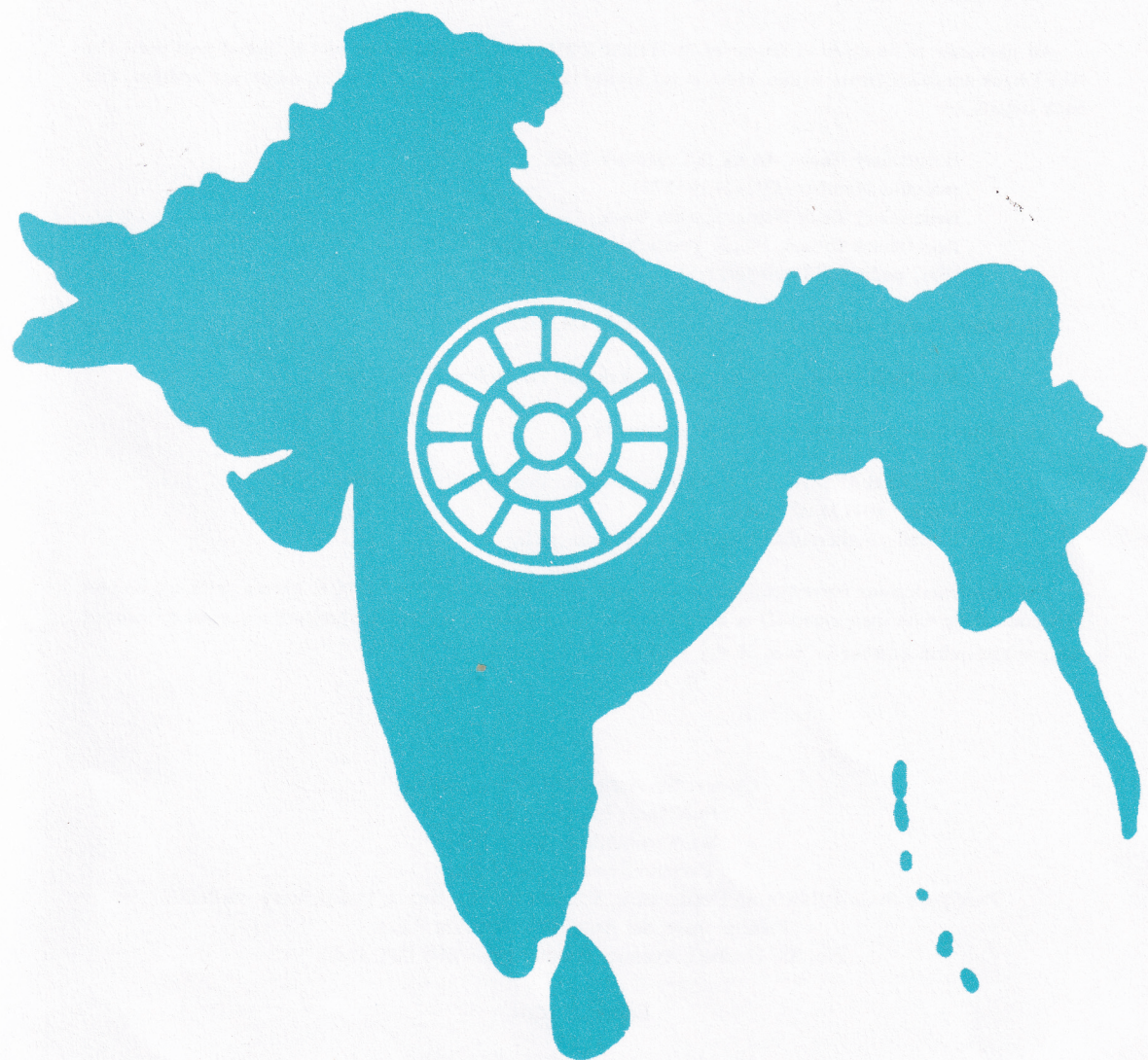


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# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE



JULY 2023

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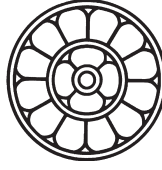
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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

JULY 2023

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM  
PONDICHERRY  
INDIA



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



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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXVI

No. 7

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## TO THE GANGES<sup>1</sup>

Hearken, Ganges, hearken, thou that sweepst golden to the sea,  
Hearken, Mother, to my voice.  
From the feet of Hari with thy waters pure thou leapest free,  
Waters colder-pure than ice.

On Himaloy's grandiose summits upright in his cirque of stones  
Shiva sits in breathless air,  
Where the outcast seeks his refuge, where the demon army moans,  
Ganges erring through his hair.

Down the snowwhite mountains speeding, the immortal peaks and cold,  
Crowd thy waves untouched by man.  
From Gungotry through the valleys next their icy tops were rolled,  
Bursting through Shivadry ran.

In Benares' stainless city by defilement undefiled  
Ghats and temples lightly touched  
With thy fingers as thou ranst, laughed low in pureness like a child  
To his mother's bosom clutched.

Where the steps of Rama wandered, where the feet of Krishna came,  
There thou flowest, there thy hand  
Clasps us, Bhagirathie, Jahnavie or Gunga, and thy name  
Holier makes the Aryans' land.

But thou leavest Aryavurtha, but thou leapest to the seas  
In thy hundred mighty streams;  
Nor in the unquiet Ocean vast thy grandiose journeyings cease,  
Mother, say thy children's dreams.

Down thou plungest through the Ocean, far beneath its oozy bed  
In Patala's leaden gloom  
Moaning o'er her children's pain our mother, Ganges of the dead,  
Leads our wandering spirits home.

1. Circa 1900-1906.



Mighty with the mighty still thou dwelledst, goddess high and pure;  
     Iron Bhîshma was thy son,  
 Who against ten thousand rushing chariots could in war endure;  
     Many heroes fled from one.

Devavrath the mighty, Bhîshma with his oath of iron power,  
     Smilingly who gave up full  
 Joy of human life and empire, that his father's wish might flower  
     And his father's son might rule.

Who were these that thronged thereafter? wherefore came these puny hearts  
     Apter for the cringing slave,  
 Wrangling, selfish, weak and treacherous, vendors of their nobler parts,  
     Sorry food for pyre and grave?

O but these are men of mind not yet with Europe's brutal mood alloyed,  
     Poets singing in their chains,  
 Preachers teaching manly slavery, speakers thundering in the void.  
     Motley wear these men of brains!

Well it is for hound and watchdog fawning at a master's feet,  
     Cringing, of the whip afraid!  
 Well it is for linnet caged to make with song his slavery sweet.  
     Man for other ends was made.

Man the arrogant, the splendid, man the mighty wise and strong,  
     Born to rule the peopled earth,  
 Shall he bear the alien's insult, shall he brook the tyrant's wrong  
     Like a thing of meaner birth?

Sreepoor in the east of Chand and Kédar, bright with Mogul blood,  
     And the Kings of Aracan  
 And the Atlantic pirates helped that hue, — its ruined glory flood  
     Kîrtinasha's waters wan.

Buried are our cities; fallen the apexed dome, the Indian arch;  
     In Chitore the jackals crowd:  
 Krishna's Dwarka sleeps for ever, o'er its ruined bastions march  
     All the Oceans thundering loud.

Still, yet still the fire of Kali on her ancient altar burns  
     Smouldering under smoky pall,



And the deep heart of her peoples to their Mighty Mother turns,  
Listening for her Titan call.

Yet Pratapaditya's great fierce spirit shall in might awake  
In Jessore he loved and made,  
Sitaram the good and mighty for his well-loved people's sake  
Leave the stillness and the shade.

And Bengal the wide and ancient where the Senas swayed of old  
Up to far Benares pure,  
She shall lead the Aryan peoples to the mighty doom foretold  
And her glory shall endure.

By her heart of quick emotion, by her brain of living fire,  
By her vibrant speech and great,  
She shall lead them, they shall see their destiny in her warm desire  
Opening all the doors of Fate.

By the shores of Brahmaputra or where Ganges nears the sea,  
Even now a flame is born  
Which shall kindle all the South to brilliance and the North shall be  
Lighted up as with the morn.

And once more this Aryavurtha fit for heavenly feet to tread,  
Free and holy, bold and wise,  
Shall lift up her face before the world and she whom men thought dead,  
Into strength immortal rise.

Not in icy lone Gungotry nor by Kashi's holy fanes,  
Mother, hast thou power to save  
Only, nor dost thou grow old near Sagar, nor our vileness stains,  
Ganges, thy celestial wave.

Dukkhineswar, Dukkhineswar, wonderful predestined pile,  
Tell it to our sons unborn,  
Where the night was brooding darkest and the curse was on the soil  
Heaviest, God revealed the morn.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 256-59)

## HINDUISM AND THE MISSION OF INDIA<sup>1</sup>

[. . .] [That] which is permanent in the Hindu religion, must form the basis on which the world will increasingly take its stand in dealing with spiritual experience and religious truth. Hinduism, in my sense of the word, is not modern Brahmanism. Modern Brahmanism developed into existence at a definite period in history. It is now developing out of existence; its mission is done, its capacities exhausted, the Truth which, like other religions, it defended, honoured, preserved, cherished, misused and disfigured, is about to take to itself new forms and dispense with all other screens or defender than its own immortal beauty, grandeur, truth and effectiveness. It is this unchanging undying Truth which has to be discovered and placed in its native light before humanity. Tad etat satyam.

There are many defenders and discoverers of truth now active among us. They are all busy defending, modifying, attacking, sapping or bolstering current Hinduism. I am not eager to disparage but neither do I find myself satisfied with any of them. If I were, there would be no need for any speculation of my own. There are the orthodox who are busy recovering and applying old texts or any interpretations, new or old, of these texts, which will support the existing order, — and ignoring all that go against it. Their learning is praiseworthy and useful; it brings to notice many great and helpful things which were in danger of being misprized, lost or flung away as worthless; but they do not seem to me to go to the heart of the matter. There are the heterodox who are busy giving new interpretations to old texts and institutions in order to get rid of all such features as the modern world finds it hard to assimilate. Their brainwork can hardly be too highly praised; it is bringing to light or to a half light many luminous realities and possibilities which, if they cannot all be accepted, yet invigorate and sharpen the habit of original thinking and help to remove that blind adherence to traditions which is truth's greatest obstacle. Still they too do not seem to me to have the right grasp and discernment. Then there are the ascetics mystical or rationalistic who call men to disgust with the world and point to the temple, the monastery or the mountaintop as the best, if not the only place for finding God, and most of whom, in order to honour the Maker slight and denounce His works. Their position and temperament is so lofty and noble and their solvent force on the gross impurities of a materialised humanity has been so invaluable that it is with some reluctance one finds oneself obliged to put them on one side and pass onward. But it seems to me that we must pass onward if we would know and possess God in His entirety and not merely in a side or aspect. There is a story in the Jewish Scriptures which relates that when God wished to show himself to Moses, he could only, owing to the spiritual imperfections of the Jewish prophet, reveal safely to him His hinder parts. Moses would have died if he had seen the front of God; he had not the dharanam, the soul-

1. Circa 1912. Editorial title. The first pages of the manuscript have been lost; the first surviving sentence lacks its beginning. — *Note in CWSA.*

power to support that tremendous vision. The story well illuminates the character of materialism generally and to its aggressive modern form, European thought & civilisation, it applies with a quite overwhelming appositeness. But it seems to me that the average Vedantist, too, has only seen, for his part, the crown of the Lord's head and the average bhakta only the Kaustubh-stone over His heart or the Srivatsa mark upon it. On the other hand, there are those rationalists who are by no means ascetical in their views or temperament and their name is legion; they insist on our putting religion and God aside or keeping Him only for ornamental uses in spare moments, leave that, they say, & devote yourselves to practical work for mankind. That rationalism is necessary too if only to balance the error of the ascetics who would make of God's world a mistake and of its Maker an Almighty blunderer or an inscrutable eccentric or an indefinable Something inhabiting a chaos or a mirage. Nevertheless, from materialism least of all, however philanthropic or patriotic, can our future salvation be expected. Finally, there are the mystics who are not ascetics, — the Theosophists. From one point of view I cannot find praise warm enough to do justice to the work of Theosophy; from another I cannot find condemnation strong enough to denounce it. It has forced on the notice of an unwilling world truths to which orthodoxy is blind and of which heterodoxy is afraid or incredulous. It has shown a colossal courage in facing ridicule, trampling on prejudice and slander, persisting in faith in spite of disillusionment, scandal and a continual shifting of knowledge. They have kept the flag of a past & future science flying against enormous difficulties. On the other hand by bringing to the investigation of that science — not its discovery, for to the Hindu Yogin it is known already — the traditional European methods, the methods of the market-place and the forum, it has brought on the truths themselves much doubt and discredit, and by importing into them the forms, jugglery and jargon of European mystics, their romanticism, their unbridled imagination, their galloping impatience, their haste, bragging and loudness, their susceptibility to dupery, trickery, obstinate error and greedy self-deception, Theosophists have strengthened doubt and discredit and driven many an earnest seeker to bewilderment, to angry suspicion or to final renunciation of the search for truth. They have scattered the path of the conscientious investigators, the severe scientists of Yoga who must appear in the future, with the thorns and sharp flints of a well-justified incredulity and suspicion. I admit the truths that Theosophy seeks to unveil; but I do not think they can be reached if we fall into bondage even to the most inspiring table talk of Mahatmas or to the confused anathemas and vaticinations hurled from their platform tripods by modern Pythonesses of the type of M<sup>rs</sup> Annie Besant, that great, capacious but bewildered and darkened intellect, now stumbling with a loud and confident blindness through those worlds of twilight and glamour, of distorted inspirations, perverted communications and misunderstood or half-understood perceptions which are so painfully familiar to the student and seeker.

If these things do not satisfy me, what then do I seek? I seek a light that shall

be new, yet old, the oldest indeed of all lights. I seek an authority that accepting, illuminating and reconciling all human truth, shall yet reject and get rid of by explaining it all mere human error. I seek a text and a Shastra that is not subject to interpolation, modification and replacement, that moth and white ant cannot destroy, that the earth cannot bury nor Time mutilate. I seek an asceticism that shall give me purity and deliverance from self and from ignorance without stultifying God and His universe. I seek a scepticism that shall question everything but shall have the patience to deny nothing that may possibly be true. I seek a rationalism not proceeding on the untenable supposition that all the centuries of man's history except the nineteenth were centuries of folly and superstition, but bent on discovering truth instead of limiting inquiry by a new dogmatism, obscurantism and furious intolerance which it chooses to call common sense and enlightenment; I seek a materialism that shall recognise matter and use it without being its slave. I seek an occultism that shall bring out all its processes and proofs into the light of day, without mystery, without jugglery, without the old stupid call to humanity, "Be blind, O man, and see!" In short, I seek not science, not religion, not Theosophy, but Veda — the truth about Brahman, not only about His essentiality, but about His manifestation, not a lamp on the way to the forest, but a light and a guide to joy and action in the world, the truth which is beyond opinion, the knowledge which all thought strives after — yasmin vijnate sarvam vijnatam. I believe that Veda to be the foundation of the Sanatan Dharma; I believe it to be the concealed divinity within Hinduism, — but a veil has to be drawn aside, a curtain has to be lifted. I believe it to be knowable and discoverable. I believe the future of India and the world to depend on its discovery and on its application, not to the renunciation of life, but to life in the world and among men.

In these articles I shall not try to announce truth, but merely to inquire what are those things in Hinduism by following which we may arrive at the truth. I shall try to indicate some of my reasons — as far as within these limits it can be done — for my faith in my guides and the manner in which I think they should be followed. I am impelled to this labour by the necessity of turning the mind of young India to our true riches, our real source of power, purification and hope for the future and of safeguarding it in the course of its search both from false lights and from the raucous challenges and confident discouragements cast at us by the frail modern spirit of denial. I write, not for the orthodox, nor for those who have discovered a new orthodoxy, Samaj or Panth, nor for the unbeliever; I write for those who acknowledge reason but do not identify reason with Western materialism; who are sceptics but not unbelievers; who, admitting the claims of modern thought, still believe in India, her mission and her gospel, her immortal life and her eternal rebirth.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 59-63)*

## JHALAKATI SPEECH<sup>1</sup>

Fellow-countrymen, delegates and people of Barisal and Bakarganj: —

I have first to express to you my personal gratitude for the kindly reception you have accorded to me. For a year I have been secluded from the fellowship and brotherly embrace of my fellow-countrymen. To me, therefore, the kindness of your welcome must awake much keener feelings than would have been the case in other circumstances. Especially is it a cause of rejoicing to me to have that welcome in Barisal. When I come to this District, when I come to this soil of Bakarganj which has been made sacred and ever memorable in the history of this country — I come to no ordinary place. When I come to Barisal, I come to a chosen temple of the Mother — I come to a sacred *pithasthan* of the national spirit — I come to the birth-place and field of work of Aswini Kumar Dutta.

It is now the fourth year since I came to Barisal first on the occasion of the Provincial Conference. Three years have passed since then — they have been years of storm and stress to the country, — they have been years during which history has been making, during which the people of India have been undergoing a process of rebirth. Many things have happened in these years, especially in the last few months. One sign of what has been happening in the past is this empty chair (*pointing to the chair upon which Aswini Kumar's photo was placed*). One aspect of these years has been a series of repressions. They have been years in which the country has had to undergo the sufferings and sacrifices which repression involves. Barisal has had its full share of these sufferings. They had begun even before I last came among you. You had then the regulation lathi of the Police and the Gurkha visitation. After that there have been other forms of coercion. In this very town of Jhalakati you had to pay a punitive police tax. It was a punitive tax, punitive not of any offence of which you have been guilty, — for you have been guilty of none. In Barisal, there was no disturbance, no breach of the law. On the contrary, you have always been patient and self-restrained — you have always kept within the four corners of the law. What you have been punished for was your patriotism — you were punished for your Swadeshism — you were punished for your successful organisation of boycott. That tax was borne by the mahajans of Jhalakati with the readiness and uncomplaining endurance of large-hearted patriotism.

And now there have come the deportations. You have been called to endure the exile of those who have been dearest to you, who stood for all that was patriotic and noble in the district. Of the deportations Barisal has had more than its full share.

