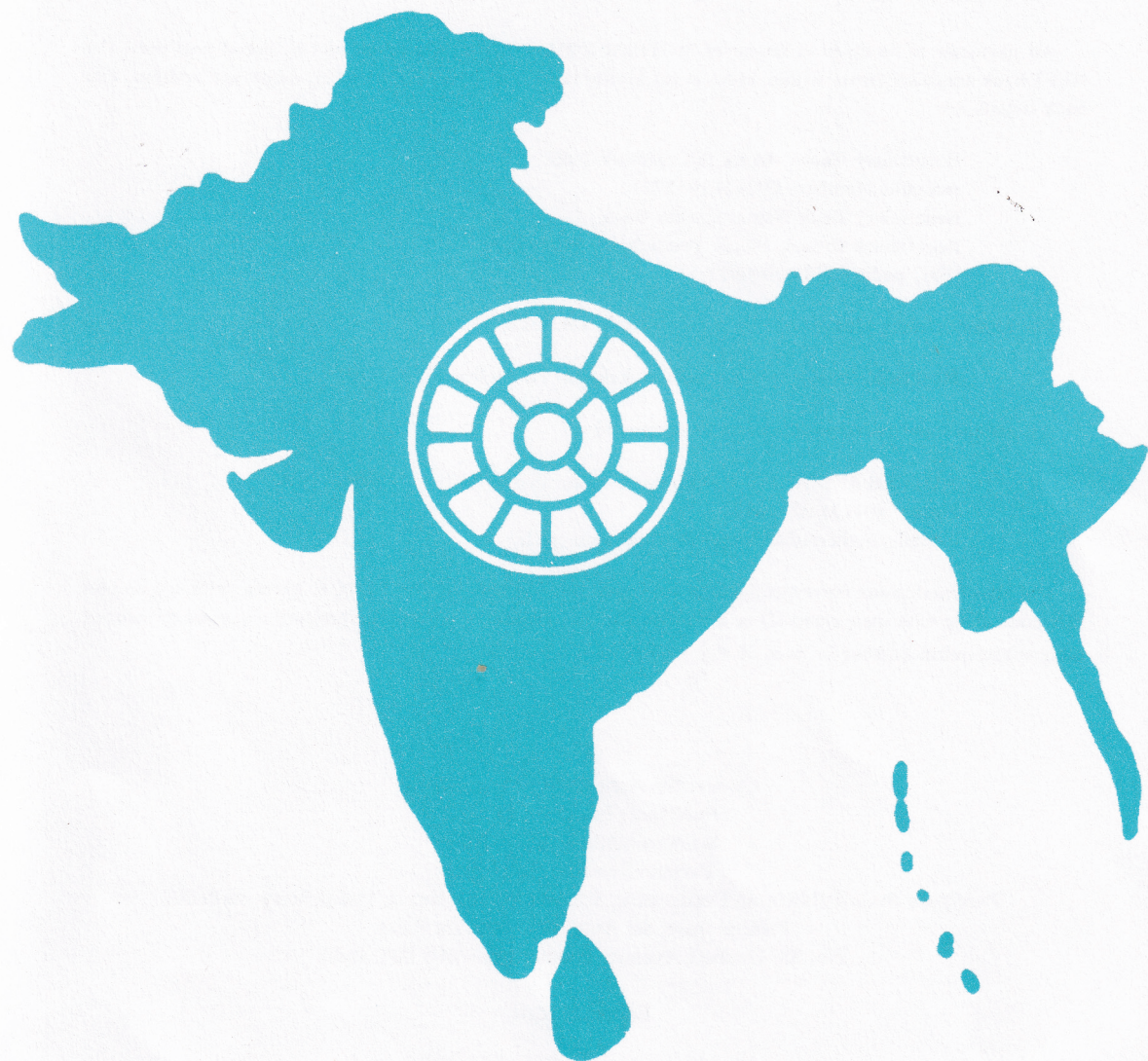


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MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE



OCTOBER 2024

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Owner: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Publisher: Manoj Das Gupta

Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Printer: Swadhin Chatterjee

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

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

Editor: S. Ravi

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

Associate Editors: HEMANT KAPOOR & RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

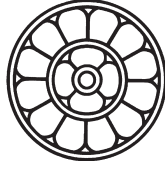
Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India: RNI No. 8667/63

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

OCTOBER 2024

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. LXXVII

No. 10

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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MUSA SPIRITUS

O Word concealed in the upper fire,
Thou who hast lingered through centuries,
Descend from thy rapt white desire,
Plunging through gold eternities.

Into the gulfs of our nature leap,
Voice of the spaces, call of the Light!
Break the seals of Matter's sleep,
Break the trance of the unseen height.

In the uncertain glow of human mind,
Its waste of unharmonied thronging thoughts,
Carve thy epic mountain-lined
Crowded with deep prophetic grots.

Let thy hue-winged lyrics hover like birds
Over the swirl of the heart's sea.
Touch into sight with thy fire-words
The blind indwelling deity.

O Muse of the Silence, the wideness make
In the unplumbed stillness that hears thy voice;
In the vast mute heavens of the spirit awake
Where thy eagles of Power flame and rejoice.

Out, out with the mind and its candle flares,
Light, light the suns that never die.
For my ear the cry of the seraph stars
And the forms of the Gods for my naked eye!

Let the little troubled life-god within
Cast his veils from the still soul,
His tiger-stripes of virtue and sin,
His clamour and glamour and thole and dole;

All make tranquil, all make free.

Let my heart-beats measure the footsteps of God
As He comes from His timeless infinity
To build in their rapture His burning abode.

Weave from my life His poem of days,

His calm pure dawns and His noons of force.
My acts for the grooves of His chariot-race,
My thoughts for the tramp of His great steeds' course!

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 531-32)



THE COLLOQUY OF INDRA AND AGASTYA¹

RIG VEDA I.170

Indra

1. It is not now, nor is It tomorrow; who knoweth that which is Supreme and Wonderful? It has motion and action in the consciousness of another, but when It is approached by the thought, It vanishes.

Agastya

2. Why dost thou seek to smite us, O Indra? The Maruts are thy brothers. By them accomplish perfection; slay us not in our struggle.

Indra

3. Why, O my brother Agastya, art thou my friend, yet settest thy thought beyond me? For well do I know how to us thou wilt not to give thy mind.
4. Let them make ready the altar, let them set Agni in blaze in front. It is there, the awakening of the consciousness to Immortality. Let us two extend for thee thy effective sacrifice.

Agastya

5. O Lord of substance over all substances of being, thou art the master in force! O Lord of Love over the powers of love, thou art the strongest to hold in status! Do thou, O Indra, agree with the Maruts, then enjoy the offerings in the ordered method of the Truth.

1. Only Sri Aurobindo's translation and commentary have been included here. For the original Sanskrit, readers may consult *CWSA*.

COMMENTARY

The governing idea of the hymn belongs to a stage of spiritual progress when the human soul wishes by the sheer force of Thought to hasten forward beyond in order to reach prematurely the source of all things without full development of the being in all its progressive stages of conscious activity. The effort is opposed by the Gods who preside over the universe of man and of the world and a violent struggle takes place in the human consciousness between the individual soul in its egoistic eagerness and the universal Powers which seek to fulfil the divine purpose of the Cosmos.

The seer Agastya at such a moment confronts in his inner experience Indra, Lord of Swar, the realm of pure intelligence, through which the ascending soul passes into the divine Truth.

Indra speaks first of that unknowable Source of things towards which Agastya is too impatiently striving. That is not to be found in Time. It does not exist in the actualities of the present, nor in the eventualities of the future. It neither is now nor becomes hereafter. Its being is beyond Space and Time and therefore in Itself cannot be known by that which is in Space and Time. It manifests Itself by Its forms and activities in the consciousness of that which is not Itself and through those activities it is meant that It should be realised. But if one tries to approach It and study It in Itself, It disappears from the thought that would seize It and is as if It were not.

Agastya still does not understand why he is so violently opposed in a pursuit which is the eventual aim of all being and which all his thoughts and feelings demand. The Maruts are the powers of Thought which by the strong and apparently destructive motion of their progress break down that which is established and help to the attainment of new formations. Indra, the Power of pure Intelligence, is their brother, kin to them in his nature although elder in being. He should by their means effect the perfection towards which Agastya is striving and not turn enemy nor slay his friend in this terrible struggle towards the goal.

Indra replies that Agastya is his friend and brother, — brother in the soul as children of one Supreme Being, friend as comrades in a common effort and one in the divine love that unites God and man, — and by this friendship and alliance has attained to the present stage in his progressive perfection; but now he treats Indra as an inferior Power and wishes to go beyond without fulfilling himself in the domain of the God. He seeks to divert his increased thought-powers towards his own object instead of delivering them up to the universal Intelligence so that it may enrich its realisations in humanity through Agastya and lead him forward by the way of the Truth. Let the egoistic endeavour cease, the great sacrifice be resumed, the flame of the divine Force, Agni, be kindled in front as head of the sacrifice and leader of the march. Indra and Agastya together, the universal Power and the human soul, will extend in harmony the effective inner action on the plane of the pure Intelligence so that it may enrich itself there and attain beyond. For it is precisely by the progressive

surrender of the lower being to the divine activities that the limited and egoistic consciousness of the mortal awakens to the infinite and immortal state which is its goal.

Agastya accepts the will of the God and submits. He agrees to perceive and fulfil the Supreme in the activities of Indra. From his own realm Indra is supreme lord over the substances of being as manifested through the triple world of mind, life and body and has therefore power to dispose of its formations towards the fulfilment, in the movement of Nature, of the divine Truth that expresses itself in the universe, — supreme lord over love and delight manifested in the same triple world and has therefore power to fix those formations harmoniously in the status of Nature. Agastya gives up all that is realised in him into the hands of Indra, as offerings of the sacrifice, to be held by him in the fixed parts of Agastya's consciousness and directed in the motion towards fresh formations. Indra is once more to enter into friendly parley with the upward aspiring powers of Agastya's being and to establish agreement between the seer's thoughts and the illumination that comes to us through the pure Intelligence. That power will then enjoy in Agastya the offerings of the sacrifice according to the right order of things as formulated and governed by the Truth which is beyond.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Secret of the Veda*, CWSA, Vol. 15, pp. 253-56)



POETIC CREATION

Three Elements of Poetic Creation

Poetry, or at any rate a truly poetic poetry, comes always from some subtle plane through the creative vital and uses the outer mind and other external instruments for transmission only. There are three elements in the production of poetry; there is the original source of inspiration, there is the vital force of creative beauty which contributes its own substance and impetus and often determines the form, except when that also comes ready made from the original sources; there is, finally, the transmitting outer consciousness of the poet. The most genuine and perfect poetry is written when the original source is able to throw its inspiration pure and undiminished into the vital and there takes its true native form and power of speech exactly reproducing the inspiration, while the outer consciousness is entirely passive and transmits without alteration what it receives from the godheads of the inner or the superior spaces. When the vital mind and emotion are too active and give too much of their own initiation or a translation into more or less turbid vital stuff, the poetry remains powerful but is inferior in quality and less authentic. Finally, if the outer consciousness is too lethargic and blocks the transmission or too active and makes its own version, then you have the poetry that fails or is at best a creditable mental manufacture. It is the interference of these two parts either by obstruction or by too great an activity of their own or by both together that causes the difficulty and labour of writing. There would be no difficulty if the inspiration came through without obstruction or interference in a pure transcript — that is what happens in a poet's highest or freest moments when he writes not at all out of his own external human mind, but by inspiration, as the mouthpiece of the Gods.

The originating source may be anywhere; the poetry may arise or descend from the subtle physical plane, from the higher or lower vital itself, from the dynamic or creative intelligence, from the plane of dynamic vision, from the psychic, from the illumined mind or Intuition, — even, though this is the rarest, from the Overmind widenesses. To get the Overmind inspiration is so rare that there are only a few lines or short passages in all poetic literature that give at least some appearance or reflection of it. When the source of inspiration is in the heart or the psychic there is more easily a good will in the vital channel, the flow is spontaneous; the inspiration takes at once its true form and speech and is transmitted without any interference or only a minimum of interference by the brain-mind, that great spoiler of the higher or deeper splendours. It is the character of the lyrical inspiration, to flow in a jet out of the being — whether it comes from the vital or the psychic, it is usually spontaneous, for these are the two most powerfully impelling and compelling parts

of the nature. When on the contrary the source of inspiration is in the creative poetic intelligence or even the higher mind or the illumined mind, the poetry which comes from this quarter is always apt to be arrested by the outer intellect, our habitual thought-production engine. This intellect is an absurdly overactive part of the nature; it always thinks that nothing can be well done unless it puts its finger into the pie and therefore it instinctively interferes with the inspiration, blocks half or more than half of it and labours to substitute its own inferior and toilsome productions for the true speech and rhythm that ought to have come. The poet labours in anguish to get the one true word, the authentic rhythm, the real divine substance of what he has to say, while all the time it is waiting complete and ready behind; but it is denied free transmission by some part of the transmitting agency which prefers to translate and is not willing merely to receive and transcribe. When one gets something through from the illumined mind, then there is likely to come to birth work that is really fine and great. When there comes with labour or without it something reasonably like what the poetic intelligence wanted to say, then there is something fine or adequate, though it may not be great unless there is an intervention from the higher levels. But when the outer brain is at work trying to fashion out of itself or to give its own version of what the higher sources are trying to pour down, then there results a manufacture or something quite inadequate or faulty or, at the best, “good on the whole”, but not *the* thing that ought to have come.

2 June 1931

Creation by the Word

The word is a sound expressive of the idea. In the supra-physical plane when an idea has to be realised, one can by repeating the word-expression of it, produce vibrations which prepare the mind for the realisation of the idea. That is the principle of the Mantra and of japa. One repeats the name of the Divine and the vibrations created in the consciousness prepare the realisation of the Divine. It is the same idea that is expressed in the Bible, “God said, Let there be Light, and there was Light.” It is creation by the Word.

6 May 1933

Creative Power and the Human Instrument

A poem may pre-exist in the timeless as all creation pre-exists there or else in some plane where the past, present and future exist together. But it is not necessary to presuppose anything of the kind to explain the phenomena of inspiration. All is here a matter of formation or creation. By the contact with the source of inspiration the creative Power at one level or another and the human instrument, receptacle or channel get into contact. That is the essential point, all the rest depends upon the

individual case. If the substance, rhythm, form, words come down all together ready-formed from the plane of poetic creation, that is the perfect type of inspiration; it may give its own spontaneous gift or it may give something which corresponds to the idea or the aspiration of the poet, but in either case the human being is only a channel or receptacle, although he feels the joy of the creation and the joy of the *āveśa*, *enthousiasmos*, elation of the inrush and the passage. On the other hand it may be that the creative source sends down the substance or stuff, the force and the idea, but the language, rhythm etc. are formed somewhere in the instrument; he has to find the human transcription of something that is there in diviner essence above; then there is an illumination or excitement, a conscious labour of creation swift or slow, hampered or facile. Something of the language may be supplied by the mind or vital, something may break through from somewhere behind the veil, from whatever source gets into touch with the transcribing mind in the liberating or stimulating excitement or uplifting of the consciousness. Or a line or lines may come through from some plane and the poet excited to creation may build around them constructing his material or getting it from any source he can tap. There are many possibilities of this nature. There is also the possibility of an inspiration not from above, but from somewhere within on the ordinary levels, some inner mind, emotional vital etc. which the mind practised in poetical technique works out according to its habitual faculty. Here again in a different way similar phenomena, similar variations may arise.

As for the language, the tongue in which the poem comes or the whole lines from above, that offers no real difficulty. It all depends on the contact between the creative Power and the instrument or channel, the Power will naturally choose the language of the instrument or channel, that to which it is accustomed and can therefore readily hear and receive. The Power itself is not limited and can use any language, but although it is possible for things to come through in a language unknown or ill-known — I have seen several instances of the former — it is not a usual case, since the *saṁskāra* of the mind, its habits of action and conception would normally obstruct any such unprepared receptiveness; only a strong mediumistic faculty might be unaffected by this difficulty. These things however are obviously exceptional, abnormal or supernormal phenomena.

If the parts of a poem come from different planes, it is because one starts from some high plane but the connecting consciousness cannot receive uninterruptedly from there and as soon as it flickers or wavers it comes down to a lower, perhaps without noticing it, or the lower comes in to supply the continuation of the flow or on the contrary the consciousness starts from a lower plane and is lifted in the *āveśa*, perhaps occasionally, perhaps more continuously higher for a time or else the higher force attracted by the creative will breaks through or touches or catches up the less exalted inspiration towards or into itself. I am speaking here especially of the overhead planes where this is quite natural; for the Overmind for instance is the ultimate source of intuition, illumination or heightened power of the planes

immediately below it. It can lift them up into its own greater intensity or give out of its intensity to them or touch or combine their powers together with something of its own greater power — or they can receive or draw something from it or from each other. On the lower planes beginning from the mental downwards there can also be such variations or combinations, but the working is not the same, for the different powers here stand more on a footing of equality whether they stand apart from each other, each working in its own right, or cooperate.

29 April 1937

*

Human creation comes from the vital planes into the physical — but there is often enough something more behind it than is expressed — it gets altered or diminished in the human physical transcription.

