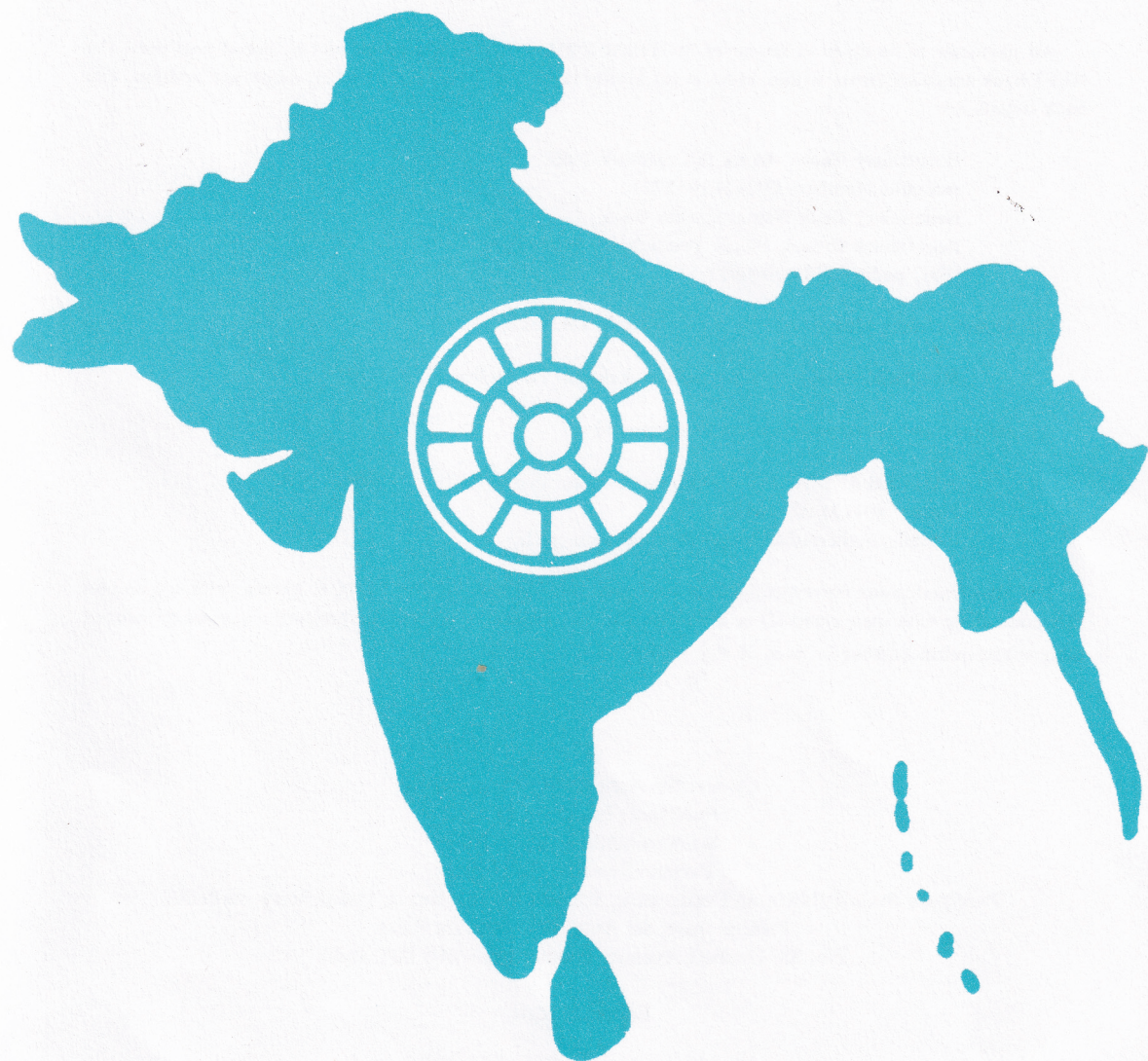


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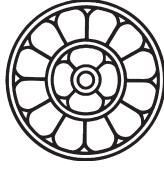
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JUNE 2023

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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Vol. LXXVI

No. 6

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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‘IT WAS TO AMUSE HIMSELF GOD MADE THE WORLD’

VASUNTHA:

It was to amuse himself God made the world.
For He was dull alone! Therefore all things
Vary to keep the secret witness pleased.
How Nature knows and does her office well.
What poignant oppositions she combines!
Death fosters life that life may suckle death.
Her certainties are snares, her dreams prevail.
What little seeds she grows into huge fates,
Proves with a smile her great things to be small!
All things here secretly are right; all's wrong
In God's appearances. World, thou art wisely led
In a divine confusion.

SRI AUROBINDO

(‘Vasavadutta’; *Collected Plays and Stories*, CWSA, Vol. 4, p. 642)



THE LIBERATION OF THE SPIRIT

The purification of the mental being and the psychic prana — we will leave aside for the time the question of the physical purification, that of the body and physical prana, though that too is necessary to an integral perfection, — prepares the ground for a spiritual liberation. *Śuddhi* is the condition for *mukti*. All purification is a release, a delivery; for it is a throwing away of limiting, binding, obscuring imperfections and confusions: purification from desire brings the freedom of the psychic prana, purification from wrong emotions and troubling reactions the freedom of the heart, purification from the obscuring limited thought of the sense mind the freedom of the intelligence, purification from mere intellectuality the freedom of the gnosis. But all this is an instrumental liberation. The freedom of the soul, *mukti*, is of a larger and more essential character; it is an opening out of mortal limitation into the illimitable immortality of the Spirit.

For certain ways of thinking liberation is a throwing off of all nature, a silent state of pure being, a nirvana or extinction, a dissolution of the natural existence into some indefinable Absolute, *mokṣa*. But an absorbed and immersed bliss, a wideness of actionless peace, a release of self-extinction or a self-drowning in the Absolute is not our aim. We shall give to the idea of liberation, *mukti*, only the connotation of that inner change which is common to all experience of this kind, essential to perfection and indispensable to spiritual freedom. We shall find that it then implies always two things, a rejection and an assumption, a negative and a positive side; the negative movement of freedom is a liberation from the principal bonds, the master-knots of the lower soul-nature, the positive side an opening or growth into the higher spiritual existence. But what are these master-knots — other and deeper twistings than the instrumental knots of the mind, heart, psychic life-force? We find them pointed out for us and insisted on with great force and a constant emphatic repetition in the Gita; they are four, desire, ego, the dualities and the three gunas of Nature; for to be desireless, ego-less, equal of mind and soul and spirit and *nistraigunya*, is in the idea of the Gita to be free, *mukta*. We may accept this description; for everything essential is covered by its amplitude. On the other hand, the positive sense of freedom is to be universal in soul, transcendently one in spirit with God, possessed of the highest divine nature, — as we may say, like to God, or one with him in the law of our being. This is the whole and full sense of liberation and this is the integral freedom of the spirit.

We have already had to speak of purification from the psychic desire of which the craving of the prana is the evolutionary or, as we may put it, the practical basis. But this is in the mental and psychic nature; spiritual desirelessness has a wider and more essential meaning: for desire has a double knot, a lower knot in the prana,

which is a craving in the instruments, and a very subtle knot in the soul itself with the buddhi as its first support or *pratiṣṭhā*, which is the inmost origin of this mesh of our bondage. When we look from below, desire presents itself to us as a craving of the life force which subtilises in the emotions into a craving of the heart and is farther subtilised in the intelligence into a craving, preference, passion of the aesthetic, ethical, dynamic or rational turn of the buddhi. This desire is essential to the ordinary man; he cannot live or act as an individual without knotting up all his action into the service of some kind of lower or higher craving, preference or passion. But when we are able to look at desire from above, we see that what supports this instrumental desire is a will of the spirit. There is a will, *tapas*, *śakti*, by which the secret spirit imposes on its outer members all their action and draws from it an active delight of its being, an ananda, in which they very obscurely and imperfectly, if at all consciously, partake. This *tapas* is the will of the transcendent spirit who creates the universal movement, of the universal spirit who supports and informs it, of the free individual spirit who is the soul centre of its multiplicities. It is one will, free in all these at once, comprehensive, harmonious, unified; we find it, when we live and act in the spirit, to be an effortless and desireless, a spontaneous and illumined, a self-fulfilling and self-possessing, a satisfied and blissful will of the spiritual delight of being.

But the moment the individual soul leans away from the universal and transcendent truth of its being, leans towards ego, tries to make this will a thing of its own, a separate personal energy, that will changes its character: it becomes an effort, a straining, a heat of force which may have its fiery joys of effectuation and of possession, but has also its afflicting recoils and pain of labour. It is this that turns in each instrument into an intellectual, emotional, dynamic, sensational or vital will of desire, wish, craving. Even when the instruments *per se* are purified of their own apparent initiative and particular kind of desire, this imperfect *tapas* may still remain, and so long as it conceals the source or deforms the type of the inner action, the soul has not the bliss of liberty, or can only have it by refraining from all action; even, if allowed to persist, it will rekindle the pranic or other desires or at least throw a reminiscent shadow of them on the being. This spiritual seed or beginning of desire too must be expelled, renounced, cast away: the *sadhaka* must either choose an active peace and complete inner silence or lose individual initiation, *saṅkalpārambha*, in a unity with the universal will, the *tapas* of the divine *Shakti*. The passive way is to be inwardly immobile, without effort, wish, expectation or any turn to action, *niśceṣṭa*, *anīha*, *nirapekṣa*, *nivṛtta*; the active way is to be thus immobile and impersonal in the mind, but to allow the supreme Will in its spiritual purity to act through the purified instruments. Then, if the soul abides on the level of the spiritualised mentality, it becomes an instrument only, but is itself without initiative or action, *niṣkriya*, *sarvārambhaparityāgī*. But if it rises to the gnosis, it is at once an instrument and a participant in the bliss of the divine action and the bliss of the divine Ananda; it unifies in itself the *prakṛti* and the *puruṣa*.

The ego turn, the separative turn of the being, is the fulcrum of the whole embarrassed labour of the ignorance and the bondage. So long as one is not free from the ego sense, there can be no real freedom. The seat of the ego is said to be in the buddhi; it is an ignorance of the discriminating mind and reason which discriminate wrongly and take the individuation of mind, life and body for a truth of separative existence and are turned away from the greater reconciling truth of the oneness of all existence. At any rate in man it is the ego idea which chiefly supports the falsehood of a separative existence; to get rid of this idea, to dwell on the opposite idea of unity, of the one self, the one spirit, the one being of nature is therefore an effective remedy; but it is not by itself absolutely effective. For the ego, though it supports itself by this ego idea, *ahambuddhi*, finds its most powerful means for a certain obstinacy or passion of persistence in the normal action of the sense-mind, the prana and the body. To cast out of us the ego idea is not entirely possible or not entirely effective until these instruments have undergone purification; for, their action being persistently egoistic and separative, the buddhi is carried away by them, — as a boat by winds on the sea, says the Gita, — the knowledge in the intelligence is being constantly obscured or lost temporarily and has to be restored again, a very labour of Sisyphus. But if the lower instruments have been purified of egoistic desire, wish, will, egoistic passion, egoistic emotion and the buddhi itself of egoistic idea and preference, then the knowledge of the spiritual truth of oneness can find a firm foundation. Till then, the ego takes all sorts of subtle forms and we imagine ourselves to be free from it, when we are really acting as its instruments and all we have attained is a certain intellectual poise which is not the true spiritual liberation. Moreover, to throw away the active sense of ego is not enough; that may merely bring an inactive state of the mentality, a certain passive inert quietude of separate being may take the place of the kinetic egoism, which is also not the true liberation. The ego sense must be replaced by a oneness with the transcendental Divine and with universal being.

This necessity arises from the fact that the buddhi is only a *pratiṣṭhā* or chief support of the ego-sense in its manifold play, *ahankāra*; but in its source it is a degradation or deformation of a truth of our spiritual being. The truth of being is that there is a transcendent existence, supreme self or spirit, a timeless soul of existence, an eternal, a Divine, or even we may speak of it in relation to current mental ideas of the Godhead as a supra-Divine, which is here immanent, all-embracing, all-initiating and all-governing, a great universal Spirit; and the individual is a conscious power of being of the Eternal, capable eternally of relations with him, but one with him too in the very core of reality of its own eternal existence. This is a truth which the intelligence can apprehend, can, when once purified, reflect, transmit, hold in a derivative fashion, but it can only be entirely realised, lived and made effective in the spirit. When we live in the spirit, then we not only know, but are this truth of our being. The individual then enjoys in the spirit, in the bliss of the spirit, his

oneness with the universal existence, his oneness with the timeless Divine and his oneness with all other beings and that is the essential sense of a spiritual liberation from the ego. But the moment the soul leans towards the mental limitation, there is a certain sense of spiritual separateness which has its joys, but may at any moment lapse into the entire ego-sense, ignorance, oblivion of oneness. To get rid of this separateness an attempt is made to absorb oneself in the idea and realisation of the Divine, and this takes in certain forms of spiritual askesis the turn of a strain towards the abolition of all individual being and a casting away, in the trance of immersion, of all individual or universal relations with the Divine, in others it becomes an absorbed dwelling in him and not in this world or a continual absorbed or intent living in his presence, *sāyujya*, *sālokya*, *sāmīpya mukti*. The way proposed for the integral Yoga is a lifting up and surrender of the whole being to him, by which not only do we become one with him in our spiritual existence, but dwell too in him and he in us, so that the whole nature is full of his presence and changed into the divine nature; we become one spirit and consciousness and life and substance with the Divine and at the same time we live and move in and have a various joy of that oneness. This integral liberation from the ego into the divine spirit and nature can only be relatively complete on our present level, but it begins to become absolute as we open to and mount into the gnosis. This is the liberated perfection.

The liberation from ego, the liberation from desire together found the central spiritual freedom. The sense, the idea, the experience that I am a separately self-existent being in the universe, and the forming of consciousness and force of being into the mould of that experience are the root of all suffering, ignorance and evil. And it is so because that falsifies both in practice and in cognition the whole real truth of things; it limits the being, limits the consciousness, limits the power of our being, limits the bliss of being; this limitation again produces a wrong way of existence, wrong way of consciousness, wrong way of using the power of our being and consciousness, and wrong, perverse and contrary forms of the delight of existence. The soul limited in being and self-isolated in its environment feels itself no longer in unity and harmony with its Self, with God, with the universe, with all around it; but rather it finds itself at odds with the universe, in conflict and disaccord with other beings who are its other selves, but whom it treats as not-self; and so long as this disaccord and disagreement last, it cannot possess its world and it cannot enjoy the universal life, but is full of unease, fear, afflictions of all kinds, in a painful struggle to preserve and increase itself and possess its surroundings, — for to possess its world is the nature of infinite spirit and the necessary urge in all being. The satisfactions it gets from this labour and effort are of a stunted, perverse and unsatisfying kind: for the one real satisfaction it has is that of growth, of an increasing return towards itself, of some realisation of accord and harmony, of successful self-creation and self-realisation, but the little of these things that it can achieve on the basis of ego-consciousness is always limited, insecure, imperfect, transitory. It is at war too with its own self, — first because,

since it is no longer in possession of the central harmonising truth of its own being, it cannot properly control its natural members or accord their tendencies, powers and demands; it has not the secret of harmony, because it has not the secret of its own unity and self-possession; and, secondly, not being in possession of its highest self, it has to struggle towards that, is not allowed to be at peace till it is in possession of its own true highest being. All this means that it is not at one with God; for to be at one with God is to be at one with oneself, at one with the universe and at one with all beings. This oneness is the secret of a right and a divine existence. But the ego cannot have it, because it is in its very nature separative and because even with regard to ourselves, to our own psychological existence it is a false centre of unity; for it tries to find the unity of our being in an identification with a shifting mental, vital, physical personality, not with the eternal self of our total existence. Only in the spiritual self can we possess the true unity; for there the individual enlarges to his own total being and finds himself one with universal existence and with the transcending Divinity.

All the trouble and suffering of the soul proceeds from this wrong egoistic and separative way of existence. The soul not in possession of its free self-existence, *anātmavān*, because it is limited in its consciousness, is limited in knowledge; and this limited knowledge takes the form of a falsifying knowledge. The struggle to return to a true knowing is imposed upon it, but the ego in the separative mind is satisfied with shows and fragments of knowledge which it pieces together into some false or some imperfect total or governing notion, and this knowledge fails it and has to be abandoned for a fresh pursuit of the one thing to be known. That one thing is the Divine, the Self, the Spirit in whom universal and individual being find at last their right foundation and their right harmonies. Again, because it is limited in force, the ego-prisoned soul is full of many incapacities; wrong knowledge is accompanied by wrong will, wrong tendencies and impulses of the being, and the acute sense of this wrongness is the root of the human consciousness of sin. This deficiency of its nature it tries to set right by standards of conduct which will help it to remove the egoistic consciousness and satisfactions of sin by the egoistic consciousness and self-satisfaction of virtue, the rajasic by the sattwic egoism. But the original sin has to be cured, the separation of its being and will from the divine Being and the divine Will; when it returns to unity with the divine Will and Being, it rises beyond sin and virtue to the infinite self-existent purity and the security of its own divine nature. Its incapacities it tries to set right by organising its imperfect knowledge and disciplining its half-enlightened will and force and directing them by some systematic effort of the reason; but the result must always be a limited, uncertain, mutable and stumbling way and standard of capacity in action. Only when it returns again to the large unity of the free spirit, *bhūmā*, can the action of its nature move perfectly as the instrument of the infinite Spirit and in the steps of the Right and Truth and Power which belong to the free soul acting from the supreme centre of its existence. Again, because it

is limited in the delight of being, it is unable to lay hold on the secure, self-existent perfect bliss of the spirit or the delight, the Ananda of the universe which keeps the world in motion, but is only able to move in a mixed and shifting succession of pleasures and pains, joys and sorrows, or must take refuge in some conscient inconstancy or neutral indifference. The ego mind cannot do otherwise, and the soul which has externalised itself in ego, is subjected to this unsatisfactory, secondary, imperfect, often perverse, troubled or annulled enjoyment of existence; yet all the time the spiritual and universal Ananda is within, in the self, in the spirit, in its secret unity with God and existence. To cast away the chain of ego and go back to free self, immortal spiritual being is the soul's return to its own eternal divinity.

The will to the imperfect separative being, that wrong Tapas which makes the soul in Nature attempt to individualise itself, to individualise its being, consciousness, force of being, delight of existence in a separative sense, to have these things as its own, in its own right, and not in the right of God and of the universal oneness, is that which brings about this wrong turn and creates the ego. To turn from this original desire is therefore essential, to get back to the will without desire whose whole enjoyment of being and whole will in being is that of a free universal and unifying Ananda. These two things are one, liberation from the will that is of the nature of desire and liberation from the ego, and the oneness which is brought about by the happy loss of the will of desire and the ego, is the essence of Mukti.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 24, pp. 674-81)



“HYMNS TO THE GODDESS”¹

This is one of a series of publications by Mr. Arthur Avalon consisting of texts and translations of the Tantras. The hymns collected and translated in this volume are, however, taken from other sources besides the Tantras. Many of them are from the considerable body of devotional hymns attributed by tradition to the philosopher Shankaracharya, a few from the Mahabharata and the Puranas. Most are well-known *stotras* addressed to the various forms and names of the female Energy, Mother of the worlds, whose worship is an important part of that many-sided and synthetic whole which we call Hinduism.

The work of translation has been admirably done. The one slight defect is the preservation untranslated of Sanskrit words other than names which might well have been rendered into English. The translation is at once faithful, simple and graceful in style and rhythm. No English version can reproduce the majesty of the Sanskrit rhythms and the colour and power of the original, but within the limits of the possible the work could hardly have been better executed.