1. *Delivered at Jhalakati, Bakarganj District, Eastern Bengal and Assam, on 19 June 1909. Text published in the Bengalee on 27 June and reproduced in the Karmayogin on 3 July.*

Of those deported three are sons of this district. The man whose name will live for ever on the lips of his countrymen as one of the great names of the age — one of the makers of the new nation — Aswini Kumar Dutta has been taken away from you. His active and devoted lieutenant has been taken away from you. That warm-hearted patriot whom I am proud to have had the privilege of calling my personal friend — Manoranjan Guha — has been taken away from you. Why have they been exiled? What was their offence? Can anyone in Barisal name a single action — can anyone of those who have sent him into exile name definitely any single action which Aswini Kumar Dutta has committed, of which the highest and noblest man might not be proud? Can anyone name a single action of Krishna Kumar Mitra's which would be derogatory to the reputation of the highest in the land? There have indeed been charges, — vague charges, shameless charges, — made. The law under which they have been exiled requires no charge. The law under which they have been exiled has been impugned in Parliament as an antiquated and anomalous Regulation, utterly out of place and unfit to be used in modern times. When it was so attacked and its use by the Government of India challenged, Lord Morley, the man who rules India with absolute sway and stands or should stand to us as the incarnation of British statesmanship, made an answer which was not the answer of a statesman but of an attorney. "The law," he said, "is as good a law as any on the Statute Book." What is meant — what does Lord Morley mean — by a "good law"? In a certain sense every law is a good law which is passed by an established authority. If there were a law which made Swadeshi illegal, by which to buy a Swadeshi cloth would become a criminal action punishable by a legal tribunal — there have been such laws in the past — and if that were enacted by the Legislative Council, it would be in Lord Morley's sense of the word as good a law as any upon the Statute Book. But would it be a good law in the true sense or a travesty of law and justice? Lord Morley says it is a good law. We say it is a lawless law, — a dishonest law, — a law that is, in any real sense of the word, no law at all. For what is its substance and purpose? It provides that when you cannot bring any charge against a man which can be supported by proofs — and when you have no evidence which would stand for a moment before a court of justice, in any legal tribunal — when you have nothing against him except that his existence is inconvenient to you, then you need not advance any charge, you need not bring any evidence, you are at liberty to remove him from his home, from his friends, from his legitimate activities and intern him for the rest of his life in a jail. This is the law which is as good a law as any on the Statute Book! But what does its presence on the Statute Book mean? It means that under certain circumstances or whenever an absolute authority chooses, there is no law in the land for any subject of the British Crown — no safety for the liberty of the person.

It is under this law that nine of the most devoted workers for the country have been exiled, some of whose names are household words in India and incompatible with any imputation of evil. When the authorities were pressed in Parliament for an



account of the reasons for their action they would not bring and refused to bring any definite accusation. Once indeed under the pressure of cross-examination a charge was advanced, — wild, vague and baseless. It was said in effect that these men were instigators and paymasters of anarchy and bloodshed. What was the authority under which such a charge was made? How was it that this monstrous falsehood was allowed to proceed from the mouths of His Majesty's Ministers and pollute the atmosphere of the House of Commons? Is there a man in his senses who will believe that Aswini Kumar Dutta was the instigator and paymaster of anarchy and bloodshed or that Krishna Kumar Mitra was the instigator and paymaster of anarchy and bloodshed, — men whose names were synonymous with righteousness of action and nobility of purpose and whose whole lives were the embodiment of uprightness, candour and fair and open living before all men? We have been told that it was not only on police evidence that they were exiled. That was not what was said at the beginning. At first it was on police information that the deportations were justified and any attempt to impugn that authority was resented. But now that police information has been shown to be false and unreliable, it is said that there was other than police information to justify the action of the authorities. We know what that information must have been. I will not make any sweeping charge against a whole body of men without exception. I know that even among the police there are men who are upright and observe truth and honesty in their dealings. I have met such men and honoured them. But we know what the atmosphere of that department is, we know what the generality of police officers are and how little reliance can be placed upon them. Of the value of police information Midnapore is the standing and conclusive proof. Besides this police information what else can there have been? Obviously the information on which the police has relied in certain of these cases — the evidence of the hired perjurer and forger, of the approver who to save himself from a baseless charge makes allegations yet more unfounded against others and scatters mud on the most spotless reputations in the land. If there were any other source besides this, we know too what that must have been. There are a sprinkling of Vibhishans among us, — men who for their own ends are willing to tell any lie that they think will please the authorities or injure their personal enemies. But if the Government in this country have upon such information believed that the lives of Aswini Kumar Dutta and Krishna Kumar Mitra are a mere mask and not the pure and spotless lives we have known, then we must indeed say, "What an amount of folly and ignorance rules at the present moment in this unhappy country."

Well, we have had many other forms of repression besides these deportations. We have had charges of sedition, charges of dacoity and violence, brought against the young men who are the hope of our country — charges such as those which we have seen breaking down and vanishing into nothing when tested by a high and impartial tribunal. This is the nature of the repression we have been called upon to suffer. It has been so engineered by the underlings of the Government that it strikes



automatically at those who are most energetic, most devoted, most self-denying in the service of the mother country. It addresses itself to the physical signs, the outward manifestations of our national life, and seeks by suppressing them to put an end to that national life and movement. But it is a strange idea, a foolish idea, which men have, indeed, always cherished under such circumstances, but which has been disproved over and over again in history, to think that a nation which has once risen, — once has been called up by the voice of God to rise, — will be stopped by mere physical repression. It has never so happened in the history of a nation, nor will it so happen in the history of India. Storm has swept over us today. I saw it come. I saw the striding of the storm-blast and the rush of the rain and as I saw it an idea came to me. What is this storm that is so mighty and sweeps with such fury upon us? And I said in my heart, “It is God who rides abroad on the wings of the hurricane, — it is the might and force of the Lord that manifested itself and His almighty hands that seized and shook the roof so violently over our heads today.” A storm like this has swept also our national life. That too was the manifestation of the Almighty. We were building an edifice to be the temple of our Mother’s worship — were rearing her a new and fair mansion, a palace fit for her dwelling. It was then that He came down upon us. He flung Himself upon the building we had raised. He shook the roof with His mighty hands and part of the building was displaced and ruined. Why has He done this? Repression is nothing but the hammer of God that is beating us into shape so that we may be moulded into a mighty nation and an instrument for His work in the world. We are iron upon His anvil and the blows are showering upon us not to destroy but to re-create. Without suffering there can be no strength, — without sacrifice there can be no growth. It is not in vain that Aswini Kumar has been taken from his people. It is not in vain that Krishna Kumar Mitra has been taken from us and is rotting in Agra Jail. It is not in vain that all Maharashtra mourns for Tilak at Mandalay. It is He, not any other, who has taken them and His ways are not the ways of men, but He is all-wise. He knows better than we do what is needful for us. He has taken Aswini Kumar Dutta away from Barisal. Is the movement dead? Is Swadeshi dead? The rulers of the country in their scanty wisdom have thought that by lopping off the heads the movement will cease. They do not know that great as he is, Aswini Kumar Dutta is not the leader of this movement, that Tilak is not the leader, — God is the leader. They do not know that the storm that has been sweeping over the country was not sent by them, but by Him for His own great purposes. And the same strength that was manifested in the storm today and in the storm of calamity that has passed over the country — the same strength is in us.

And if they are mighty to afflict, we are mighty to endure. We are no ordinary race. We are a people ancient as our hills and rivers and we have behind us a history of manifold greatness, not surpassed by any other race. We are the descendants of those who performed tapasya and underwent unheard-of austerities for the sake of spiritual gain and of their own will submitted to all the sufferings of which humanity

is capable. We are the children of those mothers who ascended with a smile the funeral pyre that they might follow their husbands to another world. We are a people to whom suffering is welcome and who have a spiritual strength within them, greater than any physical force. We are a people in whom God has chosen to manifest Himself more than any other at many great moments of our history. It is because God has chosen to manifest Himself and has entered into the hearts of His people that we are rising again as a nation. Therefore it matters not even if those who are greatest and most loved are taken away. I trust in God's mercy and believe that they will soon be restored to us. But even if they don't come again still the movement will not cease. It will move forward irresistibly until God's will in it is fulfilled. He fulfils His purposes inevitably and this too He will fulfil. Those who are taken from us must after all some day pass away. We are strong in their strength. We have worked in their inspiration. But in the inevitable course of nature they will pass from us and there must be others who will take their places. He has taken them away from us for a little in order that in their absence we might feel that it was not really in their strength that we were strong, in their inspiration that we worked but that a Higher Force was working in them and when they are removed, can still work in the hearts of the people. When they pass away others will arise or even if no great men stand forth to lead, still the soul of this people will be great with the force of God within and do the work. This it is that He seeks to teach us by these separations — by these calamities. The men are gone. The movement has not ceased. The National School at Jhalakati was started one month after the deportation of Aswini Kumar Dutta; that is a patent sign that the movement is not, as our rulers would ignorantly have it, got up by eloquent agitators. The movement goes on by the force of nature; it works as force of nature works and goes inevitably on, whatever obstacle comes in the way.

What is it that this movement seeks, not according to the wild chimeras born of unreasoning fear but in its real aim and purpose? What is it that we seek? We seek the fulfilment of our life as a nation. This is what the word Swaraj, which is a bug-bear and terror to the Europeans, really means. When they hear it, they are full of unreasoning terrors. They think Swaraj is independence, it is freedom and that means that the people are going to rise against them in rebellion, that means there are bombs behind every bush, that every volunteer who gives food to his famine-stricken countrymen or nurses the cholera-stricken, is a possible rebel and dacoit. Swaraj is not the Colonial form of Government nor any form of Government. It means the fulfilment of our national life. That is what we seek, that is why God has sent us into the world to fulfil Him by fulfilling ourselves in our individual life, in the family, in the community, in the nation, in humanity. That is why He has sent us into the world and it is this fulfilment that we demand; for this fulfilment is life and to depart from it is to perish. Our object, our claim is that we shall not perish as a nation, but live as a nation. Any authority that goes against this object will dash itself against the eternal throne of justice — it will dash itself against the laws of nature which are the laws

of God, and be broken to pieces.

This then is our object and by what means do we seek it? We seek it by feeling our separateness and pushing forward our individual self-fulfilment by what we call Swadeshi — Swadeshi in commerce and manufacture, in politics, in education, in law and administration, in every branch of national activity. No doubt this means independence, it means freedom; but it does not mean rebellion. There are some who fear to use the word “freedom”, but I have always used the word because it has been the *mantra* of my life to aspire towards the freedom of my nation. And when I was last in jail I clung to that *mantra*; and through the mouth of my counsel I used this word persistently. What he said for me — and it was said not only on my behalf, but on behalf of all who cherish this ideal, — was this: If to aspire to independence and preach freedom is a crime you may cast me into jail and there bind me with chains. If to preach freedom is a crime then I am a criminal and let me be punished. But freedom does not mean the use of violence — it does not mean bombs; it is the fulfilment of our separate national existence. If there is any authority mad enough to declare that Swadeshism, national education, arbitration, association for improvement of our physique, is illegal, it is not stamping out anarchism; it is on the contrary establishing a worse anarchism from above. It sets itself against the law of God that gives to every nation its primary rights. The judge in the Alipore case said that the aspiration after independence and the preaching of the ideal of independence was a thing no Englishman could condemn. But if you say that the aspiration after independence is a thing none can condemn and yet put down by force the only peaceful means of securing independence, you are really declaring that it is the practice of independence which you will not tolerate. Because a few have gone mad and broken the law you have chosen to brand a whole people, to condemn a nation and to suppress a whole national movement. With that we have nothing to do. We have no voice in the government of our country; and the laws and their administration are things in which you don’t allow us to have any concern. But one thing is in our own power; — our courage and devotion are in our power, our sacrifice, our suffering are in our power. That you cannot take away from us, and so long as you cannot take that from us you can do nothing. Your repression cannot for ever continue, for it will bring anarchy into the country. You will not be able to continue your administration if this repression remains permanent. Your government will become disorganised; the trade you are using such means to save will languish and capital be frightened from the country.

We have therefore only to suffer. We have only to be strong and enduring. All this machinery of coercion, all this repression, will then be in vain. That is the only virtue that is needed. We shall never lose our fortitude, our courage, our endurance. There are some who think that by lowering our heads the country will escape repression. That is not my opinion. It is by looking the storm in the face and meeting it with a high courage, fortitude and endurance that the nation can be saved. It is that

which the Mother demands from us, — which God demands from us. He sent the storm yesterday and it carried the roof away. He sent it today with greater violence and it seized the roof to remove it. But today the roof remained. This is what He demands of us. — “I have sent my storms upon you, so that you may feel and train your strength. If you have suffered by them, if something has been broken, it does not matter, so long as you learn the lesson that it is for strength I make you suffer and always for strength.” What did the volunteers do today when they flung themselves in crowds on the roof and braved the fury of the hurricane and by main strength held down the roof over their heads? That is the lesson that all must learn and especially the young men of Bengal and India. The storm may come down on us again and with greater violence. Then remember this, brave its fury, feel your strength, train your strength in the struggle with the violence of the wind, and by that strength hold down the roof over the temple of the Mother.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 33-42)



## OPINION AND COMMENTS

(From Karmayogin, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1909)

### The Highest Synthesis

In the *Bengalee*'s issue of the 29<sup>th</sup> June there is a very interesting article on Nationalism and Expediency, which seems to us to call for some comment. The object of the article is to modify or water the strong wine of Nationalism by a dash of expediency. Nationalism is a faith, the writer admits; he even goes much further than we are prepared to go and claims for Nationalism that it is the highest of all syntheses. This is a conclusion we are not prepared to accept; it is, we know, the highest which European thought has arrived at so far as that thought has expressed itself in the actual life and ideals of the average European. In Positivism Europe has attempted to arrive at a higher synthesis, the synthesis of humanity; and Socialism and philosophical Anarchism, the Anarchism of Tolstoy and Spencer, have even envisaged the application of the higher intellectual synthesis to life. In India we do not recognise the nation as the highest synthesis to which we can rise. There is a higher synthesis, humanity; beyond that there is a still higher synthesis, this living, suffering, aspiring world of creatures, the synthesis of Buddhism; there is a highest of all, the synthesis of God, and that is the Hindu synthesis, the synthesis of Vedanta. With us today Nationalism is our immediate practical faith and gospel not because it is the highest possible synthesis, but because it must be realised in life if we are to have the chance of realising the others. We must live as a nation before we can live in humanity. It is for this reason that Nationalist thinkers have always urged the necessity of realising our separateness from other nations and living to ourselves for the present, not in order to shut out humanity, but that we may get that individual strength, unity and wholeness which will help us to live as a nation for humanity. A man must be strong and free in himself before he can live usefully for others, so must a nation. But that does not justify us in forgetting the ultimate aim of evolution. God in the nation becomes the realisation of the first moment to us because the nation is the chosen means or condition through which we rise to the higher synthesis, God in humanity, God in all creatures, God in Himself and ourself.

### Faith and Analysis

Because Nationalism is the highest synthesis, it is more than a mere faith, says the *Bengalee*, it embodies an analysis, however unconscious or even inadequate, of the

actual forces and conditions of life. We do not quite understand our contemporary's philosophy. An unconscious analysis is a contradiction in terms. There may be a vague and ill-expressed weighing of things in the rough, but that is not analysis. Analysis is in its nature a deliberate intellectual process; the other is merely a perception of things separately or together but without analysis. And analysis is not inconsistent with faith, but must accompany it unless the faith is merely superstition. Every faith is to a certain extent rational, it has its own analysis and synthesis by which it seeks to establish itself intellectually; so has Nationalism. What the *Bengalee* means is apparently that our faith ought not to exceed our observation; in other words, we ought to calculate the forces for and against us and if the favourable forces are weak and the unfavourable strong, we ought to move with caution and hesitation. Now that is a very different question which has nothing to do with the philosophical aspect of Nationalism but with the policy of the moment. Our position is that Nationalism is our faith, our *dharma*, and its realisation the duty which lies before the country at the present moment. If so, it is a thing which must be done and from which we cannot turn merely because the forces are against us. If we rely on an analysis of forces, what is it we arrive at? It was only yesterday that there was a series of articles in the *Bengalee* which sought to establish the proposition that the Hindus on whom the burden of the movement has fallen are a doomed and perishing race. The writer arrived at that conclusion by patient and exhaustive analysis. What else does analysis show us? It shows us one of the most powerful Governments in the world determined not to part with its absolute control and aided for the present by a large part of one of the chief communities in India. On the other side a people unequipped, unorganised, without means or resources, divided within itself, a considerable portion of it inert, and even in the educated class a part of it unsympathetic, afraid, insisting on caution and prudence. Shall we then turn from our work? Shall we deny God? Rationality demands that we should. And if we do not, it is simply because it would be to deny God, because we have "mere" faith, because we believe that God is within us, a spiritual force strong enough to overcome all physical obstacles, weaknesses, disabilities, that God is in the movement, that He is its leader and guides it, that we belong to the world and the future and are not a spent and dying force. This faith we hold because we understand the processes by which He works and can therefore see good in evil, light in the darkness, a preparation for victory in defeat, a new life in the apparent process of disintegration.

### **Mature Deliberation**

That the movement is from God has been apparent in its history. Our contemporary does not believe that God created and leads the movement, he thinks that Srijut Surendranath Banerji created it and leads it. Only so can we explain the extraordinary

statement, “every step that has been taken in construction has been preceded by mature deliberation”. Is this so? Was the Swadeshi movement preceded by mature deliberation? Everybody knows that it was scouted by our leaders and, if it had been again proposed to them a month before it suddenly seized the country, would still have been scouted. It came as a flood comes and swept away everybody in its mighty current. Was the Boycott preceded by mature deliberation? Everybody knows how it came, advocated by obscure mofussil towns, propagated by a Calcutta vernacular newspaper, forced on leaders who shrank from it with misgivings, accepted it with tremors and even then would only have used it for a short time as a means of pressure to get the Partition reversed. Everybody knows how it spread over Bengal with the impetuosity of a cyclone. Was the National Education movement preceded by mature deliberation? It came suddenly, it came unexpectedly, unwelcome to many and still damned with a halfhearted support by the leaders of the country. This is what we mean by saying that God is in the movement and leads it. It is a greater than human force, incalculable, sudden and impetuous, which has swept over the country shattering and recreating, transforming cowards into heroes, lovers of ease into martyrs, self-seekers into self-sacrificers, changing in a few years the whole outlook, temper and character of a nation.

### **The Importance of the Individual**

It is not surprising that with these ideas the *Bengalee* should deprecate the call for continued courage and self-sacrifice which has been made by Srijiut Aurobindo Ghose in his speech at Jhalakati, for to that speech the article is a controversial answer. The cry for expediency resolves itself into an argument for individual prudence on the part of the leaders. “It seems to us to be a fatal idea that for the progress of the nation individuals are not necessary or that particular individuals are not more necessary than other individuals.” And the writer asks whether an organ is justified in cutting itself off for the sake of the organism, and immediately answers his own question partially by saying, yes, when the interests of the organism require it. The metaphor is a false one; for the individual is not an organ, he is simply an atom, and atoms not only can be replaced but are daily replaced, and the replacement is necessary for the continued life of the organism. In times of stress or revolution the replacement is more rapid, that is all. Whatever the importance of particular individuals, — and the importance of men like S. J. Aswini Kumar Dutta or S. J. Krishna Kumar Mitra is not denied by any man in his senses and was not denied but dwelt upon by the speaker at Jhalakati, — they are not necessary, in the sense that God does not depend upon them for the execution of His purposes. Our contemporary does not expressly deny God’s existence or His omnipotence or His providence, and if he accepts them, he is debarred from insisting that God cannot save India without S. J. Surendranath



Banerji or S. Aswini Kumar Dutta, that He is unable to remove them and find other instruments or that their deportation or disappearance will defer the fulfilment of His purposes to future centuries.