9 March 1933

Joy of Poetic Creation

Poetry takes its start from any plane of the consciousness, but, like all art, one might even say all creation, it must be passed *through* the vital, the life-soul, gather from it a certain force for manifestation if it is to be itself alive. And as there is always a joy in creation, that joy along with a certain *enthousiasmos* — not enthusiasm, if you please, but an invasion and exultation of creative force and creative ecstasy, *ānandamaya āveśa* — must always be there, whatever the source. But where the inspiration comes from the linking of the vital creative instrument to a deeper psychic experience, that imparts another kind of intensive originality and peculiar individual power, a subtle and delicate perfection, a linking on to something that is at once fine to etheriality and potent, intense as fire yet full of sweetness. But this is exceedingly rare in its absolute quality, — poetry as an expression of mind and life is common, poetry of the mind and life touched by the soul and given a spiritual fineness is to be found but more rare; the pure psychic note in poetry breaks through only once in a way, in a brief lyric, a sudden line, a luminous passage. It was indeed because this linking-on took place that the true poetic faculty suddenly awoke in you, — for it was not there before, at least on the surface. The joy you feel, therefore, was no doubt partly the simple joy of creation, but there comes also into it the joy of expression of the psychic being which was seeking for an outlet since your boyhood. It is this inner expression that makes the writing of poetry a part of sadhana.

29 May 1931

Essence of Inspiration

There can be inspiration also without words — a certain intensity in the light and force and substance of the knowledge is the essence of inspiration.

18 June 1933

Inspiration and Effort

Inspiration is always a very uncertain thing; it comes when it chooses, stops suddenly before it has finished its work, refuses to descend when it is called. This is a well-known affliction, perhaps of all artists, but certainly of poets. There are some who can command it at will; those who, I think, are more full of an abundant poetic energy than careful for perfection; others who oblige it to come whenever they put pen to paper but with these the inspiration is either not of a high order or quite unequal in its level. Again there are some who try to give it a habit of coming by always writing at the same time; Virgil with his nine lines first written, then perfected every morning, Milton with his fifty epic lines a day, are said to have succeeded in regularising their inspiration. It is, I suppose, the same principle which makes gurus in India prescribe for their disciples a meditation at the same fixed hour every day. It succeeds partially of course, for some entirely, but not for everybody. For myself, when the inspiration did not come with a rush or in a stream, — for then there is no difficulty, — I had only one way, to allow a certain kind of incubation in which a large form of the thing to be done threw itself on the mind and then wait for the white heat in which the entire transcription could rapidly take place. But I think each poet has his own way of working and finds his own issue out of inspiration's incertitudes.

26 January 1932

*

Merciful heavens, what a splashing and floundering! When you miss a verse or a poem, it is better to wait in an entire quietude about it (with only a silent expectation) until the true inspiration comes, and not to thrash the inner air vainly for possible variants — like that the true form is much more likely to come, as people go to sleep on a problem and find it solved when they awake. Otherwise, you are likely to have only a series of misses, the half-gods of the semi-poetic mind continually intervening with their false enthusiasms and misleading voices.

11 July 1931

*

Few poets can keep for a very long time a sustained level of the highest inspiration. The best poetry does not usually come by streams except in poets of a supreme greatness though there may be in others than the greatest long-continued wingings at a considerable height. The very best comes by intermittent drops, though sometimes three or four gleaming drops at a time. Even in the greatest poets, even in those with the most opulent flow of riches like Shakespeare, the very best is comparatively rare.

13 February 1936

Aspiration, Opening, Recognition

Impatience does not help — intensity of aspiration does. The use of keeping the consciousness uplifted is that it then remains ready for the inflow from above when that comes. To get as early as possible to the highest range one must keep the consciousness steadily turned towards it and maintain the call. First one has to establish the permanent opening — or get it to establish itself, then the ascension and frequent, afterwards constant descent. It is only afterwards that one can have the ease.

21 April 1937

*

Perhaps one reason why your mind is so variable is because it has learned too much and has too many influences stamped upon it; it does not allow the real poet in you who is a little at the back to be himself — it wants to supply him with a form instead of allowing him to breathe into the instrument his own notes. It is besides too ingenious. . . . What you have to learn is the art of allowing things to come through and recognising among them the one right thing — which is very much what you have to do in Yoga also. It is really this recognition that is the one important need — once you have that, things become much easier.

3 July 1932

Self-criticism

It is no use being disgusted because there is a best you have not reached yet; every poet should have that feeling of “a miraculous poetic creation existing on a plane” he has not reached, but he should not despair of reaching it, but rather he has to regard present achievement not as something final but as steps towards what he hopes one day to write. That is the true artistic temper.

1 May 1934

*

It is precisely the people who are careful, self-critical, anxious for perfection who have interrupted visits from the Muse. Those who don't mind what they write, trusting to their genius, vigour or fluency to carry it off are usually the abundant writers. There are exceptions, of course. "The poetic part caught in the mere mind" is an admirable explanation of the phenomenon of interruption. Fluent poets are those who either do not mind if they do not always write their very best or whose minds are sufficiently poetic to make even their "not best" verse pass muster or make a reasonably good show. Sometimes you write things that are good enough, but not your best, but both your insistence and mine — for I think it essential for you to write your best always, at least your "level best" — may have curbed the fluency a good deal.

The check and diminution forced on your prose was compensated by the much higher and maturer quality to which it attained afterwards. It would be so, I suppose, with the poetry; a new level of consciousness once attained, there might well be a new fluency. So there is not much justification for the fear.

6 October 1936

*

You seem to suffer from a mania of self-depreciatory criticism. Many artists and poets have that; as soon as they look at their work they find it awfully poor and bad. (I had that myself often varied with the opposite feeling, Arjava also has it); but to have it while writing is its most excruciating degree of intensity. Better get rid of it if you want to write freely.

14 December 1936

Correction by Second Inspiration

It is a second inspiration which has come in improving on the first. When the improving is done by the mind and not by a pure inspiration, then the retouches spoil more often than they perfect.

8 August 1936

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters on Poetry and Art*, CWSA, Vol. 27, pp. 5-13)

THE UN-HINDU SPIRIT OF CASTE RIGIDITY

(From the *Bande Mataram*, CALCUTTA, September 20th, 1907)

The *Bengalee* reports Sriji Bal Gangadhar Tilak to have made a definite pronouncement on the caste system. "The prevailing idea of social inequality is working immense evil", says the Nationalist leader of the Deccan. This pronouncement is only natural from an earnest Hindu and a sincere Nationalist like Sriji Tilak. The baser ideas underlying the degenerate perversions of the original caste system, the mental attitude which bases them on a false foundation of caste, pride and arrogance, of a divinely ordained superiority depending on the accident of birth, of a fixed and intolerant inequality, are inconsistent with the supreme teaching, the basic spirit of Hinduism which sees the one invariable and indivisible Divinity in every individual being. Nationalism is simply the passionate aspiration for the realisation of that Divine Unity in the nation, a unity in which all the component individuals, however various and apparently unequal their functions as political, social or economic factors, are yet really and fundamentally one and equal. In the ideal of Nationalism which India will set before the world, there will be an essential equality between man and man, between caste and caste, between class and class, all being as Mr. Tilak has pointed out different but equal and united parts of the Virat Purusha as realised in the nation. The insistent preaching of our religion and the work of the Indian Nationalist is to bring home to every one of his countrymen this ideal of their country's religion and philosophy. We are intolerant of autocracy because it is the denial in politics of this essential equality, we object to the modern distortion of the caste system because it is the denial in society of the same essential equality. While we insist on reorganising the nation into a democratic unity politically, we recognise that the same principle of reorganisation ought to and inevitably will assert itself socially; even if, as our opponents choose to imagine, we are desirous of confining its working to politics, our attempts will be fruitless, for the principle once realised in politics must inevitably assert itself in society. No monopoly racial or hereditary can form part of the Nationalist's scheme of the future, his dream of the day for the advent of which he is striving and struggling.

The caste system was once productive of good, and as a fact has been a necessary phase of human progress through which all the civilisations of the world have had to pass. The autocratic form of government has similarly had its use in the development of the world's polity, for there was certainly a time when it was the only kind of political organisation that made the preservation of society possible. The Nationalist does not quarrel with the past, but he insists on its transformation, the transformation of individual or class autocracy into the autocracy, self-rule or

Swaraj, of the nation and of the fixed, hereditary, anti-democratic caste-organisation into the pliable, self-adapting, democratic distribution of function at which socialism aims. In the present absolutism in politics and the present narrow caste-organisation in society he finds a negation of that equality which his religion enjoins. Both must be transformed. The historic problem that the present attitude of Indian Nationalism at once brings to the mind, as to how a caste-governed society could co-exist with a democratic religion and philosophy, we do not propose to consider here today. We only point out that Indian Nationalism must by its inherent tendencies move towards the removal of unreasoning and arbitrary distinctions and inequalities. Ah! he will say, this is exactly what we Englishmen have been telling you all these years. You must get rid of your caste before you can have democracy. There is just a little flaw in this advice of the Anglo-Indian monitors, it puts the cart before the horse, and that is the reason why we have always refused to act upon it.

It does not require much expenditure of thought to find out that the only way to rid the human mind of abuses and superstitions is through a transformation of spirit and not merely of machinery. We must educate every Indian, man, woman and child, in the ideals of our religion and philosophy before we can rationally expect our society to reshape itself in the full and perfect spirit of the Vedantic gospel of equality. We dwell on this commonsense idea here at the risk of being guilty of repetition. Education on a national scale is an indispensable precondition of our social amelioration. And because such education is impossible except through the aid of state-finance, therefore, even if there were no other reason, the Nationalist must emphasise the immediate need of political freedom without which Indians cannot obtain the necessary control over their money. So long as we are under an alien bureaucracy, we cannot have the funds needed for the purpose of an adequate national education, and what little education we are given falls far short of the Nationalist ideal, being mainly concerned with the fostering of a spirit of sordid contentment with things that be. Apart from the question of the cultivation of those virtues which only come in the wake of liberty, apart from the question of reorganisation of the country, if we were to look into the problem in its purely social aspect, even then we are confronted with the primary need of political emancipation as the condition precedent of further fruitful activity.

The Nationalist has been putting the main stress on the necessity of political freedom almost to the exclusion of the other needs of the nation, not because he is not alive to the vital importance of those needs of economic renovation, of education, of social transformation, but because he knows that in order that his ideal of equality may be brought to its fullest fruition, he must first bring about the political freedom and federation of his country.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 679-81)

CASTE AND DEMOCRACY

(From the *Bande Mataram*, CALCUTTA, September 21st, 1907)

We fear our correspondent who has criticised on another page the consistency of our views on caste, has hardly taken any trouble to understand the real drift of our articles. His attitude seems to be that we must be either entirely for caste as it at present exists or entirely against the institution and condemn it root and branch in the style of the ordinary unthinking social reformer. Because on the one hand we protested against the ignorant abuse of the institution often indulged in simply because it is different in form and spirit from European institutions, and on the other hand emphasised the perversions of its form and spirit and the necessity of its transformation in the pure spirit of Hinduism, our correspondent imagines that we are inconsistent and guilty of adopting successively two different and incompatible attitudes. Our position is perfectly clear and straightforward. Caste was originally an arrangement for the distribution of functions in society, just as much as class in Europe, but the principle on which the distribution was based in India was peculiar to this country. The civilisation of Europe has always been preponderatingly material and the division of classes was material in its principles and material in its objects, but our civilisation has always been preponderatingly spiritual and moral, and caste division in India had a spiritual object and a spiritual and moral basis. The division of classes in Europe had its root in a distribution of powers and rights and developed and still develops through a struggle of conflicting interests; its aim was merely the organisation of society for its own sake and mainly indeed for its economic convenience. The division of castes in India was conceived as a distribution of duties. A man's caste depended on his *dharma*, his spiritual, moral and practical duties, and his *dharma* depended on his *swabhava*, his temperament and inborn nature. A Brahmin was a Brahmin not by mere birth, but because he discharged the duty of preserving the spiritual and intellectual elevation of the race, and he had to cultivate the spiritual temperament and acquire the spiritual training which could alone qualify him for the task. The Kshatriya was a Kshatriya not merely because he was the son of warriors and princes, but because he discharged the duty of protecting the country and preserving the high courage and manhood of the nation, and he had to cultivate the princely temperament and acquire the strong and lofty Samurai training which alone fitted him for his duties. So it was with the Vaishya whose function was to amass wealth for the race and the Sudra who discharged the humbler duties of service without which the other castes could not perform their share of labour for the common good. This was what we meant when we said that caste was a socialistic institution. No doubt there was a gradation of social respect which placed the function

of the Brahmin at the summit and the function of the Sudra at the base, but this inequality was accidental, external, *vyavaharika*. Essentially there was, between the devout Brahmin and the devout Sudra, no inequality in the single Virat Purusha of which each was a necessary part. Chokha Mela, the Maratha Pariah, became the guru of Brahmins proud of their caste purity; the Chandala taught Shankaracharya: for the Brahman was revealed in the body of the Pariah and in the Chandala there was the utter presence of Shiva the Almighty. Heredity entered into caste divisions, and in the light of the conclusions of modern knowledge who shall say erroneously? But it entered into it as a subordinate element. For Hindu civilisation being spiritual based its institutions on spiritual and moral foundations and subordinated the material elements and material considerations. Caste therefore was not only an institution which ought to be immune from the cheap second-hand denunciations so long in fashion, but a supreme necessity without which Hindu civilisation could not have developed its distinctive character or worked out its unique mission.

But to recognise this is not to debar ourselves from pointing out its later perversions and desiring its transformation. It is the nature of human institutions to degenerate, to lose their vitality, and decay, and the first sign of decay is the loss of flexibility and oblivion of the essential spirit in which they were conceived. The spirit is permanent, the body changes; and a body which refuses to change must die. The spirit expresses itself in many ways while itself remaining essentially the same, but the body must change to suit its changing environments if it wishes to live. There is no doubt that the institution of caste degenerated. It ceased to be determined by spiritual qualifications which, once essential, have now come to be subordinate and even immaterial and is determined by the purely material tests of occupation and birth. By this change it has set itself against the fundamental tendency of Hinduism which is to insist on the spiritual and subordinate the material and thus lost most of its meaning. The spirit of caste arrogance, exclusiveness and superiority came to dominate it instead of the spirit of duty, and the change weakened the nation and helped to reduce us to our present condition. It is these perversions which we wish to see set right. The institution must transform itself so as to fulfil its essential and permanent object under the changed conditions of modern times. If it refuses to change, it will become a mere social survival and crumble to pieces. If it transforms itself, it will yet play a great part in the fulfilment of civilisation.

Our correspondent accuses us of attempting to corrupt society with the intrusion of the European idea of Socialism. Socialism is not an European idea, it is essentially Asiatic and especially Indian. What is called Socialism in Europe, is the old Asiatic attempt to effect a permanent solution of the economic problem of society which will give man leisure and peace to develop undisturbed his higher self. Without Socialism democracy would remain a tendency that never reached its fulfilment, a rule of the masses by a small aristocratic or monied class with the consent and votes of the masses, or a tyranny of the artisan classes over the rest. Socialistic democracy

is the only true democracy, for without it we cannot get the equalised and harmonised distribution of functions, each part of the community existing for the good of all and not struggling for its own separate interests, which will give humanity as a whole the necessary conditions in which it can turn its best energies to its higher development. To realise those conditions is also the aim of Hindu civilisation and the original intention of caste. The fulfilment of Hinduism is the fulfilment of the highest tendencies of human civilisation and it must include in its sweep the most vital impulses of modern life. It will include democracy and Socialism also, purifying them, raising them above the excessive stress on the economic adjustments which are the means, and teaching them to fix their eyes more constantly and clearly on the moral, intellectual and spiritual perfection of mankind which is the end.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 683-85)



CONTACT WITH VIVEKANANDA

I was wondering if you had seen or met Vivekananda somewhere.

No, not in the body. My contact with him was in the jail when he was speaking with me for about 15 days, giving me the first insight into the Intuition plane (not the intuitive mind which is mental and not supramental) as the first opening to Supermind.

21 October 1934

*

Experiences in Alipore Jail, 1908-1909

If it is not indiscreet would you ask Sri Aurobindo if it is true that in 1909 — in Alipore jail — seven years after his death — Swami Vivekananda came to him, not in vision, but in actual fact, to ask him to continue the work, that he had not yet finished?

Sri Aurobindo says that Vivekananda came to him not in a visible form but as a presence which was with him for a fortnight during which V. spoke certain things about the processes of the higher Truth-Consciousness.*

21 December 1938

* This reply was written by the Mother at Sri Aurobindo's dictation or under his instruction.
— Ed. (CWSA)

(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 264-65)

*

A Way, Not a Religion

I have no time to read books usually. I seldom had and none at all now. I have had no inspirations from the sadhana of Bejoy Goswami, though a good deal at one time from Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. My remarks simply meant that I regard the spiritual history of mankind and especially of India as a constant development of a divine purpose, not a book that is closed, the lines of which have to be constantly repeated. Even the Upanishads and the Gita were not final though everything may be there in seed. In this development the recent spiritual history of India is a very important stage and the names I mentioned had a special prominence in my thought at the time — they seemed to me to indicate the lines from which the future spiritual development had most directly to proceed, not staying but passing on. I do not know

that I would put my meaning exactly in the language you suggest. I may say that it is far from my purpose to propagate any religion new or old for humanity in the future. A way to be opened that is still blocked, not a religion to be founded, is my conception of the matter.

