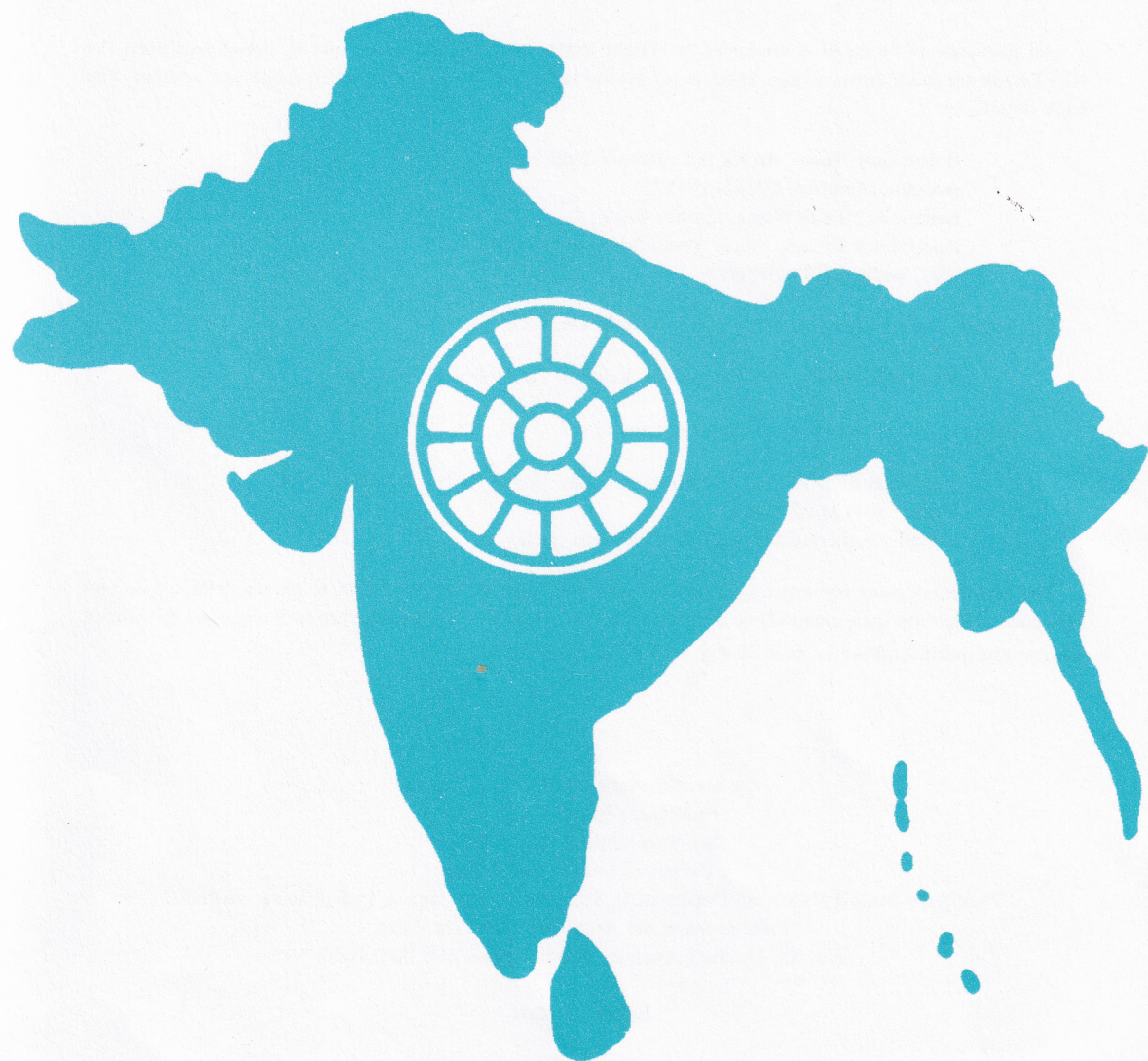


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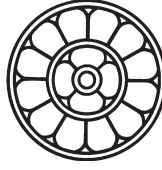
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DECEMBER 2023

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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All correspondence to be addressed to:

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

Phone: (0413) 2233642

e-mail: motherindia@sriarobindoashram.org.in

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Vol. LXXVI

No. 12

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

Sri Aurobindo

HYMN TO THE MOTHER

BANDE MATARAM (Translation in Verse) ... 7

BANDE MATARAM (Translation in Prose) ... 9

RISHI BANKIM CHANDRA ... 11

HERACLITUS — 2 ... 14

EUROPE AND ASIA ... 17

A MESSAGE TO AMERICA ... 21

The Mother

‘TO RETRACE THE PATH IN ALL INNOCENCE . . .’ ... 24

THE FOUR AUSTERITIES AND THE FOUR LIBERATIONS — I ... 25

Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)

“GLAMOUR-TIDE” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO ... 32

Dyuman

CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE MOTHER — III ... 33

Raman Reddy

ON THE BRIGHTEST PERIOD IN THE HISTORY OF THE ASHRAM —
FROM BARIN GHOSH ... 53

Gautam Malaker

“LIFE OF PREPARATION AT BARODA” —

SRI AUROBINDO, THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN (PART 41) ... 66

Section 5: Equanimity and Sweetness of Temper

HYMN TO THE MOTHER

BANDE MATARAM

Mother, I bow to thee!
Rich with thy hurrying streams,
Bright with thy orchard gleams,
Cool with thy winds of delight,
Dark fields waving, Mother of might,
Mother free.
Glory of moonlight dreams
Over thy branches and lordly streams, —
Clad in thy blossoming trees,
Mother, giver of ease,
Laughing low and sweet!
Mother, I kiss thy feet,
Speaker sweet and low!
Mother, to thee I bow.

Who hath said thou art weak in thy lands,
When the swords flash out in twice seventy million hands
And seventy million voices roar
Thy dreadful name from shore to shore?
With many strengths who art mighty and stored,
To thee I call, Mother and Lord!
Thou who savest, arise and save!
To her I cry who ever her foemen drave
Back from plain and sea
And shook herself free.

Thou art wisdom, thou art law,
Thou our heart, our soul, our breath,
Thou the love divine, the awe
In our hearts that conquers death.
Thine the strength that nerves the arm,
Thine the beauty, thine the charm.
Every image made divine
In our temples is but thine.

Thou art Durga, Lady and Queen,
With her hands that strike and her swords of sheen,
Thou art Lakshmi lotus-throned,
And the Muse a hundred-toned.
Pure and perfect without peer,
Mother, lend thine ear.
Rich with thy hurrying streams,
Bright with thy orchard gleams,
Dark of hue, O candid-fair
In thy soul, with jewelled hair
And thy glorious smile divine,
Loveliest of all earthly lands,
Showering wealth from well-stored hands!
Mother, mother mine!
Mother sweet, I bow to thee,
Mother great and free!

BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJI

(Translated by Sri Aurobindo)

(*Translations*, CWSA, Vol. 5, pp. 465-66)



BANDE MATARAM

*(Translation in Prose)*¹

I bow to thee, Mother,
richly-watered, richly-fruited,
cool with the winds of the south,
dark with the crops of the harvests,
the Mother!

Her nights rejoicing in the glory of the moonlight,
her lands clothed beautifully with her trees in flowering bloom,
sweet of laughter, sweet of speech,
the Mother, giver of boons, giver of bliss!

Terrible with the clamorous shout of seventy million throats,
and the sharpness of swords raised in twice seventy million hands,
who sayeth to thee, Mother, that thou art weak?
Holder of multitudinous strength,
I bow to her who saves,
to her who drives from her the armies of her foemen,
the Mother!

Thou art knowledge, thou art conduct,
thou our heart, thou our soul,
for thou art the life in our body.
In the arm thou art might, O Mother,
in the heart, O Mother, thou art love and faith,
it is thy image we raise in every temple.

For thou art Durga holding her ten weapons of war,
Kamala at play in the lotuses
and Speech, the goddess, giver of all lore,
to thee I bow!

1. *Translator's Note.* It is difficult to translate the National Anthem of Bengal into verse in another language owing to its unique union of sweetness, simple directness and high poetic force. All attempts in this direction have been failures. In order, therefore, to bring the reader unacquainted with Bengali nearer to the exact force of the original, I give the translation in prose line by line.

I bow to thee, goddess of wealth,
pure and peerless,
richly-watered, richly-fruited,
the Mother!
I bow to thee, Mother,
dark-hued, candid,
sweetly smiling, jewelled and adorned,
the holder of wealth, the lady of plenty,
the Mother!

BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJI

(Translated by Sri Aurobindo)

(*Translations*, CWSA, Vol. 5, pp. 467-68)



RISHI BANKIM CHANDRA

(From the *Bande Mataram*, CALCUTTA, April 16th, 1907)

There are many who, lamenting the by-gone glories of this great and ancient nation, speak as if the Rishis of old, the inspired creators of thought and civilisation, were a miracle of our heroic age, not to be repeated among degenerate men and in our distressful present. This is an error and thrice an error. Ours is the eternal land, the eternal people, the eternal religion, whose strength, greatness, holiness, may be overclouded but never, even for a moment, utterly cease. The hero, the Rishi, the saint, are the natural fruits of our Indian soil; and there has been no age in which they have not been born. Among the Rishis of the later age we have at last realized that we must include the name of the man who gave us the reviving *mantra* which is creating a new India, the *mantra* *Bande Mataram*.

The Rishi is different from the saint. His life may not have been distinguished by superior holiness nor his character by an ideal beauty. He is not great by what he was himself but by what he has expressed. A great and vivifying message had to be given to a nation or to humanity; and God has chosen this mouth on which to shape the words of the message. A momentous vision has to be revealed; and it is his eyes which the Almighty first unseals. The message which he has received, the vision which has been vouchsafed to him, he declares to the world with all the strength that is in him, and in one supreme moment of inspiration expresses it in words which have merely to be uttered to stir men's inmost natures, clarify their minds, seize their hearts and impel them to things which would have been impossible to them in their ordinary moments. Those words are the *mantra* which he was born to reveal and of that *mantra* he is the seer.

What is it for which we worship the name of Bankim today? What was his message to us or what the vision which he saw and has helped us to see? He was a great poet, a master of beautiful language and a creator of fair and gracious dream-figures in the world of imagination; but it is not as a poet, stylist or novelist that Bengal does honour to him today. It is probable that the literary critic of the future will reckon "Kopal Kundala", "Bishabriksha" and "Krishna Kant's Will" as his artistic masterpieces, and speak with qualified praise of "Devi Chaudhurani", "Anandamath", "Krishna Charit" or "Dharmatattwa". Yet it is the Bankim of these latter works and not the Bankim of the great creative masterpieces who will rank among the Makers of Modern India. The earlier Bankim was only a poet and stylist — the later Bankim was a seer and nation-builder.

But even as a poet and stylist Bankim did a work of supreme national importance not for the whole of India or only indirectly for the whole of India, but for Bengal which was destined to lead India and be in the vanguard of national development. No nation can grow without finding a fit and satisfying medium of expression for

the new self into which it is developing — without a language which shall give permanent shape to its thoughts and feelings and carry every new impulse swiftly and triumphantly into the consciousness of all. It was Bankim's first great service to India that he gave the race which stood in its vanguard such a perfect and satisfying medium. He has been blamed for corrupting the purity of the Bengali tongue; but the pure Bengali of the old poets could have expressed nothing but a conservative and unprogressing Bengal. The race was expanding and changing, and it needed a means of expression capable of change and expansion. He has been blamed also for replacing the high literary Bengali of the Pundits by a mixed popular tongue which was neither the learned language nor good vernacular. But the Bengali of the Pundits would have crushed the growing richness, variety and versatility of the Bengali genius under its stiff inflexible ponderousness. We needed a tongue for other purposes than dignified treatises and erudite lucubrations. We needed a language which should combine the strength, dignity or soft beauty of Sanskrit with the verve and vigour of the vernacular, capable at one end of the utmost vernacular raciness, and at the other of the most sonorous gravity. Bankim divined our need and was inspired to meet it, — he gave us a means by which the soul of Bengal could express itself to itself.

As he had divined the linguistic need of his country's future, so he divined also its political need. He, first of our great publicists, understood the hollowness and inutility of the methods of political agitation which prevailed in his time and exposed it with merciless satire in his "Lokarahasya" and "Kamala Kanta's Daftar". But he was not satisfied merely with destructive criticism, — he had a positive vision of what was needed for the salvation of the country. He saw that the force from above must be met by a mightier reacting force from below, — the strength of repression by an insurgent national strength. He bade us leave the canine method of agitation for the leonine. The Mother of his vision held trenchant steel in her twice seventy million hands and not the bowl of the mendicant. It was the stern gospel of force which he preached under a veil and in images in "Anandamath" and "Devi Chaudhurani". And he had an inspired unerring vision of the moral strength which must be at the back of the physical force. He perceived that the first element of the moral strength must be *tyaga*, complete self-sacrifice for the country and complete self-devotion to the work of liberation. His workers and fighters for the motherland are political *byragees* who have no other thought than their duty to her and have put all else behind them as less dear and less precious and only to be resumed when their work for her is done. Whoever loves self or wife or child or goods more than his country is a poor and imperfect patriot; not by him shall the great work be accomplished. Again, he perceived that the second element of the moral strength needed must be self-discipline and organisation. This truth he expressed in the elaborate training of Devi Chaudhurani for her work, in the strict rules of the Association of the "Anandamath" and in the pictures of perfect organisation which those books contain.

Lastly, he perceived that the third element of moral strength must be the infusion of religious feeling into patriotic work. The religion of patriotism, — this is the master idea of Bankim's writings. It is already foreshadowed in "Devi Chaudhurani". In "Dharmatattwa" the idea and in "Krishna Charit" the picture of a perfect and many-sided Karma Yoga is sketched, the crown of which shall be work for one's country and one's kind. In "Anandamath" this idea is the key-note of the whole book and receives its perfect lyrical expression in the great song which has become the national anthem of United India. This is the second great service of Bankim to his country that he pointed out to it the way of salvation and gave it the religion of patriotism. Of the new spirit which is leading the nation to resurgence and independence, he is the inspirer and political *guru*.

The third and supreme service of Bankim to his nation was that he gave us the vision of our Mother. The new intellectual idea of the motherland is not in itself a great driving force; the mere recognition of the desirability of freedom is not an inspiring motive. There are few Indians at present, whether loyalist, moderate or nationalist in their political views, who do not recognise that the country has claims on them or that freedom in the abstract is a desirable thing. But most of us, when it is a question between the claims of the country and other claims, do not in practice prefer the service of the country; and while many may have the wish to see freedom accomplished, few have the will to accomplish it. There are other things which we hold dearer and which we fear to see imperilled either in the struggle for freedom or by its accomplishment. It is not till the motherland reveals herself to the eye of the mind as something more than a stretch of earth or a mass of individuals, it is not till she takes shape as a great Divine and Maternal Power in a form of beauty that can dominate the mind and seize the heart that these petty fears and hopes vanish in the all-absorbing passion for our mother and her service, and the patriotism that works miracles and saves a doomed nation is born. To some men it is given to have that vision and reveal it to others. It was thirty-two years ago that Bankim wrote his great song and few listened; but in a sudden moment of awakening from long delusions the people of Bengal looked round for the truth and in a fated moment somebody sang *Bande Mataram*. The *mantra* had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism. The Mother had revealed herself. Once that vision has come to a people, there can be no rest, no peace, no farther slumber till the temple has been made ready, the image installed and the sacrifice offered. A great nation which has had that vision can never again be placed under the feet of the conqueror.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 6, pp. 315-19)

NOTE: See CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 637-41, for a slightly revised version. — Ed.

HERACLITUS – 2

(Continued from the issue of November 2023)

What precisely is the key-note of Heraclitus' thinking, where has he found his starting-point, or what are the grand lines of his philosophy? For if his thought is not developed in the severe systematic method of later thinkers, if it does not come down to us in large streams of subtle reasoning and opulent imagery like Plato's but in detached aphoristic sentences aimed like arrows at truth, still they are not really scattered philosophical reflections. There is an inter-relation, an inter-dependence; they all start logically from his fundamental view of existence itself and go back to it for their constant justification.

As in Indian, so in Greek philosophy the first question for thought was the problem of the One and the Many. We see everywhere a multiplicity of things and beings; is it real or only phenomenal or practical, *māyā*, *vyavahāra*? Has individual man, for instance, — the question which concerns us most nearly, — an essential and immortal existence of his own or is he simply a phenomenal and transient result in the evolution or play of some one original principle, Matter, Mind, Spirit, which is the only real reality of existence? Does unity exist at all and, if so, is it a unity of sum or of primordial principle, a result or an origin, a oneness of totality or a oneness of nature or a oneness of essence, — the various standpoints of Pluralism, of Sankhya, of Vedanta? Or if both the One and the Many are real, what are the relations between these two eternal principles of being, or are they reconciled in an Absolute beyond them? These are no barren questions of logic, no battle of cloudy metaphysical abstractions, as the practical and sensational man would have us contemptuously believe; for on our answer to them depends our conception of God, of existence, of the world and of human life and destiny.

Heraclitus, differing in this, as Mr. Ranade reminds us, from Anaximander who like our Mayavadins denied true reality to the Many and from Empedocles who thought the All to be alternately one and many, believed unity and multiplicity to be both of them real and coexistent. Existence is then eternally one and eternally many, — even as Ramanuja and Madhwa have concluded, though in a very different spirit and from a quite different standpoint. Heraclitus' view arose from his strong concrete intuition of things, his acute sense of universal realities; for in our experience of the cosmos we do find always and inseparably this eternal coexistence and cannot really escape from it. Everywhere our gaze on the Many reveals to us an eternal oneness, no matter what we fix on as the principle of that oneness; yet is that unity inoperative except by the multiplicity of its powers and forms, nor do we anywhere see it void of or apart from its own multiplicity. One Matter, but many atoms, plasms, bodies; one Energy, but many forces; one Mind or at least Mind-stuff, but many mental beings; one Spirit, but many souls. Perhaps periodically this multiplicity goes back, is dissolved into, is

swallowed up by the One from which it was originally evolved; but still the fact that it has evolved and got involved again, compels us to suppose a possibility and even a necessity of its renewed evolution: it is not then really destroyed. The Adwaitin by his Yoga goes back to the One, feels himself merged, believes that he has got rid of the Many, proved perhaps their unreality; but it is the achievement of an individual, of one of the Many, and the Many go on existing in spite of it. The achievement proves only that there is a plane of consciousness on which the soul can realise and not merely perceive by the intellect the oneness of the Spirit, and it proves nothing else. Therefore, on this truth of eternal oneness and eternal multiplicity Heraclitus fixes and anchors himself; from his firm acceptance of it, not reasoning it away but accepting all its consequences, flows all the rest of his philosophy.

