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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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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXII

No. 9

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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Lines from 'THE DESCENT OF AHANA'

A VOICE

Vision bright, that walkest crowned on the hills far above me,
Vision of bliss, stoop down from thy calm and thy silence to love me.
Only is calm so sweet? Is our end tranquillity only?
Chill are your rivers of peace and their banks are leafless and lonely.
Art thou not sated with sunlight only, cold in its lustre?
Art thou not weary of only the stars in their solemn muster?
Always the hills and the high-hung plateaus, — solitude's voices
Making the silence lonelier! Only the eagle rejoices
In the inhuman height of his nesting, — austere striving,
Deaf with the cry of the waterfall, only the pine there is thriving.
We have the voice of the cuckoo, the nightingale sings in the branches,
Human laughter leads and the cattle low in the ranches.
Come to our tangled sunbeams, dawn on our twilights and shadows,
Taste with us, scent with us fruits of our trees and flowers of our meadows.
Art thou an angel of God in His heavens that they vaunt of, His sages?
Skies of monotonous calm and His stillness filling the ages?
Is He thy master, Rudra the mighty, Shiva ascetic?
Has He denied thee his worlds? In His dance that they tell of, ecstatic,
Slaying, creating, calm in the midst of His movement and madness,
Was there no place for an earthly joy, for a human sadness?
Did He not make us and thee? O Woman, joy's delicate blossom
Sleeps in thy lids of delight! All Nature laughs in thy bosom
Hiding her children unborn and the food of her love and her laughter.
Is He then first? Was there none before Him? shall none come after?
We too have gods, — the Tritons rise in the leap of the billows,
Emerald locks of the Nereids stream on their foam-crested pillows,
Dryads sway out from the branches, Naiads glance up through the waters;
Heaven has dances of joy and the gods are ensnared by her daughters.
Artemis calls as she flees through the glades and the breezes pursue her,
Cypris laughs in her isles where the Ocean-winds linger to woo her.
Thou shalt behold in glades forgotten the dance of the Graces,
Night shall be haunted for ever with strange and delicate faces.
Lo, all these peoples and who was it fashioned them? Who is unwilling
Still to have done with it? laughs beyond pain and saves in the killing?

Nature, you say; but is God then her enemy? Was she created,
 He unknowing or sleeping? Did someone transgress the fated
 Limits He set, outwitting God? Nay, we know it was fashioned
 By the Almighty One, million-ecstasied, thousand-passioned.
 But He created a discord within it, fashioned a limit?
 Fashioned or feigned? for He set completeness beyond. To disclaim it,
 To be content with our measure, they say, is the law of our living.
 Rather to follow always and, baffled, still to go striving.
 Yes, it is true that we dash ourselves stark on a barrier appearing,
 Fall and are wounded. But He insists who is in us, the fearing
 Conquers, the grief. We resist; His temptations leap down compelling;
 Virtue cheats us with noble names to a lofty rebelling.
 Fiercely His wrath and His jealousy strike down the rebel aspiring,
 Thick and persistent His night confronts our eager inquiring;
 Yet 'tis His strengths descend crying always, "Rebel; aspire!"
 Still through the night He sends rays, to our bosoms a quenchless fire.
 Most to our joys He sets limits, most with His pangs He perplexes;
 Yet when we faint it is He that spurs. Temptation vexes;
 Honied a thousand whispers come, in the birds, in the breezes,
 Moonlight, the voice of the streams; from hundreds of beautiful faces
 Always He cries to us, "Love me!", always He lures us to pleasure,
 Then escapes and leaves anguish behind for our only treasure.
 Shall we not say then that joy is greatest, rapture His meaning?
 That which He most denies, is His purpose. The hedges, the screening,
 Are they not all His play? In our end we have rapture for ever
 Careless of Time, with no fear of the end, with no need for endeavour.
 What was the garden He built when the stars were first set in their places,
 Man and woman together mid streams and in cloudless spaces,
 Naked and innocent? Someone offered a fruit of derision,
 Knowledge of good and of evil, cleaving in God a division,
 Though He who made all, said, "It is good; I have fashioned perfection."
 "Nay, there is evil," someone whispered, "'tis screened from detection."
 Wisest he of the beasts of the field, one cunning and creeping.
 "See it," he said, "be wise. You shall be as the gods are, unsleeping,
 They who know all," and they ate. The roots of our being were shaken;
 Hatred and weeping and death at once trampled a world overtaken,
 Terror and fleeing and wrath and shame and desire unsated;
 Cruelty stalked like a lion; Revenge and her brood were created.
 Out to the desert He drove the rebellious. Flaming behind them
 Streamed out the sword of His wrath; it followed, eager to find them,
 Stabbing at random. The pure and the evil, the strong and the tempted,

All are confounded in punishment. Justly is no one exempted.
 Virtuous? Yes, there are many; but who is there innocent? Toiling,
 Therefore, we seek, but find not that Eden. Planting and spoiling,
 "This is the garden," we say, "lo, the trees! and this is the river."
 Vainly! Redeemers come, but none yet availed to deliver.
 Is it not all His play? Is He Rudra only, the mighty?
 Whose are the whispers of sweetness? Whence are the murmurs of pity?
 Why are we terrified then, cry out and draw back from the smiting?
 Blows of a lover, perhaps, intended for fiercer inciting!
 Yes, but the cruelty, yes, but the empty pain we go ruing!
 Edges of sweetness, it may be, call to a swifter pursuing.
 Was it not He in Brindâvun? O woods divine to our yearning,
 Memorable always! O flowers, O delight on the treetops burning!
 Grasses His kine have grazed and crushed by His feet in the dancing!
 Yamuna flowing with sound, through the greenness always advancing!
 You unforgotten remind! For His flute with its sweetness ensnaring
 Sounds in our ears in the night and our souls of their teguments baring
 Hales them out naked and absolute, out to His woodlands eternal,
 Out to His moonlit dances, His dalliance sweet and supernal,
 And we go stumbling, maddened and thrilled, to His dreadful embraces,
 Slaves of His rapture to Brindâvun crowded with amorous faces,
 Luminous kine in the green glades seated soft-eyed grazing,
 Flowers from the branches distressing us, moonbeams unearthly amazing,
 Yamuna flowing before us, laughing low with her voices,
 Brindâvun arching o'er us where Shyâma sports and rejoices.
 What though 'tis true that the river of Life through the Valley of Peril
 Flows! But the diamond shines on the cliffside, jacinth and beryl
 Gleam in the crannies, sapphire, smaragdus the roadway bejewel,
 Down in the jaws of the savage mountains granite and cruel.
 Who has not fathomed once all the voiceless threat of those mountains?
 Always the wide-pacing river of Life from its far-off fountains
 Flows down mighty and broad, like a warhorse brought from its manger
 Arching its neck as it paces grand to the gorges of danger.
 Sometimes we hesitate, often start and would turn from the trial,
 Vainly: a fierce Inhabitant drives and brooks no denial.
 Headlong, o'ercome with a stridulant horror the river descending
 Shudders below into sunless depths among chasms unending, —
 Angry, afraid, white, foaming. A stony and monstrous resistance
 Meets it, piling up stubborn limits, an iron insistence.
 Yet in the midst of our labour and weeping not utterly lonely
 Wander our steps, nor are terror and grief our portion only.

Do we not hear in the heart of the peril a flute go before us?
 Are there not beckoning hands of the gods that insist and implore us?
 Plains are beyond; there are hamlets and fields where the river rejoices
 Pacing once more with a quiet step and amical voices.
 There in a woodland red with berries and cool with the breezes, —
 Green are the leaves, all night long the heart of the nightingale eases
 Sweetly its burden of pity and sorrow, fragrant the flowers, —
 There in an arbour delightful I know we shall sport with the Hours,
 Lying on beds of lilies, hearing the bells of our cattle
 Tinkle, and drink red wine of our life and go forth to the battle
 And unwounded return to our beautiful home by the waters,
 Pledge of our joys, rear tall strong sons and radiant daughters.
 Shall God know? Will His spies come down to our beautiful valley?
 They shall grow drunk with its grapes and wander in woodland and alley.
 There will His anger follow us, there will His lightnings immortal
 Wander around with their red eye of cruelty stabbing the portal?
 Yes, I shall fear then His play! I will sport with my dove from His highlands,
 Pleased with her laughter of bliss like a god in my Grecian islands.
 Daughter of Heaven, break through to me, moonlike, mystic and gleaming.
 Come through the margins of twilight, over the borders of dreaming.
 Vision bright that walkest crowned on the hills far above me,
 Vision of bliss, stoop down! Encircle me, madden me, love me.

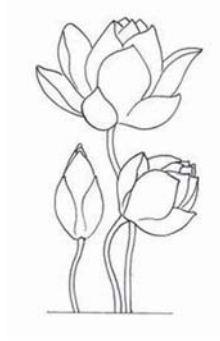
AHANA

Voice of the sensuous mortal! heart of eternal longing!
 Thou who hast lived as in walls, thy soul with thy senses wronging!
 But I descend to thee. Fickle and terrible, sweet and deceiving,
 Poison and nectar One has dispensed to thee, luring thee, leaving.
 We two together shall capture the flute and the player relentless.
 Son of man, thou hast crowned thy life with flowers that are scentless,
 Chased the delights that wound. But I come and the darkness shall sunder.
 Lo, I come and behind me knowledge descends and with thunder
 Filling the spaces Strength the Angel bears on his bosom
 Joy to thy arms. Thou shalt look on her face like a child's or a blossom,
 Innocent, free as in Eden of old, not afraid of her playing.
 Pain was not meant for ever, hearts were not made but for slaying.
 Thou shalt not suffer always nor cry to me, lured and forsaken.
 I have a snare for His footsteps, I have a chain for Him taken.
 Come then to Brindâvun, soul of the joyous; faster and faster

Follow the dance I shall teach thee with Shyâma for slave and for master, —
Follow the notes of the flute with a soul aware and exulting,
Trample Delight that submits and crouch to a sweetness insulting.
Thou shalt know what the dance meant, fathom the song and the singer,
Hear behind thunder its rhymes, touched by lightning thrill to His finger,
Brindâvun's rustle shalt understand and Yamuna's laughter,
Take thy place in the Râs and thy share of the ecstasy after.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 504-08)



WORD-FORMATION

The language of man is not framed on earth, but in heaven, as indeed are all things that the soul uses in this mortal journey. By the threefold energy of eternal truth, manifesting force and sustaining delight everything is created as a type in the world of ἰδέαι, the mahat of the ancients, in the principle of self-manifest and perfectly arranged knowledge, it is diversely developed by the more discursive but less surefooted agencies of intellectual mind. Imagination hunts after new variations, memory and association corrupt, analogy perverts, sensation, emotion, pleasure seize violent and partial satisfaction. Hence, change, decay, death, rebirth, — the law of the world. All this takes place in the descent into the worlds of mind and the worlds of matter. Therefore mankind has one original language based on certain eternal types of sound, developed by certain laws of rhythmic variation, perfectly harmonious and symmetrical in its structure and evolution. This is the devabhasha and is spoken in the Satya yuga. Then it suffers change, detrition, collapse. Innumerable languages, dialects, vernaculars are born. The guardians of the sacred language attempt always to bring back the early purity, but even they cannot do it; they reconstruct it from time to time, compromise with the new tendencies, preserve something of the skeleton, lose the flesh, blood, sinew, much of the force & spirit. This reconstructed language they call Sanskrit; all else Prakrit.

The backbone of the skeleton is composed of the roots of the original language that survive; the rest is the various principles of word-formation. Accordingly in the languages of the world which are nearest to the old sacred language, the ancient Aryan languages, there is one common element, — the roots, the elemental word-formations from the roots and so much of the original significance as survives variety of mental development playing on different lines and to different purposes. The object of this treatise is to provide a reasoned basis, built up on the facts of the old languages, Sanscrit, Greek, Latin, German, Celtic, Tamil, Persian, Arabic, for a partial reconstruction, not of the original devabhasha, but of the latest forms commonly original to the variations in these languages. I shall take the four languages, Sanscrit, Greek, Latin and Tamil first, to build up my scheme and then support it by the four other tongues. I omit all argument and handling of possible objections, because the object of this work is suggestive and constructive only, not apologetic. When the whole scheme is stated and has been worked out on a more comprehensive scale than is possible in the limits I have here set myself, the time will come for debate. Over an uncompleted exegesis, it would be premature.

I shall first indicate the principle on which the roots of the devabhasha were formed. All shabda (vak) as it manifests out of the akasha by the force of Matariswan, the great active and creative energy, and is put in its place in the flux of formed things

(apas) carries with it certain definite significances (artha). These are determined by the elements through which it has passed. Shabda appears in the akasha, travels through vayu, the second element in which sparsha is the vibration; by the vibrations of sparsha, it creates in tejas, the third element, certain forms, and so arrives into being with these three characteristics, first, certain contactual vibrations, secondly, a particular kind of tejas or force, thirdly, a particular form. These determine the bhava or general sensation it creates in the mind and from that sensation develop its various precise meanings according to the form which it is used to create.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Vedic and Philological Studies, CWSA, Vol. 14, pp. 579-80)



THE ELEMENTARY ROOTS OF LANGUAGE

I

The elementary roots of language are in sound the vowel or semivowel roots, and in sense those which convey the fundamental idea of being, burdened with the cognate & immediately resultant ideas of the substance that pervades and the motion that bridges the space & time through which being expresses itself, in which it exists and relates its different points to each other. These ideas inherent in knowledge would in a primitive race work themselves out dimly, by a slow process, from the initial expression of immediate feelings, experiences, sensations and needs. But the speakers of the Aryan language were not, according to my theory, entirely primitive and undeveloped. They developed language from the essential force of the sounds they used with some sort of philosophical harmony and rational order. They to some extent arranged language in its development instead of merely allowing it to develop fortuitously its own arrangement.

The elementary vowel roots which concern us, are the roots *a* (*ā*), *i* (*ī*), *u* (*ū*) & *r* (*ṛ*), the semivowel roots the *V* & *Y* families. The modified vowels *e* and *o* are in the Aryan languages secondary sounds conjunct of *a* and *i*, *a* and *u*. The diphthongs *ai* and *au* with their Greek variations *ei* and *ou* are tertiary modifications of *e* & *o*. Another conjunct vowel *lr* is a survival of a more ancient order of things in which *l* and *r* no less than *v* and *y* were considered as semivowels or rather as either vowel or consonant according to usage. *R* as a vowel has survived in the vowel *r*, *l* as a separate vowel has perished, but its semivowel value survives in the metrical peculiarity of the Latin tongue of which a faint trace survives in Sanskrit, by which *l* & *r* in a conjunct consonant may or may not, at will, affect the quantity of the preceding syllable.

I shall consider first the vowel roots. They are four in number, *a*, *i*, *u* and *r*, and all four of them indicate primarily the idea of being, existence in some elementary aspect or modification suggested by the innate quality or *guna* of the sound denoting it. *A* in its short form indicates being in its simplicity without any farther idea of modification or quality, mere or initial being creative of space, *i* an intense state of existence, being narrowed, forceful and insistent, tending to a goal, seeking to occupy space, *u* a wide, extended but not diffused state of existence, being medial and firmly occupant of space, *r* a vibrant state of existence, pulsing in space, being active about a point, within a limit. The lengthened forms of these vowels add only a greater intensity to the meaning of the original forms, but the lengthening of the *a* modifies more profoundly. It brings in the sense of space already created & occupied by the diffusion of the simple state of being — a diffused or pervasive state of

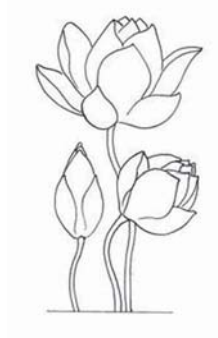
existence. These significances are, I suggest, eternally native to these sounds and consciously or unconsciously determined the use of them in language by Aryan speakers. To follow these developments and modifications it is necessary to take these roots one by one in themselves and in their derivatives.