### **The Fatalism of Action**

Our contemporary does however seem to doubt these qualities in the Ruler of all. He holds it to be a fatal doctrine “that we are none of us necessary, that everything that is happening or can happen is for the best, that God is seeking His fulfilment in inscrutable ways, that He will Himself lead the country when our prominent men are removed from the arena.” This, he says, is fatalism, and by flinging the word fatalism at Sri Aurobindo, he thinks he has damned his position. The word fatalism means usually a resigned passivity, and certainly any leader who preached such a gospel would be injuring the country. That would be indeed a fatal doctrine. But our contemporary admits that it is a fatalism of action and not of inaction he is censuring, he blames the speaker for advocating too much action and not too little. All that the “fatalism” censured means is a firm faith in the love and wisdom of God and a belief based on past experience that as it is His purpose to raise up India, therefore everything that happens or can happen just now will tend to the fulfilment of His purpose. In other words, there is now an upward tendency in the nation with an immense force behind it and, in such conditions, it is part of human experience that the force makes use of every event to assist the progress of the tendency until its contribution to human development is fulfilled. That is the idea of *Kala* or the *Zeitgeist* working, and, put religiously, it means that God being Supreme Wisdom uses everything for His supreme purposes and out of evil cometh good. This is true of our private life as every man of spiritual insight can testify; he can name and estimate the particular good which has come out of every apparent evil in his life. The same truth applies to the life of the nation.

### **God’s Ways**

When it is said that God’s ways are inscrutable, it is simply meant that man’s reason, on which the *Bengalee* lays so much stress, is not always sufficient to estimate at the time the object He has in a particular dispensation of calamity or defeat. It seems to be nothing but calamity and defeat and it is only afterwards that the light of reason looking backwards is able by the illumination of subsequent events to understand His doings. Therefore we must have faith and an invincible faith or else the calamities will be too great for our courage and endurance. Is this a false doctrine or a fatal doctrine? Will the country be injured by it or helped by it? Sri Aurobindo never

said that God would step in to fill the place of Srijut Aswini Dutta or others removed from the arena. His position was that God has been driving on the movement from the beginning and was always the leader when they were with us and remains the leader when they are taken from us.

## Adequate Value

The *Bengalee* insists however that individual life is quite as sacred *for its own purposes* as national life for its higher purposes, that the nation must get *adequate value* for each sacrifice that the individuals make, and that great men must protect themselves from danger because their removal at a critical moment may mean incalculable injury. We deny that individual life is as sacred as national life; the smaller cannot be so sacred as the greater, self cannot be so sacred as others, and to say that it is quite as sacred for its own purposes is to deify selfishness. Our lives are useful only in proportion as they help others by example or action or tend to fulfil God in man. It is not true that my ease is sacred, my safety is sacred, or my self-interest is sacred. This if anything is “a fatal doctrine”. We do not deny that sacrifice cannot be an end to itself; no one is so foolish as to advance any such proposition. But when the *Bengalee* argues that the individual must demand adequate value for every sacrifice he makes on the national altar, it shows a complete inability to appreciate the nature of sacrifice and the laws of politics. If we had acted in this Bania spirit, we should never have got beyond the point at which we stood four years ago. It is by unhesitating, wholehearted and princely sacrifices that nations effect their liberty. It has always been so in the past and the laws of nature have not altered and will not alter to suit the calculating prudence of individuals. A great man is valuable to the nation and he should guard himself but only so far as he can do so without demoralising his followers, ceasing from the battle or abdicating his right to leadership. He should never forget that he leads and the nation looks up to him as a fountain of steadfastness, unselfish service and courage. Expediency means national expediency, not individual expediency. Even so it must be the larger expediency which makes great sacrifices and faces great risks to secure great ends. Statesmanship is not summed up in the words prudence and caution, it has a place for strength and courage.

## Expediency and Nationalism

We have met the arguments of the *Bengalee* at some length because we hold the teaching in this article to be perilous in its tendencies. There is plenty of selfishness, prudence, hesitating calculation in the country, plenty of fear and demoralisation in

the older generation. There is no need to take thought and labour for increasing it. Steadfastness, courage, a calm and high spirit are what we now need, wisdom to plan and act, not prudence to abstain from action. Nationalism tempered by expediency is like the French despotism tempered by epigrams. The epigrams undermined the despotism, the expediency is likely to undermine and in some quarters is visibly undermining the Nationalism. More “incalculable injury” is likely to be done by teaching of this kind at this juncture than by the removal of any great man, however pre-eminent and inspiring his greatness.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Karmayogin*, CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 84-91)



## ‘WORK THIS SUPREME MIRACLE SO LONG AWAITED’

August 13, 1914

The being stands before Thee, with arms lifted, palms open, in an ardent aspiration.

O sweet Master, it is a Love more wonderful and formidable than any manifested so far which the earth needs; it is for this Love that it yearns. . . . Who will be capable and worthy of being its intermediary to it? Who? That matters little; but it must be done. O Lord, answer my call, accept the offering of my being despite its little worth and its limitations: Come.

More, always more; may the regenerating streams roll over the earth in beneficent waves. Transfigure and illumine. Work this supreme miracle so long awaited, and break all ignorant egoisms; awaken Thy sublime flame in every heart. Do not let us become benumbed in a tranquil serenity. We ought not to take any rest before Thy new and sovereign Love is manifested.

Listen to our prayer; answer our call: Come!

THE MOTHER

(*Prayers and Meditations*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 222)



## A CONVERSATION OF 19 FEBRUARY 1951

*To be able to enter the “earth-memory” consciously, a discipline is needed.<sup>1</sup>  
What discipline?*

A discipline much more difficult than the discipline of yoga! It is an occult discipline.

First of all, one must learn to go out of one’s body consciously and to enter into another more subtle body; to use one’s will to go where one wants to go, never to fear and sometimes to face unexpected and even terrible things; to remain calm, to develop the mind’s visual sense, to accustom one’s mind to be altogether peaceful and quiet. . . . You know, the list is long and I could continue like this for hours!

Who among you has had the experience of going out of the body — going out and knowing about it? I do not even speak of doing it at will, for that is another stage.

*Once I went out of my body but got back into it immediately!*

You did not take the opportunity of going for a little walk, did you? Well, you are not inquisitive!

*How can one know that one has gone out of the body?*

You see it immobile on your bed. There are other means of knowing also.

*I went out of my body under the effect of chloroform. I saw my body on the table and I witnessed the operation.*

So too I knew quite a remarkable clairvoyant. One day she had to undergo an operation and she was chloroformed; she went out of her body. Suddenly she began to see what was going on in the minds of the people who were there. She had the habit of talking, even while asleep, and she began to speak out quite aloud: she said that so-and-so had worries, that another had a problem to solve, and that its solution was such and such a thing.

This was an exceptional case — that happens only to gifted persons and there are not many of these. But the number of persons who remain conscious under chloroform is greater than one thinks; but generally, when one wakes up from chloroform one feels pretty uneasy and remembers but vaguely his experiences outside the body. Is there anyone here who has fainted suddenly, as if by accident?

1. See the talk of 15 February 1951.

You see your body, don't you? And you ask yourself, "But what is it doing there in that ridiculous position?" And you rush back into it! That happened to me once in Paris. I had been treated to a good dinner, and then I went to a conference hall, I believe. There were many people, it was very hot, I was standing there with the good dinner in my stomach, and suddenly I felt ill at ease. I told the person who was with me, "I must go out immediately." Once outside (it was in Trocadero Square) I fainted away completely. I saw my body there, stretched out, and I found it so ridiculous that I rushed into it and I gave it a good scolding, saying, "You must not play such tricks with me!"

Many people faint like this and see themselves. There is one condition for this: the organ of sight in the subtle physical body or in the most material vital must be developed.

I must tell you that this kind of capacity may come spontaneously, without effort — one may be a born clairvoyant. They are not necessarily very intelligent people, their vital consciousness may be mediocre, but they are born clairvoyant. It is not a sign of a great development — it comes from something else, from a capacity of the parents, of past lives, etc. But if you are not born clairvoyant, and if you do not carry in you the other extreme, I mean a psychic being wholly conscious and fully developed which leads its own independent life in the body, and you want to learn to see and have visions, then it is a very long, very slow discipline and there are very few people who have the necessary patience and endurance to go to the end of the training.

It is interesting but it is not essential, one can do without it. It is the same as with dreams. But if you can develop this capacity, it can make your life more rich, it can make your consciousness progress more quickly.

*You say there are two categories of people: those who are asked to meditate and those who are not asked. How to know to which category one belongs?*<sup>2</sup>

You are told.

*So, can we ask you?*

Certainly, I am here for that!

*At times when one goes out of the body, the body follows the part which goes out.*

2. "A discipline in itself is not what we are seeking. What we are seeking is to be concentrated on the Divine in all that we do, at all times, in all our acts and in every movement. There are some here who have been told to meditate; but also there are others who have not been asked to do any meditation at all. But it must not be thought that they are not progressing. They too follow a discipline, but it is of another nature. To work, to act with devotion and an inner consecration is also a spiritual discipline." *Questions and Answers 1929* (21 April)

You are speaking of a somnambulist? But that is quite another thing. This means that the part which goes out (whether a part of the mind or a part of the vital) is so strongly attached to the body, or rather that the body is so attached to this part, that when this part decides to do something the body follows it automatically. In your inner being you decide to do a certain thing and your body is so closely tied to your inner being that without thinking of it, without wanting to do so, without making any effort, it follows and does the same thing. Note that in this matter, the physical body has capacities it would not have in the ordinary waking condition. For instance, it is well known that one can walk in dangerous places where one would find it rather difficult to walk in the waking state. The body follows the consciousness of the inner being and its own consciousness is asleep — for the body has a consciousness. All the parts of the being, including the most material, have an independent consciousness. Hence when you go to sleep dead tired, when your physical body needs rest absolutely, your physical consciousness sleeps, while the consciousness of your subtle physical body or your vital or of your mind does not sleep, it continues its activity; but your physical consciousness is separated from the body, it is asleep in a state of unconsciousness, and then the part which does not sleep, which is active, uses the body without the physical consciousness as intermediary and makes it do things directly. That is how one becomes a somnambulist. According to my experience, the waking consciousness goes to sleep for some reason or other (usually due to fatigue), but the inner being is awake, and the body is so tied to it that it follows it automatically. That is why you do fantastic things, because you do not see them physically, you see them in a different way.

*It is said that somnambulism is due to serious preoccupations and cares. Is this true? Tartini composed a sonata in this state, and when he got up in the morning, he wrote down the whole thing.*

Somnambulism is not always due to preoccupations and cares! Yes, there are people who write wonderful things when in a state of somnambulism. But Tartini was not a somnambulist — it was in the dream-state that he wrote sonatas.

The other state is always a little dangerous, always. Unexpected things can happen, an accident to the vital, for instance.

*How can one be cured of somnambulism?*

Quite simply, by putting a will upon the body before going to sleep. One becomes a somnambulist because the mind is not developed enough to break the inner ties. For the mind always separates the external being from the deeper consciousness. Little children are quite tied up. I knew children who were quite sincere but could not distinguish whether a thing was going on in their imagination or in reality. For



them the inner life was as real as the external life. They were not telling stories, they were not liars; simply the inner life was as real as the external life. There are children who go night after night to the same spot in order to continue the dream they have begun — they are experts in the art of going out of their bodies.

*Is it good to leave the body asleep and go out rambling? Can one go back into the body at any moment one likes?*

It is dangerous if you sleep surrounded by people who may come and shake you up, believing that something has happened to you. But if you are alone and sleep quietly, there is no danger.

One can get back into the body at any time and generally it is much more difficult to remain outside than to get back — as soon as the least thing happens, one rushes back quickly into the body.

*If one goes out of the body leaving it on the bed, can someone else enter it?*

That can happen but it is extremely rare, once in a hundred thousand cases.

“Someone” cannot enter — a human being cannot enter the body of another unless he has quite an exceptional and unique occult knowledge and in that case he will not do it.

But if a human being does not enter, at times there are beings of the vital world who do not have a body and want to have one for the fun of the experience, and when they see that someone has gone out of the body (but he must go out very materially) and is not sufficiently protected, they can rush in to take his place. But it is such a rare thing that if you had not put the question I would not have spoken about it. Still it is not an impossibility.

People who have nightmares of this kind should always protect themselves occultly before going out of the body — it can be done in many ways. The simplest way, one which needs no special knowledge is to call the Guru or, if one knows somebody who has the knowledge, to call him in thought or spirit; or to protect oneself by making a kind of wall of protection around oneself (one can do many things, can't one?); this can prevent such beings from entering.

If you have a disposition for exteriorisation and if you follow a yoga, you are always asked to protect your sleep: by some contemplation, a mental movement, any movement — there are many ways of protecting oneself. But I think there is no such danger for you; perhaps not for everybody, but still one would have to be terribly ambitious, terribly insincere for such a thing to happen; one would have to be in relation with truly wicked entities, for, a being who lives in orderliness and truth will never rush into the body of another, that is an act of disorder and it is not done.

*Is it the psychic being which goes out or some other part of the being?*

If it is the psychic being which goes out, one would not be aware of it, the more so as most of the time it is not within you! Very few people carry their psychic being within them because the dwelling-place is not ready. What goes out is sometimes the subtle physical, this is when one sees one's body stretched out — for the physical vision to remain conscious, it must be a very material part of the being which goes out; one must go out very materially in the subtle physical body or in the most material vital. But usually it is the vital which goes out and still more often the mental being; but when it is the mind which goes out one is not aware of it at all, for the mind is like the psychic, it is very rarely within you. If you think of something or somebody, one part of your mind is immediately there — the mind is a vagabond, it roves, it comes and goes, it enters and goes out. There are very few people who have organised their mind sufficiently to keep it within them, close-packed, and prevent it from gadding about.

*At times I seem to go out of my body and see it dead.*

But that is a mere dream; probably you did not go out of your body at all. There are people who dream they are dead. But that is of no importance.

*When one goes out of the body, one must try to rush towards you — I think everybody does that, don't they?*

Not one in a hundred!

If you did that, very interesting things would happen to you. I knew someone in France who used to come to me every evening in order that I might show him some unknown region and take him for a ramble in the vital or mental world, and actually I used to take him there. At times there were others also, at times this person was alone. I showed him how to go out of the body, how to get back into it, how to keep the consciousness, etc., I showed him many places telling him "There you must take this precaution, here you must do such and such a thing." And this continued for a long time.

I do not mean that no one among you comes to me in the night, but there are very few who do it consciously. Generally (you will tell me if I am wrong, but that is my impression), when you go to sleep and have decided to remember me before going to sleep, it is rather a call than a will to "rush" to me, as you say. You are there on your bed, you want to rest, to have a good sleep, remain in a good consciousness; then you call me rather than have the idea of going out of the body and coming to see me.

THE MOTHER

*(Questions and Answers 1950-1951, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 4, pp. 124-31)*

## PERSONAL ADVICE

### Short Replies

*My mind is so entirely clouded by doubts and other lower influences that I feel if my body passed away just now, it would be so much for the better! In spite of all that, as a Purusha I am indifferent to any such absurd movements.*

Yes, they are absurd — shake it off.  
With my blessings.

1933

\*

*I don't know why for some time I have not been feeling well. My mind is troubled, my vital is sad and my body is sick.*

Do not worry, remain quiet, keep your faith intact. It will pass.

1 February 1933

\*

*I don't know how thoughts that are harmful to my consecration slip into my mind and upset me. I try my best to drive them away and to remain absorbed in contemplation of You, but very often they return. Why are they repeated, and where do they come from? Do they belong to the universal nature which is not yet purified, and will they keep on returning until my entire human nature is transformed?*

Yes, they belong to the unregenerate universal Nature. But to the extent that we ourselves are transformed, we can keep them at a distance and they no longer trouble us.

\*

Always to prefer what belongs to others is a vital movement. Do not pay any attention to it.

2 June 1934

\*

Do you mean that only your mind is open to my action? That would not be correct, because I act on you through the heart much more than through the mind.

4 June 1934

\*

*We are always unconscious of the real inner cause of our actions and movements.*

Yes, the movements of the being are always very complex.

5 June 1934

\*

*My physical being thirsts for Your love; do not delay, Mother. You know that the child will not listen to reason, he only wants to remain on his Mother's breast.*

You know very well that I am always with you and in you, in the physical consciousness as in the others.

10 July 1934

\*

Yes, the outer nature must become calm and quiet and turn towards the Divine.

21 December 1936

\*

*We are at least mentally convinced about our misunderstanding and error and we are determined to give a vital push for their rectification and we believe by Your Gracious Power it will be materialised rapidly. Of course, it may not be within a very short time, but surely it will come.*

Why should it not be at once? With good will and faith nothing is impossible.

6 July 1939

\*

*Mother, when someone asks me what I have done during all the years I have been here, I say that I have served with devotion, and that is my sadhana. I do not understand anything else. It is true that it has taken me a long time to understand this, and that I have sometimes been anxious. By Mother's Grace I*

*understand a little about Her service, and in it I feel Her Force and Her Love, and I find that it is quite sufficient for me. Isn't it so, Mother?*

Certainly you understand and you act better and better, with a consciousness that is progressing towards a total light.

\*

*It is rather difficult to refuse when anyone asks me for something. I think it is a failing in my nature. Isn't it so, Mother?*

It all depends on how you look at it and the spirit in which it is done.

\*

*Mother, today I made a fan out of these shavings. I offer it at Your feet, but I don't know if You will accept it for its artistic merits, because it does not have any — I must admit it in all sincerity. Mother, I believe You will accept it as a symbol of my physical offering. For my part, I consider that more important than the other qualities of any work we do. Of course, I do not mean that artistic beauty should be neglected. Mother, am I right?*

Yes, you are right, and besides the fan is not unattractive, it has a charm of its own.

\*

*I feel very sorry that I have created an impression that I am pulling at money and diverting it from where it should go — to the Mother. My endeavour is that all wealth belongs to the Mother and we must use it as directed by Her. Wherever I have a say I do this, and feel sorry that I have created an opposite impression. I write this to take a certain burden off my mind.*

I do not know who has spread this rumour, but I can assure you that I know it is not true. So, do not worry and let peace settle in your heart with my blessings.

\*

What you seek is always there ready for you. Let the psychic turn grow complete and it will of itself bring you to that for which you aspire.

My love and blessings.

15 February 1939

\*

*At times I seriously think about but do not understand what my being wants. How is it that I do not feel a sense of a real being which is and which has the delight of being and becoming? Why do I not feel any real interest in any creative activity? My mind is active, it wants to understand and become luminous and see and know the truth of things, and I feel my mind is growing in this direction. At times I feel an urge of the heart to seize something which can really satisfy my self, but the urge does not last long. It disappears into some flat state of existence. What do you think my real being wants?*

THE DIVINE.

*I also felt that you were not quite satisfied with me.*

Nothing of the kind. Each one has his difficulties and I am here to help him out of them.

My love and blessings.

25 February 1942

\*

*A thought came to me that even when I do not get any direct suggestion or direction from you, I should, in the interest of your work, do whatever I myself can, to serve you in my own way<sup>1</sup> and to the best of my ability. Graciously enlighten me and correct me if I am wrong.*

This is always dangerous. One must learn to serve the Divine *not in one's own way* but in the Divine's way.

Blessings.

10 April 1947

\*

*For taking decisions I have found a trick. I postpone the matter and put it to you inwardly. Automatically a solution comes.*

This is indeed the true way and ought to be used in all cases.

\*

1. Mother underlined these four words.

*Let me be able to do what you want me to do, knowingly or unknowingly.*

This is the right thing and the very best.

\*

My dear child, you have indeed passed from one life to another; but it is in your body that this new birth took place, and now the road is wide open before you for a new progress.

With my love and blessings.

19 April 1960

\*

*“I know the path, but what can I do if the robbers rob me on the way?”*

— Maulana Azad.

Call the Lord to catch the robbers.

26 October 1963

\*

*I seek the Mother’s light on the following question. The world being what it is, we have to work under the existing conditions. Why not use the available conditions, gather strength and then endeavour to manifest the Divine Will in its purity?*

But the very fact of living upon earth means that we are “using the available conditions”, otherwise it would be impossible to live.