The translation is accompanied by brief but numerous notes. Mr. Avalon has made a principle of submission to the authority of the Hindu commentators and learned men whom he has consulted or taken as his guides in the study of the Tantra. He writes, “It is necessary to study the Hindu commentators and to seek the oral aid of those who possess the traditional interpretation of the Shastra. Without this and an understanding of what Hindu worship is and means, absurd mistakes are likely to be made. I have thus, in addition to such oral aid, availed myself of the Commentaries of Nilakantha on the Mahabharata, of Gopala Chakravarti and Nagoji Bhatta on Chandi, and of Nilakantha on the Devibhagavata. As regards the Tantra, the great Sadhana Shastra, nothing which is both of an understanding and accurate character can be achieved without a study of the original texts undertaken with the assistance of the Tantric gurus and pundits who are the authorised custodians of its traditions.” This careful scrupulousness is undoubtedly the right attitude for the work which Mr. Avalon has set himself, — to present to the English-reading public the philosophy and worship of the Tantra and the way of the Shaktas as they have been traditionally practised and understood in mediaeval and modern India. The method followed assures a sound basis free from the vagaries of learned ignorance and unfettered ingenuity which render so much of the work of European scholarship on Indian subjects fantastic, unsound and ephemeral. It cannot, we think, be the final attitude; an independent scrutiny of the ancient scriptures and forms of philosophy and religion is needed through the whole range of Indian thought and devotion both to

1. Translated from the Sanskrit by Arthur and Ellen Avalon (Luzac and Co., London).

recover their more ancient and original forms and principles often concealed by later accretions and crystallisings and to separate from them whatever is of imperishable worth and utility for the spiritual future of mankind. But meanwhile, and especially when a great and difficult subject is being for the first time brought forward in an adequate manner to general notice, the conservative method is undoubtedly the most desirable.

Commentators, however, even the most learned, are subject to error, as Mr. Avalon has had to recognise in his translation of the verse which declares that all women without exception are forms of the Great Mother. The commentator would have us believe that the phrase *striyaḥ samastāḥ sakalā jagatsu* means all women who possess the sixty-four arts and are devoted to their husbands, are modest, etc. The translator rightly rejects this conventional distortion of a great and profound philosophical truth; he translates “all women without exception throughout the world”. We wonder whether the phrase does not admit of a different shade cutting deeper into the heart of things. The lines are,

*Vidyāḥ samastās tava devi bhedāḥ
Striyaḥ samastāḥ sakalā jagatsu.*

Is there not a hint of a distinction between the simple *bhedāḥ* and *sakalāḥ*? “All sciences, O Goddess, are different parts of thee, all women entirely in the worlds.” The sense would then be that wherever the feminine principle is found in the living personality, we have the entire presence of the world-supporting maternal soul of the Divinity. The Devi with all her aspects, *kalās*, is there in the Woman; in the Woman we have to see Durga, Annapurna, Tara, the Mahavidyas, and therefore it is said in the Tantra, in the line quoted by Mr. Avalon in his preface, “Wherever one sees the feet of Woman, one should give worship in one’s soul even as to one’s guru.” Thus this thought of the Shakta side of Hinduism becomes an uncompromising declaration of the divinity of woman completing the Vedantic declaration of the concealed divinity in man which we are too apt to treat in practice as if it applied only in the masculine. We put away in silence, even when we do not actually deny it, the perfect equality in difference of the double manifestation.

There are other instances in which the translators seem to us not to have escaped the misleading wiles of the commentator. We may instance the passage in the Hymn to Mahadevi in which the Goddess is described as being “both black and grey”. “Smoke-coloured” would be a closer rendering of the epithet *dhūmra*. We are told in the note that it means “that which is with smoke, the sacrificial rite, here the knowledge of the rites”. This is a scholastic interpretation which we cannot accept. The different hues of the Goddess are always psychologically symbolic and Mr. Avalon has himself an excellent passage to that effect in his Introduction. But, although occasionally provoking dissent, the notes are throughout interesting and

instructive and often throw a new light on the implications of the text.

Mr. Avalon in his publications insists upon the greatness of the Tantra and seeks to clear away by a dispassionate statement of the real facts the cloud of misconceptions which have obscured our view of this profound and powerful system. We shall have occasion to deal with this aspect of his work when we come to speak of the Mahanirvana Tantra. In this volume he justifies against European prejudice the attribution of the feminine form and quality to God and against modern ignorance generally the image-worship which the Tantra in common with other Hindu systems makes part of the first stage in religious progress. On both points we are in general agreement with his standpoint, though we do not hold that religious evolution must necessarily follow the line laid down by the Tantra.

Human conceptions of the Divine divide themselves first into the worship of the formed and the aspiration towards the formless, secondly, into the adoration of the Qualified and the urge of the rarest spirits towards the Unqualified, the Absolute. For all these stages the Tantric worship and discipline provides. How can the Formless invest Himself with form, asks the religious rationalist. The universe is there to reply. Hinduism worships Narayana in the stone, the tree, the animal, the human being. That which the intellectual and spiritual pride or severity of other religions scorns, it makes its pride and turns into its own form of logical severity. Stocks and stones, the quadruped and the human being, all these are equals in God, our brothers in the Divine, forms that the Omnipresent has not disdained to assume. But beyond the material forms there are others that are ideal and symbolic, but not less, if anything more real, more full of divine power than any actual physical manifestation. These are the mental images in which we worship God. The Hindu believes that to whatever form he brings his devotion, the love of God is bound to assume and vivify it, and we cannot say that the belief is irrational. For if there is a Consciousness in the universe and transcending it which answers to the yearning of all these creatures and perhaps Itself yearns towards them with the love of the Father, the Mother, the Friend, the Lover, and a love surpassing all these, then it is idle to suppose that It would assume or create for its own pleasure and glory the forms of the universe, but would disdain as an offence to Its dignity or purity those which the love of the worshipper offers to It and which after all Itself has formed in his heart or his imagination. To these mental forms mental worship may be offered, and this is the higher way; or we may give the material foundation, the *pratiṣṭhā*, of a statue or pictured image to form a physical nodus for a physical act of worship.

In the formless also we worship God, in His qualities, in His Love, Power, Bliss, Wisdom, in the great cosmic Principles by which He manifests Himself to the eye of knowledge. We worship Him as the Impersonality manifested in these things or the Personality containing them. And we rise at the apex of the pinnacle into that which is not only formless, *arūpa*, but *nirguṇa*, qualityless, the indefinable, *anirdeśyam*, of the Gita. In our human ignorance, with our mental passion for degrees

and distinctions, for superiorities and exclusions, we thus grade these things and say that this is superior, that is for ignorant and inferior souls. Do we know? The Theist looks down with reprobation on the form-adoring man-worshipping idolater and polytheist; the Adwaitin looks down with a calm and tolerant indulgence on the ignorance of the quality-adoring personality-bemused Theist. But it seems to us that God scorns nothing, that the Soul of all things may take as much delight in the prayer of a little child or the offering of a flower or a leaf before a pictured image as in the philosopher's leap from the summit of thought into the indefinable and unknowable and that he does best who can rise and widen into the shoreless realisation and yet keep the heart of the little child and the capacity of the seer of forms.

At any rate, this is an attitude towards which these Hymns to the Goddess bring us very near. They are full of the glories of her form, her visible body; full of the thinker's perception of her in all the shapes of the universe; full of the power of her psychological aspects; pervaded too by a sense behind and often expressed of her final unity and transcendence. Mr. Avalon brings this out with great force and vividness in his Introduction. But it should be manifest even to a careless reader of the Hymns. Take the following passage: —

Reverence to Her who is eternal, Raudra,
To Gauri and Dhatri, reverence and again reverence,
To Her who is moonlight and in the form of the moon,
To Her who is supreme bliss, reverence for ever.

That is from the famous hymn in the Chandi-Mahatmya, deservedly one of the best known in sacred literature; but everywhere we find the same crowding of different aspects. In a hymn of which the eleventh verse is a sensuous description of the physical goddess, —

O Gauri! with all my heart
I contemplate Thy form,
Beauteous of face,
With its weight of hanging hair,
With full breasts and rounded slender waist,
Holding in three hands a rosary, a pitcher and book
And with thy fourth hand making the jnanamudra, —

(mark how the close passes naturally into the psychological symbolism of the form), the ninth is a remarkable piece of Yogic imagery, —

O Mother! like the sleeping King of serpents
 Residing in the centre of the first lotus,
 Thou didst create the universe.
 Thou dost ascend like a streak of lightning,
 And attainest the ethereal region; —

and the opening is the highest philosophy expressed with great poetic force and interspersed with passages of the richest poetic colour —

The cause and Mother of the world,
 She whose form is that of the Shabdabrahman,
 And whose substance is bliss.

Thou art the primordial One,
 Mother of countless creatures,
 Creatrix of the bodies of the Lotus-born, Vishnu and Shiva,
 Who creates, preserves and destroys the worlds. . . .
 Although Thou art the primordial cause of the world,
 Yet art Thou ever youthful.
 Although Thou art the Daughter of the Mountain-King,
 Yet art Thou full of tenderness.
 Although Thou art the Mother of the Vedas,
 Yet they cannot describe Thee.
 Although men must meditate upon Thee,
 Yet cannot their mind comprehend Thee.

This hymn is quoted as culled from a Tantric compilation, the Tantrasara. Its opening is full of the supreme meaning of the great Devi symbol, its close is an entire self-abandonment to the adoration of the body of the Mother. This catholicity is typical of the whole Tantric system, which is in its aspiration one of the greatest attempts yet made to embrace the whole of God manifested and unmanifested in the adoration, self-discipline and knowledge of a single human soul.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 569-75)

THE RIGHT OF ASSOCIATION¹

My friend Pandit Gispati Kavyatirtha has somewhat shirked today his duty as it was set down for him in the programme and left it to me. I hope you will not mind if I depart a little from the suggestion he has made to me. I would like, instead of assuming the role of a preacher and telling you your duties which you know well enough yourselves, to take, if you will allow me, a somewhat wider subject, not unconnected with it but of a wider range. In addressing you today I wish to say a few words about the general right of association especially as we have practised and are trying to practise it in India today. I choose this subject for two reasons, first, because it is germane to the nature of the meeting we are holding, and secondly, because we have seen arbitrary hands laid upon that right of association which is everywhere cherished as a sign and safeguard of liberty and means of development of a common life.

There are three rights which are particularly cherished by free nations. In a nation the sovereign powers of Government may be enjoyed by the few or the many, but there are three things to which the people in European countries cling, which they persistently claim and after which, if they have them not, they always aspire. These are first, the right of a free Press, secondly, the right of free public meeting, and thirdly, the right of association. There is a particular reason why they cling to these three as inherent rights which they claim as sacred and with which authority has no right to interfere. The right of free speech ensures to the people the power which is the greatest means for self-development, and that is the power of spreading the idea. According to our philosophy it is the idea which is building up the world. It is the idea which expresses itself in matter and takes to itself bodies. This is true also in the life of humanity; it is true in politics, in the progress and life of a nation. It is the idea which shapes material institutions. It is the idea which builds up and destroys administrations and Governments. Therefore the idea is a mighty force, even when it has no physical power behind it, even when it is not equipped with means, even when it has not organised itself in institutions and associations. Even then the idea moves freely abroad through the minds of thousands of men and becomes a mighty force. It is a power which by the very fact of being impalpable assumes all the greater potency and produces all the more stupendous results. Therefore the right of free speech is cherished because it gives the idea free movement, it gives the nation that power which ensures its future development, which ensures success in any struggle for national life, however stripped it may be of means and instruments. It is enough that the idea is there and that the idea lives and circulates. Then the idea materialises

1. *Speech delivered at Howrah, Bengal, on 27 June 1909. Text published in the Bengalee on 29 June; thoroughly revised by Sri Aurobindo and republished in three issues of the Karmayogin in July and August.*

itself, finds means and instruments, conquers all obstacles and goes on developing until it is expressed and established in permanent and victorious forms.

This right of free speech takes the form first of a free Press. It is the Press which on its paper wings carries the idea abroad from city to city, from province to province until a whole continent is bound together by the links of one common aspiration. The right of public meeting brings men together. That is another force. They meet together on a common ground, moved by a common impulse, and as they stand or sit together in their thousands, the force of the idea within moves them by the magnetism of crowds. It moves from one to another till the hidden shakti, the mighty force within, stirred by the words thrown out from the platform travels from heart to heart and masses of men are not only moved by a common feeling and common aspiration, but by the force of that magnetism prepared to act and fulfil the idea. Then comes the right of association, the third of these popular rights. Given the common aspiration, common idea, common enthusiasm and common wish to act, it gives the instrument which binds men to strive towards the common object by common and associated actions; the bonds of brotherhood grow, energy increases, the idea begins to materialise itself to work in practical affairs and that which was yesterday merely an idea, merely a word thrown out by the eloquence of the orator, becomes a question of practical politics. It becomes work for it begins to work and fulfil itself. Therefore the people prize these rights, consider them a valuable asset, cling to and cherish and will not easily sacrifice them. Therefore they resent the arbitrary interference which takes from them what they consider indispensable for the preparation of national life.

Association is the mightiest thing in humanity; it is the instrument by which humanity moves, it is the means by which it grows, it is the power by which it progresses towards its final development. There are three ideas which are of supreme moment to human life and have become the watchwords of humanity. Three words have the power of remoulding nations and Governments, liberty, equality and fraternity. These words cast forth into being from the great stir and movement of the eighteenth century continue to act on men because they point to the ultimate goal towards which human evolution ever moves. This liberty to which we progress is liberation out of a state of bondage. We move from a state of bondage to an original liberty. This is what our own religion teaches. This is what our own philosophy suggests as the goal towards which we move, *mukti* or *moksha*. We are bound in the beginning by a lapse from pre-existent freedom, we strive to shake off the bonds, we move forward and forward until we have achieved the ultimate emancipation, that utter freedom of the soul, of the body, of the whole man, that utter freedom from all bondage towards which humanity is always aspiring. We in India have found a mighty freedom within ourselves, our brother-men in Europe have worked towards freedom without. We have been moving on parallel lines towards the same end. They have found out the way to external freedom. We have found out the way to internal freedom. We meet and give to each other what we have gained. We have learned

from them to aspire after external as they will learn from us to aspire after internal freedom.

Equality is the second term in the triple gospel. It is a thing which mankind has never accomplished. From inequality and through inequality we move, but it is to equality. Our religion, our philosophy set equality forward as the essential condition of emancipation. All religions send us this message in a different form but it is one message. Christianity says we are all brothers, children of one God. Mohammedanism says we are the subjects and servants of one Allah, we are all equal in the sight of God. Hinduism says there is one without a second. In the high and the low, in the Brahmin and the Shudra, in the saint and the sinner, there is one Narayana, one God and he is the soul of all men. Not until you have realised Him, known Narayana in all, and the Brahmin and the Shudra, the high and the low, the saint and the sinner are equal in your eyes, then and not until then you have knowledge, you have freedom, until then you are bound and ignorant. The equality which Europe has got is external political equality. She is now trying to achieve social equality. Nowadays their hard-earned political liberty is beginning to pall a little upon the people of Europe because they have found it does not give perfect well-being or happiness and it is barren of the sweetness of brotherhood. There is not fraternity in this liberty. It is merely a political liberty. They have not either the liberty within or the full equality or the fraternity. So they are turning a little from what they have and they say increasingly, "Let us have equality, let us have the second term of the gospel towards which we strive." Therefore socialism is growing in Europe. Europe is now trying to achieve external equality as the second term of the gospel of mankind, the universal ideal. I have said that equality is an ideal even with us but we have not tried to achieve it without. Still we have learned from them to strive after political equality and in return for what they have given us we shall lead them to the secret of the equality within.

Again there is fraternity. It is the last term of the gospel. It is the most difficult to achieve, still it is a thing towards which all religions call and human aspirations rise. There is discord in life, but mankind yearns for peace and love. This is the reason why the gospels which preach brotherhood spread quickly and excite passionate attachment. This was the reason of the rapid spread of Christianity. This was the reason of Buddhism's rapid spread in this country and throughout Asia. This is the essence of humanitarianism, the modern gospel of love for mankind. None of us have achieved our ideals, but human society has always attempted an imperfect and limited fulfilment of them. It is the nature, the *dharma* of humanity that it should be unwilling to stand alone. Every man seeks the brotherhood of his fellow and we can only live by fraternity with others. Through all its differences and discords humanity is striving to become one.

In India in the ancient times we had many kinds of association, for our life was much more complex and developed than it became afterwards. We had our political

associations, we had our commercial associations, our educational, our religious associations. As in Europe, so in India men united together for many interests and worked in association for common ideals. But by the inroads of invasion and calamity our life became broken and disintegrated. Still, though we lost much, we had our characteristic forms in which we strove to achieve that ideal of association and unity. In our society we had organised a common village life. It was a one and single village life in which every man felt himself to be something, a part of a single organism. We had the joint family by which we tried to establish the principle of association in our family life. We have not in our social developments followed the path which Europe has followed. We have never tended to break into scattered units. The principle of association, the attempt to organise brotherhood was dominant in our life. We had the organisation of caste of which nowadays we hear such bitter complaints. It had no doubt many and possibly inherent defects, but it was an attempt, however imperfect, to base society upon the principle of association, the principle of closely organising a common life founded on common ideas, common feelings, common tendencies, a common moral discipline and sense of corporate honour. Then we had an institution which in its form was peculiar to India, which helped to bind men together in close brotherhood who had a common guru or the initiation into a common religious fraternity. All these we had. Then the impact of Europe came upon us and one by one these institutions began to be broken. Our village life is a thing of the past. The village has lost its community, it has lost its ideals, it has lost that mutual cordiality and binding together by an intimate common life which held it up and made its life sweet and wholesome. Everywhere we see in the village moral deterioration and material decay. Our joint family has been broken. We are scattering into broken units and brother no longer looks upon brother. There is no longer the bond of love which once held us together, because the old ties and habit of association are being broken up. Our caste has lost its reality. The life has gone from within it and it is no longer an institution which helps towards unity, a common life or any kind of brotherhood. For once the idea is broken, the ideal within which is the principle of life is impaired, the form breaks up and nothing can keep it together. Therefore we find all these things perishing.

Well, we have been losing these things which were part of our associated life. But on the other hand we looked at the civilised nations of the West who are rushing upon us and breaking our society to pieces, and we saw that in those nations there were other centres of association, other means of uniting together. However imperfectly we began to seize upon them and try to use them, our life in the nineteenth century was a weak and feeble life. It had no ideals, no mighty impulses behind to drive or uplift it. It was bewildered and broken by the forces that came upon it; it did not know how to move and in what direction to move. It tried to take whatever it could from the life of the rulers. It strove to take their political associations and develop that principle of association. But our political associations had a feeble life bound

together only by a few common interests which by ineffective means they tried to establish or protect. Political association among us led to very little action, for it was an association which looked mainly to others for help and did not look to the sources of strength within. These and other kinds of associations which we then tried to form tended mainly in one direction. They were institutions for the exchange of thought, associations for the spread of knowledge, by which we instinctively but imperfectly tried to encourage and express the growing idea that was within us. This was the one real value of most of our political associations. Then there came the flood of national life, the mighty awakening which appeared first in Bengal. The principle of association began to take a new form, it began to assume a new life. It no longer remained a feeble instrument for the expression of the growing idea within us, it began to become an instrument indeed. It began to become a power. How did this new kind of association grow and to what objects did it address itself? The movement was not planned by any human brain, it was not foreseen by any human foresight. It came of itself, it came as a flood comes, as a storm comes. There had been slow preparations which we did not institute or understand. These preparations were mainly among the young men, the rising generation, the hope of India. There the spirit first awoke. At first it was not what we would call an association; it was only a temporary union of young men for a temporary cause. They called themselves by a name which has since become terrible to many of our friends of the Anglo-Indian Press. They called themselves volunteers. For what did they volunteer? They volunteered for service to the representatives of the nation who came together to deliberate for the good of the people. This is how it first came, as an idea of service, the idea of service to those who worked for the motherland. Out of that grew the idea of service to the Mother. That was the first stage and the root from which it grew into our political life. Then there was another stream which rose elsewhere and joined the first. Our Anglo-Indian brothers to whom we owe so much and in so many ways, did us this service also that they always scoffed at us as weaklings, men who were doomed to perpetual slavery and had always been a race of slaves because the people of Bengal had no martial gift, because they are not physically strong, because whoever chooses to strike them can strike and expect no blow in return. Therefore they were unfit for self-government, therefore they must remain slaves for ever.