18 August 1935

(Ibid., p. 696)

*

I was carrying on my yoga during these days learning to do so in the midst of much noise and clamour but apart and in silence and without any participation of the others in it. My yoga begun in 1904 had always been personal and apart; those around me knew I was a sadhak but they knew little more as I kept all that went on in me to myself. It was only after my release that for the first time I spoke at Uttarpara publicly about my spiritual experiences. Until I went to Pondicherry I took no disciples; with those who accompanied me or joined me in Pondicherry I had at first the relation of friends and companions rather than of a guru and disciples; it was on the ground of politics that I had come to know them and not on the spiritual ground. Afterwards only there was a gradual development of spiritual relations until the Mother came back from Japan and the Ashram was founded or rather founded itself in 1926. I began my yoga in 1904 without a guru; in 1908 I received important help from a Mahratta yogi and discovered the foundations of my sadhana; but from that time till the Mother came to India I received no spiritual help from anyone else. My sadhana before and afterwards was not founded upon books but upon personal experiences that crowded on me from within. But in the jail I had the Gita and the Upanishads with me, practised the yoga of the Gita and meditated with the help of the Upanishads; these were the only books from which I found guidance; the Veda which I first began to read long afterwards in Pondicherry rather confirmed what experiences I already had than was any guide to my sadhana. I sometimes turned to the Gita for light when there was a question or a difficulty and usually received help or an answer from it, but there were no such happenings in connection with the Gita as are narrated in the book. It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail in my solitary meditation and felt his presence, but this had nothing to do with the alleged circumstances narrated in the book, circumstances that never took place, nor had it anything to do with the Gita. The voice spoke only on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it had finished saying all that it had to say on that subject.

(Autobiographical Notes, CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 98-99)

*

Have you realised the Supermind?

Sri Aurobindo: You know I was talking about the tail of the Supermind to Y. I know what it is, I had flashes and glimpses of it. I have been trying to Supramentalise the Overmind. Not that the Supermind is not acting. It is doing so through Overmind and Intuition and the intermediate powers have come down. Supermind is above the Overmind (*he showed it by placing one palm above the other*) so that one may mistake one for the other. I remember the day when people here claimed to have got it. I myself had made mistakes about it in the beginning, and I did not know about the many planes. It was Vivekananda — who used to come to me in Alipore Jail — who showed to me the Intuitive plane. For about two to three weeks, he gave me instructions regarding Intuition. Afterwards I began to see the still higher planes. I am not satisfied with only a part, or a flash of Supermind, I want to bring down the whole mass of the Supermind pure, and that is an extremely difficult business.

(A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks*, 2007, p. 564)

*

In the course of my Yogic evolution, I came to know some of my personalities in my past lives. The elements of character I had in those previous personalities are still working in this life. My capacities and incapacities come from those personalities. My active work in the political field and my Yogic work came from different personalities of my own in the past. There are other elements in my character which have not been derived from my past personalities — they have been derived by association with other personalities.

There is the incident of the personality of Vivekananda visiting me while I was in jail. He explained to me in detail the work of the Supramental — not exactly of the Supramental, but of the intuitivised mind, the mind as it is organised by the Supramental; he did not use the word Supermind, I gave the name afterwards. That experience lasted for about three weeks. You may not believe this and regard all this as imagination — but in that case you will not be able to make any progress in this Yoga; you will have experiences, and you will have to trust them.

Disciple: Was that a vision?

Sri Aurobindo: No, it was not a vision. I would not have trusted vision.

10 July 1926

(Anilbaran Roy, *Interviews and Conversations*, Auro e-Books, 2014, p. 80)

**‘THE WORK ETERNALLY ACCOMPLISHING ITSELF
IN SPITE OF ALL, AGAINST ALL,
DESPITE ALL CONTRARY APPEARANCES
AND ILLUSORY DETOURS’**

August 31, 1914¹

In this formidable disorder and terrible destruction can be seen a great working, a necessary toil preparing the earth for a new sowing which will rise in marvellous spikes of grain and give to the world the shining harvest of a new race. . . . The vision is clear and precise, the plan of Thy divine law so plainly traced that peace has come back and installed itself in the hearts of the workers. There are no more doubts and hesitations, no longer any anguish or impatience. There is only the grand straight line of the work eternally accomplishing itself in spite of all, against all, despite all contrary appearances and illusory detours. These physical personalities, moments unseizable in the infinite Becoming, know that they will have made humanity take one farther step, infallibly and without care for the inevitable results, whatever be the apparent momentary consequences: they unite themselves with Thee, O Master eternal, they unite themselves with Thee, O Mother universal, and in this double identity with That which is beyond and That which is all the manifestation they taste the infinite joy of the perfect certitude.

Peace, peace in all the world. . . .

War is an appearance,

Turmoil is an illusion,

Peace is there, immutable peace.

Mother, sweet Mother who I am, Thou art at once the destroyer and the builder.

The whole universe lives in Thy breast with all its life innumerable and Thou livest in Thy immensity in the least of its atoms.

And the aspiration of Thy infinitude turns towards That which is not manifested to cry to it for a manifestation ever more complete and more perfect.

All *is*, in one time, in a triple and clairvoyant total Consciousness, the Individual, the Universal, the Infinite.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 236-37)

1. Prayer wholly or partly translated by Sri Aurobindo.

APPRENTICE-SUPERMEN

Sweet Mother, will there not be any intermediary states between man and superman?

There will probably be many.

Man and superman? You are not speaking of the new supramental race, are you? Are you really speaking of what *we* call the superman, that is, man born in the human way and trying to transform the physical being he has received by his ordinary human birth? Are there any stages? — There will certainly be countless *partial* realisations. According to each one's capacity, the degree of transformation will differ, and it is certain that there will be a considerable number of attempts, more or less fruitful or unfruitful, before we come to something like the superman, and even those will be more or less successful attempts.

All those who strive to overcome their ordinary nature, all those who try to realise materially the deeper experience which has brought them into contact with the divine Truth, all those who, instead of turning to the Beyond or the Highest, try to realise physically, externally, the change of consciousness they have realised within themselves — all are apprentice-supermen. And there, there are countless differences in the success of their efforts. Each time we try not to be an ordinary man, not to live the ordinary life, to express in our movements, our actions and reactions the divine Truth, when we are governed by that Truth instead of being governed by the general ignorance, we are apprentice-supermen, and according to the success of our efforts, well, we are more or less able apprentices, more or less advanced on the way.

All these are stages, so . . . In reality, in this race to the Transformation, the question is to know which of the two will arrive first: the one who wants to transform his body in the image of the divine Truth, or the old habit of the body to go on disintegrating until it is so deformed that it can no longer continue to live in its outer integrality. It is a race between transformation and decay. For there are only two stopping-places, two things which can indicate to what extent one has succeeded: either success, that is to say, becoming a superman — then of course one can say, "Now I have reached the goal". . . or else death. Till then, normally, one is "on the way".

It is one of these two things — either attaining the goal or a sudden rupture of life — which temporarily puts an end to the advance. And on the road each one has gone more or less far, but until one reaches the end one cannot say what stage one is at. It is the final step that will count. So only the one who comes a few hundred or thousand years later and looks back, will be able to say, "There was this stage

and that stage, this realisation and that realisation. . . .” That is history, it will be a historical perception of the event. Till then all of us are in the movement and the work.

How far have we gone and how far shall we go? It is better not to think too much about that, for it cripples you and you can’t run well. It is better to think only about running and nothing else. That is the only way to run well. You look at where you want to go and put all your effort in the movement to go forward. How far you have gone is not your concern. I say, “This is history”, it will come later. The historians of our effort will tell us — because perhaps we shall still be there — will tell us what we did, how we did it. For the moment what is necessary is to do it; this is the only thing that matters.

8 October 1958

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1957-1958*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 9, pp. 410-11)



THE MOST USEFUL WORK

What is the most useful work to be done at the present moment?

The general aim to be attained is the advent of a progressing universal harmony.

The means for attaining this aim, in regard to the earth, is the realisation of human unity through the awakening in all and the manifestation by all of the inner Divinity which is One.

In other words, — to create unity by founding the Kingdom of God which is within us all.

This, therefore, is the most useful work to be done:

(1) For each individually, to be conscious in himself of the Divine Presence and to identify himself with it.

(2) To individualise the states of being that were never till now conscious in man and, by that, to put the earth in connection with one or more of the fountains of universal force that are still sealed to it.

(3) To speak again to the world the eternal word under a new form adapted to its present mentality.

It will be the synthesis of all human knowledge.

(4) Collectively, to establish an ideal society in a propitious spot for the flowering of the new race, the race of the Sons of God.

*
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The terrestrial transformation and harmonisation can be brought about by two processes which, though opposite in appearance, must combine — must act upon each other and complete each other:

(1) Individual transformation, an inner development leading to the union with the Divine Presence.

(2) Social transformation, the establishment of an environment favourable to the flowering and growth of the individual.

Since the environment reacts upon the individual and, on the other hand, the value of the environment depends upon the value of the individual, the two works should proceed side by side. But this can be done only through division of labour, and that necessitates the formation of a group, hierarchised, if possible.

The action of the members of the group should be threefold:

(1) To realise in oneself the ideal to be attained: to become a perfect earthly representative of the first manifestation of the Unthinkable in all its modes, attributes

and qualities.

(2) To preach this ideal by word, but, above all, by example, so as to find out all those who are ready to realise it in their turn and to become also announcers of liberation.

(3) To found a typic society or reorganise those that already exist.

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* *

For each individual also there is a twofold labour to be done, simultaneously, each side of it helping and completing the other:

(1) An inner development, a progressive union with the Divine Light, sole condition in which man can be always in harmony with the great stream of universal life.

(2) An external action which everyone has to choose according to his capacities and personal preferences. He must find his own place, the place which he alone can occupy in the general concert, and he must give himself entirely to it, not forgetting that he is playing only one note in the terrestrial symphony and yet his note is indispensable to the harmony of the whole, and its value depends upon its justness.

7 May 1912

THE MOTHER

(*Words of Long Ago*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 2, pp. 49-50)



THE EXPERIENCE IN ALIPORE

. . . But the gods don't go to the Supermind!

No, what I mainly want to know is the difference when you cross to the other side, into the Supermind — the difference in vision between the Supermind and the overmind.

I don't know what Sri Aurobindo would tell you. . . .

This is just what I am observing these days. To me, the overmental consciousness is a magnified consciousness: far lovelier, far loftier, far more powerful, far happier, far . . . with lots of "far more's" to it. But . . . I can tell you one thing: the gods don't have the sense of Oneness. For instance, in their own way they quarrel among themselves, which shows they have no sense of Oneness, no sense of all being one, of all being various expressions of the Divine — the unique Divine. So they are still on this side, but with magnified forms, and powers beyond our comprehension: the power to change form at will, for example, or to be in many places at the same time — all sorts of things that poor human beings can only dream of having. The gods have it all. They live a divine life! But it's not supramental.

The Supermind is knowledge — Pure Knowledge. Yes, it is knowing — knowing what is to be known.

There is no longer a play *between* oneself and things, it's. . . . Truly, the sign of the Supermind is Oneness. Not a sum of a lot of different things, but, on the contrary, a Oneness . . . at play with Itself. There's nothing of the way gods relate to each other and the world, for they are still part of the realm of diversity, though *free* from Ignorance. They don't have Ignorance, they don't have what we human beings have here. They have no Ignorance, they have no Unconsciousness, but they have the sense of diversity and of separation.

What about Sri Aurobindo's experience at Alipore, then? You know, that well-known experience when he saw Narayana in the prisoners, Narayana in the guards, Narayana everywhere? . . .

That is the Supreme. Oneness.

Is it a supramental experience or . . .

It is supramental.

Supramental?

Yes, the supramental experience. He called it Narayana because he was Indian.

It's supramental, not overmental?

No, no.

It's like the message of the Gita as Sri Aurobindo explained it: not overmental, but supramental. It is Oneness, the experience of Oneness.

The experience of the gods has never been more than a distraction for me — an amusement, a pleasant diversion; none of it seems essential or indispensable. You can treat yourself to the luxury of all these experiences, and they increase your knowledge and your power, your this and your that, but it's not particularly important. *The thing is altogether different.*

We can do without the gods. We can have access to the Supermind without any of these experiences, they're not indispensable. But if you want to know and experience the universe, if you want to be identified with the Supreme in His expression, well, all this is part of His expression, in varying degrees and with varying powers. It's all part of His experience. So why not treat yourself to that luxury? It's very interesting, very interesting — but not indispensable.

I think that once you are identified with the Supreme and He has chosen you to do a work on earth, then He quite naturally grants you all these things, because it increases your power of action, that's all. That's all.

As for me, there are no more problems, no more problems!

This classification [*of the planes of consciousness*] is very convenient and necessary at a given moment, especially when you are ascending and awakening; but afterwards. . . .

(*Silence*)

Sri Aurobindo didn't put too much emphasis on the Overmind. The one significant point is that the Overmind has ruled the world through the different religions. And it is the dwelling place of all the gods, all the beings humans have made into gods in their religions. Those beings exist in their own world, and some humans, coming in touch with them, have been overwhelmed by their powers and their superiority, and have made gods and religions out of them.

But it's better not to emphasise this [*in your book*]. As I have said, we can bypass that plane, or even pass through without knowing it. It interested me to read in the Vedas that if you don't ascend the way you're supposed to, if you try to bypass the gods, then unpleasant things happen to you and your way is blocked — do you remember that? That gives you an idea of what it is. It's like an intermediary zone,

far superior to the earth, but still intermediary. Some have tried to cross it without stopping; and there, they say, you run into trouble. Personally, I am not sure, I can only speak of my own experience: there was always a sense of fraternity — as you can imagine! I knew them, I was on friendly terms with them, so there was no question of bypassing them or not!

But I have a strong impression that that world is still a magnified version of our own, and part of the old path; it has nothing to do with the Supramental Creation, which will bring to earth the sense of the Supreme and the Unique.

Basically, it's part of the old path, a consequence of all that has happened, of the whole universal formation as we know it. People who believe in essential Evil would say it's a consequence of "the accident" of creation. But is it an accident? I have my doubts. It has yet to be revealed. And we won't know until . . . until it's over.

I am speaking in riddles, but what else can I do! . . .

I mean that the why and the how of it won't be known until . . . until the curve is completed.

But the gods belong to the present curve. The overmind belongs to this curve.

Those gods are all very nice! For some people they're unbearable at times (*Mother laughs*), but they're really very nice! They have their faults, they have their good points, but with me they have always been very nice!

No more (*Mother makes an X across her mouth*).

*
* *

(Later, Mother tries to remember a word that struck her while listening to the disciple read his manuscript on Sri Aurobindo:)

. . . It's strange, I realise that I listen with a completely different type of consciousness. Nothing is left here (*pointing to the forehead*), all that comes there is sound, but I listen elsewhere.

I have no physical memory — I don't remember at all. But I had the impression . . . I saw a word turning into living bluish light, so I thought, "Ah, a good word for my translation!" (*Mother again tries to remember; then gives up.*)

Anyway, the important thing is what you told me: the experience at Alipore is supramental.

Oh, yes! He used the word Narayana because he hadn't yet developed his own terminology; but he isn't referring to the gods: it's the supramental experience.

Note: Later, on the 27th, Mother remarked:

I was reading about this very thing yesterday in *The Secret of the Veda*, in the first

hymn translated by Sri Aurobindo (*the reference is to the colloquy between Indra and Agastya*) and it helped me put my finger on the problem. In this hymn there is a dispute between Indra and the Rishi because the Rishi wants to progress too quickly without first passing through Indra [the god of the Mind], and Indra stops him; finally they reach an agreement. Sri Aurobindo's commentary is quite interesting: when one has the *individual* power to go directly, but neglects the steps which are still necessary for the whole, for the universal movement, then one is stopped short. That is absolutely my experience.

26 September 1962

(*The Mother's conversation with a disciple on 26 September 1962*)



“ON INDIAN SOIL” AND “SAGES” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

I do not know if you have already commented on this poem which is among the first few in the series which is with you. In the present copy, I have made some significant changes, getting rid of what you call “antiquities” as well as substituting new words and making the last stanza not the exact repetition of the first . . . Will you kindly give your opinion?

ON INDIAN SOIL

On Indian soil the day is dimming,
But what can haze the inward Sun
While sacred memories cease not hymning
The beauty of the timeless One?

Here where the eve can still remember
The holy life the noon has led,
The soul’s steep path thou dar’st to clamber
Shall turn familiar to thy tread.

For here thy heart is one with ages
And glows with all that yearned before,
And clasps through union with past sages
The Unknown like a friend of yore.

For here the ancient spirits hover
To lift the young aspirant high —
Take but a step and thou’lt discover
That thou hast climbed a mile thereby.

And gods shall come halfway, arisen
To share the ardours¹ of thy song;
And Whom thou seekest for a season
Himself shall seek thee all year long.

On Indian soil the day is dimming,
But naught can haze the inward Sun
While sacred memories linger, hymning
The beauty of the timeless One . . .

1. [*Sri Aurobindo’s comment in the right margin*] “burden” is better than “ardours”

Is is not a bad poem on its own level, but the level cannot be said to be a very high one. It is not an inspired poem, only adequate. And there is a tang about the expression and rhythm that sounds almost didactic — there are lines that ring like cousins to Longfellow and others that walk like nephews to Scott.

16 October 1931

Sri Aurobindo —

I should like to have your opinion on this poem. Your comment on “On Indian Soil” was such an interesting eye-opener. I hadn’t quite perceived its Longfellowship with minor poetry.

Sages who scan the solitudes of thought
With passionless fervour for the Ineffable,
Disdainful of the souls astrir
With longings of transcendent woe
For intimate skies
And stars that glow
With human beauty — your austere emprise
I envy not!
Can the cold, climbing will
That¹ lifts no poignant hands to pray
Taste of the keen felicities that know
The eternal Glory is a wanderer
Hungry for lips of clay?
And what shall save the mind that seeks
Battle with voiceless destiny
August beyond the cry of pain,
When on the sheer, truth-luminous peaks
Its quivering eyes recall
The abyss of desolate mortality,
And no sweet, answering arms of Love restrain
The miserable², blinding fall?

P.S. I have a variant for the close. Omit the line “August beyond the cry of pain” and read after the penultimate line:

*The stab of unregenerate pain,
The blinding fall?*

1. I would suggest “which” for “that” here. The two “that” are a little awkward.

2. Is “miserable” *superfluous*?

No; this is better than your proposed variant.