Still, one question remains to be resolved before we can move a step farther. Since there is an eternal One, what is that? Is it Force, Mind, Matter, Soul? or, since Matter has many principles, is it some one principle of Matter which has evolved all the rest or which by some power of its own activity has changed into all that we see? The old Greek thinkers conceived of cosmic Substance as possessed of four elements, omitting or not having arrived at the fifth, Ether, in which Indian analysis found the first and original principle. In seeking the nature of the original substance they fixed then on one or other of these four as the primordial Nature, one finding it in Air, another in Water, while Heraclitus, as we have seen, describes or symbolises the source and reality of all things as an everliving Fire. “No man or god” he says “has created the universe, but ever there was and is and will be the everliving Fire.”

In the Veda, in the early language of the Mystics generally, the names of the elements or primary principles of Substance were used with a clearly symbolic significance. The symbol of water is thus used constantly in the Rig Veda. It is said that in the beginning was the inconscient Ocean out of which the One was born by the vastness of His energy; but it is clear from the language of the hymn that no physical ocean is meant, but rather the unformed chaos of inconscient being in which the Divine, the Godhead lay concealed in a darkness enveloped by greater darkness. The seven active principles of existence are similarly spoken of as rivers or waters; we hear of the seven rivers, the great water, the four superior rivers, in a context which shows their symbolic significance. We see this image fixed in the Puranic mythus of Vishnu sleeping on the serpent Infinite in the milky ocean. But even as early as the Rig Veda, ether is the highest symbol of the Infinite, the *apeiron* of the Greeks; water is that of the same Infinite in its aspect as the original substance; fire is the creative power, the active energy of the Infinite; air, the life-principle, is spoken of as that which brings down fire out of the ethereal heavens into the earth. Yet these were not merely symbols. The Vedic Mystics held, it is clear, a close connection and effective parallelism to exist between psychical and physical activities, between the action of Light, for instance, and the phenomena of mental illumination; fire was to them at once the luminous divine energy, the Seer-Will of the universal Godhead

active and creative of all things, and the physical principle creative of the substantial forms of the universe, burning secretly in all life.

It is doubtful how far the earlier Greek philosophic thinkers preserved any of these complex conceptions in their generalisations about the original principle. But Heraclitus has clearly an idea of something more than a physical substance or energy in his concept of the everliving Fire. Fire is to him the physical aspect, as it were, of a great burning creative, formative and destructive force, the sum of all whose processes is a constant and unceasing change. The idea of the One which is eternally becoming Many and the Many which is eternally becoming One and of that One therefore not so much as stable substance or essence as active Force, a sort of substantial Will-to-become, is the foundation of Heraclitus' philosophy.

Nietzsche, whom Mr. Ranade rightly affiliates to Heraclitus, Nietzsche, the most vivid, concrete and suggestive of modern thinkers, as is Heraclitus among the early Greeks, founded his whole philosophical thought on this conception of existence as a vast Will-to-become and of the world as a play of Force; divine Power was to him the creative Word, the beginning of all things and that to which life aspires. But he affirms Becoming only and excludes Being from his view of things; hence his philosophy is in the end unsatisfactory, insufficient, lop-sided; it stimulates, but solves nothing. Heraclitus does not exclude Being from the data of the problem of existence, although he will not make any opposition or gulf between that and Becoming. By his conception of existence as at once one and many, he is bound to accept these two aspects of his everliving Fire as simultaneously true, true in each other; Being is an eternal becoming and yet the Becoming resolves itself into eternal being. All is in flux, for all is change of becoming; we cannot step into the same waters twice, for it is other and yet other waters that are flowing on. And yet, with his keen eye on the truth of things, preoccupied though he was with this aspect of existence, he could not help seeing another truth behind it. The waters into which we step, are and are not the same; our own existence is an eternity and an inconstant transience; we are and we are not. Heraclitus does not solve the contradiction; he states it and in his own way tries to give some account of its process.

That process he sees as a constant change and a changing back, an exchange and an interchange in a constant whole, — managed for the rest by a clash of forces, by a creative and determinative strife, “war which is the father and king of all things.” Between Fire as the Being and Fire in the Becoming existence describes a downward and upward movement — *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* — which has been called the “back-returning road” upon which all travels. These are the master ideas of the thought of Heraclitus.

(To be continued)

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 221-25)

EUROPE AND ASIA

(From the *Bande Mataram*, CALCUTTA, July 3rd, 1907)

The London correspondent of a contemporary quotes, with the apposite change of a word, some verses from a poem by Wilfrid Blunt which so admirably express the basic motive of the Nationalist movement in India that we reproduce it here. It is often represented by our opponents that the cry for Swaraj is a mere senseless cry for freedom without any recognition of the responsibilities of freedom. This is not so. Those who have followed the exposition of the Nationalist ideal in *Bande Mataram* know well that we advocate the struggle for Swaraj, first, because Liberty is in itself a necessity of national life and therefore worth striving for for its own sake; secondly, because Liberty is the first indispensable condition of national development intellectual, moral, industrial, political (we do not say it is the only condition) and therefore worth striving for for India's sake; thirdly, because in the next great stage of human progress it is not a material but a spiritual, moral and psychical advance that has to be made and for this a free Asia and in Asia a free India must take the lead, and Liberty is therefore worth striving for for the world's sake. India must have Swaraj in order to live; she must have Swaraj in order to live well and happily; she must have Swaraj in order to live for the world, not as a slave for the material and political benefit of a single purse-proud and selfish nation, but as a free people for the spiritual and intellectual benefit of the human race.

The verses quoted are from a poem called "The Wind and the Whirlwind", addressed to England. England, by her oppression of the Asiatic peoples under her sway, by her selfish and ruthless exploitation of their wealth, by her refusal to allow them the chance of national life and free development, is sowing the wind, and she will reap the whirlwind in the loss of her Empire, perhaps in national decay and death.

"Truth yet shall triumph in a world of justice;
This is of faith. I swear it. East and West
The law of Man's progression shall accomplish
Even this last great marvel with the rest.

Thou wouldst not further it. Thou canst not hinder.
If thou shalt learn in time, thou yet shalt live.
But God shall ease thy hand of thy dominion
And give to these the rights thou wouldst not give.

The nations of the East have left their childhood.
 Thou art grown old. Their manhood is to come;
 And they shall carry on Earth's high tradition
 Through the long ages when thy lips are dumb,

Till all shall be wrought out. O lands of weeping,
 Lands watered by the rivers of old Time,
 Ganges and Indus and the streams of Eden,
 Yours is the future of the world's sublime.

Yours was the fount of man's first inspiration,
 The well of wisdom whence he earliest drew.
 And yours shall be the floodtime of his reason,
 The means of strength which shall his strength renew.

The wisdom of the West is but a madness,
 The fret of shallow waters in their bed.
 Yours is the flow, the fulness of man's patience,
 The ocean of God's rest inherited.

And thou, too, India, mourner of the nations,
 Though thou hast died today in all men's sight,
 And though upon thy cross with thieves thou hangest,
 Yet shall thy wrong be justified in right."

The view of the East as just emerging from its childhood and the West as old and senile, is contrary to received ideas, but there is a deep truth underlying it. The East is more ancient by many thousands of years than the West, but a greater length of years does not necessarily imply a more advanced age. The years which would mean only childhood to a long-lived species would bring old age and death to more ephemeral stocks. Asia is long-lived, Europe brief and ephemeral. Asia is in everything hugely-mapped, immense and grandiose in its motions, and its life-periods are measured accordingly. Europe lives by centuries, Asia by millenniums. Europe is parcelled out in nations, Asia in civilisations. The whole of Europe forms only one civilisation with a common, derived and largely second-hand culture; Asia supports three civilisations, each of them original and of the soil. Everything in Europe is small, rapid and short-lived; she has not the secret of immortality. Greece, the chief source of her civilisation, matured in two or three centuries, flourished for another two, and two more were sufficient for her decline and death. How few in years are the modern European nations, yet Spain is already dead, Austria death-stricken and suffering from gangrene and disintegration, France overtaken by a mortal and incurable

malady, England already affected by the initial processes of decay. Germany and America alone show any signs of a healthy and developing manhood. In the place which is left vacant by the decline of the European nations Asia young, strong and vigorous, dowered with the gift of immortality and the secret of self-transmutation, is preparing to step forward and possess the future. She alone can teach the world the secret of immortality which she possesses and in order that she may do so, she must reign.

Asia has been described by the Europeans as decrepit; they will find to their amazement and dismay that she is rather emerging into her age of robust and perfect manhood. It is true that she reached ages ago heights of science, philosophy, civilisation which Europe is now toilsomely trying to reach and that afterwards there was a slackening down, loss and disturbance from which she is only now recovering, but there was no decay or decline. It was rather the disturbance, the temporary arrest, disorganization and derangement which marks the transition from boyhood to manhood. Her mighty civilizations, her great philosophies, her acute scientific observations and intuitions were the toys and games of her yet immature and imperfect powers, the light and easy play of a child-giant, and form merely a slight index of the far greater things she will accomplish in the coming days of her ripe strength and maturity. What she did, she did by the activity of intuition and imagination, the first free penetrating sympathy of a mind fresh from the divine source of life. She will now learn the scientific method of the adult and senescent West and apply it with a far greater force and ability to lines of development in which Europe is a bungler and novice.

The wisdom of the West is but a madness,
The fret of shallow waters in their bed.

This shallowness proceeds from the fact that the West has developed materially and on the surface, but has not sought for strength and permanence in the deeper roots of life of which our outer activity is only a partial manifestation. The fundamental difference between East and West has been exemplified more than once in recent times. What European nation could have changed its whole political, social and economic machinery in a few years like Japan, with so little trouble, with such thoroughness and science, with the minimum of disturbance to its national economy? The phenomenon is so alien to European nature and European experience that even to this day Western observers have been unable to understand it. Japan is a "weird" nation, that is all the conclusion they can come to on the subject. What European nation again would deal so swiftly, directly and earnestly with its own national vices as the Chinese are dealing with the opium vice in China? The very idea that China really meant it, was incredible to English observers. And well it might be, for one can imagine what would be the fate of any such attempt to deal with the national

vice of drunkenness in England. If India is unable to show such signal triumphs, it is because she has been disorganized by the merciless pressure of the alien rule and all her centres of strength and action destroyed or disabled. Yet even so, she has shown and is still showing signs of a prolonged and unconquerable vitality such as no nation subject for an equally long time has evinced since history began. It is this moral strength, this ability to go to the roots, this gift of diving down into the depths of self and drawing out the miraculous powers of the Will, this command over one's own soul which is the secret of Asia. And he who is in possession of his soul, the Scripture assures us, shall become the master of the world.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Bande Mataram, CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 572-76)



A MESSAGE TO AMERICA

I have been asked to send on this occasion of the fifteenth August a message to the West, but what I have to say might be delivered equally as a message to the East. It has been customary to dwell on the division and difference between these two sections of the human family and even oppose them to each other; but, for myself I would rather be disposed to dwell on oneness and unity than on division and difference. East and West have the same human nature, a common human destiny, the same aspiration after a greater perfection, the same seeking after something higher than itself, something towards which inwardly and even outwardly we move. There has been a tendency in some minds to dwell on the spirituality or mysticism of the East and the materialism of the West; but the West has had no less than the East its spiritual seekings and, though not in such profusion, its saints and sages and mystics, the East has had its materialistic tendencies, its material splendours, its similar or identical dealings with life and Matter and the world in which we live. East and West have always met and mixed more or less closely, they have powerfully influenced each other and at the present day are under an increasing compulsion of Nature and Fate to do so more than ever before.

There is a common hope, a common destiny, both spiritual and material, for which both are needed as co-workers. It is no longer towards division and difference that we should turn our minds, but on unity, union, even oneness necessary for the pursuit and realisation of a common ideal, the destined goal, the fulfilment towards which Nature in her beginning obscurely set out and must in an increasing light of knowledge replacing her first ignorance constantly persevere.

But what shall be that ideal and that goal? That depends on our conception of the realities of life and the supreme Reality.

Here we have to take into account that there has been, not any absolute difference but an increasing divergence between the tendencies of the East and the West. The highest truth is truth of the Spirit; a Spirit supreme above the world and yet immanent in the world and in all that exists, sustaining and leading all towards whatever is the aim and goal and the fulfilment of Nature since her obscure inconscient beginnings through the growth of consciousness is the one aspect of existence which gives a clue to the secret of our being and a meaning to the world. The East has always and increasingly put the highest emphasis on the supreme truth of the Spirit; it has, even in its extreme philosophies, put the world away as an illusion and regarded the Spirit as the sole reality. The West has concentrated more and more increasingly on the world, on the dealings of mind and life with our material existence, on our mastery over it, on the perfection of mind and life and some fulfilment of the human being here: latterly this has gone so far as the denial of the Spirit and even the enthronement

of Matter as the sole reality. Spiritual perfection as the sole ideal on one side, on the other, the perfectibility of the race, the perfect society, a perfect development of the human mind and life and man's material existence have become the largest dream of the future. Yet both are truths and can be regarded as part of the intention of the Spirit in world-nature; they are not incompatible with each other: rather their divergence has to be healed and both have to be included and reconciled in our view of the future.

The Science of the West has discovered evolution as the secret of life and its process in this material world; but it has laid more stress on the growth of form and species than on the growth of consciousness: even, consciousness has been regarded as an incident and not the whole secret of the meaning of the evolution. An evolution has been admitted by certain minds in the East, certain philosophies and Scriptures, but there its sense has been the growth of the soul through developing or successive forms and many lives of the individual to its own highest reality. For if there is a conscious being in the form, that being can hardly be a temporary phenomenon of consciousness; it must be a soul fulfilling itself and this fulfilment can only take place if there is a return of the soul to earth in many successive lives, in many successive bodies.

The process of evolution has been the development from and in inconscient Matter of a subconscient and then a conscious Life, of conscious mind first in animal life and then fully in conscious and thinking man, the highest present achievement of evolutionary Nature. The achievement of mental being is at present her highest and tends to be regarded as her final work; but it is possible to conceive a still further step of the evolution: Nature may have in view beyond the imperfect mind of man a consciousness that passes out of the mind's ignorance and possesses truth as its inherent right and nature. There is a truth-consciousness as it is called in the Veda, a supermind, as I have termed it, possessing Knowledge, not having to seek after it and constantly miss it. In one of the Upanishads a being of knowledge is stated to be the next step above the mental being; into that the soul has to rise and through it to attain the perfect bliss of spiritual existence. If that could be achieved as the next evolutionary step of Nature here, then she would be fulfilled and we could conceive of the perfection of life even here, its attainment of a full spiritual living even in this body or it may be in a perfected body. We could even speak of a divine life on earth; our human dream of perfectibility would be accomplished and at the same time the aspiration to a heaven on earth common to several religions and spiritual seers and thinkers.

The ascent of the human soul to the supreme Spirit is that soul's highest aim and necessity, for that is the supreme reality; but there can be too the descent of the Spirit and its powers into the world and that would justify the existence of the material world also, give a meaning, a divine purpose to the creation and solve its riddle. East and West could be reconciled in the pursuit of the highest and largest

ideal, Spirit embrace Matter and Matter find its own true reality and the hidden Reality in all things in the Spirit.

11-8-49

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest,
CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 551-53)*



‘TO RETRACE THE PATH IN ALL INNOCENCE ...’

August 20, 1914

To see the goal from a new angle which may usefully light up the others, we should constantly renew the experience of the inner discovery and return to the extreme limit of consciousness without at any time postulating beforehand what the end of our journey will be.

But instinctively the mind remembers the impression that it received from one or from some of the former contacts of our consciousness with the ultimate centre, and tells itself: “That is what one finds at the end of the road.” It does not realise that the “That” which is in its thought is only one of countless ways of translating the goal or even of travestying it, nor does it perceive that the intellectual conception should follow the experience and not precede it.

To retrace the path in all innocence as though one had never before travelled it, is the true purity, the perfect sincerity — the sincerity that brings an uninterrupted progress, growth, an integral perfectioning.

Despite myself, in the silence of all thought, that is, of all conscious formulas, something in my being, deeper than words, turns to Thee, O ineffable Lord, in an ardent aspiration, giving Thee in offering all its activities, all its elements, all its modes of being, and imploring for all these the supreme illumination.

... O Thou, whom I cannot think, but whom with certitude I know!

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 227)



THE FOUR AUSTERITIES AND THE FOUR LIBERATIONS

1

To pursue an integral education that leads to the supramental realisation, four austerities are necessary, and with them four liberations.

Austerity is usually confused with self-mortification, and when someone speaks of austerities, we think of the discipline of the ascetic who, in order to avoid the arduous task of spiritualising the physical, vital and mental life, declares it incapable of transformation and casts it away ruthlessly as a useless encumbrance, as a bondage and an impediment to all spiritual progress, in any case as something incorrigible, as a load that has to be borne more or less cheerfully until Nature, or divine Grace, delivers you from it by death. At best, life on earth is a field for progress and one should take advantage of it as best one can in order to reach as soon as possible the degree of perfection which will put an end to the ordeal by making it unnecessary.

For us the problem is quite different. Life on earth is not a passage or a means; by transformation it must become a goal and a realisation. Consequently, when we speak of austerities, it is not out of contempt for the body nor to detach ourselves from it, but because of the need for control and mastery. For there is an austerity which is far greater, far more complete and far more difficult than all the austerities of the ascetic: it is the austerity which is necessary for the integral transformation, the fourfold austerity which prepares the individual for the manifestation of the supramental truth. For example, one can say that few austerities are as strict as those which physical culture demands for the perfection of the body. But we shall return to this point in due time.

