, and as the world calls it, miraculously. In reality there is no such thing as a miracle; there are only laws and processes which are not yet understood.

Yoga is therefore no dream, no illusion of mystics. It is known that we can alter the associations of mind and body temporarily and that the mind can alter the conditions of the body partially. Yoga asserts that these things can be done permanently and completely. For the body conquest of disease, pain and material obstructions, for the mind liberation from bondage to past experience and the heavier limitations of space and time, for the heart victory over sin and grief and fear, for the spirit unclouded bliss, strength and illumination, this is the gospel of Yoga, is the goal to which Hinduism points humanity.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 23-28)

HERACLITUS

The philosophy and thought of the Greeks is perhaps the most intellectually stimulating, the most fruitful of clarities the world has yet had. Indian philosophy was intuitive in its beginnings, stimulative rather to the deeper vision of things, — nothing more exalted and profound, more revelatory of the depths and the heights, more powerful to open unending vistas has ever been conceived than the divine and inspired Word, the *mantra* of Veda and Vedanta. When that philosophy became intellectual, precise, founded on the human reason, it became also rigidly logical, enamoured of fixity and system, desirous of a sort of geometry of thought. The ancient Greek mind had instead a kind of fluid precision, a flexibly inquiring logic; acuteness and the wide-open eye of the intellect were its leading characteristics and by this power in it it determined the whole character and field of subsequent European thinking. Nor is any Greek thinker more directly stimulating than the aphoristic philosopher Heraclitus; and yet he keeps and adds to this more modern intellectual stimulativeness something of the antique psychic and intuitive vision and word of the older Mystics. The trend to rationalism is there, but not yet that fluid clarity of the reasoning mind which was the creation of the Sophists.

Professor R. D. Ranade has recently published a small treatise on the philosophy of Heraclitus. From the paging of the treatise it seems to be an excerpt, but from what there is nothing to tell. It is perhaps too much to hope that it is from a series of essays on philosophers or a history of philosophy by this perfect writer and scholar. At any rate such a work from such a hand would be a priceless gain. For Professor Ranade possesses in a superlative degree the rare gift of easy and yet adequate exposition; but he has more than this, for he can give a fascinating interest to subjects like philology and philosophy which to the ordinary reader seem harsh, dry, difficult and repellent. He joins to a luminous clarity, lucidity and charm of expression an equal luminousness and just clarity of presentation and that perfect manner in both native to the Greek and French language and mind, but rare in the English tongue. In these seventeen pages he has presented the thought of the old enigmatic Ephesian with a clearness and sufficiency which leaves us charmed, enlightened and satisfied.

On one or two difficult points I am inclined to differ with the conclusions he adopts. He rejects positively Pfeiderer's view of Heraclitus as a mystic, which is certainly exaggerated and, as stated, a misconception; but it seems to me that there is behind that misconception a certain truth. Heraclitus' abuse of the mysteries of his time is not very conclusive in this respect; for what he reviles is those aspects of obscure magic, physical ecstasy, sensual excitement which the Mysteries had put on in some at least of their final developments as the process of degeneration increased which made a century later even the Eleusinian a butt for the dangerous mockeries

of Alcibiades and his companions. His complaint is that the secret rites which the populace held in ignorant and superstitious reverence “unholily mysticise what are held among men as mysteries.” He rebels against the darkness of the Dionysian ecstasy in the approach to the secrets of Nature; but there is a luminous Apollonian as well as an obscure and sometimes dangerous Dionysian mysticism, a Dakshina as well as a Vama Marga of the mystic Tantra. And though no partaker in or supporter of any kind of rites or mummary, Heraclitus still strikes one as at least an intellectual child of the Mystics and of mysticism, although perhaps a rebel son in the house of his mother. He has something of the mystic style, something of the intuitive Apollonian inlook into the secrets of existence.

Certainly, as Mr. Ranade says, mere aphorism is not mysticism; aphorism and epigram are often enough, perhaps usually a condensed or a pregnant effort of the intellect. But Heraclitus’ style, as Mr. Ranade himself describes it, is not only aphoristic and epigrammatic but cryptic, and this cryptic character is not merely the self-willed obscurity of an intellectual thinker affecting an excessive condensation of his thought or a too closely-packed burden of suggestiveness. It is enigmatic in the style of the mystics, enigmatic in the manner of their thought which sought to express the riddle of existence in the very language of the riddle. What for instance is the “ever-living Fire” in which he finds the primary and imperishable substance of the universe and identifies it in succession with Zeus and with eternity? or what should we understand by “the thunderbolt which steers all things”? To interpret this fire as merely a material force of heat and flame or simply a metaphor for being which is eternal becoming is, it seems to me, to miss the character of Heraclitus’ utterances. It includes both these ideas and everything that connects them. But then we get back at once to the Vedic language and turn of thought; we are reminded of the Vedic Fire which is hymned as the upbuilder of the worlds, the secret Immortal in men and things, the periphery of the gods, Agni who “becomes” all around the other immortals, himself becomes and contains all the gods; we are reminded of the Vedic thunderbolt, that electric Fire, of the Sun who is the true Light, the Eye, the wonderful weapon of the divine pathfinders Mitra and Varuna. It is the same cryptic form of language, the same brief and abundant method of thought even; though the conceptions are not identical, there is a clear kinship.

The mystical language has always this disadvantage that it readily becomes obscure, meaningless or even misleading to those who have not the secret and to posterity a riddle. Mr. Ranade tells us that it is impossible to make out what Heraclitus meant when he said, “The gods are mortals, men immortals.” But is it quite impossible if we do not cut off this thinker from the earlier thought of the mystics? The Vedic Rishi also invokes the Dawn, “O goddess and human”; the gods in the Veda are constantly addressed as “men”, the same words are traditionally applied to indicate men and immortals. The immanence of the immortal principle in man, the descent of the gods into the workings of mortality was almost the fundamental idea

of the mystics. Heraclitus, likewise, seems to recognise the inextricable unity of the eternal and the transitory, that which is for ever and yet seems to exist only in this strife and change which is a continual dying. The gods manifest themselves as things that continually change and perish; man is in principle an eternal being. Heraclitus does not really deal in barren antitheses; his method is a statement of antinomies and an adumbrating of their reconciliation in the very terms of opposition. Thus when he says that the name of the bow (*biós*) is life (*bíos*), but its work is death, obviously he intends no mere barren play upon words; he speaks of that principle of war, father of all and king of all, which makes cosmic existence an apparent process of life, but an actual process of death. The Upanishads seized hold of the same truth when they declared life to be the dominion of King Death, described it as the opposite of immortality and even related that all life and existence here were first created by Death for his food.

Unless we bear in mind this pregnant and symbolic character of Heraclitus' language we are likely to sterilise his thought by giving it a too literal sense. Heraclitus praises the "dry soul" as the wisest and best, but, he says, it is a pleasure and satisfaction to souls to become moist. This inclination of the soul to its natural delight in a sort of wine-drenched laxity must be discouraged; for Dionysus the wine-god and Hades, the Lord of Death, the Lord of the dark underworld, are one and the same deity. Professor Ranade takes this eulogy of the dry soul as praise of the dry light of reason; he finds in it a proof that Heraclitus was a rationalist and not a mystic: yet strangely enough he takes the parallel and opposite expressions about the moist soul and Dionysus in a quite different and material sense, as an ethical disapprobation of wine-drinking. Surely, it cannot be so; Heraclitus cannot mean by the dry soul the reason of a sober man and by a moist soul the non-reason or bewildered reason of the drunkard; nor when he says that Hades and Dionysus are the same, is he simply discouraging the drinking of wine as fatal to the health! Evidently he employs here, as always, a figurative and symbolic language because he has to convey a deeper thought for which he finds ordinary language too poor and superficial.

Heraclitus is using the old language of the Mysteries, though in his own new way and for his own individual purpose, when he speaks of Hades and Dionysus and the everliving Fire or of the Furies, the succourers of Justice who will find out the Sun if he oversteps his measure. We miss his sense, if we see in these names of the gods only the poorer superficial meanings of the popular mythological religion. When Heraclitus speaks of the dry or the moist soul, it is of the soul and not the intellect that he is thinking, *psuchē* and not *nous*. *Psuchē* corresponds roughly to the *cetas* or *citta* of Indian psychology, *nous* to *buddhi*; the dry soul of the Greek thinker to the purified heart-consciousness, *śuddha citta*, of the Indian psychologists, which in their experience was the first basis for a purified intellect, *viśuddha buddhi*. The moist soul is that which allows itself to be perturbed by the impure wine of sense

ecstasy, emotional excitement, an obscure impulse and inspiration whose source is from a dark underworld. Dionysus is the god of this wine-born ecstasy, the god of the Bacchic mysteries, — of the “walkers in the night, mages, bacchanals, mystics”: therefore Heraclitus says that Dionysus and Hades are one. In an opposite sense the ecstatic devotee of the Bhakti path in India reproaches the exclusive seeker by the way of thought-discernment with his “dry knowledge”, using Heraclitus’ epithet, but with a pejorative and not a laudatory significance.

To ignore the influence of the mystic thought and its methods of self-expression on the intellectual thinking of the Greeks from Pythagoras to Plato is to falsify the historical procession of the human mind. It was enveloped at first in the symbolic, intuitive, esoteric style and discipline of the Mystics, — Vedic and Vedantic seers, Orphic secret teachers, Egyptian priests. From that veil it emerged along the path of a metaphysical philosophy still related to the Mystics by the source of its fundamental ideas, its first aphoristic and cryptic style, its attempt to seize directly upon truth by intellectual vision rather than arrive at it by careful ratiocination, but nevertheless intellectual in its method and aim. This is the first period of the Darshanas in India, in Greece of the early intellectual thinkers. Afterwards came the full tide of philosophic rationalism, Buddha or the Buddhists and the logical philosophers in India, in Greece the Sophists and Socrates with all their splendid progeny; with them the intellectual method did not indeed begin, but came to its own and grew to its fullness. Heraclitus belongs to the transition, not to the noontide of the reason; he is even its most characteristic representative. Hence his cryptic style, hence his brief and burdened thought and the difficulty we feel when we try to clarify and entirely rationalise his significances. The ignoring of the Mystics, our pristine fathers, *pūrve pitaraḥ*, is the great defect of the modern account of our thought-evolution.

(To be continued)

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 215-20)

‘MAY THY WILL BE DONE IN ALL ITS RIGOROUS PLENITUDE . . .’

August 18, 1914

Let me turn to Thee in a profound and silent contemplation; let me place this integral being and its multiple activities at Thy feet as an offering; let me stop all the play of these forces, unify all these consciousnesses, so that one alone may persist, the one which is able to hear Thy command and understand it; let me plunge again into Thee as in a sovereignly beneficent sea, that which purifies from all ignorance. I feel as if I have gone down very deep into an unfathomable abyss of doubt and darkness, as if I am exiled from Thy eternal splendour; but I know that in this descent is the possibility of a higher ascent which will enable me to span a vaster horizon and draw a little nearer to Thy infinite heavens. Thy light is there, steady and guiding, shining without intermission in the depths of the abyss as in the luminous splendours; and a serene confidence, a calm indifference, a tranquil certitude dwell permanently in my consciousness. . . . I am like a boat which has long enjoyed the delights of the port and, despite the dark storm-laden clouds which hide the sun, unfurls its sails to launch forth into the great unknown, towards shores unheard of, towards new lands.

I am Thine, Lord, without any restriction or preference; may Thy will be done in all its rigorous plenitude; all my being adheres to it with a joyous acceptance and a calm serenity.

I have no longer any idea about the future: it is Thou who wilt awaken the new conception more closely answering Thy law.

In a most perfect surrender and a most entire trust I wait: Thy voice showing me Thy path.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 225-26)

A CONVESATION OF 26 JUNE 1957

But there is here still the necessity of a resort to the normal means of propagation and the gross method of physical Nature. A purely occult method, a resort to supraphysical processes acting by supraphysical means for a physical result would have to be possible if we are to avoid this necessity: the resort to the sex impulse and its animal process could not be transcended otherwise. If there is some reality in the phenomenon of materialisation and dematerialisation claimed to be possible by occultists and evidenced by occurrences many of us have witnessed, a method of this kind would not be out of the range of possibility. For in the theory of the occultists and in the gradation of the ranges and planes of our being which Yoga knowledge outlines for us there is not only a subtle physical force but a subtle physical Matter intervening between life and gross Matter, and to create in this subtle physical substance and precipitate the forms thus made into our grosser materiality is feasible. It should be possible and it is believed to be possible for an object formed in this subtle physical substance to make a transit from its subtlety into the state of gross Matter directly by the intervention of an occult force and process, whether with or even without the assistance or intervention of some gross material procedure. A soul wishing to enter into a body or form for itself a body and take part in a divine life upon earth might be assisted to do so or even provided with such a form by this method of direct transmutation, without passing through birth by the sex process or undergoing any degradation or any of the heavy limitations in the growth and development of its mind and material body inevitable to our present way of existence. It might then assume at once the structure and greater powers and functionings of the truly divine material body which must one day emerge in a progressive evolution to a totally transformed existence both of life and form in a divinised earth-nature.

Sri Aurobindo
(*The Supramental Manifestation*, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 549)

Mother, is this method of direct transmutation without passing through birth possible now, since now the Supermind is on earth?

Is it possible? You are asking whether it is possible? . . . Everything is possible. What do you want to know? Whether this has already been done?

Yes.