The poem is very fine. I find your rhymes often rather coldly and vacantly distant from one another; there is, for example, between “astir” and “wanderer” all the space that divides London from Tokio. However, that is perhaps on my part the prejudice of an ear trained to closer and more companionate rhyme systems; in any case this poem is felicitous enough for it not to matter. Let me point out, however, that once “on the sheer, truth-luminous peaks” there is no chance of a fall — a willed descent would be possible but not a tumble! That, however, is no objection from the poetic point of view; the poet is allowed to fuse impossibilities in order to drive his suggestions more intensely home.

18 October 1931

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SAGES

Sages who scan the solitudes of thought
With passionless fervour for the Ineffable,
Disdainful of the souls astir
With longings of transcendent woe
For intimate skies
And stars that glow
With human beauty — your austere emprise
I envy not!
Can the cold, climbing will
Which lifts no poignant hands to pray
Taste of the keen felicities that know
The eternal Glory is a wanderer
Hungry for lips of clay?
And what shall save the mind that seeks
Battle with voiceless destiny
August beyond the cry of pain,
When on the sheer, truth-luminous peaks

Its quivering eyes recall
The abyss of desolate mortality,
And no sweet, answering arms of Love restrain
The miserable, blinding fall?

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

Whenever anything untoward happens, it is essential not to allow any vibrations of disturbance or unrest in either the physical mind or the nerves. One must remain calm and open to the Light and Force, then one will be able to act in the right way.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga – II, CWSA, Vol. 29, p. 283)

THE SOUP CEREMONY

The Soup Ceremony originated during the intense period of the Overmental descent shortly before and after the Siddhi Day of 24 November 1926. The earliest reference to the Mother giving soup to the disciples is by Champaklal on 18 November 1926:

While giving me soup after sipping a little, Mother said, “Take this cup and you will be fully conscious.”¹

Champaklal clarified to the ‘Archives’ Department in August 1987 that his note referred to the Mother giving him soup personally from the soup prepared for Sri Aurobindo, and that it did not refer to the general distribution of soup to the disciples by the Mother. That there were two soups being prepared simultaneously, one for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (termed sometimes as ‘Big Soup’ by Rajangam) and one for the disciples is corroborated by a number of their diary notations.

The second reference to the soup distribution is to be found at the end of Rajani Palit’s account of the Siddhi Day on 24 November 1926:

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

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

The phrase “the usual distribution of ‘Soup’ by the Mother” implies that the collective distribution of soup by the Mother had already begun even before the Siddhi Day. This is not surprising because the Mother had already come to the forefront of Ashram life and was conducting collective meditations for the disciples. In fact, in September 1926 both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had their respective groups of disciples meditating with them. The Mother’s group, which gradually increased in number, meditated in Sri Aurobindo’s room in the Library House, while Sri Aurobindo’s group meditated in the upstairs verandah of the same house.

The next mention of soup is by Haradhan Bakshi on 27 November 1926:

Darkness has covered up the Light, will and everything else except myself, the *drashta*. It began after the soup-bowl and vision-clearing business.

The “soup-bowl” (meant to receive soup from the Mother) should not be confused with the “vision-clearing business” which is described at length in Haradhan’s diary notation of the previous day, 26 November 1926:

14:30 p.m. I ran to Sri Aurobindo's [house]. Upstairs I met Datta. She asked me, "You are to come?" I said, "Yes." Datta: "Put your 2, 2 fingers here (in two vases full of water and 2 petals of red rose). Then put them at the heart at the forehead and over the eyes." I did so. "Fold hands at your chest — Mother send us down immortality!" She said something like that. Said Rajangam, "It is to purify the vision, etc." "Yes, I know," said I. In the whole matter, there was a suggestion to that effect.

This morning Khitish Babu said that Shri Mirra Devi had told him that the Anandam that had descended into the physical on 24.11.26, had today at 4.30 a.m. conquered the unconscious.

The application of the "occultly charged water" to the eyes and forehead to "purify the vision" would be associated with the "Immortality Day" of 26 November 1926, as narrated to Amal Kiran by Champaklal.² I quote from Amal Kiran's article on it in *Mother India*:

... on the 26th, in the passage room where soup used to be prepared, the Mother stood before a basin of water and, holding her hands over it, appeared to pass into the water a spiritual consciousness and power descending into her. She declared that a most important and fundamental event had occurred but it was both very sacred and secret. She asked for some small glass bottles. When they were brought, she poured the occultly charged water into them and gave them to those who were there. According to her the divine principle of Immortality had been brought down on that day.

Haradhan's diary notation of 26 November 1926 evidently describes the same event, with a difference in details. But Haradhan also mentions "the water of immortality" twice in December 1926, referring to the same kind of vision-purifying ritual which happened on the Immortality Day of 26 November 1926. On the 6th of December 1926, Haradhan put a phial containing the sacred water in the Mother's hand. The Mother then concentrated on it, took a drop and put it in the middle of his head and "on the point between the eye-brows".³ This means that the vision-purifying ritual with sacred water not only continued for a short time after the Immortality Day, but that the Soup Ceremony, a much more elaborate function, was started by the Mother around the same time and continued for several years in the early period of life in the Ashram. I quote below Anilbaran's description of the Soup Ceremony as described by him in his diary notation of 21 December 1926:

When at night I went for soup I asked Mother about the special significance of taking the soup. Mother said: "Have you not heard of Divine Communion in this manner? My flesh and blood are to go to you and form your flesh and blood,

but instead of actually giving my flesh and blood to you, I sip this soup, put my force into it and give it to be drunk by you.” N expressed the significance beautifully — he said, “By this process we get her even in our physical cells.”

Both the soup and the water for the vision-purifying ritual were prepared in the small kitchen on the first floor of the Library House where Sri Aurobindo and the Mother stayed from 25 October 1922 to 7 February 1927. Amal Kiran writes that “the occultly charged water” was made “in the passage room where soup used to be prepared”. This passage room was later used by Bansidhar and Janardhan for giving permission to visit Sri Aurobindo’s room. To the north of this passage, according to Kamala-ben and Dyuman, was the small kitchen where the soup was prepared on a charcoal stove. Kamala-ben lighted daily the charcoal stove on which the soup was boiled by Champaklal and later strained by Rajangam. The vegetables required for the soup were cut in the passage room which was named “Orderly Work”⁴ by the Mother, considering, one would suppose, the meticulousness with which Champaklal went about his work. Other kitchen utensils were also kept there with which fruit juices and other preparations were made for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

To the east of this passage is the terrace above the Notice Board area with a staircase that leads down on one side to the Samadhi, and on the other side to the central courtyard of the Ashram main building. The original terrace was much smaller and excluded part of the present Notice Board area in its length.⁵ It is on this small terrace (later called “Champaklal’s terrace” because it was adjacent to Champaklal’s room in the Library House) that the Soup Ceremony originated, according to Narayan Prasad.⁶ However, the only available evidence that corroborates his account is the following diary notation of Anilbaran Roy written on 10 March 1927.

In the evening when waiting on the terrace for soup I had a fine realisation of the infinite Purusha consciousness.

The terrace that Anilbaran Roy mentions in the above diary notation is most likely “Champaklal’s terrace” for several reasons: (1) Anilbaran Roy was given Sri Aurobindo’s room just as Champaklal was given the Mother’s room in the Library House after Sri Aurobindo and the Mother shifted to the Meditation House in February 1927. Anilbaran’s room (presently the ‘Philately’ Department.) is on the south of the passage room and the small kitchen where the soup was prepared. (2) The soup distribution may have thus started spontaneously at the place where it was prepared, as it happened with the vision-purifying ritual on the Immortality Day of 26 November 1926. (3) Anilbaran’s diary notation may be simply describing his spiritual experience while he was waiting for soup on this terrace that was near his room.

Apart from this very probable but still uncertain reference of Anilbaran Roy,

there is no other record to confirm that the Soup Ceremony began on Champaklal's terrace. On the other hand, three of the earliest disciples (Dyuman, Vasudha and Govindbhai Patel) clearly recollect the Soup Ceremony on the upstairs verandah of the Library House before it was shifted downstairs to the Reception Hall. This verandah is on the first floor of the Library House and on the south of the Prosperity Hall upstairs. The Siddhi Day Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to the disciples on 24 November 1926 took place on this verandah. Dyuman, who settled in the Ashram in May 1927, associates the same verandah with the distribution of the first copies of Sri Aurobindo's booklet *The Mother* on 29 March 1928 by the Mother during a Soup Ceremony in the evening. Govindbhai Patel, who settled in the Ashram in December 1927, writes that there "was a programme of soup distribution at about 7 p.m. above the Reception room verandah." Vasudha, who came in February 1928 and later became Mother's personal attendant, says that the Mother sat in the "verandah upstairs facing the staircase", and each disciple "would go to her with a cup and She would fill it with soup, sip it and give it back as Prasad."

The soup ceremony was only part of the Mother's daily programme. Dyuman recounts the Mother's busy schedule during this period:

In those days we had no outward activity. Meditation was the main thing here. In the morning, say at 6 o'clock after finishing her bath, Mother will go on the terrace and we will like to see her from the street, etc. At 7 o'clock we had meditation. Again at 8 o'clock, we had interviews with her. At 11 or 11.30 after finishing the interviews, she will come to the dining room to give us food; it means we had direct contact with her every second, you can say. Then at 1.30, there will be meditation. In the afternoon we will see her going out for a drive. After coming back from the drive, she gave us soup, sipping it herself, which means she tried to put in it as much of her consciousness as she could materially or physically or inwardly do. And again after soup, there will be meditation.⁷

The Mother used to also "visit people in their rooms in the afternoons" before she went out for her drives to the countryside, according to Vasudha and Tripura. Mark that the Prosperity *soirées* in the Library House upstairs in which the Mother gave talks and played various games of skill and intuition have not yet begun, at least not in the way described by Amal Kiran.⁸ (see *Document 4*) The Prosperity *soirées* originated with the Mother's sanction of articles meant for the daily use of sadhaks, such as writing pads, clothes and slippers, but expanded their scope in 1929 to include short meditations, talks by the Mother and games that brought "a breath of divine Levity" as opposed to the "Divine Gravity" of the Soup Ceremony which immediately followed it in the downstairs Reception Hall. However, during this period in early 1928, the soup was still being distributed by the Mother in the upstairs verandah of the Library House and not in the Reception Hall downstairs.

There was a major break in the Mother's programme in May 1928 after she was unwell for a whole week from 19 to 26 May 1928. Kapali Sastri notes in his diary on 19 May 1928, "The Mother stopped night meditation (general)." On the 27 May he again notes that "the Mother came out" and began the common meditation in the morning, but she did not come to the Library to meet the sadhaks and newcomers as she did earlier.⁹ Rajangam confirms the same in his diary notation of the 27th of May, "Meditation at 7 a.m. started again."

It is interesting to note that on 28 May 1928, the day after Mother recovered and resumed her daily programme, albeit with some major changes, Rabindranath Tagore visited the Ashram and met Sri Aurobindo in what later became the Darshan Room. During the meeting the Mother sat on a stool near Sri Aurobindo, and Tagore did not recognise that it was the same Mirra whom he had met earlier in Japan in 1916. Amal Kiran writes:

If I remember aright, the Mother had passed through an illness just before Tagore's visit. She had become rather emaciated. Perhaps that was partly why he could not recognise her. To some extent the reason may be that she was in a sari, a costume in which the Bengali poet had never before seen her. Another cause must be the fact that in the eight years since her stay in Japan she had grown in spiritual stature and could manifest a greater divine Presence.¹⁰

On 26 May 1928, Sri Aurobindo issued a long notice to the disciples on why it was necessary to bring urgent changes in the Mother's daily programme:

It has been found necessary to change some of the forms and methods hitherto used to help by external means the individual and collective sadhana. **This has to be done especially in regard to the consecration of food, the collective meditation and the individual contact of the sadhaka with the Mother.** The existing forms were originally arranged in order to make possible a spiritual and psychic communion on the most physical and external planes by which there would be an interchange of forces, a continuous increase of the higher consciousness on the physical plane, a more and more rapid change of the external nature of the sadhakas and afterwards an increasing descent of the supramental light and power into Mother. But for this to be done there was needed a true and harmonious interchange, the Mother leading, the sadhakas following her realisation and progress. The Mother would raise all by a free self-giving of her forces, the sadhakas would realise in themselves her realisations and would by the force of an unfaltering aspiration and a surrender free from narrow personal demand and self-regarding littleness, consecrated wholly to the divine work, return her forces for a new progress. At first partly realised, this rhythm of interchange has existed less and less. The whole burden of the

progress has fallen physically on the body of the Mother; for the forces it gives it receives little or nothing in exchange; the more its consciousness advances in the light, the more it is pulled back towards the unchanged obscurity of an unprogressive external nature. These conditions create an intolerable and useless strain and make the forms used at once unprofitable and unsafe. Other means will have to be found hereafter for the purpose. Meanwhile modifications of form will have to be made in several details and others suppressed altogether.¹¹ [*emphasis added*]

As a result, several collective activities of the Mother were discontinued at this point. The night meditations in the Meditation Hall upstairs were cancelled. (The afternoon meditations at 1.30 as mentioned by Dyuman seem to have been already dropped by this date.) The consecration of food by the Mother in the dining room at noon was also stopped. Prior to this break in the Mother's programme, Govindbhai says that the Mother herself came to the men's dining room which was in the north-west corner of the Ashram Main Building and where the present Archives Cold Storage Room is located. The old structure was demolished in January 1935 and rebuilt in August of the same year after the dining room was shifted on 4 January 1934 to its present premises beside the Governor's house. Govindbhai describes how the Mother consecrated food for the sadhaks at noon in the old dining room:

It was a small room, and at the entrance a chair was kept on which the Mother sat and gave each of us our dishes kept ready for distribution which we received after offering our pranam to her. The Mother first tasted the food separately kept in small dishes.¹²

The frequent individual contact of the Mother with the disciples was also reduced to a great extent. Sri Aurobindo issued another circular in May 1928 regarding the Mother's new schedule:

All fixed or daily times for sadhakas seeing the Mother are cancelled. Every day the Mother will call those whom she wants to see. Any others who need to see her will inform Nolini early in the morning or the night before and write the reason for their request which will be acceded to or otherwise dealt with according to circumstances and possibilities.¹³

With regard to the distribution of the soup, he wrote:

The soup will be distributed in the evening in the downstairs verandah of Sri Aurobindo's house. All who take it must be present at 8.30 and remain seated in silence till the Mother comes. Before the distribution there will be a few minutes concentration all together.

The soup distribution in the evening was resumed on 29 May 1928, as noted down by Rajangam and Kapali Sastri. The venue should have been as per Sri Aurobindo's circular "the downstairs verandah of Sri Aurobindo's house"¹⁴, and one would assume this to be the downstairs verandah of the Meditation House, that is, the hall downstairs where the Mother's couch is kept on the west and Promode Kumar's painting of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is on the east wall. But no disciple remembers the soup being distributed there. Moreover, Chandulal, the Ashram engineer, had undertaken meanwhile some major repairs in the Meditation House. In fact, according to Barin Ghose, the venue of the November Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in 1928 was shifted to the Darshan room from the Meditation Hall because it was "still not dry after the recent repairs".¹⁵

Thus the soup distribution may have very well continued as before in the Prosperity Hall above the Library Hall. But what is certain is that the soup distribution was shifted to what later became the Reception Hall of the Library House on 17 September 1928, according to Rajangam's and A. B. Purani's diary notations. Rajangam notes on this day that the "night soup was given in 9 Rue de la Marine in the downstairs front Hall", which is presently the Reception Hall, the first big hall that you come across upon entering the main gate of the Ashram Main Building. It has a big sofa set for the reception of visiting dignitaries and on the east wall is the beautiful painting by Krishnalal, the Ashram artist, of cows returning home. There are a number of long and beautiful descriptions of the Soup Ceremony (*see Documents I-3*), but all of them belong to this last period. The Hall itself was symbolically called "Divine Communion" before it was converted into the Reception Room in 1932.

Coming now to the actual description of the Soup Ceremony during this last period, I quote from Amal Kiran's *Light and Laughter*:

In the period of Ashram history somewhat earlier than that of this evening function we had what I may call the Soup Ceremony . . . It was a very important function every evening. It impressed one like a snatch of the Ancient Mysteries. The atmosphere was as in some secret temple of Egyptian or Greek times. In subdued light people would sit on mats in the hall which is now the Reception Room. At about 8 the Mother would come down from the Prosperity Room upstairs and take her seat near the shaded lamp. Champaklal brought down a big cauldron of hot soup and placed it in front of her on a stool. Then the Mother would go into a trance. In the course of her trance the arms would stretch forward over the soup-cauldron. For a minute they would remain there as if she were pouring something of her subtle-physical spirituality into the liquid. The idea must have been to give her own luminous subtle-physical substance and energy — a most concrete transference of spirituality into physical stuff. Then the Mother would open her eyes and Champaklal would remove the cauldron to one side and give her a big spoon. Each of us in turn would go down and kneel

before her and offer her our cup . . . The Mother used to take the cup and pour divine soup into it; and sometimes in the middle of the pouring she would again be lost in meditation and we had to kneel there for even three or four minutes. Suddenly she would open her eyes and smile in a little shy or embarrassed way. After filling the cup she would sip from it. You see, that was the further and final touch of the transference of her subtle-physical force to something we could materially take into ourselves.¹⁶

I quote from a video interview of Amal Kiran in 1993. We took him on his wheel chair to the Reception Hall of the Library House.