Before starting to describe the four kinds of austerity required, it is necessary to clarify one question which is a source of much misunderstanding and confusion in the minds of most people. It is the question of ascetic practices, which they mistake for spiritual disciplines. These practices, which consist of ill-treating the body in order, so they say, to liberate the spirit from it, are in fact a sensuous distortion of spiritual discipline; it is a kind of perverse need for suffering which drives the ascetic to self-mortification. The sadhu's recourse to the bed of nails or the Christian anchorite's resort to the whip and the hair-shirt are the result of a more or less veiled sadistic tendency, unavowed and unavowable; it is an unhealthy seeking or a subconscious need for violent sensations. In reality, these things are very far removed from all spiritual life, for they are ugly and base, dark and diseased; whereas spiritual life, on the contrary, is a life of light and balance, beauty and joy. They are invented and extolled by a sort of mental and vital cruelty towards the body. But cruelty, even with regard to one's own body, is nonetheless cruelty, and all cruelty is a

sign of great unconsciousness. Unconscious natures need very strong sensations, for without them they can feel nothing; and cruelty, which is one form of sadism, brings very strong sensations. The avowed purpose of such practices is to abolish all sensation so that the body may no longer stand in the way of one's flight towards the spirit; but the effectiveness of this method is open to doubt. It is a recognised fact that in order to progress rapidly, one must not be afraid of difficulties; on the contrary, by choosing to do the difficult thing at every opportunity, one increases the will-power and strengthens the nerves. Now, it is much more difficult to lead a life of moderation and balance, in equanimity and serenity, than to try to contend with over-indulgence in pleasure and the obscuration it entails, by over-indulgence in asceticism and the disintegration it causes. It is much more difficult to achieve the harmonious and progressive development of one's physical being in calm and simplicity than to ill-treat it to the point of annihilation. It is much more difficult to live soberly and without desire than to deprive the body of its indispensable nourishment and cleanliness and boast proudly of one's abstinence. It is much more difficult to avoid or to surmount and conquer illness by an inner and outer harmony, purity and balance, than to disregard and ignore it and leave it free to do its work of destruction. And the most difficult thing of all is to maintain the consciousness constantly at the height of its capacity, never allowing the body to act under the influence of a lower impulse.

This is why we shall have recourse to the four austerities which will result in four liberations within us. The practice of these austerities will constitute a fourfold discipline or tapasya which can be defined as follows:

- 1) Tapasya of love
- 2) Tapasya of knowledge
- 3) Tapasya of power
- 4) Tapasya of beauty

These terms have been listed from top to bottom, so to say, but their order should not be taken to indicate anything superior or inferior, or more or less difficult, or the order in which these disciplines can and ought to be practised. The order, importance and difficulty vary with each individual and no absolute rule can be formulated. Each one must find and work out his own system according to his personal needs and capacities.

Accordingly, only an overall view will be given here, presenting an ideal procedure that is as complete as possible. Each one will then have to apply as much of it as he can in the best possible way.

The tapasya or discipline of beauty will lead us, through austerity in physical life, to freedom in action. Its basic programme will be to build a body that is beautiful in form, harmonious in posture, supple and agile in its movements, powerful in its

activities and robust in its health and organic functioning.

To achieve these results, it will be good, as a general rule, to make use of habit as a help in organising one's material life, for the body functions more easily within the framework of a regular routine. But one must know how to avoid becoming a slave to one's habits, however good they may be; the greatest flexibility must be maintained so that one may change them each time it becomes necessary to do so.

One must build up nerves of steel in powerful and elastic muscles in order to be able to endure anything whenever it is indispensable. But at the same time great care must be taken not to demand more from the body than the effort which is strictly necessary, the expenditure of energy that fosters growth and progress, while categorically excluding everything that causes exhaustion and leads in the end to physical decline and disintegration.

A physical culture which aims at building a body capable of serving as a fit instrument for a higher consciousness demands very austere habits: a great regularity in sleep, food, exercise and every activity. By a scrupulous study of one's own bodily needs — for they vary with each individual — a general programme will be established; and once this has been done well, it must be followed rigorously, without any fantasy or slackness. There must be no little exceptions to the rule that are indulged in "just for once" but which are repeated very often — for as soon as one yields to temptation, even "just for once", one lessens the resistance of the will-power and opens the door to every failure. One must therefore forgo all weakness: no more nightly escapades from which one comes back exhausted, no more feasting and carousing which upset the normal functioning of the stomach, no more distractions, amusements and pleasures that only waste energy and leave one without the strength to do the daily practice. One must submit to the austerity of a sensible and regular life, concentrating all one's physical attention on building a body that comes as close to perfection as possible. To reach this ideal goal, one must strictly shun all excess and every vice, great or small; one must deny oneself the use of such slow poisons as tobacco, alcohol, etc., which men have a habit of developing into indispensable needs that gradually destroy the will and the memory. The all-absorbing interest which nearly all human beings, even the most intellectual, have in food, its preparation and its consumption, should be replaced by an almost chemical knowledge of the needs of the body and a very scientific austerity in satisfying them. Another austerity must be added to that of food, the austerity of sleep. It does not consist in going without sleep but in knowing how to sleep. Sleep must not be a fall into unconsciousness which makes the body heavy instead of refreshing it. Eating with moderation and abstaining from all excess greatly reduces the need to spend many hours in sleep; however, the quality of sleep is much more important than its quantity. In order to have a truly effective rest and relaxation during sleep, it is good as a rule to drink something before going to bed, a cup of milk or soup or fruit-juice, for instance. Light food brings a quiet sleep. One should, however, abstain from all

copious meals, for then the sleep becomes agitated and is disturbed by nightmares, or else is dense, heavy and dulling. But the most important thing of all is to make the mind clear, to quieten the emotions and calm the effervescence of desires and the preoccupations which accompany them. If before retiring to bed one has talked a lot or had a lively discussion, if one has read an exciting or intensely interesting book, one should rest a little without sleeping in order to quieten the mental activity, so that the brain does not engage in disorderly movements while the other parts of the body alone are asleep. Those who practise meditation will do well to concentrate for a few minutes on a lofty and restful idea, in an aspiration towards a higher and vaster consciousness. Their sleep will benefit greatly from this and they will largely be spared the risk of falling into unconsciousness while they sleep.

After the austerity of a night spent wholly in resting in a calm and peaceful sleep comes the austerity of a day which is sensibly organised; its activities will be divided between the progressive and skilfully graded exercises required for the culture of the body, and work of some kind or other. For both can and ought to form part of the physical tapasya. With regard to exercises, each one will choose the ones best suited to his body and, if possible, take guidance from an expert on the subject, who knows how to combine and grade the exercises to obtain a maximum effect. Neither the choice nor the execution of these exercises should be governed by fancy. One must not do this or that because it seems easier or more amusing; there should be no change of training until the instructor considers it necessary. The self-perfection or even simply the self-improvement of each individual body is a problem to be solved, and its solution demands much patience, perseverance and regularity. In spite of what many people think, the athlete's life is not a life of amusement or distraction; on the contrary, it is a life of methodical efforts and austere habits, which leave no room for useless fancies that go against the result one wants to achieve.

In work too there is an austerity. It consists in not having any preferences and in doing everything one does with interest. For one who wants to grow in self-perfection, there are no great or small tasks, none that are important or unimportant; all are equally useful for one who aspires for progress and self-mastery. It is said that one only does well what one is interested in doing. This is true, but it is truer still that one can learn to find interest in everything one does, even in what appear to be the most insignificant chores. The secret of this attainment lies in the urge towards self-perfection. Whatever occupation or task falls to your lot, you must do it with a will to progress; whatever one does, one must not only do it as best one can but strive to do it better and better in a constant effort for perfection. In this way everything without exception becomes interesting, from the most material chore to the most artistic and intellectual work. The scope for progress is infinite and can be applied to the smallest thing.

This leads us quite naturally to liberation in action. For, in one's action, one must be free from all social conventions, all moral prejudices. However, this does

not mean that one should lead a life of licence and dissoluteness. On the contrary, one imposes on oneself a rule that is far stricter than all social rules, for it tolerates no hypocrisy and demands a perfect sincerity. One's entire physical activity should be organised to help the body to grow in balance and strength and beauty. For this purpose, one must abstain from all pleasure-seeking, including sexual pleasure. For every sexual act is a step towards death. That is why from the most ancient times, in the most sacred and secret schools, this act was prohibited to every aspirant towards immortality. The sexual act is always followed by a longer or shorter period of unconsciousness that opens the door to all kinds of influences and causes a fall in consciousness. But if one wants to prepare oneself for the supramental life, one must never allow one's consciousness to slip into laxity and inconscience under the pretext of pleasure or even of rest and relaxation. One should find relaxation in force and light, not in darkness and weakness. Continence is therefore the rule for all those who aspire for progress. But especially for those who want to prepare themselves for the supramental manifestation, this continence must be replaced by a total abstinence, achieved not by coercion and suppression but by a kind of inner alchemy, as a result of which the energies that are normally used in the act of procreation are transmuted into energies for progress and integral transformation. It is obvious that for the result to be total and truly beneficial, all sexual impulses and desires must be eliminated from the mental and vital consciousness as well as from the physical will. All radical and durable transformation proceeds from within outwards, so that the external transformation is the normal, almost inevitable result of this process.

A decisive choice has to be made between lending the body to Nature's ends in obedience to her demand to perpetuate the race as it is, and preparing this same body to become a step towards the creation of the new race. For it is not possible to do both at the same time; at every moment one has to decide whether one wants to remain part of the humanity of yesterday or to belong to the superhumanity of tomorrow.

One must renounce being adapted to life as it is and succeeding in it if one wants to prepare for life as it will be and to become an active and efficient part of it.

One must refuse pleasure if one wants to open to the delight of existence, in a total beauty and harmony.

This brings us quite naturally to vital austerity, the austerity of the sensations, the tapasya of power. For the vital being is the seat of power, of effective enthusiasm. It is in the vital that thought is transformed into will and becomes a dynamism for action. It is also true that the vital is the seat of desires and passions, of violent impulses and equally violent reactions, of revolt and depression. The normal remedy is to strangle and starve the vital by depriving it of all sensation; sensations are indeed its main sustenance and without them it falls asleep, grows sluggish and starves to death.

In fact, the vital has three sources of subsistence. The one most easily accessible

to it comes from below, from the physical energies through the sensations.

The second is on its own plane, when it is sufficiently vast and receptive, by contact with the universal vital forces.

The third, to which it usually opens only in a great aspiration for progress, comes to it from above by the infusion and absorption of spiritual forces and inspiration.

To these sources men always strive more or less to add another, which is for them at the same time the source of most of their torments and misfortunes. It is the interchange of vital forces with their fellows, usually in groups of two, which they most often mistake for love, but which is only the attraction between two forces that take pleasure in mutual interchange.

Thus, if we do not wish to starve our vital, sensations must not be rejected or diminished in number and intensity. Neither should we avoid them; rather we must make use of them with wisdom and discernment. Sensations are an excellent instrument of knowledge and education, but to make them serve these ends, they must not be used egoistically for the sake of enjoyment, in a blind and ignorant search for pleasure and self-satisfaction.

The senses should be capable of enduring everything without disgust or displeasure, but at the same time they must acquire and develop more and more the power of discerning the quality, origin and effect of the various vital vibrations in order to know whether they are favourable to harmony, beauty and good health or whether they are harmful to the balance and progress of the physical being and the vital. Moreover, the senses should be used as instruments to approach and study the physical and vital worlds in all their complexity; in this way they will take their true place in the great endeavour towards transformation.

It is by enlightening, strengthening and purifying the vital, and not by weakening it, that one can contribute to the true progress of the being. To deprive oneself of sensations is therefore as harmful as depriving oneself of food. But just as the choice of food must be made wisely and solely for the growth and proper functioning of the body, so too the choice of sensations and their control should be made with a very scientific austerity and solely for the growth and perfection of the vital, of this highly dynamic instrument, which is as essential for progress as all the other parts of the being.

It is by educating the vital, by making it more refined, more sensitive, more subtle and, one should almost say, more elegant, in the best sense of the word, that one can overcome its violence and brutality, which are in fact a form of crudity and ignorance, of lack of taste.

In truth, a cultivated and illumined vital can be as noble and heroic and disinterested as it is now spontaneously vulgar, egoistic and perverted when it is left to itself without education. It is enough for each one to know how to transform in himself the search for pleasure into an aspiration for the supramental plenitude. If the education of the vital is carried far enough, with perseverance and sincerity,

there comes a time when, convinced of the greatness and beauty of the goal, the vital gives up petty and illusory sensorial satisfactions in order to win the divine delight.

(To be continued)

THE MOTHER

(On Education, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 12, pp. 48-57)



“GLAMOUR-TIDE” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

*Sri Aurobindo —
Anything in this?*

GLAMOUR-TIDE

The glamour-tide calling across each day
Borrows no beauty from the outer sun:
It is a mirrored moment of the way
Which wanders dreaming to the Inmost One.

{brief-lighted
We can but know {brief light and fickle foam
Until through space and time we sail to win
Vespers and dawns and noons of God on some
Gigantic ecstasy {that rolls within.
{rolling

Is any richer shade given to the idea by this variant of the last line?

Gigantic rapture rolling from within.

Yes, that is much better.
Very beautiful.

30 April 1935

GLAMOUR-TIDE

The glamour-tide calling across each day
Borrows no beauty from the outer sun:
It is a mirrored moment of the way
Which wanders dreaming to the Inmost One.

We can but know brief light and fickle foam
Until through space and time we sail to win
Vespers and dawns and noons of God on some
Gigantic rapture rolling from within.

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of November 2023)

III

Mother,

Yesterday K took R's mother to Aroumé. In the godown she asked H: "Are you married? Where is your husband? Have you got a child? How big is it?"

How imbecile!

K told H: "Do you understand what she says! May I tell you?"

H replied: "I understand, no need of your speaking."

Mother, it would be better not to have visitors when we are at work; and nobody should be taken to Aroumé at the time of serving and eating. They must arrange with me previously.

Quite right.

A notice can be put up to this effect, that Aroumé cannot be visited without a special authorisation of the Mother and previous arrangement with Dyuman as for the hour of the visit.

With all love and blessings

4 August 1934

*

Dear Mother,

A of the Washing Section asks me to help him. He says: "The Mother has written to me to be very careful about the flies so they may not gather, etc."

Yes — flies are very dangerous, just now more than ever.

When the Washing Section is working it puts the inmate's vessels in water immediately; but when the inmates go for their food at late hours, their dishes remain in the open and flies gather on them.

No dishes must be left in the open as an attraction for flies. If they cannot be washed at once, they must be dipped in a tub full of water — *this is very important.*

It is better, these days to wash every day with “*chlorure de chaux*” the floor of the kitchen, the serving room and the dining rooms. The serving tables too.

8 August 1934

*

My Beloved,

D prepares syrup to put in Your juice out of the ordinary sugar supplied by R. Would it not be better to use the Taikoo packets of China sugar for You?

It is not necessary; the other one gets quite clean by the boiling and filtering.

My dear child, I am always with you in all love, protection and trust.

16 August 1934

*

Beloved Mother,

All Love to You. May things be more quiet, more calm, and may You have a full rest.

In the present condition of things at large, we must be satisfied, I suppose, with the inner rest which is always there, untouched by any exterior turmoil.

With love and blessings always

17 August 1934

*

Mother,

What to do about the potatoes and onions asked by the ladies? I have not been able to find a solution, though several times the idea has passed in me to buy them from Madras.

There is cholera in Madras too, worse than here. I would rather they did not use onions as, of all vegetables, it is the one that catches most any infection.

18 August 1934

*

Mother,

I am informing the persons who cook for You about the onions. What shall we do for the kitchen then?

They must not be kept but used soon after buying, *peeled only at the very moment of use* (this is very important) and very well boiled.

Always near you, in the help and the trust

19 August 1934

*

Mother,

The beauty of the seasonal vegetables: [the disciple lists the ingredients of two pumpkin dishes]. The things are fresh and good and cheap.

It is all right provided there will not be pumpkin at each meal.

23 August 1934

*

Dear Mother,

I read the note of D for the white pepper. She told me: "Why buy a bottle! Bring the white pepper, I shall grind it as fine as a bottle of Morton pepper ground in London. It will be quite fresh for the Mother."

If it is truly not too much work, certainly I like better to have it prepared at home.

30 August 1934

*

My dear Mother,

At D's kitchen I saw the potatoes and told her: "These cannot be used for Mother." When they are going to rot, they become soft, and she calls them flowery potatoes. I explained to her the whole thing.

If it is a question of the uncleanness of the market, I wash and rinse the vegetables required for You in water mixed with a few drops of vinegar.

You are quite right and the market vegetables are far superior to what she gives us, especially the brinjals which seem to be made of straw.

31 August 1934

*

Beloved Mother,

There is nothing that can stop my union with You. Boils or no boils, nothing can prevent me from merging into Your Love. I am experiencing daily that You are bearing me in Your arms and heart. Love, love to Thee, dear Mother.

Surely these boils will soon go and you will be quite well once more.

All my love is there to work this out.

4 September 1934

*

Mother,

Why so sudden a change in my condition, I wonder? I was quite in a normal state this morning, and in the twinkling of an eye it all got changed and I was before You in a changed condition. Whatever it may be, I have learned many lessons today, Mother. The movements that were loose and scattered have become controlled and concentrated. Mother, in spite of falls and blunders, with a certitude to become as You wish.

There is no fall and no blunder and I do not know why your condition got so much changed. But if it is for the better I am very glad. Of course one has always something to learn and a progress to make, and in each circumstance we can find the occasion of learning the lesson and making the progress.

If you feel more concentrated than you were, it is a very good thing, especially if it is a concentration on the Divine, wanting more and more to avoid all influences except that of the Divine and to accept to be moved only by the Divine's will and no other. You said today that it is the end of making remarks to one another on people. Surely the day when the inmates of the Ashram will stop making among themselves remarks on the others, when all gossip will stop, it will be a blessed day and our work of realisation will be made much easier.

What you see, what you observe, you must keep for yourself and say to nobody except me.

Once again, be the giver of example to the others — show them how a true sadhak must be.

I trust that you will do it and all my love and force are with you for this accomplishment.

11 September 1934

*

Dear Mother,

Surely You will tell me if Your trust in me gets shaken, if Your love is not responded to. You have called forth this being to live in the Ashram in the Light of the Divine, with the head filled with the Presence of the Divine, the heart filled with Your Love, the vital filled with the dynamic Force of the Divine for the execution of the Divine Will.

O Mother, O Lord, may You possess this being, may it come forth and live exclusively in the full splendour of Your Love and Light and Truth.

This is my prayer to the All-Gracious Divine.

Your prayer is heard, your ardent aspiration is receiving the proper response. Our trust and love are always with you and our Light and Consciousness to enlighten, transform, perfect the whole being.

With all our blessings

11 September 1934

*

Dear Mother,

One thing surmounts all difficulties in me: it is that my faith, confidence and trust are never shaken. This condition of faith is solid and unbreakable; it is an eternal faith, a loving present from the Divine. I am sustained by a vast faith in You, my loving Mother, and in my beloved Sri Aurobindo.

Yes, it is your faith and love that carry you through all difficulties to an ultimate Victory.

With all my love and blessings

14 September 1934

*

Mother,

I am quiet and happy. One prayer: may this hostile attack pass away and let all of us remain sound.