From the persistent evidence of the Sanscrit language it is clear that to the initial idea of existence the Aryans attached, as fundamental circumstances of being, the farther ideas of motion, contact, sound, form and action and there are few root-families in which there are not the six substantial ideas which form the starting point of all farther development of use and significance.

Neither the root *a* itself nor its lengthened form *ā* occurs as an actual verb in any of the acknowledged Aryan languages, but in the Tamil we find the root *ā* (*ākiradu* as it is described in the Tamil system) in the sense to be and a number of derivative significations. The verbals formed from this verb, *āka* and *āna*, are utilised in the language to give a vague adjectival sense to the words to which they are attached or to modify a previous adjectival signification.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Vedic and Philological Studies*, CWSA, Vol. 14, pp. 581-82)



SRI AUROBINDO'S FORCE

Concreteness of the Force

The invisible Force producing tangible results both inward and outward is the whole meaning of the Yogic consciousness. Your question about Yoga bringing merely a feeling of Power without any result was really very strange. Who would be satisfied with such a meaningless hallucination and call it Power? If we had not had thousands of experiences showing that the Power within could alter the mind, develop its powers, add new ones, bring in new ranges of knowledge, master the vital movements, change the character, influence men and things, control the conditions and functionings of the body, work as a concrete dynamic Force on other forces, modify events etc. etc., we would not speak of it as we do. Moreover, it is not only in its results but in its movements that the Force is tangible and concrete. When I speak of feeling Force or Power, I do not mean simply having a vague sense of it, but feeling it concretely and consequently being able to direct it, manipulate it, watch its movement, be conscious of its mass and intensity and in the same way of that of other perhaps opposing forces; all these things are possible and usual by the development of Yoga.

It is not, unless it is supramental Force, a Power that acts without conditions and limits. The conditions and limits under which Yoga or sadhana has to be worked out are not arbitrary or capricious; they arise from the nature of things. These including the will, receptivity, assent, self-opening and surrender of the sadhak have to be respected by the Yoga-force — unless it receives a sanction from the Supreme to override everything and get something done — but that sanction is sparingly given. It is only if the supramental Power came fully down, not merely sent its influences through the Overmind, that things could be very radically altered in this respect — and that is why my main effort is directed towards that object — for then the sanction would not be rare! For the Law of the Truth would be at work not constantly balanced by the law of the Ignorance.

Still the Yoga-force is always tangible and concrete in the way I have described and has tangible results. But it is invisible — not like a blow given or the rush of a motor car knocking somebody down which the physical senses can at once perceive. How is the mere physical mind to know that it is there and working? By its results? but how can it know that the results were that of the Yoga-force and not of something else? One of two things it must do. Either it must allow the consciousness to go inside, to become aware of inner things, to believe in and experience the invisible and the supraphysical, and then by experience, by the opening of new capacities it becomes conscious of these forces and can see, follow and use their workings just

as the scientist uses the unseen forces of Nature. Or one must have faith and watch and open oneself and then it will begin to see how things happen; it will notice that when the Force was called in, there began after a time to be a result, — then repetitions, more repetitions, more clear and tangible results, increasing frequency, increasing consistency of results, a feeling and awareness of the Force at work — until the experience becomes daily, regular, normal, complete. These are the two main methods, one internal, working from in outward, the other external, working from outside and calling the inner Force out till it penetrates and is sensible in the exterior consciousness. But neither can be done if one insists always on the extrovert attitude, the external concrete only and refuses to join to it the internal concrete — or if the physical Mind at every step raises a dance of doubts which refuses to allow the nascent experience to develop. Even the scientist carrying out a new experiment would never succeed if he allowed his mind to behave in that way.

When the Mother said it was just a trick of reversing the consciousness, she meant that — that instead of allowing always the external mind to interfere and assert its own ordinary customary point of view, it should turn itself round, admit that things may work from in outwards, and keep itself sufficiently quiet to see that developing and being done. For then an inner mind shows itself which is capable of following and being the instrument of the invisible Forces.

It is not that you are incapable of it, for it was several times on the point of being done. But your external mind has interfered always, questioning, doubting, asking for something more external, not waiting for the movement to continue, for the inward to externalise itself and make itself concrete. That is why I object to this worship of Doubt. It is not that I used not to have doubts myself more formidable than any you have ever thought of — but I did not allow them to interfere with the development of my experience. I let it continue until it had sufficient body for me to know what it was and what it could bring me.

2 August 1932

*

Highly delighted (unyogically though) to learn you had put so much force for the sale of my gramophone records! But highly intrigued too. What is this force? A sweet blessing that all should be smooth in this rough world? Or is it a conscious way of directing a control, as one controls the organisation of a music choir? I mean does this force mean concrete business, as the scheming of a schemer does? I ask this naïve question since your force always puzzles me.

Well, I made the mistake of “thinking aloud with my pen” when I wrote that unfortunate sentence about the force I had put for the success of the gramophone records. As my whole action consists of the use of force or forces — except of

course my writing answers to correspondence which is concrete; but even that I am made to do by and with a force, otherwise I can assure you I would not and could not do it — I sometimes am imprudent enough to make this mistake. It is foolish to do so because a spiritual force or any other is obviously something invisible and its action is invisible, so how can anyone believe in it? Only the results are seen and how is one to know that the results are the result of the Force? It is not concrete.

But I am myself rather puzzled by your instances of the concrete. How are the schemes of a schemer concrete? Something happens and you tell me it was the result of a schemer's scheme. But the schemer's scheme was a product of his consciousness and not at all concrete; it was in his mind and another fellow's mind is not concrete to me unless I am a Yogi or a thought-reader. I can only infer from some things he said or did that he had a scheme, things which I have not myself seen or heard and which are therefore not to me concrete. So how can I accept or believe in the scheme of the schemer? And even if I saw or heard, I am not bound to believe that it was a scheme or that which happened was the result of a scheme. He may have acted on a chain of impulses and what happened may have been the result of something quite different or itself purely accidental. Again how do you control the music choir? By words and signs etc., which are of course concrete? But what made you use those words and signs and why did they produce a control? and why did the other fellows do what you told them? what made them do that? It was something in your and their consciousness, I suppose; but that is not concrete. Again, scientists talk about electricity which is, it seems, an energy, a force in action and it seems that everything has been done by this energy, my own physical being is constituted by it and it is at the base of all my mental and life energies. But that is not concrete to me. I never felt my being constituted by electricity, I cannot feel it working out my thoughts and life-processes — so how can I believe in it or accept it? The force I use is not a sweet blessing — a blessing (silent) certainly is not concrete, like a stone or a kick or other things seizable by the senses; it is not even a mere will saying within me "let it be so" — that also is not concrete. It is a force of consciousness directed towards or on persons and things and happenings — but obviously a force of consciousness is not seizable by the physical senses, so not concrete. I may feel it and the person acted on may feel it or may not feel it, but as the feeling is internal and not external and perceivable by others, it cannot be called concrete and nobody is bound to accept or believe in it. For instance, if I cure someone (without medicines) of a fever and send him fresh and full of strength to his work, all in the course of a single night, still why should any third person believe or accept that it was my force that did it? It may have been Nature or his imagination that made him cure (three cheers for those concrete things, imagination and Nature!) — or the whole thing happened of itself. So, you see the case is hopeless, it can't be proved at all — at all.

6 December 1935

*

Is the force you “put on me” concrete?

Concrete? what do you mean by “concrete”? It has its own concreteness; it can take a form (like a stream for instance) of which one is aware and can send it quite concretely in whatever “direction” or on whatever object one chooses.

In one of your letters to me you wrote: “A Yoga consciousness or spiritual consciousness which has no power or force in it, may not be dead or unreal but it is evidently something inert and without effect or consequence. Equally a man who sets out to be a Yogi or Guru and has no spiritual consciousness or no power in his spiritual consciousness — a Yoga force or spiritual force — is making a false claim and is either a charlatan or a self-deluded imbecile; still more is he so if having no spiritual force he claims to have made a path others can follow. If Yoga is a reality, if spirituality is anything better than a delusion, there must be such a thing as Yoga force or spiritual force.”

That is a general statement about the inherent power of spirituality. What I was speaking of was a willed use of subtle force (it may be spiritual or mental or vital) to secure a particular result at some point in the world. Just as there are waves of unseen physical forces (cosmic waves etc.) or currents of electricity, so there are mind waves, thought currents, waves of emotion, e.g. anger, sorrow etc. which go out and affect others without their knowing whence they come or that they come at all — they only feel the result. One who has the occult or inner senses awake can feel them coming and invading him; influences good or bad can propagate themselves in that way; that can happen without intention, automatically, but also a deliberate use can be made of them. There can also be a purposeful generation of force, spiritual or other. There can be too the use of the effective will or idea, which is not concrete in that sense, but is all the same effective.

6 February 1943

No Miraculous Force

I tried to convince X that it was your force that cured Y. But X said, “What about instances in which the Divine Force has failed? Why does it succeed in some cases and not in others?”

The mistake is to think that it must be either a miraculous force or else none. There is no miraculous force and I do not deal in miracles. The word Divine here is out of place, if it is taken as an always omnipotently acting Power. Yogic Force is then better; it simply means a higher Consciousness using its power, a spiritual and supraphysical force acting on the physical world directly. One has to train the

instrument to be a channel of this force; it works also according to a certain law and under certain conditions. The Divine does not work arbitrarily or as a thaumaturge; He acts upon the world along the lines that have been fixed by the nature and purpose of the world we live in — by an increasing action of the thing that has to manifest, not by a sudden change or disregard of all the conditions of the work to be done. If it were not so, there would be no need of Yoga or time or human action or instruments or of a Master and disciples or of a Descent or anything else. It could simply be a matter for the तथास्तु [*tathāstu*] and nothing more. But that would be irrational if you like and worse than irrational, — childish. This does not mean that interventions, things apparently miraculous, do not happen — they do. But all cannot be like that.

I told X, “I don’t see how you can deny the reality of this Force. Were you able to work with such vigour before you came here?” He said, “Yes, I could work a lot, so much so that people were astounded. Was that Sri Aurobindo’s Force?”

What is Sri Aurobindo’s force? It is not a personal property of this body or mind. It is a higher Force used by me or acting through me.

“And Tagore, Lenin and other greats. Is the Divine Force working in them too?”

Of course it is a Divine Force, for there is only one force acting in the world, but it acts according to the nature of the instrument. Yogic Force is different from others because it is a special power of the spiritual consciousness.

I continued, “It may not be Sri Aurobindo’s Force, but how can I exclude the possibility of a Divine Force behind? Because one is an atheist, it doesn’t mean the Divine is undivine against him!”

There was an obvious intervention in the case he speaks of — but the agent or process could only be determined if one knew all the circumstances. Such interventions are frequent; e.g. my uncle’s daughter was at her last gasp, the doctors had gone away telling him there was no more to be done. He simply sat down to pray — as soon as he had finished, the death symptoms were suspended, the girl recovered without farther treatment (it was a case of typhoid fever). Several cases of that kind have come within my personal observation.

X concluded, “Oh, if you say everything is being done at the divine impulsion, I have nothing to say. But you can’t say that I am working because Sri Aurobindo is constantly at my back!” What can I say against this?

I am not very particular about that. It is a personal question and depends on X's feeling. I certainly put force on him for the development and success of his poetry — about the rest I don't want to say anything.

I have marginalised on the Force¹ — to write more completely would need more time than I have tonight. Of course, if it depended on a few cases of illness, it would be a thing of no certitude or importance. If the "Force" were a mere freak or miracle, it would be equally trivial and unimportant, even if well-attested. It is only of importance if it is part of the consciousness and the life used at all times, not only for illness but for whatever one has to do. It manifests in various ways — as a strength of the consciousness evenly supporting the life and action, as a power put forth for this or that object of the outward life, as a special Force from above drawn down to raise and increase the scope of the Consciousness and its height and transform it not by a miraculous, but by a serious, steady, organised action following certain definite lines. Its effectiveness as well as its action is determined first by its own height and intensity or that of the plane from which it comes (it may be from any plane ranging from the Higher Mind upward to the Overmind), partly by the condition of the objects or the field in which it acts, partly by the movement which it has to effect, general or particular. It is neither a magician's wand nor a child's bauble, but something one has to observe, understand, develop, master before one can use it aright or else — for few can use it except in a limited manner — be its instrument. This is only a preface.

6 February 1935

*

Our idea was that the Divine is always omnipotent, independent of all conditions and not limited by the particular plane from which he acts. But you give so many clauses under which the Force can operate successfully! X then seems to be right when he says that if one has not got a particular possibility in him the Divine cannot make him develop in that direction. Pushing this a little farther, I would say that one must have a talent or capacity as a nucleus in him for the spiritual development he is going to have later. One must have it, the Divine cannot make anything out of शून्याम् [śūnyam].

What is शून्याम्? It is out of the silence that all things originated. All is contained in what you call Shunyam.

But then how is it that you wasted so much Force on Y to no avail? Is it that you did not use the supramental Force, which alone can work irresistibly without the necessity of adapting itself to existing conditions?

1. Sri Aurobindo wrote the above answers in the margins of the correspondent's notebook. — Ed.

Certainly, supramental Force was not the force used in that case, it was mental-spiritual. In such cases the object of the Force has always the right to say No. I put the force on him because he said he wanted to change, but his vital refused — as it had the right to do. If nothing in him had asked for the change, I would not have tried it, but simply put another force on him for another purpose.

You make a distinction between the Yogic Force and the Divine Force; but is not the former an outcome of the latter?

Of course, but all force is the Divine Force. It is only the egoism of the individual which takes it as his own. He uses it, but it is not his.

By the way, Z did not question the reality of your Force for his poetry or other literary activities, but he said he could not admit that all his activities were permeated by your Force, because he used to work with great vigour and energy even before he came here.

Of course not — all the activities cannot be that. It is only in the Yoga realisation that one feels all one's activities to be from the one source — something from above or the Yogashakti or the Guru Shakti or the Cosmic Force or whatever it may be (all names for the same thing in different formations) driving the whole consciousness and being.

Success in life outside is dependent on different things, on one's own energy and the environmental stimulus.

What is one's own energy after all? You mean Nature's energy in you? It may, in new conditions, remain extant in some things, develop in others, fail or change in others. One can't make a rule.

Looking at myself, I wonder how a vitalistic man like me can pass his days in cellular imprisonment without any suffocation!

That kind of change happens.

One may say that a tamasic, indolent man can't be activated by the Divine to that extent.

Of course he can.

Am I really wrong?

No, but there are many sides or aspects to a question.

After the “preface” is any chapter likely to follow?*

Perhaps in some weeks or some months or some centuries the chapter may follow! But I used the word preface to characterise the nature of what I had written, not in a prophetic sense. There are two things — Yoga-Force in its original totality which is that of the Divine spiritual force, always potentially all-powerful, and Yoga-Force doing its work under the conditions of the evolutionary world here.

It is not a question of “can” or “cannot” at all. All is possible, but all is not licit — except by a recognisable process; the Divine Power itself imposes on its action limits, processes, obstacles, vicissitudes. It is possible that an ass may be changed into an elephant, but it is not done, at least physically, because of the lack of a process. Psychologically such changes do take place. I have myself in my time changed cowards into heroes and that can be done even without Yogashakti, merely by an inner force. How can you say what is latent in man or what is incurably absent? I have developed many things by Yoga, often even without any will or effort to do so, which were not in my original nature, I may even say that I have transformed my whole nature and it is in many respects the opposite of what I began with. There can be no question about the power to change, to develop, to awaken faculties that were not there before; this power exists already, but it can be raised to an acme by being lifted to the spiritual plane.