Amal Kiran: Mother's chair used to be there against the right-hand side wall [*indicating the east wall*] and mats were spread all over the room keeping some distance from the Mother's chair. Mother used to be in trance for some time and a huge cauldron of soup was brought by Champaklal and put on a stool in front of her. And then in trance she would stretch her arms like that over the cauldron for some time with eyes shut. And then she would withdraw her arms and Champaklal would put the cauldron on her right side. There was a big ladle in Mother's hand and we would all come, bend down and offer our cups to her. And Mother used to take the [cup], pour in it and hold the cup and touch it to her lips and even take a small sip sometimes or just touch and give it to us. Sometimes holding the cup in her hand, she would just go into a trance and we had to wait there for 3 or 5 minutes even.

Which side was she facing?

Amal Kiran: This side straight [*indicating west*].

And you would be kneeling to her?

Amal Kiran: Like that [*indicating east*].

And the soup would be on her right side?

Amal Kiran: Ultimately on the right, in the beginning in the front, and she would stretch out her arms over the soup.

And Champaklal would fill each cup on the right?

Amal Kiran: No, no. She herself would fill it. She would take the cup in her hand, fill it and bring it near to her lips and then give it to us.

And where will the cups be? Where were the cups arranged?

Amal Kiran: Not arranged. Each one had his own cup. And we used to sit up to here on mats like that [*indicating the sofa on the east nearest to the east wall*]. The whole room was full of us and there was darkness except for some light somewhere, I don't know where it could be.

What was the time?

Amal Kiran: Time was about, I think, 7 o'clock or so I believe, 7.30 or so.¹⁷

How many persons were there?

Amal Kiran: Must be 50 or more here.

And how long it would last normally?

Amal Kiran: First meditation for some time and then it would start. Once I remember a bandicoot came here and got into Dara's dhoti (*laughter*) and Dara was shifting from one side to the other side and Mother could not know what was happening and Pavitra in a hilarious tone said, "Bandicoot." (*laughter*) And it was so comic that I ran to the Mother with my cup and burst out laughing. And she too laughed.¹⁸

From which side did the Mother come?

Amal Kiran: She would come down not by this staircase [*pointing to the Prosperity staircase*]. She would come down from there, the back staircase [*staircase coming down behind the Fruit Room*] and we would come down by this staircase [*pointing to the Prosperity staircase*] from the Store room.¹⁹

Oh, there was a store room?

Amal Kiran: Yes upstairs. Prosperity room was also called the Stores.

I quote from Sahana Devi's recollection of the Soup Ceremony which corroborates Amal Kiran's account:

There was a time when the Mother used to distribute soup every evening at eight o'clock in the Reception Room of the Library House facing the main gate. It was a ceremony rendering the atmosphere deep and intimate. She used to sit

on a chair placed on a raised dais and all the lights, except a dim one, were put out. Just in front of her on a small table the large receptacle containing the soup was placed. She at first meditated for a while keeping both her hands stretched full length over the container invoking Sri Aurobindo's power into it. The meditation over, the container was moved to the right side for her to begin the distribution. The disciples sat, each one of them at his place appointed by the Mother herself. Each one, an empty cup in hand, approached her and handing the cup over to her bowed down in pranam at her feet. As he or she got up the Mother gave him or her the cup. The cups received, the disciples, one by one, would leave the room. The distribution of soup took about an hour, and was accomplished in perfect silence; all were merged in a deep inner feeling in that dim light, a feeling of a different world, an impressive far-off existence pressed upon the consciousness of all and slowly spread all around the room surcharging the atmosphere as if a tangible influence was at work consolidating all that was external and inner in a seeming vagueness of one's personal existence. We hardly understood where we were but became aware of all kinds of feelings of many worlds. How enchanting the Mother appeared then to our eyes! Also, it was at that hour that diverse divine expressions used to manifest from her. If one looked into her eyes, one became aware of a look in them, not quite human, a look that penetrated into the inner depths of our physical body, observing all, into the farthest corners. Her smile was beyond comparison. Often she entered into trance with the cup in her hand, motionless as a statue. But as soon as she returned to her bodily consciousness the distribution went on as before as if nothing had happened a short while ago — utterly simple and natural as ever.²⁰

Nirodbaran relates how the Mother returned to her room in the Meditation House after the Soup Ceremony:

After the ceremony was over, a grand spectacle used to greet our eyes. The Mother would return to her room across the courtyard, which had an altogether different appearance. Two sadhaks held a lamp and a censer in front of her and some sadhaks followed her from behind. The rest of us would stand on the side watching her pass with a solemn gait, almost in semi-trance. Her resplendent face, with an enchanting half-smile, would fill the whole hushed atmosphere with a supraphysical ambience. "Eternal beauty wandering on its way" — one could repeat with Yeats.²¹

Amal Kiran has a slightly different version of the Mother returning to her room and a more detailed account of the Ashram main building during this period:

At that time — the early '30s — the Ashram was a complex of several separate houses with their own courtyards which were connected by small “tunnels”. Every evening, after the Soup Distribution the Mother used to pass through a “tunnel”²² from the Library House towards her own building. Dara would be carrying a hurricane lantern in front of her. I used to go ahead and wait on the other side.²³

Lalita has yet another account of the Mother walking back to her house:

After our Prosperity-meetings and the Soup-distribution, when the Mother went back to Sri Aurobindo's room, Champaklal and Chinmayi usually went with Her, carrying a basket of flowers each, for the Mother to give to the sadhaks who had lined themselves all along the way. Sometimes, when one of them was not there, I too got this chance.²⁴

17 September 1928 not only marks the day when the Soup Ceremony was first held in the present Reception Room (as noted above), but it was also the day when the morning meditation with the Mother in the Meditation Hall upstairs was replaced by the morning Pranam downstairs in the room that was later occupied by Bula, the former head of the Ashram Electricity Department. The Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on 24 November 1928 was likewise held in the small room on the east of the Meditation Hall upstairs. The Darshan was previously held for a whole year (15 August 1927 to 15 August 1928) in the Meditation Hall itself and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother sat on the big sofa which is still there on the northern side of the Hall. Though the repair of the ceiling of the Meditation House was the immediate cause for the change of venue, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother continued to use the same room for the general Darshan till 1950, even though the repairs were finished by the end of 1928.

On 19 October 1931 the Mother had yet another breakdown in health, which was much more severe than the one she had in May 1928. Her recovery in 1931 took more than a month and there were as many changes in her daily programme as in May 1928 upon the resumption of her collective activities. Not only the Mother's car-drives to the countryside in the afternoon ceased for a long time (until 1946), but the lively meetings in the Prosperity Hall upstairs followed by the mystic Soup Ceremony in the downstairs Reception Hall of the Library House were never taken up again by the Mother.

Documents on the Early History of the Ashram

Notices of May 1928

[1]

It has been found necessary to change some of the forms and methods hitherto used to help by external means the individual and collective sadhana. This has to be done especially in regard to the consecration of food, the collective meditation and the individual contact of the sadhaka with the Mother. The existing forms were originally arranged in order to make possible a spiritual and psychic communion on the most physical and external planes by which there would be an interchange of forces, a continuous increase of the higher consciousness on the physical plane, a more and more rapid change of the external nature of the sadhakas and afterwards an increasing descent of the supramental light and power into Mother. But for this to be done there was needed a true and harmonious interchange, the Mother leading, the sadhakas following her realisation and progress. The Mother would raise all by a free self-giving of her forces, the sadhakas would realise in themselves her realisations and would by the force of an unfaltering aspiration and a surrender free from narrow personal demand and self-regarding littleness, consecrated wholly to the divine work, return her forces for a new progress. At first partly realised, this rhythm of interchange has existed less and less. The whole burden of the progress has fallen physically on the body of the Mother; for the forces it gives it receives little or nothing in exchange; the more its consciousness advances in the light, the more it is pulled back towards the unchanged obscurity of an unprogressive external nature. These conditions create an intolerable and useless strain and make the forms used at once unprofitable and unsafe. Other means will have to be found hereafter for the purpose. Meanwhile modifications of form will have to be made in several details and others suppressed altogether.

26 May 1928

Sri Aurobindo

[2]

Meditation on all days of the week except Wednesday and Friday.

Flower offering on Tuesday and Thursday; none on Saturday, Sunday and Monday.

May 1928

Sri Aurobindo

[3]

Meditation at 7 a.m. as before.

All fixed or daily times for sadhakas seeing the Mother are cancelled. Every day the Mother will call those whom she wants to see. Any others who need to see her will inform Nolini early in the morning or the night before and write the reason for their request which will be acceded to or otherwise dealt with according to circumstances and possibilities.

The soup will be distributed in the evening in the downstairs verandah of Sri Aurobindo's house. All who take it must be present at 8.30 and remain seated in silence till the Mother comes. Before the distribution there will be a few minutes concentration all together.

The night meditations are cancelled for a time.

On the 1st of each month the distribution from the stores will be made in the store-room in the presence of the Mother at 8 P.M.

May 1928

Sri Aurobindo

(Autobiographical Notes, CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 532-33)

Soup Ceremony — Document 1

The soup distribution used to take place at 8 p.m. in the present Reception Room and lasted two hours. The inmates were about hundred in number and they sat inside the hall while we visitors had to sit in the verandah outside from where it was difficult to see the Mother — one had to peep over the shoulders of the people in front. Still, I preferred to remain outside, for from what I saw I could not bear sitting for two hours in a room surcharged with dimness, incense fume and an atmosphere mystic but sleep-inducing to my unaccustomed nature. Later on, we were given a chance to sit inside and then we had a good view of the Mother in her various moods, sometimes in trance, sometimes awake, smiling or grave, and very often pouring the soup in an in-drawn state, the hands shaking a little as she poured it. Each one had to wait for his turn and it was a long waiting for me. As I was not used to meditate, I had to struggle hard against losing my chance by falling asleep, and thus being marked “missing”. If that happened, my niece was there, wide awake, to stir me into consciousness.

We felt as if we had entered into some “prophet cavern” or some ancient Greek temple where Eleusinian mysteries were being performed, the Mother being the presiding Priestess. Amal said, “This is exactly the impression I had. I told it to the Mother and I used the word ‘ancient’ for the presiding Priestess. Unfortunately this word means ‘old’ in French and the Mother was a little taken aback.” After taking

her seat, she would close her eyes; then her arms would stretch out and her hands spread over the soup-vessel by way of channelling Sri Aurobindo's power into the liquid. Then her eyes would open and she would start the distribution. Some people used to see Sri Aurobindo's hands spread over hers in response to her call to him. As I had to wait quite an hour before my turn came, I spent my time partly in sleep-meditation, partly in looking at the quick-changing moods of the Mother. I could not vouch for any concrete experience. Neither could I say that she took any cognisance of my presence when I went before her, but she was invariably an impersonal sweetness. Once only, and that makes me remember it, she cast an inquiring look when I approached her for the soup, I could not make out what it meant. I knew that at the time I had a boil — the "blessed boil!" and it was causing me pain. Could the pain have been reflected on my face? But that would be too trivial a matter to draw her attention. Now I know that nothing that concerned our well-being, physical or otherwise was too trivial for her.

After the ceremony was over, a grand spectacle used to greet our eyes. The Mother would return to her room across the courtyard, which had an altogether different appearance. Two sadhaks held a lamp and a censer in front of her and some sadhaks followed her from behind. The rest of us would stand on the side watching her pass with a solemn gait, almost in semi-trance. Her resplendent face, with an enchanting half-smile, would fill the whole hushed atmosphere with a supraphysical ambience. "Eternal beauty wandering on its way" — one could repeat with Yeats.

(Nirodbaran, *Memorable Contacts with the Mother*, pp. 7-8)

Soup Ceremony — Document 2

In the period of Ashram history somewhat earlier than that of this evening function we had what I may call the Soup Ceremony . . . It was a very important function every evening. It impressed one like a snatch of the Ancient Mysteries. The atmosphere was as in some secret temple of Egyptian or Greek times. In subdued light people would sit on mats in the hall which is now the Reception Room. At about 8 the Mother would come down from the Prosperity Room upstairs and take her seat near the shaded lamp. Champaklal brought down a big cauldron of hot soup and placed it in front of her on a stool. Then the Mother would go into a trance. In the course of her trance the arms would stretch forward over the soup-cauldron. For a minute they would remain there as if she were pouring something of her subtle-physical spirituality into the liquid. The idea must have been to give her own luminous subtle-physical substance and energy — a most concrete transference of spirituality into physical stuff. Then the Mother would open her eyes and Champaklal would remove the cauldron to one side and give her a big spoon. Each of us in turn would go down

and kneel before her and offer her our cup . . . The Mother used to take the cup and pour divine soup into it; and sometimes in the middle of the pouring she would again be lost in meditation and we had to kneel there for even three or four minutes. Suddenly she would open her eyes and smile in a little shy or embarrassed way. After filling the cup she would sip from it. You see, that was the further and final touch of the transference of her subtle-physical force to something we could materially take into ourselves.

(Amal Kiran, *Light and Laughter*, pp. 62-69)

Soup Ceremony — Document 3

It was not until the third day that the Mother permitted me to attend the morning Pranam, which in those days took place in the present room of Bula, and the evening Soup, which was then being distributed by Her from the Soup Hall, now the reception room of the Ashram. Many, I heard, had to wait quite a long time for permission for these two opportunities. Some have already described this Soup ceremony, so I need not go into the details except for some personal experiences. It was in the evening that this function was held and there was a dim light burning near the place where the Mother sat with Her feet resting upon a low stool. She would first meditate and as she opened her eyes, Champaklal would bring the soup vessel, a big cylindrical container with handles, and place it before Her. After putting it on a stool he removed the lid; then over the steaming vapour the Mother stretched forth and brought down Her hands and held them there for half a minute or so. Then each one went to Her with his cup in which she would pour the soup. During this time they made pranam at Her feet, then got up to receive the cup from Her hand.

She explained to someone that when She brought down Her palms that She invoked Sri Aurobindo on the soup, and when the soup, so blessed, entered the body it acted on the cells to help transform them. That was the central truth of it, but individual experiences varied. After pranam at Her feet I would raise my head up and look at Her with my hands stretched forward to receive the soup cup. Often she was in trance and Her eyes would suddenly open and with a wonderful smile on Her lips She would communicate much more than by explaining to me in mere words. Not things philosophical or some deep spiritual experience, but things we call practical, of day-to-day life, solutions to problems of the past day or of the next, what I should or should not do, all these and in the most minute detail, were received from Her in those few seconds. The whole body felt as if it was filled with something, with the sense of a purified and raised consciousness. There were days when She did not open Her eyes at all, not even to give the cup to me. I almost had to pull it out of Her hand in order to allow the next person's turn to come. This meant to me that perhaps

I was not open to Her that day. Often, on the succeeding day when I did not follow Her indication from the previous evening Soup-time, things did not really go well in peace and harmony. This was a constant factor in my life. But the Mother always gives precious things too easily, so my human nature failed to appreciate properly and to realise the purpose behind — to help me change my nature. It quickly turned then into mechanical routine. Thus when it became a habitual movement for the majority of the Ashramites, it was a foregone conclusion that in the inner world the decision was already there to stop it.

(Mrityunjoy Mukherji, 'A Look Behind', *Breath of Grace*, pp. 57-58)

Soup Ceremony — Document 4 Prosperity Meetings

Closely connected with the Soup Ceremony was a series of meetings between the Mother and a few sadhaks in the Prosperity Room before she went down. If the Soup Ceremony had an air of Divine Gravity, the Prosperity Meeting may be considered to have had about it a breath of Divine Levity. The Mother came an hour before the Soup and sat down and attended first to the chits submitted for articles from the Stores. . . . In the course of time more and more people gathered around the Mother in the Stores. The total number stayed fixed at the end. I think it was 24. . . .

Various things were done in the Prosperity *soirées*. The Mother answered all sorts of questions and gave many talks. I would jot down her words . . . My transcriptions have appeared as the third series in *Words of the Mother*. At times there would be readings from the works of Sri Aurobindo. We would thrust a finger of a paper cutter into the pages of a book and read out the passage on which we would thus alight. The Mother herself took part in this game. At other times she invented games to test or develop our faculty of intuition. She would arrange some flowers to make up a sentence according to the significance allotted by her to them. . . . There were other games too. . . . Whenever we succeeded in scoring a hit we got a material reward. A slab of French chocolate was the usual gift. . . .

When the Mother, as a gracious host, entertained us in those sixty minutes in the Prosperity Room, we saw not only in her utter height but also her complete refusal to put on airs. Perhaps 'refusal' is not the right term because any airs would be unnatural to her and she does not have to make any effort against them.