Not as far as the most material plane; as far as the perceptible subtle physical — perceptible by the intermediary senses, between the physical senses and those of the subtle physical; for instance, like a breath felt as a gentle breeze, like certain perceptions of smell, like subtle perfumes. Naturally, those who have an inner vision can see, but for the most material senses there is not — how shall I put it? — not the permanence given by the physical body as we know it materially. There are phenomena, yes, that can even be seen, but they are fleeting. There is no stability, the stability in matter, the *fixity* has not been acquired. I mean there is a contact, there is even the contact of touch, there is a perception, but there isn't the permanence given by the material body. They are transient phenomena which, naturally, don't give you the same feeling of an altogether tangible reality. Still, the influence is constant, the intervention is constant, the perception is constant, but there is not the stability of a body which . . . well, which, when it goes out of the room and returns, it comes back the same as it went out, you understand? Or when you sit down in a certain place, it occupies that place in a very concrete way.

I cannot say because I don't know everything that has happened and is happening on earth, but as far as I know, this has not yet been achieved, this concrete permanence.

Yet, it was of matter, for there was sight, touch, hearing. But hearing doesn't need to be very material: the sounds of the subtle physical life, its vibrations can be heard very well; and quite strangely, it is hearing and smell which seem to be the most permanent in the subtle physical world, more so than the perception of form — and also a certain sense of contact which is very, very concrete. Only, this heavy material presence of a physical body which occupies an absolutely definite and concrete place and prevents any other thing from occupying the same place, this does not yet seem to be possible; therefore, what has so far been achieved has after all to be a little more fluid than the heaviest kind of matter.

Does this progress depend on the human consciousness?

You mean for a more complete materialisation? . . . It depends on the power of manipulating the vibrations of matter. This power of manipulation is necessarily the result of a certain state of consciousness. And all depends on the standpoint that is taken, for no individual progress can come about without what could be called the "authorisation" of the divine Will. Ultimately, nothing in creation can happen without the sanction of the divine Will. So . . .

Mother, will the first supramental body be like this?

Like what?

A transformation without passing through a terrestrial birth?

Ah! Excuse me, you must not confuse things. There are two things. There is the possibility of a purely supramental creation on one hand, and the possibility of a progressive transformation of a physical body into a supramental body, or rather of a human body into a superhuman body. Then it would be a progressive transformation which could take a certain number of years, probably a considerable number, and would produce a being who would no longer be a “man” in the animal sense of the word, but would not be the supramental being formed fully outside all animality, for its present origin is necessarily an animal one. So, a transmutation may take place, a transformation that’s enough to liberate the being from this origin, but all the same it wouldn’t be a purely and entirely supramental creation. Sri Aurobindo has said that there will be an intermediary race — a race or perhaps some individuals, we don’t know — an intermediary rung which could serve as a passage or could be perpetuated according to the needs and necessities of creation. But if one starts from a body formed in the same way as human bodies are at present, the result will never be the same as a being formed entirely according to the supramental method and process. It will perhaps be more on the superhuman side in the sense that all animal expression may disappear, but it won’t be able to have the absolute perfection of a body that’s purely supramental in its formation.

And in this transformed human body will there be a differentiation between man and woman?

What, what are you saying?

If the Supermind accepts this transformed body . . .

Accepts? What do you mean, “accepts”?

I mean “descends” in this half-human body — will there be a differentiation?

But it is not like that, it is not a bottle into which one pours some liquid! It’s not that!

Are you asking whether the body will keep its masculine or feminine form? Probably this will be left to the choice of the being who enters the house, the occupant. . . . Does it interest you very much, this difference? (*Laughter*)

You tell us that there won’t be any difference, but so far there is still a great difference.

From what point of view? If it is the physical appearance, I agree — and yet, not so

much as all that, but still . . . From what point of view?

*From the point of view of the idea of sex, that there are two different sexes.
That still exists.*

The idea! But that's the fault of the person who thinks! One can very well dispense with thinking. You know, these very petty limits of thought are things which ought to disappear before you can even attempt to transform your body. If you still have these very petty ideas which are purely animal, there is not much hope that you could begin the least process for the transformation of your body. You must first transform your thought. . . . For that is something which is still crawling far down below. If you are not able to feel that a conscious and living being can be quite free, even in a certain definite form, from all feeling of sex, it . . . it means that you are still up to your neck in the original animality.

In the inner thought one feels it, but in the actuality of material life . . .

What about the actuality?

In the outer life I haven't yet realised that. In the inner. . .

You spend your time thinking about it?

But one may live twenty-four hours out of twenty-four without giving a single thought to this difference! You must really be hypnotised by this affair. Do you suppose that when I speak to you I think that you are a man and when I speak to Tara I think she is a woman?

Still there is a difference!

Ah! but it is not at all necessary.

In theory I understand.

In theory! What theory?

That there is no difference. But when I am in contact with someone, either I am speaking to a man or a woman.

Well, it's a great pity both for you and for the other person.

No, it is just the very opposite of what ought to happen! When you are in contact with someone and speaking with him, it is precisely to what surpasses all

animality that you should speak; it is to the soul you must speak, never to the body. Even more is asked of you, for you are asked to address the Divine — not even the soul — the one Divine in every being, and to be conscious of that.

But if only one person is conscious and the other is a brute, what will happen?

If you alone are conscious? And what do you know about it? And how and on what plane do you judge that the other is not conscious?

His way of replying.

But perhaps he thinks the same of you!

Well, I tell you that so long as it is not the divine Presence you address when you speak to someone, it means you are not conscious of it in yourself. And then it's terribly presumptuous to judge what state the other person is in. What do you know about it? If you yourself are not conscious of the Divine in the other being, what right have you to say whether he is conscious of it or not? On what basis? Your small outer intelligence? But it knows nothing! It is quite incapable of perceiving anything whatever.

Unless your vision is *constantly* the vision of the Divine in all things, you have not only no right but no capacity to judge the state which others are in. And to pronounce a judgment on someone without having this vision spontaneously, effortlessly, is precisely an example of the mental presumptuousness of which Sri Aurobindo always spoke. . . . And it so happens that one who has the vision, the consciousness, who is capable of seeing the truth in all things, never feels the need to judge anything whatever. For he understands everything and knows everything. Therefore, once and for all, you must tell yourselves that the moment you begin to judge things, people, circumstances, you are in the most total human ignorance.

In short, one could put it like this: when one understands, one no longer judges and when one judges, it means that one doesn't know.

Judging people is one of the first things which must be totally swept away from the consciousness before you can take even a step on the supramental path, because that is not a material progress or a bodily progress, it is only a very little progress of thought, mental progress. And unless you have swept your mind clean of all its ignorance, you cannot hope to take a step on the supramental path.

In fact, you have said something terrible. When you said, "I cannot speak to his soul if he is a brute", well, you have given yourself away . . . you have stuck a label on yourself. There you are.

All those who have truly and sincerely had the experience of the divine Presence, all those who have truly been in contact with the Divine, have always said the same thing: that sometimes, even often, it is in what is most decried by men, most despised

by men, most condemned by human “wisdom”, that one can see the divine light shining.

They are not mere words, they are living experiences.

All these ideas of good and evil, good and bad, higher, lower, all these notions belong to the ignorance of the human mind, and if one really wants to come into contact with the divine life, one must liberate oneself totally from this ignorance, one must rise to a region of consciousness where these things have *no* reality. The feeling of superiority and inferiority completely disappears, it is replaced by something else which is of a very different nature — a sort of capacity for filtering appearances, penetrating behind masks, shifting the point of view.

And these are not words, it is altogether true that *everything* changes its appearance, totally, that life and things are completely different from what they appear to be.

All this contact, this ordinary perception of the world loses its reality completely. This is what appears unreal, fantastic, illusory, non-existent. There is something — something very material, very concrete, very physical — which becomes the reality of the being, and which has nothing in common with the ordinary way of seeing. When one has this perception — the perception of the work of the divine force, of the movement being worked out behind the appearance, *in* the appearance, through the appearance — one begins to be ready to live something truer than the ordinary human falsehood. But not before.

There is no compromise, you see. It is not like a convalescence after an illness: you must change worlds. So long as your mind is real for you, your way of thinking something true for you, real, concrete, it proves that you are not there yet. You must first pass through to the other side. Afterwards you will be able to understand what I am telling you.

Pass through to the other side.

It is not true that one can understand little by little, it is not like that. This kind of progress is different. What is more true is that one is shut up in a shell, and inside it something is happening, like the chick in the egg. It is getting ready in there. It is in there. One doesn't see it. Something is happening in the shell, but outside one sees nothing. And it is only when all is ready that there comes the capacity to pierce the shell and to be born into the light of day.

It is not that one becomes more and more perceptible or visible: one is shut in — shut in — and for sensitive people there is even that terrible sensation of being compressed, of trying to pass through and then coming up against a wall. And then one knocks and knocks and knocks, and one can't go through.

And so long as one is there, inside, one is in the falsehood. And only on the day when by the Divine Grace one can break the shell and come out into the Light, is one free.

This may happen suddenly, spontaneously, quite unexpectedly.

I don't think one can go through gradually. I don't think it is something which slowly wears and wears away until one can see through it. I haven't had an instance of this so far. There is rather a kind of accumulation of power inside, an intensification of the need, and an endurance in the effort which becomes free from all fear, all anxiety, all calculation; a need so imperative that one no longer cares for the consequences.

One is like an explosive that nothing can resist, and one bursts out from one's prison in a blaze of light.

After that one can no longer fall back again.

It is truly a new birth.

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1957-1958, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 9, pp. 128-37)



Sri Aurobindo —

White horse, white horse,
Awake, awake . . .
our
Out of the cavern of thy sleep
my
Like laughter break

Into the moon's pure flush
And the stars' pale sheen!
What has thy magic colour to do
With grey or green,

The grey of drowsing soil
And the green of wood-gloom?
Thy feet have wings: for thee was made
 wide
Heaven's infinite room.

silver
Soar to the silvery globes
And pasture there,
Until the lost dawn leaps to thee —
A golden mare!

30 July 1936

* * *

Sri Aurobindo —

I have rewritten the last stanza and the second and seventh lines. Your opinion now, please? And what about the plane of inspiration?

White horse, white horse,
Deathlessly wake . . .
Out of the cavern of our¹ sleep
Like laughter break

Into the moon's pure flush
And the stars' pale sheen!
How can thy magic colour mate
With grey or green,

The grey of drowsing soil
And the green of wood-gloom?
Thy feet have wings: for thee was built
Heaven's wide room.

Soar through the silver deeps
On a passion of prayer
Until the lost dawn echoes thy love
gold²
From its ~~golden~~ lair!

1. Do you prefer “thy”?

No.

2. Should “gold lair”, if kept, be hyphenated?

No.

Very good now — a beautiful poem. Intuitive — intensely so.

31 July 1936

* * *

(P.S. added at the bottom of a sheet of a poem written earlier on 28.7.36:)

*P.S.: I couldn't be sure of one word in your comment on my "White Horse".
After "Intuitive", is what follows "intensely so" or "entirely so"?*

It is "intensely".

* * *

(P.S. added at the bottom of a sheet of another poem:)

*P.S.: Do you mind telling me what quality and characteristic of vision, phrase
or rhythm in that "White Horse" of mine made you call it "intensely" intuitive?*

Can't say. If I could it would not be intensely intuitive.

Is the poem symbolic or is it mystic?

Both, I think.

*I myself somehow feel very partial to it (maybe to some extent because I am a
great lover of horses!), but would YOU consider it one of my best?*

Yes.

2 August 1936

WHITE HORSE

White horse, white horse,
Deathlessly wake . . .
Out of the cavern of our sleep
Like laughter break

Into the moon's pure flush
And the stars' pale sheen!
How can thy magic colour mate
With grey or green,

The grey of drowsing soil
 And the green of wood-gloom?
 Thy feet have wings: for thee was built
 Heaven's wide room.

Soar through the silver deeps
 On a passion of prayer
 Until the lost dawn echoes thy love
 From its gold lair!

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

The Supreme Guide and Teacher

What is his method and his system? He has no method and every method. His system is a natural organisation of the highest processes and movements of which the nature is capable. Applying themselves even to the pettiest details and to the actions the most insignificant in their appearance with as much care and thoroughness as to the greatest, they in the end lift all into the Light and transform all. For in his Yoga there is nothing too small to be used and nothing too great to be attempted.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 61)

CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of October 2023)

II

Mother

All through I have felt Your Love. You have given me a long rest, and in fact the body does need to rest still more. Even when I speak, I get high and rapid breathing — a kind of fatigue comes to the lungs.

O my dear Mother, heart of my heart and love of my love, as long as You are with me, I am fearless. You have given me today a true and solid confidence and my entire being has taken refuge in You.

I will work outwardly, but inwardly I will always be in Your deep and infinite peace, in Your ice box of Eternal Peace.

I am so happy that all the clouds are gone. Now only some time more of rest for the body to recover completely and all will be all right — with something gained that was not there before.

27 March 1934

*

Dear Mother,

Some people tell me that my condition is the result of too much strain. No doubt the nerves got strained and then came the breakdown of the body, but I have lost nothing thereby — I have gained. Strain or no strain, I have not lost my Mother. Mother, we have lost nothing. You have gained a child who knows and understands You better, and I have gained my Mother; I have Her love and She presides in my being actively.

Yes, we have lost nothing, on the contrary, we have gained much.

With love and blessings

28 March 1934

*

Mother,

I feel that the persons who were connected with me in a personal relation are definitely wishing for my recovery. What will be my relation with them when I shall be out? Mother, You will settle it, and I shall obey You.

The most important thing will be not to allow them to eat you up as they used to do before.

Mother, I am quite at rest and the days are passing so quickly.

Yes, rest, rest, rest — be quiet and gather strength and force, not only to do work but also, chiefly, to achieve the Transformation.

With love and blessings

30 March 1934

*

Dear Mother,

I pass the day in Your Love and Presence. All through the day we are together, and at each moment this becomes more and more real and concrete: to live in You is the Truth.

This is very good and a promise of complete victory.

My love, my blessings, my presence are always with you.

4 April 1934

*

Mother,

D came to me this evening and told me: "J is forcing me to wash the mats. Can they be washed with soap? Can they be washed?" I told her: "No, they cannot be washed; at the most you can put them in the sun."