My dear child, be sure of our trust and love. Our help and protection is over all so that all trouble may come to an end.

15 September 1934

*

My dear child,

I do not understand how what you propose can help. The work you are given, the life you live must be the work and the life of a sadhak, not that of a coolie. If you were treated or lived like a coolie and not as a sadhak, this work could never be done by you.

Moreover I do not see how your renouncing the things I give you could in the least cure the discontent of A and those like him.

The true attitude is neither to be an ascetic nor to indulge in desire. The true attitude is to take in all simplicity what I give, to be perfectly satisfied with it and neither to ask for more nor to refuse what is given. This is the true example to give, the one that can help the others towards a better understanding of their duties as sadhaks.

Nothing can cure A except getting rid of this making desire and the satisfaction of desire the principle of his life.

Now, if he *truly* wants to stop the cleaning of the kitchen vessels, I suppose that you will be able to manage in another way. But first you must ascertain from him that he truly wishes to give up that work.

Remain my child, simple, quiet and content, and all will be all right.

5 October 1934

*

My dear Mother,

Let me tell You, my dear Mother, I am completely quiet all through, though there are direct accusations against me, and I feel happy to inform You that a better understanding is coming.

It is bound to come if we stand firm in the right attitude.

*My beloved Mother, I accept You, I receive You, I have You in my heart always.
My dear Mother, may Your Love manifest.*

Yes, I am with you always, in the heart of your heart, in unshakeable Consciousness and Love.

11 October 1934

*

Dear Mother,

I heard that D, B, N and G have all made accusations against me. But that does not matter. I am quite happy — happier and more firm and quiet than ever before. There is one thing that has given me quietness and kept me at rest: Your confidence, Your Love, and my faith in Your Love.

Dear Mother, the entire thing is ending and I have full hope that there will be better understanding and a little more peace.

So long as all these women are living in the vital consciousness — as they do — they are bound to quarrel, to be jealous, envious, spiteful, depressed, and the rest. The best is not to pay much importance to it — because in fact it has none. You set things right, the next day they go wrong again, because the seat of their consciousness is not changed. Even if they turn to the Divine, they will turn in the same spirit and with the same reactions: competition, strife, anger, jealousy, spite and the rest.

It is the consciousness that must change its seat and get out from the vital to a higher or deeper place.

When they come to you, you can tell them that all these stories have no importance whatever, that they are the ordinary reactions of the ordinary life and that surely it is no use coming here to live in that ordinary way. They must make an effort to rise to a higher and truer, to a more disinterested and unselfish consciousness and there they will see that all will be all right for them.

As for you, I am happy that all this turmoil left you untouched. Indeed it must be so more and more and you must yourself look at all these things from the light and equanimity of a spiritual consciousness filled with the Divine Presence and Love.

Our help and trust are always with you.

12 October 1934

*

My dear Mother,

This morning, when H and P were frying the balls for vegetables, this thought passed in me:

We come here to stay. Suppose we are put to the test? We are put in a big pan filled with oil beneath a very strong fire, and we have to sit in the pan, calm, quiet, unmoved and completely at rest. Those who pass the test are allowed to take up the Yoga.

It would scarcely be a test. The moral courage and endurance are often much more difficult to get than the material courage and endurance.

15 October 1934

*

Dear Mother,

My task is more difficult now. When A comes to me, he hardly speaks about the work at the Granary. But he can freely talk on subjects unnatural to me: the world, its curiosities and many other things. I am really puzzled over the matter.

Let him talk, you need not answer. Simply keep living in you the thought of the true consciousness and the will that he should awake to it.

18 October 1934

*

My dear Mother,

During the monsoon rains the servants failed to show up and we inmates volunteered to distribute the food and carry the dishes to the other inmates. Shall we not go on like that?

Yes, it will have to be done. People cannot go without food.

21 October 1934

*

My dear and beloved Mother,

I am happy because I am always supported and carried by You. So often the workers come to me and play a drama and fall into gloom. But I am happy, my dear Mother, so the gloom passes away from them and happiness and peace pervade.

Yes, it is very good — happiness is as contagious as gloom. And nothing can be more useful than to pass on to people the contagion of a true and deep happiness.

25 October 1934

*

Dear Mother,

My entire being remains more unmoved than before, more unshaken, more undisturbed, more unclouded by circumstances, conditions and gloom.

Yes, this is good — and this equanimity and poise must go on increasing until perfection.

Our help, love and trust are always with you.

26 October 1934

*

My dear Mother,

Not a pleasant information: this evening at 6.00 I broke the porcelain handle of the window-spring. I am very very sorry for this unpleasant incident.

It does not matter, they will replace it by a brass one — it is truly a very small incident without importance.

Always with you my dear child, bringing you peace, help and protection with an unshakeable love.

28 October 1934

*

My dear Mother,

Surely Your Love is unshakeable and always You love me. Surely I shall advance with You, as fast as Your Love permits. I am once more firmly poised on a better plane than ever before. After a little shaking and crying my equanimity has become more strong and unshakeable — because of Your unshakeable Love.

Your love fully answers to mine.

Yes, my dear child, it has, indeed, been a true and great progress and your feeling of having emerged in a new light is true; rather it is a new light which has descended in some parts of the being still obscure and brought there a Certitude.

Love is, in truth, the Victor.

29 October 1934

*

Mother,

M took no food last night, this morning and this noon. Is he not well?

I know nothing about M not eating, but perhaps it is in protest because I made him remove plants which he did not want to remove (the plants were injuring the foundations of Cocotiers house). But now if the men also will start a hunger strike when I do not do exactly what they want me to do! then . . . Perhaps you might speak

to him and ask him why he did not eat. Do not mention my supposition — let him say what he has to say.

30 October 1934

*

My dear Mother,

A few days ago S put a demand on me: "Come to Canal House daily."

I told her, "It is not possible."

Then she said, "Once a week."

I replied, "That too is difficult. All the same I shall try but it will not be regular."

"I want to come to you," she said.

"All right, at 11 a.m. when you come for your flowers."

I have not said, "Do not come to me," but when they try to bind me tight, I always find it very difficult.

She has passed through a difficult time and old movements have come up again trying to drag her back to ancient errors; that is why probably she was wanting to see you.

But surely she will be all right again after some time.

You are right in letting nobody catch hold of you, it would be very bad in all ways.

With love and blessings always

7 November 1934

*

My dear Mother,

S of the bakery came to me this evening and told me: "Why do you give us hard bread now? Why do you keep the stock? You can give us fresh bread daily." I explained to him the problems of the rise and fall in consumption each day and the need to keep some stock.

I suppose things can continue as they are now. But do you not think it would be fair to give to S and the bakery people a loaf of fresh bread every day? They have all the work and hard work too; they must at least eat their own bread when it is quite good.

9 November 1934

*

Dear Mother,

S is again badly disturbed. When I am frank, there is difficulty; when I remain silent, there is also difficulty. Give me a middle path, such as Buddha found.

Do not worry — whatever you do will always be criticised. So the best is not to pay any attention to what people say and to go on one's own path according to the highest light one can get.

With all love and blessings always

10 November 1934

*

My dear Love,

Physically, I am much better; the throat also seems to be better. I hope to be quite all right.

Let the light, the force, the consciousness flood your whole being and give you the strength to throw away at once the attack on your body.

Always with you

11 November 1934

*

Dear Mother,

I had a little fever today and the throat is bad also. Perhaps it is due to a sudden change of weather and it will be quite all right in a day or two. My dear Mother, I do not accept this fever or this cold. It has to go away.

Certainly it must go at once. But why not have your throat painted by P as he did it for you before?

Do you have something warm to cover yourself in the night? If not tell me, I shall give you a rug. It is in the middle of the night that the weather becomes cold.

Our love and blessings are always with you.

12 November 1934

*

My dear Mother,

The condition of the vegetable market is exceptionally poor. Nothing can be found in quantity for us. Prices have gone up more than double and for certain vegetables 5 or 6 times.

For the money we must accept the necessity of the expense, but we must be strict about the quality of the food. We cannot give bad or spoilt things.

13 November 1934

*

My dear Mother,

M told R: "Why not ask the Mother to get biscuits prepared for your son in our Bakery?" R told me: "Will you ask the Mother and take her permission to get the biscuits prepared for the boy? I shall pay you the money." I did not answer him.

I told M: "Do not make such statements. We do not do such things, it is altogether new. We shall have to write to the Mother first before we take up such things."

It is quite impossible to tax the Bakery people with such extra work and to do business with their work.

14 November 1934

*

My dear Mother,

You have told us: "I have come to fight and conquer."

Accept me, my dear General, as Your humble soldier. I carry Your banner of Truth and Light. I accept no defeat.

A decisive Victory is crowned upon You, my dear Mother. Divine Love is the Victor.

Yes, my dear child, you are my good warrior and you will have your share in the Victory.

With love and blessings always

16 November 1934

*

My dear Mother,

The last two days, when I was on the footpath of Aroumé, I got a rising of temperature in my body and a bad head; this morning it was worse and I was pushing and pushing it out.

Today I cleaned M's bottle with sweets and was bringing it to You from Aroumé. I held it tight with a consciousness that it must not fall. It did not slip, but jumped out of my hand; twice I grabbed for it and the third time it went out of my hand onto the stone steps of Aroumé and broke into pieces.

The bottle itself has no importance, but why these attacks on me when I go to Aroumé? It did not stop there. Some hostile force wanted to send me away from the Ashram, it wanted me to tell You: "Mother, I want to retire; make me free from Aroumé and the Aroumé workers."

My dear Mother, the hostile forces are taking a little pleasure in troubling me, but I accept no defeat, I do not become weak; I am up and up and on and on, forward with full strength, zeal and confidence in myself and in You and in the final Victory of the Divine Light.

Yes, fear not.

The attack is not on you only but on the whole place, because of the approaching darshan.

We have only to say — in perfect peace — to these adverse forces: what you are trying to do is perfectly useless — you can in no way interfere with the victory of the Divine.

All love and blessings to you, my dear child

19 November 1934

*

My dear Mother,

In all love for You, I disappear in You, and You alone live in me. My Mother, I am Thy child.

With all love to you, my dear child, I take you in my arms and keep you in my heart.

20 November 1934

*

My dear Mother,

This evening I wished and wished for a being to come, a being who has risen above all lower nature and is completely merged in the Divine. My dear

Mother, there are such beings somewhere above; may they come down and serve You and manifest Your Love and Consciousness.

If they took a body, they would at the same time take upon them the human nature and all its difficulties.

27 November 1934

*

My dear Mother,

My entire nature is changing and will change more and more and reach its perfection. I wish to be a happy transformed being, only so that I may be at Your service.

It is true that you are advancing rapidly towards the goal.

My love is accompanying you on the way.

28 November 1934

*

My dear Mother,

Today S tells me: "I want to work with a winnowing fan also." The day before yesterday she definitely told me: "Only husking and nothing else." When she goes on with her whims, it is rather difficult to go to the others and make changes in the work.

One thing I wish to know: do You want her to husk and do all other work?

What can I say when she agrees to one thing and the next moment she wants another one.

30 November 1934

*

My dear Mother,

Mother, my Mother, may the Divine Peace descend upon earth. May the Divine Peace descend into each heart. It is only in Peace that the Divine shall manifest and spread the glory of His Divinity.

My Mother, I ask for Peace, Peace and Peace.

Yes, Peace is the indispensable basis. Our peace, love and blessings are always with you.

30 November 1934

*

My dear Mother,

I read Sri Aurobindo's notice about You. I read it again and then read it once more.

My Lord, the Mother has no rest; may She have some. Lord, grant that wherever I go and move and work, there may be nothing but peace and happiness.

My dear Mother, this is my humble prayer to the Divine: may You have rest.

Just now, I am resting quite all right. Surely the best way to help is, indeed, to be peaceful and happy. And if peace and happiness were spread in the Ashram much of the work would be saved.

Our love and blessings are always with you.

1 December 1934

*

My dear Mother,

I am quiet, happy and filled with Your Love, the Love that is a great victorious force.

Yes, love is the great Victor.

All love and blessings to you, my dear child

2 December 1934

*

My dear Mother,

Ah, the moment we remain fully conscious and vigilant, all our difficulties vanish — they cannot stand! It is impossible for them to face the flaming fire of the Divine. Grant me full consciousness, complete vigilance and that flaming fire.

Surely you will have more and more the divine fire of progress and purification burning in your heart.

With our love and blessings

3 December 1934

*

My dear Mother,

Happy am I that You are in my heart; Your Love and Light surround me.

Yes, I am always in your heart and the peace, protection and help are constantly surrounding you.

With love and blessings

7 December 1934

*

My dear Mother,

This evening at 8 p.m. a very strong giddiness came in my head and began to make me unconscious. I sat down for a few minutes and it passed away.

Why do such things happen? I know why: in 1935 we enter the Eternal Consciousness, a consciousness of complete peace, joy, harmony and happiness. In order to obstruct this, such things come.

To be quiet and fearless is the condition in which these adverse forces can do no harm at all.

Always with you

8 December 1934

*

Mother of my heart,

Awaken the unawakened parts in me. Make me integrally conscious of Thy Presence, the Presence which will lead me to an integral and perfect union with Thee and make me live as a brilliant portion of Thyself.

Yes, your prayer will be granted.

Always with you, day and night, in the action and in the rest.

With love and blessings

10 December 1934

*

My dear Mother,

D has taken so many photos and there is now an album. People ask me: "Where are you?" I answer: "In the heart of the Mother." I have only one place, and it is Your heart.

My dear child,

Well, you have lost nothing from not being photographed because the photos are far from good!

And surely it is better to be in my heart (where you actually are) than in an album . . .

18 December 1934

*

My dear Mother,

S has not taken her evening food, for reasons she knows. I do not, but most probably I am the culprit.

I do not think you are the culprit. I must be the culprit because she wanted to embroider a crown for me in gold and I said that I had no gold thread that I could give, which is the plain truth.

All these moods are absurd, and the best thing is not to mind them at all. A perfect equanimity is the strongest power.

19 December 1934

*

My dear Mother,

May S have submission and love for the Divine, may she be filled with gratitude, may she progress in the sadhana.

I shall add: may she have a simple humility, because that is what she needs most.

The Divine Grace is infinite. O Mother, grant me a perfect receptivity. I give myself to the Divine.

Yes, my dear child, it is with the widening of the consciousness and the one-pointedness of the aspiration that the receptivity increases.

23 December 1934

*

My dear Mother,

I don't know how far it is true, but I feel that I am a being who has come down upon earth and taken up the human form only to manifest the Divine Will. I am eternal, unborn and immortal.

Let me tell You, after having this consciousness I feel myself untouched by anything and I find the strength of the lower life completely broken.

Your consciousness is quite true and I am happy you have come to realise this. Keep this consciousness in all humility towards the Divine because such is the condition of an integral realisation.

Our blessings are with you.

23 December 1934

*

My dear Mother,

May You rest, and the best way of giving You rest is for me to rise above the lower nature and progress in the Divine Light so that I may live only as a spark and ray of the Light.

If each inmate determines to do this and progresses, surely, my dear Mother, You will have more rest and ease.

You are quite right, the only thing that can give me rest is that each one should take the right attitude and progress.

I am much better today.

With love and blessings always

25 December 1934

*

My dear Mother,

Seeing You this evening, this prayer arose in me so fervently: "O Lord, may my Mother get completely cured tonight." Surely had we been devoted to You, a collective prayer and aspiration would have arisen, instead of the sneezing, yawning and coughing. How nicely we receive You! You appear on the steps, and we begin this noise.

My dear Mother, may a collective and concentrated will be created, a will consecrated to the Divine for the manifestation of the Divine Love.

My very dear child, yes it is quite sure; if many could think and feel like you, things would become so much easier and so much time would be saved!

All love to you

27 December 1934

*

Mother,

C says the light in his section is too high. A says the light in his washing department is too dim. Others say the light in the dining halls is too dim. They ask me to put in more powerful bulbs.

The bulbs in the dining halls cannot be changed. The two other things have been arranged.

The kitchen has two bulbs. I think one can be put aside and used only when necessary.

It is better not to take away the bulb. It can create some mischief in the electricity.

c. 1934

*

Mother,

A takes extra bread and gives it to the gardener and his daughters. He gets slices from the tiffin-carriers of others and this too he gives to them. If he asks for more slices, it is secretly for this purpose. I do not think we can allow such things to develop.

Give him the number of slices he used to take and nothing more. If he asks why, you have only to answer, "Mother's orders."

c. 1934

*

Mother,

People are complaining about milk spilling in the tiffin-carriers. When the carriers are opened, we fill them like this: bread comes first and we put it in the bottom pot. Then come the vegetables; we put them in the next pot. Last of all comes the milk and it goes in the top pot. Now when the carriers are sent off on the cart, the milk sometimes drops down by the jerks of the cart and spoils

the vegetables and bread. So people have begun to ask for the milk to be served in the bottom pot. This means at least four times the labour and time for the workers.

In my heart I feel that if we give food, why not give it in a better condition? But my mind refuses to yield; it says that those who are so particular should come and take away their carriers themselves.

Mother, please decide for me.

It seems to me that it is only a question of organisation of the work. Why not have all the pots of each tiffin-carrier spread in a row, in the order in which they have to be placed afterwards, like this: 1 2 3 4 (1 is top, 4 is bottom)?

Logically, 1 must contain bread

2 " " vegetables

3 " " rice

4 " " milk or curds

Each thing is served in the corresponding pot as soon as it is ready (that is to say, bread first, vegetables afterwards, etc.) and the tiffin-carriers are remounted *only when all is served*, which allows the milk to be put at the bottom.

I hope I have been clear in my explanation about how to deal with the tiffin-carriers. Of course two minutes' practical demonstration of how to do it would make it clearer and easier to understand. If something is still obscure, I shall call you and explain how to do it. The only objection you can make to my proposal is the space needed to spread 50 to 60 tiffin-carriers. But perhaps it is quite possible to manage the required space.

c. 1934

(To be continued)

DYUMAN

(New Correspondences of the Mother – I, pp. 45-68)

Do not take my words for a teaching. Always they are a force in action, uttered with a definite purpose, and they lose their true power when separated from that purpose.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – I, CWM, Vol. 13, p. 53)

ON THE BRIGHTEST PERIOD IN THE HISTORY OF THE ASHRAM

From Barin Ghose

(1)

The Light Descended Too Soon

It was a period tense with expectation when the Mother took charge of the entire Ashram. Somehow we instinctively felt that something great was going to happen and henceforth things would move rapidly towards a great consummation. The Mother took charge of the daily meditation and began receiving the sadhaks individually. I was put in charge of the beginners who began to come for their joint meditation with me in my room, so that the burden on Mother's shoulder would not be too heavy.