Our Anglo-Indian friends do not proclaim that theory now. They have changed their tone. For the spirit of the nation could bear the perpetual reproach no longer, the awakening Brahman within our young men could bear it no longer. Associations grew up for physical exercise and the art of self-defence and grew into those Samitis which you have seen flourishing and recently suppressed. We were determined to wash the blemish away. If this was the blemish, to be weak, if this was the source of our degradation we determined to remove it. We said, "In spite of our physical weakness we have a strength within us which will remove our defects. We will be a race of brave and strong men. And that we may be so, we will establish everywhere

these associations for physical exercise.” That, one would think, was an innocent object and had nothing in it which anyone could look upon with suspicion. In fact we never thought that we should be looked upon with suspicion. It is the Europeans who have trumpeted physical culture as a most valuable national asset, the thing in which the English-speaking nations have pre-eminently excelled and which was the cause of their success and energy. That was the second seed of association.

There was a third seed and it was the thing for which our hearts yearned, the impulse towards brotherhood. A new kind of association came into being. That was the association which stood by labour and service and self-sacrifice, whose object of existence was to help the poor and nurse the sick. That was the flowering out of the Hindu religion. That was what Swami Vivekananda preached. That was what Aswini Kumar Dutta strove to bring into organised existence. That was what the Ramakrishna Mission, the Little Brothers of the Poor at Barisal tried to effect. This was the third way in which the new association established itself, the third seed of union, the third stream of tendency seeking fulfilment. All these streams of tendency came together, they united themselves and have been in their broad united purifying current the glory of our national life for the last three years. These Samitis of young men by labour, by toil for the country, worship of the motherland held themselves together and spread the habit of association and the growth of brotherhood over the land. That is their spirit and ideal and that the way in which these associations have been established.

These are the associations which have now been crushed out of existence under a charge which cannot be and has not been maintained, a charge which has been disproved over and over again. It is a monstrous charge. The charge is that these associations are associations of hatred and violence, associations for rebellion and dacoity. That is the charge under which these associations have been suppressed. I have come recently back from Barisal. While I was there I heard and read something of the work of the young men’s association in Barisal, the association called the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti which with its network covered the whole district of Bakarganj. This association grew out of a much smaller association started by Aswini Kumar Dutta called the Little Brothers of the Poor. What was the work commenced by these Little Brothers of the Poor? When epidemic broke out, when cholera appeared in all its virulence, the young men of the Barisal Brajamohan College went out in bands. They nursed the sick, they took charge of those who had been abandoned, they took up in their arms those whom they found lying on the roadside. They were not deterred in those moments by the prejudice of caste or by the difference of creed. The orthodox Brahmin took up in his bosom and nursed the Mohammedan and the Namasudra. They did not mind the epidemic or fear to catch the contagion. They took up and nursed them as brother nurses brother and thus they rescued many from the grasp of death. Aswini Kumar Dutta is in exile. How did he establish that influence which caused him to be thought dangerous? By philanthropy, by service.

While ordinary colleges under the control of the Government were mere soulless machines where they cram a few packets of useless knowledge into the brain of the student, Aswini Kumar breathed his own lofty and noble soul into the Brajamohan College and made it an engine indeed out of which men were turned, in which hearts and souls were formed. He breathed his noble qualities into the young men who grew up in the cherishing warmth and sunlight of his influence. He made his college an institution which in the essentials of education was a model for any educational institution in the world. This is how he built up his influence among the educated class. They followed him because he had shaped their souls between his hands. It is therefore that they loved him, it is therefore that they saw no fault in him. His influence among the common people was built up by love, service and philanthropy. It was out of the seed he planted that the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti grew.

What was the work of this Samiti, the existence of which could no longer be tolerated in the interests of the peace and safety of the Empire? First of all it continued with that blessed work which the Little Brothers of the Poor had begun, nursing, serving, saving the poor, the sick and the suffering. They made it their ideal to see that there was no sick man or sick woman of however low a class or depressed a caste, of whom it could be said that they went unhelped in their sickness in the Bakarganj District. That was the first crime the association committed.

The second crime was this. These young men went from house to house seeking out the suffering and the hungry when famine broke out in the country. To those who were patiently famishing they brought succour, but they did more. There were many people who belonged to the respectable classes on whom the hand of famine was laid. They would not go for help to the relief works; they would not complain and show their misery to the world. The young men of Barisal sought out these cases and secretly, without injuring the feelings of the suffering, they gave help and saved men and women from starvation. This was the second crime of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti.

Then there was another. The social life of Bengal is full of discord and quarrels. Brother quarrels with brother and quarrels with bitter hatred. They carry their feud to the law-courts; they sin against the Mother in themselves and in others; they sow the seed of lasting enmity and hatred between their families. And beyond this there is the ruin, the impoverishment of persistent litigation. The young men of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti said, "This should not be tolerated any more. We will settle their differences, we will make peace between brother and brother. We will say to our people, 'If there is any dispute let us try to settle it first. If you are dissatisfied with our decision you can always go to the law-courts; but let us try first.'" They tried, and hundreds of cases were settled out of court and hundreds of these seeds of enmity and hatred were destroyed. Peace and love and brotherhood began to increase in the land. This was their third crime.

Their fourth offence is a great crime nowadays. These young men had the

hardihood to organise and help the progress of Swadeshi in the land. There was no violence. By love, by persuasion, by moral pressure, by appeals to the Samaj and the interests of the country, they did this work. They helped the growth of our industries; they helped it by organising the condition for their growth, the only condition in which these infant, these feeble and languishing industries can grow, the general determination to take our own goods and not the goods of others, to give preference to our Mother and not to any stranger. In no other district of Bengal, in no other part of India was Swadeshi so well organised, so perfectly organised, so peacefully and quietly organised as in Barisal. That was the last and worst crime they committed. For these crimes they have been proclaimed, they have been forbidden to exist. This Swadesh Bandhab Samiti carried organisation to a perfection which was not realised in other districts because it is not every district which can have an Aswini Kumar Dutta or a Satis Chandra Chatterji. But the same impulse was there, the same tendencies were there. I do not know any single society of the kind in Bengal which has not made some attempt to help the people in times of famine or to bring succour to the sick and suffering or to remove quarrels and discord as well as to help the growth of Swadeshi by organising that exclusive preference to which we have given the name of boycott. These were general offences, common crimes.

But there was another thing that led to the suppression. This was an association that had that very dangerous and lethal weapon called the lathi. The use of the lathi as a means of self-defence was openly taught and acquired, and if that was not enough there was the imagination of a very highly imaginative police which saw hidden behind the lathi the bomb. Now nobody ever saw the bombs. But the police were quite equal to the occasion; they thought there might be bombs. And what if there were not? Their imagination was quite equal to realising any bomb that could not be materialised, — in baithak-khanas and elsewhere. The police suspected that the lathi was the father of the bomb. Their procedure was simple with the simplicity of the highest detective genius. When they heard of a respectable-sized dacoity, they immediately began to reason it out. They said, “Now why are there so many dacoities in the land? Obviously the lathi fathered the bomb and the bomb fathers the dacoities. Who have lathis? The Samitis. Therefore it is proved. The Samitis are the dacoits.” Our efficient police have always shown a wonderful ability. Generally when a dacoity is committed, the police are nowhere near. They have not altered that; that golden rule still obtains. They are not to be found when the dacoity takes place. They only come up when the dacoity is long over and say, “Well, this is the work of the National volunteers.” They look round to see what is the nearest Samiti and, if they find any which has been especially active in furthering Swadeshi, they say, “Here is the Samiti.” And if there is anyone who was somewhat active in connection with the work of the Samiti, they say at once, “Well, here is the man.” And if he is a boy of any age from twelve upwards, so much the better. The man or boy is instantly arrested and put into hajat. After rotting there some days or weeks,

the police can get no evidence and the man has to be released. That does not frighten the courageous police; they immediately arrest the next likely person belonging to the Samiti. So they go on persevering until they lose all hope of finding or creating evidence. Sometimes they persist, and members of the Samitis, sometimes mere boys, have to rot in hajat until the case goes up to a court of justice and the judge looks at the case and after he has patiently heard it out has to ask, "Well, but where is the evidence?"

Formerly, you may remember, those of you who have lived in the villages, that wherever there was any man in a village who was physically strong the police wrote down his name in the black book of budmashes. He was at once put down as an undesirable. That was the theory, that a man who is physically strong must be a hooligan. Physical development was thus stamped out of our villages and the physique of our villagers began to deteriorate until this movement of Akharas and Samitis came into existence to rescue the nation from absolute physical deterioration and decay. But this was an immortal idea in the mind of our police and it successfully effected transmigration. It took this form, that these Samitis encourage physical education, they encourage lathi-play, therefore they must be the nurseries of violence and dacoity and factories of bombs. Our rulers seem to have accepted this idea of the police. So perhaps this is the crime these Samitis have committed. Nothing has been proved of all this easy theorizing. It is yet to be known when and where the bomb has been associated with the work of the Samitis in Eastern Bengal. There was indeed a great dacoity in Eastern Bengal and the theory was started that it was done by one of the Samitis, but even our able detective police were unable to prove any association in that case. They did catch hold of some young men apparently on principle. There is a confidential rule, — it is confidential but the public have come to know of it, — that "somebody must be punished for the day's work." That was the circular of a Lieutenant-Governor of this province and the police no doubt thought it ought to be observed faithfully. So they caught hold of some likely men and the people so charged were about to be "punished for the day's work"; but fortunately for them a judge sat upon the High Court Bench who remembered that there was such a thing as law and another thing called evidence, things whose existence was in danger of being forgotten in this country. He applied the law, he insisted on having the evidence, and you all know the result.

These associations, then, which were the expression of our growing national life and the growing feeling of brotherhood among us, did such work as I have described, and these were the ways, guiltless of any offence in the eyes of the law, in which they did their work. Still they have been suppressed not because they were criminal, but because their existence was inconvenient. It has always been the case that when established institutions of government were unwilling to move with the times, they have looked with suspicion upon the right of association and the right of free speech, they have discouraged the right of a free Press and the right of public

meeting. By destroying these instruments they have thought to arrest the progress which they did not love. This policy has never permanently succeeded, yet it is faithfully repeated with that singular stupidity which seems natural to the human race. The sword of Damocles hangs over our Press. It is nominally free, but we never know when even that simulacrum of freedom may not be taken from it. There is a law of sedition so beautifully vague and comprehensive that no one knows when he is committing sedition and when he is not. There is a law against the preaching of violence which enables a Magistrate whenever he chooses to imagine that your article advocates violence, to seize your machine. The press is taken away and of course the case goes up to the High Court, but by that time the paper suffers so much that it becomes difficult or impossible for it to rear its head again. There is a notification by which, as I pointed out in Beadon Square the other day, a meeting becomes peaceful or criminal not according to the objects or to the behaviour of the people assembled but according as the sun is up or the sun is down. There is a law of proclamation by which our right of association can be taken from us whenever they please by a stroke of the pen. The British people have certain traditions, they have certain ways of thinking and fixed ideas of which they cannot entirely get rid. It is for that reason they have not yet passed a law entirely and expressly suppressing the freedom of the Press or the right of public meeting. But even that may come. What should we do under these circumstances? We see the sword of Damocles hanging lower and lower over our heads. Our association may be declared criminal and illegal at any moment. The executive can any moment it pleases confiscate our press. We ourselves are liable to be arrested and harassed at any moment without evidence, "on suspicion", by an irresponsible and apparently unpunishable police. Under whatever difficulties and whatever restrictions may be put upon us, we must of course go on. But the restrictions may be greater in future. The sword is hanging lower and lower over our heads. Still we cannot stop in our work. The force within us cannot be balked, the call cannot be denied. Whatever penalty be inflicted on us for the crime of patriotism, whatever peril we may have to face in the fulfilment of our duty to our nation, we must go on, we must carry on the country's work.

After all what is an association? An association is not a thing which cannot exist unless we have a Chairman and a Vice-Chairman and a Secretary. An association is not a thing which cannot meet unless it has its fixed meeting place. Association is a thing which depends upon the feeling and the force within us. Association means unity, association means brotherhood, association means binding together in one common work. Where there is life, where there is self-sacrifice, where there is disinterested and unselfish toil, where there are these things within us, the work cannot stop. It cannot stop even if there be one man who is at all risks prepared to carry it on. It is only after all the question of working, it is not a question of the means for work. It is simply a question of working together in common in one way or in another. It is a matter of asking each other from time to time what work there is to be

performed today and what is the best way of performing it, what are the best means of helping our countrymen, what work we shall have to do tomorrow or the day after and having settled that to do it at the appointed time and in the appointed way. That is what I mean when I say that it is a question of working and not of means. It is not that these things cannot be done except by the forms which our European education has taught us to value. Whatever may be the difficulties we can go on with the work. The association that we shall have will be the association of brothers who are united heart to heart, of fellow-workers joined hand-in-hand in a common labour, the association of those who have a common motherland. It is the association of the whole country, to which every son of India and every son of Bengal ought by the duty of his birth to belong, an association which no force can break up, the association of a unity which grows closer day by day, of an impulse that comes from on high and has drawn us together in order that we might realise brotherhood, in order that the Indian nation may be united and united not merely in the European way, not merely by the common self-interest, but united by love for the common country, united by the ideal of brotherhood, united by the feeling that we are all sons of one common Mother who is also the manifestation of God in a united humanity. That is the association which has been coming into being, and has not been destroyed, since the movement came into existence. This is the mighty association, which unites the people of West Bengal with the people of East and North Bengal and defies partition, because it embraces every son of the land, — *bhai bhai ek thain*, or brother and brother massed inseparably together. This is the ideal that is abroad and is waking more and more consciously within us. It is not merely a common self-interest. It awakens God within us and says, “You are all one, you are all brothers. There is one place in which you all meet and that is your common Mother. That is not merely the soil. That is not merely a division of land but it is a living thing. It is the Mother in whom you move and have your being. Realise God in the nation, realise God in your brother, realise God in a wide human association.” This is the ideal by which humanity is moved all over the world, the ideal which is the *dharma* of the Kaliyuga, and it is the ideal of love and service which the young men of Bengal so thoroughly realised, love and service to your brothers, love and service to your Mother and this is the association we are forming, the great association of the people of Bengal and of the whole people of India. It increases and will grow for ever in spite of all the obstacles that rise in its way. When the spirit of Aswini Kumar Dutta comes into every leader of the people and the nation becomes one great Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, then it will be accomplished. This is for ever our national ideal and in its strength our nation will rise whatever law they make; our nation will rise and live by the force of the law of its own being. For the fiat of God has gone out to the Indian nation, “Unite, be free, be one, be great.”

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 67-83)

‘I AM THE VAST BOSOM OF THY BOUNDLESS LOVE. . . .’

August 11, 1914

O my sweet Master, enter into all these confused thoughts, all these anguished hearts; kindle there the fire of Thy divine Presence. The shadow of the earth has fallen back upon it, it has been completely shaken by it; but this shadow was hiding Thy immutable sun, and now that it has crashed down upon this poor world, rocking its very foundations and transforming it into a formidable chaos, wilt Thou not once again move upon the chaos and speak Thy will: “Let there be Light”?

O Thou marvellous Unknown One, Thou who hast not yet manifested Thyself, Thou who awaitest the propitious hour and hast sent us upon earth to prepare Thy ways, all the elements of this being cry to Thee, “May Thy will be done” and give themselves to Thee in a supreme, unconquerable urge. . . .

Envelop this sorrowful earth with the strong arms of Thy mercy, permeate it with the beneficent outpourings of Thy infinite love.

I am the powerful arms of Thy mercy.

I am the vast bosom of Thy boundless love. . . . My arms have enfolded the sorrowful earth and press it tenderly to my generous heart; and slowly a kiss of supreme benediction is laid upon this struggling atom: the kiss of the Mother which soothes and heals. . . .

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 221)



“WHAT THOU WILLEST, WHAT THOU WILLEST, WHAT THOU WILLEST . . .”

6 May 1972

[Mother “looks inwardly”.]

Do you see something?

(Silence)

I believe I already told you that there is as though a golden Force which is pressing down (*gesture of pressing*) that has no material consistence and yet seems to be tremendously heavy. . .

Yes, yes.

. . . and which is pressing upon Matter, thus, to compel it to turn towards the Divine *inwardly* — not an outward escape (*gesture upward*), but inwardly to turn to the Divine. And so the apparent result is as though catastrophes were inevitable. And yet along with this perception of inevitable catastrophe, there are at the same time solutions to the situation, events which come about that are by themselves altogether miraculous. It is as though the two extremes were becoming more extreme, as though what is good was becoming better and what is bad becoming worse. It is like that. With the formidable Power that is *pressing* upon the world — that was my impression.

Yes, it is perceptible.

Yes, it is felt like that (*Mother fingers the air*). And then in the circumstances, many things that happen generally in an indifferent way become acute; situations, differences become acute; bad wills become acute; *and*, at the same time, extraordinary miracles — extraordinary! People are saved who were about to die, things that were inextricable all of a sudden get sorted out.

And then, for individuals also, it is the same thing.

They who know how to turn towards . . . (how to say it?) who sincerely call the Divine, who feel that it is the only salvation, the only way out, and who sincerely give themselves, then (*gesture of breaking through*) in a few minutes it becomes wonderful. For the smallest things — there is nothing small or big, important or

unimportant — it is all the same.

The values change.

It is as though the vision of the world changes.

(Silence)

It is, as it were, to give an idea of the change in the world by the descent of the Supramental. Truly things that were neutral become absolute: a little error becomes categorical in its consequences, and a little sincerity, a little true aspiration becomes miraculous in its result. The values have intensified in people, and even from the material point of view the smallest fault, the very smallest, has big consequences, and the least sincerity in the aspiration has wonderful results. The values have intensified, become precise.

Mother, you speak of fault, error — I do not know if it is an aberration, but I am having a more and more precise impression that fault, error, all that is not true. It is not like that. It is a means . . . how to say? Yes, it is a means for widening the field of aspiration.

Yes, yes, perfectly so.

The perception of the whole is that everything is . . . everything is willed with a view to the conscious ascent of the world. The consciousness is preparing to become divine. And it is perfectly true: what we consider as faults are altogether part of the ordinary human conception, altogether, altogether.

The only fault — if there is any — is not to want the other thing. But from the time one wants the other thing . . .

But it is not a fault, it is an imbecility!

Well, it is very simple. The whole creation must want nothing but the Divine, nothing but to manifest the Divine. And all that it does, even all its so-called errors, are only means towards making it inevitable for the whole creation to manifest the Divine — but not the “Divine” as man conceives him to be, “this and not that”, with all kinds of restrictions: a *Totality* of tremendous power and light. It is truly the Power in the world, a new and tremendous Power that has come into the world and must manifest itself and must make “manifestable” (if one may so put it) this Divine All-Power.

I have come to this conclusion. I have looked, I have observed and I have seen that what we call “supramental”, lacking a better word, this Supramental makes the creation more sensitive to the higher Power; we call that “divine” because we . . . It is divine in relation to what we are, but . . . It is something (*gesture of descent and*

pressure) which must make Matter more sensitive and more . . . “responsive” to the Force. How to say it? At present whatever is invisible or insensible is unreal for us (I mean to say for the human being in general). We say that there are “concrete” things and things that are not so; yet this Puissance, this Power that is *not material*, becomes more concretely powerful upon earth than earthly material things. Yes, it is that.