The force put on the gentleman you speak of at least made it necessary for him to change if he remained here. He had no will in the vital to change and so did not remain here but went to his fate.

The rest is for the indefinable future. One day I shall certainly try to explain methodically and by examples what the spiritual force is; how it has worked on the earth-plane, how it acts and under what conditions — conditions not rigidly fixed, but plastic and mutable.

7 February 1935

Receptivity to the Force

In one of your letters you have written about being “sufficiently open” to receive the Force. What did you mean by this?

I mean simply a certain receptivity in the consciousness — mind, vital, physical, whichever is needed. The Mother or myself send a force. If there is no openness, the force may be thrown back or return (unless we put a great force which it is not

* See letter dated 6 February 1935; pp. 19-21 in this issue.

always advisable to do) as from an obstruction or resistance: if there is some openness, the result may be partial or slow; if there is the full openness or receptivity, then the result may be immediate. Of course there are things that cannot be removed all at once, being an old part of the nature, but with receptivity these also can be more effectively and rapidly dealt with. Some people are so open that even by writing they get free before the book or letter reaches us.

8 June 1933

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You said, in regard to that Spanish General, "I put the right force on him and he wakes up and, with his military knowledge and capacity, does the right thing". Exactly, if he has these things, he can receive your right force.

It does not follow. Another man may have the knowledge but receive nothing. If he receives, his knowledge and capacity help the Force to work out the details.

It seems that though you have no patent or latent military capacity . . .

Not in this life.

your Force has, and it wakes up in the man the right judgments etc. This is all a mystery beyond my ken.

May I ask why? Your idea is that either I must inspire him specifically in every detail, making a mere automaton of him, or, if I don't do that, I can do nothing with him? What is this stupid mechanical notion of things?

The Force having military knowledge, poetic power, healing virtues, etc., the embodiment of the Force also must have the latent general, poet, medico, etc. — sounds strange to me otherwise.

Because you have the damnably false idea that nothing can be done in the world except by mental means — that Force must necessarily be a mental Force and can't be anything else.

The strangest thing of all is that if the Divine wills, why can't an effective drug in a case be revealed to him, medico or no medico?

Why the devil should He will like that in all cases? . . .

As to Force let me point out a few elementary notions which you ignore.

(1) The Force is a divine Force, so obviously it can apply itself in any direction;

it can inspire the poet, set in motion the soldier, doctor, scientist, everybody.

(2) The Force is not a mental Force — it is not bound to go out from the Communicator with every detail mentally arranged, precise in its place, and communicate it mentally to the Recipient. It can go out as a global Force containing in itself the thing to be done, but working out the details in the Recipient and the action as the action progresses. It is not necessary for the Communicant to accompany mentally the Force, plant himself mentally in the mind of the Recipient and work out mentally there the details. He can send the Force or put on the Force, leave it to do its work and attend himself to other matters. In the world most things are worked out by such a global Force containing the results in itself, but involved, concealed and working them out in a subsequent operation. The seed contains the whole potentiality of the tree, the gene contains the potentiality of the living form that it initiates, etc. etc., but if you examine the seed and gene ad infinitum, still you will not find there either the tree or the living being. All the same the Force has put all these potentialities there in a certain evolution which works itself out automatically.

(3) In the case of a man acting as an instrument of the Force the action is more complicated, because consciously or unconsciously the man must receive, also he must be able to work out what the Force puts through him. He is a living complex instrument, not a simple machine. So if he has responsiveness, capacity, etc. he can work out the Force perfectly, if not he does it imperfectly or frustrates it. That is why we speak of and insist on the perfecting of the instrument. Otherwise there would be no need of sadhana or anything else — any fellow would do for any blessed work and one would simply have to ram things into him and see them coming out in action.

(4) The Communicant need not be an all-round many-sided Encyclopaedia in order to communicate the Force for various purposes. If we want to help a lawyer to succeed in a case, we need not be perfect lawyers ourselves knowing all law, Roman, English or Indian and supply him all his arguments, questions, etc., doing consciously and mentally through him his whole examinations, cross-examinations and pleading. Such a process would be absurdly cumbrous, incompetent and wasteful. The pre-arrangement of the eventual result and the capacity for making him work his instruments in the right way and for arranging events also so as to aid towards the result are put into the Force when it goes to him, they are therefore inherent in its action and the rest is a question of his own receptivity, experience etc. Naturally the best instrument even is imperfect (unless he is a perfected Adhar) and mistakes may be committed, other suggestions accepted etc. etc., but if the instrument is sufficiently open, the Force can set the thing to rights and the result still comes. In some or many cases the Force has to be renewed from time to time or supported by fresh Force. In some directions particular details have to be consciously attended to by the Communicant. All that depends on circumstances too multitudinous and variable to be reduced to rule. There are general lines, in these matters, but no rules, the working of a non-mental Force has necessarily to be plastic, not rigid and tied to

formulas. If you want to reduce things to patterns and formulas, you will necessarily fail to understand the workings of a spiritual (non-mental) Force.

(5) All that I say here refers to spiritual Force. I am not speaking of the Supramental.

(6) Also please note that this is all about the working of Force on or through people: it has nothing to do with intuition which is quite another matter. Also it does not preclude always and altogether a plenary and detailed inspiration from a Communicant to a recipient — such things happen, but it is not necessary to proceed in that way, nor below the Supermind or supramentalised Overmind can it be the ordinary process.

10 April 1937

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You said, in regard to the Spanish General, "Let us suppose . . . I put the right force on him". Why did you say "right"? Is there also a wrong Force?

Don't remember what exactly I wrote — so can't say very well. But of course there can be a wrong Force. There are Asuric Forces, rajasic Forces, all sorts of Forces. Apart from that one can use a mental or vital Force which may not be the right thing. Or one may use the Force in such a way that it does not succeed or does not hit the General on the head or is not commensurate with the opposing Forces — (opposing Forces need not be Asuric, they may be quite gentlemanly Forces thinking they are in the right. Or two Divine Forces might knock at each other for the fun of the thing. Infinite possibilities, sir, in the play of the Forces.)

What I want to know is whether the Force applied or directed is always the right Force. Can there be any mistake in the Force, either in its application or in any other way, resulting in its failure to get the desired result?

What is a mistake? Eventually the Force used is always the Force that was destined to be used. If it succeeds, it does its work in the whole and if it fails, it has also done its work in the whole. ন ভ্রম শোচতে বৃথঃ ।

My main point is the intuition. The Force has evidently a close connection with the intuition or any other faculties which are awakened by the action of the Force.

In what way? A Force may be applied without any intuition — an intuition can come without any close connection with a Force, except the force of intuition itself which is another matter. Moreover a Force may be applied from a higher plane than that of any Intuition.

17 April 1937

Response of the Divine

You can send your Force to whomever you like — Lenin, Kemal, Gandhi, but how people calling Shiva or Krishna for their Ishta Devata get responses from you, I don't understand.

Again who is Shiva? and who is Krishna? and what is an Ishta Devata? There is only one Divine, not a thousand Divines.

It would mean that wherever a sincere heart is aspiring for the Divine, his aspiration reaches your ears.

Why my ears? Ears are not necessary for the purpose. You might just as well say, reaches me by the post.

And you send your responses, because you want to manifest the Divine Rule on earth.

That has nothing to do with it. Besides it is not the Divine Rule on earth that I am after, but the supramental rule. This however has nothing to do with any supramental or Divine Rule on earth. It is only a general question of the response of the Divine and to the Divine.

5 February 1936

Power to Help

I do not ask you to believe that the Divine Grace comes to all or that all can succeed in the sadhana or that I personally have succeeded or will succeed in the case of all who come to me. I have asked you if you cannot develop the faith that the Divine is — you seemed often to doubt it, — that the Divine Grace is and has manifested both elsewhere and here, that the sadhana by which so many profit is not a falsehood or a chimaera and that I have helped many and am not utterly powerless — otherwise how could so many progress under our influence? If this is first established, then the doubt and denial, the refusal of faith boils itself down to a refusal of faith in your own spiritual destiny and that of X and some others — does it not? I have never told you that the power that works here is absolute at present; I have on the contrary told you that I am trying to make it absolute and it is for that that I want the Supermind to intervene. But to say that because it is not absolute therefore it does not exist, seems to me a logical inconsequence.

There remains your personal case and you may very well tell me “What does it matter to me if these things are true when they are not true to me, true in my own

experience?" But it does make a difference that they are true in themselves. For if your personal want of experience is held as proving that it is all moonshine, then all is finished — there is no hope for you or me or anybody. If on the other hand these things are true but not yet realised by you, then there is hope, a possibility at least. From the point of view of reason you may be right in thinking that because you have not realised yet, you can never realise — though it does not seem to me an inevitable conclusion. From the same point of view I also may be right in concluding from my experience and that of other Yogis that there is no such inevitability and that with the persistent aspiration in you and the vairagya we have the conditions for a realisation that must come — sooner, for there are sudden liberations, or later.

28 August 1934

Variations in the Action of the Force

Do you think if you put the Force at an exact time, say 9 p.m., it would have a greater chance of immediate success?

One can't make a rule like that. There is nothing more variable than the way the Force acts.

11 July 1936

The Force and Will

I feel a great Force above my head. But it is not coming down. Do you want me to draw it down by my will-force?

The Force must come down, though probably it will do so by stages. The will has to invite it if not draw it. Also the Force has to be used, that is, something of it directed by the will against the obstacles. This training of the will to act in the Yogic way is very important as a stage in the sadhana.

28 July 1935

Sri Aurobindo's Force and World Events

Somebody told X that Sri Aurobindo brought about the Russian revolution through Lenin. X told Y that people here were over-credulous to believe such things. Y insisted that such things were possible, but X seems to be unable to understand the working of occult forces. As far as I can see, if it is possible to cure dangerous diseases of the body by Yogic power, why should it not be possible to act on the mind of another person and pour into him immense vital force which can bring about such results as the Russian revolution?

The statement made to X was not quite correct; it is putting things in too physical a form. A spiritual and occult working supplies forces and can watch over the members of the execution of a world event; but to put it like that makes the actual workers too much of automata which they are not.

25 January 1937

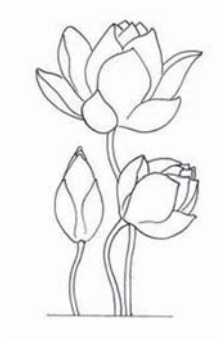
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Certainly, my force is not limited to the Asram and its conditions. As you know it is being largely used for helping the right development of the war and of change in the human world. It is also used for individual purposes outside the scope of the Asram and the practice of Yoga; but that, of course, is silently done and mainly by a spiritual action. The Asram however remains at the centre of the work and without the practice of Yoga the work would not exist and could not have any meaning or fruition. But in the Yoga itself there are different ways of proceeding for different natures, even though the general path is the same, surrender to the Divine and change of nature. But surrender to the Divine in the completest sense cannot be achieved in a short time, nor can the change of the nature. On the whole, one has to go as quickly as one can and as slowly as is necessary — which seems contradictory but is not.

13 March 1944

SRI AUROBINDO

(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 479-96)



‘THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF THE PLAY’

June 24, 1914

From the point of view of the manifestation, the work to be carried forward upon earth, a hierarchy is needed — but in this world which is still in disorder, can it be established unarbitrarily, that is, in perfect conformity with Thy law? . . . The witness being, calm, indifferent, smiling, looks upon the play, the comedy which is unfolding itself, and awaits circumstances with serenity, knowing that they are nothing but a very imperfect translation of what should be.

But the religious being turns to Thee, O Lord, in a great aspiration of love, and implores Thy help so that it may be *the best* that shall be realised, so that as many obstacles as possible may be overcome, all possible obscurities dispelled, all possible egoistic ill-will vanquished. It is not *the best* possible in circumstances of the present disorder which must happen — for that always happens — it is these circumstances themselves which, through a greater effort than ever yet was made, must be transfigured, so that a “best”, new in quality, new in quantity, an altogether exceptional “best” may be manifested.

So let it be.

*

It is always wrong to want to evaluate the future or even to foresee it by the thought we have about it, for this thought is the present, it is in its very impersonality the translation of present relations which are necessarily not the future relations between all the elements of the terrestrial problem. Deducing future circumstances from present ones is a mental activity of the nature of reasoning, even if the deduction takes place in the subconscious and is translated in the being into the form of intuition; but reasoning is a human faculty, that is, it is individual; its inspirations do not come from the infinite, the unlimited, the Divine. It is only in the Omniscience, only when one is at once What knows, what is to be known and the power of knowing that one can become conscious of all relations, past, present and future; but in this state there is no longer a past, present or future, *all is* eternally. The order of manifestation of all these relations does not solely depend upon the supreme impulsion, the divine Law, it depends also upon the resistance put up against this law by the most external world; from the combination of the two there comes forth the manifestation and so far as it is at present possible for me to know, this combination is in a way undetermined. This is what makes the play, the unexpectedness of the play.

THE MOTHER

(*Prayers and Meditations*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 183-84)

THE GITA HAS HAD AN IMMENSE SPIRITUAL ACTION*

On the Asuras

“Each time that we have made a decisive step in our spiritual progress, the invisible enemies of the Divine always try to take their revenge, and when they cannot injure the soul they strike the body. But all their efforts are in vain and will finally be defeated, for the Divine Grace is with us.”

Words of the Mother, CWM, Vol. 15, p. 20

What are these “invisible enemies of the Divine”?

They are precisely those four persons who have naturally put forth innumerable emanations, which have again put forth others, which have made formations. And so there are millions and millions and millions of them, and it is these who have formed between themselves a certain habit and have the logic to preserve it and persist in not wanting any other rule than theirs to govern. These are what are called in India the Asuras, the beings of darkness. It is through a sort of logic that they are like that. They began by going wrong, they continue. Now, I must say, there are some among them who change their mind. But this is mentioned in the Gita also; I believe they speak of those who will be converted, and then of those who absolutely refuse any conversion, who prefer to disappear, to be destroyed rather than be converted. And that’s how it is. Some are of one kind, others of another.

Which are “the others” who have been converted?

Ah, you know that? You have a good memory. There is one of them who has been converted, and who even collaborates, he is the one of Consciousness and Light.

If he is converted, the difficulty must go of itself.

Naturally, but his power remains. This becomes a formidable being.

You said that consciousness had changed into inconscience. But when consciousness is converted, inconscience must go?

* M10: 63

It becomes once again consciousness and light — it becomes once more what it was.

Hasn't it become that again?

But I have just said a minute ago that when it became inconscience or darkness, it produced innumerable formations — emanations, formations, creations. And its conversion does not mean that all the rest follow. They obey that same law of freedom, freedom of choice. They may be converted or not. There are those who are converted, there are those who refuse. And I believe that in fact there are many more who refuse.

But the one who does the greatest harm is the “Lord of Falsehood”. He it is indeed who is the biggest obstacle in the universe, this constant negation of the truth. And he has a very strong hold on the terrestrial world, on the material world. Besides, here (on the earth), those who see him, see him as an absolutely marvellous, splendid being. He entitles himself the “Lord of the Nations”, and he appears formidable, luminous, powerful, very impressive. . . . Historically, he was the inspirer of certain heads of State, and he proclaims himself the Lord of the Nations because it is he who governs the peoples. He is evidently, at the source, the supreme organiser of these last two wars. It was on that occasion that he manifested himself as the Lord of the Nations. And he declared, besides, that he would never be converted. And he knows that his end will come — naturally, he will try to make it as late as possible. And he declared that he would destroy all he could before being destroyed. . . . We may expect all possible catastrophes. (M5: 374-76)

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There were people here who had a great aspiration, but who for some reason or other revolted and went away. And these are the ones who are specially against the Ashram. But then, could we say that one day they will come back?