(Amal Kiran, *Light and Laughter*, pp. 65-68)

Compiled and edited by RAMAN REDDY

Notes and References:

1. *Champaklal Speaks*, 1975 Ed., p. 29.
2. *Mother India*, February 1976, pp. 113-15.
3. Diary notation of 6 December 1926 of Haradhan Bakshi.
4. See *The History of the Ashram Main Building*, p. 158
5. See the earliest photograph of the Library House in *The Story of the Ashram Main Building*, p. 36.
6. Narayan Prasad, *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 113.
7. Interview with Dyuman, 'Archives' Department.
8. Amal Kiran, *Light and Laughter*, p. 67.
9. *Collected Notes and Papers of Kapali Sastri*, Vol 3, pp. 21-22.
10. Amal Kiran, *Our Light and Delight*, pp. 81-82.
11. Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes*, CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 532-33.
12. Govindbhai, *My Pilgrimage to the Spirit*, p. 9.
13. Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes*, CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 533.
14. This was the only house owned by Sri Aurobindo at this point of time among the four houses that comprise the Ashram Main Building. The other houses were still rented and not yet purchased. Sri Aurobindo paid two instalments of Rs. 7000 each in January and July 1927 for the purchase of the Meditation House. The second instalment was paid after Sri Aurobindo and the Mother moved to the Meditation House from the Library House on 7 February 1927. (*The History of the Ashram Main Building*, pp. 21, 24). Even if we suppose that Sri Aurobindo for some reason meant the Library House by "Sri Aurobindo's House" in his circular of May 1928, we still have no evidence that the soup distribution was immediately shifted there. On the other hand, both Rajangam and Purani note down in their diaries that the soup distribution commenced in the downstairs hall of the Library House on 17 September 1928.
15. Raman Reddy, 'Darshan History', *Golden Chain*, August 2004, p. 27.
16. Amal Kiran, *Light and Laughter*, pp. 62-69.
17. Mark that Amal Kiran says earlier in his talk of March 3, 1971 that the soup distribution was at about 8. One could naturally take the earlier version to be more accurate than what he said in 1993 in the video interview.
18. When narrating the incident on an earlier occasion Amal Kiran had a livelier version:
 "The Mother was in deep trance. We tried to imitate her by shutting our eyes tight. Now, a big rat decided to join the meditation. (*laughter*) But it had a rather original way of meditating. It ran to and fro amongst us – I'm sure with its eyes shut like ours, because otherwise one cannot explain what it ultimately did: it rushed right into Dara's dhoti! (*laughter*)
 You can imagine poor Dara. He was in a terrible fix. Perhaps the word "fix" is not quite the mot juste, for he was extremely mobile. (*laughter*) He jumped up on one side of his seat and jumped down on the other, he thrust out one leg, pulled in the other, and fumbled with both hands to catch the fellow within the folds of his dhoti. (*laughter*) At last the rat ran out, but there was such a commotion that the Mother opened her eyes and looked for an explanation. Then Pavitra, in what he believed was a voice suitable to the solemnity of the

Soup Distribution, said in a low rumble: “It is a bandicoot!” (*laughter*)

The Mother was amazed at first and then amused. I was in such a state I had to exert supreme self-control in order not to explode into a most unspiritual Ananda. Well, I managed to bottle myself up for some time, until my turn came to go to the Mother. I went to her, knelt at her feet and, still holding myself tight, gave her my cup. She looked at me and smiled with a twinkle in her eyes. I just burst into laughter. I couldn’t act the concentrated Yogi any longer. And she was quite a sport: she opened her eyes wide, smiled very broadly, filled my cup, took a sip from it as usual and, with a slight knowing push, gave it back to me.” – *Light and Laughter*, pp. 81-82

19. Amal Kiran says in his talk of March 3, 1971 that the Mother came down from the Prosperity room upstairs, but he does not tell which staircase the Mother used to come down to the Reception Hall downstairs. In his video interview of 1993, he remembers that the Mother came down from the back staircase while the disciples came down by the Prosperity staircase in front.

20. Sahana Devi, ‘Early Recollections of the Ashram’, *Breath of Grace*, pp. 112-13.

21. Nirodbaran, *Memorable Contacts with the Mother*, pp. 7-8.

22. The tunnel is mentioned as a “covered passage” in *The History of the Ashram Main Building*, pp. 166 and 168 (drawing).

23. Amal Kiran, *Mother India*, October 1988, p. 669.

24. Lalita, *Mother India*, September 1979, pp. 542-43.

... if, for example, you want to do something practical, if in your feelings you are completely upset, agitated, if there’s a kind of storm within, then by concentrating you can try to find out the cause of all that, you see, the inner cause, the real cause, and at the same time you can aspire to bring peace, quietude, a kind of inner immobility into your feelings, because without that you can’t see clearly. When everything is in a whirlwind one sees nothing; as when you are in a great tempest and the wind is blowing from all sides and there are clouds of dust, you cannot see; it is the same thing. To be able to see, all must become quiet. So you must aspire and then draw into this storm . . . draw peace, quietude, immobility, like this; and then if you succeed it is still another experience, it is the beginning.

Of course one can sit down and try . . . not to meditate, because that’s an activity of thought which does not lead to experience, but to concentrate and aspire and open oneself to the force from above; and if one does it persistently enough, there is a moment when one feels this force, this peace or this silence, this quietude descending, penetrating and descending into the being quite far. The first day it may be very little, and then gradually it becomes more. This also is an experience. All these are easy things to do.

The Mother

(*Questions and Answers 1955*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 7, p. 79)

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

(Part 49)

(Continued from the issue of September 2024)

Section 5: Equanimity and Sweetness of Temper

Alipore Bomb Case

On 15th August, 1908, Sri Aurobindo was interviewed at the Alipore Magistrate’s Court. Although the interview was taken by the *Empire*, a pro-British newspaper, Sri Aurobindo did not have any objection. Finding him in good spirits, the newspaper correspondent wrote:

. . . the Arabindo of Saturday was, however, quite another being. His personality, hitherto grave and prepossessed, had been metamorphosed into one of sprightliness and sunniness. The cause of all this jollification, as Arabindo explained, was to a certain extent remarkable. “In the first place,” he explained, “today is my birthday; and we are celebrating it as best we can under the circumstances. I was born on the 15th August 1872, and on that anniversary in 1906 the National College opened its doors to teach among other things, the principles of Swadeshism. It was either the day before or the day after my birthday, 1907,” he continued waxing warm with the subject “that I was arrested in connection with the first ‘Bande Mataram’ sedition case. And more remarkable still my birthday is round again today and the Magistrate has given a definite assurance that he will commit on the evidence given in this, a case not of sedition but revolution.

“Besides all this my brother [Barindra]¹ is threatened on my birthday to be charged with abetment of murder in the Mozufferpore affair, besides having to stand his trial for conspiracy. These are what I call a remarkable string of coincidences,” he added with a smile.

“Are we getting tired of this protracted trial you ask? Well, to be candid we are, although we don’t mind it in the least. As a matter of fact it is useless pumping witnesses about my supposed editorship of the ‘Bande Mataram.’ I certainly have edited the ‘Bande Mataram,’ but this I only did on different

1. MS Birendro.

occasions when Bepin Babu first edited it, and I will state now once and for all I never, never did occupy its editorial chair. I must also deny that I fathered the many brilliant leaders that have appeared in that paper. I certainly did write some of them, but I cannot claim the authorship of the best of them. I wish I could,” he added with a twinkle.²

Sri Aurobindo ended the interview with a touch of nonchalance, poise and panache:

Arabindo’s facetious parting shot to the “frequenter” was: “You can add to those coincidences the fact that I shall be very probably coming back from the Andamans on my birthday next year.”³

Sri Aurobindo’s fortitude is again discernible when one of the English sentries came up to him and jokingly said, “Abrindo (he could not say Aurobindo), you are caught at last, you are caught at last.” Sharp and immediate was Sri Aurobindo’s retort: “And yet I will escape, and yet I will escape!”⁴

About Sri Aurobindo’s comportment during the preliminary enquiry which began on 19th May, 1908, in the Magistrates Court before Mr. Birley, a report in the *Empire* read:

Ever since the commencement of the trial until Saturday [15 August 1908] Arabindo has preserved a stolid lethargic demeanour.

From the first day’s hearing to the thirty-sixth, he has occupied one bench, his eyes immovably fixed on the floor, totally indifferent to the unfolding issues of the case.⁵

After the preliminary enquiry the trial commenced at the Sessions Court before Mr. C. P. Beachcroft, I.C.S., Additional Sessions Judge, Alipore. Manoj Das writes:

The trial began at the Sessions Court on the 19th of October 1908 and continued till 14th of April 1909. It is left to our imagination to visualise the face of the judge, Mr. C. P. Beachcroft, when his eyes fell on Sri Aurobindo. The pitifully attired accused standing in a corner of the cage meant for those standing the trial was his brilliant classmate at Cambridge, one who stood first in Greek while he stood second!

Sri Aurobindo’s face was not likely to show any mark of surprise, pleasant or otherwise, for by then anything external had ceased to affect him, as his

2. *CWSA*, Vol. 7, pp. 1145-46.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 1146.

4. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works*, Vol. 7, 1st Ed., 1978, p. 379.

5. *CWSA*, Vol. 7, p. 1145.

fellow prisoners testify.⁶

Sri Aurobindo later remarked to a disciple: “Beachcroft, who was my school-mate, somehow couldn’t believe that I was a revolutionary.”⁷ Another Cambridge fellow-student remarked: “Fancy, Ghose a ragged revolutionary! He can with far greater ease write a big lexicon or compose a noble epic.”⁸

Interestingly, Barin discerned that, unlike other British officials, Beachcroft was somewhat considerate to the revolutionaries. He wrote to Sarojini, “If you do not like to come here, you can see us in court. Our Judge Beachcroft is very kind in that way. I am sure he will see his way to grant the interview”.⁹ Nolini Kanta Gupta felt that Beachcroft had a soft corner for him. As a boy in his early teens he had defied a general order by participating in a procession when it was forbidden on that day. This was used by the prosecution against him to prove that he was an old offender. Nolini Kanta Gupta writes that this was an unpardonable offence, a “deliberate defiance of the law! . . . But the Judge of the Alipore court, Beachcroft, had rather taken a fancy to me. He did not take any note of this point and dismissed it as schoolboy bravado.”¹⁰ And although Nolini Kanta Gupta was a core member of the revolutionaries at the Muraripukur Gardens, Beachcroft acquitted him on the grounds that the case against him was weak.¹¹

Another instance of Beachcroft’s solicitude was concerning no tiffin being served to the accused during the court lunch break from 1 to 2 p.m. The prisoners would have their first meal at 9.30 am in jail and their next meal was in the evening after returning to jail. A petition for permission to send refreshments for the prisoners from their well-wishers was submitted to the court. The prosecution objected on the ground that this might create an opportunity to smuggle something undesirable into the court room. The Court Inspector, Abdur Rahman, then assured the court that he would personally inspect the food packets coming in. Beachcroft permitted this arrangement. Because of the poor quality of food provided in the jail, the refreshment provided was a source of solace to the revolutionaries.¹²

Occasionally Rahman used to distribute food at his own expense. He would console the prisoners that since they were not criminals, God would certainly have mercy on them.¹³ Many years passed but the revolutionaries still remembered the

6. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, October 2015, p. 828.

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

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

9. <https://overmanfoundation.org/barindra-kumar-ghoses-letters-to-his-sister-sarojini/> 27.5.2024.

10. Nolini Kanta Gupta, ‘Reminiscences’, *Mother India*, April 1963, p. 24 (translated from Bengali by Sanat Banerji).

11. See Amiya K. Samanta, *Alipore Bomb Trial 1908-1910 – Arguments in Courts and Judgements*, Vol. 2, p. 147.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

13. *Ibid.*

goodness of Rahman. In his memoirs Upendranath remembered him “because he was responsible for providing us with refreshments. Just like Prahlad amongst the demons, he was the only gentleman amongst the policemen. Even today, I vividly remember the sorrowful expression on his face when he thought that we might be deported.”¹⁴ Nolini Kanta Gupta also refers to this man: “In fact our laughter and fun, our mirth and play, and our sweet simplicity had astonished them all. We had a Court Inspector, an elderly Muslim gentleman, who would almost burst into tears as he looked on us. ‘How dare you laugh and play?’ he used to say, ‘you have not the least idea of the terror you have to face. You do not know what kind of life it is in Andamans. You are not the only ones who read the Gita. I too have gone through the book repeatedly and still read it.’ For this show of sympathy, the gentleman had to suffer punishment. His promotion was stopped or perhaps he was dismissed from the service.”¹⁵

During the court proceedings the revolutionaries would casually discuss various topics amongst themselves. Nolini Kanta Gupta recorded his observations of Judge Beachcroft: “Our discussions sometimes grew so loud and hot that Judge Beachcroft . . . would shout at us like a schoolmaster, “Less noise there, less noise there!” If that did not stop all the noise, then he had to make this threat, “Unless you stop, your tiffin will stop.” That was a deadly blow and made us perfectly still.”¹⁶ Upendranath Banerjee too has recollected the spirited behaviour of the accused during the court proceedings: “Our noisy laughter would often almost bring the proceedings in the court to a halt. The judge sahib would try to frighten us with handcuffs, the barristers would run across and request Aurobindo Babu: “Please ask the boys to stop for some time.” Aurobindo Babu would sit, impassive, and silent, like a stone statue, in a corner; in response to the request of the barristers, he would inform them that he had no control over the boys.”¹⁷

In spite of being indicted on grave charges the revolutionaries were a jovial lot. Sri Aurobindo, however, remained completely detached. Barin writes:

During the duration of the hearing in the Sessions Court, our days passed reasonably happily, with entertainment and merrymaking, even though these were long days and months; in our excessive joy, many of us did not see the imminent threat of punishment that was looming over our heads. This was especially true of those amongst us who had kept the outer world at bay, and had built our home of joy. Amongst those of us who were engrossed in meditation and spiritual practices, Aurobindo was first and foremost, completely immersed

14. Upendranath Banerjee, *An Autobiography of an Exile (Nirbashiter Atmakatha)*, translated from Bengali by Kumkum Roy – manuscript).

15. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works*, Vol. 7, 1st Ed., 1978, pp. 370-71.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 366.

17. Upendranath Banerjee, *An Autobiography of an Exile (Nirbashiter Atmakahini)*, translated from Bengali by Kumkum Roy – manuscript).

in his own yoga; those who came after him included me, Debabrata, Bijoy Nag, Naren Bakshi, Sachin Sen, and a couple of others. The rest were a boisterous lot, engaged in all kinds of games.¹⁸

Nolini Kanta Gupta writes of an Englishman who was struck by the nobility and the courage of the revolutionaries:

The man who was captain of the English guard used to say, “You are strange specimens. You look so tender and soft, and so simple and sweet in your manner! How could you ever commit such heinous crimes? I have lived in Ireland and have seen the Irish patriots, I have had to deal with them. But they were poles apart from you in their looks and their manner. They were harsh and rude and hard; one could know at once what kind of people they were.” Most of us were boys and young men of 16 to 20, except for a few like Barin, Upen and Hrishikesh who were about the same age, all nearing thirty.¹⁹

When Mother was shown some of the photographs of the Alipore accused she remarked:

These revolutionaries have proved that the realisation of the embodied Motherland is dearer than life itself. That is why there is no sign of worry or grief on their faces. It is wonderful.²⁰

The accused, some thirty-five in all, were taken from the jail to the court in a horse-drawn carriage. In the court room the accused were locked inside a cage made of wire with three or four rows of benches in it.²¹ The conduct of the court authorities towards these self-sacrificing patriots was humiliating. Upendranath Banerjee, particularly, was incensed with the treatment meted out to Sri Aurobindo:

Our handcuffs were chained when we went to the court and while we returned. In the afternoon, when we went to the washroom, the police would drag us through the road with those handcuffs. We were not particularly embarrassed: “For the naked need not fear the cheat.” [*a popular Bengali proverb*]. How could one who was not respectable lose his self-respect? But when one saw Aurobindo Babu being dragged in handcuffs, a storm of rebellion would brew in the mind. But he would endure all of this quietly, like a gentleman.²²

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

19. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works*, Vol. 7, 1st Ed., 1978, p. 371.

20. Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 1989, p. 20.

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

22. Upendranath Banerjee, *An Autobiography of an Exile (Nirbashi Aranyak)*, translated from Bengali by Kumkum Roy – manuscript).

Another person who was infuriated with the harsh handling of Sri Aurobindo was Sudhir Sarkar. Nolini Kanta Gupta narrates:

We Swadeshis were herded into a cage in the courtroom and all sorts of evidence was demanded from us. At that time a sentry on duty noticed that Sri Aurobindo looked quite unconcerned and unmindful of all that was happening. The sentry got upset and shook him roughly. Sudhir, seeing the sentry handle Sri Aurobindo so roughly, jumped from the gallery where he was seated. Seething in anger, with his raised hands shackled in handcuffs, he was about to strike the sentry on his head. We were alerted by the loud thump made by his jump and were shocked to see Sudhir raging in anger and about to hit the policeman. Some of us shouted, “Sudhir, stop! What are you doing? Stop! Stop and calm down!” Luckily we managed to push him aside. Sudhir spewing out fire, muttered to himself: “What audacity that fellow has to touch Sri Aurobindo! I will finish him off!”²³

Sudhir Sarkar’s reverence for Sri Aurobindo is apparent from an account in his biography, *A Spirit Indomitable*:

When asked about his prison days, Sudhir-da’s face used to light up. “Oh how to describe those days! Like dreams of happiness they were. The constant company of my Lord! I used to serve him, sponge his body, bathe him. I used to do everything.” Then Sudhir-da used to spread his palms before my eyes, “Look these hands still remember those touches. How soft was my Lord’s body! From his eyes affection and benevolence seemed to rain incessantly on us.”²⁴

For more than two months the revolutionaries were kept in a spacious hall divided into three compartments. They indulged in all kinds of games and frolic. Nolini Kanta Gupta stated: “In the midst of all this, Sri Aurobindo occupied his little corner engrossed most of the time in his *sādhana* and meditations.”²⁵ At the Sessions Court too, Nolini Kanta Gupta noted, Sri Aurobindo remained quite detached:

In the midst of all this, Sri Aurobindo used to sit apart in his little corner. But we would approach him if anyone had anything to ask. One day we arranged a “general meeting”, that is, requested him to give us a talk — of course in the court-room itself and during the proceedings! The court would go on and we would go on with our “meeting”. Sri Aurobindo agreed to speak and he chose as his subject, “Nationalism and the Three Gunas (Psychological Types).” Afterwards, on coming out of jail, he wrote out the substance of his speech and

23. Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 1989, pp. 57-58.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

25. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol. 7, 1st Ed., 1978, p. 378.

had it published in one of his papers. It has since been included in his Bengali work, *Dharma O Jatiyata*. . . .²⁶

During the trial Sri Aurobindo was a model of equipoise. Abinash Bhattacharya sat next to him in the courtroom and observed: “He was always absorbed in meditation. Sometimes he said a word or two to me.”²⁷ During the entire trial Barin observed that Sri Aurobindo appeared to be in a “trance”.²⁸ Sri Aurobindo himself noted that in the large prisoners’ cage at the courtroom “the whole day he remained absorbed in his meditation”.²⁹

A 14-year-old S. R. Das, who later became the Chief Justice of India, attended the Sessions Court since he was fascinated by Sri Aurobindo. He spoke about Sri Aurobindo’s unconcerned look at the end of the day’s court proceedings:

I remember I used to go to my cousin’s [C. R. Das] house and quietly stand at the corner of the front verandah on the first floor of the house . . . and hear the discussion carried on by the elders as to how the case was progressing. I used to get absorbed and filled with a sense of emotion. To my young mind Sri Aurobindo whom I had never up to that time seen became a hero with a radiant halo round his head.