This is the protection and the means of defence for supramental beings. It will be a thing which is not material in appearance but which has a greater power *over Matter* than material things. This is becoming more and more true from day to day, from hour to hour — the feeling that this Force, when it is directed by what we call “the Divine”, it *can*, truly it can — you understand — it has the power to move Matter, it can produce a *material* accident; and it can efface the consequences of an absolutely material thing — it is stronger than . . . Matter. This is what is altogether new and incomprehensible; and therefore it produces a kind of panic in the ordinary consciousness of people. Yes, it is that. It seems . . . it is *no more* what it was. And truly there is something new — it is *no more* as it was.

All our common sense, all our logic, all our practical sense is dashed to the ground! Useless! It has no force any more, no reality any more; it no longer corresponds to what is. It is truly a new world.

(*Silence*)

It is this in the body which finds it difficult to adapt itself to this new Power and creates the disorder and difficulties, the illnesses. But all of a sudden one feels that if one were wholly receptive, one would become formidable. That is the impression — the impression I am having more and more, that if the whole consciousness (the whole of the most material consciousness — the most material) were receptive to this new Power . . . one would become for-mi-da-ble.

(*Mother closes her eyes.*)

But one essential condition: the reign of the ego must be ended. The ego is now the obstacle. The ego must be replaced by the divine consciousness — Sri Aurobindo himself called it “supramental”; we can call it supramental so that there might not be any misunderstanding, because when one speaks of “the Divine”, immediately people think of a “God”, and that spoils everything. It is not that. No, it is not that. (*Mother slowly brings down her closed fists*) It is the descent of the supramental world, which is not a purely imaginative thing (*gesture upward*), it is an *absolutely* material Power. But (*Mother smiles*) it has no need of material means.

A world which wants to take a body in the world.

(*Silence*)

Several times there have been moments when my body felt a kind of new unease and anxiety; and there was as though something which was not a voice, but which translated itself in words in my consciousness: “Why are you afraid? It is the new consciousness.” It came several times. And then I understood.

(Silence)

You understand; it is this which in the human common sense says: “It is impossible, that has never been”; it is this which has come to an end. It is finished, it is foolish. It has become a stupidity. One might say: it is possible *because* it has never been. It is the new world and it is the new consciousness and it is the new Power, it is possible, and this is and will be more and more manifested *because* it is the new world, because it has never been.

It will be because it has never been.

(Silence)

It is beautiful: it will be because it has never been — *because* it has never been.

(Mother enters into a long contemplation.)

It is not material and it is more concrete than Matter!

Yes. It is crushing almost.

Crushing, yes, it is that. . . . Oh! It is . . .

All that is not receptive feels the crushing, but whatever is receptive feels on the contrary something like a . . . powerful widening.

Yes, but it is very strange, it is both!

Both at the same time.

Yes, one feels something like a swelling, as though the whole thing is going to explode, and at the same time there is something that is crushed.

Yes, but that which is crushed is the thing that resists, that is not receptive. It has only to open itself. And then the thing becomes as though . . . a formidable thing. . . . It is extraordinary. It is our habit of centuries, is it not, which resists and gives this impression; but whatever opens out . . . one feels as though one became large, large, large. . . . It is magnificent. Oh! It is . . .

30 August 1972

I see clearly: it is the consciousness which is directing and not the thought. So, if the consciousness is quietly open to the Divine, everything is all right. All the while things are happening in the consciousness as if all that was coming from the whole world (*gesture of assault from all sides*): all that denies or contradicts the divine Action — that is coming thus all the time (*same gesture*). And so, if I know how to be quiet (*gesture of self-offering, hands open upward*), in an attitude of . . . (*Mother smiles*) of non-existence, a kind of . . . I do not know if it is transparency . . . I do not know if it should be called transparency or immobility; in any case it is something in the consciousness that is like this (*same gesture of self-offering, hands open*); when the consciousness is like that everything goes well, but as soon as it starts moving, that is to say, the person shows itself in any way, it becomes detestable. But it is very strong.

You know, there are a thousand experiences of the physical body which say: “Ooh! This beatific state is an impossibility” — it is this stupidity which delays everything. It is as though it were the cells — the cells of the body — that are accustomed to fight and suffer and are unable to accept that things could be like that (*same gesture of self-giving, hands opened*). But when it is like that . . . it is wonderful.

Only, it does not last. It does not last all the time — all the time, all the time things are happening (*same gesture of universal assault*). But now I see very well, very clearly — very clearly: consciousness is replacing thought.

And . . . (how to say it?) the difference: thought is something which goes this way (*gesture of whirling*), it moves, it moves . . . consciousness is something that is like this (*gesture of hands opened, offered upward*). I cannot explain.

(Mother closes her eyes and remains with the hands open.)

Do you have anything to say or ask?

I was asking myself what I could do to hasten the movement. In the daily life we are so much assailed by so many things, are we not? . . . What can one do to hasten the movement?

If one could remain without being troubled, that would make a great difference.

Yes.

A great difference.

You understand? My body is beginning — just beginning — to know that the

divine side means a life (*Mother stretches out her arms into an immensity*), a life progressive and luminous; but the accumulation of past experiences says: “Oh! It is not possible!” There you are, and so it is this idiotic “not possible” which delays and spoils things.

This is based upon the fact that as soon as the body gives up the true attitude, it becomes painful, everything hurts, everything is suffering — the impression is there as of death, of dissolution everywhere. Therefore it is that which strengthens . . . the imbecility of Matter.

So, to tell the truth, I would rather not speak unless it is to answer a precise question.

As for me I ask myself on what point precisely should I apply myself?

(*After a silence*) Do you feel that you have passed beyond thought?

Ah, yes, that altogether. The only thing that remains in me is a mechanical thought-movement, but otherwise . . . I can say that I never make use of my thought. I have always the feeling that I am drawing from above. The speculative mind, for example, is impossible for me.

Yes, then it is all right, you are on the right path.

Well, yes! But practically there is the feeling of a struggle, of being somewhat submerged.

Well, for me, all the things on which I used to rely for action have as though crumbled down purposely so that I may say (for everything, even the most trifling things): “What Thou willest.” It has become . . . it has become my only refuge.

To an ordinary observer who does not know, one has to agree to pass for a blockhead.

But there are quite a few who see the Light also, you know.

Possibly. (*Mother laughs.*) So much the better for them.

(*Silence*)

Very often, very often, I ask the Lord, “How can I help, now that I can no more see clearly nor speak clearly?” It is a state. . . . And the body does not feel the decline! It is convinced that if tomorrow the Lord wanted it to take up again its activities, it would be able to do so. The strength is there (*Mother touches her arms, her muscles*),

at times a mighty strength! . . . Why! . . . The condition is willed so that . . . I might be left quiet.

But, you know, this is surely a willed state, because I myself have the feeling, so far as I can perceive in my small measure, that in your immobility you are like a tremendous generating centre.

Yes, that I know. That I know. Tremendous. Yes, a Force

25 October 1972

[The disciple gives a flower to Mother, and Mother gives it back to the disciple.]

It is “the power of Truth in the subconscious”.

(Silence)

In the subconscious all the contradictions are accumulated.

Yes.

And it rises thus (*gesture of gushing up*), all the time, all the time. And then . . . you have the feeling that you are absolutely imbecile, inconscient, of bad will. And all this (*same gesture of a rising up from below*).

And the consciousness is there (*gesture around the head*), peaceful, extraordinarily peaceful . . . (*Mother opens out her hands*) “May Thy Will be done, O Lord.” And then that puts a pressure upon what is coming from below.

It is as though the battle of the world was being fought within my consciousness.

It has come to such a point that to forget, to forget the Divine even for a minute spells a catastrophe.

And with you, how is it?

Well, it seems to be interminable, this cleansing of the subconscious.

Yes. It is not merely that of one person, it is the subconscious of the earth. It is interminable. And yet one must . . .

So, to stop that means to stop the work. To continue that means it would take time. . . . I do not know . . . it is interminable.

Clearly, yes, clearly, to stop that means to stop the work. It is as though in the

consciousness there (*Mother makes a gesture around her head*) lay the centre of junction and action.

So I have but one means, to keep quiet, quiet, quiet (*Mother opens out her hands upward*) . . . to have the feeling that individuality is nothing, nothing, nothing — it allows the divine rays to pass. This is the only solution. It is the Divine who . . . who must do the battling.

(*Silence*)

Last time you said: Oh! Hundreds of years will be needed, perhaps thousands, before men turn consciously towards the Divine. But . . .

Perhaps not.

. . . one feels that this time something decisive is bound to come.

Yes. . . . You know, I have the feeling that the person is like an image for fixing one's attention. Men have need of something — they have always had the need of something of their dimension so that they can fix their attention. And so the body does all it can in order not to be an obstruction to the Divine Force which passes through, it seeks to annul its interception, and at the same time it sees that it is . . . as though an image that men need to fix their attention.

4 November 1972

The whole subconscious . . . (*Mother makes a gesture of a rising up from below.*)

(*Silence*)

It is not a sensation, it is not knowledge, it is a kind of . . . (*Mother feels the air with her hand*) . . . it cannot be called a conviction: it is a certitude — a certitude in the perception — that there is a Beatitude which . . . which is there, ready for us, and that there is a whole world of contradictions suppressed in the subconscious which comes up in this way to prevent us from feeling it. So . . . one might say it is a battlefield, but in a perfect calm. It is impossible to describe.

Impossible to describe.

So, if I do not move and if I enter into this Consciousness, time passes with a tremendous speed and in a kind of . . . luminous calm. And then, the slightest thing that pulls me out of it, it is as though I was dragged into a hell. That is it.

The unease is so great that you feel you cannot live one minute or a few minutes

in that way. And then . . . and then you call the Divine . . . then you feel you nestle within the Divine.

Then it is all right.

8 November 1972

I have had for a moment — just a few seconds — the supramental consciousness. It was so wonderful, my child! . . . I have understood that if we were made to taste of that now, we would not wish to live otherwise. And we are in the course of (*gesture of kneading*) changing laboriously. And the change, the process of the change, seems . . . One can have it through a sort of indifference (I do not know how to say it). But it does not last for long. And generally it is laborious.

But that consciousness, it is so wonderful, you know!

And it is a very interesting thing, for it is, as it were, an *utmost* activity in a complete peace. But that lasted only a few seconds.

(*Silence*)

And you?

It is a total consciousness?

It is extraordinary. It is like the harmonisation of contraries. An activity, yes, total, tremendous, and a perfect peace.

But all these are words.

(*Silence*)

It is a material consciousness?

The action is a material action — but not in the same manner.

(*Silence*)

How can one come into contact with that more easily? How can one reach there or be there?

I do not know, because for me the *whole* consciousness, including that of the body, is always (*gesture of offering*) turned constantly towards the . . . what it feels as the Divine.

And that without “trying”, you understand?

Yes, yes.

20 December 1972

You have nothing to ask?

I asked myself a question about Sri Aurobindo. I wanted to know at what point he had arrived when he passed away — at what point of transformation. What difference in the work, for example, is there between what you are doing now and what he was doing at that time?

He had gathered in his body a great amount of supramental force and as soon as he left . . . You see, he was lying on his bed, I stood by his side, and in a way altogether concrete — concrete with such a strong sensation as to make one think that it could be seen — all this supramental force which was in him passed from his body into mine. And I felt the friction of the passage. It was extraordinary — extraordinary. It was an extraordinary experience. For a long time, a long time like that (*Mother indicates the passing of the Force into her body*). I was standing beside his bed, and that continued.

Almost a sensation — it was a material sensation.

For a long time.

That is all I know.

But what I wanted to understand is at what point of the inner work was, for example, the cleaning of the subconscious and all that? What difference is there, say, between the work he had done at that time and the work to which you have come now? I mean to say, is the subconscious less subconscious or . . .

Oh! Yes, that, surely. Surely.

Well, this is the mental way of looking at things — I do not have it any more.

Yes, Mother.

(Silence)

The difference is perhaps a difference in the general or collective intensity of this Power, of this Force, is it not so?

There is a difference in the *power* for action. He himself possesses more action, more power for action, now than when in his body. Besides, it is for that that he left, because it was necessary to act in that way.

It is very concrete. His action has become very concrete. Evidently it is something which is not at all mental. It is from another region. But it is not ethereal nor . . . it is concrete. One could almost say that it is material.

But this other region, I have often asked myself what is the true movement one must make to get there. There are two possible movements: the movement inward towards the soul, and another in which the individuality is annulled and one is rather in a wideness without the individual. . . .

Both must be there.

Both must be there?

Yes.

(Mother goes into herself.)

30 December 1972

So it is going to be the new year. . . .

Do you feel anything for this new year?

(After a silence) Things have taken an extreme form. So there is, as it were, an uplift of the atmosphere towards a splendor . . . almost inconceivable, and at the same time the feeling that at any moment one may . . . one may die — not “die”, but the body may be dissolved. And so the two at the same time form a consciousness (*Mother shakes her head*) . . . all the old things seem puerile, childish, unconscious — within there . . . it is tremendous and wonderful.

So, the body, the body has one prayer — and it is always the same:

Make me worthy of knowing Thee,
Make me worthy of serving Thee,
Make me worthy of being Thee.

I feel in myself a growing force . . . but it is of a new quality . . . in silence and in contemplation.

Nothing is impossible (*Mother opens her hands upward*).

(Silence)

So, if you have no questions . . . if you want silence . . . conscious silence . . .

But I do not know if I am making the right movement.

(After a silence) But when you want to enter into relation with the Divine, what movement do you make?

I place myself at your feet.

(Mother smiles and goes into herself.)

7 February 1973

[On Mother's message of 31 December 1972:

“There is only one solution for falsehood.

“It is to cure in ourselves all that contradicts in our consciousness the Presence of the Divine.”]

Yes, I insist on that; it is very true, very true. It may not be easy to understand, but it is a *very profound* truth.

All that veils and deforms and prevents the manifestation of the Divine in us: it is *that*, the falsehood.

It is quite a labour!

This is what I have been doing all the while — every day and the whole day long, even while I see people. It is the only thing worth living for.

10 March 1973

I do not know, whenever I try to come in contact with this consciousness,¹ I have always the feeling, as you say, of a luminous vastness.

Yes.

1. The New Consciousness.

But I have the feeling that it does not move, that one is there and one can eternally remain like that, but . . .

It is so. This is my feeling.

Is it enough to let oneself be filled with That, is there nothing else to do?

I think, I think that it is the only thing. I am repeating always: “What Thou willest, what Thou willest, what Thou willest . . . let it be what Thou willest, may I do what Thou willest, may I be conscious of what Thou willest.”

And also: “Without Thee it is death; with Thee it is life.” By “death” I do not mean physical death — it may be so; it may be that now if I lost the contact, that would be the end, but it is impossible! I have the feeling that it is . . . that I *am That* — with all the obstructions that the present consciousness may still have, that’s all. And then, when I see someone (*Mother opens her hands as though to offer the person to the Light*), whoever he may be: like that (*same gesture*).

(*Silence*)

All the while (it is amusing), all the while I have the feeling that I am a little baby who nestles — nestles within . . . (what to call it?) a Divine Consciousness . . . *all-embracing*.

THE MOTHER

(*Notes on the Way*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 11, pp. 313-32)



HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA

2. THE GLORIOUS POETIC FRUITION

(Continued from the issue of May 2023)

How far have my hopes and prophecies about Harindranath Chattopadhyaya come true? At a moment of crisis in his personal life he joined the Ashram of Yoga which had sprung up in Pondicherry round Sri Aurobindo. Two years he lived there — two glorious years in which he did the poetic work of two lifetimes, so abundant and so uniformly excellent were the poems of various kind he rattled off at breakneck speed on his typewriter. But this phenomenon came to a sudden halt when something in the man proved too rigid for the transforming pressure Sri Aurobindo was putting on all his disciples. Something refused to change and Chattopadhyaya, instead of humbly withdrawing from the “brave, new world” emerging in the Ashram, rose in revolt, flung away the luminous power that was lifting his poetic genius to its climax and plunged back into the mêlée of common life. He could have kept sweet his inner contact with the Master, even though the outer association had been split. Then the result of his departure would not have been a stop in genuine inspiration. The old mystical beauty of his work no less than the new light that had suffused it vanished. Its place was taken by a communistic enthusiasm, a passion of the proletariat, turning out excited propaganda in verse relieved at extremely long intervals by the true poetic flash. Various concerns of an all-too-common kind also occupied the forefront of his mind. Art has an alchemic touch that can turn to gold anything on which its fingers may fall, but all men have not the capacity to carry the philosopher’s stone wherever they go. There are trends of genius as there are trends of character, and while Chattopadhyaya the mystic could voyage through magic seas of poetry and discover golden countries, Chattopadhyaya the “comrade” and commoner could not wield the sickle to gather any rich harvest and the hammer in his hand could only drive nails into a coffin for his own dying poetic spirit. This, to the mind of any critic who has seen his work under Sri Aurobindo, is the most appalling tragedy that has overtaken the world of art in our day.

After his break-away from Yoga, he has published two books compiled from the output of his Ashram days. They scarcely represent the many-sidedness and range of his creativity. As they are the only ones somehow allowed to slip from the stranglehold he has applied to his mystical penchant, the public cannot adequately appreciate what Yoga did for him. But even these meagre volumes are packed with supreme qualities. The poems are of an intense inner life figured forth in several styles. The most prevalent is a lyric fluency simple to the point of spoken speech yet

alive with the most rich and profound suggestion. Perhaps this style is best illustrated by “Shaper Shaped”:

In days gone by I used to be
 A potter who would feel
 His fingers mould the yielding clay
 To patterns on his wheel;
 But now through wisdom lately won
 That pride has died away,
 I have ceased to be the potter
 And have learned to be the clay.

In bygone times I used to be
 A poet through whose pen
 Innumerable songs would come
 To win the hearts of men;
 But through new-got knowledge
 Which I hadn't had so long,
 I have ceased to be the poet
 And have learned to be the song.

I was a fashioner of swords
 In days that now are gone,
 Which in a hundred battlefields
 Glittered and gleamed and shone;
 But now that I am brimming with
 The silence of the Lord,
 I have ceased to be sword-maker
 And have learned to be the sword.

In other days I used to be
 A dreamer who would hurl
 On every side an insolence
 Of emerald and pearl;
 But now that I am kneeling
 At the feet of the Supreme,
 I have ceased to be the dreamer
 And have learned to be the dream.

No finer and at the same time no plainer statement of the self-dedication which animates Yoga can be offered. The new Chattopadhyaya does not sing for singing's

sake but because each song streams from the silence of the divine Spirit growing within and floats him into a yet deeper realm of the same Spirit. However, while the lyric light displayed by “Shaper Shaped” needs no interpretation, unfolding as it does its profundities like a bud opening into a flower — exquisitely natural — and calling for no effort on the reader’s part to respond to its revelation, the stuff of a poem like “The Shepherd” has a different quality and appeal. Here too is a natural felicity, a flower-like process, yet we feel at once that this flower with the mystical aroma has not risen from the outer mind sown with seeds of the inner divinity. It is a growth in another region of consciousness than “Shaper Shaped”, a region where the inward is expressed not in an outward language but in a language that has itself the turn and rhythm of inwardness. The mind feels somewhat baffled, for an order of reality is imaged, which exists beyond our mind’s usual vision of Nature. The mystical life is not presented here through earth-symbols so much as carried bodily out, as it were, from its profound plane: the symbols belong to an unknown dimension and may seem surrealistically incomprehensible in a strange luminous way instead of the murkily fitful way adopted by Surrealism in Europe. To a brooding attention, the poem loses its bright inconsequence and becomes concrete and harmonious, a masterpiece of what I have termed creative insight:

My soul is a shepherd
 Leading the sheep of hours
 Silverly across wide silences
 Strewn with singing flowers.

He is driving his lonely
 Old gray-silver sheep
 Towards the solitary fold
 Of inward-shining sleep.

They are gathered slowly
 Into the soundless fold
 Where they are long rows of silver
 Washed in hushed gold.