Two weeks were hardly over when miracles began happening. A young man called Purushottam was in the group who were told to sit with me. He had been a teacher in Gujarat and had given up everything to join the spiritual community here. One morning when he was sitting in meditation with me on the floor, I alone being on a chair, his body began twisting like a snake and approaching my feet. This physical manifestation frightened me as I used to discourage such movements in a sadhak after Krishnashashi's sudden derangement. So I broke up the meditation in a hurry. I listened to whatever each sadhak had to say, keeping Purushottam last, waiting until everybody had left.

When asked to explain what he felt and why he was behaving like that, he began talking of some power manifesting itself in him and taking possession of his being. So I went to the Mother and reported what had happened. She called Purushottam upstairs. We heard that Sri Aurobindo had come out too. This began happening to Purushottam daily and I begged Mother to let me discontinue this sitting as I did not feel confident to guide the meditation. Just then I heard from her that something had really manifested in Purushottam. He developed an inner sight and could feel and know things in each sadhak's development. Purushottam was therefore told to keep to his room until further orders.

Miss Hodgson had been passing through an acute inner struggle for sometime. Being English she had something hard and unyielding in her. Perhaps her mental outlook was too rational and analytical, her vital nature too strong to yield to spiritual discipline and the call for necessary renunciation. I had heard from the Mother that she was about to leave the Ashram for good, as she was unable to reconcile herself to this life. Besides that she was not having any very great realisation to sustain her

in her arduous attempt and give her an abiding faith in the pursuit of this path.

This hardness in her had somehow yielded now after Sri Aurobindo's great Siddhi and I found her in tears. She went to the Mother after the event and requested her to change her name and permit her to obliterate her past completely as a preparation for a rebirth, so to say. Next day she kindled a big fire in the backyard and burnt all her possessions including her costly dresses. She went back to her bare room a new woman with the name of "Dutta" (the dedicated) given to her by the Mother. Henceforth she begged to be clad in saffron coloured sari and was the only one allowed to do so in the Ashram.

Purushottam was gradually permitted to come and join the evening meditation. On the first day he came and sat near me when the Mother was guiding our meditations. In the front row there was a French lady sitting in sadhana as she had come here recently in order to learn Yoga. I was very curious to know how Purushottam would behave now. I found the same unquiet movements manifesting itself in him. He began talking about each sadhak present there, pointing out his or her defects. Quite unexpectedly he turned and gave the French lady a slap on the face. She went red with anger, but the Mother was smiling reassuringly at her, telling her to keep calm and not mind it. Then Purushottam turned to me and told me that my chief difficulty was in my throat. He caught hold of my throat and gave it a twist. I distinctly felt my head shooting up and up until I was looking down on everybody from a great height.

After this Purushottam was not allowed to come to joint meditation. He was sent for by the Mother next morning and Sri Aurobindo came out to see him in the upper verandah. Champaklal, a Gujarati boy, used to stay upstairs at day time and prepare and serve Sri Aurobindo's fruit juice and tea. He was present at this time. We heard a great commotion upstairs. Later on we came to know that Purushottam had given Champaklal a sound thrashing. Champaklal began perspiring in a peculiar way and his clothes were dyed yellow with it. He was sent to bathe in the bathroom upstairs. When he came out he was found to have changed to a much fairer complexion and his face was exceptionally bright and shining for a few days after this.¹

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did not approve of Purushottam's condition. He was again sent away with the order to keep to his room. The Mother told me he would lose his powers in seven days as he was abusing them. In fact it did happen like that and a month or so afterwards Purushottam came out of seclusion an ordinary man. He took charge of all the Ashram gardens and took to gardening.

Events like this began crowding as days passed. A great descent of divine power manifested at this time and touched very many people in the Ashram. One Tirupati, a Telugu boy, went raving mad. Kanailal, the Bhawanipur sadhak, had an attack of neurasthenia and nearly lost his senses. As his was a pure psychic Adhar (vehicle) the Mother ultimately pulled him through. Both Tirupati and Kanai had, before the

1. See also *Champaklal Speaks*, p. 71. [The footnotes are by Raman Reddy. – Ed.]

breakdown, felt a great realisation of illumination and sense of power. Each of them came upstairs under the impression that he was the real Sri Aurobindo. Tirupati was sent away and is still a deranged man. Kanai passed through a valley of darkness and fear, and became sane after a fortnight or so.

I believe that the Mother had, by her Yogic powers, drawn down and made a great descent of divine manifestation possible. It was evidently premature and we were not ready for such siddhi. So it only succeeded in throwing some of us off our balance. Those who were most open and receptive naturally took in most of it but could not contain it and suffered in consequence. The Mother told me later on that Sri Aurobindo had told her the time was not ripe yet for such a great leap. Gradually things subsided and everything was again normal.

I hesitated long to surrender to the Mother as it meant cutting myself completely adrift from the outside world and whatever it held for our normal fulfilment. Besides, I felt I did not know or realise the Mother as Divine. Either I had to take things for granted or tell her my doubts plainly. I did so. She received me and smiled in her own sweet way when I told her I did not feel her to be divine. Quite graciously she advised me to wait for some sign from above which was sure to come. That evening while walking in front of the house I felt uplifted by a great faith surging up in me. I came at once and laid my head on Mother's feet. I was accepted.

Things began moving fast. One afternoon all the inmates of the houses were told to go out; the gates were locked and the Mother led Sri Aurobindo to the new house. When we came back we knew that the great Master had removed to the new house, which would henceforth be his abode. I, Nolini Kanta Gupta, K. Amrita and a few others removed there too. The old building at Rue de la Marine was used for housing the Library and the stores department. Sri Aurobindo's room was given to Anilbaran Roy, the Congress leader of Bankura (a district of Bengal), who had come to the Ashram sometime back straight from jail after his release from internment.

Henceforth a new order came into our day to day life in the Ashram. We would get up in the morning, have our bath and gather in the spacious courtyard for *darshan* (sight) of the Mother. She would come down clad in white with her luminous smile and sit in a room to receive our *namaskar* (obeisance) and offering of flowers. Turn by turn we approached her, touched her feet lovingly laying a wreath or a spray of flowers there. She blessed us laying her hand on our head, chose a particular flower or combination of flowers for each sadhak and gave it to him. Each flower as she gives has a special significance, a symbolic meaning for the particular sadhak. A rose and a spray of white jasmine means that the Mother wants love or bhakti with purity in him. A spray of green leaves with marigold means supramental light to guide and sublimate his actions. The lotus is considered in the Ashram to be the king of flowers — a deep mystic meaning woven into it — which can more be felt than given expression to. There are flowers meaning supramental purity, light and grace. There are flowers too giving the sense of power and dynamism, of detachment and

surrender.

After her blessing we disperse for tea and our solitary meditations in our rooms. The day passes in simple Ashram duties such as cleaning, milk distribution, library work, and so on. In the afternoon food is carried upstairs in trays by ladies who have cooked special delicacies as offering for the divine Master and the Mother. Some people wait on the stairs for *prasad* — the food touched by him and consecrated for distribution among those who care to take it. Ibrahim's (Dara's) step-mother, a Persian lady, does not touch any other food except that which is brought down from them.

We have our Ashram meal at noon brought by servants to those who do not care to join the common meal in the kitchen. A bell is rung and sadhaks come from the houses to sit on *Asans* — seats arranged in rows. Their food is waiting for them covered with gauze covers. The kitchen gives you a wonderful sense of cleanliness and grace. It is an act of almost worship to dine there. You feel the Mother's touch in it — the Supreme Lakshmi of the Ashram.

(*Sri Aurobindo as I understand Him*, pp. 102-106)

(2)

[The following is a letter of Barin Ghose to the Mother written during the brightest period.]

My divine Mother,

[1926-1927?]

Yesterday during the afternoon meditation a luminous body was felt in this physical body. The body-cells were beginning to flower like small flowers of light. The two palms of the feet were full of beauty and shining with light. Inside the nose, at the lobe, twitches came and some subtle grains of mysterious matter uncoiling in intensely sweet fragrance. Your lotus-odour was now and then enveloping me.

The first day of Tirupati's coming when we were sitting with him upstairs in the morning, a connection was made between Nefdi and the being behind him and help came to me. An assurance drifted from him that henceforth the two will touch each other and help mutually their growth and manifestation. The same day he came to my room at night and it brought a touch and interplay again. But a bad odour was flowing from his dark body and I had to reach the being behind avoiding his exterior being.

Today in the afternoon sitting as soon as I sat down and shut my eyes I found all the cells in my body in full bloom and emitting light. In the last two

days now and then a warm glow was flowing in me. Today it came and grew and grew into great heat as if a sun was burning inside me. Along with the heat came energy simmering and filling the body [*with*] light. All this time very little of that nervous twitch in the sex centre was there. In this state I felt the beings behind Kanai, Tirupati, Nolini, Kshitish, Amrita, Bijoy and many others, all helping me to grow. You were a thin figure of light like a lightning of beauty playing in a great effulgence and getting lost in it now and then. . . .

Your child
Barin

(3)

Letter of Barin Ghose to Mrityunjoy Mukherjee

(Translated from the Bengali original)

[When Barin Ghose wrote this letter to Mrityunjoy Mukherjee, the latter was in Calcutta. He joined the Ashram in June 1929, shortly before Barin left the Ashram in December of the same year. The letter has been published here because it makes a passing reference to the brightest period.]

Pondicherry

15.4.1928

Kalyanbaresu

(To you who deserve my good wishes)

Received the plants. They have reached me in good condition. It is extremely hot here and, due to that, one *Mutabilis Pink* is in a half-dead state. One plant in the list is not there in the basket. There must have been some mistake at the time of despatch; but it does not matter.

Right now I am in charge of four gardens: one vegetable and three flower gardens. Apart from these, there are three more gardens in the “charge”² of three other persons. There are two rose gardens. In all, we are four gardeners looking after four gardens. But four persons are not enough, because we work only for two hours in the evening. Everyone has other Ashram work to do. There is also sadhana. Then we attend the Mother’s daily “programme” of

2. Words within quotation marks have been used by Barin Ghose himself in the original Bengali letter.

meditation, etc. What a relief would it be for us if we had a few more gardeners. I have almost stopped painting because of this hassle of gardening. Cousins is trying to sell my painting “Kali” at Rs.50/-. A certain American friend of mine has offered me Rs.550/- for a “portrait” of Sri Aurobindo. I have promised him to complete the painting in two months. But I have not been able to make much progress due to lack of time and inspiration.

It is always difficult to maintain for a long time in the sadhana the peace, the force or the touch of Ananda. It depends on the upward disposition of the heart. When the mind looks upwards, the treasures of the higher realms remain permanently with us. But the mind cannot hold on to this state for long, it sinks by the downward pull of earth. The force of Ananda diminishes and, in the end, evaporates completely. There is nothing wrong with studies;³ we too here write, read, paint, learn vocal and instrumental music, do gardening, cook and chat away. But doing all these with vital desire creates obstacles in the sadhana. We shirk three fourths of our responsibility in doing Mother’s work. It is very difficult to do Mother’s work. Those who are doing it here have to remain practically buried alive in work and serve Her without any personal likes or dislikes. It may be that not all of them have the right inner attitude towards work, but the Mother herself is physically present here and we have her daily darshan and physical touch. What that really means is difficult to understand unless one has the experience. It is as indispensable to life as the air we breathe. However lofty your “ambition”, it will be fulfilled here because the Mother is going to create here a vast “city of sadhaks”; it is already being created here in a miniature form. Everyone will have a place here — artist, architect, writer, engineer, doctor, peasant, servant, grocer and businessman. However, all this is for the “community”, in fact, for the Divine, and not for the sake of one’s personal satisfaction. But to have such a mature “angle of vision” requires time. It requires sadhana too. After you come here, it is very possible that you may have to go back, because the vital has not yet surrendered. You may have to return due to the pull of the vital. However, I believe, that your coming here will have some positive results. *Manushyattwa, Mumukshattwa, and Mahapurush Sanshray. [Enlightened manhood, the will to be liberated and contact with a great spiritual personality.]* You have not yet had the privilege of the last. Our Mother is the universal Mother, the Supreme Shakti incarnate in a human body. I have seen this with my own eyes and experienced it directly. It is a rare fortune to be a child at the feet of such an extraordinary lady. If in this age the Divine takes birth in a human form on earth, then surely He will embody himself in Them. **The hidden divinity within you which is waiting to manifest, can only manifest by the touch of the embodied universal**

3. Mrityunjoy at this point of time was in college, hence the reference to his studies.

Mother. The supreme Goddess will come and awaken the sleeping gods in human beings. The Mother has already shown this to a few of us. Last year I had a glimpse of this extraordinary manifestation in myself and a few others.⁴ However, it is no use being hasty. First, one must be pure. Let the vital understand that all its desire, hope, joy, force, enjoyment, money and lust are to be consecrated at the feet of the Mother for bringing in a divine world. There are quite a few who have not yet understood this truth, yet continue to stay here and are in the process of realising it. Wherever you live, near or far, surrender is a must. Even a little insincerity will not do. You achieve this surrender quickly when you are serving the Divine. If you are away, you learn it rather slowly and have to pass through a state of uncertainty. You are fine in a certain way, but very weak in another. Your vital is a big knot. But even this knot will be untied, and is perhaps waiting for an auspicious moment. The pull which has given you a human body for enjoyment, is not always visible or seized, yet it is there inextricably linked with the whole being. Your interest for studies is only one of its “manifestations”. Life here is not very attractive from outside. It is extremely “arduous” and monotonous because the path is too difficult. Yet those who have stuck to it are fortunate as they are so near the unfailing Light. Even if they fail to attain the realisation, whatever they get will still bring about a miracle in their lives. People fail in spite of staying here; you and even me, both of us, may fail. Yet living in heaven, be it only for a couple of days, is something unimaginable; in my “cycle of evolution” the results are immediate and undeniable.

Accept my love. Hope you are well. Now I will go for cooking.

Yours
Barin-da

Compiler's Note on Barin Ghose

(After his return from the Andamans)

Sri Aurobindo's younger brother Barin Ghose was released from the Andamans in January 1920. After coming back to Bengal, he visited a number of spiritual centres, including the Prabartak Sangha of Motilal Roy at Chandernagore. Disappointed by all of them and especially by Motilal's Roy attempt at forming a spiritual commune, he wrote a letter to Sri Aurobindo in a pessimistic vein. Sri Aurobindo's long reply in Bengali dated 7 April 1920 on the Integral Yoga and the formation of a divine

4. Barin refers here to the brightest period. Emphasis added.

community (Deva Sangha) with particular reference to Motilal Roy's Prabartak Sangha is well-known, so I will not delve into it. Barin was so impressed by the letter that he immediately published it in the *Jaishtha* (May/June) issue of the *Narayan*, a literary magazine started by C. R. Das, who had requested him to take up its editorship for a stipend of Rs 150 a month, as soon as he came back from the Andamans. Barin then took permission from the Government of Bengal to see Sri Aurobindo so that the purpose of his visit might not be misunderstood by the police, and arrived in Pondicherry around the middle of 1920. He found his brother absorbed in Yoga and busy writing for the *Arya* amid a group of carefree boys. He met Paul Richard and the Mother (known then as Mirra) who made a deep impression on him. When Barin went back to Calcutta, he published her photograph in the next issue of the *Narayan* saying that she was "the living embodiment of Sri Aurobindo's yoga".

Barin returned to Calcutta and plunged himself in work. But instead of consolidating his position as the editor of *Narayan*, he launched a weekly paper of his own named *Bijoli*, the first issue of which was printed in November 1920. It created a flutter of excitement in Calcutta and was poised for a successful run, but Barin soon left for Pondicherry in January 1921, leaving the editorship in the hands of Upen Bannerji, Sachin Sengupta and Nolini Kanto Sarkar. This time he stayed in Pondicherry for several months during which he picked up the rudiments of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. He had a spiritual experience lying on the sands of the Pondicherry beach and, though it lasted only for a few minutes, it opened a new chapter in his life. He wrote about it later:

My whole unquiet and ambitious vital nature had caught fire at the touch of Sri Aurobindo. New experiences began to act like wine. They flooded in and crowded out all my worldly pre-occupations . . . Sri Aurobindo had become the lode-stone, the guiding star of my spiritual life for the next seven or eight years.

Around the month of September 1921, Barin returned to Calcutta and embarked upon another ambitious venture. He took a number of loans from his friends and sympathisers and bought *The Cherry Press* in Bowbazar Street from Arunkumar Sinha. The offices of the *Narayan* and *Bijoli* were shifted to the first floor of the three-storied building with the Press on the ground floor. The office-bearers themselves occupied the second floor. All was set for *Bijoli's* second successful year of publication, but the editor disappeared again. The entire burden of running the *Cherry Press* and publishing the *Bijoli* and *Narayan* fell on the shoulders of an infuriated Upen Bannerji, who eventually disassociated himself from them. But Barin proved to be of great assistance to Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry. In June 1922, he found a house on 9, Rue de la Marine, negotiated the rent with its owner and set in motion a suit of ejection to vacate the old tenants. On 25 October 1922, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, accompanied by a few of their close disciples, moved to what came to

be known as the Library House. Barin then left for Calcutta in order to collect money for Sri Aurobindo and his impoverished little community of disciples. He was so deeply moved by the sight of the Mother making blouses out of their torn dhotis that he asked Sri Aurobindo to permit him to go to Bengal and make a public appeal for funds. Sri Aurobindo refused to listen to his proposal, but after repeated requests, allowed him to go and approach only those individuals who were drawn to his Yoga. He gave him a letter of authority to collect money on his behalf and wrote a letter to C. R. Das requesting him to help Barin in his mission.

Barin spent the next ten months in Bengal from the end of October 1922 to the third week of August 1923. He settled down in a small house at 11, Roy Street, Bhawanipore, Calcutta, and began guiding young aspirants in Yoga. The result was almost immediately disastrous. Two young men, Jyotish Ghose and Krishna Shashi, completely lost their balance; the latter turned raving mad and had to be tied with ropes. Barin desperately sought help from Sri Aurobindo who explained to him the causes of their breakdown. In both the cases, there was a premature opening into the vital worlds without sufficient spiritual guidance and protection which nobody could provide at the Bhawanipore centre. Barin henceforth did not admit any new sadhaks without Sri Aurobindo's permission and kept his brother well-informed of the activities of the centre. It is to be noted that during this period Sri Aurobindo often referred these cases to the Mother (known then as Mirra) and communicated her advice to Barin who had no inhibitions about accepting her guidance. In January 1923 he asked for a photograph of the Mother for the Bhawanipore centre. As Barin worked tirelessly to collect funds for Sri Aurobindo, he became a focal point in Bengal for the next few months, attracting a number of spiritual seekers, just as Motilal Roy had done earlier in Chandernagore. Among the early aspirants who came were Kanai Ganguly, Rajani Palit, Rati Palit, Kshitish Dutt, Kumud Bandhu Bagchi, Hrishikesh Kanjilal and Nolini Kanto Sarkar. Many of them later settled down at the Ashram in Pondicherry.