Blessings.

18 March 1965

\*

*Divine Mother,*

*If I should have an attack of any kind in the future, could I send you a note immediately, instead of people just taking me off to the hospital?*

Surely, let me know *at once*, so that I can help.

Love.

30 September 1966

\*



*Divine Mother,  
I am having some difficulty in my vital. Would you please help me.*

If you were to do some work? . . .  
Blessings.

25 May 1967

\*

*Divine Mother,  
What I want is to move all of my being into the future. Will you help me  
with those parts that need a push?*

This is quite a good resolution. The push is and will be given.  
Now, do not resist.  
Love and blessings.

20 May 1968

\*

*Divine Mother,  
I am ready.*

Start.  
Blessings.

1 July 1969

\*

*Since yesterday's darshan I feel something revolting in me against a spiritual  
life. I am afraid of this revolt. What shall I do?*

What revolted in you when you were in front of me is exactly what prevents you  
from leading a spiritual life. Now that you are conscious of the enemy you can throw  
him out of you if so you decide.

21 November 1969

\*

*I had collected some money for books. One day I passed it on to you. Imme-  
diately afterwards somebody presented me with all those books that I wanted  
and more!*

This kind of thing has happened hundreds of times and is happening more and more — but to me it seems quite “natural”, although I am unwilling to explain.

\*

*X is very pleased to have the photographs of You and Sri Aurobindo. He told me that he felt a distinct change in the atmosphere of his room after he had opened them. Mother, when I kept in my room that photograph of Sri Aurobindo, which I received from Your hands, I too felt that it was vibrating with life. Isn't this because of Your touch?*

Sri Aurobindo and I always put a force into the photographs we sign. In the present case Sri Aurobindo had also looked at the frame and admired it.

\*

*(About difficulty in writing)*

Be receptive and it will be all right.

\*

Go on writing. How do you know if the inspiration is not ready, waiting to come to you?

\*

Inspiration brings its manifold gifts to the one who knows how to receive them.

\*

*Sweet Mother,*

*A young man who has finished the Higher Course came to see me a few days ago and said he wanted to study The Life Divine with me. As I have not read the book except in bits and pieces, I told him that I could not help him. But he was very insistent and I had eventually to agree to his request.*

*He asks me questions, some of them quite difficult, from the book. And though I do not know the answers, I give them as they come to me. Both of us have found out the answers are correct, and quite often the language of my answers is very nearly the same as Sri Aurobindo's own in the book.*

*I wish to know: (1) Is this intuition? (2) Is there a plane where all knowledge*

*exists, and if one can open to that plane, he can get whatever knowledge he needs? (3) If teaching is my vocation, what should I do to develop the receptivity?*

You are in conscious connection with Sri Aurobindo's teaching, which is universal and immortal, in the higher mental world.

The more you are silently attentive, the more clearly you will receive it.

Blessings.

13 June 1968

\*

*(The Sri Aurobindo Research Academy was established on 24 April 1970 to provide guidance to research scholars intending to study the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at an advanced level. When the Academy was first proposed, Mother wrote to its founder:)*

Anything that is done can contribute to the progress of humanity, but all depends on the way of doing it.

My blessings are with you and your project.

March 1970

THE MOTHER

*(Words of the Mother – III, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 15, pp. 235-44)*



## “INVISIBLE” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

*Sri Aurobindo —*

*How do you find this poem? What plane does it come from? I suppose the first and the last stanzas are rather obscure. I have tried to avoid a hackneyed or monotonous suggestion in the metre, but do my modulations help?*

### INVISIBLE

When lips go singing love,  
The eyes are always<sup>1</sup> wet  
Because of an unviewed Visage  
They never can forget!

Immitigable gloom  
Hangs between  
Our dream and dawns of Beauty  
No yearning heart has seen.

| O vain all music-throb —  
| A sweet despair!<sup>2</sup>  
Who shall imprison Godhead  
In moving nets of air?

Only the quiet fall  
Of pure flesh-line,  
Rhyming with soul of worship,  
Utters the far Divine.

Though still our eyes are dim,<sup>3</sup>  
Clay now is a magic grace —  
God one with man! What creature  
Can view his own rapt face?

*1. Is this word necessary?*

Not necessary — better without it.

2. [*The two lines marked*] Very weak and sentimental.

3. *I had originally written: “Although eyes still are dim”.*

I can’t make much of the last stanza. It is as obscure as hell — and why should the creature want to see his own face rapt or unrapt? The “unviewed visage” is certainly not the creature’s face! Besides, a cynical reader of the modern type might retort “Well, buy a mirror and try to look rapt while you gaze in it — then you’ll see!” Taking this and the praise of the pure flesh-line, one would imagine that the solution of the problem is to fall in love with your own face and flesh-line, though you seem to suggest that perhaps it is impossible — which it obviously would be. But that can hardly be your meaning.

Apart from this obscurity and the vain music throb of a too sweet despair, the poem as poetry is a very good one. The modulations are all right. I don’t detect the plane.

12 November 1935

\* \* \*

*Sri Aurobindo —*

*Good Heavens, no! my poem is not a glorification of the Narcissus-complex. One might as well confound “So hamasmi” with that; but I confess the question closing my poem was not quite clear. By “rapt” I meant to suggest the condition of trance, eyes seeing nothing outward — a fact which should give a spiritual turn to the idea that we don’t see our own faces: in this instance the implication was that the divine Visage remains unviewed because it becomes one with our own! What do you say to the following alteration? — (the phrase preceding it is . . . “Utters the far Divine”.)*

Our eyes no longer seek,  
Clay now is a magic grace:  
| God one with man — the Eternal  
| Shining from our own face!<sup>4</sup>  
through

4. [*The two lines marked*] Gracious Heavens!

*And that sentimental pair of lines will improve, I think, if “sweet” is chucked out:*

O vain all music-throb —  
 A void despair!<sup>5</sup>  
 Who shall imprison Godhead  
 In moving nets of air?

5. [*The two lines marked*] No use.

*What is your opinion of the poem now? Anything hellishly obscure or too paradisaically saccharine, yet?*

I don't find any improvement.

13 November 1935

\* \* \*

*Sri Aurobindo —*

*A poem which had remained incomplete owing to a few flaws. I have tried to remove them. What do you think of it now?*

Yes; it seems quite all right now. Very beautiful.

*The final stanza is perhaps over-condensed?*

No.

### INVISIBLE

When lips go singing love,  
 The eyes are wet  
 Because of an unviewed Visage  
 They never can forget.

Immitigable gloom  
 Hangs between  
 Our dream and dawns of Beauty  
 No yearning heart has seen.

O vain all magic tune  
 Weaved<sup>6</sup> by despair:  
 Who shall imprison Godhead  
 In moving nets of air?

Only the quiet fall  
Of pure flesh-line  
Rhyming with soul of worship  
Beckons the far Divine;

And though ~~clay~~-eyes are dim  
The lips' ~~love~~-drouth  
Is sealed to a hush of heaven  
By some ~~invisible~~ Mouth . . .<sup>7</sup>

or,

And though clay-eyes are dim  
The lips' lone drouth  
Is sealed to a hush of heaven  
By a viewless ~~Lover~~-mouth<sup>8</sup> . . .  
Lover's

6. “Weaved” for p[*past*] p[*participle*] is permissible?

7. [*Stanza crossed out by Sri Aurobindo*]

8. [*“Lover-” crossed out by Sri Aurobindo*]

13 February 1936

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## INVISIBLE

When lips go singing love,  
The eyes are wet  
Because of an unviewed Visage  
They never can forget.

Immitigable gloom  
Hangs between  
Our dream and dawns of Beauty  
No yearning heart has seen.

O vain all magic tune  
Weaved by despair:  
Who shall imprison Godhead  
In moving nets of air?



Only the quiet fall  
 Of pure flesh-line  
 Rhyming with soul of worship  
 Beckons the far Divine;

And though clay-eyes are dim  
 The lips' lone drouth  
 Is sealed to a hush of heaven  
 By a viewless Lover's mouth . . .

AMAL KIRAN  
 (K. D. SETHNA)

*Men are always mixed and there are qualities and defects mingled together almost inextricably in their nature. What a man wants to be or wants others to see in him or what he is sometimes on one side of his nature or in some relations can be very different from what he is in the actual fact or in other relations or on another side of his nature. To be absolutely sincere, straightforward, open, is not an easy achievement for human nature. It is only by spiritual endeavour that one can realise it — and to do it needs a severity of introspective self-vision, an unsparing scrutiny of self-observation of which many sadhaks or Yogins even are not capable and it is only by an illumining Grace that reveals the sadhak to himself and transforms what is deficient in him that it can be done. And even then only if he himself consents and lends himself wholly to the divine working.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga – II, CWSA, Vol. 29, p. 51)*

## SAHANA'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO — XI<sup>1</sup>

*(Continued from the issue of June 2023)*

Yes, it was what the Mother meant. The attraction of the emotional and sentimental feeling naturally passes away when one grows inwardly from the vital basis into the maturer psychic stage but there is an interval when that has gone and the deeper psychic feeling has not yet found its seat or its form or expression. Even when it does, it may find fewer to appreciate it. (31.1.35)

\*

From what you describe it seems that you have got into contact with the mechanical mind whose nature is to go on turning round in a circle on the thoughts that come into it. This sometimes happens when the thinking mind is quiet. This is part of the physical mind and you should not be disturbed or alarmed by its rising up but see what it is and quiet it down, or get control of its movements. The one serious difficulty is about the sleeplessness — that must stop, for it weakens the nerves and the body and produces fatigue and inertia. You must try and receive the Force and get back the sleep. With sleep and rest the other things ought soon to disappear.

What you propose about seeing the Mother at will is not physically practicable and whenever in a few cases it has been allowed in the past, the results have not been helpful. What you should do is to write every two days or so a few lines until the difficulty is over. You must especially let me know about the sleep and the nervous condition. In fact you ought to have let me know at once although correspondence was stopped and still is till further notice, I had said that important or necessary communications could be sent. (3.3.35)

\*

The thoughts and feelings expressed in your letter are born of the depression and have no truth in themselves apart from it. Your being here does not in the least take up space that could be occupied by 'better' sadhaks. For a good sadhak there will always be a place in one way or another. The incapacity which you discover in yourself is simply the resistance of the habitual external and physical nature,

1. This instalment is marked XI because part X was inadvertently left out and the mistake was noticed too late. Part X will appear in the September 2023 issue. — Ed.

which everyone has and which none, however good a sadhak, has yet been able to transform radically, because it is the last thing to change and its resistance is acute just now because it is against this that the power of the sadhana is now pressing so that the change may come. When this part presents itself it always tries to appear as something unalterable, incapable of change, impervious to the sadhana. But it is not really so and one must not be deceived by this appearance. As for the fear of madness, it is only a nervous impression which you should throw away. It is not vital weakness that leads to such upsets — it is an obscurity and weakness in the physical mind accompanied by movements of an exaggerated vital nature (e.g. exaggerated spiritual ambition) which are too strong for the mind to bear. That is not your case. You have had long experience of inner peace, wideness, Ananda, an inner life turned towards the Divine and one who has had that ought not to speak of general incapacity, whatever the difficulties of the external nature, — difficulties common in one form or another to all. (11.3.35)

\*

A weeping that comes with the feeling you speak of is the sign of a psychic sorrow — for it translates an aspiration of the psychic being. But depression and hopelessness ought not to come. You should rather cling to the faith that since there is a true aspiration in you — and of that there can be no doubt — it is sure to be fulfilled, whatever the difficulties of the external nature. You must recover in that faith the inner peace and quietude while at the same time keeping the clear insight into what has to be done and the steady aspiration for the inner and outer change. (17.3.35)

\*

The conversion which keeps the consciousness turned towards the light and makes the right attitude spontaneous and natural and abiding and rejection also spontaneous is the psychic conversion. That is to say man usually lives in his vital and the body is its instrument and the mind its counsellor and minister (except for the few mental men who live mostly for the things of the mind, but even they are in subjection to the vital in their ordinary movements). The spiritual conversion begins when the soul begins to insist on a deeper life and is complete when the psychic becomes the basis or the leader of the consciousness and mind and vital and body are led by it and obey it. Of course if that once happens fully, doubt, depression and despair cannot come any longer, although there may be and are difficulties still. If it is not fully, but still fundamentally accomplished, even then these things either do not come or are brief passing clouds on the surface — for there is a rock of support and certitude at the base, which even if partially covered cannot disappear altogether.

Mostly however the *constant* recurrence of depression and despair or of doubt

and revolt is due to a mental or vital formation which takes hold of the vital mind and makes it run round always in the same circle at the slightest provoking cause or even without cause. It is like an illness to which the body consents from habit and from belief in the illness even though it suffers from it, and once started the illness runs its habitual course unless it is cut short by some strong counteracting force. If once the body can withdraw its consent, the illness immediately or quickly ceases — that is the secret of the system. So too if the vital mind withdraws its consent, refuses to be dominated by the habitual suggestions and the habitual movement, these recurrences of depression and despair can be made soon to cease. But it is not easy for this mind, once it has got into the habit of consent, even a quite passive and suffering and reluctant consent, to cancel the habit and get rid of the black circle. It can be done easily only when the mind refuses any longer to believe in the suggestions or accept the ideas or feelings that start the circle. (13.3.36)

\*

You feel as you do only because you are largely identified with the part that has to undergo change and so you feel the difficulty, even the impossibility of changing. But although the difficulty is there the impossibility does not exist. Even this identification may be helpful, for so the change can be radical by a direct action in the part itself, instead of an indirect influence upon it through the mind or higher vital. Rest and restore your physical forces, open so that the Mother's force may freely work on you, all trouble pass away and a new stronger movement commence. (22.3.36)

\*

It is perhaps that the attitude you took of going on with the calm within and slowly changing what had to be changed, postponing certain things for the future — though not a wrong attitude in itself — made you somewhat lax, allowing things to play on the surface (desire etc.) which should have been kept in check. This resolution may have opened the way for the old movements to rise through this part which was not yet ready to change at all and the hostile forces finding you off your guard took the opportunity to push the attack home. They are always vigilant for an opportunity and there must be a sufficient vigilance on the sadhak's side to refuse it to them. It is also possible that as the Force descending in the general atmosphere has carried in it some pressure on the consciousness of the sadhaks to be more ready, more awake, less engrossed in the movements of the ordinary nature than they are now, it fell upon this part and the resistance in it which was mostly passive for a long time became suddenly active under the pressure. (29.3.36)

\*

What you write is quite accurate about the true soul, the psychic being. But people mean different things when they speak of the soul. Sometimes it is what I have called in the *Arya* the desire soul, — that is the vital with its mixed aspirations, desires, hungers of all kinds good and bad, its emotions, finer and grosser, or sensational urges crossed by the mind's idealisings and psychic stresses. But sometimes it is also the mind and vital under the stress of a psychic urge. The psychic so long as it is veiled must express itself through the mind and vital and its aspirations are mixed and coloured there by the vital and mental stuff. Thus the veiled psychic urge may express itself in the mind by a hunger in the thought for knowledge of the Divine, what the Europeans call the intellectual love of God. In the vital it may express itself as a hunger or hankering after the Divine. This can bring much suffering because of the nature of the vital, its unquiet passions, desires, ardours, troubled emotions, cloudings, depressions, despairs. The psychic can have a psychic sorrow when things go against its diviner yearnings, but this sorrow has in it no touch of torment, depression or despair. Nevertheless all cannot approach, at least cannot at once approach the Divine in the pure psychic way — the mental and vital approaches are often necessary beginnings and better from the spiritual point of view than an insensitiveness to the Divine. It is in both cases a call of the soul, the soul's urge — it only takes a form or colour due to the stress of the mind or vital nature. (29.5.36)

\*

What you have written about your condition seems to be correct as a whole. There is certainly a greater calm within and a freedom of the inner being which was not there once. It is this which gives you the equality you feel there and the capacity to escape from more serious disturbances. When one has this basis of inner calm, the difficulties and imperfections of the surface can be dealt with without upset, depressions, etc. The power to go among others without any invasion is also due to the same cause.

As for the second question there is no general rule, but your attitude is the right one for you — for you have not the need of any particular development of capacity, having behind a sincere attitude of a more general and penetrating and pervasive character. Others who feel the need of a particular development actually ask for it and get it. (9.6.36)

\*

Fundamentally, it is the same question as the control of speech, — not to allow the mind or the vital to act or speak or make formations without an inner criticism and control. Once that habit of psychic control and the eye of the psychic perception kept on these things is established, there will be no difficulty. (21.6.36)

\*

There is no reason for despondency; when one has progressed as far as you did, that is, so far as to feel and maintain the calm and have so much of the psychic discrimination and the psychic feeling, one has no right to despair of one's spiritual future. You could not yet carry out the discrimination into an entire psychic change, because a large part of the outer physical consciousness still took some pleasure in old movements and therefore their roots remained alive in the subconscious. When you were off your guard the whole thing rose up and there was a temporary and violent lapse. But this does not mean that the nature is not changeable. Only the calm inner conscious poise, the psychic discrimination and above all a will to change, stronger and steadier than before, must be so established that no uprising or invasion will be able to cloud even partly the discrimination or suspend the will. You saw the truth but this part of the old nature which rose up did not want to acknowledge — it wanted its play and imposed that on you. This time you must insist on a complete truthfulness in the whole being which will refuse to accept any denial of what the psychic discrimination sees or any affirmation or any consent anywhere to what it disapproves, spiritual humility and the removal of self-righteousness, self-justification and the wish to impose yourself, the tendency to judge others etc. All these defects you know are in you; to cast them out may take time, but if the will to be true to the inner self in all ways is strong and persistent and vigilant and always calls in the Mother's force, it can be done sooner than now seems possible. (21.8.36)

\*

You did quite right to go to V — it was the thing to do as soon as the vital was clear. You also saw accurately about the obstacle (as to be) the first to go, that it was a pride that had not to be entertained. The ordinary and the spiritual view of these things must necessarily be different, and from the spiritual viewpoint not to give a foothold to the ego was the important thing. Also the resolution not to preoccupy oneself with the faults and offences of others — whether committed against oneself or other people — is just the right resolution. There was no mistake nor any thing vital concealed in your movement. (3.9.36)

\*

It is of course the resistance of the old vital in the past that is being redeemed which creates this irritation and these imaginations about the Mother's displeasure. For as a matter of fact there was no dissatisfaction against you in the Mother's mind and this idea is usually a suggestion to the sadhak's mind from the Force that wants to create the wish to go or any other kind of discontent or depression. It is a curious form of delusion that has taken root, as it were, in the Asram atmosphere and is cherished not so much by the individual vital as by the forces that work upon it to

break, if possible, the sadhana. You must not allow any harbourage to that or else it will create any amount of trouble. The absence of proper sleep naturally brings a state of fatigue in the nerves which helps these things to come — for it is through the physical consciousness that they attack and if it can make that consciousness tamasic in any way their entry is more easy. (15.9.36)

\*

Your attitude towards the change needed and new life is the right one. A quiet vigilant but undistressed persistence is the best way to get it done.