It seems that they have become very dirty with vegetable droppings, salt, etc. I do not think we can keep them like that, they would begin to smell horribly. A wet cloth might be passed over them, at least, and they must be placed in the sun.

4 April 1934

*

Dear Mother,

My body is increasing in bulk and volume, my physical consciousness or outward consciousness is growing in Your consciousness. The growth of my body depends upon this external consciousness growing in You.

It is all right. I think you can put on a little more flesh without any inconvenience.

Love and blessings

5 April 1934

*

Mother,

I have no confidence in the body; it is too sensitive. I cannot be rash. I still fear to drink cold water from the kuja, I go to the filter each time for water. I cover myself before going to sleep.

A fear and a feeling of weakness have entered the body, but this fear and this feeling are not true. They are falsehoods that are to be shaken away and replaced by the contrary conviction and feeling — the conviction that the body will get stronger than before and the feeling that the physical strength, like the rest, belongs to the Divine and that there is no reason why the body should not receive it in plenty.

8 April 1934

*

Mother,

Now I realise that if I could love You with all my being and keep Your Presence in every single cell and atom, it would not be an inferior work to any outer work or activity.

My dear Mother, do with me as You want. I remain completely quiet, obedient, surrendered and cheerful.

Yes, keep quiet and gather peace and strength. When the time has come I shall ask you to start work again and you will see that it will be done quite smoothly.

With love and blessings always

8 April 1934

*

Mother,

Quietly happy and at rest. The body is becoming strong, and it will become more so. Tomorrow I finish my last bottle of honey.

I think that soon we shall speak of taking up a little work, very little work only to begin with. I shall call you once before so that we may speak of it fully.

With love and blessings always

12 April 1934

*

Mother,

In spite of some of the things I have been hearing about Aroumé and the work there, I am quietly happy. I feel that things are going to change and get better. I leave them to You.

It seems to me that things have gone on fairly all right during your absence; it is not at all so bad as it could have been. I intend to see you on Friday the 20th at 11 a.m. We shall see what is to be done at that time.

With love

13 April 1934

*

Mother,

Today the head is strained — by what I do not know. I feel a great heaviness on the head, as if the whole sky has come down. The body does not want to move, it asks only for rest. When I sit down my eyes close by themselves; at once I feel still, quiet, as if frozen, yet full of life within.

Be very, very quiet, do not think about what the work will be. This week take complete rest, and sleep as much as you feel inclined to sleep. It is perfectly strong and rested, with the head free, that you must take up the work again. It is very important that the head should be neither heavy nor strained.

14 April 1934

*

Mother,

S bought 24 kg of potatoes yesterday. Out of that, 9 kg were not good. Of course they will be utilised in parts.

Bad potatoes are very dangerous and have a nasty taste even in the “good” parts. It might be better not to use these spoilt potatoes.

Last night’s salad (cucumber and potatoes) was so very good that I thought during the hot season we might try to have salad twice a week.

16 April 1934

*

Beloved Mother,

I remain completely quiet, calm and open. And if this outer consciousness remains a block and does not give way like an obstinate horse, we shall patiently take it into our control, make it submissive and allow the Divine Will to manifest.

This is quite good.

Do not get bothered with the recurrence of the “cold”. With the influenza it is almost always like that. But finally it will get cured.

Blessings

17 April 1934

*

Dear Maman,

When You asked me: “Do you take S with you in the push rickshaw?” I said “No.” Did You mean that I may take him? Or was I to take him?

I thought that if he went at the same time as you go to the market he might feel it an injustice that he should have to walk when you are sent in the push. But if he goes after you this question does not arise.

21 April 1934

*

Mother,

This auspicious Darshan day has given me a new life, a new consciousness and a new aspiration. I feel that a force of transformation has gathered and it

will transform me. I bow down to Thee, dear Mother, and with Your Love and Blessings I begin the new life.

Yes, a special protection accompanies my blessings today and a certitude of Victory is included in my love.

24 April 1934

*

Mother,

I am happy to be working again. All Your Love, Grace and Protection are with me, Your Presence is in me and, Mother, surely the Divine Grace shall manifest.

Keep this quietness and this faith, let *nothing* disturb them. If there are things to be changed, do it slowly, not in a hurry — *time* is a great helper when we know how to make use of it — and change only what is quite indispensable. Rules must not be too rigid — the Divine's working needs suppleness and plasticity — and for the workers, a too rigid rule is a big strain for the nerves. It is only when the liberties taken are dangerous and harmful that they must be checked.

And be sure that all will be all right.

With love and blessings

24 April 1934

*

My dear Mother,

I am quietly happy in Your love and confident of being as the Divine wishes because You will make me so.

I am quite confident that you will be more and more as the "Divine wishes" and that all will be all right.

B gave me a bag of paddy from Chidambaram; we shall have this rice cooked for the whole Ashram on the 29th.

Will you remind me of it on the day so that I may put special care in tasting it.

25 April 1934

*

Mother,

N often comes to me for work. If You like, we can give him the kerosene work. He will keep the account and give it to me daily; this will be a check upon him. I do not fear that he will misuse the articles entrusted to him. With a ray of faith that he may be changed, I submit this to You.

Did you speak to L about stopping the kerosene work? How does he take it? This is an important point.

If we give that work to N it must be with a *very strong warning* that he must be *absolutely scrupulous*, that any breach of trust would be taken very seriously. He must give regular accounts daily which will be submitted to me.

All love and blessings with you.

I hear that A's salad leaves have been thrown in the dust bin! What a horrible wastage! So many people would have been glad to get them, it is such wholesome food! I cannot understand such a thing.

If it was too much work to put them in the general cooking, at least they could have been given away. S would have been so happy to get them. I hope that in future such a thing will not happen again.

26 April 1934

*

Mother,

In the kitchen, H and P work hard and without any reserve. If ever You have a worker of Your choice for the kitchen, I pray to You, please lighten the work for them.

The difficulty will be to find somebody whom they will agree to take inside the work. I do not want fresh quarrels. If you have anybody to suggest, I shall very willingly arrange.

With patience and persistence everything will become all right.

With love and blessings

26 April 1934

*

I have taken my seat in the heart of my child and my blessings are with him.

7 May 1934

*

O my beloved Mother,

Surely You are giving me a bath in Your Love.

Whatever people may say of me — good or bad — I have my dear Mother in my heart, holding me close to Her bosom. I know also that when dangers are outside, when there is bad will, my Mother keeps me under Her wings and then nothing can touch me, nothing can affect me.

Yes, my child.

You are always in my arms, bathed in my love which must be the strongest protection against all attacks of any kind. Keep your entire faith and confidence: we shall cross victoriously through all difficulties.

13 May 1934

*

Mother,

D asked for less curds, but J served her the ordinary cup. She began to return the cup, but he would not take it, so she left it on the table. Then he asked her to get Mother's sanction if only half a cup of curds was required. D complained to me about all this. I said: "I shall see tomorrow."

Truly we cannot interfere in such petty things. Those who constantly forget that they are not here to lead the most silly ordinary life cannot expect us to deal with their stupid quarrels.

27 May 1934

*

O Lord Buddha, the forces of Mara attacked You, but You were unshaken, concentrated, calm, quiet, peaceful; then the Light descended, the hostile forces disappeared and there was peace on earth.

O Mother, let us all remain consecrated to the Truth, always peaceful, calm, quiet and unshaken, unmoved by any circumstances, and the hostile forces shall vanish.

Yes, this is excellent. It is by a quiet, strong and persistent peace that the true victories can be won.

With love

28 May 1934

*

My Beloved Mother,

My entire being takes refuge in You and at each moment feels You as the Reality.

I always keep you in my arms and will carry you through all difficulties.

29 May 1934

*

Dear Mother,

Let my entire being remain turned only towards You.

Be very careful to remain always calm and peaceful and let an integral equanimity establish itself more and more completely in your being. Do not allow your mind to be too active and to live in turmoil, do not jump to conclusions from a superficial view of things; always take your time, concentrate and decide only in quietness.

My love and blessings are always with you.

30 May 1934

*

Mother,

I am tired of my nature. I must rise above it if I want to fulfil the work. Again and again it knocks me down and tries to drag me into an unquiet state full of doubt, lack of confidence, and ego.

Mother, lift me once more out of this turmoil in my nature and let me breathe in the free and vast air of Your infinite Love.

It is not in one day that one can overcome one's own nature. But with patience and enduring will the Victory is sure to come.

1 June 1934

*

Dear Mother,

I actually see the waves of hostility against me, yet I am quiet; my being remains firm, poised and concentrated in Your Love and Presence.

Yes, be quiet. We have only to work patiently without being disturbed by anything and keep unshaken the faith in the inevitable Victory.

With love and blessings

6 June 1934

*

Dear Mother,

I asked for tamarind on behalf of the ladies, to use for cleaning. He told me a long story about Your sanction for the tamarind, so I gave it to him. I still hold my view that lemon skins are sufficient, but these ladies have their own ideas. Tamarind cleans faster than lemon, which takes more work and which they do not want to do.

The advantage of the lemon skins over the tamarind is that lemon skins do not spoil the hand — on the contrary — while the tamarind will bring crevasses. But let them have the experience of it.

Mother, L and I have a nick-name now: Pagal, which means madcap.

Do not mind the stupidity of others.

8 June 1934

*

Dear Mother,

The Divine Consciousness descends, fills the earth and penetrates deeply. It is sure to bring about the complete recovery of the earth.

You have worked out many things in me within these few days; You have given me Your patience, quietness and peace, an energy that works and works and a firm faith in the infinity of time.

Yes, the certitude of the Victory gives an infinite patience with the maximum of energy.

Always with you

9 June 1934

*

Dear Mother,

I do not find it difficult to deal with F. I believe that I can exert a good influence upon her and bring her back to You. Arrange that we may come in contact with each other under the pretext of work or anything You like. I know that if I go, I am surrounded with Your love and protection. I dare to do so because You have kept me in the protection of Your love.

It is true that the divine protection is always around us, but it works completely only when we are faced by dangers which were unavoidable; that is to say, when doing

some work for the Divine if dangers suddenly rise on the way then the protection works at its best. But to take up some work that is, after all, not at all indispensable and not even surely useful and which is extremely dangerous, counting on the divine protection to save us from all possible consequences, this is a movement which is like a challenge to the Divine, and the Divine will never agree to it.

I will explain myself — if it were indispensable that you should learn her work (which is, in fact, not only not indispensable but absurdly useless) and if F was the only person who could teach you (which is not the case, because H knows almost as well as she does) then we could overlook the very real dangers that await you by meeting F regularly, and this meeting could perhaps, with the Divine's help and protection, have some good results for F.

But to pretend to learn the work only with the purpose of acting on F's character, is putting a worm of insincerity in the very seed of the action and can only have disastrous results.

With love and blessings

10 June 1934

*

Dear Mother,

The work at the Dining Room is being done and it will always be done; the cupboards, floor and cloths there are cleaner than at any other place. But something else must be done now: we must rise above falsehood and our false nature.

Yes, this is the important thing. Once falsehood is conquered, all these difficulties will go.

22 June 1934

*

Dear Mother,

Formerly, the wood pieces bought for cooking used to take a long time to burn — it was slow cooking; but the fire from these wood-shavings is quite strong and cooks quickly. Personally, I feel that food cooked under a slow fire is good in taste and good for the digestion also.

I am tasting the food both morning and evening and find it *quite good* in all ways. As for the fire some things need quick cooking, some need slow cooking. In the last case you might add a few pieces of wood to the shavings in order to keep a slower fire.

Mother, I would like to know who are the persons having the stomach ache, for I may be able to trace something. The water used for cooking is always filtered and passed through a piece of cloth. Since a very long time, we clean our pans and vessels with ashes only — fine and sieved. Is soap required?

No, soap is not required and I am sure that nothing is dirty. As for the people who had stomach ache they are of several kinds and most of them are not taking food from outside, but it may very well be the change of weather and that they have caught cold in their stomach. There is nothing to worry about, I am sure.

24 June 1934

*

Mother,

Today I was threatened with clouds, dark clouds; but now all that has passed away quietly. Mother, forgetfulness of Your Loving Presence, even for a few minutes, brought such a deathlike condition — it was quite unbearable. I felt so relieved when it passed away.

I do not understand how clouds can come to you now and am quite sure that they cannot remain at all. You must have caught it from somebody. Be careful to always keep the living Presence and Protection around you when you speak to people.

With all love always.

26 June 1934

*

Mother,

I worked with C or rather I replaced him for a few minutes. I felt so happy to see him. You have joined us as friends for Your work and taken us to such a state of conscious understanding, knowledge and love that misunderstanding, disharmony, intolerance and anger have no place.

What you say is quite true. There is a deep and true Consciousness in which all can meet in love and harmony.

28 June 1934

*

Mother,

The 14th of July¹ is coming. The roads on both sides of Aroumé will be filled with crowds of people and there will hardly be any space for people to pass, especially in the evening. I propose that the inmates finish their dinner early, a gate-keeper be put there all through the day, and the gate be locked from inside at 7.30 p.m. I do not fear the public rowdiness, but it is better for us to be on our guard.

Yes, it is better to be on guard. It may even be better to close completely the front gate (except for letting in and out the cart) and to open the door of the waiting room on the rue François Martin, with somebody keeping that door. Moreover the terrace of Aroumé will be a wonderful place for watching the fireworks. All those who want to see them must be allowed to remain there and go away together by the back door when all is finished. When they are gone M will bolt the door.

A suggests that the ladies need not go for their food that evening — it can be sent to their rooms in tiffin boxes.

I do not see at all the necessity of these precautions, if things are arranged as I have explained. Moreover, some of the ladies may like to see the fireworks and if they go and come with somebody to accompany them, there is no possible danger.