Read the poem three or four times, not by the eye alone but with the ear attentive to a slow subdued intoning. The rhythmic effect is as important as the vision-stimulus, for the vision is of a “subliminal” region to which we are unaccustomed and, unless the rhythm is absorbed, the living thrill, the vibrant sense of the reality brought into view will escape. There is a deep vowellation throughout, and across it runs a thin or thick sibilance: wideness and profundity are suggested, with a sweep through them into a spiritual quiet. In the second and third stanzas the predominant vowel is the

long o: it brings here a sense of entry into some large yet enclosed secrecy of inner space. Growing into a state of purity and calm “strewn” with lovely spontaneities of inspiration and concentrating all its awareness of the time-process into a movement towards the Timeless, the consciousness is pictured as passing into a condition of trance wherein the diverse aspects of the purified human nature are steeped into a divine silence, a divine illumination — “long rows of silver/Washed in hushed gold.” The sibilance of that closing phrase is remarkable. Added to the effect of washing and hushing, there is subtly indicated the increase or change from the soul’s silver to God’s gold by the deepening of the thin *s*-note into the thick sound of *sh*.

It is difficult to align this poem with any particular trend in English verse. The general stuff of atmosphere and rhythm has affinities with stray passages in Blake, but Blake has a more nocturnal touch, so to speak — he gives us mystery rather than revelation. Yeats’s twilight, with its fairy and mythic hues, is also close to the tone here, but a more genuinely spiritual light is present in “The Shepherd”, an Indian rather than an Irish trance. The impression is as of something Yeatsian crossed with AE — not the magical occult but the mystical occult. Chattopadhyaya has struck a vein of far-reaching originality, with novel possibilities of poetic expression.

A poem equally out of the way on the whole, though not equally consistent in plane of inspiration with regard to the parts, is the sonnet entitled “Mask”. This sonnet is not exactly typical of Chattopadhyaya who writes as a rule from the plane of vivid thought: no doubt, mystical vision and spiritual experience grip that plane, yet they assume the form and rhythm of the thinking mind. No bit of poetic excellence is thereby lost: only, the turn of language and the cumulative sound-suggestion are not such as would be found if he wrote directly from planes of consciousness above the mind — the planes that break upon us in the ancient Upanishads. The highest Upanishadic range is well-nigh impossible to catch except in a few isolated moments: no published work of Chattopadhyaya’s shows it. The middle ranges are not beyond a spiritual poet’s reach: it is their presence in “Mask” that makes it stand out from Chattopadhyaya’s usual style. The usual style, when austere and not lavish, speaks thus of a spiritual realisation:

. . . the naked everlastingness
Which nor by pleasure nor by pain is stirred,
Being a hush that bears no human word
Nor deed nor dream nor passion as a burden,
Since it exists unto itself, a truth
That ages not but, gifted with a youth
Won from the lonely Light of God as guerdon,
Its path is pure and smooth.

The substance is drawn from above the mind: the language and rhythm instead of

leaping out straight from there are transposed to a mental key. It is high poetic utterance with the accent of a Sophoclean chorus without the precise choric measure. But the style is of the spiritualised mind: another style is possible, not more poetically perfect yet more spiritually vibrant. The peculiar excellence of that rare style can be gauged if we set the sonnet “Mask” side by side with the quotation just made and if we compare in its own octave or sestet the lines that are spiritualised mind to those that are sheer spirituality:

Beyond your many-coloured moods I bear
 The flowering white monotony of foam,
 The diamond dimness of the domèd air
 And the deep Mood which silence makes its home.
 In me, the Timeless, time forgets to roam,
 Drunk with my poise, grown sudden unaware,
 Offering up its noontide and its gloam,
 Withdrawn in a lost attitude of prayer.

I have grown illimitably alien
 To the brief gaudiness of time and space,
 A thing immortal beyond mortal ken,
 Evasive essence that you cannot trace.
 Here, even here, amidst a crowd of men
 I hide the light behind a human face.

The inner state depicted is not altogether the same as that in the preceding quotation or even in “The Shepherd”. Still, it has affinities with them which render a comparison fruitful. The inwardness suggested by

Being a hush that bears no human word
 Nor deed nor dream nor passion as a burden

carries a rhythm and motion of wings different from

Offering up its noontide and its gloam,
 Withdrawn in a lost attitude of prayer.

Though the former has a revelatory force of its own, I should say there is more subtle illumination in the latter, more intuitive breadth, more rapt closeness to the spiritual reality, even as there is more of these things in that picture of a high heavenly mood of night-coloured mystery —

The diamond dimness of the domèd air
than in the picture of spiritual agelessness gifted with
a youth
Won from the lonely Light of God as guerdon.

The same more and less of sheer spirituality is perceived if the close of the sonnet —

Here, even here, amidst a crowd of men
I hide the light behind a human face

is weighed against the two lines immediately before it:

A thing immortal beyond mortal ken,
Evasive essence that you cannot trace.

It is not merely the presence of images or of visual terms that constitutes the *differentia*. We can have a penetrating mystical figure, as in another poem —

Then life begins to know itself at last
As an immortal moving pyramid
Conscious of the arcane within it hid,
A pyramid of glow which does not cast
The shadow that it did —

and feel none the less that a quality of spirit-stuff — at once ample and intense, far-sounding and close-throbbing in the rhythm as well as in the word and the vision — draws a dividing line between the two kinds of mystical exaltation.

Between “The Shepherd” and “Mask” the dividing line is thinner in some respects. Even the products of the spiritualised mind have no absolute gulf separating them from those of sheer spirituality. Influences from the latter steal across, influences of amplitude and height. What, on the other hand, is common to “Mask” and “The Shepherd” is direct intensity and light. The feeling and seeing in both are spiritually intimate, the vision is so worded and rhythmised that it invades us with a tangible concreteness of the Unknown. But the Unknown has many domains, and there is missing in “The Shepherd” the wind of an eagle’s passage through unbounded space. Its style is a dip shiningly inward, whereas that of the intuitive parts of “Mask” is a kindled soar upward in broad circles from an inward starting-point.

As pure poetry, however, all styles can sit on equal thrones. And Chattopadhyaya's work is full of throned inspiration. It would be a shame if he suppressed

for good the immense bulk of verse to which his two years of Yoga gave birth. His later life having been out of tune with mysticism, he might not have cared for so masterful an expression of spiritual truths. But what has art to do with the man's phases? Each phase can be, for art, of paramount value; art is any substance caught up in an insightful perfection of form; if Chattopadhyaya was still an artist at heart, no matter with what communistic or hedonistic bent blocking his outlet, he should not have muffled a voice from his past that had rung so beautifully true. Nor should he have let himself be cowed by the superficial tendency of the public to declaim against an artistic creation if it did not reflect the man as he might be at the moment. Few artists are on a par with the height and depth of consciousness opening up before us in their works. It would be crass folly for anyone to charge a spiritual poem with being pretentious, should the poet not be a practising saint twenty-four hours of the day. A good poem stands by itself: if it has inspiration it fulfils itself and is perfectly sincere. A poem's sincerity or truth lies in the verse being a faithful transcription of something fine in the heights and depths of our consciousness, regions that are mostly far away and hidden from our normal state — the sincerity or truth does not consist in whether the poetic revelation agrees altogether with the poet's day-to-day outer life or even with the actual experience with which the poem began. That is the first thing to understand about art. If Chattopadhyaya has written spiritual poetry of a truthful order in the artistic sense, why should he be debarred from publishing it? What can be pretentious about such a publication? If people want to measure one's outer life entirely by one's poetry, they are going the wrong way about a most delicate business. It is their fault and not the poet's or his poetry's. Great poetry does not pose: the simple reason is that it is truly inspired. In art, mere intellectual ingenuity, mere rhetoric, mere artifice of word and rhythm are the only poses. So true is this that if a man leading a non-spiritual life were in a spell of inspiration to dash off "Shaper Shaped", "The Shepherd" and "Mask" they would nowise stand condemned as hypocritical. It is not in the least beyond possibility that such a phenomenon should take place. As Whitman said, each of us contains multitudes, and a personality at once poetic and mystical can very well appear in brief flashes among the jostling crowd within us of egotist and altruist, fool and philosopher, solitary and society-hunter. The man and the artist do not always coincide: art is often if not ever an outrush of hidden splendours of the subliminal and the supraliminal through one side of the man that is afire with a sense of beauty and quick with creative genius. Provided this particular side serves as a transparent medium, a work of art can be held as authentic, with no stain of pose upon it.

Only from one point of view the publication of the gigantic wealth Chattopadhyaya gathered during his Yogic years would cause a mood of bitterness. Knowing the wonders he created and dreaming of the miracles such genius would foreshadow, we should be bound to make a wry face. A man whose genius has at its roots the mystical aspiration ruins himself by shedding the mystic in him. Perhaps he cannot

really shed that side, but he can keep it choked and rob year after year of the most golden fruition. Despite all weakness and obstacle he should treasure and cherish the mystical spark until the day when it can burst into a myriad tongues of flame. The more he does that treasuring and cherishing, the greater will be his fulfilment. And what a superb fulfilment Chattopadhyaya could have had! The sorriest thing that can be spoken about him is such an exclamation. That is the epitaph of damning praise his admirers dread they would utter if they saw the mystic's magnificence which the "comrade" and commoner have kept unpublished.

One judgment, however, can be boldly pronounced. No matter how short he has fallen of the empyrean accessible to him, the complete publishing of the poetry born in his two years of Yoga will prove Harindranath Chattopadhyaya the writer of the largest number of first-rate poems of brief length the world has been enriched with by one single man.

(Concluded)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

(Reprinted from *Inspiration and Effort — Studies in Literary Attitude and Expression*,
1995, pp. 180-90)

... the whole style and rhythm of poetry are the expression and movement which come from us out of a certain spiritual excitement caused by a vision in the soul of which it is eager to deliver itself. The vision may be of anything in Nature or God or man or the life of creatures or the life of things; it may be a vision of force and action, or of sensible beauty, or of truth of thought, or of emotion and pleasure and pain, of this life or the life beyond.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 17)

SAHANA'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO — IX

(Continued from the issue of May 2023)

III. Sri Aurobindo's Letters

The rejection of desire is essentially its rejection from the consciousness itself as a foreign element not belonging to the true self and the inner nature. But refusal to indulge the suggestions of desire can also be part of the rejection and it must be part of the yogic discipline. It is only when it is done in the wrong way, by an ascetic principle as a hard moral rule, that it can be called suppression.

When one lives in the true consciousness one feels the desires outside oneself, entering from outside, from the universal lower Prakriti, into the mind and vital parts. In the ordinary human condition this is not felt; men become aware of the desire only when it is there, when it has come inside and so they think it as their own and a part of themselves. The first condition for getting rid of desire is, therefore, to become conscious with the true consciousness, for then it becomes much easier to dismiss, than when one has to struggle with it as if it were part of oneself to be thrown out from the being.

When the psychic being is in the front, then also to get rid of desire becomes easy; for the psychic being has in itself no desires, it has only aspiration and love for the Divine. The constant prominence of the psychic being tends of itself to bring out the true consciousness. This is what is happening in you; so you need not be over-anxious about the desires, only careful that they do not get in and bring a vital mixture. (21.3.31)

*

The division of the being of which you speak is a necessary stage in the yogic development and experience. One feels that there is a twofold being, the inner psychic which is the true one and the other the outer human being which is instrumental for the outer life. To live in the inner psychic being in union with the Divine while the outer does the outward work, as you feel, is the first stage in "Karma Yoga". There is nothing wrong in these experiences; they are indispensable and normal at this stage.

If you feel no bridge between the two, it is probably because you are not yet conscious of what connects the two. There is an inner mental, an inner vital, an inner physical which connect the psychic and the external being. About this, however, you need not be anxious at present.

The important thing is to keep what you have and let it grow, to live always in the psychic being, your true being. The psychic will then in due time awake and turn to the Divine all the rest of the nature, so that even the outer being will feel itself in touch with the Divine and moved by the Divine in all it is and feels and does. (9.4.31)

*

You write “যতদিন না আমার¹ psychic being জাগে²” But your psychic being is already awakened, if it were not, you would not have these experiences. The inner being which you feel in union with the Mother is the psychic being. As you probably have not quite understood what I wrote to you, it might be better if you show Nolini my letter and ask him to explain to you the difference between the three layers (স্তর) of the being about which I have spoken in the letter —

(1) The inmost psychic being which is now awakened in you.

(2) The external being which you feel doing work while the inner (psychic) is in union with the Mother.

(3) The inner mental, vital and physical consciousness which connects the two, but of which you are not as yet conscious. (9.4.31)

*

It is all to the good if you are not disturbed by the recurrence of the pain; not to be disturbed, to remain quiet and confident is the right attitude, but it is necessary also to receive the help of the Mother and not to shrink back for any reason from her solicitude. One ought not to indulge ideas of incapacity, inability to respond, dwelling too much on defects and failures and allowing the mind to be in pain and shame on their account; for these ideas and feelings become in the end weakening things. If there are difficulties, stumblings or failures, one has to look at them quietly and call in tranquilly and persistently the divine help for their removal, but not to allow oneself to be upset or pained or discouraged. Yoga is not an easy path and the total change of the nature cannot be done in a day. It is necessary for us to know precisely the state of your health so as to give you precise and constant help, that is the reason why the Mother has to put you the question from time to time. (27.5.31)

*

There is no reason why you should not practise singing, if you feel that you can make it part of your yoga.

1. until my

2. awakes

It is not possible for the Mother to give you the five minutes a day you ask for, her time is already too much taken. There are many others who have asked the same thing, the Mother has had to refuse them all. You are mistaken if you think that any such arrangement is necessary for your sadhana and daily meditation of the kind would help you if you kept always the right attitude; but if you keep the right attitude, you will not need any such routine of outward means, the help the Mother is always giving you would be more than sufficient.

I think it needful at this stage of your sadhana to repeat my previous warning about not allowing any vital mixture. It is the crudity of the unregenerated vital that prevents the psychic from remaining always in the front. You have now seen clearly the two different consciousnesses, — according to what you have written in one of your letters, — the psychic and the vital. To get rid of the old vital nature is now one of the most pressing needs of your sadhana. You are trying to get rid of the vital attachments and to turn entirely to the Mother. At this juncture you must be careful not to allow the movements of the old vital nature to enter into your relations with the Mother. Take this matter of your wish for more physical nearness to her or contact with her. Take care not to allow this to gain on you or become a desire; for if you do, the vital will begin to play, to create demands and desires, to awake in you jealousy and envy of others and other undesirable movements and that would push your psychic being into the background and spoil the whole truth of your sadhana. There are some who have suffered much trouble and difficulty in their yoga by making this mistake, and I think it therefore better to put you on your guard. (13.7.31)

*

I do not know why you doubt your experiences — you should accept them as genuine unless we expressly say anything to the contrary. In all the experiences you have sent to me up to now I have never found any that were not perfectly genuine; moreover, your observation of them is quite sound and accurate.

Your first experience was that of the opening of the psychic; you became aware of the psychic being and its aspirations and experiences and of the external being in front, as two separate parts of your consciousness. You were not able to keep this experience because the vital was not purified and pulled you out into the ordinary external consciousness. Afterwards, you got back into the psychic and were at the same time able to see your ordinary vital nature, to become aware of its defects and to work by the power of the psychic for its purification. I wrote to you at the beginning that this was the right way; for if the psychic is awake and in the front, it becomes easy to remain conscious of the things that have to be changed in the external nature and it is comparatively easy too to change them. But if the psychic gets veiled and retires into the background, the outer nature left to itself finds it difficult to remain conscious of its own wrong movements and even with great effort cannot succeed

in getting rid of them. You can see yourself, as in the matter of food, that with the psychic active and awake the right attitude comes naturally and whatever difficulty there was soon diminishes or even disappears.

I told you also at that time that there was the third part of the nature, the inner being (inner mind, inner vital, inner physical) of which you were not yet aware, but which must also open in time. It is this that has happened in your last experience. What you felt as a part of you, yourself but not your physical self, rising to meet the higher consciousness above, was this inner being; it was your (inner) higher vital being which rose in that way to join the highest self above — and it was able to do so because the work of purifying the outer vital nature had begun in earnest. Each time there is a purification of the outer nature, it becomes more possible for the inner being to reveal itself, to become free and to open to the higher consciousness above.

When this happens, several other things can happen at the same time. First, one becomes aware of the silent Self above — free, wide, without limits, pure, untroubled by the mental, vital and physical movements, empty of ego and limited personality — this is what you have described in your letter. Secondly, the Divine Power descends through this silence and freedom of the self and begins to work in the Adhar. This is what you felt as a pressure; its coming through the top of the head, the forehead and eyes and nose meant that it was working to open the mental centres — especially the two higher centres of thought and will and vision in the inner mental being. These two centres are called the thousand petalled lotus and the ajnachakra between the eyebrows — you can ask Nolini to explain to you about them. Thirdly, by this working inner parts of the being are opened and freed; you are liberated from the limitations of the ordinary personal mind, vital, and physical and become aware of a wider consciousness in which you can be more capable of the needed transformation. But that is necessarily a matter of time and long working and you are only taking the first steps on this way.

When one goes into the inner being, the tendency is to go entirely inside and lose consciousness of the outside world — this is what people call Samadhi. But it is also necessary to be able to have the same experience (of the Self, the workings in the inner consciousness, etc.) in the waking state. The best rule for you will be to allow the entire going inside only when you are alone and not likely to be disturbed, and at other times to accustom yourself to have these experiences with the physical consciousness awake and participating in them or at least aware of them. You did therefore quite right in stopping the complete going inside while you were at M's place. There was no harm in having these experiences there or anywhere, but there should be nothing to draw the attention of others — especially of those who are not in the yoga or in the atmosphere. (5.8.31)

*

The Witness of whom you have become aware is not the psychic but the *inner mental being* which has come to the front as the psychic came before. It is this mental being in you which watches, observes and passes judgement on all that happens in you. The psychic does not watch and observe in this way like a witness, but it feels and knows spontaneously by the very purity of its own nature and the divine instinct within it, and so, whenever it comes to the front it reveals at once what are the right and what the wrong movements. It is evident that the psychic is still active in you, not prominently in front, but shedding its native light on the mental; otherwise the mental being would not be so sure in its observation and judgement but might make mistakes and be misled by the outer vital or clouded by the physical nature.

I have already told you that while the psychic is the inmost part of the being, there is also standing between it and the external surface nature a triple inner being, the inner mental, the inner vital, the inner (subtle) physical, and that these too had in their turn to come to the front. This is what is now beginning to happen in you.

The being of man is composed of these elements, the psychic behind supporting all, the inner mental, vital and physical, and the outer external nature of mind, life and body which is their instrument of expression. But above all is the central being (Jivatman) which uses them all for its manifestation, it is a portion of the divine Self and is hidden from the external man who replaces it by the mental and vital ego. It is only those who have begun to know themselves that become aware of their true central being; but it is there standing behind the action of mind, life and body and is most directly represented by the psychic which is itself a spark of the Divine. It is by the growth of the psychic element in one's nature that one begins to come into conscious touch with one's own central being. When that happens and the central being uses a conscious will to control and organise the movements of the nature it is then that one has a real, a spiritual self-mastery. But in the meanwhile it can and often does use the inner mental being for the purpose. This is what is happening in you just now and that is why you feel the conscious will coming forward to obey and execute the instructions of the witness. It is the beginning of self-mastery, but, naturally, it cannot be at once complete; you have to go on until all in you opens and you become completely conscious of yourself, and are entirely in all your being the child and instrument of the Divine Mother. (21.9.31)

(To be continued)

SAHANA

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

THE FEAST OF YOUTH

[Sri Aurobindo's review of Harindranath Chattopadhyay's The Feast of Youth was featured in the April issue of this journal.]

A few of the poems mentioned by Sri Aurobindo were featured in the previous issue. Here are some more of them.]

CHANGED

I have strangled my yearnings and buried them deep
In the flowering sod!
In the silence of darkness I made a bold leap
In the river of God!

I have scorned all the joys and the pleasures of earth.
And its colour and song . . .
And forgot even the mother that shaped me to birth
And built me so strong.