For the intimacy within to be reestablished the quietude must deepen so that the psychic may come out in the physical as it has done in the higher parts. (28.9.36)

\*

It is the beginning of a very decisive experience and realisation — first, the Ascent above the mind (head) into the spiritual plane. It is here that one realises and is released into the vastness, stillness, silence, freedom, peace and joy of the Infinite and becomes aware of the Universal Self and the Divine. This realisation is the foundation (when it is fixed and one lives constantly above the body in the wideness of the infinite Being) of the spiritual state and the beginning of the spiritual transformation of the nature. What you have been having up to now is the psychic change; when the psychic and spiritual join together, then the transformation can be complete. For this Descent is necessary and that is the second thing you are feeling, — the Descent of the higher, spiritual, or divine consciousness and energy into the whole system down to the bottom of the spine where is the Muladhara or centre of the Physical Consciousness. The Energy descends through all the levels and centres, mind centre, vital centre, physical centre and fills the whole body with the higher existence and consciousness. The ascent is the liberation (Mukti), and when one thus ascends, one is liberated from the body consciousness, one no longer feels the body as a form, no longer feels contained in the body, but widens out into the formless Vastness of the Divine. Or sometimes the body is felt as something very small in this Vastness. In the Descent the body is felt but not as a confining form so much as an instrument and receptacle for this larger consciousness. Your description of the experience is unmistakable. All the elements are there. What has to happen is to get fixed in the wideness, freedom, stillness, peace of the consciousness above and for the Descent to continue till it has fixed the higher power of being everywhere below — in the body and in the subconscious below it and also all round the body so that one lives enveloped in this new consciousness and being. (13.11.36)

\*

It is indeed good that the psychic intervened and prevented the mind taking the wrong direction. It is not possible that there should not be occasional stumbles, failures etc. in the work of self-purification and change, but to feel upset or remorseful over them is harmful rather than helpful; it easily brings depression and depression brings clouding of the mind and weakness. To observe calmly the wrong movement and its nature (here it was the tongue that was at fault and the tongue is always an easily erring member) and to set it right inwardly is always the best way. Calm, especially when the true spiritual calm of the Self is there, is the thing that must always be preserved; for all that everything else can be done in time and with the least trouble. (27.11.36)

\*

The difficulty you experience exists because speech is a formation which in the past has worked much more as an expression of the vital in man than of the mental will. Speech breaks out as an expression of the vital and its habits without caring to wait for the control of the mind; the tongue has been spoken of as the unruly member. In your case the difficulty has been increased by the habit of talk about others — gossip, to which your vital was very partial, so much that it cannot even yet give up the pleasure in it. It is therefore this tendency that must cease in the vital itself, not to be under the control of the impulse to speech, to be able to do without it as a necessity and to speak only when one sees that it is right to do so and only what one sees to be right to say, is a very necessary part of yogic self-control.

It is only by perseverance and vigilance and a strong resolution that this can be done, but if the resolution is there, it can be done in a short time by the aid of the Force behind. (6.12.36)

*(To be continued)*

SAHANA

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



## A 'DENIAL' AND A 'REFUSAL'

### Re-reading the Matter-Spirit Dichotomy in *The Life Divine*<sup>1</sup>

It may not be entirely fortuitous that Sri Aurobindo wrote and published the first 54 original chapters of *The Life Divine* in *Arya: A Philosophical Review*, in the midst of the cataclysmic Great War of 1914, when most of the Western World lay in ruins. The Bolshevik Revolution, sanguine and far-reaching in character, took place in 1917. Many of the contemporary utopian thinkers of the time — D. H. Lawrence, Carl Jung and Aldous Huxley — sought the regeneration of the West in the aftermath of the devastating total war: Lawrence's quest took him to the remote heartland of the American South West, to Taos and Santa Fe, to the habitat of the Native Americans, just as Huxley created his idyll in his novel, *Island*, set half-way between the Andaman Islands and Sumatra. The anthropologist Margaret Mead saw her utopia in the American Samoa in the South Pacific, and the Nobel Laureate, Ernest Hemingway found deliverance, sailing in his yacht 'Pilar' in the Caribbean Sea.

Sri Aurobindo was radically different. In *The Life Divine*, he offered a new manifesto for the future of humanity, a blueprint for a New World, hitherto unimagined in the West. He explained the rationale of his new vision of Man in metaphysical/ evolutionary terms, outlined the contours of a divine life on earth and heralded the coming of a New Species. Man, he said memorably, is a 'transitional being' who would be surpassed by the Superman. The first original chapters, published in 54 instalments in *Arya* were revised in 1939 and appeared in book form in 1949 published by the Sri Aurobindo Library, New York.<sup>2</sup> What is the relevance of *The Life Divine* to our own times?

Sri Aurobindo's philosophical treatment of the 'evolutionary crisis,' went beyond the concerns of the world-order, manifest in the League of Nations. His vision remained distant to most during 1939-1945, when the world witnessed another devastating conflagration, this time with the added horrors of the Holocaust and the spectre of a nuclear Armageddon.

The Cold War and the creation of the United Nations Organisation (UNO) led to an uneasy truce and an unstable balance of power among warring nations; they did not pave the way for greater wisdom and the promise of a lasting peace. Indeed, more than a century after *The Life Divine* appeared in the *Arya*, the world is

1. Paper presented at the ICPR-Rishihood University National Seminar on 'Sri Aurobindo: The Herald of The Life Divine,' 26-28 May, 2022 at Rishihood University, Sonipat, Haryana.

2. For the publication details of *The Life Divine*, see 'Bibliographical Note,' *Sri Aurobindo: The Life Divine*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram; 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1939-1940.

yet to grasp the power of Sri Aurobindo's Vision in *The Life Divine*. The Ukraine crisis, the big power rivalry, the wanton use of chemical and biological weapons, the threat of mutual annihilation, a looming ecological disaster on the horizon, and the outbreak of a catastrophic world-wide pandemic, have questioned the survival of the planet. What is the meaning of civilisation, based on the supremacy of Reason and the rational order? The achievements of mankind in the fields of intellect, the arts, literatures and cultures, path-breaking advancements in the domains of science, medicine, agriculture and technology, have not led to a corresponding transformation of our deeper emotional, ethical and spiritual being. The internet, the world-wide-web may have brought civilisations and nations together in the physical sense; but these have not led to the true meeting of minds and the coming together of nations. The exploration of outer space coexists with the bankruptcy of the inner self.

If the growing mismatch between the inner and the outer worlds stares us in the face, the same paradox is manifest in the vaunted world of the media and academia as well. For the reigning discourse in the metropolitan West today is an unquestioned faith and belief in **cultural materialism**, a far cry from Sri Aurobindo's position in *The Life Divine*. The resurgence of religiosity, often in regressive and divisive forms, in many parts of the world, seems to negate his critique of Religion and the coming of the Subjective Age, essentially spiritual in character. At the same time, the Spirit-Matter conflict seems to go unchallenged. The intellectual class and the intelligentsia are anchored to cultural materialism and consumerism, while the masses, wedded to religiosity and an unbridled consumer culture, have created a worldwide Manichean divide. Sri Aurobindo's prophecy of the passing of the Age of Reason and Religion and the coming of the Subjective Age seems to exist in isolated pockets and communities while the promise of *The Life Divine* seems to have been relegated to a distant future. The arrival of the Subjective Age, spiritual in character, that Sri Aurobindo heralds appears to be far away from our present reality.

It is in this context that perhaps we need to revisit *The Life Divine*. If the 'Human Aspiration' in terms of an abiding quest for God, Light, Freedom and Immortality is the dominant drive that survives all stages of scepticism, then we must see the dichotomous and fractious relationship between Matter and Spirit as central to the unfolding in *The Life Divine* both as a text and as a vision.

Sri Aurobindo considered himself, first and foremost, a poet. He wrote philosophy, he said, by accident as a result of the editorial collaboration between himself and the French savant Paul Richard. Sri Aurobindo's language in *The Life Divine* is often poetical, Mantric in speech, and revelatory in character. Punctuated by symbols and metaphors, it contains the luminosity of his futuristic vision. At the same time, he advances arguments in a careful, systematic manner with logic and reasoning that are convincing to the rational mind, rooted in the philosophical traditions of the East and the West. We would therefore do well to revisit two chapters of *The Life Divine* and review the Matter-Spirit dichotomy before we consider his views on the

possibility of a divine life upon earth, as an evolutionary necessity and imperative. In the final section, we shall try to surmise the reasons for the continuation of the dichotomy and the ways it could be harmoniously resolved.

## II

In *The Life Divine* in general, and in the two chapters under discussion, Sri Aurobindo invokes the Vedic vision that underlies his position and arguments. The premises of the Vedas and the Upanishads remain pivotal to his thinking and realisation. This vision and the Truths therein constitute the sheet anchor; they are the templates for his reasoning and arguments. The essential Truths, as Sri Aurobindo views them, are already latent in the sacred texts, even if in seed form. They need to be rediscovered and redefined for our purpose, especially for the use of the rational mind that functions in terms of binaries and exclusivity. How do we go beyond such binaries that have led to polarisations and an increasing hiatus between Materialism and Asceticism? How should we proceed towards integration where each finds its completion and fulfilment in the other and a greater third?

Chapter II, entitled 'The Materialist Denial', carries an epigraph from the Taittiriya Upanishad.<sup>3</sup> The quote here envisions a shift from the principle: 'Matter is Brahman' to 'Energy is Brahman'; as the principal answer to the problem posed, it is an extraordinary *tour de force*.

The negation of matter or of spirit, Sri Aurobindo argues, must appear as 'irreconcilable opponents bound together in unhappy wedlock,' 'their divorce the one reasonable solution.' There are two primary and possible ways of bringing about a 'luminous reconciliation', he says, one by 'an objective method of analysis' the other by a 'subjective synthesis and illumination' and a 'catholic affirmation' can the 'manifold conflicting forces' be harmonised. Indeed, the 'negation of the materialist and the refusal of the ascetic', he tells us, 'have sought to assert themselves and dominate the conception of Life'.

Using the language of paradox, characteristic of mystics like William Blake, Sri Aurobindo draws our attention to the cardinal fact that the materialist's denial carries 'within itself its own cure'. For, agnosticism, a form of such denial, admits the 'Unknowable behind all manifestations' and while denying the world of the Spirit, 'extends the limits of the unknowable' beyond that which is generally comprehensible to us. He points out that the general propensity is to deny all evidence of supra-physical experience. This is understandable, since humanity is currently going through a period of rationalistic materialism. The fact of the matter is that the physical body with emotional desires and nervous impulses leads to 'illuminating confusion',

3. The extracts used in the text, unless otherwise stated, pertain to *Sri Aurobindo: The Life Divine*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram; 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1939-1940.

rather than 'clarifying truth.' Matter is of fundamental importance because 'The touch of earth,' he declares, 'is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge.' Here is a profound understanding of Matter and material existence.

What then is the service that atheism and agnosticism render to mankind? It is that 'all possible knowledge is within the power of humanity, so even agnosticism and atheism play a vital role in the progressive growth of the human consciousness. In order to find the answer, we may turn to the formula of the Upanishadic Vedanta. We must remember, argues, Sri Aurobindo, that an arbitrary distinction created by thought 'divides form of substance from form of energy.' This, we must note, is a remarkable perspective, indeed, a shift from physics to metaphysics.

In the light of the above, we can resolve the on-going conflict by postulating the following: The self-involution of Consciousness/Energy precedes a self-evolution out of form to actualise 'some mighty possibility in the universe which it has created.' This needs to be considered carefully, for it is central to our understanding of Sri Aurobindo's explanation of creative evolution in *The Life Divine*.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the fact that the 'materialist field' must be surpassed is indicated by developments in the scientific domain like 'wireless telegraphy'. There may even come a time, Sri Aurobindo declares, when even the physical medium, at both ends, may not be necessary. Properly studied, and harnessed, the mind can be seen to directly 'seize on the physical energy and speed it accurately on its errand,' towards the acquisition of 'cosmic knowledge'.

Having shown the positive achievements of Matter and its limitations in relation to the Spirit, Sri Aurobindo now turns his attention, in the next chapter to 'The Refusal of the Ascetic.' The chapter carries an epigraph with a quote from the Mandukya Upanishad:

'All this is the Brahman; this self is the Brahman and the self is fourfold.'

'Beyond relation, featureless, unthinkable, in which all is still.'

This is an affirmation; it is positive and self-evident in tone. Sri Aurobindo opens the argument by stating that a belief in a world beyond the senses and material reality is not a figment of the imagination or a chimera; it has been glimpsed through 'methodological research,' though 'imperfect' and 'ill-affirmed.' Indeed, there are witnesses to facts/realities beyond 'the range of the corporeal organs.' It is true that the general approach is for the individual to 'live his life' through 'feverish effort', since no further life may be available, and one must make most of the present life in terms of pleasure and gratification. However, like spiritual monism, material monism is both compelling and transitory. In the context of a dominant life-denying spirit, the most viable answer is to 'return into the non-Being or the relationless Absolute as the sole rational escape from the meaningless tangle of phenomenal life.' And yet, there

is a necessity for an inner enlargement of consciousness 'from the individual into the cosmic existence.' The possibility of such a consciousness in humanity is coming slowly to be admitted in modern psychology, he declares emphatically.

It may be noted, on the other hand, that an overriding belief in the supremacy of the Spirit may concede the world to be real, but may deny it 'an independent existence.' It is 'Conscious Energy one with Being that creates it. It is the existence of material form in its own right, apart from the self-illuminated energy which assumes the form that would be a contradiction of the truth of things . . .'

We may therefore see here that it is the need to go beyond the pure self of the Advaita, the 'inactive Brahman the transcendent Silence' that leads to the sense of 'unreality of the world'. This is the danger of 'a potent call to the wilderness — the 'refusal of the ascetic,' a pitfall that must be avoided.

In some quarters, declares Sri Aurobindo, the reign of the ascetic and the anchorite may be explained as a sign of the exhaustion of life, the 'failing of vital energy.' But this understanding may not explain adequately the dominance of such a world view, for so long. The answer perhaps is to read the two Vedantic formulae together, namely 'One without a Second', and secondly 'All this is the Brahman'. There is an upward aspiration in man 'for the Divine' and an equally important drive of the divine 'leaning downward to embrace eternally its manifestation'. Both Matter and Spirit need to be seen in the largest and most potent sense.

Viewed from this angle, it may be concluded that Materialism and Asceticism have served their end, and both need to go beyond their inherent limitations to realise their mission and destined role in the evolutionary order.

### III

It would thus be seen that Sri Aurobindo's discussion of the two concepts and the two views of life, seen above as seeming polar opposites, is marked by a rare approach at synthesis and integration, a hallmark of his genius reflected in all that he has touched upon. **He goes beyond the habitual rational/logical approach, based on preference and selectivity; instead, he endeavours to bring all under an all-encompassing and an overarching rubric that recognises the strength and limitations of each, and embraces all for a common goal where each finds its fulfilment and destiny.** Materialism and Asceticism have gone in separate directions in the West and the East, affirming their own role and importance while denying the role and relevance of the other. Sri Aurobindo does not negate the experiments in the history of human evolution. He shows us that it is the tendency of Nature to take up each category at a time, lead it to its extreme, realise its fullness and then proceed to the next. This wiser philosophical approach, based on a deeper and more profound understanding of Man and human psychology can take us beyond this impasse to the meeting points between Matter and Spirit.

We may see such creative convergences and intermingling in the so-called materialist West where mysticism and Gnosticism of the Greeks, the transcendental philosophy of Saint Augustine, the experiences of the medieval mystics and later in the ideas of seers like Emerson have existed and flourished, just as the materialistic philosophy of the Charvakas has taken roots in India. What is important is to integrate all in a balanced, harmonious and holistic manner. To that extent, it may be said that the two chapters in *The Life Divine* act as important templates that have served well in paving the way logically for the rest of the book. Indeed, they are crucial gateways to the corpus of Sri Aurobindo's thought and vision in all his writings. These two chapters of *The Life Divine* make rich allusions to a body of ancient wisdom that are prophetic and revelatory. They rest their claims on the bedrock of logic, reason and sense experience, and yet go beyond them in a free-flowing, seamless manner to a higher realm of harmony and integration. Coming immediately after the opening chapter, 'The Human Aspiration', the twin chapters discussed here become crucial precursors to the conclusions of the last chapter: 'The Divine Life.' Materialism and Asceticism are regarded as the leitmotifs of the West and the East, but they need not be equated with the West and the East in a homogenous manner.

#### IV

It may be useful to ask at this stage the reasons for the persistence of the dichotomy between Matter and Spirit, Materialism and Asceticism. The answer perhaps lies in the fact that in each cycle, changes must be realised not only in a minority, but it is the race which must undergo the changes as a whole. The experiment must be taken to its logical conclusion. The eastern lands that have had their share of the spiritual have been denied the fullest extent of the material culture, barring certain historic periods in the past. They need to go through this phase, and the process fully, through a phase of consumerism if needed, until they feel the necessity of the Spirit, just as the West, after prolonged material comforts and hedonism, is awakening now to the demands of the life of the Spirit. In many parts of the world, both in the East and the West, vast sections of the society, the poor, the destitute and the marginalised remain outside the pale of civilised existence. Suffering from hunger and neglect, they deserve better material comforts, health care and nutrition. The enlightened and progressive section of mankind must spearhead efforts in the direction of social justice and equality and hasten the process of the evolutionary change.

Only an enlightened social vision may hasten the pace of human evolution, perhaps a timely reminder of the World Spirit today. Religion too needs to cleanse itself from the burden of dogma, creed and cult and emerge as a life-affirming Spirituality. Only then could Matter and Spirit unite, and the Materialist and the Ascetic find a lasting reconciliation.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY



## BOOK REVIEW

*Inspired Journeys: An Art Inspired Travel Memoir Around Built Environments*  
By Satyajit Ghosh; Published by Macmillan Education 2022.

I am sending this note from Athens, where I have recently travelled carrying a copy of the book by Professor Ghosh in my backpack. It is my pleasure to write a review of *Inspired Journeys* written by him.

When I think of Professor Ghosh, a very special word comes to my mind: ‘serendipity’, a neologism attributed to Horace Walpole, with an interesting origin that can be traced back to a story published in 1557 by Michele Tramezzino in Venice,<sup>1</sup> which in turn was probably inspired by a fairy tale ‘The Three Princes of Serendip’, an adaptation of the Persian poem *Hasht-Bihisht* (The Eight Paradises). My encounter with Ghosh was indeed a serendipitous one, because like every great teacher he had an impact on my life-story and managed to encourage, kindle, and enrich my quest for knowledge. And like the word itself, and the fairy tale that evoked the fabulous wonders of India and Sri Lanka (“Serendip” was in fact an archaic name for Sri Lanka, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary), Ghosh’s book transcends time and space, taking us to distant lands, enriching our views and perspectives. It is not a mere coincidence that in the second chapter he presents a lucid discourse from an ancient settlement in Sri Lanka’s Anuradhapura where large *stupas* serve as reliquaries of Lord Buddha’s mortal remains and where arguably early signs of sustainability were sown when the Anuradhians invented hydraulic air-conditioning.