1 July 1934

*

My dear and beloved Mother,

Today I was very badly disturbed — the disturbance of all those ladies was rushing upon me. I refused to listen to anything; I said to myself: “The Divine is the Truth; the same Divine element is in all. See that, live that. Harmony, love, peace and happiness is the life of the Ashram.”

I am happy to see that you have kept the right attitude and remained unshaken by these superficial and silly storms.

Always with you in the love and the protection

6 July 1934

*

1. French Republic Day.

Mother,

The serving room has become a place to read the newspapers. Can it be allowed? Had there been the works of Sri Aurobindo or Your "Prayers", it would be all right. But novels, monthlies and dailies — how can they be read there?

I suppose it is difficult to interfere in this matter. If the readers don't feel we cannot impose it upon them.

7 July 1934

*

Dear Mother,

It has always seemed to me that I do not know the meaning of Bhakti. But like a river, my entire being flows and flows towards You. This is all that I know, Mother, and I wish that it may flow more and more, rise in floods, break all limits and disappear once and for all into Your Love.

This is bhakti and nothing else.

10 July 1934

*

Dear Mother,

When the servant K comes to fetch the empty tiffin-boxes, he opens them and eats anything that is left or takes it away. I have asked Amrita to tell him not to open the tiffin-boxes at all: his business is only to remove them. A will speak to him tomorrow.

What happens to all the food taken back in the tiffin-boxes? Is it distributed (and first to the servants working in Aroumé) or is it thrown away? If it is not distributed I do not see why this poor man should not eat if he is hungry. Most of the servants refuse to take the food that is left; if one takes it why refuse it to him? Perhaps when the boxes come back to Aroumé all the food is mixed up and becomes uneatable. All this is to be seen carefully, before deciding anything.

14 July 1934

*

Mother,

The ants trouble me too much; they cover up the butter in my room. I have no jar or bottle, so I keep the butter in the butter-tin itself.

For the butter you have only to take a deep dish filled with water, you set an empty tin in the middle and place your butter on the top of the tin.

18 July 1934

*

Mother,

M does not feel inclined to give cow-dung. He asked me: "What will you do with it?"

I said: "I shall mix cow-dung, sawdust and charcoal dust, and prepare balls for fuel."

"From where do you get the charcoal dust?" he asked.

"From S," I replied.

He told me: "I ask and ask him for it, but he does not give it to me. If you give me charcoal dust I will give you cow-dung, as much as you want."

Mother, if You want to give him charcoal dust, certainly it can be given.

The charcoal dust is *absolutely* indispensable in the balls if you want them to last long and give good heat without having too bad a smell. But S has much more charcoal dust than you can use; in fact there was one time when he was giving or throwing it away. So there will be surely enough charcoal dust for the balls and to give to M also. If you need a word written for S, I shall give it.

20 July 1934

*

Mother,

I am not so sure of getting plantains. If they are available, they will be the plantains You saw today, kept until tomorrow. If they are not available, shall I return without them? And I might put a notice written on the slate in Aroumé: "No plantains in the market."

It is difficult to put up such a notice if there are actually some plantains in the bazaar. It is only if truly there are none that you can say so.

22 July 1934

*

Mother,

Will the day not come soon when I work for You, my dear Mother, and You rest completely on Your sofa; You bring down the Divine unmanifest and we work and manifest You.

This is a point which is impossible for me to answer just now.

With all love and blessings always

23 July 1934

*

Dear Mother,

All submission to Thee, all love for Thee, a complete merging, a total disappearance in Thee. Today an unconditional surrender of my entire being rushes out in floods to Thee.

Yes, my dear child, I know that your surrender is quite sincere, and you know also, I am sure, that my trust in you and your future is complete.

All love and blessings to you, always

23 July 1934

*

Mother,

I got 200 plantains quite unripe. I am distributing them tomorrow morning with a hope that inmates will preserve them for one day and then eat them.

Perhaps you could send a notice saying that the plantains are unripe and have to be kept as nothing else was available in the market.

24 July 1934

*

Beloved Love,

Surely I know Your love, Your affection, Your trust in my future — it is bright, brilliant, luminous. May all my love be for You, Mother.

Look in front of you with a wide, quiet, strong peace and advance steadily. All will be all right.

With love and blessings

25 July 1934

*

Mother,

My consciousness is getting changed. I see and realise Oneness, Union, Harmony. You are in each one of us and You shine in all. I feel You, Mother, Your Love and Your Light.

It is your own consciousness that is growing and changing, and it is very good.

All love to you, my child

28 July 1934

*

My dear Mother,

The entire adhar must be perfectly strong — quiet, at rest, in peace, unmoved, undisturbed, steady, perfectly balanced — before the Divine Realisation takes place.

Yes, all this is quite correct and it is indeed this deeper Peace that must establish itself in you.

With all love and blessings, always

29 July 1934

(To be continued)

DYUMAN

(New Correspondences with the Mother – I, pp. 24-45)

The peace must be immense, the quietness deep and still, the calm unshakable, and the trust in the Divine ever-increasing.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – II, CWM, Vol. 14, p. 138)

ON THE BRIGHTEST PERIOD IN THE HISTORY OF THE ASHRAM

From Nolini Kanta Gupta

(1)

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.

The Mother would now sit down daily for her meditations with all of us together, in the evening after nightfall. That was the beginning of the collective meditation. She made a special arrangement for our seating. To her right would sit one group and to her left another, both arranged in rows. The right side of the Mother represented Light, on the left was Power. Each of us found a seat to her right or left according to the turn of our nature of the inner being. I was to her right, Amrita sat on her left.

A strange thing used to happen every day at these meditations. Purushottam was one of our number in those days. He used to sit directly in front of the Mother, a little apart from the rest of us. As soon as the meditation began, he would begin to sway his body and even move about with eyes closed while still meditating. He would come and get hold of some of us, give them a thorough kneading and would not even hesitate to tear at the hair on their head or face. In those days, almost all of us sported a beard and a moustache and wore our hair long. He used to say that this was his allotted work, this work of purification and helping in the purification. Not only did anyone ever raise an objection to this kind of molestation, it was accepted by all with perfect equanimity, with joy almost; it was considered to be a necessity, a sign of the Mother's Grace. But these attentions were reserved only for two or three people. During this process, the Mother of course remained silent and engrossed in meditation. All was done, no doubt, under her control and guidance, but from an inner poise. One day, Purushottam proclaimed to the Mother in a loud voice, "Mother, I do not mean it as a boast, I mention this to you in utter humility: Mother, just as you are the highest Force of the Supreme, even so I am the lowest force of this earth-nature. You have given me the privilege of being a collaborator in your Work." He used to say that Seshanaga, the primal energy that sustains the material world, had manifested in him, that he was Seshanaga itself. He was the spirit of Inconscience, of the Force in the nether world; his task was to work in that darkness, sweep it clean and make room for the Light, the Higher Forces of the Mother. This manner of working continued for some time; then it came to a halt, and we had only meditations.

The Mother's endeavour at that time was for a new creation, the creation here of a new inner world of the Divine Consciousness. She had brought down the Higher Forces, the Gods, into the earth atmosphere, into our inner being and consciousness. A central feature of that endeavour was that she had placed each of us in touch with his inner godhead. Every individual has what may be described as his line of spiritual descent and also ascent; for into each individual consciousness has come down from the supreme Maha Shakti an individual divine being, a particular godhead following a particular line of manifestation of divine power, *vibhūti*. To bear inwardly the touch of this divinity and found it securely within oneself, to concentrate on it and become one with it, to go on manifesting it in one's outer life, this was the aim of the *sādhana* at the time. This was a period of extreme concentration and one-pointedness, a "tortoise phase" of the *sādhana* one might call it. Like the tortoise one had to gather

oneself in, limbs and all, and hide as in a shell by cutting oneself off from all outward touches. This was a temporary necessity in order to maintain the consciousness of the individual and the collectivity always at a high level and keep it unsullied and unchanged. Our give and take with the outside world was very little indeed and it was carried on under the strictest vigilance. All around us there had been fixed a cordon, an iron curtain almost. Even among ourselves, personal contacts like meeting one another or the paying of visits had been reduced to the barest minimum. To use the poetic language of Tagore, we seemed to be blossoming forth

Like a flower in the air, stemless
And sufficient unto itself . . .

But after following out this line for some distance, the Mother could see that the new creation, even if it came about, would be something narrow and confined to a limited circle and for the most part effective only for an inner action. But that has not been her aim. The new creation must embrace the entire human race, a new race of men must be created and not merely a small select group. And in that new creation must be included not only the inner being of man but also his vital and physical life. In other words, we have to come down to the lower levels and work for the purification there, in order to raise them beyond themselves by the infusion of the higher consciousness and make them fit instruments for the higher things. We are still continuing with that work, through the “ups and downs of an uneven path”. [emphasis added]

Let me just illustrate, from my own experience, to what extent we had become self-gathered and indrawn. One day, for some reason or other, I happened to have come out of the Ashram precincts and away from its atmosphere; that is to say, I was going about the town and through the market area. Suddenly I began to feel rather queer, as if I were not walking on the ground. There was no weight in my legs, I floated on air through a mist as in a dream and there was no solid ground or a settled path. I felt terribly uneasy, almost like a fish out of water. I hurried my steps back and it was not till I had reached the Ashram precincts that I could heave a sigh of relief.

We have left that stage far enough behind us now. We have in fact reached the opposite end perhaps. We have taken a plunge outwards, identified ourselves with the outer being — a tendency against which the Upanishad has used a word of warning: *parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat*, our senses have a natural pull towards the outer things. But this too was necessary and still is. We form part of the world, we are united with it and inseparable. We are an image of the entire world, its symbol and representative. We have to share in its work and suffer its deeds. Even Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have not spared themselves this, but that is another matter. Whatever changes we succeed in effectuating in ourselves here will initiate similar changes all the world over. Therefore, not to become wholly externalised, — a tendency

which is uppermost here in our collective life today, — but to keep the path open for the inner *sādhana*, this should be our endeavour. We have to harmonise the two extremes, for not to disjoin but to unite, that is Yoga.

(For full article, see *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta* (1979),
Volume 8, pp. 203-06)

* * *

(2)

A Review of Our Ashram Life

... The work that Mother could do then and was doing, she has herself described and explained to us. It was the creation of a world — a region at least — of the higher consciousness in which everyone who participated had his own place, everyone with his soul-being sufficiently in front; and this being she could connect or link up with a being of the higher sphere — a counterpart, an over-soul as it were for each soul. It was a kind of descent — a subtle incarnation of Gods which the Mother's Grace occasioned or brought about into the elevated and sublimated human level.

The ground had already been prepared, we may note, by the descent of the 24th November 1926 — the descent of the Overmind or Krishna-consciousness into Sri Aurobindo's body-consciousness and thence generally into the earth-atmosphere and becoming its natural and permanent possession.

But arrived at one point, Sri Aurobindo happened to make an observation which meant halt! The Mother narrates to us the story in an amusing way. One day Sri Aurobindo was telling the Mother: "What you are doing is very fine and very grand. It will bring you name and fame, you will become a world-figure and your work a marvel. It will be a 'grand succès'." Well, that was sufficient. The whole thing dropped from Mother's hands. The new creation vanished in a moment, as it were: there was a *pralaya*.

The Gods withdrew, we came down with a thud upon earth — down to earth, earth to earth. We are still there, crawling, forward I hope, as best as we can.

This creation of a luminous world in a higher sphere of the mind which Mother attempted could not be fully achieved; for the foundations were not properly laid, the basic ground was not prepared. Any higher structure of the mind and overmind must be built upon man's vital being and physical life. The new creation left out of account these realities of basement, so one had to come down, forgetting for the moment the higher realisation, into these darker regions and make a thorough cleaning of them. The regions of the vital consciousness and

physical consciousness are, as we all know, full of human failings and dangerous complications. One had to leave the heavens and come down to these lower levels and tackle the problems that beset them, the crucial problems whose solution alone could lay a strong foundation for the final consummation, the supreme transformation. One had to face the stark realities there and master them before one could think of a heavenly ascent. So we all became once more ordinary human beings with human weaknesses and a modicum of aspiration perhaps. This was then the task given to all to battle through and conquer here below. The scene changed completely. A mid-summer night's dream turned almost into a sombre Hamlet-tragedy.

The first sign of this Return, this resumption of life as it is, was the re-assertion of the individual, the freedom of the personal unit. Because of the increased number of people and because of the incursion of children, the earlier frame could no longer hold good. The willing surrender of individuality is a lesson that has to be acquired and achieved: it is not just God's gift, for the many. The many have to grow, grow by degrees, through toil and trouble, and slowly led into the mysteries of the higher realisation of surrender and self-giving. And towards that consummation independence, freedom, is the first step. But once the climb down begins, it does not admit of an arrest, it becomes slid down, a continuous descent until you reach the very rock-bottom of the vale of tears. The Roman poet spoke of the easy descent down the cliffs to the river.

The realisation aimed at demands a wholesale change, an integral transformation; it does not rest content with a partial success, an attainment on one level, on one portion of the being. There is therefore a global shake-up, nothing is allowed to remain in its old status unnoticed, all must come out and declare themselves to the Light. Hence the darkness of it all. All the impurities, imperfections and vilenesses show themselves — the grass-roots as they say, that have to be extirpated and the ground ploughed and furrowed — prepared for the new seed. It is a difficult time, the heroic soul must bear and stand, know what it is and move bravely on.

I spoke of the community-ideal that obtained among us at the outset of our life here, that broke to pieces. Individualism reared its gruesome head with all its inevitable consequence: egoism had uncontrolled sway, instead of submission and surrender and obedience, freedom attained complete freedom, liberty pushed to licence.

Like individuals collective bodies also (in the matter of work and enterprises) were allowed freedom to grow — or perhaps not to grow — independently. Each group or section, each undertaking sought to depend upon itself, secured its own personal equipment and resources: its gains were its own; and naturally losses were bound to be more than the gains, the real gain was perhaps the experience. The experience is meant to develop the consciousness and it is hoped that the consciousness did make a gain.