I have put out the lamp of my love and desire,
For their light is not real . . .
In the dark, I descry a miraculous fire
Of my laughing Ideal!

I have left my great burdens of sorrow behind
In the flowering sod . . .
In immutable silence I carve a new mind
In the Beauty of God!

*

SONG TO MEMORY

O Burning Daughter of the ashen hours!
Veiled in a rainbow veil
Of many-coloured joys and agonies!
Thro' the rich heart of flowers
To-day, I send thee an imploring wail,

And a pale message thro' my dreaming eyes . . .
 I see thy beauty floating in the skies
 In vast assurance of a higher birth
 Of them that lived and died upon the earth . . .
 Thou playest on the heart-strings. of my lyre
 A song of ancient fire,
 Making my dead heart live into desire . . .
 O! flying Goddess shod with radiant flame,
 I catch thee in thy glowing flight
 To hear thee: speak thy music-pointed name,
 Piercing my endless darkness into light . . .

Thy touch is beautiful and strong and free,
 O Living Memory!
 It thrills my flesh into a flaming god,
 That laughs in swift, ecstatic flight,
 Mocking the gain of time,
 And waking the death-smitten from the sod!
 O Memory! I catch thee and enfold
 Thy beauty like a blazing dream of gold,
 Plucking renascent glory from the Old . . .

To-day my being breaks in ringing rain,
 The clouds are filled with yearning and with pain,
 And I invoke thy aid,
 O! Blossom like a shade-enfolding tree,
 Unfaded Memory!
 That I might murmur in thy ample shade
 And feed thee with fire-mingled tears like rain,
 Till leaves upon thy branches be unlaid . . .
 My heart cries out to thee,
 O Dancing Memory!
 Thou dancest thro' all time
 In dazzling ecstasy . . .
 Thy feathers, moon-sublime,
 Spread grand and perfect as a Poet's rhyme!
 O Peacock mine! commence
 Thy crystal dance before my showering eyes . . .

(My tears are more intense
 Than God's, who weepeth in the clouded skies)

O Dance before mine eyes, my peacock, dance!
 And through thy moon-eyes fling a sudden glance
 Into my sleeping heart,
 Like a fine tinted dart,
 And wake me from my fragile mortal trance!

O Memory! engirt with deathless power,
 Thy beauty and thy laughter
 Change from passing hour to hour
 Like an undreamt chameleon-flower . . .
 I run thee after
 As if thou wert my troubled bride
 Evading me and flying at thy will,
 Maiden Invincible!

O come to me this day, my silver-eyed . . .
 O be thou still
 My only joy and love and pride . . .
 Come! Long-necked Camel from the dreary plain
 Of ever-burning Pain . . .
 And let us journey thro' the long-dead hours
 Until we reach at last
 The memoried gardens of the glimmering past . . .
 The music of thy tread
 Will wake my lovely dead,
 Bursting the brazen bosom of the earth,
 And cry: "There is no death without a birth,
 No birth without the passing of a breath
 Thro' the dim gates of death . . ."
 O Memory! Forgive my foolish cry,
 Thou hauntest earth and sky,
 And weavest with thy magic wondrous grand,
 Strange fascination in the heart of things,
 My old, dead sufferings
 By thy most scented breath-winds fanned,
 Flower anew into red wine-fraught bloom,
 And like a thirsty bee, thy sweetness stings
 My flesh till I cry,
 And spread athwart the tranquil sky
 The murmured rumour of my own perfume!

*

SONNET

Love! I have known you for one little hour
 And claimed you mine for ever . . . You have wrought
 My life into a white, continuous thought
 Of you, and left me breaking . . . into flower.
 Your fragrant breath was prophet to the shower
 Within my heart. Beloved! I have bought
 Your love with painful silences, and caught
 Your echo in my soul's resounding tower.

Only our mortal lives are lived apart . . .
 We are together through the lonely years
 Invisible lip to lip and heart to heart . . .
 You laugh my laughter, and I weep your tears.
 We move to meet each other on our ways
 O Love! down burning nights and burning days.

*

SONNET

You move among the crowd on flowering ways . . .
 I stand alone in shadows full of fear.
 I dare not call your name lest they should hear
 And know the secret of our nights and days.
 They offer you their flowers and songs and praise
 Day after day, beloved, year after year.
 I wait among the shadows, with a tear
 A-tremble in these eyes I dare not raise.

But this I know that though I stand apart
 You are not far from me, my very own!
 In separateness you move among the crowd . . .
 Their offerings, can never touch your heart,
 For O! mine own beloved! you have known
 My offering of a tear, and felt so proud!

*

SONNET

We shall not meet in fear, nor love and part.
 Our love would perish and our dreams grow poor. . . .
 Life would turn bitter to the very core,
 O Love! my heart would soon forget your heart.
 We shall not meet in fear, nor love and part.
 I fain would love you more and more and more
 Until my soul knock whitely at your door
 To claim your soul that wept so long apart.

Over the earth's dead margin we shall rise
 On great white wings towards our shining goal. . . .
 We shall not yearn to see through earthly eyes,
 But love like lightning flying from pole to pole
 Will light our lives, till all the earth and skies
 Ring with clear marriage-bells of soul to soul.

*

DAWN

Through the unfathomable depths of dark
 Dawn drops to earth, a lightly-blossomed rose.
 The pale sky lit with day's prophetic spark
 Laughs inwardly, and glows.

The shadowy hills begin to chant aloud
 In audible crimson to the listening ray.
 God writes a purple message on the cloud,
 "Another golden day!"

The fire of Beauty thrills my dreamy sense . . .
 Frail lips of Light all secretly I kiss.
 My heart-bud blossoms, blossoms in intense,
 Ecstatic pain of bliss!

*

SUNRISE

The warm sun rises over the eastern rim,
I feel his rising glory in my frame . . .
He thrills my blood with warmth . . . I blow in him
A breath of inward flame.

He burns in my flesh . . . I turn a part of his fire . . .
He follows still his ancient-beaten track!
I mount him like a horse, and higher and higher
Soar on his ardent back.

The warm sun rises over the eastern rim,
And journeys towards the shadows of the west.
I tread the burning, burning path with him,
Towards the hour of rest.

*

NOON

The noon, a mystic dog with paws of fire,
Runs through the sky in ecstasy of drouth,
Licking the earth with tongue of golden flame
Set in a burning mouth.

It floods the forests with loud barks of light,
And chases its own shadows on the plains . . .
Its Master silently hath set it free
Awhile from silver chains.

At last, towards the cinctured end of day,
It drinks cool draughts from sunset-mellow rills . . .
Then, chained to twilight by its Master's hand,
It sleeps among the hills.

*

DUSK

The bird of daylight folds her yellow wings
 Behind the violet-shadowed hills afar . . .
 From heights of peace some secret poet flings
 On dusky streams, the poem of a star.

The sky, the silence and the dusk are mine,
 For they are Thine, and Thou art mine, in love.
 Ah God! my heart is turning crystalline
 Seeing Thee play at crystal stars above!

Deep in my soul, the voice of Beauty lulls
 My white-flame heart and earth-enchanted eyes.
 Through the dim-purpled dusk my listening pulse
 Throbs to the music of the dreaming skies.

*

NIGHT

God plays upon the heart-strings of the dark
 To lull the cry of birds and flowers and streams.
 His magic fingers weave each starry spark
 Into my sapphire dreams.

Out of the depths of night, a vision starts,
 Haunting my anguish with a touch of flame . . .
 Like a rich flower unfolds the Heart of Hearts
 The petals of my name.

The stars are white because His thoughts are white,
 And are, like them, in deeps of darkness born.
 O God! I seek the message of the night
 And find the gold of morn!

HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAY

(The Feast of Youth, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India, 1918)

ON SRI AUROBINDO¹

Only rarely do we South Americans come in contact with remote literature. It is perhaps one of the paradoxes of the world that semi-Asiatic people such as we are should harbour such fabulous ignorance about the Indo-European and Oriental portions of the globe and fail to recognise our Mongolian and Polynesian strains, while at the same time feeling a kinship to this or that part of Europe.

Because of this anomalous situation the vast culture of Asia has reached our shores only in the form of three guests: the works of Tagore, one book of Gandhi, and a few emasculated fragments of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Even the rare Oriental book which does arrive, usually in a twice-removed translation, labours under several severe handicaps in trying to reach our people; these religious texts are abstruse and our ordinary reader is an easy-going fellow who much prefers uncomplicated literature which he can race through with little effort. The Oriental texts on the contrary are veritable mountains, not easily scaled and their steep sides offer little rest to the weary climber; they require in fact heroic efforts from the reader, like those which must be made by one who aspires to plumb the depth of the sea or scale our high Andes, which present obstacles second only to the Himalayas.

Thus the discovery of Sri Aurobindo came to me late and in a mutilated form. On the shop-counter of a French book-stall I unexpectedly came across a copy of *The Mother* and found myself in contact with one of those pieces which are so intense and beautiful that they captivate at once even though they are mere fragments of something far greater. I sought for more by the unknown author and I was told of *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Unfortunately I did not find then his central work *The Life Divine* and I have remained until today thirsting for it. (I remember smiling at a photograph of the Hindu sage whose features seemed to me so much like those of my South Pacific peoples: those indigenous features which recur everywhere between Peru and Mexico.) I read these books knowing almost nothing about the author: his strange Indo-European background, his high rank in Oriental literature and his wide influence on Indian political life.

To give an opinion on a writer read in double translation is a painful ordeal. Honesty and diffidence would normally require one to abstain from comment under such circumstances and therefore I write this appraisal with shy misgiving. I can only hope to offer my South America, my beloved Chile, some glimmering participation in this great day of jubilation. For the man who is now retired in his Ashram belongs to that order of human beings who are universal because of the breadth of their

1. The author of this article is a Chilean poet and winner of the Nobel Prize.

message and who, like gushing fountains, bring refreshment and solace to the human race.

It is probable that if the extinct League of Nations and the United Nations of today had in their midst more true apostles and fewer tricky politicians, their debates would be attended with more Divine Grace for the good of humanity. Even in Greek mythology Mercury — Commerce — followed rather than preceded Apollo, the enchanter of man. We must eliminate from the Conclave of Nations all this name-calling and speech-making entirely empty of any sincere desire for Spiritual Unity. The word “world-wide” recurs in these debates only because our delegates are descendants of men of a high spiritual order. On the other hand, this term has never lost its true meaning in that Asia scorned by Europe which has become the victim of a great amnesia. To have forgotten one’s mother is perhaps the greatest amnesia and the Orient is the mother of Europe in every sense, for it is to the Orient that European culture owes its birth and sustenance. If the word “unity” is repeated by a faithful Asia day after day, it is simply because it is the first letter in their moral alphabet. It is repeated in the morning prayers and in the evening hymns of the faithful. The devotees of Asia have always striven to encompass in their faith the entire human race. Nothing is cut off or excluded by frightening chasms. There is no attempt to evaluate nations by economic standards. The same cannot be said of our own preachers whose sphere is usually bounded by their own coastlines or by the white-washed marker-stones of frontiers whose origin is political and therefore false. No learned man today need remain in absolute ignorance of the two religions which encompass millions of Asiatics. A sincere attempt to approach Buddhism — to mention only one of the more profound Oriental creeds — would free us from the error of making infantile mockery of a great religion, which was surely the forerunner of Christianity and the prologue to the “Great Event”. This sea of prose of Sri Aurobindo turns out to be a Mediterranean smooth and buoyant like that which bore the galleons of old.

Six foreign languages have given the Master of Pondicherry a gift of ordination, a clarity free from gaudiness, and a charm which borders on the magical. These are three attributes which are rarely found together in the exegete, even less in the seer. Some fall into the sin of obscurity, others suffer from a doctrinarian fever, a grave thing which leads us astray, seizing us in the grip of religious controversies. Moreover, apostles and exegetes usually lack the beauty of expression though the substance they seek to expound may come from the world of the Divine and be more precious than gold or rare spices.

Mysticism has been declared by many as a dangerous zone. It is said to be fallow and even disreputable. In the two branches of Christianity, Catholic and Protestant, it is viewed with suspicion as a malarial marsh covered with unhealthy mists. In spite of the glorious names of our saints and devotees, from St. John the Evangelist to Ruysbroek and Spain’s contingent of enlightened souls, the majority of ordinary

Christians as well as the spiritual *petite bourgeoisie* of the Christian hierarchy still seem altogether afraid to approach the great zone of fire.

Sri Aurobindo, the Master, highest of mystics, happily presents the rare phenomenon of an exposition clear as a beautiful diamond, without the danger of confounding the layman. This is possible only because Sri Aurobindo is a unique synthesis of a scholar, a theologian and one who is enlightened.

These are indeed “glad tidings” that come to us: to know that there is a place in the world where culture has reached its tone of dignity by uniting in one man a supernatural life with a consummate literary style, thus making use of his beautifully austere and classical prose to serve as the handmaid of the Spirit. One finds here texts which do not belabour with the anxious stutterings so common to saintly souls whose poor expression often dissuades even the most zealous readers. We have before us a prose which approximates to that of the great Eckhart, German classicist and fountain-head of European mysticism.

This treatise is a gift which reaches us at a time when we are besieged by a stormy materialism, in which we have been living since the surge of French and English rationalism destroyed the tenets of Universal Christianity. I should like to know if the ordination which gives an inner discipline of the spiritual type and the perfect agreement between a spiritual doctrine and a way of life are always necessarily reflective in human writing of the highest order. The extraordinary case of Sri Aurobindo the writer surely seems to give great validity to such a theory.

Another absorbing fact which provokes our unworthy comment: the honeyed superabundances of rhyme and rhythm are often damaging to the poet who also writes prose, because his fantasy nearly always obstructs or submerges the necessary realism which people demand from the prose writer.

This was rather the case with Tagore. In him we had, above all, a poet, and when he was obliged to lecture to his devoted people the constrained prose-writer often permitted the spirit of poetry to overcome and fling to the ground the rationality of its half-sister prose.

In reading Sri Aurobindo, one notes that in his religious teaching he only allows a few glimmers of the great frenzy which is poetry to enter into his text and co-operate in the didactic literature without interfering with or detracting from it.

Magnificent grace for a people is a child who brings such a wealth of endowments into the world, and who has pressed all of them into the service of his race. The gift of Civil Leadership, the gift of Spiritual Guidance, the gift of Beautiful Expression: this is the trinity, the three lances of light with which Sri Aurobindo has reached the great number of Indians, that is to say, the masses of his countrymen.

That which we celebrate today is 77 years of his terrestrial journey and divine experience, 77 years of the most curious politic, the “Politic of God” as St. Augustine might have called it, the most pungent politic of our human epoch.

May Sri Aurobindo live on through the hour of darkness through which we are

now passing, in which the signs are stormy and our way seems already lost, because the rudder dances about in the hands of the nations' leaders.

The man whose people, with garlands in their hands, go to seek guidance in his Ashram today, comes out once more to see the faces of his children, the congregation of his faithful.

May the one and only God, the divine Trinity worshipped in diverse modes by Christians and non-Christians alike, augment in the man of sanctity and gracious action his grace, his life, his illumination and his years.

August 1949

GABRIELA MISTRAL

(Reprinted from the August 1974 issue of *Mother India*.

Translated from Spanish by Norman Dowsett.)

When we withdraw our gaze from its egoistic preoccupation with limited and fleeting interests and look upon the world with dispassionate and curious eyes that search only for the Truth, our first result is the perception of a boundless energy of infinite existence, infinite movement, infinite activity pouring itself out in limitless Space, in eternal Time, an existence that surpasses infinitely our ego or any ego or any collectivity of egos, in whose balance the grandiose products of aeons are but the dust of a moment and in whose incalculable sum numberless myriads count only as a petty swarm. We instinctively act and feel and weave our life thoughts as if this stupendous world movement were at work around us as centre and for our benefit, for our help or harm, or as if the justification of our egoistic cravings, emotions, ideas, standards were its proper business even as they are our own chief concern. When we begin to see, we perceive that it exists for itself, not for us, has its own gigantic aims, its own complex and boundless idea, its own vast desire or delight that it seeks to fulfil, its own immense and formidable standards which look down at us with an indulgent and ironic smile at the pettiness of ours. And yet let us not swing over to the other extreme and form too positive an idea of our own insignificance. That too would be an act of ignorance and the shutting of our eyes to the great facts of the universe.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 78)

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

(Part 36)

Section 3: A QUIET AND HUMBLE DISPOSITION

(Continued from the issue of May 2023)

In September 1909 *India* — a weekly edited by the Tamil poet Subramania Bharati — sent its correspondent Parthasarathi, the brother of publisher Srinivasachari, to Calcutta to interview Sri Aurobindo. An excerpt in the journal read:

When our correspondent saw the humility, the peace, the solemnity, the innocence and the light that appeared on Aravindo’s face when he answered, it was very clear to him that Aravindo is indeed a *Mahasiddha* (Person of Supreme Realisation).

ARAVINDO: “Yes, I saw Narayana. I had all my *darshans* in the waking state; they were not dreams.”

CORRESPONDENT: “Is there a way to reach the state you are speaking about?”

ARAVINDO: “Yes. Yoga is the way.” . . .¹

Six months later Sri Aurobindo arrived in Pondicherry to exclusively pursue an intense Yoga. Srinivasachari, Subramania Bharati, Shankar Chetty and Suresh Chakravorty (Moni) received him at the port. Srinivasachari and Bharati were publishing *India* from Madras but had to take political exile in Pondicherry to publish the weekly from there. They both became friendly with Sri Aurobindo and K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes that they “met Sri Aurobindo in the evenings, there would be no sense of time, for talk was free.”²

When Sri Aurobindo took political retirement in Pondicherry some of his revolutionary comrades lived with him. Georges Van Vrekhem writes: “Aurobindo had hardly known any of them before his imprisonment in Alipore Jail. Now Nolini Kanta Gupta, Bejoy Nag, Suresh Chakravarti, Saurin Bose [a cousin of Mrinalini Devi] and others sought shelter with him and solace from his presence. Practically all of them had been students before they became activists, and Aurobindo did

1. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, March 2017, pp. 68-69.

2. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 411 (fn).

everything possible to give them some education and to act as their protector and elder brother.”³

Sri Aurobindo’s relation with these young revolutionaries was more of a friend and teacher than that of a Guru. Nolini Kanta Gupta states: “we had then . . . infinite freedom, we did almost whatever we liked, went wherever it pleased us to go”.⁴ During these years there was much financial hardship. Georges Van Vrekhem writes: “They usually had but little money to spend and led their ‘camp life’ in such an improvised way that Motilal Roy, on one of his visits from Chandernagore, was scandalised by the carelessness with which they looked after Sri Aurobindo.”⁵

When the Mother first came to Pondicherry in 1914 she discovered that Sri Aurobindo was keeping money under the table cloth or under his bed. “Why do you keep money in this way?” she asked. “If money is not kept hidden the boys will take it and go to town and spend it on food and drink”, he answered. Mother then replied, “From now on I will take charge of your money.”⁶ The Mother once expounded to a disciple:

Once, Sri Aurobindo (I think it was in 1920) said to me one day, “Oh, they have put my room in order, I can’t find anything anymore!” For their part, they said he had his papers everywhere: on his bed, on the chairs, on the table, in the drawers, on the shelves; there were papers everywhere, notes and so on. But he knew exactly where everything was. Then they “put things in order,” they “tidied up” — and he couldn’t find anything anymore! It was very funny. I asked him, “Would you like me to do your room and clean it? I won’t touch anything.” — “Ah, if you don’t touch anything . . .” (*Mother laughs*) So I left the papers on the bed, on the chair, on the table, on the shelves! I cleaned a shelf, then in a book I found some money. I told him (thinking it had been forgotten), I told him, “I found . . . a hundred, two hundred rupees” (I don’t remember now) “in a book.” (One banknote was in one place, another note was in another place.) He replied, “Yes, I am forced to hide it, otherwise they take it from me!” (*Mother laughs*)

But I am no good at hiding places!