From Sri Lanka one is taken to Cambridge in the third chapter, ‘British Connections’. One walks through its cobbled streets and of course into the haloed precincts of King’s College, Sri Aurobindo’s *alma mater*, where documents related to Sri Aurobindo’s life including a precious obituary piece were obtained. Professor Ghosh talks about his association with Nirodbaran — a preeminent Aurobindonian — with a great deal of reverence at several places in the book, especially in the beginning of this chapter when he writes “It is a matter of great personal satisfaction that Nirodbaran graciously showered his benedictions for my forthcoming journey to Cambridge from his room within the main precincts of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. He had studied medicine in the U.K. and was able to tell me very briefly about English tastes and habits and their understated humour. Nirodbaran of course had the privilege of experiencing this directly from Sri Aurobindo himself. He spent twelve years almost continuously with the master as the scribe for the *magnum opus* ‘Savitri’ and was perhaps the only person who brought out the wry English humour from Sri Aurobindo’s otherwise saintly equipoise. Who else but Nirodbaran could

write to Sri Aurobindo on poetic styles with such candour? An example follows:

Nirodbaran:

Here is my attempt at the use of anapaests in the iambic metre:

The dismal clouds haunting my days and nights  
Dissolve into a calm transparent wide  
Horizon, when ascends on the black heights  
Thy moon increasing in its luminous tide.

Sri Aurobindo:

It is stressed transparent, not transparent. What a howler! It makes me ‘drop into poetry’ — thus

Sir, you seem apparently ignorant  
That parent is the trick and not parent.  
And yet the stress transpires transparently  
And is apparent to both ear and eye.  
So, you compare and do not compare things;  
Your soul prepares, not prepares heavenly wings.

Your use of anapaests is still clumsy! (Nirodbaran, 1974)

My first brush with English humour followed soon after I left for Cambridge — the historic city — and gratifyingly — Sri Aurobindo’s *alma mater*.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, the very act of obtaining them are recounted with telling accuracy — the overwhelming architecture of the carpeted staircase leading up to the receptionist’s desk, the tone of the conversations and many peculiarly English gestures are described in a very interesting sequence holding the reader at times in gripping expectancy:

Nirodbaran had asked me to write to him after visiting King’s College where Sri Aurobindo read the classics. One morning I walked up along Kings Parade and went past the Porters Lodge straight to a staircase where there was a reception desk. It was the widest staircase in Kings painted in pale green and had carpeted floors. I came straight to the point and asked, “I would be very interested in investigating Sri Aurobindo’s records whilst he was here.”

“What was the name again?” she asked.

I said his full name was ‘Aurobindo Ghose’ and he was here from 1890-92



when he studied Classical Tripos.

She smiled and said, “Let me see what I can do.”

It surprises me now when I look back to a different world order, a world where people heard you even without prior appointments. She came back with a leather-bound register nearly a hundred years old and turned over to a page where Sri Aurobindo’s entry record was written out in fountain pen.

She also said, “I have another document that might be of interest” and handed me a copy of a write-up from King’s College as a mark of appreciation when the college learnt of Sri Aurobindo’s death in 1950.

As I thanked her, she said, “You might also want to have a look at a photograph that we have.” I thought, what a treat and climbed up the wide flight of stairs. She then led me to a wall that had two pictures — one of E. M. Forster and the other of Sri Aurobindo. Both were in black and white. Sri Aurobindo’s photo was captured by Henri Cartier-Bresson in Pondicherry and was gifted to the King’s College a couple of decades later.

“These two photographs are part of our famous Kingsman collection.”

In a typically English fashion, she left me alone with the pictures sensing that I might want some quiet moments with the picture. The obituary write-up that she handed me was a very precious document and perhaps not available with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram archives. It had to be sent over. So, I wrote about it to Nirodbaran. Within a month an Air Mail Parcel arrived from him with a copy of the monthly magazine *‘Mother India’*. The very first article was this obituary.

I had written “I have unearthed an interesting piece of document from King’s College — an extract from their 1951 Annual Report written from a very British point of view, though. I am sending you a copy.” The editorial team of the monthly journal *‘Mother India’* published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram published this document with their own assessment.<sup>3</sup>

These descriptions make us reflect on the bliss of a fortuitous encounter (be it with a person, with a work of art, or with a place), of an unforeseen act of generosity that can unexpectedly alter the course of our life forever, with what could be as fateful and yet as gentle as a ‘butterfly effect’, and as graceful as a melody that one is hearing for the first time. Apart from these special moments, the general life of an academic in Cambridge University also forms part of the narrative, and since the book is ‘an art inspired travel memoir’, life here with its ‘ancient and venerable buildings’<sup>2</sup> encounters high art through the University’s many buildings and art collections held at the Fitzwilliam Museum. Apart from Cambridge’s more famous buildings along the King’s Parade, other lesser-known museums are also described. For example, the way artefacts are displayed in the Kettle’s Yard gallery is elaborately recounted. How a Brancusi figure head on a grand piano and a Barbara

Hepworth vase on a simple wooden shelf offers a more ‘fulsome viewing’<sup>3</sup> with the placed objects as a part of an intimate lived-in experience, forms a very interesting read. The city of Pondicherry with its many art galleries might relate to this ethos of Kettles Yard where a collector’s home functions as a modern gallery. We are told that in Kettle’s Yard all artworks can be touched and felt. Apart from descriptions of many illustrious scientists and writers, this chapter has a generous sprinkling of classic understated English humour. The author’s hilarious experience of a ‘review’ of his first submission of a research paper to his mentor, and the conversations that followed, might well inform many scholars on the nuances of good writing so that it must ‘never ever read like a report’.<sup>3</sup>

Another lucky encounter, the one that happened between Ms Ismini Panagopoulou (First Councillor, Head of Cultural and Political Section, Embassy of Greece in India), Professor Ghosh and myself, makes me extremely happy. That meaningful connection had a very positive impact on me urging me to write this review. Ms Panagopoulou and I, both observed that in his descriptions of Greece, Ghosh introduces Sri Aurobindo’s thoughts at several places. Indian scholars may well be aware of the sage’s observations on life and democratic traditions of ancient Greece; however most in Greece are largely deprived of them and it is time that observations of such profundity are more widely disseminated in today’s world through seminars and conferences. Sri Aurobindo’s remarks on the need for debates and discussions in a modern democracy is carefully placed in context. For example, the sentence “The tendency to a democratic freedom in which every man had a natural part in the civic life as well as the cultural institutions of the State, an equal voice in the determination of law and policy and as much share in their execution as could be assured to him by his right as a citizen and his capacity as an individual”<sup>2</sup> is used aptly when the reader is taken through an Athenian amphitheatre where such democratic debates actually happened. The reader is also shown the author’s own photographs of the site. I was equally fascinated by the way high-end technical descriptions are combined with anecdotal reminiscences almost in every chapter. For example, the problem of dust transport over the iconic Delphi theatre was linked to an architectural discourse on the seating arrangements with suggestions for a robust handling of the deleterious imprint of embedded dust on the marble facades affecting the transmissibility of sound in the theatre.

Tenets of sustainable architecture from around the world are described in the book’s 12 chapters. Starting from Indian traditions, the chapters cover Asia (Tibet, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Java), South America (Macchu Pichu in Peru), Africa (Masai Mara), North America (Frank Lloyd Wright’s Taliesin West) Australia and ends with European Traditions. The confluence of eastern and western traditions in Turkey is reminisced with graphic descriptions of not only the famed Aya Sophia and the Blue Mosque, but also of baths and bazaars and artist’s studios. Travels through Jerusalem, Nazareth and Tiberias following the footsteps of Jesus

read like a pilgrim's diary notes penned by a true 'bhakta'.

Sri Aurobindo's spiritual collaborator, Mme Mirra Alfassa, or the Mother's observations on art and its spiritual significance is described from places where she lived, particularly from ancient Japan and Paris. For example, I was very happy to note what she had once remarked when she was describing Impressionism — "All the artists I knew were true artists, they were serious and made admirable things which have remained admirable. It was the period of the impressionists; it was the period of Manet. It was a beautiful period, they made beautiful things".<sup>4</sup> The high culture of this period is very well captured when Ghosh describes a typical street scene at 41 Haussmann Boulevard where the Mother had herself lived. Gallery spaces from the Louvre as well as from the Musée d'Orsay were photographed, and pertinent observations were carefully recorded. They show paintings created by many artists the Mother knew personally.

That Professor Ghosh is very loyal to his Sri Aurobindo Ashram roots is immediately perceived. Right at the beginning, it is mentioned that *Inspired Journeys* commenced from Nirodbaran's room and in the epilogue, it is stated that an aura of saintliness still lingered when he once again went in upon the conclusion of his journeys. In all his travels the author carried *Savitri* portions of which were dictated by Sri Aurobindo to Nirodbaran. I am told that many Aurobindonians vouch for the mantric quality of many of *Savitri*'s lines. They believe that by reading *Savitri* one can connect to a transcendent and guiding power. A curious incident involving a special reading of this epic poem is described in the penultimate chapter when Ghosh describes his travels through Florence and Rome. He describes the incredible sequence of events that followed:

It was very salubrious outside on that warm summer evening, and I was keenly reading pages from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* from the Canto entitled 'The way of Fate and the Problem of Pain'. This canto had telling imagery of Jesus, as the world redeemer having to carry the yoke of pain and suffering to redeem mankind. It also described Calvary and Gethsemane and many other Christian themes in the iambic hexameter. I noticed a young Keralan priest approach me cautiously.

"I have been watching you, Sir. What are you reading so intently?"

I said, "I am reading portions of an epic poetry written by the Indian mystic Sri Aurobindo describing the last days of Jesus Christ."

"Was Sri Aurobindo Christian?"

I said "No, but he believed that Jesus was an Avatar — in Christian thought, he was indeed the Son of God. May I read out some beautiful lines to you?"

He said, "I am very curious" and drew up his chair close to mine to be able to hear me clearly.

And I began to recite:

... Hard is the world-redeemer's heavy task;  
 The world itself becomes his adversary,  
 Those he would save are his antagonists:  
 This world is in love with its own ignorance,  
 Its darkness turns away from the saviour light,  
 It gives the cross in payment for the crown . . .

Sri Aurobindo

I noticed that within minutes of me reading only a few lines, he sat upright, held his head down in full concentration and waited until I finished reading that page. There was a hushed silence after my reading and then he said,

"I have not heard anything so poetic before about my beloved Lord," and then bade me good night.

On the following day, I made my way to the Vatican where I saw Swiss guards dressed in striking outfits designed by Rafael and was caught up in a sea of humanity. I knew that people had come from the world over for the ordination ceremony to be conducted live by the Pope.

Then I spotted the same Malayali priest making his way towards me with a great deal of hurry and difficulty.

I was wondering why he was doing so. There was a sense of urgency about his approaching me. Finally, he came close enough to touching distance and swiftly shoved a yellow postcard into my breast pocket and shouted, "I thought that it was more important for you to attend the swearing-in ceremony with the Pope than myself, because of what you read out to me last night."

I was dumbfounded by this act of generosity. Having come all the way from distant Kerala he gave away his entry pass to me! He just disappeared into the milling crowd even before I could protest. What a gracious act of Christian generosity!<sup>3</sup>

The sacred link of the author with the Master is perceived in other chapters as well: an Aurobindonian rendezvous in St Petersburg tellingly describes how followers and devotees celebrate His birthday even in a communist country.

In conclusion, I might say that *Inspired Journeys* connects people and cultures through not just technology but also through literature and art. Today's world is indeed 'in love with its own ignorance'<sup>2</sup> and artificial walls are being erected. Humanity is turning against itself and much too often a man is a wolf to another man (like in the times of Plautus). *Homo sapiens* is turning into *Homo insipiens*. This book by Ghosh is like a beacon in the dark encouraging one to discover, understand and embrace the new and unfamiliar, humbly and joyfully.

Like Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's adventurous journeys, and like a new Ovid,

with his truly encyclopaedic spirit, Ghosh shows us that ‘a man [. . .] is not a wolf to his fellow man, but a man’<sup>5</sup> (my apologies for using a quote that is not gender-neutral). His *Inspired Journeys* will certainly inspire all of us to visit all the wonderful places described, and to welcome every small life-occasion as a precious gift to cherish. It is truly captivating and will be welcomed by all who wish to enrich life experiences through travel. This hard-bound first edition is beautifully published by Macmillan and is even more valuable because it has over 100 coloured pictures from the author’s own collections from the world over and must be treasured.

JACOPO MOSESSO

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([https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Special:CiteThisPage&page=Homo\\_homini\\_lupus&id=1115623319&wpFormIdentifier=titleform](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Special:CiteThisPage&page=Homo_homini_lupus&id=1115623319&wpFormIdentifier=titleform))

*The aspiration need not be in the form of thought – it can be a feeling within that remains even when the mind is attending to the work.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga – II, CWSA, Vol. 29 p. 58)*

## ON SRI AUROBINDO

### A DOCUMENT FROM KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

*Dr. Satyajit Ghose, Department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics, University of Cambridge, wrote to Nirodbaran: "I have just unearthed an interesting piece of document from King's College — an extract from their 1951 Annual Report — written with a very British point of view, though. I am sending you a copy."*

*Despite its few inaccuracies this complimentary document is valuable precisely because of its independent British source. Obviously it served as a spontaneous appreciative obituary from the College where Sri Aurobindo had studied for a number of years with distinction.*

Aurobindo (then Aravind Acroyd) Ghose came up from St Paul's in 1890. His father, Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose of Khulna in East Bengal, and an M.D. of Edinburgh, wishing him to be brought up in the best English tradition, had sent him to this country at the early age of seven, and put him in the care of a family at Manchester. At King's he was a Scholar, and Prizeman, and in 1892 was placed in the 1<sup>st</sup> Class of the Classical Tripos. While at Cambridge he also published some poems, *Songs to Myrtilla*, and passed the examination into the Indian Civil Service with record marks in classics. Apparently disliking horses, however, he omitted to take the riding test that was necessary, and this debarred him from joining. He then entered the service of the Maharajah Sayaji Rao III of Baroda, a very enlightened and progressive Prince, and at the Baroda College he became Lecturer in French, Professor of English, and Vice-Principal. In September 1903 he wrote to us in King's, giving his address — this reads curiously now — as Racecourse Road, Baroda, or the Baroda Officers' Club, Baroda Gymkhana. That so quick and sensitive a young Indian mind should have felt drawn at that time to politics, however, was natural, for Bengal was in a ferment over the controversies with which Curzon's Viceroyalty had ended; and in 1906 Aurobindo moved to Calcutta. There, as Principal of the Bengal National College and as Editor of *Bande Mataram*, he advanced rapidly to the spearhead of the nationalist agitation, and was widely believed — though this was not proved — to be implicated in the cult of Terrorism. Twice arrested for sedition, the second time in connection with the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy, he was twice acquitted; and, while for many months in prison during trial on the latter occasion, he underwent the

extraordinary change which converted India's fore-most young political 'activist', the patriot-hero of those days, into the famous sage and recluse. Soon after leaving jail, to avert fresh attentions from the police, he disappeared quietly during 1910 into French Territory at Pondicherry, where he remained until his death on December 5, 1950, the centre of a cult totally, startlingly, removed from that of the bomb and the revolver with which, as late as 1935, the Government of India's Intelligence officials still half-believed him to be associated. Of the eminence that he attained during those three decades, not only as contemplative or mystic, but as academic philosopher, critic and literary craftsman there can be no question. Books and articles flowed steadily from his pen — most of them insufficiently known to Western readers because they were published in India and his *Essays on the Gita* (1916-18) and his monumental *The Life Divine*, in particular, are works of very high distinction. His *ashram* at Pondicherry became a place of pilgrimage; yet during his later period he lived there almost completely withdrawn, permitting himself to be seen even by his own followers only twice a year in formal *darshan*, and on very rare occasions making oracular pronouncements on politics which must somewhat have perplexed or displeased his conventional nationalist admirers. Early in World War II, for example, he declared himself wholly in sympathy with Britain, and he commended the Cripps Mission in 1942. At his death on December 5, 1950, aged 78, the Press throughout India was filled with columns in his praise, to the exclusion of much ordinary news; President Prasad, Prime Minister Nehru, the Governors of States, and many leading public men wrote copiously in eulogy and reminiscence; and within a few hours, at Pondicherry, 60,000 people had filed past his bier. His gifts of spirit and of intellect had plainly been of the loftiest quality, and to this was added the romance of a unique career. Some would say that his position, among the great men produced by the new India of this century, is equalled only by that of Gandhi and Tagore.

(Reprinted from the August 1988 issue of *Mother India*)

*It was in England while at Cambridge that he made revolutionary speeches at the meetings of the Indian Majlis which were recorded as a black mark against him by the India Office.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Autobiographical Notes*, CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 68)



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

**(Part 37)**

*(Continued from the issue of June 2023)*

## **Section 4: FORTHRIGHTNESS WITH THE MAHARAJA**

Amongst the 565 or so princely States, also referred to as native States, Baroda was one of the five that were in the “21-gun salute” category. Baroda was considered the second most important princely State and was only preceded by Hyderabad. The other three States were Mysore, Kashmir and Gwalior. Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III (1863-1939) was considered to be the 8<sup>th</sup> richest man in the world; the Nizam of Hyderabad was considered to be the richest. Here is a description of the importance of the gun-salute to the princely States:

Indian States counted their prestige and importance based on a British system designed to pamper and play to the delicate egos of the Rulers — the number of gun-salutes received by the King on ceremonial occasions. The King and Queen of England received 101-gun salutes when they were present in person; 31 guns were fired on special occasions related to the birth, accession, coronation and so on of the British Sovereign. There were five 21-gun States — Hyderabad, Baroda, Mysore, Kashmir, and Gwalior. Bhopal and Indore were 19-gun States, which put them ahead of the 17-gun States of Jodhpur, Bharatpur, Bikaner, Kotah, Tonk, Bundi, Karauli, and Patiala. Besides, there were numerous 15, 13, 11, and 9-gun States. There were hundreds of no-gun salute States as well.

Salutes were fired when a Ruler visited the Viceroy, or when the Ruler was celebrating a special occasion, like his birthday, in his own State. The number of gun-salutes were indicative of the power and prestige the Ruler commanded within the British establishment. The Ruler of a 21-gun-salute State would receive the Viceroy at the door of the drawing room of his palace; the Ruler of 11-gun-salute States received the Viceroy on his porch as soon as he dismounted from his car or carriage; 9-gun-salute States had to welcome the Viceroy several miles from the palace; finally, Rulers of lesser States waited at the border of their kingdoms to accompany the Viceroy upto their palace. Further, the salutes also made a difference as to the seating arrangements of the Rulers at official Darbars and State banquets. Many were the intrigues among the Princes in order to secure a higher number of gun salutes, along with the



many titles — such as the Order of the Star of India — that the Crown bestowed on cooperative Rulers.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's rapport with the Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad was something unique, for, if we remember the spirit of the time, it is inconceivable that a Maharaja of such an important state would have such an equable and mutually respectful relationship with a subject of his state. In those days a feudal mentality was all-pervasive in India and Maharaja Sayaji, a powerful personage, was treated with great reverence and to whom his subjects either had to bow or be submissive. The Gaekwad, though, looked up to Sri Aurobindo because of his scholarly brilliance, powers of concentration, deep culture, purity and strong character. Sri Aurobindo has remarked about the “slave mentality” that caused India to be occupied by another country.<sup>2</sup> While still in the Baroda service, Sri Aurobindo wrote about the Indian political situation in the *Bande Mataram* on 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1907:

We do not acknowledge that a nation of slaves who acquiesce in their subjection can become morally fit for freedom; one day of slavery robs a man of half his manhood, and while the yoke remains, he cannot compass a perfect and rounded moral development.<sup>3</sup>

Dinendra Kumar Roy wrote that people in Baroda knew that Sri Aurobindo was highly regarded by the Maharaja and some used to call on him for this reason.<sup>4</sup> The Maharaja quickly discerned that Sri Aurobindo was a man of great ability with immense powers of concentration and was thus eager to exploit his extraordinary gifts, often making demands on Sri Aurobindo's personal time. Such encroachments could not be avoided but there were instances when Sri Aurobindo would tactfully deal with the Maharaja, giving a clear hint that there were limits to demands on his private time. On several occasions Sri Aurobindo was able to ward off the Maharaja which prompted the Maharaja to complain that he was not regular.<sup>5</sup>

About his joining the Baroda State Service Sri Aurobindo remarked to his disciples:

It is strange how things arrange themselves at times. When I failed in the I.C.S. riding test and was looking for a job, the Gaekwar happened to be in London. I don't remember whether he called us or we met him. We consulted an authority

1. Devdip Ganguly, 'The Integration of the Princely States of India', *Mother India*, August 2007, pp. 738-39.

2. See Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2013, p. 642.

3. *CWSA*, Vol. 6, p. 237.