Come back? (*Mother makes a movement.*) That is . . . I shall tell you this personally.

It depends on something. . . . We could put it like this: first — the very same question is in the Gita — there are two kinds of Asuric beings. There are those who can be converted and will be converted — after all, perhaps it would be enough if only at one moment, were it just in a passing flash, these beings have conceived the possibility of conversion, for this to happen one day. And there are those who have absolutely consciously and wilfully decided that they would prefer to be dissolved and to disappear. So those who want to be dissolved will be dissolved and those who want to be converted will be converted. That's how it is in life!

There are those who die, those who return. Usually it is something known,

almost decided. One could say with certainty, *these will die*. They will die, they will die, that is to say, they cut themselves off from their soul. They may have — as I said a while ago — a life that is quite . . . that seems to be altogether successful. They are not necessarily unhappy physically, far from it; sometimes, on the contrary, everything turns out successfully for them. And then, on the other hand, there are perhaps others under a special grace, who, in their adventure meet the worst rebuffs, and after some time they realise that they have been foolish, idiotic, stupid. And then . . . they come back. It depends on people. In fact, when they are successful it means that they are condemned; when they do not succeed, well, it is that the Grace has not left them.

But mostly it will be after their death that there will be a difference, because those human beings who have allowed adverse forces to take hold of them and govern their lives, as soon as they leave their body, they are just swallowed up, that's all! They have already cut off the connection with their psychic being, so their psychic being often has gone somewhere far off already in other worlds . . . and so, their vital being, which is the receptacle for these forces, as soon as it leaves the body will be quite simply swallowed, and that's all. And so they will really die for good. That won't make much difference in the world. It won't change things much.

Sweet Mother, what will swallow them up?

A still greater vital being! (*Laughter*) You see, they have in them an emanation of adverse vital forces, and the being or power which has emanated this force has done so in order to make use of the body, to make it do in the material life exactly the things it wanted to do. But now, when there is no longer a body left, it is no longer interesting. . . . You see, it was this body which was meant to do a certain number of things to act against the divine action. Once the body has disappeared, the emanation is withdrawn and all the force that was with it, and it is swallowed up again for another opportunity.

They spend their time doing this. They emanate and then reabsorb when it pleases them, at times before death . . . that is, this hastens death a bit. It leaves the being like a kind of rag, powerless, lifeless, without anything. . . . This happens; it makes them absolutely mad. Or else, when they die in some sort of catastrophe, as it happened during the war, suddenly . . . hup! It acts like a cupping-glass, it absorbs everything, swallows up everything again for another occasion. It looks for this, for what is ready to receive it, and it makes it. . . There is always someone who is open to receive it, and who immediately believes himself a very superior being; because it gives this, it gives people the feeling that they are truly, exceptionally remarkable . . . they are capable of seeing the faults of things which others don't see; their judgment is more sane than that of hundreds of other individuals. Besides, they have decided, they are among

those who have decided what the creation ought to be like and who try to make it so, to put things in their place as they ought to be.

I had these . . . people who, in a moment of lucidity or sincerity, a second of sincerity, had asked to be freed from the hostile emanation which made them act. And then, in that moment of sincerity this emanation went out of them, and without hurting the body it could be caught and destroyed. That has happened several times.

Then for some days the being is so happy . . . and it feels free, feels good, feels luminous. . . . And then suddenly, it tells itself, “But I no longer have any power! I don’t know any longer, can’t do anything any longer, I am altogether an ordinary being!” And then, “But this is not at all good, it was much better before!” And so, as these adverse forces are countless — these entities exist in thousands and thousands, you see, they are there swarming around people, only waiting for an opportunity to be able to rush into someone — immediately one reabsorbs one’s dose and becomes once again what one was before, sometimes worse.

And so the comedy begins all over again.

But as for me, nothing doing, once is enough! You are far too attached to it! Keep your little hostile being with you! It is useless, in this case. But it is this, it’s the feeling, all of a sudden, of having lost one’s power. But note, this happens to ambitious people, above all to ambitious people who want to have power, want to dominate others, want to be great masters, great instructors, want to perform miracles, have extraordinary powers . . . it is to these that this happens most often . . . those who have a kind of ambition, here, turning in their mind. This is dangerous.

It is so good to be simple, simply good-willed, to do the best one can, and in the best way possible; not to build anything very considerable but only to aspire for progress, for light, a peace full of goodwill, and let That which knows in the world decide for you what you will become, and what you will have to do. One no longer has any cares, and one is *perfectly happy!*

There we are. (M6: 245-48)

How the Mother was introduced to the Gita

I said that between the age of eighteen and twenty I had attained a conscious and constant union with the divine Presence and that I had done it *all alone*, with *absolutely nobody* to help me, not even books, you understand! When I found one — there came to my hands a little later Vivekananda’s *Raja Yoga* — it seemed to me so wonderful a thing, you see, that someone could explain something to me. This made me gain in a few months what would have perhaps taken me years to do.

I met a man. I was perhaps twenty-one then, I think, either twenty or twenty-one. I met a man who was an Indian, who came from here, and he spoke to me about the Gita. There was a translation, which, by the way, was quite bad, and he advised me to read it and gave me the key — his key, it was his key — he told me:

“Read the Gita, this translation of the Gita which is not up to much, but still that’s the only one in French.” At that time I wouldn’t have been able to understand anything in any other language. Besides, the English translations were as bad and I did not have. . . Sri Aurobindo had not yet written his.

He said, “Read the Gita, and take Krishna as the symbol of the immanent God, the inner Godhead.” This was all that he told me. He said to me, “Read it with that — the knowledge that Krishna represents the immanent God in the Gita, the God who is within you.” Well, in one month the whole work was done! (M6: 298-99)

The Mother’s remarks apropos the Gita

Sweet Mother, Sri Aurobindo speaks of “this executive world-Nature”. Is there an executive Nature on the other planes also?

On the other planes, what do you mean?

In the mind and higher up.

The earth-Nature contains not only matter — the physical and its different planes — but also the vital and the mind; all this is part of the earth-Nature.

And after that there is no Nature, that is to say, there is no longer this distinction. That belongs essentially to the material world as it is described here.¹

But, as Sri Aurobindo says, this is not “all the true truth”. He has simply given a summary of what is explained in the Gita. That is what the Gita says; it is not exactly like that.

Only, as he says, this may be useful, that is, instead of causing a confusion between the different parts of the being, this helps you to distinguish between what is higher and what is lower, what is turned towards the Divine and what is turned towards matter. It is a psychologically useful conception, but, in fact, that’s all there is to it. Things are not like that.

Sri Aurobindo writes: “Nature, — not as she is in her divine Truth, the conscious Power of the Eternal, but as she appears to us in the Ignorance, — is executive Force, mechanical in her steps, not consciously intelligent to our experiences of her, although all her works are instinct with an absolute intelligence.”

Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 91

1. In the passage of *The Synthesis of Yoga* (SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 91) the Mother had just read, Sri Aurobindo expounds the traditional distinction between Purusha and Prakriti, the Master of Nature and Nature, and describes the different stages of immersion of the Master of Nature in Nature, or of the soul in the activities of the world; then he shows the traditional path of the liberation of the spirit, which rises above Nature and becomes once again the Master of Nature. — Editorial note in CWM 8.

Nature is not consciously intelligent? . . .

There is an intelligence which acts in her and through her, in her action, but she is not conscious of this intelligence. You can understand this with animals. Take ants, for example. They do exactly what they have to do; all their work and organisation is something which really looks perfect. But they are not conscious of the intelligence which organises them. They are moved mechanically by an intelligence of which they are not aware. And even if you take the most developed animals, like the cat and dog for instance, they know exactly what they have to do: a cat bringing up its little ones brings them up just as well as a woman hers — sometimes better than a woman but it is impelled by an intelligence which moves it automatically. It is not conscious of the intelligence which makes it do things. It is not aware of it, it can't change anything at all in the movement by its own will. Something makes it act mechanically but over that it has no control.

If a human being intervenes and trains a cat, he can make it change its behaviour; but it is the consciousness of the human being which acts upon it, not its own consciousness. It is not conscious of the intelligence which makes it act.

And this kind of self-awareness, this possibility of watching oneself acting, of understanding why one does things, how one does them and, therefore, of having a control and changing the action — that belongs to the mind and in his own right to man. This is the essential difference between a man and an animal — that a man is conscious of himself, that he can become aware of the force which makes him act, and not only become aware of it but control it.

But all those who feel themselves driven by a force and say, “I was forced to do it”, without the participation of their will, show that they are still deeply rooted in animality, that is to say, in the inconscient. One begins to become a conscious human being only when one knows why one does things and when one is capable of changing one's action by a determined will, when one has a control. Before having any control, one is still more or less an animal with a small embryo of consciousness which is just beginning, a little flame flickering and trying to burn, and likely to be blown out by the slightest passing breeze.

“Nature as Prakriti is an inertly active Force, — for she works out a movement imposed upon her; but within her is One that knows. . . .

“The individual soul or the conscious being in a form may identify itself with this experiencing Purusha or with this active Prakriti. If it identifies itself with Prakriti, it is not master, enjoyer and knower. . . .”

The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 91

If Nature is led by the Power which is self-aware and if she does exactly what is imposed upon her, how is it that there are all these distortions? How can Nature distort things?

Yes, I was expecting that.

I tell you this is the theory of the Gita, it's not the whole Truth.

I heard this when I was in France; there are people who explain the Gita, saying there is no flame without smoke — which is not true. And starting from that they say, "Life is like that and you can't change it, it's like that. All you can do is to pass over to the side of the Purusha, become the governing force instead of being the force that is governed." That's all. But, as Sri Aurobindo says at the end, it is the theory of the Gita, it's not the whole truth; it is only a partial way of seeing things — useful, practical, convenient, but not wholly true.

If that is so, how is it that some of the disciples of Sri Aurobindo preach the message of the Gita for the salvation of the world?

That's their business. If that makes them happy, it's all the same to me.

But it has no connection with Sri Aurobindo's yoga?

One can't say no connection; but it's narrow-mindedness, that's all. They have caught hold of a small bit and make it the whole. But that happens to everybody. Who is capable of grasping the whole, I would like to know? Everyone grasps his bit and makes it his whole.

But Sri Aurobindo has explained . . .

Oh! but you are a propagandist! Why do you want to convince them? If they are content with that, leave them in their contentment. . . . If they come and tell you, "This is Sri Aurobindo's theory", you have the right to tell them, "No, you are mistaken, that is the traditional theory, this is not the theory of Sri Aurobindo." That's all. But you can't tell them, "You must change yours." If it pleases them, let them keep it.

It's very convenient. I saw this in France, in Paris, before coming to India, and I saw how very practical it was. First, it allows you to grasp a very profound and extremely useful truth, as I said; and then it shields you from all necessity of changing your outer nature.

It's so convenient, isn't it? You say, "I am like that, what can I do about it? I separate myself from Nature, I let her do whatever she likes, I am not this Nature, I am the Purusha. Ah! let her go her own way; after all, I can't change her." This is extremely convenient. And that is why people adopt it; for they imagine they are in the Purusha, but at the least scratch they fall right back into Prakriti, and then they fly into a temper or are in despair or fall ill. And that's that.

I heard someone who had, however, realised precisely this kind of identification

with the Purusha and radiated a very remarkable atmosphere; but he called dangerous revolutionaries all those who wanted to change something in the earth-Nature, all who wanted things on earth to change — wanted, for example, that suffering might be abolished or ultimately the necessity of death might be done away with, that there might be an evolution, a luminous progress requiring no destruction: “Ah! Those who think like that are dangerous revolutionaries. If need be, they should be put in prison!”

But if one wants to be wise even without becoming a great yogi, one must be able to look at all these things with a smile, and not be affected by them. You have your own experience; try to make it as true and complete as possible, but leave each one to his own experience. Unless they come seeking you as a guru and tell you, “Now, lead me to the Light and the Truth”; then, there your responsibility begins — but not before. (*Looking at a disciple*) He is longing to speak!

Sri Aurobindo has said, “The Gita . . . pauses at the borders of the highest spiritual mind and does not cross them into the splendours of the supramental Light.”

The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 87

By following the Gita, why doesn't one catch the central truth and come to the path of the supramental Yoga?

I don't know what you mean. But there are also many people who believe they are following the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and who don't reach the supramental truth.

It does not depend so much on the path one follows; it depends on the capacity one has.

But I am asking: the central truth of the Gita is surrender to the Lord — why doesn't one grasp that? . . . “Its highest mystery of absolute surrender to the Divine Guide, Lord and Inhabitant of our nature, is the central secret.”

The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 87

But of course, this is what is written in the Gita, that you must give yourself entirely. You know, in the Gita, Krishna is the Guide and inner Master, and you must give yourself entirely to Him, make a total surrender — so? I tell you, people profess one teaching or another, but they are not always able to follow it; they come to a certain point and stop.

I don't understand your difficulty. You mean that those who are convinced of the truth of the teaching of the Gita do not realise this teaching?

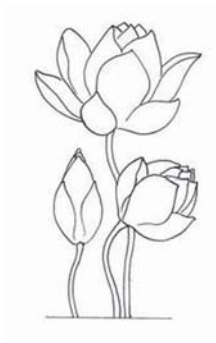
The teaching of surrender.

Yes, anyway the teaching contained in the Gita — and this surprises you? But there are countless people throughout the world who are convinced of the truth of a teaching, but that doesn't make them capable of realising it. For instance, all Buddhists, the millions of Buddhists in the world who profess that Buddhism is the truth — does this enable them to become like a Buddha? Certainly not. So, what is so surprising about that?

I told you why there are people who accept this even after having read and studied Sri Aurobindo: why they accept it, hold fast to it, cling to this teaching of the Gita; it is because it's comfortable, one doesn't need to make any effort to change one's nature: one's nature is unchangeable, so you don't at all need to think of changing it; you simply let it go its own way, you look at it from the top of your ivory tower and let it do whatever it likes, saying, "This is not I, I am not that."

This is very convenient, it may be done very rapidly — at least one could claim that it's done. As I said, in practice one is rarely consistent with one's theory; if you have a bad throat or a headache or have grazed your foot, you begin to cry out or complain, to groan, and so you are not detached, you are altogether attached and tightly bound. This is a very human fact.

Or else, when someone says something unpleasant to you, you get quite upset. It is like that — because you are closely attached to your nature, although you have declared you are not. That's all. (M8: 59-65)



A CONVERSATION OF 26 MARCH 1951

“At every moment one must know how to lose all in order to gain all.” What does this mean?

We have already spoken about this. When we enter upon the path of yoga, why do our dear ones leave us? One loses all worldly possessions, all one's attachments; sometimes, even, one loses one's position, and to gain what? — the most important thing, the only thing which is valuable: the divine Consciousness. And to gain this one must know how to lose all the goods of this world, to let go of all one's possessions, all desires, all attachments, all satisfactions; one must know how to lose all this if one wants to get the divine Consciousness.

It is a little paradoxical for the mind.

You have said that after finishing their development psychic beings could go to other worlds; yet, the psychic being belongs exclusively to the earth, doesn't it?

But the psychic being is not material, it is psychic! It is not bound to the material world; as soon as it stops living in a body, it goes away to the psychic world which is very far from being a material world.

How can one transform the vital?

The first step: will. Secondly, sincerity and aspiration. But will and aspiration are almost the same thing, one follows the other. Then, perseverance. Yes, perseverance is necessary in any process, and what is this process? . . . First, there must be the ability to observe and discern, the ability to find the vital in oneself, otherwise you will find it hard to say: “This comes from the vital, this comes from the mind, this from the body.” Everything will seem to you mixed and indistinct.