It was during the progress of this momentous trial that I went up to the Alipore court one day and waited the whole day to get a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo. At the close of the day’s proceedings the prisoners were escorted out of the court premises and put inside the black police van then drawn by horses. There came Sri Aurobindo at the head of the party. He looked up to the skies — a distant look in his eyes — oblivious of his immediate surroundings — and disappeared into the interior of the ugly police van. . . .

I returned home in a dazed state of mind, overwhelmed by the glimpse of the benign countenance of Sri Aurobindo and the eager and earnest expression on the face of his young workers who had staked their all under the spell of his inspiration. I remember I could not resist the temptation of waiting in the court precincts on a few more occasions to have a darshan of Sri Aurobindo and his band of selfless workers.³⁰

Barin recalled that Sri Aurobindo’s yogic practice during the trial had an influence on others:

26. *Ibid.*, p. 366.

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

28. See Barindra Kumar Ghose, *Barindrer Atmakahani* (translated from Bengali by Kumkum Roy — manuscript).

29. See *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 60.

30. S. R. Das, ‘A Reminiscence of Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, January 1959, p. 50.

When the case began in the Sessions Court, then Debabrata, Naren Bakshi, Bijoy Nag, Sachindra Sen and I were engaged in collective spiritual practices. Aurobindo spent his days and nights immersed in silent, immobile sadhana; he would be in that state in his cell in the jail, and he would be in the same state in a corner of the court, alone, immersed in himself.

Our spiritual practices included words, songs, reading the shastras and debates; but his spiritual practices were solitary, silent, inward-looking, and directed towards a single goal; he had no companions, no activity, no other worries or thoughts, he was in a state of complete surrender . . .

If one saw him, it would seem that he was no longer aware of his external surroundings, it would seem that he walked and talked in a trance, as if all his senses, his mind and intellect had left the external world to join in a great festival in a solitary city in his innermost recesses. On seeing him, anyone drawn towards spiritual practices would automatically engage in them, so his silent influence was not insignificant on these few lives.³¹

One gets a glimpse of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga in jail when he touched upon a certain aspect of it:

. . . In the dispensation of the All-Good (*mangalamaya*) even out of evil cometh good. The third purpose was to give me this lesson that my yoga practices would not be done by personal effort, but that a spirit of faith or reverence (*sraddha*) and complete self-surrender (*atma-samarpana*) were the road to attain perfection in yoga, and whatever power or realisation the Lord would give out of His benignity, to accept and utilise these should be the only aim of my yogic endeavour. Since the day when the deep darkness of Ignorance began to lessen, I started to see the true nature of the All-Good Lord’s amazing infinite goodness as I watched the different events in the ward. There is no event great or small or even the smallest from which some good has not accrued. He often fulfils three or four aims through a single event.³²

Curiously, the prosecution presented Mrinalini Devi’s eight-page long letter from Deoghar, dated 20th December, 1907, to Sri Aurobindo (found by the police when Sri Aurobindo was arrested), where she expresses her anguish due to the lack of monetary support from her husband. The intimacy of their relationship is reflected in her upbraiding him without any qualms. That he treasured this letter so full of wifely resentment is clear from the fact that he did not preserve any of her other letters.³³ In response Sri Aurobindo patiently wrote two consoling letters to Mrinalini

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

32. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 4th Ed., 2014, p. 42 (translated from the Bengali, *Karakahini*).

33. Pradip Bhattacharya, ‘A Letter’, *Mother India*, January 2002, p. 39.

Devi dated 17th and 21st February, 1908.³⁴

Sri Aurobindo remained disinterested in the case. Abinash Bhattacharya wrote: “Mr. Das and the other lawyers asked each of us to write down whatever we had to say in our defence. I used to write down whatever had to be said about Aurobindo-babu for Barrister Das. Sometimes I even used to answer questions for him.”³⁵ Sudhir Kumar Sarkar observed: “He had nothing to discuss with his lawyers, C. R. Das and Byomkesh, no comments to give them about his case. He would sit in a corner of the dock and sometimes laugh uncontrollably, becoming almost red in the face. What he saw there he alone knew.”³⁶ Sudhir Sarkar bemusedly adds: “Thus a whole year passed before us. When C. R. Das could not get any assistance from Sri Aurobindo, he would stand looking helpless, wipe away his tears in dismay and go away. We would say among ourselves, ‘Political leaders, when the blows fall hard and mercilessly, either turn into sadhus or else they go mad!’”³⁷

During the preliminary enquiry Sri Aurobindo gave instructions to his Counsel, Byomkesh Chakravarty but when the trial opened in the Sessions Court with C. R. Das as his new Counsel Sri Aurobindo left the case entirely to C. R. Das and “troubled no more about it . . .”³⁸ In his Uttarpara speech Sri Aurobindo talks about C. R. Das taking up the case:

When I saw him, I was satisfied, but I still thought it necessary to write instructions. Then all that was put from me and I had the message from within, “This is the man who will save you from the snares put around your feet. Put aside those papers. It is not you who will instruct him. I will instruct him.” From that time I did not of myself speak a word to my Counsel about the case or give a single instruction and if ever I was asked a question, I always found that my answer did not help the case. I had left it to him and he took it entirely into his hands . . .³⁹

Later Sri Aurobindo was queried about statements in court. He replied:

Sri Aurobindo never made a public statement in the Court. When asked by the Court, he said he would leave the case to his lawyers, they would speak for him; he himself did not wish to make any statement or answer the Court’s questions. If any such statement as the one spoken of was made, it must have been drawn up by the lawyers on his behalf, not made by himself.⁴⁰

34. See *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1st Ed., pp. 70-72.

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

36. See Mona Sarkar, *Spirit Indomitable*, p. 101.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

38. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 61.

39. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 8.

40. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 85.

Chittaranjan’s speech for the defence was spread over eight days, and came to be praised universally as an eloquent piece of oratory. Sri Aurobindo was not a politician in the ordinary sense but a supreme patriot to whom politics, to secure his country’s freedom, was a profound spiritual experience. Elucidating this point, Chittaranjan presented Sri Aurobindo’s viewpoint thus:

The whole of my case before you is this. If it is suggested that I preached the ideal of freedom to my country which is against the law, I plead guilty to the charge. If that is the law here, I say I have done that and I request you to convict me. But do not impute to me crimes that I am not guilty of; deeds against which my whole nature revolts, and which having regard to my mental capacity are something which could never have been perpetrated by me. . . .⁴¹

Chittaranjan contended that Sri Aurobindo was a Vedantist and the basis of his patriotism “is drawn from Vedantism”; he “looks upon the country as the mother” and considers it as a “manifestation of God.” Chittaranjan explains:

You know the doctrine according to Vedantism is that the whole world is a manifestation of God. . . . “What do you think of your country? It is not merely forest, river, etc.” To Arabinda it is the manifestation of motherhood. That is another aspect of divinity according to Hindu religion. His basis of patriotism is that you must so regard your country that you can discover and realise the motherhood of the country. You must so love your country that you can realise within yourself that it is another aspect of God. A man who believes in Vedanta can see clearly and finds no difficulty at all. That is the basis of his patriotism. You must realise the divinity in the country in which you live.⁴²

When Sri Aurobindo was a professor in Baroda, one of his students, K. M. Munshi, asked him how Nationalism could be developed. Sri Aurobindo pointed to a map of India and told him Her cities, mountains, rivers and forests make up Her body. He advised him to look at India as a living Mother and to meditate upon Her and worship Her.⁴³

Expounding on the principles of Vedantism Chittaranjan said:

The doctrine of Vedantism is that man is not disassociated from God: that is to say, if you want to realise yourself you must look for the God within you. It is within your heart and within your soul, that you will find that God dwells and as no man can attain to his own salvation without reaching to that God that

41. Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*, 1922, p. 140.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

43. See Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 227.

is within you; so also in the case of nations . . . As in case of individuals, you cannot reach your God with extraneous aid, but you must make an effort — that supreme effort — yourself before you can realise the God within you; so also with a nation. It is by itself that a nation must grow; a nation must attain its salvation by its unaided effort. No foreigner can give you that salvation. It is within your own hands to revive that spirit of nationality. That is the doctrine of nationality which Arabinda has preached throughout . . .⁴⁴

Das continued by elucidating on Sri Aurobindo’s doctrine of passive resistance:

. . . the doctrines he preaches are not doctrines of violence but doctrines of passive resistance. It is not bombs but suffering. He deprecates secret societies and violence and enjoins them to suffer. If there is a law which is unjust and offensive against the development of the nation, break that law by all means and take the consequences. . . . If the Government thought fit to bring in a law which hinders you from attaining that salvation, Arabindo’s advice is to break that law if necessary in the sense of not observing it. You owe it to your conscience; you owe it to your God. If the law says you must go to jail go to jail. That was the cardinal feature of the doctrine of passive resistance which Arabindo preached. . . . He was oppressed with a feeling of disappointment, because his country was losing everything, having lost their faith. Therefore you find that whenever he preached freedom he brought out that feature clearly. He says believe in yourself; no one attains salvation who does not believe in himself. Similarly, he says, in the case of the nation. If the nation does not feel that it has got something within it to be free to attain that salvation then there is no hope for that nation. Accordingly we find Arabinda preaching “you are not cowards, you are not a set of incapable men, because you have got divinity. Have faith in you and in that faith go on towards the goal and become a self-developed nation.”⁴⁵

Beachcroft understood the concept of Sri Aurobindo’s Vedantism and aptly recapitulated it in his judgment:

His counsel argues that he is a Vedantist . . . the doctrine of Vedantism applied to the individual is to look for the godhead within oneself and so to realise what is best within oneself, so in the case of a nation, it can only grow by realising what is best within itself, that no foreigner can give it that salvation, which it can only attain by methods indigenous to the country. . . . If the law is unjust

44. Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*, 1922, p. 111.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-12.

don't obey it, and take the consequences. Do not be violent, but if the law is unjust, you are not bound morally to obey it; refuse to obey it and suffer. He has been saying to the people, you are not cowards, believe in yourselves and attain salvation, not by assistance from outside, but through yourselves. And this, Mr. Das says, is the key of his case.⁴⁶

In his argument Das also alluded to Sri Aurobindo's selfless and compassionate nature. He declared: "The man has spent all his income for the good of the country, for charity, keeping only that for his bare subsistence."⁴⁷ In Sri Aurobindo's written statement of defence to the court an excerpt reads: "That while I was at Baroda, I used to help my deserving pupils to complete their education in Europe . . . I used also to spend money in local religious and industrial movements as would appear from some of my letters to my wife . . ."⁴⁸

After describing Sri Aurobindo "as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity," Chittaranjan Das poignantly concluded his defence address:

. . . Long after he is dead and gone his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands. Therefore I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this Court but before the bar of the High Court of History. . . .

I appeal to you in the name of all that is noble, of all the thousand principles of law which have emanated from the English Bench, and I appeal to you in the name of the distinguished Judges who have administered the law in such a manner as to compel not only obedience, but the respect of all those in whose cases they had administered the law. I appeal to you in the name of the glorious chapter of English history and let it not be said that an English Judge forgets to vindicate justice. To you gentlemen I appeal in the name of the very ideal that Arabinda preached and in the name of all the traditions of our country; and let it not be said that two of his own countrymen were overcome by passions and prejudices and yielded to the clamour of the moment.⁴⁹

The trial at the Sessions Court closed on 4th March, 1909, and there was a long spell of two months before the judgment was delivered on 6th May, 1909. The judgment ran over three hundred pages of closely written foolscap. The Government had employed all its resources to obtain a long sentence of the accused

46. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., p. 69.

47. Amiya K. Samanta, *Alipore Bomb Trial 1908-1910 – Arguments in Courts and Judgements*, Vol. 2, p. 53.

48. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 308.

49. Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*, 1922, pp. 140-41.

persons, particularly of Sri Aurobindo, in order to break the backbone of the entire revolutionary movement in Bengal of that period. This desperation was noted by Mr. Beachcroft for in the judgment he stated: “I now come to the case of Arabinda Ghose, the most important accused in the case. He is the accused, whom more than any other the prosecution are anxious to have convicted and but for his presence in the dock there is no doubt that the case would have finished long ago.”⁵⁰

In his judgment Beachcroft touched upon the strife in the faction-ridden political field by referring to “much jealousy between various prominent persons” in Congress politics.⁵¹ However, Sri Aurobindo was above such sentiments. Beachcroft noted that a book named *Human Bullets*, dated Tokyo, 10th April, 1908, was presented to Arabinda by a brother Nationalist in Japan “in affection of his work for Nationalism in India.”⁵² Distinguished political leaders of the stature of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai have referred to his saintly disposition. Beachcroft quoted a certain Ram Chander Probhu — an associate of Upendranath Banerjee — who described Sri Aurobindo as “a simple, child-like, saintly soul yet withal burning with a true patriot’s passionate enthusiasm, such as I have rarely seen.”⁵³ Regarding Sri Aurobindo’s political life, Barin remarked: “He was universally adored almost as a saintly character”.⁵⁴ Jealousy, Sri Aurobindo pointed out, “is a sentiment lacking in nobility and quite unyogic.”⁵⁵

Referring to Sri Aurobindo’s writings and speeches Beachcroft remarked that they “seem to advocate nothing more than the regeneration of his country”.⁵⁶ He referred to two unpublished articles of Sri Aurobindo that were presented by the prosecution. The first article was called ‘The Morality of Boycott’. It was written, just before his arrest, in response to Rabindranath Tagore’s disapproval of boycott as a weapon of political struggle and economic protectionism.⁵⁷ In the article Sri Aurobindo alluded to Tagore and defended his stance:

A poet of sweetness and love who has done much to awaken Bengal, has written deprecating the boycott as an act of hate. The saintliness of spirit which he would see brought into politics is the reflex of his own personality colouring the political ideals of a sattwic race. But in reality the boycott is not an act of

50. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., p. 69.

51. ‘C. P. Beachcroft’s Judgment in the Case of Arabinda Ghose at the Alipore Bomb Trial, Dated 6.5.1909’, *Mother India*, August 1998, p. 544 (Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*).

52. Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*, 1922, p. 166.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

54. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

55. *CWSA*, Vol. 31, p. 244.

56. ‘C. P. Beachcroft’s Judgment in the Case of Arabinda Ghose at the Alipore Bomb Trial, Dated 6.5.1909’, *Mother India*, September 1998, p. 634 (Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*).

57. See Amiya K. Samanta, *Alipore Bomb Trial 1908-1910 – Arguments in Courts and Judgements*, Vol. 1, pp. 42-47.

hate. It is an act of self-defence, of aggression for the sake of self-preservation. To call it an act of hate is to say that a man who is being slowly murdered, is not justified in striking out at his murderer.⁵⁸

On ‘The Morality of Boycott’ Beachcroft said in his judgment:

The morality of the Kshatriya justifies violence in times of war, and boycott is a war. Nobody blames the Americans for throwing British tea into Boston Harbour, nor can anybody blame similar action in India on moral grounds. It is reprehensible from the point of view of the law, of social peace and order, not of political morality. . . . Again he says: “Aggression is unjust only when unprovoked; violence unrighteous when used wantonly or for unrighteous ends.”

The argument of the whole article shortly is this. “To drive out that which is evil, violence is justifiable. We don’t hate the English, but we object to their exploiting the country, for the interests of the two nations must be different; and we can stop that exploitation by boycott. Boycott is not morally wrong for the ends at which it aims are the interests of the people. And that being so, we should be morally justified in using force, if we were strong enough to do so.”⁵⁹

Beachcroft then concluded, “As a mere piece of philosophic writing there is no special harm in this. The danger is the state of feeling in the country at the time . . .”⁶⁰

About the second article, ‘The New Nationalism’ Beachcroft remarked that it is “a still more extraordinary article” where the “nationalist is not afraid of anarchy & suffering”, rather welcomes it “if the result is the building up of the nation.” He added, “The nationalist has a deep respect for the law because without it the nation cannot attain proper development. But the law must be in accordance with the wish of the nation.”⁶¹ He concluded by stating: “As an essay this article is a splendid piece of writing. . . . The fact that neither of these articles was published is again a point in Arabinda’s favour.”⁶²

Even with the articles that were published in the *Bande Mataram* Beachcroft took a flexible stand. He noted: “As I have pointed out nothing that can be called revolutionary, in the bad sense, has been shown to me from the columns of that paper.”⁶³ Elsewhere he noted:

58. *CWSA*, Vol. 7, p. 1118.

59. Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*, 1922, pp. 160-61.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 161-62.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

63. ‘C. P. Beachcroft’s Judgment in the Case of Arabinda Ghose at the Alipore Bomb Trial, Dated 6.5.1909’, *Mother India*, August 1998, p. 544 (Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*).