The freedom, the devolution or departure from the centre control went so far as to bring about, as I say, almost a real separation between the two: the same tendency, by the way, as we may notice in the play of world politics today.

The limbs declared their independence and sought and fought for this independence but that could only be at the cost of the Heart. The calvary of the Divine lay precisely here: it is due to this sense of separation, an individual exclusive self-existence prevailing in his children, issues of his own body. The units in the cosmic body of the Divine in the Ignorance are indeed ignorant; and the force that compels them to be together apparently is the forced bond of ignorance, they seem outwardly to press towards inevitable disintegration and chaos.

In reality however, this movement of dispersion out of bounds, a flight away from the centre, harbours a reverse movement in it, a self-conscious advance towards a re-awakening to the one central consciousness that is in all, that is all.

This is an intermediate stage when the faults, the imperfections in the creation, the wrong forces that issued from and were inherent in the original Ignorance and first separation had to be tracked and met, could not be allowed to lie dormant eternally; therefore they rose and declared themselves so that the Light can deal with it and swallow it.

One remembers the legend of the Vedic Rishi Agastya and his consort who once attempted a new and renovated creation. They were engaged in a tremendous and superhuman labour to discover the roots of evil upon earth: they dug up, opened out its very bowels: they went deeper and deeper, layers after layers of obstructive darkness till they arrived at the very source of the Night. They brought in there with them a light that could produce a reversal of consciousness changing darkness into radiance.

The lower sphere of the vital and the physical is a mass of ignorant nature (*prakriti*) — all moving together helplessly, mechanically, bound together indissolubly to one inexorable fate, and it stands on the rock of utter unconsciousness — the Inconscient — which is the very basis and stuff of that sphere. Consciousness, the conscient Being has to come down or emerge and penetrate there, break the hard block of inert matter, striking and scattering and throwing up as it were, its myriad disparate bits, turning them into particles of Light and Consciousness. These free sparks, the first-born of consciousness at the outset become erratic, errant conscious units, free but fighting against each other, each exclusive in its unitary consciousness: but that was the way towards a purer, higher, wider, integrating consciousness. As the consciousness works and moves forward, the dross, the grit is blown away and it works towards a clearer light and a harmonic weaving of all component units.

We are thus in a transition period, it is an interregnum, it is beset with great difficulties but they are also great opportunities. The calvary is not merely a passage of pain and suffering, it is a purgatory, that is to say a period or a zone, a process where the being and consciousness is cleaning itself, throwing off its own scales,

shuffling its old skin and in course of time it will come out in a rejuvenated body and in a harmonious setting. The Paradise lost will one day be thus regained. Paradise Lost thus will have one day inevitably as its sequel and consummation Paradise Regained.

(For full article, see *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta* (1970), Volume 5, pp. 70-75)

Compiler's Notes

The above two articles of Nolini Kanta Gupta not only describe “the brightest period in the history of the Ashram”, but also give us a perspective of Ashram life over fifty years in one grand visionary sweep. He says the new creation attempted by the Mother during this brief period could not be achieved because the vital and physical consciousness of the disciples was not ready, but that even if it were achieved, it would have been “effective only for an inner action” and confined to “merely a small select group”. It would not have embraced the entire human race. The necessity of widening the influence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Yoga was therefore inherent and unavoidable for a full transformation of the earth-consciousness. Of course, embracing the entire human race should not be taken literally, in the sense of making each and every one accept the Yoga of physical transformation, but to make it possible and applicable to all in a symbolic and representative way. Nolini writes:

We [*the disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*] form part of the world, we are united with it and inseparable. We are an image of the entire world, its symbol and representative. We have to share in its work and suffer its deeds. Even Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have not spared themselves this, but that is another matter. Whatever changes we succeed in effectuating in ourselves here will initiate similar changes all the world over.

Sri Aurobindo explains this more clearly in a letter dated 31 October 1935:

It is necessary or rather inevitable that in an Asram which is a “laboratory”, as Adhar Das puts it, for a spiritual and supramental Yoga, humanity should be variously represented. For the problem of transformation has to deal with all sorts of elements favourable and unfavourable. The same man indeed carries in him a mixture of these two things. If only sattwic and cultured men came for the Yoga, men without very much of the vital difficulty in them, then because the difficulty of the vital element in terrestrial nature has not been faced and overcome, it might well be that the endeavour would fail. **There**

might conceivably be under certain circumstances an overmental layer superimposed on the mental, vital and physical and influencing them, but hardly anything supramental or a sovereign transmutation of the human being. Those in the Ashram come from all quarters and are of all kinds; it cannot be otherwise. [*emphasis added*]

In the course of the Yoga, collectively — though not for each one necessarily — as each plane is dealt with, all its difficulties arise. That will explain much in the Ashram that people do not expect there.¹

Mark the sentence in bold which refers to the overmental creation that was attempted by the Mother a little before and after the Siddhi Day. The inevitable dilution of sadhana that consequently took place in the Ashram in the late twenties and thirties, and even more so in the forties and fifties with the coming of the children, had thus an *advantage* from a long term point of view. I quote from the Mother's talk of 25 August 1954:

This has one advantage. We were too much outside life. Many problems did not occur which, when the full manifestation is wanted, would suddenly appear. We have taken up the problems a little too soon. But it was necessary to solve them. One learns many things in this way. Many difficulties are overcome. But it becomes more complicated. And perhaps, in the present conditions, with such a large number of elements which don't have the least idea of the purpose for which they are here . . . it asks much more effort from the disciples than before.

Formerly, you see, we began with thirty-five, thirty-six; but even till a hundred and fifty, even till a hundred and fifty it was so much as though . . . they were as though held in an egg-shell in my consciousness, so close, you know, that I could direct all their movements, both inner and outer, all the time, everything was under complete control, at every moment, night and day. And naturally, I believe, in those days they made some progress. It was altogether true that I did the sadhana for them, *all the time*! But then, you see, with this invasion [*of children*], one can't do sadhana for little chits of three or four or five, you understand. It is out of the question; all I can do is to put the consciousness upon them and try to see that they grow up in the best possible conditions.

So, this has an advantage. It is that instead of being so totally and passively dependent, each one must make his own little effort and, truly speaking, this is excellent!²

1. CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 600-01.

2. Mother's Talk of 25 August 1954, CWM, Vol. 6, pp. 297-98.

I quote Mother's well-known answer to an obvious question that most of us would ask: Why did not Sri Aurobindo and the Mother decide to first supramentalise their own bodies and then proceed to form the representative group of disciples in whom the same could be repeated? Why did they have to form a group which inevitably slowed them down on the path of physical transformation? Mother says:

Truly speaking, it was the first question which came up when I met Sri Aurobindo. I think I have already told you this; I don't remember now, but I spoke about it recently. Should one do one's yoga and reach the goal and then later take up the work with others or should one immediately let all those who have the same aspiration come to him and go forward all together towards the goal?

Because of my earlier work and all that I had tried, I came to Sri Aurobindo with the question very precisely formulated. For the two possibilities were there: either to do an intensive individual sadhana by withdrawing from the world, that is, by no longer having any contact with others, or else to let the group be formed naturally and spontaneously, not preventing it from being formed, allowing it to form, and starting all together on the path.

Well, the decision was not at all a mental choice; it came spontaneously. The circumstances were such that there was no choice; that is, quite naturally, spontaneously, the group was formed in such a way that it became an imperious necessity. And so once we have started like that, it is finished, we have to go to the end like that.

At the beginning there were five, ten, not more. There were five or six for a long time. It became ten, twelve, about twenty; then thirty, thirty-five. That remained for quite a long while. And then suddenly, you know, it started; and then here we are! The last figure was more than eleven hundred. We are growing.

Now, among these there are many who do not do the sadhana, then the problem does not come up. But for all those who do it, it is like this, it is as Sri Aurobindo has described it here. And if one wants to do the thing in a solitary way, it is absolutely impossible to do it totally. For every physical being, however complete he may be, is only partial and limited; he represents only one law in the world; it can be a very complex law, but it is only one law; what is called in India, you know, the Dharma, one Truth, one Law.

Each individual being, even if he be of a completely higher kind, even if he is made for an absolutely special work, is only one individual being; that means, the totality of the transformation cannot take place through one single body. And that is why, spontaneously, the multiplication came about.

One can reach, alone and solitary, his own perfection. One can become in one's consciousness infinite and perfect. But when it is a question of a work, it is always limited.

I don't know if you understand me well. But personal realisation has no limits. One can become inwardly in himself perfect and infinite. But the outer realisation is necessarily limited, and if one wants to have a general action, at least a minimum number of physical beings is needed.

In a very old tradition it was said that twelve were enough; but in the complexities of modern life it doesn't seem possible. **There must be a representative group.** Which means that . . . you know nothing about it or you don't imagine it very well, but each one of you represents one of the difficulties which must be conquered for the transformation. And this makes many difficulties! (*Mother laughs*) I have written somewhere . . . I have said that, more than a difficulty, each one represents an impossibility to be solved. And it is the whole set of all these impossibilities which can be transformed into the Work, the Realisation. Each case is an impossibility to be solved, and it is when all these impossibilities are resolved that the Work will be accomplished.³ [*emphasis added*]

The representative group naturally got connected with all the activities that could be transformed spiritually, so that the Ashram became "a symbolic representation of life on earth".⁴ It will not be out of place here to mention the external evolution of the Ashram since its inception in 1926, without attempting to link it with its spiritual evolution. First came the essential services of the Ashram in the late twenties and thirties, such as the Dining Room, the Bakery, the Construction Department and a Workshop for the maintenance of machines and cars. Next came the School and the Physical Education Department (with their respective sub-sections) in the forties and fifties for engaging the children of the Ashram. At the same time large tracts of agricultural fields and flower gardens were acquired and there was an attempt to make the Ashram self-sufficient in the supply of rice, vegetables and milk by setting up farms and dairies. In the fifties and sixties various commercial ventures were started, such as the Honesty Engineers & Contractors, Cottage Industries, Hand Made Paper products and the Sugar Factory.⁵ Finally, under the Mother's influence began the formation of small centres and large organisations across India and the world, culminating in the foundation of Auroville in 1968. The list of activities that I have mentioned is not at all complete, and it would be more correct to ask which activities of the world were not represented in the Ashram than excluded from it. For the dynamic inspiration of the Mother led to an explosion of diverse activities, creative and mundane, artistic and technical which literally made the Ashram a mini-world.

3. Mother's Talk of 21 December 1955, *CWM*, Vol. 7, pp. 409-10.

4. *CWM*, Vol. 16, p. 331.

5. Though the New Horizon Sugar Factory belonged to a private owner, Mother practically took it as her own project and extended all help from the Ashram.

But this did not happen in a phased and pre-planned manner. Sri Aurobindo writes on this subject in a letter dated 22 August 1939, and what he wrote can be extrapolated to the period when the Ashram was under the Mother's care and supervision after Sri Aurobindo's passing in 1950:

What seems to me of more importance is to try to explain how things are worked out here. Indeed very few are the people who understand it and still fewer those who realise it.

There has never been, at any time, a mental plan, a fixed programme or an organisation decided beforehand. The whole thing has taken birth, grown and developed as a living being by a movement of consciousness (Chit-tapas) constantly maintained, increased and fortified. As the Conscious Force descends in matter and radiates, it seeks for fit instruments to express and manifest it. It goes without saying that the more the instrument is open, receptive and plastic, the better are the results.⁶

Finally, Nolini explains to us the origin of collective disharmony in the Ashram after the fall from the short period of Grace that had uplifted the consciousness of the sadhaks during the overmental creation. The fall into the physical consciousness led to an assertion of individual freedom at the expense of collective harmony.

The realisation aimed at demands a wholesale change, an integral transformation; it does not rest content with a partial success, an attainment on one level, on one portion of the being. There is therefore a global shake-up, nothing is allowed to remain in its old status unnoticed, all must come out and declare themselves to the Light. Hence the darkness of it all. All the impurities, imperfections and vilenesses show themselves — the grass-roots as they say, that have to be extirpated and the ground ploughed and furrowed — prepared for the new seed. It is a difficult time, the heroic soul must bear and stand, know what it is and move bravely on.

I spoke of the community-ideal that obtained among us at the outset of our life here, that broke to pieces. Individualism reared its gruesome head with all its inevitable consequence: egoism had uncontrolled sway, instead of submission and surrender and obedience, freedom attained complete freedom, liberty pushed to licence.

Like individuals collective bodies also (in the matter of work and enterprises) were allowed freedom to grow — or perhaps not to grow — independently. Each group or section, each undertaking sought to depend upon itself, secured its own personal equipment and resources: its gains were its own;

6. CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 676-77.

and naturally losses were bound to be more than the gains, the real gain was perhaps the experience. The experience is meant to develop the consciousness and it is hoped that the consciousness did make a gain.

But this difficult self-cleansing process is an intermediate stage and a period of transition. Nolini concludes his article with optimism after giving us this breath-taking view of Ashram life over half a century.

We are thus in a transition period, it is an interregnum, it is beset with great difficulties but they are also great opportunities. The calvary is not merely a passage of pain and suffering, it is a purgatory, that is to say a period or a zone, a process where the being and consciousness is cleaning itself, throwing off its own scales, shuffling its old skin and in course of time it will come out in a rejuvenated body and in a harmonious setting. The Paradise lost will one day be thus regained. Paradise Lost thus will have one day inevitably as its sequel and consummation Paradise Regained.