Barin left Calcutta in August 1923, handing over the charge of the Bhawanipore centre to Kumud Bandhu Bagchi and his wife Indu Bala. This time he stayed in Pondicherry for six and a half years and practised Yoga under the direct guidance of Sri Aurobindo. He became his brother's secretary and interacted with visitors and disciples according to his instructions. He also did cooking for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and looked after the vegetable and flower gardens of the Ashram. He grew roses on the terrace of the Rosary House⁵ and regularly arranged the flower canopy over the Darshan seat of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. When the Mother took charge of the Ashram after the Siddhi Day, he did not revolt at the sudden transition of authority, though he did have some initial difficulty in accepting her. In his own words:

5. The house came to be known as the Rosary House because Barin used to grow roses on its terrace.

I hesitated long to surrender to the Mother as it meant cutting myself completely adrift from the outside world and whatever it held for our normal fulfilment. Besides, I felt I did not know or realise the Mother as Divine. Either I had to take things for granted or tell her my doubts plainly. I did so. She received me and smiled in her own sweet way when I told her I did not feel her to be divine. Quite graciously she advised me to wait for some sign from above which was sure to come. That evening, while walking in front of the house, I felt uplifted by a great faith surging up in me. I came at once and laid my head on Mother's feet. I was accepted.⁶

On 7 February 1927, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother⁷ moved from the Library House to the Meditation House. Again, it was Barin who negotiated the rent with the owner of the house and accompanied the Mother on her first inspection of the new premises. His letters to Mrityunjay Mukherjee written during this period evince a keen knowledge of human nature, the difficulties of sadhana and the Mother's indispensable role in it. Yet, in 1928, his ambitious nature surged back and he wrote to Sri Aurobindo that he wanted to follow his own path. I quote at length from Sri Aurobindo's reply which points out the root cause of the tragic failure of Barin's sadhana:

The idea that comes to you to go away and try a severe asceticism, "to go *my* way to fight *my* battle alone and in *my* own way", as you express it, is an error and the suggestion of an adverse force, and at the same time it points directly to the real difficulty in you that has stood blocking your progress. If you went, you would go very far not only from us but from the Yoga and be lost to the Path, and you would fare no better than now. The difficulties would be always with you or sleep for a time only to rise again in your nature. However hard the fight, the only thing is to fight it out now and here to the end. The trouble is that you have never fully faced and conquered the real obstacle. There is in a very fundamental part of your nature a strong formation of ego-individuality which has mixed in your spiritual aspiration a clinging element of pride and spiritual ambition and is supported by a long-formed habit of leadership, self-confident activity and self-reliance. This formation has never consented to be broken up in order to give place to something more true and divine. Therefore, when the Mother has put her force upon you or when you yourself have pulled the force upon you, this in you has always prevented it from doing its work in its own way. It has begun itself building according to the ideas of the mind or some demand, trying to make its own creation in its "own way", by its own strength, its own Sadhana, its own Tapasya. There has never been any real surrender, any

6. *Sri Aurobindo as I understand Him*, p. 104.

7. Barin, Nolini and Amrita also moved to the Meditation House shortly after this date.

giving up of yourself freely and simply into the hands of the Divine Mother. And yet that is the only way to succeed in the Supramental Yoga. To be a Yogi, a Sannyasi, a Tapaswi is not the object here. The object is transformation, and the transformation can only be done by a force infinitely greater than your own, it can only be done by being truly like a child in the hands of the Divine Mother.⁸

Barin did realise later the truth of Sri Aurobindo's explanation, but it was too late by then. He wrote about it in 1935 at the age of 55 when he had already left the Ashram:

Now at the age of fifty-five⁹ when I look back, I can very well feel the muddy stream of aspiration which caught me in its grip and helped to open up some sort of a door for the light to stream in. I wanted more to be a great yogi than to attain the actual realisation of the great Truth. My strong egoistic vital being was getting ready to storm the giddy heights of Shivaood and win eternal glory. It is always so with imperfect beginners.

Sri Aurobindo's reply to Barin which I have quoted above was written on 7 June 1928. Barin had by then shifted from the Ashram main building to the first floor of the 'Retraite' house on Rue Saint Gilles, which is right across the street and opposite to Sri Aurobindo's room on the first floor of the Meditation House.¹⁰ He now led a life of retirement much against Sri Aurobindo's advice and discontinued all his work except his own correspondence. Incoming letters from Bengal were now forwarded to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother by Nolini Kanta Gupta instead of Barin, and this seemed to have profoundly hurt him, though he was himself responsible for it. But he did not break off all contact with the Mother. He came to the Mother's morning Pranam and offered her flowers and at Darshan time took charge of the arrangement of the flower canopy over Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Darshan seat. He continued to write letters full of devotion and wisdom to Mrityunjay Mukherjee (who had not yet joined the Ashram), even as he found himself more and more dissatisfied with life in the same Ashram. On 4 December 1929, he wrote a long letter of petty complaints to the Mother regarding the organisation of the Dining Room. On 24 December 1929, he left the Ashram leaving a letter on his table addressed to Nolini, from which I quote below:

I am leaving Pondicherry today. First I will go to Calcutta, and if I get money, I don't know where I will go . . . I did not get permission from the Mother to

8. *Autobiographical Notes*, CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 367-68.

9. Barin Ghose was born on 5 January, 1880. He was fifty-five in 1935.

10. The first floor above the present Drawing Office of the Ashram. It was later occupied by Mrityunjay Mukherjee.

go away . . . I am going from a place of Truth at my own risk. It won't do any good to me. I believe that I shall come back by Sri Aurobindo's birthday. Tell the Mother to bless this son who is going away from the path . . . I hope nobody follows me on the wrong path.

When Barin left Pondicherry, he took some money from the Ashram account for his immediate expenses, which he later scrupulously returned in small amounts. For the next few years, he struggled for lack of money and practised journalism as a means of subsistence. He revived the *Bijoli* in April 1930 and appealed to the writers of the Ashram to contribute their articles. But Sri Aurobindo forbade them to write because it would convey to the public the impression that he supported Barin's views and his work. *Bijoli* was wound up at the end of 1931 due to lack of funds and Barin Ghose, the erstwhile fiery revolutionary, appealed for help to Mahatma Gandhi, the champion of non-violence and satyagraha. Not much help seems to have come, for he soon had to correct examination papers at the Calcutta University for his daily sustenance. Meanwhile, he tried his hand in the art world and sold a few of his paintings without much profit. Ironically, at one point of time, he was bargaining with a prospective customer in order to sell his paintings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In 1933, he went to Kashi University, Benares, to exhibit his paintings and ran a tea stall at the time of the exhibition.

In February 1934, Barin married Sailaja Devi, a widow with two sons. By 1936, they had moved to Kulinpara at Khardah and set up what Barin called his "Sadhanashram". During the next decade, there seems to have been a gradual estrangement from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother despite the fact that he kept in touch with the Mother and sent her occasional offerings. He even wrote an article in the *Khulnabasi* on the occasion of the Mother's birthday of 21 February 1940. One would be enthused by his ungrudging praise of the Mother and the Ashram, but Sri Aurobindo was quite sceptical about it. I quote from the *Evening Talks*:

Disciple: Does this article show any change in Barin's attitude?

Sri Aurobindo: It depends. He says what is uppermost in his mind, and what suits him at the moment, according to his moods. But it may be a change in his attitude, but it is difficult to say if there is any progress. The change may be due to his having failed in everything after going from here and the Ashram growing out since. That may have impressed him. It may be due to mental causes also.

Disciple: He admits that he had fallen from the path and in his attitude towards the Mother.

Disciple: No, he was critical.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes. He says things according to his own mood and what suits him. He wrote one book on the Mother and asked Andrews for introduction.

Andrews refused saying: “I know the Mother.” About the Ashram, Moore also refused to believe his criticisms.”¹¹

Sri Aurobindo’s mention of the book on the Mother written by Barin is actually a chapter on the Mother in Barin’s biography of Sri Aurobindo, which was rejected by the publishers. Barin later sent the biography to Sri Aurobindo who simply put it aside as he found it “full of inaccuracies”. However, what comes out clearly in the above conversation is that Sri Aurobindo already knew about Barin’s earlier criticisms of the Mother and the Ashram, not to be taken in by his high praise for the same. It is difficult to understand this strange contradiction or duality in Barin. But subsequent facts prove abundantly Sri Aurobindo’s reservations. In April 1951, after Sri Aurobindo’s passing, Barin opposed the Mother’s proposal of starting a University Centre in Pondicherry, saying that it would only reinforce the grip of the French over Pondicherry which had not yet merged with India. Hemendra Prasad Ghosh had to speak up strongly in defence of the Ashram and refute Barin’s arguments in the same newspaper. One of his last unsuccessful ventures was the Bande Mataram House, an institution which would keep the records of those who fought in the revolutionary movement in India. His last days don’t seem to have been very happy as his health failed and his ambitious plans crumbled one after another. He died eventually at the age of 79 on 18 April 1959.

Compilation and Notes by RAMAN REDDY

11. *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* recorded by A. B. Purani (1995), p. 707.

To live within in a constant aspiration for the Divine enables us to look at life with a smile and to remain peaceful whatever the outer circumstances may be.

The Mother

(On Thoughts and Aphorisms, CWM, Vol. 10, p. 266)

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

(Part 41)

(Continued from the issue of November 2023)

Section 5: Equanimity and Sweetness of Temper

Since his childhood gentleness was an intrinsic part of Sri Aurobindo’s nature. In 1877, at the tender age of five, Sri Aurobindo was sent — along with his two elder brothers — to boarding school, Loretto Convent School, at Darjeeling run by Irish nuns. Sri Aurobindo’s biographer, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar wrote: “About his school life, again, little is known, but he seems to have made a profound impression on his teachers at Darjeeling by his sparkling and wide-awake intelligence and the singular sweetness of his nature.”¹

Annette Beveridge (née Akroyd), a good friend of Sri Aurobindo’s father, when on a visit to Darjeeling, went to see Sri Aurobindo and his elder brothers at their school. On September 1877 she recorded her impressions:

At length a lady appeared and had a long chat with me. She told me that the boys had been sent for but they were very long in coming from the boys’ house which is considerably higher. She told me they were very good and industrious and that the little one (Sri Aurobindo) is now quite happy. Then came another lady who is I believe the Rev. Mother but I could not stay longer . . . Coming up the very steep hill towards home I met the boys — all grown and looking so well-dressed in their blue serge and scarlet stockings. The little fellow had a grey suit, very becoming — and is greatly aged — grown tall and boyish. I was struck particularly by the broadening of his forehead. He was pleased to see me I think but all were quite silent except for an extorted yes! Or no! I am going to see them again soon, meantime please let the doctor hear this . . . They asked if Mr. Ghose was a Christian and also Mrs. Ghose.²

From his childhood Sri Aurobindo became accustomed to live away from his parents. The three brothers used to visit their parents during vacations and also visited their grandfather at Deoghar. Very little information is available about the two years Sri Aurobindo spent at Darjeeling. Years later he recounted an incident in

1. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 28.

2. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, September 2011, p. 782.

the long dormitory where the students used to sleep. Manmohan usually slept near the door and on one particular night someone, who was late, knocked on the door to be let in. Manmohan replied, “I can’t, I am sleeping!”³

Later at Cambridge, Professor R. S. Lepper, an Irishman who was an undergraduate at King’s College with Sri Aurobindo in 1890-91 and was well acquainted with him, remarked that Sri Aurobindo “was liked by all who knew him.”⁴ Concerning Sri Aurobindo’s comportment at Cambridge, his tutor Sir G. W. Prothero, stated in a letter: “His conduct throughout his two years here was most exemplary.”⁵

At Cambridge Sri Aurobindo was not shy to help his classmates in their studies. Charu Chandra Dutt narrates an interesting conversation he had with a Cambridge student by the name of Percy Mead who was his superior in the I.C.S. :

After a quiet dinner we chatted for a couple of hours on a variety of things, big and small, and got into bed about midnight. In a little while, Mead called out, “Dutt, are you a Bengali?” I said, “I am but why do you ask?” He replied, “There was an Indian student in my days, at the Varsity, a great classical scholar, who had well-nigh beaten all records in Latin and Greek. His name was Aurobindo Akroyd Ghose. I knew him well. In fact he helped me materially in my studies. Do you know him? I have an idea that he was a Bengali, though some fellows because of his English middle name, said he was a Christian.” I laughed, “No, he is not a Christian, he is a Hindu Bengali. I know his people, but I have not actually met him as yet. He is the vice-principal of Baroda College.” Mead said, “It is a pity that the man is an Indian and has had to come to this country. He would have been a famous professor in Cambridge. Well, Dutt, remember me to him when you meet him and tell him Percy Mead was inquiring after him. Good night”! A couple of years later, I recounted the tale to Aurobindo. He replied promptly, “Yes, I remember young Mead. He was a nice fellow, not stuck up like the average public school man.”⁶

The last phrase reflects that Sri Aurobindo possibly had to face a fair share of prejudice in school and University especially considering his ethnicity, isolation in a foreign land and his adverse pecuniary circumstances. But he never spoke about such matters, let alone complain about it. Manmohan had in fact told his poet-friend, Laurence Binyon, about the difficulties he was facing, “It is hard perhaps that my nationality should be so against me in England. But it is in my destiny.”⁷ Prior to

3. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, pp. 3-4.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 327.

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

7. Lotika Ghose, *Manmohan Ghose – Makers of Indian Literature*, published by Sahitya Akademi, 1998, p. 24.

being appointed to the Baroda State Service, Nirodbaran points to an instance that reflects Sri Aurobindo's consideration for his father, Dr. K. D. Ghose, who had high hopes from this favoured son:

Then he failed in the I.C.S. riding test; he did it as you know, deliberately by remaining absent as if by a tangle of unavoidable circumstances: in order not to hurt his hopeful father, not to inflict any pain on him, he had to resort to a trick.⁸

Sri Aurobindo told his disciples that his father

. . . had great hopes for his sons, expected us to be civil servants, and yet he could be quite reasonable. When Manmohan wrote to him that he wanted to be a poet, my father made no objection; he said there was nothing wrong in that. Only, he didn't send any more money.⁹

Sri Aurobindo was fond of his father and has referred to his strong personality, great ability and overgenerous nature.¹⁰ Dr. K. D. Ghose was unable to send money to his three sons in England for long because, as his youngest son Barin explained, Dr. K. D. Ghose was “a selfless donor, the friend of the poor and regarded the entire world as his family. Even today, the name of K. D. Ghose is proverbial on account of his unstinted gifts and his ability to love people and treat them as his own.”¹¹ A. B. Purani writes: “In spite of what to us appears as want of sense of duty on the part of Dr. K. D. Ghose, it is surprising that neither Manmohan nor Sri Aurobindo seems to have any chagrin or bitterness towards their father. On the contrary, every time they wrote or spoke about him was with great admiration and pride.”¹² Manmohan spoke how his father would walk through miles of mud and slush to see a poor patient and would have the patient's diet prepared in his own kitchen. Dr. Ghose himself wrote to his brother-in-law about the host of people for whom he had to provide.¹³ Purna Chandra Chatterjee, (the brother of the novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee), who was Deputy Collector at Rangpur, remarked, “Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose was a remarkable man. I have never met anyone so highly educated, so spirited and with such a strong personality.”¹⁴

During his last year of study at St. Paul's school, Sri Aurobindo was a member

8. Nirodbaran, 'Sri Aurobindo – Perfect Gentleman', *Mother India*, August 1970, p. 407.

9. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 123.

10. See *Talks by Nirodbaran – December 1969 to July 1970*, edited by Sunayana and Maurice, 2018, p. 219; See *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 15; See A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., p. 624.

11. Barindra Kumar Ghose, *Bonar Yuger Kahani*, (translated from Bengali by Kumkum Roy – manuscript).

12. A. B. Purani, *Sri Aurobindo in England*, 1956, p. 30.

13. Lotika Ghose, *Manmohan Ghose – Makers of Indian Literature*, published by Sahitya Akademi, 1998, p. 5.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

of the “I.C.S. Class”. This was a group of senior boys who were working for the Indian Civil Service examination.¹⁵ “I appeared for the I.C.S. because my father wanted it and I was too young to understand it. Later I found out what sort of work it was and I had no interest in the administrative life”,¹⁶ said Sri Aurobindo. In spite of his disinterest, he got a high ranking of 11th in the examination. He then deliberately disqualified himself by repeatedly missing the obligatory horse riding test. In spite of pressure from family and well-wishers to accept the prestigious upcoming appointment, Sri Aurobindo’s determination not to join the I.C.S. is noticeable. After missing the riding test on 9th August, 1892, several letters were sent to him to fix another date but were left unanswered. Subsequently a date was fixed on 26th October but he did not appear. A messenger was then sent to his house and the date 31st October was fixed but he came 40 minutes late. On 10th November he was ordered to come at noon but arrived at 12.50 pm. He was given a last chance to appear for the riding test on 15th November which he skipped altogether following which he was rejected.¹⁷

Sri Aurobindo’s rejection dismayed his tutor Sir G. W. Prothero — a historian, writer and a senior fellow at King’s College who later became the president of the Royal Historical Society. He felt compelled to write to James Cotton about his student’s exceptional brilliance with the hope that Cotton would be able to persuade the authorities to give such a gifted candidate another chance. On 20th November, 1892, he wrote:

I am very sorry to hear what you tell me about Ghose, that he has been rejected in his final I.C.S. Examination for failure in riding. . . . He held a foundation scholarship, which he obtained (before passing his first I.C.S. Examination) by open competition, in classics. His pecuniary circumstances prevented him from resigning this, when he became a Selected Candidate, and the regulations of the scholarship obliged him to devote a great part of his time to classics, of course to some extent to the disadvantage of his I.C.S. studies. He performed his part of the bargain, as regards the College, most honorably, and took a high place in the 1st class of the Classical Tripos at the end of the second year of his residence. He also obtained certain college prizes, showing command of English and literary ability. That a man should have been able to do this (which alone is quite enough for most undergraduates), and at the same time to keep up his I.C.S. work, proves very unusual industry and capacity. . . .