After a very sustained observation, you will be able to distinguish between the different parts and recognise the origin of a movement. Quite a long time is necessary for this, but one can go quite fast also, it depends upon people. But once you have found out the different parts ask yourself, “What is there of the vital in this? What does the vital bring into your consciousness? In what way does it change your movements; what does it add to them and what take away? What happens in your consciousness through the intervention of the vital?” Once you know this, what do you do? . . . Then you will need to watch this intervention, observe it, find out in

what way it works. For instance, you want to transform your vital. You have a great sincerity in your aspiration and the resolution to go to the very end. You have all that. You start observing and you see that two things can happen (many things can happen) but mainly two.

First, a sort of enthusiasm takes hold of you. You set to work earnestly. In this enthusiasm you think, "I am going to do this and that, I am going to reach my goal immediately, everything is going to be magnificent! It will see, this vital, how I am going to treat it if it doesn't obey!" And if you look carefully you will see that the vital is saying to itself, "Ah, at last, here's an opportunity!" It accepts, it starts working with all its zeal, all its enthusiasm and . . . all its impatience.

The second thing may be the very opposite. A sort of uneasiness: "I am not well, how tedious life is, how wearisome everything. How am I going to do all that? Will I ever reach the goal? Is it worth while beginning? Is it at all possible? Isn't it impossible?" It is the vital which is not very happy about what is going to be done for it, which does not want anyone to meddle in its affairs, which does not like all that very much. So it suggests depression, discouragement, a lack of faith, doubt — is it really worth the trouble?

These are the two extremes, and each has its difficulties, its obstacles.

Depression, unless one has a strong will, suggests, "This is not worth while, one may have to wait a lifetime." As for enthusiasm, it expects to see the vital transformed overnight: "I am not going to have any difficulty henceforth, I am going to advance rapidly on the path of yoga, I am going to gain the divine consciousness without any difficulty." There are some other difficulties. . . . One needs a little time, much perseverance. So the vital, after a few hours — perhaps a few days, perhaps a few months — says to itself: "We haven't gone very far with our enthusiasm, has anything been really done? Doesn't this movement leave us just where we were, perhaps worse than we were, a little troubled, a little disturbed? Things are no longer what they were, they are not yet what they ought to be. It is very tiresome, what I am doing." And then, if one pushes a little more, here's this gentleman saying, "Ah, no! I have had enough of it, leave me alone. I don't want to move, I shall stay in my corner, I won't trouble you, but don't bother me!" And so one has not gone very much farther than before.

This is one of the big obstacles which must be carefully avoided. As soon as there is the least sign of discontentment, of annoyance, the vital must be spoken to in this way, "My friend, you are going to keep calm, you are going to do what you are asked to do, otherwise you will have to deal with me." And to the other, the enthusiast who says, "Everything must be done now, immediately", your reply is, "Calm yourself a little, your energy is excellent, but it must not be spent in five minutes. We shall need it for a long time, keep it carefully and, as it is wanted, I shall call upon your goodwill. You will show that you are full of goodwill, you will obey, you won't grumble, you will not protest, you will not revolt, you will say

‘yes, yes’, you will make a little sacrifice when asked, you will say ‘yes’ wholeheartedly.”

So we get started on the path. But the road is very long. Many things happen on the way. Suddenly one thinks one has overcome an obstacle; I say “thinks”, because though one has overcome it, it is not totally overcome. I am going to take a very obvious instance, of a very simple observation. Someone has found that his vital is uncontrollable and uncontrolled, that it gets furious for nothing and about nothing. He starts working to teach it not to get carried away, not to flare up, to remain calm and bear the shocks of life without reacting violently. If one does this cheerfully, it goes quite quickly. (Note this well, it is very important: when you have to deal with your vital take care to remain cheerful, otherwise you will get into trouble.) One remains cheerful, that is, when one sees the fury rise, one begins to laugh. Instead of being depressed and saying, “Ah! In spite of all my effort it is beginning all over again”, one begins to laugh and says, “Well, well! One hasn’t yet seen the end of it. Look now, aren’t you ridiculous, you know quite well that you are being ridiculous! Is it worthwhile getting angry?” One gives it this lesson cheerfully. And really, after a while it doesn’t get angry again, it is quiet — and one relaxes one’s attention. One thinks the difficulty has been overcome, one thinks a result has at last been reached: “My vital does not trouble me any longer, it does not get angry now, everything is going fine.” And the next day, one loses one’s temper. It is then one must be careful, it is then one must not say, “Here we are, it’s no use, I shall never achieve anything, all my efforts are futile; all this is an illusion, it is impossible.” On the contrary, one must say, “I wasn’t vigilant enough.” One must wait long, very long, before one can say, “Ah! It is done and finished.” Sometimes one must wait for years, many years. . . .

I am not saying this to discourage you, but to give you patience and perseverance — for there is a moment when you do arrive. And note that the vital is a small part of your being — a very important part, we have said that it is the dynamism, the realising energy, it is very important; but it is only a small part. And the mind! . . . which goes wandering, which must be pulled back by all the strings to be kept quiet! You think this can be done overnight? And your body? . . . You have a weakness, a difficulty, sometimes a small chronic illness, nothing much, but still it is a nuisance, isn’t it? You want to get rid of it. You make efforts, you concentrate; you work upon it, establish harmony, and you think it is finished, and then. . . . Take, for instance, people who have the habit of coughing; they can’t control themselves or almost can’t. It is not serious but it is bothersome, and there seems to be no reason why it should ever stop. Well, one tells oneself, “I am going to control this.” One makes an effort — a yogic effort, not a material one—one brings down consciousness, force, and stops the cough. And one thinks, “The body has forgotten how to cough.” And it is a great thing when the body has forgotten, truly one can say, “I am cured.” But unfortunately it is not always true, for this goes down into the

subconscient and, one day, when the balance of forces is not so well established, when the strength is not the same, it begins again. And one laments, "I believed that it was over! I had succeeded and told myself, 'It is true that spiritual power has an action upon the body, it is true that something can be done', and there! it is not true. And yet it was a small thing, and I who want to conquer immortality! How will I succeed? . . . For years I have been free from this small thing and here it is beginning anew!" It is then that you must be careful.

You must arm yourself with an endless patience and endurance. You do a thing once, ten times, a hundred times, a thousand times if necessary, but you do it till it gets done. And not done only here and there, but everywhere and everywhere at the same time. This is the great problem one sets oneself. That is why, to those who come to tell me very light-heartedly, "I want to do yoga", I reply, "Think it over, one may do the yoga for a number of years without noticing the least result. But if you want to do it, you must persist and persist with such a will that you should be ready to do it for ten lifetimes, a hundred lifetimes if necessary, in order to succeed." I do not say it will be like that, but the *attitude* must be like that. Nothing must discourage you; for there are all the difficulties of ignorance of the different states of being, to which are added the endless malice and the unbounded cunning of the hostile forces in the world. . . . They are there, do you know why? They have been tolerated, do you know why? — simply to see how long one can last out and how great is the sincerity in one's action. For everything depends upon your sincerity. If you are truly sincere in your will, nothing will stop you, you will go right to the end, and if it is necessary for you to live a thousand years to do it, you will live a thousand years to do it.

Does not the vital seek its own transformation? It aspires but it is always the victim of things, of impulses from outside.

If it seeks to transform itself, it is truly wonderful! And if it aspires for transformation, it will try to free itself. If the vital is weak, its aspiration will be weak. And mark that weakness is an insincerity, a sort of excuse one gives oneself — not very, very consciously perhaps, but you must be told that the subconscient is a place full of insincerity. And the weakness which says, "I would like it so much, but I can't" is insincerity. Because, if one is sincere, what one cannot do today one will do tomorrow, and what one cannot do tomorrow one will do the day after, and so on, until one can do it. If you understand once for all that the entire universe (or, if you like, our earth, to concentrate the problem) is nothing other than the Divine who has forgotten Himself, where will you find a place for weakness there? Not in the Divine surely! Then, in forgetfulness. And if you struggle against forgetfulness you struggle against weakness, and to the extent you draw closer to the Divine your weakness disappears.

And that holds good not only for the mind, but also for the vital and even for the body. All suffering, all weaknesses, all incapacities are, in the last analysis, insincerities.

There are many places where insincerity may be lodged, and hence it should never be said as so often people say to me, "I am perfectly sincere." It is like those who assure you, "I have never told a lie." If you were perfectly sincere, you would be the Divine, if you had never told a lie, that is, something that is not true, you would be the Truth! So, as you are neither the Divine nor the Truth in fact (you are that in essence but not in fact), you have always a long way to go to reach the Truth and sincerity.

You need not look unhappy because it is like that.

It is like those people in despair who tell you, "Why is the world so frightful?" What is the use of lamenting, since it is like that? The only thing you can do is to work to change it. Naturally, from a speculative point of view one may try to understand, but the human mind is incapable of understanding such things. For the moment it is quite useless. What is useful is to change it. We all agree that the world is detestable, that it is not what it ought to be, and the only thing we have to do is to work to make it otherwise. Consequently, our whole preoccupation should be to find the best means of making it different; and we can understand one thing, it is that the best means (though we do not know it quite well yet), is we ourselves, isn't it? And surely you know yourself better than you know your neighbour — you understand better the consciousness manifested in a human being than that manifested in the stars, for instance. So, after a little hesitation you could say, "After all, the best means is what I am. I don't know very well what I am, but this kind of collection of things that I am, this perhaps is my work, this is perhaps my part of the work, and if I do it as well as I can, perhaps I shall be doing the best I can do." This is a very big beginning, very big. It is not overwhelming, not beyond the limits of your possibilities. You have your work at hand, it is always within your reach, so to say, it is always there for you to attend to it — a field of action proportionate to your strength, but varied enough, complex, vast, deep enough to be interesting. And you explore this unknown world.

Many people tell you, "But then this is egoism!" It is egoism if you do it in an egoistic way, for your personal profit, if you try to acquire powers, to become powerful enough to influence others, or if you seek means to make a comfortable life for yourself. Naturally, if you do it in this spirit, it will be egoistic. But the beauty of it is that you will not get anywhere! You will begin by deceiving yourself, you will live in increasing illusions and you will fall back into a greater and greater obscurity. Consequently, things are organised much better than one thinks; if you do your work egoistically (we have said that our field of work is always within our reach), it will come to nothing. And hence the required condition is to do it with an absolute sincerity in your aspiration for the realisation of the divine work. So if you

start like that I can assure you that you will have such an interesting journey that even if it takes very long, you will never get tired. But you must do it like that with an intensity of will, with perseverance and that indispensable cheerfulness which smiles at difficulties and laughs at mistakes. Then everything will go well.

What mirror is that which can reflect the Supreme?

Consciousness itself. It is because that is there, without it one would never get anywhere. If the supreme Consciousness were not at the centre of all creation, never could the creation become aware of the Consciousness.

To transform the vital one must have will, perseverance, sincerity, etc. But in what part of the being are all these things found?

The source of sincerity, of will, of perseverance is in the psychic being, but this translates itself differently in different people. Generally it is in the higher part of the mind that this begins to take shape, but for it to be effective at least one part of the vital must respond, because the intensity of your will comes from there, the realising power of the will comes from its contact with the vital. If there were only refractory elements in the vital, you would not be able to do anything at all. But there is always something, somewhere, which is willing — it is perhaps something insignificant, but there is always something which is willing. It is enough to have had once one minute of aspiration and a will even if it be very fugitive, to become conscious of the Divine, to realise the Divine, for it to flash like lightning through the whole being — there are even cells of the body which respond. This is not visible all at once, but there is a response everywhere. And it is by slowly, carefully, putting together all these parts which have responded, though it be but once, that one can build up something which will be coherent and organised, and which will permit one's action to continue with will, sincerity and perseverance.

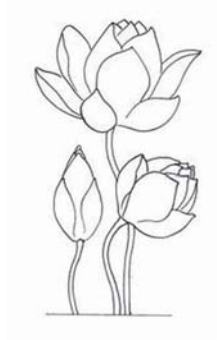
Even a fleeting idea in a child, at a certain moment in its childhood when the psychic being is most in front, if it succeeds in penetrating through the outer consciousness and giving the child just an impression of something beautiful which must be realised, it creates a little nucleus and upon this you build your action. There is a vast mass of humanity to whom one would never say, "You must realise the Divine" or "Do yoga to find the Divine." If you observe well you will see that it is a tiny minority to whom this can be said. It means that this minority of beings is "prepared" to do yoga, it is that. It is that there has been a beginning of realisation — a beginning is enough. With others it is perhaps an old thing, an awakening which may come from past lives. But we are speaking of those who are less ready; they are those who have had at a certain moment a flash which has passed through their whole being and created a response, but that suffices. This does not happen to

many people. Those ready to do yoga are not many if you compare them with the unconscious human mass. But one thing is certain, the fact that you are all here proves that at least you have had that — there are those who are very far on the path (sometimes they have no idea about it), but at least all of you have had that, that kind of spontaneous integral contact which is like an electric shock, a lightning-flash which goes through you and wakes you up to something: there is something to be realised. It is possible that the experience is not translated into words, only into a flame. That is enough. And it is around this nucleus that one organises oneself, slowly, slowly, progressively. And once it is there it never disappears. It is only if you have made a pact with the adverse forces and make a considerable effort to break the contact and not notice its existence, that you may believe it has disappeared. And yet a single flash suffices for it to come back.

If you have had this just once, you may tell yourself that in this life or another you are sure to realise.

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1950-51, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 4, pp. 247-56)



**“SKY-RIMS” —
CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO**

Sri Aurobindo —

Will you please tell me the worth of these lines both as poetry and sonnet?

SKY-RIMS

As each gigantic vision of sky-rim
Preludes yet stranger spaces of the sea,
For those who dare the rapturous wave-whim
Of soul's uncharted trance-profundity
There is no end to God-horizonry:
A wideness ever new awaits behind
Each ample sweep of plumbless harmony
atreatle
Circling with vistaed gloriole the mind.

For the Divine is no fixed paradise,
But truth beyond great truth — a spirit-heave
From unimaginable sun-surprise
Of beauty to immense love-lunar eve,
Dreaming through lone sidereal silence on
To yet another revelatory dawn!

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

It is very good poetry and a very good sonnet — except for the last line where the vice is the word “revelatory” which is flat and prosaic, at any rate here. I would use “revealing” backed by another (and, if possible revealing) adjective.

16 December 1933

*

Sri Aurobindo —

I am very glad and thankful you have drawn my attention to “revelatory”. Will the line be up to the mark thus:

To yet another rich revealing dawn?

Or do you prefer:

To yet another } splendid mood-dawn?
 } mood-miraculous dawn?

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

The first will do, I suppose, though “rich” is not revealing — the others are too artificially splendid. “Miraculous” without “mood” would be tempting if there were no gap to fill.

21 December 1933

*

Sri Aurobindo —

I know “rich” is not quite adequate, though of all the epithets I can think of at present it seems the least objectionable. But how if I write the line like this —

To yet another ecstasy of dawn?

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

It is better than anything yet proposed. The difficulty is that the preceding lines of the sestet are so fine that anything ordinary in the last line sounds like a sinking or even an anticlimax. The real line that was intended to be there has not yet been found.

22 December 1933

[*To Sri Aurobindo*]

One more shot:

To yet another veil-uplifting dawn!

Sri Aurobindo’s answer:

Not very uplifting.

*

Sri Aurobindo —

How does the sestet of my “Sky-Rims” read with the last line I have now thought of:

. . . For the Divine is no fixed paradise,
But truth beyond great truth — a spirit-heave
From unimaginable sun-surprise
Of beauty to immense love-lunar eve,
Dreaming through lone sidereal silence on
To yet another alchemy of dawn!

P.S. Harin suggests “lambency” as an alternative.

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

That is quite satisfactory — you have got the right thing at last.