(To be continued)

Compilation and Notes by RAMAN REDDY

All true Truth of love and of the works of love the psychic being accepts in their place: but its flame mounts always upward and it is eager to push the ascent from lesser to higher degrees of Truth, since it knows that only by the ascent to a highest Truth and the descent of that highest Truth can Love be delivered from the cross and placed upon the throne; for the cross is the sign of the Divine Descent barred and marred by the transversal line of a cosmic deformation which turns it into a stake of suffering and misfortune.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 157)

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

(Part 40)

(Continued from the issue of October 2023)

Section 4: FORTHRIGHTNESS WITH THE MAHARAJA

At Baroda Sri Aurobindo's two great interests were poetry and securing India's independence. He notes in the third person: "As long as he was in the Baroda service, Sri Aurobindo could not take part publicly in politics."¹ But he writes that a large part of his last years in Baroda "was spent on leave in silent political activity, for he was debarred from public action by his position at Baroda."² It was the partition of Bengal that gave him the opening to openly join the political movement. When Lord Curzon announced the partition of Bengal on 20th July, 1905, Sri Aurobindo saw an opportunity to strengthen the revolutionary movement. From Baroda he wrote to the revolutionary workers in Calcutta, "A golden opportunity has come. Lay special stress on the Anti-Partition movement. Many workers will come from this movement." He sent a little pamphlet that he had written called "No Compromise" which, because of its highly seditious content, no printer wanted to publish. Somehow it was privately printed and about a thousand copies of the pamphlet were circulated. When the Moderate leader Surendranath Banerjee was shown the manifesto he was utterly stunned and remarked: "No Indian, why, not even a Bengali, could write such English, and present the facts so cogently". When he was told that Aurobindo Ghose was the author, he said, "Yes, he is the only person who could write in this way."³

In end December 1905, Sri Aurobindo attended the Benares Congress. After returning to Baroda he obtained two months privilege leave in February 1906, to which he attached the summer vacation and spent the entire period in Bengal.⁴ Sri Aurobindo returned to Baroda in June 1906 and took a year's leave without pay beginning in end June 1906. He returned to Calcutta in early July 1906.⁵ That the Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad acceded to an employee's unusual request for a year's leave was rather extraordinary and perhaps indicated that he did not wish to lose a valued officer by disappointing or even annoying him.

Whilst Sri Aurobindo was on privilege leave the revolutionary paper *Yugantar* got established in March 1906. Sri Aurobindo notes: "At Barin's suggestion he

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

2. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

3. See Abinash Bhattacharya, 'Aurobindo', *Srinwantu*, November 1984, p. 111.

4. See *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 6.

5. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 217.

agreed to the starting of a paper, *Yugantar*, which was to preach open revolt and the absolute denial of the British rule and include such items as a series of articles containing instructions for guerrilla warfare. Sri Aurobindo himself wrote some of the opening articles in the early numbers and he always exercised a general control . . .”⁶ Sri Aurobindo also notes that he “left Baroda in 1906 and went to Calcutta as Principal of the newly-founded Bengal National College.”⁷ The daily paper *Bande Mataram* started in August 1906. Sri Aurobindo, in the third person, notes: “Sri Aurobindo took up joint editorship of the journal . . . He gave up his Baroda job some time after this; he had taken indefinite leave without pay; for this reason he did not take up officially and publicly the editorship of the *Bande Mataram* although after Bepin Pal left that post, he was practically in full control of the policy of the paper.”⁸

When the Maharaja granted Sri Aurobindo a year’s leave he was alert to the fact that Sri Aurobindo wished to join India’s independence movement. As early as 1893-94, soon after Sri Aurobindo joined Baroda State Service, the Maharaja was already aware of Sri Aurobindo’s nationalistic feelings. It was no secret that the anonymous seminal articles, published in the *Indu Prakash* in 1894, severely criticising the British and their harsh governance, was written by Sri Aurobindo. Much later when the French biographer Gabriel Monod-Herzen alluded to the fact that the authorities objected to Sri Aurobindo’s patriotic activities, Sri Aurobindo clarified:

Is the reference to the Baroda authorities? Sri Aurobindo is not aware that his utterances or writings were ever objected to by them. His articles in the *Indu Prakash* were anonymous, although many people in Bombay knew that he was the writer. Otherwise, except for a few speeches at functions in the Palace itself such as the reception of Dr. S. K. Mullick which had nothing to do [with]⁹ politics, he spoke mainly as Chairman of the Baroda College Union, there was no objection made at any time and he continued to preside over some of these debates until he left Baroda.¹⁰

In addition to Sri Aurobindo’s patriotic sentiments the Maharaja also knew that Sri Aurobindo was a sympathiser of the revolutionary movement. When Sister Nivedita visited Baroda in 1902, as a guest of the Maharaja, she asked him to support the revolution and said that he could communicate to her through Sri Aurobindo. About this incident Sri Aurobindo remarked: “Sayajirao was much too cunning to plunge into such a dangerous business and never spoke to me about it.”¹¹

6. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 50.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

9. *MS (dictated)* at.

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

11. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

Referring to the time during the early 1900s, the titular Maharaja of Baroda from 1951 until 1988, Fatehsingrao Gaekwad, explains why it was “a dangerous business” to support the secret revolution:

And whatever his private feelings, Sayajirao was scrupulous about keeping to the form; he knew that any rash display of an independent spirit was certain to be met with disastrous consequences; it had happened in Baroda to his predecessor, and it was to happen again to a brother prince, Maharaja Shivajirao Holkar of Indore. . . .

Under these circumstances, there was never any possibility of Sayajirao showing the slightest sympathy or support for the nationalist movement; if anything, he had to make a show of his opposition to it. All the same, just as the British never ceased to suspect that he was secretly in league with the nationalists, the nationalists for their part always regarded him as one of themselves. Alone among the Indian princes, his name figures prominently in official post-independence histories of the freedom struggle, as a patriot who despite his extremely vulnerable position, did all in his power to support the nationalists.

. . . the Residency records that have remained undestroyed, in the repetitive comment that “his behavior was openly suspicious, that he was in sympathy with the extremists.”

Oddly enough, even at the time, at the turn of the century, this sympathy with the “extremists”, was known to extremists themselves, or was at least taken for granted by them. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the foremost among the nationalists, always made laudable if guarded references to his independence and liberalism, and, in a letter written from his cell in the penal colony in the Andamans, V. D. Savarkar had advised his younger brother who had qualified as a doctor, not to set up practice in a squalid town like Bombay but to “go to a place like Baroda which is ruled by an enlightened prince.”¹²

Sayajirao had met Tilak several times and remarked about him: “I was especially impressed with his intelligence and learning.”¹³ In fact an intimate college friend of Tilak, V. S. Bapat, worked as a land settlement officer of Baroda State. Elsewhere, Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad writes that Sayajirao “admired Tilak and Aurobindo”.¹⁴

Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad has revealed that the Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad was quite aware of Sri Aurobindo’s political ideals and activities:

Before Sayajirao’s return to India, Aurobindo Ghose had left Baroda service.

He had joined it in 1893, as a recruit to the Revenue service. Sayajirao had

12. Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad, *Sayajirao of Baroda – The Prince and the Man*, 1989, pp. 183-84.

13. *Reminiscences and Anecdotes of Lokmanya Tilak*, edited by S. V. Bapat, 1928, p. 174.

14. Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad, *Sayajirao of Baroda – The Prince and the Man*, 1989, p. 219.

been impressed by his work and had soon taken him on as his Private Secretary, and later made him the Vice Principal of the Baroda College. In the process, his salary had jumped from Rs 200 a month to Rs 750. Even in his new job he “was often informally entrusted with drafting very important confidential communications.”

Almost from the day of his arrival in Baroda, Aurobindo had plunged into political activities, and written fiery articles for various papers “denouncing the wrongs of British rule”. Even though these articles were written under a pseudonym, it did not take long for the British police to discover the identity of their author, and after that Aurobindo carried out his political work more or less openly. He gathered around himself a circle of like-minded young men and came out on the side of the “extremists” in the Congress, who advocated the demand for “self-government” as distinct from the “moderates” who wanted the British to give them political reforms and a greater voice in the running of the country. By 1906, his name had been coupled with that of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, whom the British regarded as the most indefatigable and articulate enemy of their rule.

Sayajirao was perfectly aware of Aurobindo’s political views and activities and, by all accounts, secretly sympathised with them. He was also aware that, to harbour a well-known extremist in his educational service was, for someone in his position, a grave risk. And yet he had gone on supporting Aurobindo, to the extent of giving military training to one of Aurobindo’s friends, Jatin Banerji in the Baroda Cavalry, and thereby defying a ban imposed by the British Government against the employment of Bengalis in the army.

The position was that, even if the British had already branded Aurobindo as a revolutionary, Sayajirao had no intention of asking him to leave his service. It was Aurobindo who must have realised that his presence in Baroda was a constant source of recrimination between the employer and the Residency. In any case, he was getting restive in Baroda. He was anxious to be in Bengal where the freedom movement was already active and to play his own part in it. For the past few months he was contributing regularly to *Yugantar*, a Bengali language paper run by his younger brother Barindra, and had watched helplessly while editor after editor of the paper had been sent to jail for publishing his writings [*sic*]. Now he wanted to go and join the others whom he had inspired by his writings and who in a sense were his followers. He put in for long leave and went to Calcutta to look for a job.¹⁵

After Sri Aurobindo went to Calcutta on long leave the Maharaja tried several times, through various avenues, to dissuade him from resigning. Sri Aurobindo’s

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 206-07.

first recruit at Bengal, Abinash Bhattacharya, who was working at *Yugantar*, writes that “after settling all his affairs in Baroda, Aurobindo-babu joined us. The Maharaja of Baroda came to call him back but had to return disappointed.”¹⁶

The Maharaja and Subodh Mullick were on cordial terms and during one of the Maharaja’s visits to Calcutta in 1905, the Mullicks hosted a reception for him. Subsequently the Maharaja visited Calcutta again and invited Sri Aurobindo where Subodh Mullick accompanied him for the meeting. Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta, also a *Yugantar* worker, narrates the gist of the meeting:

At this juncture Sri Aurobindo resigning his job and coming over to Calcutta inspired the youths. The Raja of Baroda came to Calcutta in 1906. He proposed to make Aurobindo the Principal of the college so that he agreed to return to Baroda. But he (Sri Aurobindo) did not agree. Some friends from Baroda were then Subodh Mullick’s guests. One of them asked Subodh Mullick, after (his) return from meeting the Raja, what Aurobindo told the Raja. He (Subodh Mullick) replied, Aurobindo said, “No, No”! This writer who then sat near Subodh Babu, heard this with his own ears.¹⁷

Sukumar Sen, a close friend of the Mullick family, also mentions that the Maharaja was anxious to have Sri Aurobindo back in service but Sri Aurobindo was firm in his commitment to the national cause.¹⁸

On 16th January, 1907, Principal Clarke sought sanction to appoint an Englishman as Vice-Principal and professor of French at Baroda College as he understood that “Mr A. A. Ghose is not returning to the College on the expiration of his leave”.¹⁹ On 29th January, 1907, the Dewan wrote that “the present proposal cannot be entertained till the question of Mr. Ghose’s return is settled. He has got extension of leave but if he is to return at the end of that period, nothing need to be done about the present Tippan. Accordingly the matter can be considered only in the abstract, and can be put into effect only if Mr. Ghose does not return.”²⁰

In spite of Sri Aurobindo’s revolutionary writings and activities in Bengal, the Maharaja was eager to retain him in his administration, risking raising the ire of the British Government. Sometime in 1907, Charu Chandra Dutt met the Maharaja. He writes:

16. Abinash Bhattacharya, ‘Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, July 2012, p. 530.

17. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, July 2013, p. 573 (Bhupendranath Dutta in Sri Aurobindo Special Number of *Nirnay* (Bengali), cited by Trij Roy in *Sri Aurobindo: Banga Parva*; Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir, Kolkata).

18. See Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, January 2016, p. 37.

19. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

20. *Ibid.*

Truth to tell, no one understood my chief, not even his clever Maharaja. In 1907, when I met His Highness in Baroda, he said to me quite solemnly, “Try and persuade your friend not to resign his job here. Let him go on extending his leave. Otherwise they are sure to lock him up.” When I told Aurobindo this, he laughed out, “The old man will never understand my politics. Still, he is fond of me, I suppose. Of course, you would say it is the fondness of the Moslem housewife for the fowl that she is fattening up for the festive meal.”²¹

Even the high regard and fondness of a king from one of the most prestigious Princely States in India left Sri Aurobindo unmoved. Sri Aurobindo officially resigned from Baroda State Service in June 1907.

After Sri Aurobindo completed a month-long political tour to Maharashtra in January 1908, a book, covering some of his speeches, was published. An extract from the preface read: “When it was decided in 1906 by Bengalee leaders to start a National Board, he was invited. He resigned his post, although Maharajah Saheb was not desirous to part with him.”²²

In Sayajirao’s biography, Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad, writes:

When, while still on his travels, Sayajirao heard that Aurobindo had decided to leave Baroda for good, his reaction was characteristic. Anyone else might have been thankful that he was being rid of a man whose presence had been a major cause of his difficulties with the government. Instead, he dashed off a letter to his Dewan asking that efforts should be made to persuade Aurobindo “not to leave Baroda and the college.”

But Aurobindo had made up his mind. He “joined the staff of the Bengal National College . . . on a salary of Rs. 150 per month . . . one fifth of his salary at Baroda!”²³

After attending the Surat Congress Convention in end December 1907, Sri Aurobindo visited Baroda and gave speeches on the Indian political situation. The Principal of Baroda College, Mr. Clarke, had issued orders to the students that they were not to meet Sri Aurobindo. The British Government kept a close eye on the nationalist leaders and discouraged the princes from meeting them, yet the Maharaja invited Sri Aurobindo to his palace. After this meeting the Maharaja extended another invitation but on the advice of Bhaskar Lele Sri Aurobindo did not oblige.²⁴ About the meeting K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes: “While at Baroda, he had met the

21. Charu Chandra Dutt, ‘My Friend and my Master’, *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, Eight number, p. 125.

22. *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, p. 181.

23. Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad, *Sayajirao of Baroda – The Prince and the Man*, 1989, p. 207.

24. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 274; See A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 100.

Maharaja once at his request; an attempt was made, perhaps, to detach Sri Aurobindo from active politics, but it couldn't make him swerve in the least from his chosen course.”²⁵

Dinendra Roy mentions that the Maharaja of Gaekwad was amongst the few princes in India capable of appreciating the qualities of a person like Sri Aurobindo.²⁶

Rajaram Patkar, a student who assisted Sri Aurobindo for a number of years, observed that Sri Aurobindo was always fearless and forthright with the Maharaja. The Maharaja valued his Cambridge scholar's frank views. Rajaram N. Patkar writes:

One thing peculiar to him was that he never hesitated giving his own impartial opinion to the Maharaja boldly on any particular subject of importance, without caring for the latter's likes or dislikes — which none of his predecessors ever dared to do. This raised him in the estimation of the appreciating Maharaja, who many times thanked him for the frank expression of his opinions.²⁷

And Barin writes:

His Highness Sayajirao Gaekwar used to hold Sri Aurobindo in deep estimation and stood in awe of his sturdy spirit of independence. With other State officials the Maharaja was autocratic and whimsical to a degree, but with the humble professor of his College, he was all politeness and consideration. He knew the force of character in the silent and deep thinker and was very eager to utilise his powerful and inimitable style for writing his despatches to the British Government and his public speeches.²⁸

Sri Aurobindo's candidness with the Maharaja is illustrated in the following incident:

Once at a quiet early hour, an old poor woman, standing on the wayside with a basketful of cow-dung cakes, shouted out at a passing horse rider to help her put the basket on her head. The rider dismounted and helped her thus and the woman expressed her gratitude to this stranger. Unknown to the woman the horseman was none other than the Maharaja who happened to be riding in ordinary clothes without his bodyguards. When the Maharaja was about to mount his horse he saw Sri Aurobindo approaching and waited to exchange pleasantries since he looked up to Sri Aurobindo as a friend. Sri Aurobindo greeted the Royal with a smile and the latter suspected a hidden meaning behind

25. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 290.

26. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st Ed., 2006, p. 27, (Dinendra Kumar Roy, *Aurobindo Prasanga* – Translated from Bengali by Maurice Shukla).

27. Reminiscences of Rajaram N. Patkar dated 30 September 1956; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

28. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

the smile. “Mr Ghose,” he asked, “What makes you smile?”

“No reason in particular,” Sri Aurobindo smilingly replied.

Knowing that Sri Aurobindo was not a person subject to frivolity the Maharaja was curious to know the real reason behind his smile. He continued, “Sayajirao, the Maharaja of Baroda, was helping a poor mother by lifting a basket of cow-dung cakes onto her head — was that what made you smile?”

Sri Aurobindo replied, “No, it was not that.”

“Then what was it?” asked the King.

Sri Aurobindo said, “Maharaj, you helped a poor woman by lifting a basket of cow-dung cakes and putting it on her head. It was, no doubt, a good deed. But I was wondering what would be a really great act on the part of Shri Sayajirao Gaekwad, the Maharaja of Baroda. Would it be to place a basket of cow-dung cakes on the head of an old woman, or to relieve her from carrying such a burden?”

The words of Sri Aurobindo made a decisive impact on the Maharaja. The next day an official brought the old woman to the palace. The Maharaja had a brick house built for her and took responsibility for all her expenses for the rest of her life.

On accomplishing this task the Maharaja told Sri Aurobindo about what he had done. Sri Aurobindo was very pleased and thanked the Maharaja by saying, “This is the work worthy of you.” Sri Aurobindo’s compliment made the Maharaja glow within.²⁹

The Maharaja sometimes conversed with Sri Aurobindo on subjects that he would not ordinarily do with his other subjects. Once while speaking of the vision of Brahman a disciple told Sri Aurobindo, “Some press the eyeballs and make people see the ‘light’”. Sri Aurobindo replied:

The Gaekwad also used to say the same thing. He used to say: “People say that Brahman is Light but that I see when I press my eyes. What is the difference between that and the Brahman?” I did not know anything about Yoga at that time and so I used to say: “It is not quite the same light.”³⁰

Whilst speaking about another kind of light, Sri Aurobindo wrote to a disciple:

Dreams of this kind can last for years and years after the waking consciousness has ceased to interest itself in things of that kind. The subconscious is exceedingly obstinate in the keeping of its old impressions. I find myself even recently

29. Praneeta Chakraborty, ‘The Maharaja of Baroda and the Cow-dung Cake Seller’, *Mother India*, April 2006, pp. 284-85 (translated from Bengali by Jyoti Sen from an article in *Srinivantu*).

30. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, pp. 466-67.

having a dream of revolutionary activities or another in which the Maharaja of Baroda butted in, people and things I have not even thought of passingly for the last twenty years almost. I suppose it is because the very business of the subconscious in the human psychology is to keep all the past inside it and, being without conscious mentality, it clings to its office until the light has fully come down into it, illumining even its corners and crevices.³¹

Sri Aurobindo opined that Sayajirao had a strong individuality and was a capable ruler. During the talks with his disciples Sri Aurobindo alluded to the Maharaja having a certain personality and solidity in him.³² When Sayajirao Gaekwad died on 6th February, 1939, his grandson Yuvaraj Pratapsingh Rao became the Maharaja. A few days later Sri Aurobindo alluded to Sayajirao's personality when he remarked on the new Maharaja: “I saw his photograph today. He has a weak face, nothing of the grandfather in him. His father [*Fatehsingh*] had more brilliance and dash. Pratapsingh has a soul, but not a strong one.”³³

Sayajirao was one of the rare princes in favour of self-government, which was known to the Congress party. Once, in early 1939, an attendant said: “Vallabhbhai is trying to appeal to the Gaekwad, telling him that he (the Gaekwad) was the first to think of self-government and has always been thinking of advancing political life, etc.” Sri Aurobindo remarked, “He will think for thirty years more before he gives in. But who knows, he may give in. Since he is old he may take the glory and give the legacy of trouble to his successor.”³⁴

In 1940 a disciple said, “Gandhi says that he has no objection to the Princes if they remain like the King of England.” Sri Aurobindo replied: “If the Princes remain at all, I am not for stinting them any power. If a Prince is capable or if he has capable ministers, he can do a lot of good which a parliament can't.”³⁵

“Aurobindo's opinion of the Maharaja was very high”, writes Dinendra Kumar Roy. He adds, “He told me that the Maharaja was worthy of governing a far greater empire and that it was hard to find in India a politician like him.”³⁶ Nirodbaran writes that Sri Aurobindo “considered the Maharaja to be an able ruler, far in advance of most of his contemporaries”.³⁷

In a 1926 conversation with his disciples Sri Aurobindo said: “The Indian princes may be anything personally, but as a class they lack courage and political wisdom.” He added: “No doubt, if the princes were politicians they could hasten the

31. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, pp. 380-81.

32. See A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 700.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*, p. 684.

35. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 385.

36. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st Ed., 2006, p. 27, (Dinendra Kumar Roy, *Aurobindo Prasanga* – Translated from Bengali by Maurice Shukla).

37. Nirodbaran, *Sri Aurobindo For All Ages*, 1994, p. 25.

march of freedom to a very great extent. They could create real centres of power within their dominions which would serve when the time for revolution came. That was the idea in Gaekwad’s mind when he began but it was not carried through.”³⁸

Sri Aurobindo’s above statement can perhaps be explained from the fact that Sayajirao’s confidence was badly shaken in 1911 when the British Government amplified their harassment and intimidation towards him because of his independent views. Dr. Manilal told Sri Aurobindo that the Maharaja was humiliated at the durbar of King George V in 1911 following which he started going downhill. “Before this he was really great”, he added.³⁹

Let us briefly examine the sequence of events and circumstances that led to Sayajirao being put under immense pressure by the British Government that ultimately led to his mellowing down from his earlier combative persona. Sri Aurobindo’s long service in Baroda was also one of the reasons that raised suspicions of Sayajirao’s disloyalty in the bureaucracy.

As early as 1895, the British Resident at Baroda, Colonel Biddulph, in a confidential report to the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, had charged Sayajirao as being “disloyal both in thought and action”.⁴⁰ Later, in the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy Case of May 1908 Barin was interrogated by three people including a CID inspector, immediately after his arrest. He writes that they

. . . asked me several questions as we chatted away: “Had we really thought that we would be able to conquer the English state by hurling some bombs? Alright, even if that does not happen, maybe the objective was to frighten them and acquire political power, but who gave us all this advice? Was the Russian government behind this? Some of the princely states? Not even that! Okay, what about the Gaekwad?” Troubled by these barbed questions, I somehow managed to hold on till one o’clock.”⁴¹

In November 1909 the Viceroy, Lord Minto, visited Baroda. In Sayajirao’s proposed welcome speech the Resident found that that it did not contain the requisite assurance of help. Sayajirao made the necessary alterations in his speech. Nonetheless, the British bureaucracy believed that Sayajirao’s loyalty to the British crown was “vague and half-hearted.” This lapse on the part of Sayajirao caused the Residency to relook into the earlier charges of disloyalty or insufficient loyalty. From now on there was a stricter watch on his movements and utterances. The evidence in the Residency records had been steadily piling up, and two years later,

38. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 289.

39. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2013, p. 952.

40. Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad, *Sayajirao of Baroda – The Prince and the Man*, 1989, p. 183.

41. Barindra Kumar Ghose, *Barindr Aranyak* (translated from Bengali by Kumkum Roy – manuscript).

it was to form the subject matter of a lengthy secret letter of twenty-five pages, sent by the next Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, to the British Government, recommending “an uncompromisingly tougher line with the Gaekwad.” Inevitably, Aurobindo Ghose, “the noted extremist”, comes in for special denunciation:

For a time he acted as His Highness’s Private Secretary and consequently . . . as Vice-Principal of the Baroda College . . . There can be no question but that his employment in the State gave a great impetus to the anti-British movement.⁴²

In 1911 the British Resident, Mr. Cobb, told the Dewan of Baroda, Mr. Seddon (who was an English officer from the I.C.S.), that he believed that as many as a third of Baroda’s subjects were nationalists or seditionists. Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad writes:

Cobb’s belligerence was misdirected, for at that time, there was very little anti-British activity going on in the Baroda state. Cobb’s principal bogey man, Aurobindo Ghose, was of course, no longer in Baroda and indeed, from February 1910, was not even an active nationalist. After the historic trial of the Bengal terrorists which came to be known as the Alipore Bomb case in which Ghose was one of the accused had ended and Ghose was acquitted, he had fled to Pondicherry, the tiny French enclave in South India, and had announced that he had given up politics to devote his life to spiritual pursuits.

In the absence of Ghose, Cobb kept pestering Seddon to take some sort of punitive action against two men in Baroda service who were known to have been friendly with Aurobindo while he was there, four years earlier, Khaserao Jadhav and Keshavrao Deshpande.⁴³

At this point the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, had already decided to get tough with the Gaekwad. Subsequently Cobb sent a report to the Viceroy that two of the Maharaja’s senior-most officers, K. G. Deshpande and Khaserao Jadhav, were believed to be undertaking anti-British activities and the fact that both were particularly close to Aurobindo Ghose was incontrovertible proof that they were anti-British. Lord Hardinge, demanded action against the two officers and called upon the Gaekwad — of what can only be termed as an ultimatum — to accept the following conditions: a) to convene a special ‘darbar’ to deliver a Government-drafted speech condemning the nationalists, b) to make his press laws as stringent as those in British India, c) to accept a British officer as his police chief, and d) to dismiss and deport from his state, certain of his officers. Lord Hardinge’s letter ended on an ominous note: “But should His Highness adopt a different attitude or suggest abdication, we should (resort to) even more forcible measures.”⁴⁴ Both Jadhav and Deshpande were

42. See Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad, *Sayajirao of Baroda – The Prince and the Man*, 1989, pp. 214-15.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 233-36.

demoted following which Deshpande resigned in protest.

In December 1911 the Delhi Durbar was held to mark the succession of King George V and the Indian princes had to pay their homage to their King Emperor. The independent-minded Sayajirao behaved quite unconventionally, breaking every rule. Contrary to a Prince in formal attire, Sayajirao wore the simplest of white, absolutely no jewellery and in the place of the sword that was almost compulsory, he carried a gold-topped cane. He made just one cursory bow to the King and took a couple of backward steps, instead of the standard seven backward steps, and then wheeled around thus committing sacrilege by turning his back on the future Emperor of India. His action was interpreted as a sign of dissent to British rule and there was uproar with demands of his deposition. Lord Hardinge who months earlier had sent a damning report to the Secretary of State was fully vindicated by the Gaekwad's demeanour at the durbar. Lord Hardinge was baying for blood and there was a possibility that he would even consider demanding Sayajirao's abdication.⁴⁵

However, Mr. G. K Gokhale was sent to the Maharaja to elicit an apology. On Gokhale's advice Sayajirao dashed off a letter to Lord Hardinge declaring his profound loyalty to their Majesties and saying that if he had seemed not to conform to the ritual, it was due to “nervousness and confusion in the presence of Their Majesties.”⁴⁶ But Lord Hardinge was not convinced. Fatehsingrao Gaekwad writes:

Lord Hardinge was on the warpath. The Gaekwad, so everyone said, had “insulted” the King at a public ceremony; it was therefore only fitting that his letter of apology must also be given the fullest publicity. He sent round word to Sayajirao that he should either consent to the publication of the letter or consider himself un-invited for the reception which he was holding for the King that same evening. There was nothing to be done but to agree to the publication of this letter.