You see, I instinctively go and take the book, I open it and find the money. So I asked him, “Would you like to entrust your money to me? I will keep it for you.” He replied, “That would make things simpler.” But after a year, I had three thousand rupees of his money, coming from books, from here and there! I told him (*laughing*), “See, it has borne fruit!”⁷

3. Georges Van Vrekhem, *The Mother*, 2000, p. 124.

4. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol. 5, March 1974, p. 67.

5. Georges Van Vrekhem, *The Mother*, 2000, p. 144.

6. Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, *I Remember*, 1993, p. 131.

7. Mother’s conversation with a disciple on 22 May 1966.

About Sri Aurobindo’s early Pondicherry days, Nirodbaran in a talk said:

He came to Pondicherry from British India, with a few brave young revolutionaries, living a very precarious, a kind of bohemian life — what we would call “living dangerously”; on the one hand, the police [the police were constantly monitoring his residence], and, on the other hand, no money in their pockets. It was a kind of communistic adventure — they all had only one towel, which they used in common, and Sri Aurobindo used it last, after everybody else; and we now have three or four each! (*Laughter*) This is communism par excellence — no private property. There was hardly any distinction between Sri Aurobindo and his “disciples”. They lived like comrades — in the outer life. Sri Aurobindo refused to call himself “Guru”. There was hardly any respect given to him; they addressed him not as Sri Aurobindo, but as “*Moshai*” [Sir — in Bengali] and Sri Aurobindo treated them just like young friends. He once said, “This Guruship has been imposed on me.”

I don’t know how far the story is true. It seems, once, a visitor was shocked to see the few inmates behaving so riotously, behaving with Sri Aurobindo as if he was their pal, and this visitor tried to teach them some manners, tried to reform them. And when he objected to their behaviour, Sri Aurobindo admonished him, saying: “Leave them alone, I know how to deal with them.” This was the life they used to lead. Later, Mother tactfully managed everything, and taught the children and the other elders to respect him; she put order into the chaos. She took charge of attending to Sri Aurobindo personally; she arranged for some proper, nourishing food for him since he had become thin, fragile, ascetic-looking, and tried to give other home comforts, and finally took charge of the whole Ashram.⁸

Sri Aurobindo has noted:

Until I went to Pondicherry I took no disciples; with those who accompanied me or joined me in Pondicherry I had at first the relation of friends and companions rather than of a guru and disciples; it was on the ground of politics that I had come to know them and not on the spiritual ground. Afterwards only there was a gradual development of spiritual relations until the Mother came back from Japan and the Ashram was founded or rather founded itself in 1926.⁹

In his *Reminiscences*, Nolini Kanta Gupta writes:

8. *Talks by Nirodbaran*, edited by Ranganath R. and Sudha, 2012, pp. 284-85.

9. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 98.

For as I have already hinted, our mode of living, our life itself took a different turn with the arrival of the Mother. How and in what direction? It was like this. The Mother came and installed Sri Aurobindo on his high pedestal as Master and Lord of Yoga. We had hitherto known him as a dear friend and close companion, and although in our mind and heart he had the position of a Guru, in our outward relations we seemed to behave as if he were just like one of ourselves. He too had been averse to the use of the words “Guru” and “Ashram” in relation to himself, for there was hardly a place in his work of new creation for the old traditional associations these words conveyed. Nevertheless, the Mother taught by her manner and speech, and showed us in actual practice, what was the meaning of disciple and master; she has always practised what she preached. She showed us, by not taking her seat in front of or on the same level as Sri Aurobindo, but by sitting on the ground, what it meant to be respectful to one’s Master, what real courtesy was. Sri Aurobindo once said to us, perhaps with a tinge of regret, “I have tried to stoop as low as I can, and yet you do not reach me.”¹⁰

Nolini Kanta Gupta has expounded on the last statement:

Then one day, years after, Sri Aurobindo told us — we were at that time only four or five in number — he told us, somewhat seriously, he was seldom serious or grave with us, he had always his smile — “You have so forgotten yourselves, you do not think even of what you have come here for (because we had all left our family, even our country and all worldly considerations); to be with you, to be one of you, I have made myself very small, I have cut myself so to say to your size to walk with you, to be on the same level. Even then you cannot follow, I seem to be still too far from you. That won’t do. Now you must try to run and come up to me. I cannot make myself still smaller. I have made myself sufficiently small.”¹¹

Amrita has also mentioned a similar experience:

During the period when I had free access to the Master, I had often found him reaching down to my level and becoming one with me. . . .

Though he was like us before us, we could see and feel the shadow of our self falling off little by little, all through his grace and our being flooded with light, strength and joy. I have experienced this clearly and without doubt.¹²

10. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Reminiscences*, 1st Ed., 2015, pp. 69-70.

11. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol. 5, March 1974, pp. 67-68.

12. *Amrita*, Birth Centenary Commemoration Volume September 1995, p. 3.

About Amrita, Nirodbaran writes:

I was told that in the early period Amrita was given the exceptional privilege of washing Sri Aurobindo's hand by pouring water on it after he had finished his meal. Once when he was late, Sri Aurobindo kept on waiting. Another anecdote of the early days, recounted by Sri Aurobindo, which I have recorded elsewhere, runs like this. Amrita was suffering from an incessant hiccough, became panicky and said to Sri Aurobindo, “Sir, I am going to die!” “What does it matter if you die?” was the brutal reply and at once the hiccough stopped!¹³

“During these years,” writes A. B. Purani, “it seems, Sri Aurobindo used to lead his daily life according to some ideal. He used to carry out the dominating ideal in every detail of his life. At one time it was freedom of the individual and democracy. At this time he considered everyone else his equal and acted accordingly. Once, his foot inadvertently touched Amrita's. Sri Aurobindo sat up in the chair and said, ‘I beg your pardon.’”¹⁴

Nirodbaran states: “As you know, Sri Aurobindo never liked to be looked upon as ‘Guru’ and others to be considered as *shisyas*, neither had he any intentions of establishing an Ashram.”¹⁵ In his biography of Sri Aurobindo, Nirodbaran writes: “To the small group of young men who lived with him he was friend, comrade, teacher, chief and Guru but his own relations with those around him in the house were more of a friend and companion than of a Guru. In his behaviour with others he treated everyone as his equal including the servants.”¹⁶

Sri Aurobindo has remarked: “I had the same kind of violent objection to Gurugiri, but you see I was obliged by the irony of things or rather by the inexorable truth behind them to become a Guru and preach the Guruvada. Such is Fate.”¹⁷ The Mother too has said: “I don't want to be anybody's guru. People should simply be told that things are to be done on the basis of Sri Aurobindo's thought.”¹⁸

Sri Aurobindo has alluded to the bothers and dangers of becoming a Guru:

In “helping” one often gets part of the other's inconvenience and many Yogis refuse to take disciples because they will have to assume others' burdens as well as their own. There are also other dangers — growth of ego etc.¹⁹

Elsewhere he writes:

13. Nirodbaran, ‘Old Long Since – Some Memories of Amrita’, *Mother India*, September 1970, p. 486.

14. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2006, p. 159.

15. *Talks by Nirodbaran – December 1969 to July 1970*, edited by Sunayana and Maurice, 2018, p. 74.

16. Nirodbaran, *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, 1994, p. 162.

17. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 398.

18. Mother's conversation with a disciple on 4 March 1961.

19. *CWSA*, Vol. 31, p. 319.

This “helping others” is a perilous business — it brings the “guru” ego or else you very uncertainly rid others of their difficulties and very certainly get them yourself. “Why do you have all these disciples?” said a sage to some Maratha saint (I have forgotten the names); “to have disciples means to add all their difficulties to your own.” “Helping others” has the same disadvantage.²⁰

A. B. Purani was one who wanted to be a revolutionary but Sri Aurobindo assured him that India would gain her independence and suggested to him to devote his energies to yoga instead. Amal Kiran states that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother “were never anxious to have disciples” and then narrates an incident about Purani:

I remember my friend Purani telling me an incident of early days. Sri Aurobindo was standing at the door of his room while Purani was leaving. The disciple went down on his knees to make obeisance to Sri Aurobindo’s feet. After a few seconds he lifted his head and looked up. There was nobody standing any more. Purani told me with a laugh: “Strange Guru indeed who runs away like that!”²¹

About a darshan in 1933 Sri Aurobindo told a disciple:

There is no obligation on European visitors to make the pranam [*during darshan*] — very few have done so, none perhaps. Even from those who have stayed here, it was not asked — they were left free to abstain unless they asked for it — e.g. X, Y, Z and A. B must not get the impression that we exact it from anybody. I do not know whether a mere “look” at us will help him — it is only in some cases that that happens, and these usually when there was a previous disposition or habit of response to supraphysical Light or Power as in the case of C.²²

The Mother clarified that divine beings have no pride:

But if you take real divine beings, this is not at all something they value. They do not like to be worshipped. No, it does not give them any special pleasure at all! Don’t think they are happy, for they have no pride. It is because of pride that a man likes to be worshipped; if a man has no pride he doesn’t like to be worshipped; and if, for instance, they see a good intention or a fine feeling or a movement of unselfishness or enthusiasm, a joy, a spiritual joy, these things have for them an infinitely greater value than prayers and acts of worship and pujas . . .²³

20. *Ibid.*, p. 318.

21. Amal Kiran, *Life-Poetry-Yoga*, Vol. 2, 1995, p. 140.

22. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 522.

23. *CWM*, Vol. 6, 2nd Ed., pp. 195-96.

Overcoming pride and cultivating humility is an endeavour that lesser humans too can value. Benjamin Franklin writes in his autobiography:

My list of virtues contained at first but twelve. But a quaker friend having kindly informed me that I was generally thought proud, that my pride showed itself frequently in conversation, that I was not content with being in the right when discussing any point, but was overbearing and rather insolent — of which he convinced me by mentioning several instances — I determined endeavouring to cure myself if I could of this vice or folly among the rest, and I added *Humility* to my list, giving an extensive meaning to the word. I cannot boast of much success in acquiring the reality of this virtue, but I had a good deal with regard to the appearance of it. I made it a rule to forbear all direct contradiction to the sentiments of others and all positive assertion of my own. . . . When another asserted something that I thought an error, I denied myself the pleasure of contradicting him abruptly and of showing immediately some absurdity in his proposition . . . I soon found the advantage of this change in my manners: The conversations I engaged in went on more pleasantly; the modest way in which I proposed my opinions procured them a readier reception and less contradiction . . .

In reality there is perhaps no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as *pride*; disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive and will every now and then peep out and show itself. You will see it perhaps often in this history. For even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility.²⁴

On matters of dispute Sri Aurobindo has counselled: “There should also be no insistence that you are right and the others wrong,” and to “keep the tone of speech and the wording very quiet and calm and uninsistent.”²⁵ He told a sadhak: “. . . in your dealings with others here strive to conquer anger, self-assertion and pride, whatever may be their attitude or behaviour towards you; for so long as you keep these moods, you will find it difficult to make progress in the Yoga.”²⁶

For the yogic path, Sri Aurobindo suggests:

A certain spiritual humility, a serious un-arrogant look at oneself and quiet perception of the imperfections of one’s present nature and, instead of self-esteem and self-assertion, a sense of the necessity of exceeding one’s present self, not from egoistic ambition, but from an urge towards the Divine would

24. Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Selections From His Other Writings*, edited by Herbert Schneider, 1949, pp. 91-92.

25. *CWSA*, Vol. 31, p. 87.

26. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, pp. 634-35.

be, it seems to me, for this frail terrestrial and human composition far better conditions for proceeding towards its supramental change.²⁷

Sri Aurobindo adds: “Humility before the Divine is also a *sine qua non* of the spiritual life, and spiritual pride, arrogance, or vanity and self-assurance press always downward.”²⁸

Nolini Kanta Gupta writes how Mother taught him the significance of humility:

Now to come back to a personal experience. The first thing I heard and came to know about the Mother was that she was a great spiritual person. I did not know then that she might have other gifts; these were revealed to me gradually. First I came to know that she was a very fine painter, and afterwards that she was an equally gifted musician. But there were other surprises in store. For instance, she had an intellectual side no less richly endowed; she had read and studied enormously, had been engaged in intellectual pursuits even as the learned do. I was still more surprised to find that while in France she had already studied and translated a good number of Indian texts, like the Gita, the Upanishads, the Yoga Sutras and the Bhakti Sutras of Narada. I mention all this merely to tell you that the Mother’s capacity of making her mind a complete blank was as extraordinary as her enormous mental acquisitions. This was something unique. In the early days, when she had just taken charge of our spiritual life, she told me one day in private, perhaps seeing that I might have a pride in being an intellectual, “At one time I used to take an interest in philosophy and other intellectual pursuits. All that has now gone below the surface, but I can bring it up again at will.” So, I need not have any fears on that score! It was as if the Mother were trying to apologise for her deficiencies in scholarship. This was how she taught me the meaning of humility, what we call Divine Humility.²⁹

V. Ramaswami Iyengar, who stayed with Sri Aurobindo during the early years in Pondicherry, relates another aspect of how Sri Aurobindo treated everyone equally:

Aurobindo was informed every now and then about the activities of the revolutionary movement, from all over India, especially from Bengal and Punjab. We would all be hearing the stories; there was no secrecy. No oath of secrecy was administered to us. This is a very remarkable trait in Aurobindo’s character; he trusted our honour and sense of patriotism not to divulge such things even to our nearest and dearest.³⁰

27. *Ibid.*, Vol. 28, p. 303.

28. *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, p. 42.

29. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Reminiscences*, 1st Ed., 2015, pp. 89-90.

30. Shyam Kumari, *More Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, 2005, p. 13.

In a similar vein Charu Chandra Dutt was touched with his induction into revolutionary activity by Sri Aurobindo sometime in 1905. He narrates:

Sri Aurobindo had made it perfectly clear to me that he advocated complete independence for India and that he was not squeamish about the method to be pursued but up to a certain point of time he was content to let me work for the Bhavani Mandir scheme and the Swadeshi movement. I was, however, growing impatient and a few of my underground workers in Maharashtra were getting out of hand. At this juncture Aurobindo Babu came one day to me at Thana and took me away for the night to Bombay. His brother Barin was with him. We went to a house in Girgaum where there were no men-folk present. Soon after our arrival, when we had locked ourselves inside the parlour, the Chief turned towards me solemnly and said, “Now Charu, do you want to join us in our work? You have twice turned down our offer.” I understood that he referred to the big organisation of which I had heard before. Some of my men had joined this society recently. I made up my mind very quickly and said, “I don’t know whom you mean by us, and I don’t wish to know them. But I shall be proud to serve under you personally, if you would have me; I am yours unreservedly and unconditionally.” The exact words I have forgotten, but I spoke more or less in this strain. He accepted me without any oath or formality and I felt deeply grateful to him. At his bidding, Barin explained to me the state of things in Bengal, how the anti-partition agitation had helped towards the revolutionary movement marvellously in that province. Aurobindo Babu was categorical in his declaration that absolute freedom was his goal and the goal of the people he worked with, and this gratified me immensely as I could not possibly have agreed to the whittling down of our noble aim. There is one childish thing I still remember. When I cried out in excitement, “But you must not try for a bloodless revolution,” the Chief laughed out, “O you blood-thirsty fellow!”³¹

Ever since his early political days, Sri Aurobindo treated the younger revolutionaries as equals and several of them visited him at Pondicherry. In a letter to the editor of *Hindu* he has referred to them as “brother Nationalists”. The Maniktala Gardens’ revolutionaries who were incarcerated at the horrific Andamans Cellular Jail were fortunate, for due to a general amnesty after the First World War, they were released in 1920. About them Nolini Kanta Gupta writes: “Barin, Upen, Hrishikesh had all come back from the Andamans, although they were still hesitating as to whether they should join us here in the life of yoga or continue for some time longer their work in the outside world.”³²

31. C. C. Dutt, ‘My Contact with Certain Phases of the Independence Movement’, *Srinwantu*, August 1981, pp. 129-130.

32. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Reminiscences*, 1st Ed., 2015, p. 62.

In 1921, Upendranath Banerji came to Pondicherry to stay with Sri Aurobindo for a while. Although Upendranath revered Sri Aurobindo, political rather than spiritual matters were uppermost in his mind. He tried to impress his political views on Sri Aurobindo but Sri Aurobindo never took offence. T. Kodandarama Rao, living with Sri Aurobindo from 1921 to 1924, narrates:

Upendranath Banerji had the highest regard for the Master, but he was a rationalist and political revolutionary and an unbeliever in supernatural or superconscious phenomena. He often joked and made fun of Supermind and its descent and was sceptical about the dawn of the New Era as visioned by the Master. . . . He attended the evening sittings before the Master only to talk about politics and somehow convert Sri Aurobindo to his views and lead him into the political arena. But the Master was too astute and elusive a personality to be hoodwinked by such persons. All the same, the Master had a soft corner in his heart for everyone, and condescended to come down to our level and be compassionate to all that came into contact with him. Such was his magnanimity.³³

The same year another Andamans-returned revolutionary, Hrishikesh Kanjilal, accompanied by Nolinikanto Sarkar, visited Pondicherry. Nolinikanto Sarkar was surprised to see how freely Sri Aurobindo received Hrishikesh, as if they were friends. He also soon observed Sri Aurobindo’s liberal attitude towards his disciples. He writes: “Every afternoon tea was served at four o’clock. Sri Aurobindo then met the disciples on the first floor verandah and talked to them for some time. He sat on a chair on one side of a table and the disciples sat facing him, also on chairs. Only the Mother sat on the floor at his feet.”³⁴

Two years later, yet another Andamans-released prisoner, Abinash Bhattacharya, visited Pondicherry. Sri Aurobindo’s liberal attitude was charming when interacting with his former political attendant, who behaved with a familiarity and a touch of bluntness in his speech. Abinash narrates:

When I first saw him he told me: “Chitta has made a big mistake.”

“What has Chitta done this time?”

“Signed this pact — this pact means admitting that there are two races in India, the Hindus and Muslims. Now we will have to face the virulent consequences.”

“You are engaged in the discipline of yoga and have become a *sadhu* — why do you have to concern yourself with all this?”

“I am not doing this yoga for my personal liberation, my sadhana is for

33. T. Kondandarama Rao, *At the Feet of the Master*, 2nd Ed., pp. 23-24.

34. Nolinikanto Sarkar, ‘Between the Arrival and the Departure’, *Mother India*, November 2004, p. 1032 (translated by Aniruddha Sircar from the original Bengali, *Asa Jaoar Majhkhane*).

the good of the whole world. To lift man to a higher state of progress is my endeavour.”

“In that case you shouldn’t make any distinction between the Hindus and the Muslims.”

“That is just what I say. In India there will be no Hindus and no Muslims. All will be one — Indian.”³⁵

Motilal Roy — a revolutionary from Chandernagore who had assisted Sri Aurobindo — first came to Pondicherry in 1911 but it was difficult to meet Sri Aurobindo as he was under constant police surveillance. When they finally met, Sri Aurobindo told him, “You cannot come everyday, the police vigilance has got to be circumvented. You will have to go back to Bengal, which is exclusively your field. Today is a Tuesday; come again on Friday next.” Sri Aurobindo then characteristically added, “Twice a week, do you approve?”³⁶ Motilal Roy visited Pondicherry again in October 1913 and writes: “Finally, Sri Aurobindo came out of the room. I knelt before him to touch his feet but my clothes came in the way. He took me in both his arms . . . and asked me, “Did you arrive safely?”³⁷ During this visit Motilal Roy mentioned that there was an air of informality and everyone usually used to address Sri Aurobindo as “Auro”.³⁸

T. Kodandarama Rao also noticed Sri Aurobindo’s liberal nature:

In those days the disciples did not observe the formality of saluting the Master or making pranams to him daily at the meditation time or in the mornings when they happened to see him. They sat in their chairs before the Master and even smoked. But Sri Aurobindo never took exception to this or any other failings and treated everyone as an equal and enjoyed the company of all kinds of persons. Unfortunately, we were blissfully ignorant of the heights and depths and width of his vast spiritual consciousness which could discern everything so calmly and coolly and remain unaffected like the vast unmoving ocean.³⁹

About Sri Aurobindo’s forbearance, Nirodbaran writes:

In many of my letters, summoning an astonishing audacity I dared to differ and argue with him who was Knowledge itself on matters of which, even by purely human standards, my understanding was pathetically slight. But he suffered all

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

36. Motilal Roy, *My Life’s Partner*, p. 275 (translated from Bengali by D. S. Mahalanobis).

37. See Motilal Roy, ‘Yugapurush Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, September 2009, p. 773 (translated from Bengali by Gopa Basu).