Moreover the man has not only ability but character. He has had a very hard and anxious time of it for the last two years. Supplies from home have almost entirely failed, and he has had to keep his two brothers as well as himself, and

15. A. B. Purani, *Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 20.

16. Nirodbaran, *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, 1994, p. 18.

17. See A. B. Purani, *Sri Aurobindo in England*, 1956, pp. 52-53.

yet his courage and perseverance have never failed. . . .

In conclusion, I hope sincerely that your efforts to re-instate him as a Selected Candidate will prove successful, for I think, if he is finally turned out, it will be, however legally justifiable, a moral injustice to him, and a very real loss to the Indian Government. It may also perhaps be suggested that to reject so able a Hindoo because he cannot ride is likely to give rise to serious misunderstanding in India, and to open the door to a charge of partiality, which is of course absolutely untenable, but which might be put forward by natives with some plausibility.

Yours truly,

G. W. Prothero¹⁸

James Cotton had an immense goodwill for all the three brothers and made every effort to convince the authorities to give Sri Aurobindo another chance for the riding test. Finally, after a petition was sent to the Secretary of State for India, Earl of Kimberley, he remarked, “I should much doubt whether Mr. Ghose would be a desirable addition to the Service . . .”¹⁹ Apparently Sri Aurobindo’s many revolutionary speeches that he delivered at Cambridge reached Kimberley’s ears and in a note he was informed, “The impression which Mr. Ghose has made on the minds of the Commission is by no means a favourable one, and I think that a perusal of the memorandum by the Senior Examiner tends to confirm their view of his character.”²⁰ In a conversation with his attendants Sri Aurobindo revealed some more circumstances of his I.C.S. probationership:

DR. MANILAL: What is the reason for your failure in the riding test in the I.C.S., Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: I appeared late for the test. . . .

DR. MANILAL: Why? Was it under any inspiration?

SRI AUROBINDO: No, (*laughing*) it was intentional. I wasn’t dealing in inspiration then. I didn’t want to be in the British Government Service. I had a strong dislike for the British.

DR. MANILAL: But then why did you appear for the I.C.S. exam at all?

SRI AUROBINDO: I had no intention to do it. It was my father who wanted me to be a civilian. I had to play this trick; otherwise my father and everybody would have howled. My poet brother was horrified to see me smoking and playing cards with my elder brother at the Liberal Club after avoiding the riding test.

DR. MANILAL: Was your father alive at that time?

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, he was arranging with Sir Henry Cotton a post for me in

18. A. B. Purani, *Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, pp. 327-28.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 335.

20. A. B. Purani, *Sri Aurobindo in England*, 1956, p. 69.

Bihar under Sir Henry. But he died of shock soon after.

DR. MANILAL: What shock?

SRI AUROBINDO: He asked me to return to India by a particular ship. I don't know why on that ship. The ship was wrecked off the Portuguese coast. He thought I was on it. But I hadn't sailed on it at all.

DR. MANILAL: Why?

SRI AUROBINDO: I didn't intend to.

NIRODBARAN: Did your father know of your failure in the test?

SRI AUROBINDO: No.

DR. MANILAL: Then he would have been shocked in any case.

SRI AUROBINDO: When they came to know, they all asked me to try again. But I didn't want to and I knew too that the British Government wouldn't give me another chance.

DISCIPLE: Why?

SRI AUROBINDO: My record was too bad.

DISCIPLE: How?

SRI AUROBINDO: They thought that I was a revolutionary, giving seditious speeches in the Indian Majlis. There was a man named Mehedi Hussain, an Indian deputy magistrate — I don't know why he went to England — who used to come to the Majlis and was supposed to be a spy. He may have reported me to the Government.²¹

Alluding to his rejection for the I.C.S. Sri Aurobindo has noted:

... as a member and for some time secretary of the Indian Majlis at Cambridge he delivered many revolutionary speeches which, as he afterwards learnt, had their part in determining the authorities to exclude him from the Indian Civil Service; the failure in the riding test was only the occasion, for in some other cases an opportunity was given for remedying this defect in India itself.²²

As regards Dr. K. D. Ghose's shock on hearing about his favoured son's shipwreck, Sri Aurobindo's niece, Lotika Ghose, writes:

Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose was deeply attached to his son, Aurobindo. The false news that the ship by which Aurobindo was coming to India had been sunk, (in fact Aurobindo did not sail by that ship) was such a blow that he fell unconscious. He was carried to his bed and lingered for a few days. Then the iron will that had given battle to his destiny flagged ... and the compassionate

21. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2013, pp. 954-55.

22. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 32.

heart, full of love and tenderness for the sick, the poor, the widow and the orphan stopped beating.²³

A disciple once asked: “Do you think your I.C.S. examination answer papers of 1892 have been preserved by the authorities? I was thinking of getting them if possible, in order to preserve them as a relic with us. Perhaps they do not give them out or they might have disposed of them.” Sri Aurobindo replied: “Not likely that they keep such things.”²⁴

By virtue of his brilliance, goodness and mild manners, Sri Aurobindo was adored by his four siblings and other family relatives. Barin writes:

He loved his wife, his only sister, his mother and his youngest brother and companion very dearly. But that love was always unobtrusively awake to their well being and comfort. He would without ever speaking a word go out of his way and deny himself to fulfil their needs.²⁵

During their childhood Sri Aurobindo and Benoybhusan were more liked than Manmohan for the latter tells his poet-friend, Laurence Binyon, “As a boy I often perceived with jealousy that my brothers were always preferred to me.”²⁶

The eldest brother Benoybhusan often spoke to Charu Chandra Dutt about his “favourite brother”, Sri Aurobindo, and “of his sweet temper”.²⁷ Alluding to his talks with Benoybhusan, Charu Chandra Dutt remarked: “Now, we are all familiar with the old portrait of Sri Aurobindo as a boy of eleven. His brilliant intelligence and sweet temper are apparent enough therein”.²⁸ In Sri Aurobindo’s biography K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes of his sensitive and considerate nature: “Since early childhood he had felt a strong hatred and disgust for every kind of cruelty and oppression, and this feeling had but deepened and grown more poignant in his years of adolescence and youth.”²⁹

When in 1939 he was asked about his eldest brother, Sri Aurobindo fondly remembered Benoybhusan:

He went up for medicine but couldn’t go on. He returned to India and got a job in Coochbehar. Now I hear he has come back to Calcutta. He is a very practical man, the opposite of poetic, and takes more after my father. He is a very nice man and one can easily get on with him.³⁰

23. Lotika Ghose, *Manmohan Ghose – Makers of Indian Literature*, published by Sahitya Akademi, 1998, p. 6.

24. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, pp. 10-11.

25. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

26. Manmohan Ghose, *Collected Poems*, Vol. 1, University of Calcutta, 1970, p. 163.

27. Charu Chandra Dutt, ‘My Friend and my Master’, *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, Eighth number, p. 123.

28. *Ibid*.

29. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 39.

30. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 124.

In 1884 the three brothers moved from Manchester to London where Manmohan (1869-1924) and Sri Aurobindo were admitted to St. Paul’s School but Benoybhusan (1867-1947) does not seem to have continued with his academic studies. Benoybhusan too sat for the I.C.S. examination but was unsuccessful.³¹ During the period from 1887 to 1889 Benoybhusan and Sri Aurobindo suffered enormously — having to skip meals regularly. It was only Benoy’s meagre earnings of five shillings a week as assistant to James Cotton, which helped them survive. Sri Aurobindo writes: “James Cotton was well acquainted with my eldest brother, because C was secretary of the South Kensington Liberal Club where we were living and my brother was his assistant.”³² About this difficult phase of life Nirodbaran writes that Sri Aurobindo “took it calmly . . . But, as he has written to me, poverty was no terror for him, nor an incentive.”³³

Manmohan, on the other hand, could not stand the hardship and was fortunate to find a lady who gave him boarding and lodging on credit and he ate nicely. Soon after, in October 1887, Manmohan obtained a scholarship to Oxford and Benoy accompanied him to the university town to ensure he settled down. Interestingly, Manmohan was a regular visitor at the house of James Cotton, who was one of the editors of the *Academy* and also edited *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*. Sri Aurobindo has written that Cotton “took great interest in us.”³⁴ In December 1899 Manmohan wrote to Binyon:

I also go frequently to see the Cottons. Mrs. Cotton is a most charming woman; indeed I have never met anyone so pleasant with the exception of your aunt. She is not qualified as your aunt is, but is so sympathetic and takes such a private interest in everything that you cannot help liking her very much. Cotton is so very affable and lent me quite a number of books of which I was very much in need. The fussy and amusing little man talked a great deal as usual about the Academy, his Oxford days etc. and very kindly asked me to come any evening and have a chat with him.³⁵

In April 1889 Sri Aurobindo and Benoybhusan moved to private lodgings at 28, Kempsford Gardens, Earl’s Court, South Kensington. For months together they were unable to pay the rent but fortunately their kind-hearted landlady made no demands on them. It was Sri Aurobindo who later cleared the dues after receiving his I.C.S. probation allowance of £150 in end December of 1892. Manmohan cut short his scholarship at Oxford and returned to London in 1889 to join his brothers and told

31. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 20.

32. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 34.

33. Nirodbaran, ‘Sri Aurobindo – Perfect Gentleman’, *Mother India*, August 1970, p. 407.

34. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 34.

35. A. B. Purani, *Sri Aurobindo in England*, 1956, p. 94.

Binyon, “I intend to do some tutoring work, and writing, in the meantime, which will give me enough to live on, with a little help from my brothers.”³⁶ A.B. Purani writes that Sri Aurobindo

. . . got scholarship from St. Paul’s to join King’s College, Cambridge, and also the stipend for the I.C.S. probationership. Even so, he was always hard up, particularly because he used to help his two brothers whenever he could.³⁷

Benoybhusan returned to India from England sometime around September 1894. After his ship anchored at Calcutta Port he took a hackney-coach to go to the house of his father’s friend, the lawyer Manomohan Ghose, at Theatre Road. Benoy could not speak any Indian language then and the coachman did not understand any English; as a result they were wandering in the street for long till a kindly Brahmin priest, who was observing them with interest, enquired from Benoy and then directed the coachman and even accompanied Benoy to the right house. Benoybhusan quickly found a job as tutor to the Prince of the Coochbehar State, in the north of Bengal. He also worked as auditor and finance secretary at the administration of Coochbehar State. Benoy borrowed Rs.1500 and sent it to Manmohan so that the latter could also return to India.³⁸

The two brothers had their amusing encounters and in a letter to Binyon, Manmohan wrote about his illness in London and Benoybhusan’s wry sense of humour:

This situation had its humorous side, too, I must say. Perhaps you don’t know what it is to fall ill in a lodging-house. You have to do everything yourself, when, perhaps, you are too ill to do anything, there is no one else to help you. So it was with me, and while I lay in bed, unable to stir, in high fever, I should have given anything to have some book to read, to divert my thoughts into a brighter channel. There was a Sophocles on the table — but, alas, a few inches out of my reach! And I had to spend many hours wishing it was a few inches nearer, and not a little amused that one’s happiness should depend (oh, irony of fate!) on the distance of a few inches. At last, to my joy, my brother came to see me, who, as you know is a very matter-of-fact person, with a purely commercial mind, a person who looks at everything from a business point of view. And he began comforting me very cheerfully with the reflection that everybody must die some day, remarking how conveniently near the cemetery was, (Kempsford Gardens, I must tell you, looks out upon Brompton Cemetery and funerals pass

36. Manmohan Ghose, *Collected Poems*, Vol. 1, University of Calcutta 1970, pp. 230-32.

37. A. B. Purani, *Sri Aurobindo in England*, 1956, p. 11.

38. Website: https://auromaa.org/sri-aurobindo-ru/images/other/item_00920_e.htm/21.7.2023

down it every day) and hoping that undertakers did not charge very high, as he had nearly come to the end of his last remittance.³⁹

Sri Aurobindo narrated an amusing story about Benoybhusan to Dinendra Kumar Roy. An astrologer had prepared Benoybhusan’s chart and praised him over it. A flattered Benoy rewarded the astrologer handsomely. Soon after Benoy showed the chart to his uncle Jogendra who was well versed in Sanskrit. While reading the chart the uncle smiled, at which Benoy queried him. The uncle replied, “Look, everything that is written in your chart is fine, but there is one bad indication with regard to your character”, and then he read and explained the relevant Sanskrit *shloka*. After hearing the explanation Benoy went red with anger: “That rascal astrologer hoodwinked me and got ten rupees out of me. Had I known this before, I would have kicked the beggar!” Uncle Jogendra was greatly amused by his nephew’s anger.⁴⁰

Having spent their childhood and youth in adversity and isolation in England, there was a sense of solidarity and camaraderie between the three brothers. Sri Aurobindo remarked to his disciples: “Manmohan and I used to quarrel pretty often but I got on very well with my eldest brother.”⁴¹ Sri Aurobindo continued: “Once Manmohan said to me, “I hear you have been living with Madhavrao Jadhav year after year.” “Why not?” I said. “How could you do that?” he asked, “I could not live for six months without quarrelling with him.”⁴²

There was, however, an inner bond between Manmohan and Sri Aurobindo because of their deep love of poetry. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes: “During his last years at St. Paul’s, Sri Aurobindo began writing poetry in earnest. There was the catalytic effect of Manmohan’s association on his younger brother”.⁴³ He adds that they “were, indeed, in the Horatian phrase *par nobile fratrum*, a noble pair of brothers”.⁴⁴ Sri Aurobindo himself admitted that Manmohan “stimulated me greatly to write poetry.”⁴⁵

Manmohan sounded out Sri Aurobindo’s brilliance to his poet-friend Laurence Binyon who affirmed that Sri Aurobindo was gifted and encouraged him to continue with his writing of poetry.⁴⁶ Manmohan was always concerned about his brilliant younger brother and when Sri Aurobindo deliberately failed to appear for the I.C.S. riding test he was terribly upset. Later when Sri Aurobindo joined politics he implored him not to give up his poetry as he believed him to be a “born poet”. Later, however,

39. Manmohan Ghose, *Collected Poems*, Vol. 1, University of Calcutta, 1970, pp. 215-16.

40. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st Ed., 2006, p. 48 (Dinendra Kumar Roy, *Aurobindo Prasanga* – translated from Bengali by Maurice Shukla).

41. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 124.

42. *Ibid.*

43. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 32.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

45. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 98.

46. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 32.

Manmohan lauded Sri Aurobindo's political career.

Regarding the evening talks that Sri Aurobindo had with his attendants, Nirodbaran mentions an incident concerning the Mother:

Rarely did she participate in our talks. Once she asked, “What are you laughing about?” Sri Aurobindo replied with a smile, “I am telling them the story of my poet-brother Manmohan.” It was one of the most interesting talks we had!⁴⁷

Indeed, Manmohan was an interesting character and it would be fascinating to delve a bit into his life and personality especially since he had a small role to play in Sri Aurobindo's early life. Besides having a deep love for poetry the poet-brothers shared other qualities although these gifts were particularly more marked in Sri Aurobindo. They were both brilliant scholars in the classics and got their respective scholarships from Oxford and Cambridge. Later they became excellent teachers. The poet-brothers were both confident of their abilities and were also independent-minded. Another likeness was that they were kind and considerate. We shall examine all these aspects.

Manmohan was quite flamboyant and Sri Aurobindo once remarked, “Manmohan was extravagant, if you like.”⁴⁸ Like many artists Manmohan too had an oversensitive side to his personality. Days after gaining admission to Oxford he confided to Binyon, “Mr. Sampson this morning at roll-call came up and examined my gown exclaiming, “Why, Mr. Ghose, you have a Bachelor gown.” I felt perfectly ashamed, and am resolved to change it first thing tomorrow at “Searig's” in Queen St. I have an extremely sensitive nature, and such mistakes of ignorance quite overwhelm me.”⁴⁹ Manmohan's daughter, Lotika Ghose, wrote that her father was “extremely sensitive and highly strung”.⁵⁰ Lotika further writes that life was extremely lonely for him in London. Shy and sensitive, he felt that deeper relations with English people were not possible. In a letter to Binyon Manmohan wrote:

. . . I have never been accustomed to society, and am silent and embarrassed what to say, being unwilling to speak what I feel or think for a fear every moment of committing a solecism. This is construed as apathy, and I am quite at a loss how to put myself right . . . I feel deeply that I must always, seem a stranger to English people, and only slight relations can grow out of this. But I have a passionate nature hungering to give and receive sympathy of a far deeper kind than such relations afford. . . . When I meet with people I

47. Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2000, p. 228.

48. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 123.