That should have ended the matter had not the British papers now got into the act. Four days after the event, the London *Times* published its own version of the incident along with the Gaekwad's letter, and then proceeded to devote an entire column to show how the Gaekwad had always tended to shield the nationalists and seditionists in his state. The article went back to 1905 and to the employment of the state's service of Aurobindo Ghose; it alluded to the discovery of Aurobindo's books in a well in Naosari, and alleged that the Baroda administration had shielded the officials who had been ostensibly responsible for having the book printed and distributed . . .⁴⁷

But in the *Pioneer*, the Scottish statesman and Labour Party leader, Keir Hardie, an admirer and sympathiser of Sri Aurobindo, roundly applauded the Gaekwad's

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 237-38.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 239-40.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

dignified behavior at the durbar and contrasted it with that of some of his fellow princes who were, Hardie sneered, “taught to grovel low before the Throne”. Hardie’s article was widely republished in India and read with glee.⁴⁸ About the Delhi Durbar incident Sayajirao later admitted that “he had intentionally dressed and behaved in the manner that he did.”⁴⁹

During the evening conversations with his disciples Sri Aurobindo had spoken about us Indians having a slave mentality which has kept India in bondage.⁵⁰ This slave mentality has led to a diminution of the power of thought which he believed was the main cause of India’s weakness.⁵¹

An aphorism of Sri Aurobindo reflects the importance of developing one’s individuality:

Imitation is sometimes a good training-ship but it will never fly the flag of the admiral.⁵²

“The crisis provoked by the durbar incident was to prove a turning point in Sayajirao’s life. It had been touch and go whether they would take it into their heads to depose him over it”.⁵³ As he could never discount the threat of being forced to abdicate, in the event he showed any disrespect to the Crown in the future, Sayajirao, from that time on, became very circumspect in his behaviour. Furthermore all his actions were being closely watched by the Government. Sayajirao’s wings were truly clipped and this is why Dr. Manilal told Sri Aurobindo that Sayajirao started going downhill after the Delhi Durbar.

Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad has noted that “any prince who was not properly subservient at all times was marked down as disloyal.”⁵⁴ In a June 1907 article in the *Bande Mataram* Sri Aurobindo complained that the princes lacked courage and were subservient to the British Government in enforcing their seditious laws on their subjects; in contrast to the other princes he praised Sayajirao for trying to promote the individuality of the State.⁵⁵ Later, in the *Karmayogin* of 6th November, 1909, Sri Aurobindo declared that Sayajirao was the only one or two of the princes who were not submissive to the British bureaucracy:

For some time past the Native States of Rajputana and Punjab have been vying with each other in promulgations and legislations of a drastic character against

48. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

49. *Ibid.*, p. x.

50. See Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, p. 642.

51. See Sri Aurobindo, *Bengali Writings*, All India Books, 1991, pp. 369-70.

52. *CWSA*, Vol. 12, p. 467.

53. Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad, *Sayajirao of Baroda – The Prince and the Man*, 1989, p. 245.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

55. See *CWSA*, Vol. 6, pp. 473-75.

sedition and conspiracy. The object of these edicts seems to be to stifle all agitation or semblance of any political thought and activity that may be directed against the existing state of things not in the States themselves but in British India. Otherwise, it is impossible to account for the Draconian severity of the language and substance of these ukases or the foolish thoroughness of some of the measures adopted, such as the prohibition of entry even to colourless papers like the *Bengalee*. The exponents of Anglo-Indian opinion point triumphantly to these measures both as a proof of aristocratic loyalty to British officialdom and as an index of the severity with which the agitation would be visited if, instead of the misplaced leniency of British bureaucrats, we were exposed to the ruthlessness of an indigenous government. As every Indian knows, these self-gratulations are insincere and meaningless. The majority of Native States are wholly under the thumb of the Resident and, with the exception of one or two independent princes, like the Gaekwar, neither Maharaja nor Council of Administration can call their souls their own.⁵⁶

In July 1912, D. L. Purohit, a professor at Baroda College who was deputed by H. H. the Gaekwar of Baroda to study various religious and social activities in Europe and India, made a chance visit to Pondicherry. He accidentally met Sri Aurobindo at which point Purohit showed him a printed letter of his questions.

An extract from D. L. Purohit's journal dated 23rd July, 1912, reads:

Mr. Ghose after reading various questions of the circular letter, talked of Yoga — not the conventional method of *Patanjali* but the natural method on which he stumbled upon in his meditations. He believed that egoism would vanish if we were to put ourselves on a higher plane which we can do by allowing ourselves to be only servants of God. First His will will be our will. His knowledge will be our knowledge. This state has given him & his disciples perfect peace. He wanted to systematise it for himself and at a later stage would like to publish his experiences after verification by others. He could annihilate time and space which are merely conventional. There is a reality. . . .

He now does not think before writing. He does not move his hands. He is the complete instrument of [the] eternal and infinite one. Sometimes desires would survive but by efforts they do evaporate and we are able to distinguish between the right & wrong. Out of *manas*, *citta*, *buddhi*, *abhimāna* he found by experience *buddhi* more important. *Mahat* becomes *ahankāra* & egoism is the result. The infinite can help the individual best when the latter knows how to become a complete instrument of Him. . . .⁵⁷

56. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, pp. 291-92.

57. D. L. Purohit, 'Professor D. L. Purohit's Visit', *Mother India*, August 2009, p. 632.

When the British Government learnt of Prof. Purohit's visit to Sri Aurobindo they put pressure on the Maharaja to dismiss him. In end 1912 Purohit tendered in his resignation.

Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad expounds on the circumstances of Prof. Purohit's resignation:

It would be difficult to think of anyone less politically minded than Purohit, who of all things, was a professor of philosophy in the Baroda college. Sayajirao had selected him to go to England to study religious and social questions, the administration of charities etc.” Upon Purohit's return, Sayajirao had commissioned him to travel all over India and make a comparative study of the western and oriental concepts of philosophy by holding discussions with other academicians and theologians. Purohit's offence had been that, in the course of his study tour, he had made a small detour to Pondicherry to see Aurobindo Ghose, who, apart from being an outstanding brilliant philosopher, had once been Purohit's Vice-Principal in Baroda.

For this, the Resident had demanded that Professor Purohit should be dismissed from Baroda service . . .

In the charged atmosphere of the time, there was little that Sayajirao could have done but to carry out the Resident's behest.⁵⁸

A. B. Purani first visited Pondicherry in December 1918 with the sole intention of meeting Sri Aurobindo. He writes:

When the talk turned to Prof. D. L. Purohit of Baroda, Sri Aurobindo recounted the incident of his visit to Pondicherry where he had come to inquire into the relation between the Church and the State. He had paid a courtesy call on Sri Aurobindo as he had known him at Baroda. This had resulted in his resignation from Baroda State service on account of the pressure of the British Residency. I conveyed to Sri Aurobindo the good news that after his resignation Mr. Purohit had started practice as a lawyer and was quite successful, earning more than the pay he had been getting as a professor.⁵⁹

With the advent of the First World War Sayajirao got a reprieve from the attacks of the officials of the Government. Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad writes:

But circumstances beyond the control even of the Raj supervened, in the form of the First World War. In the atmosphere of awakening Indian nationalism,

58. Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad, *Sayajirao of Baroda – The Prince and the Man*, 1989, p. 269.

59. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 18.

the Raj could hardly afford to shock Indian opinion by deposing one of India's most popular rulers. The offensive against Sayajirao fizzled out.⁶⁰

The Maharaja not only admired Sri Aurobindo for his scholarship and genius but also considered him a formidable revolutionary-cum-nationalist leader. But once referring to the Maharaja, Sri Aurobindo remarked, “By the way, he said about me, between my Swadeshi and early Pondicherry periods, ‘Mr. Ghose is an extinct volcano now. He has become a Yogi.’”⁶¹

That Sri Aurobindo was highly regarded by the Baroda royal family is evident when the Maharani of Baroda, Maharani Chimnabai II (1871-1958), wrote to Sri Aurobindo in 1930 seeking spiritual guidance. Although Sri Aurobindo had reached a national stature as a political leader, yogi and philosopher, in his reply he courteously addressed the Maharani as “Your Highness”.⁶² In the letter Sri Aurobindo acknowledges that he has gained spiritual attainment and reveals the method of his yoga, his spiritual help to the world and his unique aim of creating “a divine life upon earth”:

To H. H the Maharani of Baroda

It is true that I have by the practice of Yoga attained to the higher spiritual consciousness which comes by Yoga, and this carries with it a certain power. Especially there is the power to communicate to those who are ready or to help them towards that spiritual state which, in its perfection is a condition of unalterable inner calm, strength and felicity. But this spiritual peace and joy is something quite different from mental peace and happiness. And it cannot be reached without a spiritual discipline.

I do not know whether this has been rightly explained to Your Highness. I may say briefly that there are two states of consciousness in either of which one can live. One is a higher consciousness which stands above the play of life and governs it; this is variously called the Self, the Spirit or the Divine. The other is the normal consciousness in which men live; it is something quite superficial, an instrument of the Spirit for the play of life. Those who live and act in the normal consciousness are governed entirely by the common movements of the mind and are naturally subject to grief and joy and anxiety and desire or to everything else that makes up the ordinary stuff of life. Mental quiet and happiness they can get, but it can never be permanent or secure. But the spiritual consciousness is all light, peace, power and bliss. If one can live entirely in it, there is no question; these things become naturally and securely his. But even if he can live partly in it or keep himself constantly open to it, he

60. Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad, *Sayajirao of Baroda – The Prince and the Man*, 1989, p. 152.

61. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 186.

62. See *CWSA*, Vol. 36, pp. 440-42.

receives enough of this spiritual light and peace and strength and happiness to carry him securely through all the shocks of life. . . .

There are many ways of opening to this Divine consciousness or entering into it. My way which I show to others is by a constant practice to go inward into oneself, to open by aspiration to the Divine and once one is conscious of it and its action to give oneself to It entirely. This self-giving means not to ask for anything but the constant contact or union with the Divine Consciousness, to aspire for its peace, power, light and felicity, but to ask nothing else and in life and action to be its instrument only for whatever work it gives one to do in the world. If one can once open and feel the Divine Force, the Power of the Spirit working in the mind and heart and body, the rest is a matter of remaining faithful to It, calling for it always, allowing it to do its work when it comes and rejecting every other and inferior Force that belongs to the lower consciousness and the lower nature.

I have written so much in order to explain my position and the nature of my Yogic power. I do not usually ask anyone to practise this Yoga, because it is possible only for those who have from the beginning or who develop a strong call to it; others cannot go through it []⁶³ to the end. Nor [do I]⁶⁴ often go out of my way to help those who are merely in need of some kind of quietude of [the] external nature as many Yogins do — though I do not refuse to do it in certain cases. My aim is to create a centre of spiritual life which shall serve as a means of bringing down the higher consciousness and making it a power not merely for “salvation” but for a divine life upon earth. It is with this object that I have withdrawn from public life and founded this Asram in Pondicherry (so-called for want of a better word, for it is not an Asram of Sannyasins, but of those who want to leave all else and prepare for this work). But at the same time I have a small number of disciples all over India who live in their families and receive spiritual help from me even at a distance.

This is all I can answer to Your Highness at present. It is for Your Highness to decide whether what you seek has anything to do with what I have explained in this letter.⁶⁵

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

63. *MS* with.

64. *MS* I do.

65. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, pp. 440-42.

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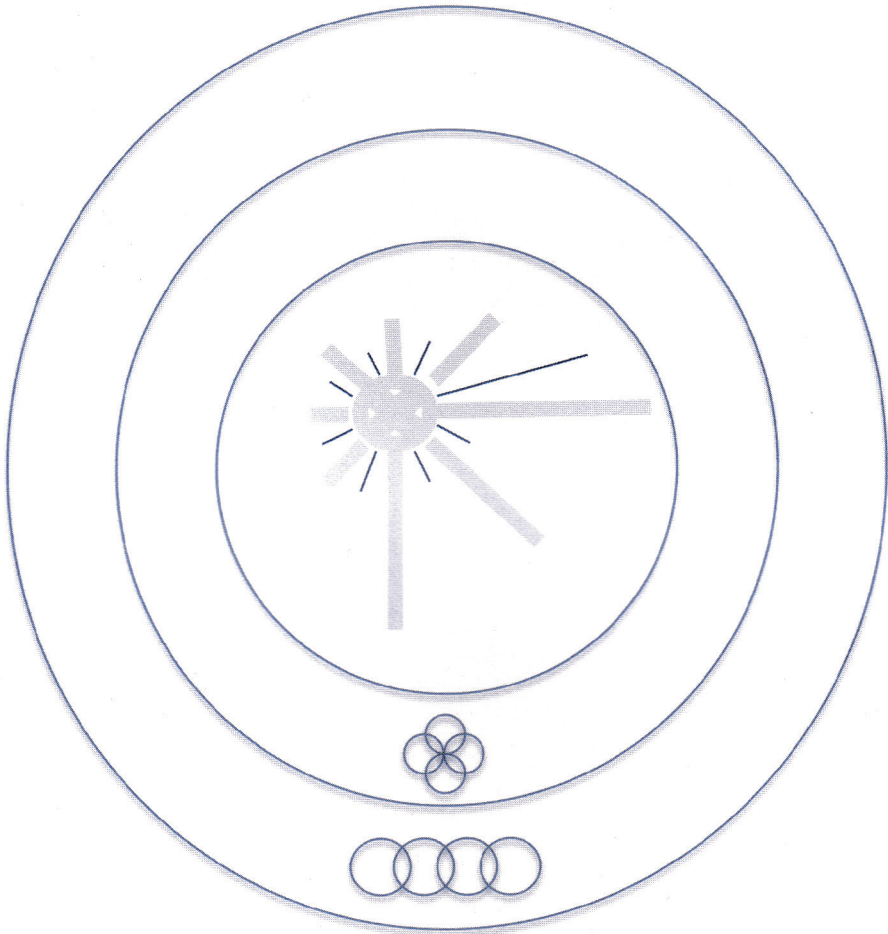
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