38. *Ibid.*

39. T. Kondandarama Rao, *At the Feet of the Master*, 2nd Ed., p. 23.

my foolishness, my impertinence and never uttered a harsh word. . . .

I said before that I wrote to Sri Aurobindo on subjects ranging from the most profane to the most sublime and that he always answered with loving indulgence, never shunning any topic that was raised as being beneath his exalted regard.⁴⁰

With scores of letters — some even irreverent — everyday there were excessive demands on Sri Aurobindo’s time but he never betrayed the slightest impatience or annoyance. Nirodbaran writes:

You’ll be very much amused to hear what kind of questions some people used to ask. I’ve heard that someone asked: “When I walk, shall I put my left foot first or my right foot? When I put sugar in the milk, shall I stir it in this way or that way?” and Sri Aurobindo answered them calmly and quietly, in a serious manner.⁴¹

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother treated all their disciples equally, irrespective of wealth, education, culture or family background. T. Kodandarama Rao writes:

Sri Aurobindo’s way of judging persons was unique. He never asked a person about his parentage, antecedents, etc., in order to find out his capacity to take to yoga; his way of knowing was by identity with the person. . . . Generally people are judged by their external appearance and garb. But to enter into the soul of a person and find out his worth is a stupendous task. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother could judge persons by entering into their heart and soul for their way of knowing persons and things was by identity.⁴²

Sri Aurobindo has written:

The Mother and myself deal with all according to the law of the Divine. We receive alike rich and poor, those who are highborn or low-born according to human standards, and extend to them an equal love and protection. Their progress in Sadhana is our main concern . . .⁴³

In the *Essays on the Gita* Sri Aurobindo writes that all have right of entry to the temple of God — irrespective of the person being virtuous, an outcaste or a sinner — provided there is self-giving. Indeed the Lord has no repulsion or disgust towards anyone, high or low:

40. *Sri Aurobindo: A Garland of Tributes*, 1973, Editor: Arabinda Basu, p. 122.

41. Nirodbaran, ‘Sri Aurobindo – Perfect Gentleman’, *Mother India*, August 1970, p. 409.

42. *Breath of Grace*, Editor: Madhav Pandit, 2002, p. 47.

43. *CWSA*, Vol. 32, p. 116.

The equal Divine Presence in all of us makes no other preliminary condition, if once this integral self-giving has been made in faith and in sincerity and with a fundamental completeness. All have access to this gate, all can enter into this temple: our mundane distinctions disappear in the mansion of the All-lover. There the virtuous man is not preferred, nor the sinner shut out from the Presence; together by this road the Brahmin pure of life and exact in observance of the law and the outcaste born from a womb of sin and sorrow and rejected of men can travel and find an equal and open access to the supreme liberation and the highest dwelling in the Eternal. Man and woman find their equal right before God; for the divine Spirit is no respecter of persons or of social distinctions and restrictions: all can go straight to him without intermediary or shackling condition. “If” says the divine Teacher “even a man of very evil conduct turns to me with a sole and entire love, he must be regarded as a saint, for the settled will of endeavour in him is a right and complete will. Swiftly he becomes a soul of righteousness and obtains eternal peace.”⁴⁴

An aspect of Sri Aurobindo’s humility was that self-assertion was entirely foreign to his nature. Vivekananda’s youngest brother, Bhupendranath Dutta, who worked at *Yugantar* notes Sri Aurobindo’s non-assertive style:

He never said do this; but for any work to be done his permission was necessary. He gave permission for this and for this the extremists were his followers — he was a leader of their choice.⁴⁵

A. B. Purani explains the Master’s non-interfering demeanour:

Sri Aurobindo had never imposed himself on anyone. Do’s and don’ts were not his ways. He would at best say that a particular thing was not good for the person concerned. He would in most cases give perfect freedom to individuals to decide things for themselves. That does not mean that he refused help if needed. His method of helping people was unique and unexampled. Instead of deciding things himself he would arouse the Divine in those who sought his aid and thus help them arrive at correct decisions.⁴⁶

Nirodbaran writes that “Sri Aurobindo very, very rarely intervened in correcting others and other matters. Even when he did, he said it casually, without insisting. That is all. They could make out from the tone of it — which meant ‘positively

44. *Ibid.*, Vol. 19, p. 334.

45. See Bhupendranath Dutta, *Aurobindo Smarane*, translated from Bengali; sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

46. Narayan Prasad, *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, 2010, pp. 80-81.

no’, which was ‘neutral’, etc . . . So from the tone you had to get the shade of the meaning.”⁴⁷

Sri Aurobindo told a disciple: “I have never been in the habit of insisting that everybody must think as I do — any more than I insist on everybody following me and my yoga.”⁴⁸ The Mother has said:

If you arrive at the conception of the world as the expression of the Divine in all His complexity, then the necessity for complexity and diversity has to be recognised, and it becomes impossible for you to want to make others think and feel as you do.

Each one should have his own way of thinking, feeling and reaction; why do you want others to do as you do and be like you? And even granting that your truth is greater than theirs — though this word means nothing at all, for, from a certain point of view all truths are true; they are all partial, but they are true because they are truths but the minute you want your truth to be greater than your neighbour’s, you begin to wander away from the truth.

This habit of wanting to compel others to think as you do, has always seemed very strange to me; this is what I call “the propagandist spirit”, and it goes very far. You can go one step further and want people to do what you do, feel as you feel, and then it becomes a frightful uniformity.⁴⁹

Sri Aurobindo’s unassertiveness was also reflected in his impersonality. A. B. Purani writes:

. . . But there were occasions when he did give his independent, personal views on some problems, on events or other subjects. Even then it was never an authoritarian pronouncement. Most often it appeared to be a logically worked out and almost inevitable conclusion expressed quite impersonally though with firm and sincere conviction. This impersonality was such a prominent trait of his personality! Even in such matters as dispatching a letter or a telegram it would not be a command from him to a disciple to carry out the task. Most often during his usual passage to the dining room he would stop on the way, drop in on the company of four or five disciples and, holding out the letter or the telegram, would say in the most amiable and yet the most impersonal way: “I suppose this has to be sent.” And it would be for someone in the group instantly to volunteer and take it. The expression he very often used was “It was done” or “It happened”, not “I did.”⁵⁰

47. *Talks by Nirodbaran – December 1969 to July 1970*, edited by Sunayana and Maurice, 2018, p. 83.

48. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, pp. 438.

49. *CWM*, Vol. 8, 2nd Ed., p. 105.

50. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., pp. 11-12.

A disciple once asked: “You hardly take the initiative and ask people to do this or not to do that. It is your principle to give them a long rope either to hang themselves or have a taste of the bitter cup.” Sri Aurobindo replied: “I am to put everybody into leading strings and walk about with them — or should it be the rope in their nose? Supermen cannot be made like that — the long rope is needed.”⁵¹

When two sadhaks quarrelled due to a strong dislike for each other another disciple asked Sri Aurobindo to intervene. He replied:

Each has to get rid of his wrong reactions — they are here for that. What other remedy is there? If they are not prepared to do that, then we remain on the ground of the ordinary life where one has to do as in a big family, intervening in quarrels, reconciling, soothing, rebuking, punishing, lecturing, somehow getting things going until the next clash. There is no end to that and we gave it up long ago. Each must mend himself — there is no other way out of it.⁵²

In a conversation with his disciples Sri Aurobindo said: “I believe in a certain amount of freedom, freedom to find out things for oneself in one’s own way, freedom to commit blunders even. Nature leads us through various errors and eccentricities. When Nature created the human being with all his possibilities for good or ill, she knew very well what she was about. Freedom for experiment in human life is a great thing. Without freedom to take risks and commit mistakes, there can be no progress.”⁵³

“Why do you never write to me about my problems — unless I specifically ask?” demanded another disciple. Replied the Master: “I never do that to anybody unless he gives me the occasion. A sadhak must become conscious and lay himself before the light, see and reject and change. It is not the right method for us to interfere and lecture and point out this and point out that. That is the schoolmaster method — it does not work in the spiritual change.”⁵⁴ The Mother has said:

I never *impose* my will on anybody. It is only when somebody asks me what is my will in order to obey it, that I say clearly what my will is. But afterwards if this same person shows displeasure or discomfort in obeying that will, I never insist upon it or use coercion. I leave each one free to do what one feels best.⁵⁵

In a letter to a sadhak, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

51. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 438.

52. *Bulletin*, February 2023, p. 70.

53. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 56.

54. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, pp. 438-39.

55. Huta, *White Roses*, Second Enlarged Edition, 1964, p. 5.

I think I have not imposed my own choice unduly upon anyone in the matter of *sadhana*. Those who wanted to go wholesale for meditation, I have left to do so without any interference, though not without any help I could give. I have latterly sometimes discounselled entire retirement, but that was because I did not want a repetition of the cases of N and others who, in spite of my warnings, went in for it and came to grief. I have written what I thought when people asked me; but if they have no use for my ideas about things, why do they ask me?⁵⁶

Once, Prof. G. Monod-Herzen asked Pavitra, “Why has Sri Aurobindo not spoken of his own *sadhana*, since everybody would like some information on the subject?” Pavitra answered, “The reason is extremely simple. Sri Aurobindo used to say, ‘If I said, I don’t eat this, or I don’t eat that; I use this type of soap or that toothbrush, I meditate at such and such hour. Everybody will do the same thing.’ And that is precisely what Sri Aurobindo does not want, because it is not by copying him that we can become him. It is up to the disciple to choose not only his hours for meditation but even the smallest necessities of life. It is up to him to acquire the proper attitude which will permit him to utilise his daily routine for spiritual progress.”⁵⁷

Sri Aurobindo has made a clear distinction between zeal and self-will, self-assertion and demands. A disciple asked, “If silence does not contain the fire within, will it not be the silence of a dead man? What can one accomplish without fire, zeal, enthusiasm?” Sri Aurobindo clarified:

Zeal and enthusiasm are all right and very necessary but the spiritual condition combines calm with intensity. Psychic fire is different — what you are speaking of here is the rajasic vital fire of self-assertion, aggressive self-defence, exerting lawful rights etc.⁵⁸

For another disciple Sri Aurobindo drafted a prayer: “I pray to be purified from self-will and self-assertion so that I may become docile and obedient to the Mother . . .”⁵⁹

Sri Aurobindo also mentioned that one of the conditions “for being a flawless servant” is to be “void of self-will and self-assertion”.⁶⁰

The Mother told a young disciple that Sri Aurobindo never asserted himself. She said:

56. Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, 5th Ed., 2004, p. 142.

57. See Shyam Kumari, *Beautiful Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, 2003, p. 19.

58. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, pp. 46-47.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 843.

60. *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, p. 245.

You know, before writing *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo said to me, “I am impelled to launch on a new adventure; I was hesitant in the beginning, but now I am decided. Still I do not know how far I shall succeed. I pray for help.” And you know what it was? It was — before beginning, I warn you in advance — it was his way of speaking, so full of humility and divine modesty. He never . . . asserted himself. And the day he actually began it, he told me: “I have launched myself in a rudderless boat upon the vastness of the Infinite.” And once having started, he wrote page after page without intermission, as though it was a thing already complete up there and he had only to transcribe it in ink down here on these pages.⁶¹

The Mother once explained Sri Aurobindo’s quiet and humble disposition to a disciple:

He wanted absolutely no propaganda, but he also didn’t much like attempts to “explain things” to people and make them “understand,” because he very well knew how useless it is. He very, very often said it to me: no propaganda whatsoever, of course, and above all, above all, no attempt to make people understand: the maximum effect one can obtain is the effect of the Consciousness at work in the world (*universal gesture*), because in everyone it produces the utmost the person can do — the utmost of what he can understand, he understands through the influence of the pressure of the Consciousness. As soon as words intervene, the whole mind makes a mess of it.⁶²

One of Sri Aurobindo’s fascinating traits was his egalitarian and liberal attitude towards his disciples. Dilip Kumar Roy remarked: “It was because he allowed us such liberties that we could go on treating him almost as our equal in stature — so much so that Nirod often ran full tilt into him whenever his daemon impelled him to.”⁶³

Dilip Kumar Roy adds: “He was always like that — had never any weakness for lording it over the weak whom he actually invited to ‘discuss things’ familiarly with him. And he did it so unostentatiously that we often forgot how ill-equipped we were when we presumed to argue with him almost as though he encouraged us to believe that he had as much to learn from us, garrulous dwarfs, as we from him, the reticent giant!”⁶⁴

There was an instance where a sadhak wanted to leave the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo tried to dissuade him, writing back, “I beg of you, I pray to you.” Nirodbaran writes:

61. Mona Sarkar, *Sweet Mother – Luminous Notes*, 1st Ed., 2009, p. 46.

62. Mother’s conversation with a disciple on 8 February 1969.

63. Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, 5th Ed., 2004, p. 30.

64. *Ibid.*

“Sri Aurobindo saying this to a disciple, however cherished he might be — what humility!”⁶⁵

Amal Kiran told the editor of *Sri Aurobindo Circle* that he was “surprised how Sri Aurobindo could allow him to write not only at great length but also in bold terms as if to an equal, and how the Master had the patience and the graciousness to deal in detail with all the topics proposed.”⁶⁶

Once, Amal Kiran submitted a long tedious article, ‘Probability in Micro-Physics’. After Nirodbaran read it out to Sri Aurobindo, he asked Nirodbaran, “Do you understand anything of it?” “No!” was the reply, to which Sri Aurobindo smiled and said, “Neither do I.”⁶⁷

An aspect of Sri Aurobindo’s non-assertive nature was his reluctance to cause inconvenience to others. When Sri Aurobindo was a revolutionary leader Charu Chandra Dutt observed that “he was averse to accepting personal service.”⁶⁸

Dinendra Kumar Roy felt that the Maharaja’s esteem for Sri Aurobindo was such that he would refuse him nothing but Sri Aurobindo never asked for anything.⁶⁹ This trait was noticed in Pondicherry too, although he was the Guru, Master and Lord all rolled into one. While talking about his early days in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo revealed that as a rule he never asked anything from anybody:

There is another instance. I was a great tea addict and could not do any work without a cup of tea. The management of tea was in charge of Saurin. He used to bring the tea at any time he woke up from sleep. One day, though, I had much work to do. I was thinking, “When will he bring tea? Why does he not come?” I had made a rule never to ask anything from anybody. Suddenly a particular time appeared on the wall in front of me. And — I looked at the watch — it was at that very moment that the tea was brought!⁷⁰

M. P. Pandit writes: “We have known Yogis who make it a rule of their life to never ask for anything but accept what came unasked. We are told that Sri Aurobindo would not ask for anything to be done or brought for him, even a glass of water. He would wait in patience.”⁷¹ Nirodbaran noted that Sri Aurobindo “would not ask for any assistance — but this, not from any sense of egoism. He would put up with any inconvenience but if we offered him some help, he did not refuse it.”⁷² “And

65. See Nirodbaran, ‘Sri Aurobindo – Perfect Gentleman’, *Mother India*, August 1970, p. 412.

66. *Amal-Kiran: Poet and Critic*, edited by Nirodbaran and R. Y. Deshpande, p. 57.

67. See Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2000, pp. 248.

68. Charu Chandra Dutt, ‘My Friend and My Master’, *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, Eighth Number, p. 134.

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

70. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 545.

71. M. P. Pandit, ‘Editorial’, *Advent*, November 1990, p. 3.

72. Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2000, p. 202.

whenever he needed anything,” Nirodbaran adds, “he would look this way, that way, to see if the attendant was free or engaged. After being sure that he was free, he would say: ‘Could I have this? Could I have that?’ — always in a mild and detached tone. I may mention that he could be even quite impersonal.”⁷³

Sri Aurobindo would never make any demands, not even to the Mother, who was always particular that he should not have any obstacle in doing his work of the supramental yoga. Nirodbaran notes: “Sri Aurobindo did not want us to detain her in any way. He would cut short his walk, or hurry his meal to suit her convenience.”⁷⁴ And M. P. Pandit adds: “To a disciple, who complained that he did not get something he asked for, Sri Aurobindo wrote: ‘I am taking whatever the Mother gives, so you also take whatever the Mother gives.’”⁷⁵

Udar Pinto has written:

Sri Aurobindo, reached levels of consciousness never attained before, yet his humility was extraordinary. Mother said he was the most humble man she ever met. He never showed the slightest trace of any superiority, he was so open to all. He never forced a conversation, but he never refused one either, and answered in a humorous way; it was a delight, only we didn’t want to disturb him too much.⁷⁶

The Mother has said: “Whatever is your personal value or even your individual realisation, the first quality required in yoga is *humility*.”⁷⁷

Two of Sri Aurobindo’s aphorisms hint at what true humility is:

When thou callest another a fool, as thou must, sometimes, yet do not forget that thou thyself hast been the supreme fool in humanity.⁷⁸

When thou findest thyself scorning another, look then at thy own heart and laugh at thy folly.⁷⁹

Dilip Kumar Roy in his *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me* writes:

For he was nothing if not humble to the point of shyness. I know it is presumptuous on the part of a disciple to appear to certify the humility of his Guru, but

73. Nirodbaran, ‘Sri Aurobindo – Perfect Gentleman’, *Mother India*, August 1970, p. 411.

74. Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2000, p. 51.

75. M. P. Pandit, ‘Editorial’, *Advent*, November 1990, p. 3.

76. *Udar: one of Mother’s children*, p. 153.

77. *CWM*, Vol. 14, 2nd Ed., p. 153.

78. *CWSA*, Vol. 12, p. 446.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 463.

as my main object has been to reminisce about him, I may venture to speak simply about his simplicity and humbly about his humility, even though here too, those who have never known a real Guru are, I fear, unlikely to appreciate the full import of what I am going to say.

It happened about twenty years ago. The Mother used to come to my room every Sunday and answer our questions which were taken down by an American *sadhika* who was an expert stenographer. One day somebody asked her a question about the value of humility, whereupon I said ironically that it was a rare virtue. Mother smiled and nodded. “Yes,” she said, “and even rarer than one believes. I have known only one person here who can be called perfectly humble.”

And were we not intrigued? “Who can it be?” was the unspoken question which visited each of us who hoped against hope . . . like the holder of a Derby ticket . . . but alas, she disappointed us all with an impeccable impartiality when she revealed that it was no other than Sri Aurobindo himself.⁸⁰

We conclude this section with Sri Aurobindo’s poem ‘God’:

Thou who pervadest all the worlds below,
Yet sitst above,
Master of all who work and rule and know,
Servant of Love!

Thou who disdainest not the worm to be
Nor even the clod,
Therefore we know by that humility
That thou art God.⁸¹

(*To be continued*)

GAUTAM MALAKER

80. Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, 2nd Ed., 1984, pp. 455-56.

81. *CWSA*, Vol. 2, p. 218.

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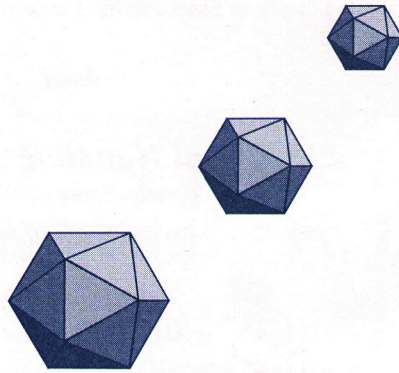
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