49. Manmohan Ghose, *Collected Poems*, Vol. 1, University of Calcutta 1970, p. 148.

50. Lotika Ghose, *Manmohan Ghose – Makers of Indian Literature*, published by Sahitya Akademi, 1998, p. 16.

like, a strange uncontrollable passion awakes in me, and I have to tear myself away as from a dangerous temptation. . . . Books are my only refuge, which I seek not from choice but from necessity, and I try to allay a burning breast with hard intellectual labour. . . . Love is as necessary to me as to every other human being. I may imprison myself in solitude and devote every hour to calm cultivation yet without this the richest gains of mind will in the end seem as dust, and life becomes a dreary blank.⁵¹

Laurence Binyon was Manmohan’s closest friend. Gradually, Manmohan seemed to have overcome some of his social inhibitions. He became an intimate visitor at the home of the family of Stephen Phillips — the English poet and dramatist. Stephen Phillips’ mother had a warm affection for him and he spent happy days in the company of Stephen Phillips and his wife May. Stephen Phillips’ brother Harold became Manmohan’s devoted friend.⁵²

Sri Aurobindo once remarked: “When materialisation takes place, it is most often immediately before death or after. . . . My brother Manmohan used to say he had heard from Stephen Phillips that the latter’s mother visited him when she was on her death-bed at a distant place. But my brother was a poet, you must remember — very imaginative. And, moreover, he was a friend of Oscar Wilde.”⁵³ About the imaginative Oscar Wilde Sri Aurobindo narrated an anecdote to his attendants:

Wilde was as brilliant in conversation as in writing. Once some of his friends came to see him and asked how he had passed the morning. He said he had been to the zoo and gave a wonderful description of it, making a striking word-picture of every animal. Mrs. Wilde, who was all the time sitting in a corner, put in a small voice, “But, Oscar, how could you say that? You were with me all morning.” Wilde replied, “But, my dear, one has to be imaginative sometimes.”⁵⁴

In a draft of a letter, written sometime in 1899-1900, which Sri Aurobindo intended for Manmohan, he expressed his gratitude to him and offers the poem ‘Love and Death’ as a long-owed “part-payment of a deep intellectual debt” adding, “Unknown to yourself, you taught and encouraged me from my childhood to be a poet.” The draft ends with:

From your sun my farthing rush-light was kindled, and it was in your path that I long strove to guide my uncertain and faltering footsteps. If I have now

51. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

53. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 155.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

in the inevitable development of an independent temperament in independent surroundings departed from your guidance and entered into a path, perhaps thornier and more rugged, but my own, it does not lessen the obligation of that first light and example. It is my hope that in the enduring fame which your calmer and more luminous genius must one day bring you, on a distant verge of the skies and lower plane of planetary existence, some ray of my name may survive and it be thought no injury to your memory that the first considerable effort of my powers was dedicated to you.⁵⁵

Manmohan's claim to fame first occurred in 1890 when a book *Primavera*, featuring poems of Manmohan, Laurence Binyon, Stephen Phillips and Arthur Cripps, was published. In November 1890, Manmohan wrote to Binyon:

My father writes to me asking for ten copies of *Primavera*. Am I entitled to any more, I wonder? If you would send me that number I should be infinitely obliged to you. He is pestered by all sorts of people asking for copies in India. I am quite famous in my own country through our brilliant little success. So that I may expect golden statues to be set up hereafter in my memory, in all the capitals of India, as their representative poet! Pray send back “Prince Pomegranate” as soon as you can, with any remarks or suggestions on the opposite page and your initials to them.⁵⁶

“Prince Pomegranate” was a long unfinished poem in prose and a romance in rhythm written by Manmohan. The prince in the poem bears the name of Raja Aurobindo. The opening para reads:

In a wonderful mountain-azured region of the land of palm and jasmine there ruled long ago a lotus-eyed Rajah; whose miraculous fortune was the pride of his turbaned subjects, the envy of his neighbours, and the perpetual wonder of all the earth. To few of us does Lakshmi, celestial giver of gladness, grant an equally-woven life of thorns and roses; to fewer still the happier preponderance. What was it then in Rajah Aurobindo that caught her eyes of solemn amethyst? . . . The golden wife of Vishnu had indeed smiled on this fortunate Prince from her water-lily throne in Paradise . . .⁵⁷

Manmohan was keen to present a copy of *Primavera* to Sri Aurobindo and so he wrote to Binyon, “Would you also mind giving my brother a copy, with your name and Cripps’ inscribed on it in your own handwritings?”⁵⁸

55. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, pp. 137-38.

56. Manmohan Ghose, *Collected Poems*, Vol. 1, University of Calcutta 1970, p. 247.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

That Manmohan exchanged notes on poetry with his younger brother is apparent when he writes to Binyon: “You have not been the only one to think some of my verses have a similarity to Matthew Arnold’s. My brother once remarked to me that he thought I imitated Matthew Arnold in many of my poems.”⁵⁹ Sri Aurobindo also revealed that Arnold possibly had an influence on him too.⁶⁰

Oscar Wilde showed particular favour to Manmohan’s verses when he reviewed *Primavera* in the evening newspaper *Pall Mall Gazette*. He writes: “His verses show us how quick and subtle are the intellectual sympathies of the Oriental mind and suggest how close is the bond of union that may someday bind India to us by other methods than those of commerce and military strength. Mr. Ghose ought someday to make a name in her literature.”⁶¹ Oscar Wilde also praised Manmohan as the “young Indian of brilliant scholarship and high literary attainment who gives some culture to Christ Church.”⁶² Sri Aurobindo has said that Manmohan was an intimate friend of Oscar Wilde and at one time “almost Wilde’s disciple.”⁶³ In a letter to Binyon dated May, 1890, Manmohan writes:

. . . and Oscar Wilde in his notice of us in the *Pall Mall* thought possibly of the kind: and that was why, good soul that he is, he praised me so much, so out of proportion to my merits, and gave me a sort of introduction to the public as well. You, by getting the Newdigate [the prize for poetry at Oxford], and Stephen as an actor, are already before the public in other ways; but I was quite unknown till Oscar’s quite generous notice of me.”⁶⁴

In another letter to Binyon, dated 4th August, 1890, Manmohan writes:

I have been to see Oscar Wilde lately. Oscar was as charming and affectionate as ever. From the warmth with which he greets me and from what he told Stephen, Oscar appears to have taken a great liking to me. His notice of me in the *Pall Mall* shows that I think. And when I went to see him the other day, he was most kind and affectionate. He upbraided me much for not coming to see him before, and when he heard that I had been going about vainly in search of employment, was very anxious to do something for me. He wished to write to several editors and get me some reviewing work to do. It was too late to get a holiday tutorship or else he would have done that for me. He was quite charmed with my design for a short Indian tale. “I should advise you,” he said,

59. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

60. See *CWSA*, Vol. 27, p. 349.

61. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

62. Manmohan Ghose, *Songs of Love and Death*, Basil Blackwell Oxford, 1926, p. 12.

63. See *CWSA*, Vol. 27, p. 449.

64. Manmohan Ghose, *Songs of Love and Death*, Basil Blackwell Oxford, 1926, p. 225.

“to make a bold bid for the public favour. With your beautiful English and your Oriental name you ought to strike people’s fancy. Write this tale, and make it rich, striking and concentrated, and send it to me: I will get it into the *Quarterly Review* or some other Magazine for you. I am going to France for a week or so, and then we shall be able to take counsel together and carry out our little plans. I hope to see much more of you then.” This is very generous and charming of him, is it not? If he likes, Oscar can prove a most useful friend; for he knows almost everybody. Mrs Wilde, too, is well-connected and moves in very high circles; so that, as regards private influence and all that that can do for me, I am as well placed as I could be. But Oscar advises me to write my tale first; and then he will be in a better position to recommend me for employment, when he can speak of me as the author of a clever tale and a deserving young man: otherwise, he says, it is so like asking a favour.⁶⁵

Manmohan was so greatly enamoured of Oscar Wilde that when Binyon criticised the author, he wrote to his friend, “You mustn’t say anything bad of Oscar. Oscar has taken an immense liking to me; and now I know him well, I love him very much. He is a wonderful and charming being. You are inclined to think him superficial, I know. You should know him as I do; and then you would feel what depth and sagacity there is behind his delightful mask of paradox and irony and perversity. Oscar is a wonderful personality; one of the most wonderful personalities of our age.”⁶⁶

When a disciple asked Sri Aurobindo his opinion of Oscar Wilde, he wrote:

As for Wilde, there was always a strain of insincerity somewhere, he posed even over his sufferings — but he was a marvellous artist of speech and his imagination and his colouring are superb. In spite of the touch of insincerity, of overstress, [*De Profundis*]⁶⁷ remains one of the greatest things [written in] English prose.⁶⁸

During this time in London, Manmohan met many members of the ‘Rhymers’ Club’ such as the poets Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dowson, who were both very fond of him. Dowson had wished for Manmohan’s work to be included in *The Book of the Rhymers Club* that was published in 1892, but Manmohan was unable to contribute as he could not share the cost of the expenses.⁶⁹

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 232-33.

66. Lotika Ghose, *Manmohan Ghose – Makers of Indian Literature*, published by Sahitya Akademi, 1998, pp. 25-26.

67. One corner of the manuscript of this letter has been lost. The words printed within square brackets are conjectural reconstructions. – Ed.

68. CWSA, Vol. 27, pp. 378-79.

69. See <https://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/manmohan-ghose/29.7.2023>.

About Manmohan’s poetic career Sri Aurobindo remarked:

Manmohan used to have poetic illness at times. Once we were walking through Cumberland. We found that he had fallen half a mile behind, walking at a leisurely pace and moaning out poetry in a deep tone. There was a dangerous place in front of us, so we shouted at him to come back. But he took no heed, went on muttering the lines and came to us with his usual leisurely steps. When he came to India, his playing the poet dropped off.⁷⁰

Sri Aurobindo has mentioned that Manmohan and Binyon were very close friends who greatly admired and stimulated each other.⁷¹ Sri Aurobindo opined that Binyon was “a fine poet and an admirable critic”.⁷² Manmohan and Binyon discussed “everything in heaven and earth after the manner of youth but specially poetry and the poets.” They exchanged, criticised and appreciated each other’s poems. Binyon tells us that he found Manmohan “well read in the English poets, better read than I in the Elizabethans and the older lyrists. But what struck me most was his enthusiastic appreciation of Greek poetry, not so much the books prescribed in the school as those which he had sought out on his own account. Theocritus, Meleager, above all Simonides, were his special favourites.”⁷³

The Open University, a public research university and the largest university in the United Kingdom has documented Binyon’s friendship with Manmohan:

Laurence Binyon was a poet, critic, artist, dramatist and curator. . . . He was introduced to Indian literature and philosophy by the poet Manmohan Ghose. They met as schoolboys at St Paul’s School, in a seventh form English class when Ghose quoted *Othello* in class. They became fast friends, bonding over their love for poetry and Classics and admiration of Matthew Arnold. Binyon followed Ghose to Oxford in 1888 . . .

Binyon had been introduced to the work of Tagore by Manmohan Ghose who had returned to India in 1894 but maintained a correspondence for some years — providing inspiration for Binyon’s poem ‘Asoka’ or ‘The Indian Prince’ in 1900.⁷⁴

In 1897 Manmohan was appointed Assistant Professor of Dacca College and during this time he got well acquainted with Rabindranath Tagore who had invited

70. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, pp. 123-24.

71. See *CWSA*, Vol. 27, p. 449.

72. *Ibid.*

73. Lotika Ghose, *Manmohan Ghose – Makers of Indian Literature*, published by Sahitya Akademi, 1998, p. 11.

74. See <https://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/laurence-binyon/8> August 2023.

him to Shillaidah. A jubilant Manmohan Ghose wrote from Deoghar on 24th October, 1897, “I shall come and join you without fail and hope to enjoy many pleasant talks about delightful things, and to catch a glimpse of the charming village life of which I had heard so much, and know a little from your poetry and Bankim Babu’s novels.” Unfortunately Manmohan fell ill and was unable to go. The very next month he writes again, “I am sorry that my prospective visit to you has been cut short. I was looking forward with such pleasure to seeing you again, and gaining fresh stimulus and inspiration towards writing poetry by a little of your delightful society. But I have really been in too wretched a condition to enjoy anything.” Later when Tagore and his party were returning to Shillaidah from Dacca, after attending the Bengal Provincial Conference, Manmohan was supposed to accompany them but due to some unforeseen circumstances was unable to do so.⁷⁵ Sometime around in 1898 an overjoyed Manmohan writes to Tagore from Dacca College:

You cannot think how much I value your simple and sincere words of praise. I feel sure that if there is any one competent to know and criticise about poetry (whether in English or in Bengali) it is yourself; and your praise is doubly precious and encouraging to me, as coming from so distinguished and experienced a master in the art of writing verse, and the foremost living genius of my country. I will carefully treasure your letter, that in the moments of gloom and despondency, I may open and read your kind words of praise and feel cheered and encouraged by them.⁷⁶

In the last available letter, written on 17th October, 1898, Manmohan tells Tagore that he was very ill in September and had been ordered by the doctors to a dry place, so he would go to Deoghar for the first part of his Puja holidays but asks if Tagore will be in Shillaidah from the 1st to 15th November, 1898.⁷⁷ In the same letter he informs that he will try to persuade Sri Aurobindo to come down to Calcutta so that they can both meet.⁷⁸ Sometime in 1898-99 Tagore was making enquiries about Sri Aurobindo through his letters to Dinendra Kumar Roy who was then staying with Sri Aurobindo.⁷⁹ Manmohan had apprised Tagore of Sri Aurobindo’s “literary gift” and Sri Aurobindo’s keenness to know of Tagore’s assessment of his book of verses.⁸⁰ This book was apparently *Songs to Myrtilla and Other Poems* which carried

75. See Lotika Ghose, *Manmohan Ghose – Makers of Indian Literature*, published by Sahitya Akademi, 1998, p. 29.

76. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

78. See Letter of 17th Oct. 1898 from Manmohan to Rabindranath Tagore; sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

79. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, ‘Reminiscences of the Days of Yore’ (Translated from the Bengali article ‘*Sekaler Smriti*’); sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

80. Letter from Manmohan Ghose to Rabindranath Tagore; sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

the inscription, “To my brother Manmohan Ghose these poems are dedicated.”⁸¹

In 1898 *Elkin Mathews’ Shilling Garland* series published Manmohan’s poems under the title *Love Songs and Elegies*. Some time earlier some poems were published in an Anthology entitled *The Garland*. These were to be all the poems published by Manmohan during his lifetime except what appeared in the *Presidency College Magazine* and the *Calcutta Review*.⁸² The rest was published posthumously.

In October 1903 Manmohan was transferred to Calcutta as a Professor in the Presidency College and since settled there. The first two years at Calcutta was indeed happy for the poet. He had many friends among the barristers whom he knew in England. His culture and literary and artistic interests drew kindred spirits to him. Whenever Tagore was in Calcutta he would send word to Manmohan to see him at his Jorasanko house. There he became friendly with Abanindranath and Gaganendranath Tagore with whom he spent many happy mornings or evenings talking about art. Manmohan’s interest in art started at Oxford from where he wrote to Binyon: “I exist on bread and butter except at Hall and spend my patrimony in buying books.” Once he bemoaned to Tagore the loss of two albums of a splendid collection of photographs of pictures, while changing trains. Indeed, he kept on collecting art reproductions and bought books on art, literature and allied subjects right until his eyesight started failing in 1918 as they were affected by cataracts. When he rested in the afternoons after returning from College he would pour over his collection of reproductions of European Art. At the time of his death he had a choice library of expensively illustrated books on art, Greek, Latin, Italian, Hebrew and French classics in original and in translations, as well as almost all English literary classics. There were also books on other subjects, history, religion, philosophy etc., the total collection being nearly 2,000 volumes.⁸³

After returning to India Manmohan struggled to find any stimulating company and his main source of solace was when his younger brother came to Bengal in 1906 to join the Bengal National College. Lotika Ghose writes:

In his letters to Laurence Binyon, Manmohan Ghose had regretted the absence of intellectual company of a satisfying nature and a true understanding of things. When therefore his brother came to reside permanently in Bengal he would frequently go to visit him in the house of Raja Subodh Mullick where Aurobindo was staying at the time and the two brothers would happily discuss Greek poetry, European Art and above all their own poetical compositions.

81. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

82. See Lotika Ghose, *Manmohan Ghose – Makers of Indian Literature*, published by Sahitya Akademi, 1998, p. 31.

83. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.



Manmohan, Benoybhushan and William Drewett



Manmohan with his mother Swarnalata Devi

But as his brother was being more and more drawn into the swirl of politics he mildly protested one day and asked him, “What are you, a poet, doing in politics?”⁸⁴

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

84. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

We must remember that duty is an idea which in practice rests upon social conceptions. We may extend the term beyond its proper connotation and talk of our duty to ourselves or we may, if we like, say in a transcendent sense that it was Buddha's duty to abandon all, or even that it is the ascetic's duty to sit motionless in a cave! But this is obviously to play with words. Duty is a relative term and depends upon our relation to others. It is a father's duty, as a father, to nurture and educate his children; a lawyer's to do his best for his client even if he knows him to be guilty and his defence to be a lie; a soldier's to fight and shoot to order even if he kill his own kin and countrymen; a judge's to send the guilty to prison and hang the murderer. And so long as these positions are accepted, the duty remains clear, a practical matter of course even when it is not a point of honour or affection, and overrides the absolute religious or moral law. But what if the inner view is changed, if the lawyer is awakened to the absolute sinfulness of falsehood, the judge becomes convinced that capital punishment is a crime against humanity, the man called upon to the battlefield feels, like the conscientious objector of today or as a Tolstoy would feel, that in no circumstances is it permissible to take human life any more than to eat human flesh? It is obvious that here the moral law which is above all relative duties must prevail; and that law depends on no social relation or conception of duty but on the awakened inner perception of man, the moral being.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, pp. 34-35)

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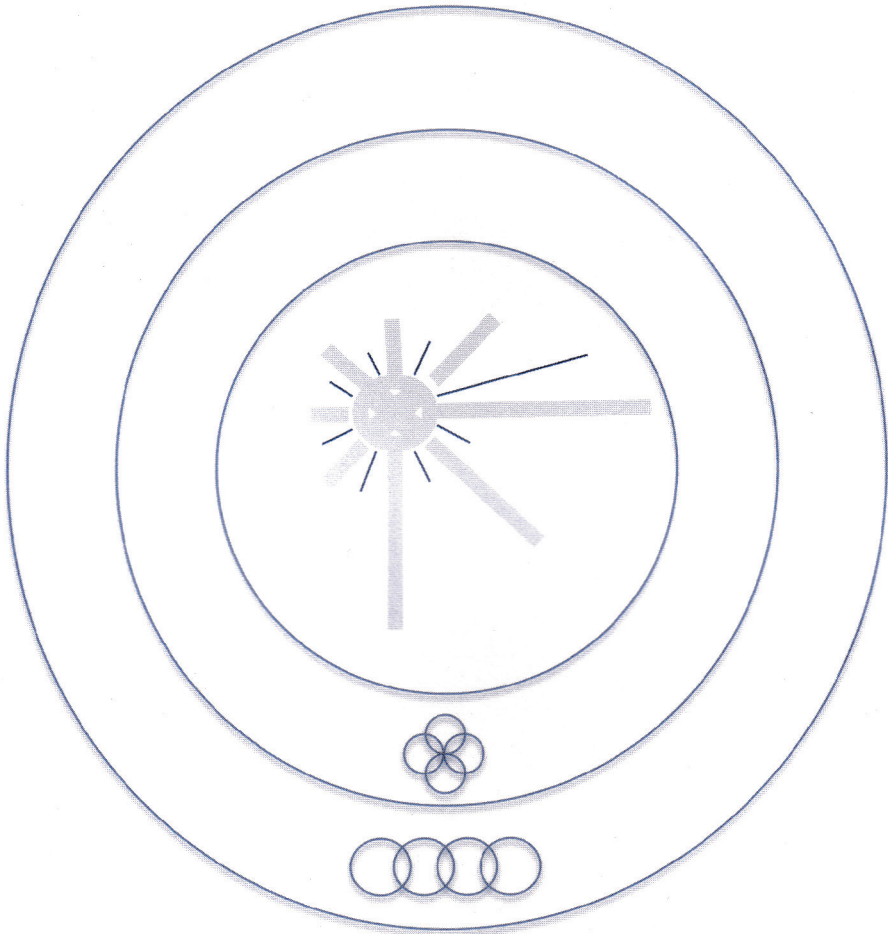
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