In his favour we have the fact that he has in the columns of the *Bande Mataram* deprecated violence; there is such an article dated 28th May 1907. And so late as 10th April 1908, there is an article saying that the national movement cannot be allowed to be driven inward and made an affair of a secret society as it would if outward expression were stopped. His connection with the conspiracy can only be considered established if we find that while writing one thing he has been doing another.⁶⁴

Alluding to the remark of the judge about the inordinate duration of the trial the Calcutta journal *Daily Hitavadi* remarked: “Mr. Beachcroft, the Judge, has openly said that but for Aravinda’s complicity in the case, it would not have taken such a long time to come to an end. This means that the case was dragged on for such a long time, because the prosecution tried to prove Aravinda guilty by stretching and twisting what was only light and flimsy evidence.”⁶⁵ The reputed daily *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* too noted: “We are told by the Judge that ‘But for his (Aurobindo Babu’s) presence in the dock, there is no doubt this case would have been finished long ago.’ So it is obvious, but for the anxiety of the Prosecution to get him (an innocent man) convicted, the trial would have come to an end in a far shorter time. This is, we repeat, not our opinion, but the finding of the Judge.”⁶⁶

Sri Aurobindo was acquitted by Beachcroft and this was a bitter pill for the British Government to swallow. A report of 11th May 1909 in the *Bangabandhu* explained why the Government was zealously trying to get Sri Aurobindo convicted:

The learned Judge plainly says that the Government of Bengal, and the Government of India as well, suspected Aurobindo to be guilty and were very anxious to get him convicted. It is of course, quite natural for them to do so under the influence of suspicion. The Government of India thought that if a highly accomplished man like Aurobindo who was held in high esteem by the people of India, could be convicted and punished for such a heinous offence, it would be easy for them to strike terror into the hearts of his followers and admirers.⁶⁷

After the judgment some British officials insinuated that a friendship existed between Sri Aurobindo and Beachcroft, obviously alluding to the fact that both were in Cambridge at the same time and sat for the I.C.S. together. However, Sri Aurobindo studied in King’s College whilst Beachcroft was in the adjoining Claire College. A rumour was floated that the friendship influenced the verdict and that the

64. Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*, 1922, p. 176.

65. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, pp. 459-60.

66. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., p. 95.

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-06.

trial judge was partial to Sri Aurobindo.⁶⁸ Later in 1930 a note covering his days in England was sent to Sri Aurobindo. An extract of his reply read:

But what is Beachcroft doing here? He butts in in such a vast and spreading parenthesis that he seems to be one of “these ancient languages” and in him too, perhaps, I got record marks! Besides, any ingenious reader would deduce from his presence in your note that he acquitted me out of fellow-feeling over the two “examinations” and out of university camaraderie, — which was far from being the case. I met him only in the I.C.S classes and at the I.C.S examinations and we never exchanged two words together. If any extralegal consideration came in subconsciously in the acquittal, it must have been his admiration for my prose style to which he gave fervent expression in his judgment. Don’t drag him in like this — let him rest in peace in his grave.⁶⁹

Besides Sri Aurobindo, the others acquitted were Nolini Kanta Gupta, Sachindra Kumar Sen, Kunjalal Saha, Bejoy Kumar Nag, Narendra Nath Bakshi, Purna Chandra Sen, Hemendra Nath Ghose, Dindayal Bose, Birendra Nath Ghose, Hem Chandra Sen, Debabrata Bose, Nikhileshwar Roy Moulik and Bijoy Chandra Bhattacharya. The following sentences were handed out by the Judge:

1. Sentenced to be hanged: Barindra Kumar Ghose and Ullaskar Dutta.
2. Sentenced to be transported for life: Hem Chandra Das, Upendranath Banerjee, Bibhuti Bhushan Sarkar, Hrishikesh Kanjilal, Birendra Chandra Sen, Sudhir Kumar Sarkar, Indranath Nandy, Abinash Bhattacharjee, Sailendra Nath Bose and Indu Bhushan Roy.
3. Sentenced to be transported for 10 years: Paresh Chandra Moulik, Sisir Kumar Ghose and Nirapado Roy.
4. Sentenced to be transported for 7 years: Asoke Chandra Nandy, Balkrishna Hari Kane and Sushil Kumar (or Chandra) Sen.
5. Sentenced to 1 year’s rigorous imprisonment: Krishnajibon Sanyal.

The two brothers, Nagendra Nath and Dharani Nath whom Sri Aurobindo spoke so highly of were also acquitted but were already undergoing a sentence of 7 years’ rigorous imprisonment in the Harrison Road Arms Act Case. Provas Chandra Deb was also acquitted but was re-arrested under section 124A IPC for being the author of the seditious pamphlet ‘Deshacharya’.⁷⁰

68. See Amiya K. Samanta, *Alipore Bomb Trial 1908-1910 – Arguments in Courts and Judgements*, Vol. 2, p. 450.

69. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 13.

70. See Niharendu Roy, *Alipore Conspiracy Case – An outline of the Sensational Trial in the History of the Indian Independence Movement*, 1st Ed., 2016, pp. 56-57.

In an interview, subsequent to the verdict, Sri Aurobindo remarked that “everybody was under the impression that guilty or not guilty he was sure to be punished.”⁷¹

Barin was not impressed with the fairness of Beachcroft’s judgement. He wrote: “. . . Beachcroft, however, did not melt even after Chittaranjan’s oratory, nor did he waver hearing the misconceived ideas of the assessors, his British soul, eager for justice, would not rest in peace unless he was able to hang a couple of big fish and raise a cry of victory.”⁷²

After Beachcroft’s judgment the *Daily Hitavadi* reported: “There are very few Bengalis who are held in such high respect as Aravind Ghose is. In education, talent, intelligence and character, he is honoured not only in Bengal, but in all India.”⁷³

Biren Chandra Sen noticed that Sri Aurobindo was unflappable during the entire trial. He describes what happened on the adjudication:

The trial at the sessions closed on the 4th of March, 1909, and there was a long spell of two months before the judgement was delivered. We saw very little of one another except when we were taken out for meals, or for the daily exercise, or for bath and washing. At last the day of judgement came, and we were taken to the Court. The judge was very grave. For a moment he seemed to have lost that composure of mind that should belong to a dispenser of Justice, and there was a perceptible tremor in his voice as he pronounced the death sentences.

Sri Aurobindo was acquitted along with 15 others and he was as unconcerned in his acquittal as he was in his confinement. There were touching scenes of leave-taking. The convicted persons were separated and removed to prison, and a veil descended upon their earthly life, as in death.⁷⁴

An extract from the report of F. C. Daly, Deputy Inspector General, Special Branch to the Chief Secretary of Bengal, read:

The sentences were received in silence — that is, silence compared to the turmoil that there has usually been in the Dock. Arabindo, as usual, looked stoically indifferent, but seemed well pleased with himself when he was allowed to walk out and leave the Court. The accused all embraced Barin.⁷⁵

Upendrachandra Bhattacharya, the younger brother of Abinash Bhattacharya, was also present when the verdict was delivered. He wrote:

71. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., p. 110.

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

73. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, pp. 459-60.

74. Biren Chandra Sen, ‘Sri Aurobindo as I Remember Him’, *Mother India*, April 1964, p. 21.

75. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, pp. 479-80.

Sri Aurobindo was in meditation while Mr. Beachcroft read the judgment. Only a few could realise that he was far above all that was around him — the court, the judge and the crowd — entranced in some world of his own. Those convicted shouted *Bande Mataram* and were handcuffed and strings of rope were tied around their waists. Those set free stood sad and silent.

One by one the young convicts came near Sri Aurobindo and bowed down to him.

“You will not be hanged,” he told Barin. To my elder brother he said, “You will not be detained for more than seven years.”⁷⁶

Sudhir Sarkar recalled that after the pronouncement of the judgment Sri Aurobindo talked to the revolutionaries about his realisations and his sadhana. The convicted then, one after another, bid farewell to him and asked him about their future. He narrates:

Vasudev had already told Sri Aurobindo that we would be given sentences, and that Ullas and Barin would not be hanged. Getting this chance I asked, “How will I be able to bear the days in prison at this young age? If I become weak and falter, what shall I do?” Sri Aurobindo replied, “Think of me; I shall always be with you.” How deeply touching were those words! Out of jail, whenever in difficulty or danger, whenever in my helplessness I have been able to remember him, always I have seen that the difficulty has become a blessing . . .

Later, during our life in exile, whenever the tyranny of the British Government tried to oppress us, we noticed how Sri Aurobindo’s Grace was always there to protect us. In the midst of endless abuses and suffering a heavenly cheerfulness wrapped us in its warm embrace, shielding us, comforting us.⁷⁷

Sri Aurobindo’s prophecy regarding both the reduced sentences for Barin and Abinash came true after the convicted appealed in the High Court. Barin’s and Ullaskar’s death sentences were reduced to transportation for life. Furthermore, except for Upendranath and Hem Chandra, the rest received lesser sentences and five were fully acquitted. Amiya K. Samanta in his *Alipore Bomb Trial 1908-1910* noted: “Aurobindo had great affection for the younger brother as he had suffered much in his boyhood and early youth, and perhaps on account of that he gave considerable indulgence to him”.⁷⁸ During the trial, whilst referring to a letter of Sri Aurobindo where Barin’s name is mentioned, the prosecutor Norton inferred that “Arabinda is a very affectionate brother.”⁷⁹

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

77. Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 1989, p. 105.

78. Amiya K. Samanta, *Alipore Bomb Trial 1908-1910 – Arguments in Courts and Judgements*, Vol. 1, p. 39.

79. C. R. Das, ‘Alipore Bomb Case Trial’, *Mother India*, November 1999, p. 1054.

A propos his acquittal, the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* commented that Sri Aurobindo's nobility was of such fineness that it was obvious not only to his fellow countrymen but also to many an Englishman and even the presiding judge:

The acquittal of Babu Aurobindo has not only lifted a mountain-load of anxiety and suspense from the mind of every Indian, but it has, we feel sure, pleased many an Englishman too.

The remarks of the trying judge himself very plainly indicate that he could not help entertaining a regard for this gifted man and was apparently very much relieved when he could see his way to find him not guilty.⁸⁰

Mr. Ramsay MacDonald — an admirer of Sri Aurobindo who later became the first Labour Prime Minister of Britain — declared in the House of Commons:

I am giving currency to no secret; it is a current report that as a matter of fact this man after having been tried on an accusation that might have cost his life . . . this man having been brought before the court and acquitted, according to common and self-informed reports, it was actually discussed whether his name should be put among the list of men to be deported without trial under the Section of which we heard so much last session.⁸¹

Beachcroft alluded to the public holding Sri Aurobindo in high esteem by stating that the prosecution “proved nothing beyond the fact that he was received with acclamation wherever he went, a fact which the defence has never attempted to deny.”⁸²

Curiously, whilst the trial was on Nolinikanto Sarkar mysteriously received an anonymous letter containing some legal points of the case. When the document was presented to Chittaranjan Das he was astonished by the legal analysis for it was so insightful that it could have been done only by a brilliant lawyer who was fully conversant with the case. Besides, the letter contained some vital information. The defence team was convinced that it could have been sent by none other than Mr. Beachcroft.⁸³ Nolinikanto Sarkar later revealed that at the time of Sri Aurobindo's acquittal they “managed to approach Justice Beachcroft to congratulate him. By the by we dared to question him very privately: ‘We received an anonymous cover containing two typed sheets. May we guess that it had been sent by you?’ Mr.

80. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., p. 90.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

82. ‘C. P. Beachcroft's Judgment in the Case of Arabinda Ghose at the Alipore Bomb Trial, Dated 6.5.1909’, *Mother India*, August 1998, p. 545 (Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*).

83. See Nolinikanto Sarkar, ‘Between the Arrival and the Departure’ (*Asa Jaoar Majhkhane*), *Mother India*, June 2004, pp. 516-17 (translated from Bengali by Aniruddha Sircar).

Beachcroft simply smiled.”⁸⁴

In a speech on 19th June, 1909, Sri Aurobindo stated that Judge Beachcroft said that “the preaching of the ideal of independence was a thing no Englishman could condemn.”⁸⁵

And in the *Karmayogin* of 17th July, 1909, Sri Aurobindo alluded to Beachcroft’s open-mindedness by stating that the judge “expressly admits the possibility of peaceful passive resistance and the blamelessness of the ideal of independence.”⁸⁶

In September 1959, two marble tablets were installed by S. C. Lahiri, Chief Justice, Calcutta High Court, in memory of Sri Aurobindo, at the very place in the Alipore Judge’s Court premises where the trial took place. The tablet reads: “In this room was held in 1908-9 the historic trial of the fighters for Indian emancipation including Sri Aurobindo, the Prophet of Life Divine.” Also inscribed in the tablet are the prophetic words uttered by Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das during Sri Aurobindo’s defence. Sri Lahiri, Chief Justice, in his address said that this court room would be looked upon as a place of pilgrimage by Sri Aurobindo’s fellow countrymen and would continue to inspire them in the pursuit of the ideals shown by him.

The President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, in a message on this occasion said:

I send my humble tribute to the memory of this great revolutionary and Saint Philosopher Sri Aurobindo who is one of those great Souls who link modern India with the lofty traditions of its hoary past. Let me hope this memorial tablet will serve to inspire our people at a time when clear thinking and high moral standards are needed as never before in our history.

The only two living co-accused in this historic trial — Sri Abinash Chandra Bhattacharjee and Sri Purna Chandra Sen, were introduced to the audience by the president at the meeting. Sri Hemachandra Ghosh, the only living person among the counsel for the defence, also spoke at the meeting.⁸⁷

During his turbulent and hazardous political life, a distinct characteristic of Sri Aurobindo was his self-sacrifice and calm demeanour. Barin wrote:

His deep love of country must have been deep and sincere to a rare degree otherwise it could not make him throw all his worldly chances to the winds and risk long incarceration and untold hardships, voluntary poverty and exile. But even this had no uncontrolled and hysteric expression in emotional outburst as we so often find in orators in Indian meetings. I have seen Shyam Sundar

84. Raghunandan, ‘An Unpublished Aspect of Sri Aurobindo’s Career’, *Mother India*, November 1980, p. 671.

85. *CWSA*, Vol. 8, p. 41.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

87. See ‘Commemoration of Sri Aurobindo’s Trial’, *Mother India*, January 1960, pp. 9-11.

Chakravorty lecturing in a Swadeshi meeting, dancing about in tears and gesticulating violently like a mad man while giving vent to his strong feelings. Immediately after him Aurobindo gets up and standing like a quiet statue of Buddha speaks in his terse forceful style and simple and dignified English and carries the whole audience with him. His power of restraining his feelings and giving him beautifully moulded and controlled expression was wonderful to behold.⁸⁸

In an essay ‘A strength of Silence’ Sri Aurobindo writes: “The more complete the calm, the mightier the yogic power, the greater the force in action.”⁸⁹

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

88. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

89. CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 58.

The strength of noise and activity is, doubtless, great, – did not the walls of Jericho fall by the force of noise? But infinite is the strength of the stillness and the silence, in which great forces prepare for action.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 59)

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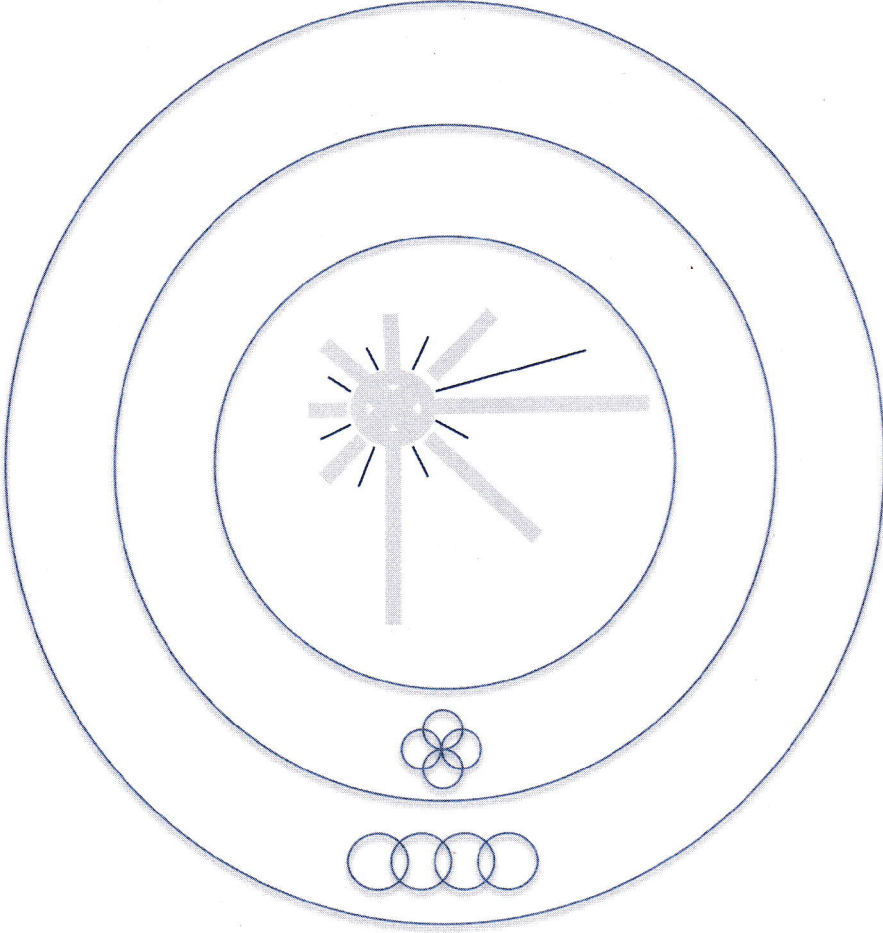
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