4. See Sanat K. Banerji, 'Glimpses of Sri Aurobindo', *Mother India*, December 1959, p. 14 (Dinendra Kumar Roy, *Aurobindo Prasanga* – translated from Bengali).

5. See *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 43.

about the pay we should propose. We had no idea about these things. He said we could propose Rs. 200, but should accept even 130, for that was quite a good sum. He was calculating according to the pound which was equivalent to Rs. 13; so he took ten pounds as a quite good sum.<sup>6</sup>

Sri Aurobindo added that five pounds a month “was quite sufficient” to live in England,<sup>7</sup> so in India, where the cost of living was far lower than in England, that salary would be considered very handsome although not fully commensurate with Sri Aurobindo’s qualifications and talents since a probationer being appointed to the I.C.S. would draw a far higher salary.

The job offer, which Sri Aurobindo accepted, occurred in November-December 1892. In the end of November 1892, the Civil Service Commission had decided not to give Sri Aurobindo another chance to appear for yet another riding test, which in effect meant that he would not get an appointment in the I.C.S. The final nail in the coffin was a memo dated 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 1892, by Lord Kimberley, Secretary of State for India, where he refused to take a compassionate view on Sri Aurobindo failing to appear for his riding test. On 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1892, Sri Aurobindo was informed of the same.<sup>8</sup> On 12<sup>th</sup> December, 1892 Sri Aurobindo wrote: “As the Civil Service Commissioners have decided that they cannot give me a Certificate of qualification for an appointment to the Civil Service of India, I beg to apply to your Lordship for the remainder of the allowance that would have been due to me as a Probationer. . . .”<sup>9</sup> The Civil Service Office issued a memorandum note to this letter where an excerpt stated: “As this is the first case of a candidate rejected after passing his Periodical and Final examinations on account of failing to pass his *Riding* Examination it is submitted that the allowance of £150 be paid to Mr. A. A. Ghose . . .”<sup>10</sup> The same memo stated: “Mr. J. S. Cotton informs me that he has grounds for hoping that Mr. G. [*Sri Aurobindo*] will obtain at once an appointment in the service of the Gaekwar of Baroda.”<sup>11</sup>

Following Sri Aurobindo’s appointment to the Baroda State Service the Maharaja was so pleased with himself that he boasted to people that he had employed an I.C.S. probationer for a mere Rs. 200 per month.<sup>12</sup>

Sri Aurobindo left England by ship on 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1893. Upon arrival in Bombay on 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1893, at 10.55 in the morning, Sri Aurobindo seems to have proceeded straight to Baroda by train, reaching that city on 8<sup>th</sup> February. He,

6. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, pp. 158-59.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

8. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, pp. 335-36.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 336-37.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 337-38.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 337.

12. See A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 636.

however, commenced work at the Baroda State Service from 18<sup>th</sup> February, 1893. The Maharaja apparently valued his new recruit, for soon after Sri Aurobindo's joining service he passed an order stating that Sri Aurobindo's salary of Rs. 200 per month will commence from the 8<sup>th</sup> and not the 18<sup>th</sup>.<sup>13</sup>

Professor Manoj Das in his book on Sri Aurobindo writes:

We know that the Maharaja was happy with his choice of an I.C.S. at a relatively small salary. But that could only be the starting point for an attitude of subdued awe towards this 20-year-old youngest member of the higher level of his administrative staff.<sup>14</sup>

At the time of joining the Baroda State Service, little did the Maharaja know that Sri Aurobindo's interest lay elsewhere than in matters of state. Sri Aurobindo has told his disciples that during his time in Baroda his interests were in Sanskrit literature and the independence movement and not in administration.<sup>15</sup> Referring to the work in the I.C.S., he amusingly told a disciple “If I had been a practising civilian, I might have to do it, but probably I wouldn't have done it and they would have chucked me out for insubordination and laziness.”<sup>16</sup> When asked the reason for accepting an administrative job in Baroda, Sri Aurobindo pointed out the difference and said he much preferred serving a native ruler than to be submissive to a patronising English officer who ruled your fate. “There was much room for freedom and dignity,” he added.<sup>17</sup>

Of all the accounts written on Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad, the biography written by his great-grandson, Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad, titular Maharaja of Baroda from 1951 until 1988 and an able Parliamentarian, is perhaps the most well-researched and authentic record of his life. Of his great-grandfather and Sri Aurobindo he writes:

It is doubtful if there was another prince in India who, in the year 1894, thought in terms of people's rights.

But while Baroda was much on his mind, ironically enough, it was a decision he took while on a holiday in southern France that was later to bring him much more trouble . . . Always on the lookout for bright young men to serve as officers in his state, he now took on a young man who, even though he had topped the list of candidates in that year's examination for recruitment to the Indian Civil Service, had been dropped because he had failed to pass the riding test.

Abbas, in one of his letters to the Minister, mentions that the young man,

13. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

14. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo – Life and Times of the Mahayogi*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 2020, p. 96.

15. See A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 568.

16. *Nirodbaran's Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2001, p. 1084.

17. See Nirodbaran, *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, p. 23.

Aurobindo Ghose, had been recruited for service in the Revenue Department and that he was to be given “an opportunity to study most fully, the details connected with the work of subordinate officers”.

Aurobindo Ghose was, at that time, a name unknown in India. Fifteen years later, it was to be cited as that of the brain and inspiration behind a band of desperate terrorists. Another fifteen years, and he had been accepted by his fellow Indians as a Mahayogi, a great saint, the founder of a vigorous cult for humanity’s salvation that was to draw disciples from all over the world. Sri Aurobindo, the master of Auroville (*sic*), the *ashram*, or sanctuary for philosophers, near Pondicherry.<sup>18</sup>

Sri Aurobindo served in the Baroda State Service from 8<sup>th</sup> February, 1893, to 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1907, the last year was spent in Bengal on unpaid leave. Sri Aurobindo writes that his first few appointments at Baroda were administrative in nature, “He was put first in the Settlement Department, not as an officer but to learn the work; then in the Stamps and Revenue Departments; he was for some time put to work in the Secretariat”.<sup>19</sup> He adds that he was first sent to the Land Settlement Department “to train him for Revenue work. For the same reason he spent some time in the Stamps and other Departments or in the Secretariat, but for training, not with a firm appointment.”<sup>20</sup>

Nirodbaran writes, “As an officer of the State Service he could hardly avoid administrative work but his real interests were engaged elsewhere. The Gaekwad, however, was fully aware of Sri Aurobindo’s exceptional abilities and was keen to utilise them not only for his State but also for his personal work,”<sup>21</sup> and so demands were made on Sri Aurobindo’s personal time. A Huzur Order (Royal Order) dated 11<sup>th</sup> April, 1900, stated: “His Highness the Maharaja Saheb has been pleased to order that Mr. Arvind Ghose, who works with His Highness the Maharaja Saheb at his (Ghose’s) leisure time, should be given Rs. 60/- (sixty) over and above his pay for the additional work he does.”<sup>22</sup>

Sri Aurobindo noted that whenever he had the need, the Maharaja would send for him for writing letters or for drawing up delicate documents, which needed extra care in the correctness and preciseness of the language. “All this was quite informal”, he added.<sup>23</sup> Sri Aurobindo also writes, “Most of the personal work for the Maharaja was done in an unofficial capacity; he was usually invited to breakfast with the

18. Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad, *Sayajirao of Baroda – The Prince and the Man*, 1989, pp. 162-63.

19. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 42.

20. *Ibid*.

21. Nirodbaran, *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, 1994, p. 23.

22. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

23. See *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 42.

Maharaja at the Palace and stayed on to do this work”,<sup>24</sup> and “he also employed him to prepare some of his public speeches and in other work of a literary or educational character.”<sup>25</sup>

That the Maharaja made every use (or should one use the word ‘overuse’!) of Sri Aurobindo’s gifts is apparent from Sri Aurobindo’s two letters to Mrinalini Devi. On 25<sup>th</sup> June, 1902, Sri Aurobindo wrote in Bengali:

“Kencho” [Maharaja] went to the Lonavala Hills. He called me there too. He called me because he wanted to write a document. It was written but he did not send it. At the last minute he suddenly changed his mind. Another very big and secret work came up. I had to do it. When he saw my work “Kencho” was very satisfied and he promised to raise my salary. Who knows whether he will do it or not. “Kencho’s” word is not worth very much. But he may give the raise.<sup>26</sup>

And on 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1902, Sri Aurobindo wrote to Mrinalini Devi that although the Maharaja had given him a promotion he is being burdened “with overwork”.<sup>27</sup>

Elsewhere too, Sri Aurobindo noted the demands that were made on his private time: “What work I did directly with the Maharaja was irregular and spasmodic, though frequent and I used to be called for that from my house, not from the office.”<sup>28</sup> Sri Aurobindo clarified: “These invitations [*by the Maharaja*] were usually for some work to be done and could not be refused.”<sup>29</sup>

Sri Aurobindo was interested in teaching at Baroda College but the Maharaja was not willing to part with him for his confidential work. “. . . finally”, Sri Aurobindo writes, “he oscillated towards the College and entered it at first as part-time lecturer in French, afterwards as a regular Professor teaching English and was finally appointed Vice-Principal.”<sup>30</sup> Sri Aurobindo persuaded the Maharaja to allow him to teach for he writes that “without joining the College and while doing other work he was lecturer in French at the College and finally at his own request was appointed there as Professor of English. All through, the Maharaja used to call him whenever something had to be written which needed careful wording . . .”<sup>31</sup> Sri Aurobindo also told his disciples, “As I said, I was not interested in administrative work and soon I got the Maharaja to transfer me to the College.”<sup>32</sup>

Let us examine the other circumstances that obliged the Maharaja to shift Sri Aurobindo from his administrative duties to teaching in Baroda College, which was

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

26. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 56.

27. See *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 145.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

32. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 40.

established in 1881. Due to a strong recommendation of H. Littledale, the Principal of Baroda College, the Maharaja assented to the proposal that Sri Aurobindo teach French from January 1897 at the College for an hour each afternoon, although Principal Littledale expressed his bitter disappointment to the authorities when Sri Aurobindo's first class was cancelled because he was taken away by the Maharaja on the day he was to commence his teaching.<sup>33</sup>

On 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1898, the Dewan wrote to the Principal of the Baroda College: “His Highness the Maharajah is willing to share the services of Mr. Ghose for the present for employment in the College. His Highness at the same time states that it is possible that Mr. Ghose may have to be employed a couple of months hence in another capacity and in that case he will have to be withdrawn from the College for some months.”<sup>34</sup>

When Professor Littledale went on leave in 1898 Sri Aurobindo was appointed acting professor of English. A Tippan (a note) dated 4<sup>th</sup> February, 1898, stated: “Mr. A. A. Ghose to officiate as an extra Professor on a salary of British Rs. 300/- per mensem [*month*]”.<sup>35</sup>

In 1900 he was appointed, on the strong recommendation of the new Principal, Mr. Tait, as permanent Professor of English on a pay of Rs. 360 per month.<sup>36</sup>

When in September 1900 the Maharaja wanted to transfer Sri Aurobindo from the College to another department, the new Principal, Mr. Tait, expressed to the Dewan his strong disapproval, stating that Sri Aurobindo was an eminent academic and scholar and it would be to the detriment of Baroda State if he is transferred to any other department, as the quality of education in the College would be adversely affected.<sup>37</sup> The next day Principal Tait followed up with another note to the Dewan stating “it is essential to retain Mr Ghose as a Professor in the College”, and requested him to obtain the orders of His Highness to that effect.<sup>38</sup> The Maharaja finally gave his assent with the proviso that if there was any change in this arrangement he would duly communicate his desire to Mr. Tait.<sup>39</sup>

On 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1902, the Maharaja issued a Huzur Order (Royal Order) stating: “If convenient Mr Ghose's services can be utilised in the Baroda College; only care should be taken that his interests do not suffer in any way by his services being lent to the College for some time.”<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, the Maharaja had his say when from end February 1903 to August 1904 Sri Aurobindo did not teach at Baroda College. During most of this period he

33. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

34. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 19.

35. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

36. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 46.

37. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 15.



worked directly under the Maharaja. Between May and September 1903, he had the title of Acting Secretary during their tour in Kashmir. Between the end of 1903 and September 1904, he had the title of Assistant Huzur Kamdar (Crown Secretary). In September 1904 he rejoined Baroda College as Vice-Principal and Professor of English.<sup>41</sup>

When Sri Aurobindo was in Kashmir with the Maharaja in mid-1903, he received a form from the King's College *Register of Admissions* asking him information about his university and subsequent career. Sri Aurobindo filled in and returned the form on 16<sup>th</sup> September, 1903. Under the career/profession, Sri Aurobindo wrote: “For the greater part of the time on special duty. Lecturer in French for three years and Assistant Professor of English for two years in the Baroda College.” Under present occupation Sri Aurobindo entered, “H.H the Maharaja Gaekwar's Service, at present Secretary (acting).”<sup>42</sup>

In August 1904, Principal Tait, was due to retire and a successor had to be found. The State's Minister of Education opined that Sri Aurobindo had built up a phenomenal reputation and his services should be exclusively spared to the College.<sup>43</sup> The Maharaja wholly agreed and promoted him to the designation of Vice-Principal. But still the Maharaja did not want to release him fully and put a condition. The Huzur Order [Royal Order] dated 6<sup>th</sup> September, 1904, read:

His Highness has been pleased to order that . . . the service of Mr. Ghose can be spared for English work in the College.

Mr. Ghose's work should be so arranged that he may be able to spare 2 hours in the day to attend for work in the Huzur whenever required by His Highness. When he finds that this double work is becoming more than he can manage, he must inform His Highness so that he may either be entirely spared to the College or replaced by someone else . . .<sup>44</sup>

Principal Clarke protested vehemently at this Order and the Maharaja relented and said, “Mr. Ghose's services will be allowed fully to be at the disposal of the College.”<sup>45</sup>

On 28<sup>th</sup> September, 1904, Sri Aurobindo was assigned to the post of Vice-Principal at a salary of Rs. 550/- per month. And when Principal Clarke went on leave Sri Aurobindo was made the Acting Principal of the College, from 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1905, to 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1906, at a salary of Rs. 710/- per month. In February 1906, Sri Aurobindo resumed the position of Vice-Principal.<sup>46</sup> On 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1906, he went to Bengal on privilege leave, then extended his leave, after which he never resumed his

41. See CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 568.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

43. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

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

duty till he resigned in June 1907.

The Minister of Education of Baroda State felt that Sri Aurobindo was an exceptional educationist. When Sri Aurobindo went on a year's unpaid leave from June 1906, he remarked that the post of Vice-Principal was “specially created to discriminate Mr. Ghose from the other Professors.”<sup>47</sup>

The Maharaja knew that Sri Aurobindo was not only a brilliant scholar but also had a great capacity for administrative work. Let us go through some of the documents illustrating the Maharaja's acknowledgement that Sri Aurobindo was an irreplaceable versatile talent. The cases that came up to the Maharaja for a verdict were termed “Huzur Orders” (Royal Orders):

1. The Huzur Order [Huzur is the Crown, i.e. the Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwar] dated 10<sup>th</sup> October, 1895, states: “Mr. Ghose should be given Rs. 50 from the first of this month [salary Rs. 250 per month] and the Dewan should take responsible work from him and inform this office accordingly.”<sup>48</sup>
2. On 19<sup>th</sup> November, 1895, the Huzur Order states: “H.H. the Maharaja Saheb has been pleased to order that Mr. Arvind Ghose should be appointed as attaché in the Dewan Office and should do the important cases that will be given to him.”<sup>49</sup>
3. The Principal of Baroda College was eager that Sri Aurobindo should teach French for an hour each day, and accordingly made a request to the Maharaja. In response a letter from the Baroda State on behalf of the Maharaja dated 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 1897, stated: “I shall feel obliged if you will arrange for his taking the classes in the forenoon as he has often to wait upon His Highness the Maharaja in the afternoon on business.”<sup>50</sup>
4. On 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1899, Sri Aurobindo received a cash bonus of Rs. 2000.
5. When in August 1900 Sri Aurobindo requested 17 days privilege leave on full pay from the College for some urgent private business at Calcutta, the response through a Tippan stated: “it may be granted especially as he has done good work during the year.”<sup>51</sup>
6. The Huzur Order dated 17<sup>th</sup> April, 1901, states: “His Highness The Maharaja Saheb has been graciously pleased to order that: ‘The Rupees 2000 (two thousand)

47. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*



British, which are ordered to be advanced to Professors Arvind A. Ghosh . . . should be regarded as a gift to Mr. Ghosh on the occasion of his marriage.”<sup>52</sup>

7. A Huzur Order dated 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1900, states: “His Highness the Maharaja Saheb has an idea of getting the memoirs of his life and of his reign, together with a Review of the last twenty years’ Administration in Baroda written soon after his return to Baroda. For this purpose the services of Professor Arvind A. Ghose of the Baroda College will be required for about a year or so. Arrangements should therefore be made to relieve Mr. Ghose from his College duties soon after the return of His Highness.

“By the above arrangement Mr. Ghose will not lose his lien upon the college appointment, which he may have at present, nor would he be prevented from reverting to the college after his temporary work is finished.”<sup>53</sup>

8. A Huzur Order dated 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1901, reads: “His Highness the Maharaja Saheb has been pleased to order that — (1) During the absence of Mr. French on duty in Europe, Professor Arvind A. Ghosh will be in charge of the tuition of the younger Princes; and will superintend over their education. (2) This special work, Mr. Ghosh will do, over and above the work of compiling a Report on the Twenty Years’ Administration of the Baroda State, entrusted to him. . . . (6) Mr. Ghosh is permitted to enjoy the vacation of six weeks which he would have been entitled to, had he remained at the College, as a special case.”<sup>54</sup>

9. The Maharaja’s Huzur Order dated 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1902, reads:

His Highness the Maharaja Saheb has been graciously pleased to order that

(1) A monthly increase of Rs. 90 (Ninety British) is to be given to Mr. Aravind Ghose [*Salary Rs. 450 per month*].

(2) His Highness is pleased to note that he has found Mr. Ghose a very useful and capable young man. . . .

(3) The Minister should try to make a good use of Mr. Ghose’s abilities in entrusting him with the compilation of Annual Administration Reports and other important compilations. He is a man of great powers and every use should be made of his talents.

(4) The Minister should also suggest from time to time the different uses to which Mr. Ghose’s abilities can be advantageously put. The Huzur will

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 21.

54. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

also occasionally direct the uses to be made of Mr. Ghose's services.<sup>55</sup>

The large sum of Rs. 2000 awarded in 1899 and then again in 1901 as bonus to Sri Aurobindo perhaps indicates an extraordinary gesture of affection and respect from the Maharaja. Nirodbaran notes: “Even the Maharaja of Baroda held him in high esteem.”<sup>56</sup> And Sri Aurobindo's biographer, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, writes: “Prince and Professor seem to have entertained high mutual regard and respect. On the whole, Sri Aurobindo was brilliant and quick and efficient in work, though he was not exactly the ideal servant for an Indian Maharaja.”<sup>57</sup> And Rishabhchand writes: “The Maharaja respected and admired him for his noble character, his calm and penetrating intelligence, and his brilliance, quickness and efficiency . . .”<sup>58</sup>

The Maharaja's regard for Sri Aurobindo is possibly also reflected by the fact that there were occasions when they ate their meals (both breakfast and dinner) together at the same table. About these invitations from the Maharaja, Sri Aurobindo has stated, “I used to be called privately to dinner and I attended.”<sup>59</sup> However, invitations from the Maharaja, a rare privilege for any aristocrat, were at times politely refused. Dinendra Kumar Roy writes in his book *Aurobindo Prasanga*:

A number of interested persons also showed him much deference, but I wonder if that had anything to do with his genius. They used to come to him for all sorts of favours, as they knew that the Maharaja had a great regard for him. Occasionally a Gujarati businessman or a Marathi Sardar would call on him for advice on the education of their sons abroad.

Now and again a hussar from the Luxmivilas Palace would arrive in the morning or in the afternoon with a letter for Aurobindo from the Maharaja's Private Secretary. The letter usually contained something to this effect: “The Maharaja would be very happy if you would come and dine with him tonight”, or “Could you find it convenient to see the Maharaja at such and such an hour?” I have seen him refuse the Maharaja's invitation at times because he was busy. There were so many eminent people who waited for months in the hope of getting an interview with the Maharaja, and here was a mere professor who regarded his time and work more valuable than the Maharaja's favour!<sup>60</sup>

As regards the aforesaid Laxmivilas Palace of the Maharaja, Fatehsingh Rao Gaekwad writes of its “Italian gothic influence”:

55. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., pp. 14-15.

56. Nirodbaran, ‘Sri Aurobindo – Perfect Gentleman’, *Mother India*, August 1970, p. 408.

57. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 47.

58. Rishabhchand, *Sri Aurobindo: His Life Unique*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 1981, p. 33.

59. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 121.

60. Sanat K. Banerji, ‘Glimpses of Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, December 1959, p. 14 (Dinendra Kumar Roy, *Aurobindo Prasanga* – translated from Bengali).

... there is something in the outward aspect of Laxmi Vilas that is not of Indian origin, and the interior has strong Italian overtones because much of the marble work on the floors and pillars was done by Florentine craftsmen brought over from Italy.

But, whether or not Laxmi Vilas lives up to the architectural pretensions of its designer, there can be no mistaking the fact that it was built to suit a style of life that was brazenly reminiscent of the Roman Emperors. As such it resembles more a public monument than a family residence. . . .

The vast structure stands surrounded by wide lawns and artificial pools enclosed by a fence containing an area some two and a half miles long and a mile and a half broad. The grounds which cover 720 acres of parkland contain several of the earlier summer palaces of the Gaekwads as well as two ancient monuments. The garden is ambitiously landscaped by Goldering, an Englishman, who must have had a wonderful time digging up the flat, featureless ground or throwing up embankments to create artificial lakes or hills as a proper setting for exotic trees and plants and grasses that he imported at considerable expense. It is easy to get lost in the Laxmi Vilas gardens, or to wander for hours along the footpaths that wind through clumps of enormous shade trees. There are ten miles of such footpaths and another ten miles of motorable roads.<sup>61</sup>

But Sri Aurobindo discloses his forthright thoughts about the Maharaja's residence in his diary during the Kashmir tour: “The Maharaja's palace [*of the Kashmir Maharaja*] by the river in the true quaint Hindu way of building was the one building which struck me in Srinagar, — how much superior to the pretentious monstrosities of architecture at Luxmivilas Palace!”<sup>62</sup>

In Kashmir the Maharaja once sent for Sri Aurobindo, but the messenger came back and timidly reported that Ghose Sahib was asleep. After a while a second messenger had the same news to convey. “Couldn't you wake him up?” shouted the Maharaja. As the messenger was hurrying away to execute his master's order, the Maharaja stopped him. He then took a stroll along the balcony and peeped into Sri Aurobindo's room and quietly came back to his table.<sup>63</sup>

G. S. Sardesai, a historian who was part of the Maharaja's entourage, has also narrated the story:

It is said that, on one occasion, the Maharaja sent for Sri Aurobindo twice in the course of a morning; not meeting with any response, the Maharaja went himself to Sri Aurobindo's room, found him asleep, and returned without disturbing him.<sup>64</sup>

61. Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad, *Sayajirao of Baroda – The Prince and the Man*, 1989, pp. 78-79.

62. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 18.

63. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, March 2012, pp. 201-02.

64. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 47.

In a Bengali article, ‘*Sekaler Smriti*’, Dinendra Kumar Roy writes:

At times the Maharaja’s Turkish horseman came with a letter from the Maharaja requesting Sri Aurobindo to call on him for some discussions. At times Sri Aurobindo was so deeply engrossed in his studies that he would be late to call on the Maharaja. But the Maharaja never took exception to this as they knew each other well. A sweet relation seemed to exist between them.<sup>65</sup>

No wonder that the Maharaja complained that Sri Aurobindo was lacking in “punctual habits”.<sup>66</sup> Yet the above incident cannot but be construed as anything but a gesture of warmth and esteem that the Maharaja had for Sri Aurobindo.

Rajaram N. Patkar writes of a rather delicate encounter between Sri Aurobindo and the Maharaja:

Once, I remember, the Maharaja sent for him. . . . He was busy with some important matter and told the messenger that he was busy and would go to the Maharaja when he would be free. Evidently the Maharaja did not like this reply, but being fully aware of Aravind’s independent nature, he drove straight to Aravind’s bungalow and his ADC announced to Mr. Ghose that the Maharaja had come. Mr. Ghose was not prepared to receive him, but as he had no time to change his dress, he at once came down and received the Maharaja in his usual simple home costume viz. — Sadara and Dhoti. The Maharaja who had all Western etiquettes about him, shook hands with Mr. Ghose with an expression of apology for having disturbed him. Mr. Ghose then conducted him to his receiving room on the downstairs — which was barely furnished to receive such a personage. They were then closeted together for nearly an hour and none knew for what purpose.<sup>67</sup>

Barin relates an interesting incident:

One morning I was busy preparing tea; Sri Aurobindo was still in bed. I noticed a carriage passing by my window and the whole house was in a bustle. I came out only to know that Maharaja Sahib had come and was quietly gone, hearing that Sri Aurobindo was still in bed and giving strict instruction not to disturb him. He came back from his drive in the park after an hour and Sri Aurobindo went out to meet His Highness just as he was in his dhoti and bare body.<sup>68</sup>

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

66. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

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

68. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, March 2012, p. 201.

Dinendra Kumar Roy had observed that Sri Aurobindo used to go to the palace to meet the Maharaja in ordinary clothes.<sup>69</sup>

Sri Aurobindo needed his personal time as he was engrossed in studying Sanskrit and Bengali literature, learning several modern Indian languages, doing translations from Sanskrit and Bengali, writing poems, besides his other general reading; and so largely kept away from social gatherings. Nirodbaran mentions that Sri Aurobindo “led there almost a solitary life, far from the crowd or the glamour of the Maharaja’s Court.”<sup>70</sup> K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes: “With the Maharaja’s Court as such, however, Sri Aurobindo had hardly anything to do during the whole course of his stay at Baroda, though very occasionally he may have participated in a function in the Palace itself like the reception to Dr. S. K. Mullick.”<sup>71</sup> A snippet from P. B. Kulkarni’s Marathi book *Yogi Aravinda Ghose* stated: “Aravind Babu used to attend the lectures of the Swami [*Paramhansa Maharaj Indraswarup*] with much interest . . . and personally met him and learnt about *āsanas* and *prānāyāma*.” When this was brought to the attention of Sri Aurobindo he clarified, “Only heard his lecture at the Palace, did not go to see him, did not practise Pranayam till long afterwards.”<sup>72</sup> Elsewhere Sri Aurobindo seems to be alluding to the same Swami when he told his disciples, “About Swami Hamsa I don’t remember his name. It was in the Gaekwad’s palace that he gave two or three lectures. I was invited. But it is not true that I went and saw him. At that time I was not interested in Yoga. I did not ask him about Pranayama. I learnt about Pranayama from the engineer Devdhar who was a disciple of Brahmananda.”<sup>73</sup>

As a schoolboy Sri Aurobindo read English poetry and literature, French literature, the history and culture of ancient, mediaeval and modern Europe besides learning several European languages.<sup>74</sup> His years at Baroda were of “self-culture, of literary activity” and assimilating “the spirit of Indian civilisation”.<sup>75</sup> The Maharaja’s regular interactions with Sri Aurobindo was bound to have a positive cultural influence on the Maharaja. Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad writes about his great-grandfather, Sayajirao Gaekwad:

But his ceaseless efforts at self-improvement, his reading of history and philosophy and the classics in two languages, Marathi and English, his constant exposure to the professional pundits of his own court such as Aurobindo and

69. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 17 (Dinendra Kumar Roy, *Aurobindo Prasanga* – Translated from Bengali by Maurice Shukla).

70. *Talks by Nirodbaran – December 1969 to July 1970*, edited by Sunayana and Maurice, 2018, p. 7.

71. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 47.

72. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 108.

73. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 113.

74. See *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 28.

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

Sardesai and to others during his travels within and outside India, had broadened his outlook and brought about a pronounced shifting of the focus.”<sup>76</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s gentlemanliness and humility did not preclude him in standing his ground on occasions, even if that person was the sovereign. The Maharaja made several attempts to make Sri Aurobindo his Private Secretary, a most prestigious position for any staff serving in the Baroda State Service, but Sri Aurobindo was not interested and mostly warded off the Maharaja. Sri Aurobindo notes: “In the Kashmir tour he was taken as Secretary, for the time of the tour only.”<sup>77</sup>

Sri Aurobindo notes that “there was no appointment as Private Secretary. Once H.H. took Sri Aurobindo as Secretary on his Kashmir tour, but there was much friction between them during the tour and the experiment was not repeated.”<sup>78</sup> In a conversation with disciples Sri Aurobindo said:

I was not the Private Secretary though I acted as one in the absence of the secretary. It was only during the Kashmir tour that I was the Private Secretary to the Maharaja. But I had several tussles with him and he did not want to repeat the experiment.<sup>79</sup>

Rishabhchand expounds on the “friction” and “tussles” during the Kashmir tour in 1903:

The Kashmir tour with the Maharaja did not prove to be very happy. It was not in Sri Aurobindo’s nature to admit encroachments upon his time of study and rest, and dance attendance on the Maharaja at all hours of the day or whenever he was summoned. The Maharaja respected and admired him . . . but was often put out by his habitual lack of punctuality and regularity; it was this lack that caused “much friction between them during the tour.”<sup>80</sup>

In a humorous vein a disciple told Sri Aurobindo that Sylvain Levi, the Sanskrit scholar and influential Orientalist and Indologist, came to Baroda and the Maharaja used to refer to Sri Aurobindo as being “my secretary”. Sri Aurobindo’s riposte was, “Not a troublesome one?” (*Laughter*)<sup>81</sup>

Besides being a *littérateur* Sri Aurobindo was a great satirist. When Sri Aurobindo accompanied the Maharaja Gaekwad to Kashmir he comically narrates a day spent in Srinagar:

76. Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad, *Sayajirao of Baroda – The Prince and the Man*, 1989, p. 218.

77. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 38.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

79. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 121.

80. Rishabhchand, *Sri Aurobindo: His Life Unique*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 1981, p. 33.

81. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2013, p. 951.





Sri Aurobindo with staff officers of the Maharaja of Baroda in Srinagar, Kashmir, in 1903. Sri Aurobindo is seated on the right.



Not having his son to quarrel with, H.H has filled up the gap with his wife; they have been at it hammer & tongs since the Maharani joined him at Murree, chiefly, it seems, about dhobies & other such highly unroyal topics. To spite his wife H.H has raised the subject of Tarabai Ghadge’s carriage allowance, which she has been taking very placidly without keeping any carriage; for neglect in suffering this “payment without consideration”, Mohite, Raoji Sirgavkar & the Chitnis are each to be fined 105 Rs. Note that Mohite alone is to blame, having signed the usual declaration that he had assured himself the recipient had her own conveyance; but this sort of thing is becoming too common to be wondered at. *Quicquid delirant reges, plectuntur officiali*.<sup>82</sup> The order adds that if any of the stricken has objections to make, he may make them and, if found satisfactory, the fine will be withdrawn. This is perilously like hanging a man first and trying him afterwards — or to put it accurately, I throw my shoe in your face and then permit you to prove that the salutation was causeless, in which case I shall be graciously pleased to put my shoe on my foot again.<sup>83</sup>

Sri Aurobindo humorously further narrates the Maharaja’s commercial-mindedness:

The latest trouble is about “unnecessary tongas” from Murree to Srinagar; yet the Maharaja was assured that if he insisted upon starting at once, there was no other course open, and at the time he promised to sanction any expense entailed. Now that he has had his own convenience satisfied, he chooses not to remember that he ever promised anything of the sort, so that he may have the pitiful satisfaction of venting his ill temper on innocent people. He has also ordered that no one shall receive special *bhutta* at a hill-station, unless the matter is brought to his notice and he is personally satisfied that prices are higher than in Baroda. Where will all this shopkeeping unprinceliness & petty-fogging injustice end?

Ashudada sent Visvas’ son Hemchandra with a note to me; the lad is a young Hercules five foot ten in height & monstrous in muscle with a roaring voice and continual outbursts of boisterous laughter over anything in the shape of a joke good or bad — a fine specimen of the outlander Bengali.<sup>84</sup>

Interestingly, Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad writes about Maharaja Sayajirao’s penchant for penny-pinching since from the very beginning of his reign, he went into detail of sanctioning expenses, even for small sums, instead of delegating it to a responsible subordinate:

82. An allusion to the Latin poet Horace’s saying “For any madness of their kings it is the Greeks who take the beating”, implying in this context that for the fault of their masters, it is the officials who bear the punishment.

83. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, pp. 16-17.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

The cases that came up to him for a verdict, or, as they were termed “Huzur Order” (Royal Orders) were later printed in book form, and reveal the gradual evolution of his system of personal rule. In the early stages, the most trivial matters were put up to him for a decision. A year after his investiture, when once he rode to the Residency on an elephant, he had himself to sanction the expenditure of less than eight annas spent for the candles. But, four years later things were not much different. A house to be rented for the use of a village school had to have his sanction — the rent; no more than four rupees a month. Years later, he was to lament that he had spent an unconscionable amount of time and energy in “disposing of cases asking for sanction for a door handle or a mat”.

Door handles or doormats were dreary trivia that might properly have been dealt with by a clerk, but this involvement with detail gave Sayajirao a thorough grounding in the practical aspects of office work that was to stand him in good stead all through his life. It taught him to distinguish between detail and fundamentals, between mere padding and essence. The later Huzur Orders bear ample testimony to this ability. They contain admonitions on prolixity, on confused thinking, on the need for clarity; little waspish asides on clumsy staffwork, on public extravagance, impatience with laziness and inefficiency; but above all they display an eagerness to get to grips with basic issues.

But there was another, far more well-founded, reason why even the simplest cases could not be dealt with at the lower levels; and it was that most of the lower echelon officials were altogether incapable of dealing with them.<sup>85</sup>

Shankar Balwant Didmishe, a student at Baroda College, narrates an amusing story he heard when Sri Aurobindo accompanied the Maharaja to Kashmir. Sri Aurobindo and a group of officials were taking their morning tea. On seeing the Mehtar (sweeper) doing the work of sweeping Sri Aurobindo put the question, who is happy in this camp. He then went on to answer the question himself: “The Maharaja as he has the company of the Maharani and next this Mehtar as his wife (Mehtarani) is also here with him.” When the tale was carried to his Highness he enjoyed a hearty laugh.<sup>86</sup>

*(To be continued)*

GAUTAM MALAKER

85. Fatehsinghrao Gaekwad, *Sayajirao of Baroda – The Prince and the Man*, 1989, pp. 89-90.

86. Reminiscences of Shankar Balwant Didmishe, translated from Marathi by Mansimharao Gaekwad; sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

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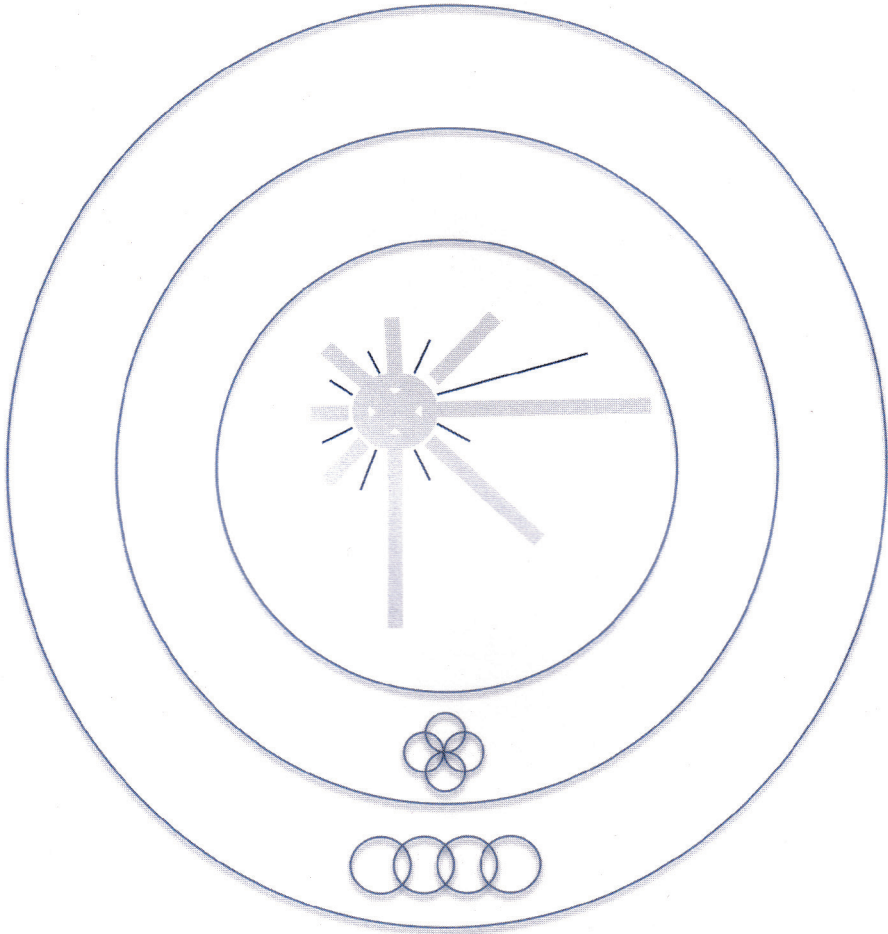
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