6 January 1934

SKY-RIMS

As each gigantic vision of sky-rim
Preludes yet stranger spaces of the sea,
For those who dare the rapturous wave-whim
Of soul’s uncharted trance-profundity
There is no end to God-horizonry:
A wideness ever new awaits behind
Each ample sweep of plumbless harmony
Circling with vistaed gloriole the mind.

For the Divine is no fixed paradise,
But truth beyond great truth — a spirit-heave
From unimaginable sun-surprise
Of beauty to immense love-lunar eve,
Dreaming through lone sidereal silence on
To yet another alchemy of dawn!

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

Addendum:

In a short talk recorded at the beginning of the 1970s Amal recited “Sky-Rims”. His explanation regarding the last line:

. . . I, wanting to satisfy Sri Aurobindo as well achieve as good an effect as I could, wouldn’t accept that comment [22 December 1933] as final. So I started to look for another word to go in place of ‘ecstasy’. At that time I had a poet-friend here — a very gifted person [*Harindranath Chattopadhyaya*]. He also set his mind to finding the inevitable word. He struck upon a certain word and came to me and said, “Why don’t you try this?” I said, “All right, let’s see what it is.” He said, “To yet another lambency of dawn.”

Well, that makes a pretty poetic verse. But still I felt that it did not fit into my [. . .]. I wanted something else to be expressed there. So I said, “Well, your effort is quite apt and if you had written a poem of this kind on the same subject it would have been the perfect close. As for me, I think I want something else.” And so I went on trying for the right word [*alchemy*]. . . .

For me true poetry is beyond all philosophy and beyond all explanation.

The Mother

(*On Education*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 12, p. 241)

POEMS ON MUSIC

The first adesh (Divine Command) Mother gave me:

In 1961, at the age of twenty-three, . . . I first met Mother on the second floor of the Ashram main building. . . . To be given an appointment with her was the greatest gift one could hope to receive.

She had asked about my music as I had been given a scholarship to Hunter College in Manhattan by the great mezzo-soprano, Regina Resnik, in preparation for a career at the Metropolitan Opera. Her teacher, Rosalie Miller, was also my voice teacher.

Mother asked me, "Is the music with you now?" I replied, "Yes, Mother, it is always with me." Mother answered, "Not always." And then, after a deep silence, she said to me in a powerful voice, "You must bring down a new music." Since I had already been singing professionally in a number of languages in New York and New Jersey and being moved by the way composers had taken the poetry of great poets of their country and united both arts in a divine harmony, I said to Mother, "Mother, I don't know how to combine words and music." Mother replied, "No, No, you must go far above words and bring down the pure music."

NEW ANTHEMS TO THE ONE

A greater music waits unscored above,
Its cadences too fine for human ear
Its harmonies unheard in earth's dull air
The rapture-chant of the eternal Seer.

We've sung so many masses for the dead
And requiems to God's great sacrifice,
Shall there be no oratorios to the light
Or overtures that sing of Paradise.

Might we wake to His rhythms beyond time
And dance that frees the soul to wonder-flights,
The melodious song of heaven in our hearts
And descant voices calling from the heights.

We will compose new anthems to the One
Whose ecstasies transcend our mortal dreams

Arpeggios that leap with godhead's laugh
And variations on eternal themes.

— 0 —

O MUSIC

If heaven's vaults would open to my prayer
And music of the newer world descend
Harmonious to heal the earth's despair
Its rancour and its rivalries to end,

For this my life as instrument I give
And listen for the sanctifying sound,
To hear again those subtle strains I live
That open to us the spirit's native ground.

For there the forces of division fail,
The fuel that fires our greed, our hate, our lust,
In flames consumed, so bright the sun seems pale
And all our littleness reduced to dust.

O Music, touch our hearts, play on these strings
The songs that tune our lives to higher things.

— 0 —

SONG OF SACRIFICE

Our song of sacrifice must rise beyond
The temporal to fill the halls of time,
And gratitude in simple concert lift
The human spirit nearer the divine,
Each moment in this mortal life become
A hymn of offering, a chant of love,
Joy's chorale that calls the soul to us
To orchestrate the movements of our lives
And harmonise the discords of our being.
Music now a tool of mental make
Must wake to harmonies and strains unheard
Descending in the silent cavern space.

— 0 —

SONGS OF ECSTASY

I have penned my thoughts on shifting sands
 Obliterated by the sea,
 What I have built with awkward hands
 Is but a dreamer's legacy.

The depths of being I do not know,
 The heights remain unrealised,
 The spirit's lamp is but aglow,
 Immortal yet undivinisèd.

But my soul is guided through the night
 In the unfolding mystery,
 By One who made me for delight
 To sing my songs of ecstasy.

— 0 —

WHEN SHALL WE

When shall we hear beyond the shoals
 Of ignorant seas in which we strive,
 The music chambered in our souls,
 The harmony for which we live,
 The 'aves' of a thousand choirs
 Chanting the marriage of the dawn,
 And melodies the heart desires
 Through star-clad night and sun-bright morn.
 When shall we see undimmed by tears,
 With the awakened eye within
 Beauty's face that through the years
 Above our songs of sadness and sin?
 When shall we dream and recreate
 The joy supreme known to those
 Great spirit guides who watch and wait
 For darkness failing in its throes.
 When shall we be, not just become,
 No longer think but love and know
 Our earth, our skies, our spirit's home,
 The grace descending here below.

— 0 —

THE MUSIC OF THE FUTURE

The music of the future calls to us,
 Its harmonies too subtle for the ear
 As we our few and tired chords repeat
 That move us less with every passing year.

Shall no new anthems sound upon our souls,
 Or melodies descend from heights sublime
 To open us to hidden worlds above,
 Beyond the finite boundaries of time.

I sing of joy that lurks in sadness' heart
 And love that lives within the core of hate,
 Of beauty waiting on the sill of life
 That would descend and change our deathbound fate.

For I have glimpsed in human form the Lord
 Who opens us to heavens full with song,
 He brings to earth the great transforming word
 Intones the strophes for which our spirits long,

In chant and magic symphonies of light,
 Awakes the deadened inner ear to sound
 Transcendent, modes that move the sun and stars,
 As rhythms of the greater life resound.

— 0 —

THERE IS A MUSIC

There is a music heard within the soul,
 Melodious but to the mind unknown,
 A single note that contains the whole,
 All sounds it seems and yet a sound alone.

It is a drone that makes the silence ring
 And the enchanting music of the spheres,
 A great cathedral bell's awakening
 Or temple gong across the bridge of years.

At birth its music hums in crystal tones,
 At death it sings the weary soul to rest
 Its chant safe passage through the danger zones
 Swelling to a hymn among the blessed.

The mantra of love, it is the distant OM
 That in our hearts now finds its lasting home.

— 0 —

MUSIC LIKE AN ANTHEM OF THE SOUL

Music like an anthem of the soul
 In waves of ecstasy descending came,
 One body sang, one voice rose up in prayer
 Calling on the great transforming name
 To guide the heart to realms of unsung bliss
 And catch the unvoiced stanzas of delight,
 To open wide through sound the spirit's door
 This finite life to bear the Infinite:
 Chanting the hymns of love that made the world,
 Intoning the stanzas of the ode divine,
 United tongued a new creation sing
 Embracing all, the deity enshrine.

— 0 —

IS THERE A MUSIC?

Is there a music to the listening ear
 Unrecognised as ether to the eye,
 Is there a sound that every sound contains
 Whose music guides our human destiny?
 Is there an ode divine we cannot hear
 Of which our lives are but a brief refrain,
 Is there a Singer of celestial song
 Whose music can assuage our human pain
 And carry us upon its silver waves,
 Melt a frozen heart or move a star,
 Refashion us to sacred harmonies
 That we may become what we truly are.

— 0 —

INNER MUSIC

A sound above our singing calls,
 A flute in night's lament,
 A secret bearing pure delight
 And deep divine intent.

— 0 —

NARAD (RICHARD EGGENBERGER)

(From Narad's *Poems on Music, Love, Poetry, and Prayer*)

I heard a Sufi mystic, who was besides a great musician, an Indian, saying that for the Sufis there was a state higher than that of adoration and surrender to the Divine, than that of devotion, that this was not the last stage; the last stage of the progress is when there is no longer any distinction; you have no longer this kind of adoration or surrender or consecration; it is a very simple state in which one makes no distinction between the Divine and oneself. They know this. It is even written in their books. It is a commonly known condition in which everything becomes quite simple. There is no longer any difference. There is no longer that kind of ecstatic surrender to "Something" which is beyond you in every way, which you do not understand, which is merely the result of your aspiration, your devotion. There is no difference any longer. When the union is perfect, there is no longer any difference.

The Mother

(*Questions and Answers 1953, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 5, p. 57*)

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

This article largely consists of a series of vignettes or evocative episodes on the delightful personality of Sri Aurobindo — based on observations made by Sri Aurobindo’s family members, relatives, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, associates, students, revolutionary comrades and others — during the time of his early adulthood, when he served at the Baroda State Service.

The events reflect attributes or aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s character or individuality. Sri Aurobindo has stated: “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”.¹

The Baroda stay can be divided into two phases: 1893 to 1904 was his pre-yogic phase and the following years — from 1904 to 1908 — was prior to his “first complete realisation of the Nirvana in the Self”.² Yet his innate divinity, during both these periods, was apparent to many who knew him.

The incidents in Sri Aurobindo’s early life are so inspiring and instructive that they could help the reader to imbibe, in however small a measure, the virtues Sri Aurobindo demonstrated.

Indeed, Sri Aurobindo’s demeanour could serve as a model for any aspirant, for has not Sri Aurobindo written, “Adore and what you adore attempt to be.”³ Interestingly, the Mother has said:

Moreover, it is a well-known fact that one grows into the likeness of what one loves. Therefore if you want to be like the Divine, love Him alone.⁴

The Mother has also written:

There is only one true love — it is the Divine Love; all other loves are diminutions, limitations and deformations of that Love. Even the love of the bhakta for his God is a diminution and often is tainted by egoism. But as one tends quite naturally to become like what one loves, the bhakta, if he is sincere, begins to become like the Divine whom he adores, and thus his love becomes purer and purer.⁵

1. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 98.

2. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 255.

3. CWSA, Vol. 3, p. 527.

4. CWM, Vol. 12, 2nd Ed., p. 69.

5. CWM, Vol. 16, 2nd Ed., p. 297.

In the evening talks Sri Aurobindo has reportedly said: “Emotion, in the case of friendship or love, however intense, is still human. Ultimately it must be freed from the human element altogether and turned towards the Divine.”⁶

Sri Aurobindo reassures us: “If the Bhakta seeks and yearns after Bhagavan, Bhagavan also seeks and yearns after the Bhakta.”⁷ A similar sentiment is expressed when Sri Aurobindo writes: “He who chooses the Infinite has been chosen by the Infinite.”⁸

The Mother had once remarked: “Sri Aurobindo is a gentleman; he won’t say anything that might hurt”.⁹

Speaking on the quintessential character of a gentleman, Nirodbaran quotes J. H. Newman (1801-1890) from the celebrated piece, “A Gentleman”:

It is almost a definition of a gentleman to say he is one who never inflicts pain. . . . He is mainly occupied in merely removing the obstacles which hinder the free and unembarrassed action of those about him; . . . The true gentleman in like manner carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or a jolt in the minds of those with whom he is cast; — all clashing of opinion, or collision of feeling, . . . his great concern being to make everyone at their ease and at home. . . . he guards against unseasonable allusions, or topics which may irritate . . . He never speaks of himself except when compelled, never defends himself by a mere retort, he has no ears for slander or gossip, . . . He is never mean or little in his disputes, never takes unfair advantage, . . . He has too much good sense to be affronted at insults, he is too well employed to remember injuries, and too indolent to bear malice. He is patient, forbearing, and resigned, on philosophical principles . . .¹⁰

Nirodbaran then continues: “For my part I can say that in every fibre of his being, Sri Aurobindo was a perfect gentleman.”¹¹

Most significantly, Nirodbaran says that the Mother once said that “in all her life, she found only one true gentleman and that is Sri Aurobindo.”¹²

In the course of the article we shall discover Sri Aurobindo was already a thorough gentleman in his pre-Pondicherry days.

Sri Aurobindo has written how nobility of nature incorporates elements of divine nature:

6. V. Chidanandam, ‘Sri Aurobindo at Evening Talk’, *Mother India*, June 1970, p. 273.

7. CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 32.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

9. Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2005, p. 47.

10. Nirodbaran, ‘Sri Aurobindo — Perfect Gentleman’, *Mother India*, August 1970, p. 406.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 407.

12. *Talks by Nirodbaran — December 1969 to July 1970*, Edited by Sunayana and Maurice, 2018, p. 32.

. . . the teaching of the Gita springs from an Indian creed and to the Indian mind compassion has always figured as one of the largest elements of the divine nature. The Teacher himself enumerating in a later chapter the qualities of the godlike nature in man places among them compassion to creatures, gentleness, freedom from wrath and from the desire to slay and do hurt, no less than fearlessness and high spirit and energy.¹³

Sri Aurobindo has also written:

The Deva nature is distinguished by an acme of the sattwic habits and qualities; self-control, sacrifice, the religious habit, cleanness and purity, candour and straightforwardness, truth, calm and self-denial, compassion to all beings, modesty, gentleness, forgivingness, patience, steadfastness, a deep sweet and serious freedom from all restlessness, levity and inconstancy are its native attributes. . . . But its gentleness and self-denial and self-control are free too from all weakness: it has energy and soul force, strong resolution, the fearlessness of the soul that lives in the right and according to the truth as well as its harmlessness, *tejah*, *abhayam*, *dhr̥tiḥ*, *ahimsā*, *satyam*. The whole being, the whole temperament is integrally pure; there is a seeking for knowledge and a calm and fixed abiding in knowledge. This is the wealth, the plenitude of the man born into the Deva nature.¹⁴

In 1972 the Mother was asked, “What are the rules of conduct You consider indispensable in our community?” She replied,

Patience, perseverance, generosity, broad-mindedness, insight, calm and understanding firmness, and control over the ego until it is completely mastered or even abolished.¹⁵

We shall see that as a young adult Sri Aurobindo had these qualities in abundant measure.

Sri Aurobindo has referred to the first phase of his adult life as “Life of preparation at Baroda 1893-1906”¹⁶ and said that his time at the Baroda Service “were years of self-culture, of literary activity — for much of the poetry afterwards published from Pondicherry was written at this time — and of preparation for his future work.”¹⁷

13. CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 58.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 471-72.

15. CWM, Vol. 12, 2nd Ed., p. 374.

16. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 14.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

As regards his interest in philosophy and his practice of spiritual life in Baroda, Sri Aurobindo stated that he

. . . took no interest in philosophy at all at that time; he was interested in the sayings and life of Ramakrishna and the utterances and writings of Vivekananda, but that was almost all with regard to spiritual life; he had inner experiences, from the time he stepped on to the shores of India, but did not associate them at that time with Yoga about which he knew nothing. Afterwards when he learned or heard something about it from Deshpande and others, he refused to take it up because it seemed to him a retreat from life.¹⁸

Sri Aurobindo joined the Baroda State Service on 8th February 1893. After an uninterrupted service of 13 years, he took two months privilege leave from 1 March 1906 (whole of the first term of the college) to which he attached the summer vacation and spent the whole period in Bengal to engage himself in political work. In June 1906 he returned to Baroda and requested 12 months' leave without pay which was sanctioned by the Baroda State w.e.f. 18th June 1906. After a year he returned to Baroda and formally resigned from the Baroda State Service on 18th June 1907.¹⁹ He was 20 when he joined and 34 when he resigned and this article primarily covers this period.

In a brief sketch of his life in Baroda Sri Aurobindo has written:

In England he had received, according to his father's express instructions, an entirely occidental education without any contact with the culture of India and the East. At Baroda he made up the deficiency, learned Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages, assimilated the spirit of Indian civilisation and its forms past and present. A great part of the last years of this period was spent on leave in silent political activity, for he was debarred from public action by his position at Baroda. The outbreak of the agitation against the partition of Bengal in 1905 gave him the opportunity to give up the Baroda Service and join openly in the political movement. He left Baroda in 1906 and went to Calcutta as Principal of the newly-founded Bengal National College.

The political action of Sri Aurobindo covered eight years, from 1902 to 1910. During the first half of this period he worked behind the scenes, preparing with other co-workers the beginnings of the Swadeshi (Indian Sinn Fein) movement, till the agitation in Bengal furnished an opening for the public initiation of a more forward and direct political action than the moderate reformism which had till then been the creed of the Indian National Congress.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

19. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 86.

In 1906 Sri Aurobindo came to Bengal with this purpose and joined the New Party, an advanced section small in numbers and not yet strong in influence, which had been recently formed in the Congress.²⁰

In order to give a more comprehensive portrayal of the Baroda period we have tried to widen the range of the article by including other additional material such as Sri Aurobindo's activities, achievements, interactions etc. It also touches upon some of the personalities — family, friends and associates in Baroda and Bengal — who were close to Sri Aurobindo. In the odd instance we have traversed into the pre- or post-Baroda phases but this is only to reiterate a point; or to give a backdrop or a consequence to an observation, situation or event. At any rate, Sri Aurobindo has referred his time at Baroda as his 'Life of Preparation' and so the Baroda period had ramifications in his later life. Some of Sri Aurobindo's letters, writings and conversations are also contextually included to give a clearer picture of his life at that time.

At Baroda Sri Aurobindo was highly respected as a superlative classics scholar, linguist, litterateur and poet but intriguingly he was adored for his kindness, simplicity, modesty and selflessness by those who knew him then and just after. Dinendra Kumar Roy (1869-1943), a rising Bengali writer well received in Bengal's literary circles stayed with Sri Aurobindo as a companion from 1898 until 1900. Sri Aurobindo notes: "Dinendra lived with Sri Aurobindo as a companion and his work was rather to help him to correct and perfect his knowledge of the language and to accustom him to conversation in Bengali than any regular teaching."²¹

For a period of two years Dinendra Kumar Roy was living day and night with Sri Aurobindo in the same house (and even the same room) and thus was in a position to closely observe a rather young Sri Aurobindo. At that time Sri Aurobindo was leading a quiet life and was largely unknown in Bengal. Later when Sri Aurobindo became a public figure Suresh Chandra Samajpati — one of the leading journalists in contemporary Bengal — urged Dinendra Kumar Roy to write something on Sri Aurobindo about this period when he was mostly not known. Subsequently Dinendra Kumar Roy published his Bengali book, *Aurobindo Prasanga*, in 1923. In the preface of the book Roy writes:

My beloved friend, the late Suresh Chandra Samajpati, once said to me: "When Aurobindo was at Baroda few Bengalis knew him and recognised his worth. Nobody was aware of the treasure that lay hidden in the desert of Gujarat. . . . But during his long stay there, you were the only Bengali who was fortunate enough to have the opportunity of knowing him intimately and observing him

20. CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 5-6.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

at close quarters for some time. . . . Today new Bengal is eager to hear about him. . . . Today millions of Bengali readers are, indeed, very anxious to know something of the past life of Aurobindo. I hope the holy saga of this dedicated votary of Mother India will be appreciated by the youth of Bengal. . . . I believe that in future, people born in Bengal with a heart will feel joy and satisfaction discussing the life of Sri Aurobindo.”²²

The article has been divided into several chapters, each highlighting a special characteristic of Sri Aurobindo.

1. KINDNESS AND COMPASSION (Part 1)

Living with Sri Aurobindo at such close quarters, it did not take much time for Dinendra Kumar Roy to realise that Sri Aurobindo was from another world — a heavenly world of goodness, beauty and purity. He writes:

He was so simple in worldly matters that everyone cheated him. But since he had no attachment to money the cheating did not affect him.²³

Sri Aurobindo was always very observant of people and events. His perceptive and path-breaking articles, written as a mere 21-year-old, in the journal *Indu Prakash* are a testament to this. These articles questioned the ‘general timidity of the Congress’ and “vehemently denounced the then congress policy of pray, petition and protest and called for a dynamic leadership based upon self-help and fearlessness.”²⁴ He called the four-time Prime Minister of Britain, the legendary William Gladstone “not only quite unprincipled and in no way to be relied upon, but whose intervention in an Indian debate has always been of the worst omen to our cause.”²⁵ Referring to the time when he just arrived in Baroda Sri Aurobindo wrote about himself: “He had already in England decided to devote his life to the service of his country and its liberation. He even began soon after coming to India to write on political matters (without giving his name) in the daily press, trying to awaken the nation to the ideas of the future.”²⁶ Sri Aurobindo has also stated that he “has always stood for India’s complete independence which he was the first to advocate publicly and without

22. Quoted in Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 87.

23. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, p. 25; translated by Maurice Shukla from Dinendra Kumar’s Bengali *Aurobindo Prasange*.

24. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 51.

25. CWSA, Vol. 6, p. 14.

26. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 67.

compromise as the only ideal worthy of a self-respecting nation.”²⁷ Undeniably, Sri Aurobindo had a kind of inimitable insight and vision.

Therefore, Roy’s statement that: “He was so simple in worldly matters that everyone cheated him”, seems a bit too simplistic. While Sri Aurobindo was detached from money and so simple that he did not concern himself much with the daily household finances, he was conscious that others benefitted from his kindness.

That Sri Aurobindo was very simple is expressed by none else than the Mother. Around 1956, the artist sadhak, Pramode Kumar Chatterji (1885-1979), had made a painting from Sri Aurobindo’s boyhood picture. When the Mother saw the picture she remarked: “His nature’s spontaneous simplicity and freshness have come out very well; he came to this world with these virtues. His inner beauty is visible in front. He had no idea of worldly life.”²⁸

Concerning his early life Sri Aurobindo himself admitted his innocence in worldly matters. Referring to the time in late 1892, after passing out from Kings College, Cambridge:

It is strange how things arrange themselves at times. When I failed in the I. C. S. riding test and was looking for a job, exactly at that time the Gaekwad happened to be in London. I don’t know whether he called us or we met him. An elderly gentleman whom we consulted wanted us to propose Rs. 200 per month. It was just a little more than 10 pounds, and it is surprising that he thought it was very good! But I left the negotiations to my eldest brother and James Cotton. I knew nothing about life at that time.²⁹

From the tender age of seven till the age of twenty-one Sri Aurobindo spent his student years in England with very little emotional and financial support from his parents, except the rare letter from his father, Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose (1844-1892). His stay in England was a struggle especially for one year when he and his eldest brother had to face extreme poverty.

On completion of his Classical Tripos at Kings College, Cambridge, Sri Aurobindo set sail from England on 12th January 1893 and arrived at the Apollo Bunder, Bombay on 6th February. As he set foot on Indian soil an inexplicable ‘vast calm’ descended upon him which remained with him for months. He notes: “He knew nothing about India or her culture etc.”³⁰ From Bombay he directly went to Baroda arriving there on 8th February. He commenced his work at the Baroda State Service on 18th February but for some unknown reason the Maharaja retroactively paid him from 8th February.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 472.

28. Nirodbaran, *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, p. 10.

29. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 636.

30. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 29.

Initially, Sri Aurobindo served in several administrative departments. He “was first put in the Land Settlement Department, for a short time in the Stamps Office, then in the central Revenue Office and in the Secretariat.”³¹ The administrative work consisted of pushing files and office work, quite similar to work at the I.C.S. which he had rejected since he had detested it. When this was later pointed out to Sri Aurobindo, he said: “True, but with a difference. Baroda was a native State under a native ruler. You did not have to be all attention to the superior English officer ruling your fate. There was much room for freedom and dignity.”³² Sri Aurobindo once amusingly reflected: “I wonder what would have happened to me if I had joined the Civil Service. I think they would have chucked me for laziness and arrears of my work!”³³ Although Sri Aurobindo was highly competent in his administrative work, his interest lay in academics. His talents in this field could not be ignored and the Maharaja had to acquiesce to Sri Aurobindo — with some prodding from Mr. Littledale, Principal of Baroda College — in having him inducted as a part-time Professor in Baroda College in 1897; since then his involvement at College steadily increased. “I wrote many memoranda for the Maharaja,” notes Sri Aurobindo, “but along the lines he gave me. As I said, I was not interested in administrative work and soon I got the Maharaja to transfer me to the College.”³⁴ In September 1900 Principal Tait sent a message to the Maharaja regarding the necessity of retaining Sri Aurobindo as a Professor, if the College was to improve as an institution.³⁵

About the period from 1897 Sri Aurobindo writes:

Afterwards without joining the College and while doing other work he was lecturer in French at the College and finally at his own request was appointed there as Professor of English. All through, the Maharaja used to call him whenever something had to be written which needed careful wording . . . Afterwards Sri Aurobindo became Vice-Principal of the College and was for some time acting Principal.³⁶

The dates on which Sri Aurobindo joined the various departments are mentioned in the footnote.³⁷

31. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

32. Nirodbaran, *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, p. 23 [See CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 40-41, See Sujata Nahar, *Mother's Chronicles*, Book V, pp. 17-18].

33. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo: a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 36.

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

35. See *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1st Ed., p. 20.

36. CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 41-42.

37. Sri Aurobindo joined the Land Survey Settlement Department in March 1894, then worked in the central Revenue Office and in the Secretariat in November 1895. He joined Baroda College as part time lecturer in French in 1897 and then was appointed Professor of English in February 1898. In September 1904 he became Vice-Principal and later was the acting Principal from March 1905 to February 1906.

Besides Sri Aurobindo's remarkable rise in Baroda College, his talents were constantly used by the Maharaja. For, it did not take long for the Maharaja to realise Sri Aurobindo's exceptional mastery of the English language. Thus, he entrusted him with "drawing up dispatches etc" at the Secretariat; additionally he also employed him for his personal work such as "writing letters, composing speeches or drawing up documents of various kinds which needed special care in the phrasing of the language."³⁸ The famous Marathi historian Govind Sakharam Sardesai notes: "Sri Aurobindo and myself were together with Sayaji Rao very often. . . . Sometimes men like Sri Aurobindo would pen out lectures for him."³⁹

Besides Sri Aurobindo's teaching at Baroda College and invaluable help to the Maharaja for his personal work, we know for a fact that Sri Aurobindo was outstanding in his administrative duties at the Baroda State Service. Decades later, when pressed by his biographer he admitted: "If . . . it were said that he was brilliant and quick and efficient in work, it would be more accurate."⁴⁰ There are many instances, which we shall deal with in a later chapter, from which it is apparent that the Maharaja considered Sri Aurobindo to be an exceptional talent with extraordinary capacities. For instance, he instructed that Sri Aurobindo was "a man of great powers and every use should be made of his talents."⁴¹

Dinendra Kumar Roy was appointed as Sri Aurobindo's Bengali teacher by his eldest maternal uncle, Jogendranath Bose, and approved by his maternal grandfather, Rajnarain Bose (1823-1899). Roy, a literary man and a writer, was recommended by Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). His articles in *Bharati*, a magazine edited by the Tagores, was well appreciated in Bengal's literary circles. Sri Aurobindo has referred to Dinendra Kumar Roy as "a young Bengali littérateur"⁴² and adds that he "was not a pupil of Dinendra Kumar; he had learnt Bengali already by himself and only called in Dinendra to help him in his studies."⁴³ Sri Aurobindo's favourite Bengali weekly was a journal called *Basumati*. Soon after Roy left Baroda he was coincidentally employed by this weekly and later became its editor.⁴⁴

Roy knew Sri Aurobindo to be an outstanding classics scholar, who moreover had not only passed the rigorous I.C.S. examination but secured record marks in Latin and Greek. Thus he was a bit nervous to teach him. Prior to his introduction to Sri Aurobindo, Roy was sceptical as he expected this distinguished Cambridge scholar to be dressed immaculately in European clothes, westernised, arrogant and rude — amongst other things. However, he was most surprised to see Sri Aurobindo's

38. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 42.

39. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 39.

40. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 43.

41. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1st Ed., p. 15.

42. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 43.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

44. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, pp. 40-41.

“soft dreamy eyes”. He was further surprised to see his simple native dress; he wore a coarse ordinary dhoti and his footwear was an undistinguished pair of Indian slippers with unfashionable upturned toes.⁴⁵

Roy soon realised that Sri Aurobindo’s personality was a marvellous blend of simplicity and unfathomable compassion. He narrates:

In any case, after a short acquaintance, I realised that there was nothing of the meanness and dross of earth in his heart. His laughter was like a child’s, simple, liquid and soft. . . . there was not the least force of worldly ambition or ordinary human selfishness in his heart; there was only a longing, rare even among the gods, to give himself in order to relieve others’ suffering.⁴⁶

Roy then goes on to state:

As I became acquainted with his nature, living together with him day and night, I realised that Aurobindo was not of this world. He was a god fallen from heaven.⁴⁷

Roy’s sentiment that Sri Aurobindo was “a god fallen from heaven” was echoed by Rajaram N. Patkar. Patkar came as a sixteen-year-old to Baroda in 1899 for further education and stayed with his brother-in-law K. G. Deshpande. Deshpande joined the Baroda State Service in 1898 — five years after Sri Aurobindo. Deshpande and Sri Aurobindo ‘were intimate friends’ due to their long association since their college days in England. At Baroda, for a while, they stayed together in one house and Patkar had the “good fortune to be in personal contact with Sri Aurobindo.”⁴⁸

Patkar later became a student of Sri Aurobindo and subsequently became an advocate in Baroda. In his reminiscences he narrates a touching incident reflecting Sri Aurobindo’s selfless benevolence:

One day a poor student approached Sri Aurobindo for help. Without asking him any question he quietly went to the table and gave a handful of rupees to him out of the amount lying in his tray without counting how much he gave him. The student went away quite satisfied and told me this incident. I spoke to my sister about this. She already knew his ways and she said to me, “We have got a Sadhu in our house; he is God’s good man and he deserves to be worshipped. Nobody can equal him in his saintly behaviour.” Since that time

45. See Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo — His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., pp. 55-56.

46. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, pp. 6-7.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

48. See Reminiscences of Rajaram N. Patkar dated 30 Sep 1956; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

my respect for him which was great — became greater and I began to worship him like God.⁴⁹

Dinendra Kumar Roy further adds: “The students of Baroda looked upon Aurobindo as a God.”⁵⁰

A Sindhi student, P. B. Chandwani, says: “I admired and remembered him like a God. While people would repeat the name of God, I used to repeat the name “Aurobindo, Aurobindo” in my mind. I have no words to express how much I was aflame with him.”⁵¹

Sri Aurobindo’s wife Mrinalini Devi (1887-1918) once told her cousin:

I had no other God except my husband. I have seen God’s manifestation in him alone. When he spoke I felt as if a distant bodiless sound was coming out of his mouth. When he looked at me, I felt as if two dreamy eyes were pouring down their effulgent rays on my body.⁵²

Mrinalini Devi’s cousin, Sailendra Basu writes: “Mrinalini says she considered Aurobindo as her God. Clearly saw the divinity in him. Wanted to die when he was snatched away from her [*when Sri Aurobindo was arrested in the Alipore Bomb Case*].”⁵³

Abinash Bhattacharya (1882-1962), who was associated with Sri Aurobindo from 1903 to 1909, writes of Sri Aurobindo:

In him I discovered a vast being, beyond my imaginings. . . . Into the confusion of the present-day world, bearing the perfection of Sri Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, descended the lord of my heart, Sri Aurobindo, endowed with divine life: He cannot die. The whole world will experience his glory in the not too distant future. I can hear the cry: “Fear not, fear not.”⁵⁴

Upendranath Banerji (1879-1950), a fellow revolutionary who was also a sub-editor at *Bande Mataram*, reportedly told a disciple:

49. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, May 2012, p. 349.

50. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, p. 25.

51. Har Kishan Singh, ‘Sri Aurobindo through the eyes of one of his students’, *Mother India*, August 1963.

52. Nirodbaran, *Mrinalini Devi*, pp. 12-13.

53. Sailendra Nath Basu, *Sri Aurobindo Sahadharmini, Mrinalini Devi Smriti Katha* (translated from Bengali); papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

54. Abhinash Bhattacharya, ‘Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, July 2012, p. 539; originally published in *Galpa-Bharati*, Vol. 6, 1950-51, pp. 829-50; translated from Bengali and reproduced in *Srinwantu*, November 1984.

How can I say I don't believe in God when I know Sri Aurobindo? I have a measuring rod for men and I can measure them all right; but in Sri Aurobindo's case I cannot measure him. In case of other great people they reach a certain point in their growth and then they stop, whereas in his case he is always going on further and further.⁵⁵

When this assessment was conveyed to Sri Aurobindo he responded with a smile and said, "I see."⁵⁶

Dr. Arthur R. S. Roy, who worked as the manager-cum-accountant at the *Bande Mataram* office, expressed his gratitude to Sri Aurobindo:

I knew nothing of accounts or managing a press; . . . when an accountant, one of the few Chartered Accountants in those days, began to point out my mistakes and expressed his utter disgust about my book-keeping, Aurobindo just looked at him and smiled at me and said, "He does not know book-keeping and we should have had a cashier who knew." I was much eased in the mind and grateful since I was getting quite nervous at the terrible bungle I had made of it all. It was at the *Bande Mataram* that I became closer to him and felt there was something big in him; but at that time I could not quite understand what it was that was big in him . . . He was a grand scholar . . . I was astounded to learn that in two years he had mastered Sanskrit and had actually translated *Bhagavat Gita*. . . . I believe he worked for 56 hours at a stretch without rest and he was even-tempered and seemed fresh throughout. He became a demigod to me.⁵⁷

Dr. C. R. Reddy (1880-1951), an educationist, essayist, poet and literary critic who succeeded Sri Aurobindo as Vice-Principal of the Baroda College, said:

I had the honour of knowing him. . . . We had a number of friends in common. Mr. A. B. Clark, the principal of the Baroda College, remarked to me, "So you met Aurobindo Ghosh. Did you notice his eyes? There is mystic fire and light in them. They penetrate into the beyond." And he added, "If Joan of Arc heard heavenly voices, Aurobindo probably sees heavenly visions." Clark was a materialist of materialists. I have never been able to understand how that worldly but delightful person could have glimpsed the truth, then latent, about Aurobindo.⁵⁸

Commenting on A. B. Clark's remark, Sri Aurobindo's official biographer, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, writes: "The reference to Joan of Arc was prophetic: if

55. See A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., p. 631.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Manoj Das, 'Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi', *Mother India*, December 2013, p. 1029.

58 K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo: a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 55.

St. Joan was ultimately to redeem France, wasn't Sri Aurobindo destined likewise to be the redeemer of India?"⁵⁹

In 1906, Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907), the fiery, courageous and respected editor of *Sandhya*, had this to say of Sri Aurobindo:

Have you ever seen the spotless all-white lotus? The hundred petalled lotus in full bloom in India's Manasarovar! No lily or daffodil this, growing in odd and obscure corners of a European dwelling, scentless, mere play and display of colour! Of no use in worship of the gods, of no need in a sacrificial celebration. Sheer pomp and vanity in the western way. Our Aurobindo is a rare phenomenon in the world. In him resides the sattvic divine beauty, snow-white, resplendent. Great and vast — vast in the amplitude of his heart, great in the glory of his own self, his swadharma as a Hindu. So pure and complete a man — a fire-charged thunder, yet tender and delicate as the lotus-leaf. A man rich in knowledge, self-lost in meditation. You can nowhere find his like in all the three worlds. In order to free the land from her chains, Aurobindo has broken through the glamour of western civilisation, renounced all worldly comfort, and now as a son of the Mother, he has taken charge of the 'Bande Mataram'. He is the Bhavananda, Jivananda, Dhirananda of Rishi Bankim, all in one.⁶⁰

The editor's portrayal of Sri Aurobindo can be measured in light of Sri Aurobindo's assessment made many years later: "Brahmabandhava Upadhyaya, editor of *Sandhya*, was another great man. He used to write so cleverly that the Government could not charge him."⁶¹

Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay, a colleague of Sri Aurobindo at the Bengal National College during the period 1906-07 — he later became a sannyasi — was mesmerised by Sri Aurobindo, since he saw Shiva in him. He notes:

In the beginning I sought to recognise in Sri Aurobindo the Vedic Agni in its dual aspect — the blazing force of Rudra and the serene force of the Brahmic consciousness, radiant with supernal knowledge. When he started his work in the heaving politics of Bengal, it was the blazing, fiery aspect of Rudra that stood out in front. But those who associated with him in the National College saw his serene figure, glowing with a mellow lustre. These two aspects were fused into one in Sri Aurobindo as in the third eye of Shiva.

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Talks by Nirodbaran*, Edited by Ranganath R. and Sudha, 2012, pp. 134-35 (see also Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., pp. 2-3).

61. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 570.

From among the days I came into close contact with Sri Aurobindo, I can single out two in my memory. One day there was a meeting of the teachers of the National College. Sri Aurobindo was in the chair, his body framed in august silence. We always knew him to be reticent and reserved in speech. The subject discussed in the meeting was: which should be the days of national festival? Somebody proposed that Bankim day should be one of them, and all of us gave it an enthusiastic support. But the support which came from Sri Aurobindo had the benign vibrant blare of the trumpet of Shiva.

Another day it was Saraswati puja. We were all squatting in the courtyard. Sri Aurobindo sat next to me, his heavenly body almost touching mine. The Vaishnavic music of Kirtan was playing. It moved me so profoundly that I could not restrain my tears — they flowed in an incessant stream of ecstasy. But Sri Aurobindo sat, silent and immobile, like Shiva in a trance. Even now when I shut my eyes his gracious, tranquil, luminous face swims up in into my vision.⁶²

Just after Sri Aurobindo resigned from the Baroda State Service, Sudhir Kumar Sarkar (1889-1974) lived with Sri Aurobindo like a family member for almost a year. It would be interesting to note his observations. He recalls an incident at Deoghar where a maternal uncle of Sri Aurobindo who lived in a small mud hut in seclusion had a fear of the sound of a gunshot. Sudhir Sarkar, aware of his phobia, decided to have some fun and so crept up to his window and fired a shotgun. A terrible howl came from the hut and all hell broke loose. Sri Aurobindo's grandmother immediately came to comfort her son and even Sri Aurobindo, Mrinalini Devi and Sarojini rushed to the scene. Such was the commotion that a frightened Sudhir Sarkar hid himself as he was too ashamed to show his face. Finally at midday Sarojini found Sudhir Sarkar and said, "It's getting late, *Sejda (Sri Aurobindo)* is waiting for you for lunch." Sudhir Sarkar continues:

I entered the house feeling like a thief apprehended. I decided I would admit my mischief at the first opportunity. . . . How a boy like me with such an insubordinate and misbehaving nature could be disciplined was perhaps known only to him. I felt as if I were dead, Sri Aurobindo took in my sorry plight with a single glance and said nothing.

In this way I indulged in one mischief after another and received inner blows. This made me reflect: "Such a man, he is really like a god! I will never, never hide anything from him and speak a lie to him. To disturb such a godlike being is the worst of sins!" . . . I even went so far as to speak to him of my weaknesses. He only said: "Human beings are weak. It is not good to make

62. Sujata Nahar, *Mother's Chronicles*, Book V, pp. 334-35.

them still more weak by dwelling on their weaknesses. Rather one should think only of that which gives strength to the mind.”⁶³

In 1912 Maa Sarada Devi (1853-1920), widow of Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886), referred to Sri Aurobindo as ‘Mahayogi Aurobindo?’⁶⁴ Sri Aurobindo has alluded to Maa Sarada Devi as a great spiritual figure.⁶⁵

Aurobindo means lotus and it was an uncommon name in those days. Providentially in occult language, Aurobindo signifies the Divine Consciousness.

Nirodbaran concluded his talk titled ‘Sri Aurobindo — Perfect Gentleman’ thus:

Now if I have been able by all these instances to prove to you that Sri Aurobindo was a perfect gentleman, I’ll be satisfied. If you demur to the common appellation ‘gentleman’, let us call him a Supramental perfect gentleman. But the one impression that he left with us is that he was Shiva.⁶⁶

Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya has said:

The Mother said that Sri Aurobindo was of the line of Shiva. Shiva is the Lord of transformation. Sri Aurobindo’s yoga too is in that line.”⁶⁷

In another talk Nirodbaran said that Sri Krishna

was one of Sri Aurobindo’s incarnations.⁶⁸

To a disciple Sri Aurobindo wrote:

If you reach Krishna you reach the Divine; if you can give yourself to him, you give yourself to me.”⁶⁹

In a letter to a disciple Sri Aurobindo wrote:

If you had an unprecedented peace for so long a time, it was due to my persistent inner pressure; I refuse to give up all the credit to my double, Krishna.”⁷⁰

63. *A Spirit Indomitable*, Edited by Mona Sarkar, 21st February 1989, p. 96 (this incident happened in the period a few months after he resigned from Baroda).

64. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, November 2012, p. 891.

65. See *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 89.

66. Nirodbaran, ‘Sri Aurobindo — Perfect Gentleman’, *Mother India*, August 1970, p. 413.

67. Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, *By the Way*, Part II, p. 120.

68. *Talks by Nirodbaran*, Edited by Ranganath R. and Sudha, 2012, p. 87.

69. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 431.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 367.

Furthermore Sri Aurobindo has written,

In Mother's childhood's visions she saw myself whom she knew as "Krishna".⁷¹

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

71. CWSA, Vol. 32, p. 36.

I don't think that one can ever smile too much. Someone who knows how to smile in all circumstances is very close to true equality of soul.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – II, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 14, p. 177)

SRI AUROBINDO'S EARLY POETRY ACCORDING TO RASAVĀDA

(Continued from the issue of July 2019)

VI

The poem to be studied next is 'Phaethon'. It may be seen as a myth-based poem or as a pastoral.¹ Let me quote from the article in *Ṛtam*.²

Phaethon was the son of Apollo by a mortal mother and he wanted to drive Apollo's chariot. He had two sisters who helped him harness the fiery horses of Apollo and Phaethon ascended to the sky. He could not, however, control the immortal horses and fell from the sky into the river Po and thus perished. The two grieving sisters were transformed into two poplars. Poplars are trees whose bark exudes a fragrant juice, supposed to be the tears of the sisters. This poem is addressed to some poplars growing by a river. Except for the name, Phaethon is not mentioned anywhere. The reader has to make the connection between the poplars and the foolhardy boy on his own, but if the myth is known, this should not be difficult. The poet apostrophises:

Ye weeping poplars by the shelvy slope
From murmurous lawns down-dropping to the stream
On whom the dusk air like a sombre dream
Broods and a twilight ignorant of hope . . .³

The rasa that is definitely generated in the poem, as these few lines make clear, is karuna-rasa. The sage Bharata says that there are three kinds of karuna — *dharmopaghataja* (generated by the loss of religion), *arthopacayodbhava* (generated by loss of money), and *śokakṛta* (generated by sorrow at the loss of near and dear ones). This is definitely of the last kind. Throughout the poem there is no mention of sorrow. The first few lines have already been quoted. The last two lines are:

1. As was done by the author in *Sri Aurobindo Kavya O Myth*, Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Hooghly Chuchura, 2005, p.11 and in *Ṛtam* (see next reference).

2. *Ṛtam*, Uttarpara Sri Aurobindo Parishad, 'Sri Aurobindo's Poetry and the Pastoral Tradition', 16.11.05 onwards.

3. *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 7.

And thus with tearful gusts your branches sway
Sighing a requiem to your emerald day?⁴

Definitely the main rasa evoked in the poem is karuna and no other. The reader might well ask if prakṛti-rasa is present. But I do not think so. Nature, in the aspect of poplars, is definitely present. But the poplars serve as the uddipana of karuna. They are not the alambara as they should have been if prakṛti-rasa had been evoked.

Regarding the technical aspect of the poem, let me again quote from the article in *Rtam*:

The poem can be called a sonnet for it has fourteen iambic pentametre lines, but it is written in two seven-line stanzas. This arrangement will prevent the purist from calling it a sonnet. Now, rhyme royal are seven-line stanzas rhyming *ababbcc*. Here the rhyme-scheme is *abbabaa* and therefore we cannot call them rhyme royal stanzas. The reader can see that the young poet has already mastered the technical aspect of versification so well that he can alter rhyme-schemes at will, without giving any impression of unease or unwieldiness. Moreover, he has made his own stanzas more tightly-knit than the conventional stanza by giving us just two rhymes and not three as in rhyme royal. . . . may I point out that the poem consists of two rhetorical questions? . . . The first stanza is a question which is answered by another rhetorical question in the next. There are actually four kinds of rhetorical questions, but I do not want to burden the innocent reader with them.⁵

The reader may wonder why I take up for discussion a poem I have already discussed. It is because a poem by a true poet is like a well-cut jewel: as you take it up and turn it, the different facets take on fire and light. The wonder of it never palls.

And I almost forgot to mention that it is from the name of the ambitious boy that the horse-drawn carriage — phaeton — has borrowed its name!

(*To be continued*)

RATRI RAY

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Op.cit.*, pp. 47-48.

PHAETHON

Ye weeping poplars by the shelvy slope
 From murmurous lawns down-dropping to the stream
 On whom the dusk air like a sombre dream
 Broods and a twilight ignorant of hope,
 Say what compulsion drear has bid you seam
 Your mossy sides with drop on eloquent drop
 That in warm rillets from your eyes elope?

Is it for the too patient, sure decay
 Pale-gilded Autumn, aesthete of the years,
 A gorgeous death, a fading glory wears
 That thus along the tufted, downy way
 Creep slothfully this ooze of amber tears
 And thus with tearful gusts your branches sway
 Sighing a requiem to your emerald day?

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 7)

AN INTERVIEW WITH SWARNA SARCAR

(on 13 March 1991)

So, you want to know about the Ashram in the early days?

Yes.

Do you want to know specifically about anybody?

No, not about anyone specifically; but about life in the Ashram at that time? What difference do you find in the life of that time and today?

Oh, the difference is between sky and earth. Those days we knew nothing else but meditation. Whatever work we did, that became our meditation. And after finishing our work, we would quietly go and sit in the Meditation Hall at our suitable time.

The Meditation Hall, was it in the same place inside the Ashram?

Yes. Some went to the Meditation Hall, some sat in their houses.

About Anilbaran Roy

The Ashram was quite small at that time, wasn't it?

No, when I came, it was not small, it was quite full. A few days before I arrived, the house where Mother and Sri Aurobindo stayed first [*Library House*] was bought. Champaklal's present room was originally Mother's room. Now his aunt Motiben stays there. And the room where Sri Aurobindo stayed was given to Anilbaran after Mother and Sri Aurobindo shifted to this side [*Meditation House*]. In that room, there was a big photograph of the Mother in Japan. Anilbaran stayed there, and he didn't allow any servants in his room and did all the cleaning himself. He didn't use any table or chair for sitting. He sat on the floor, on a mat, with a low stool for writing. Writing was his main work. When the book *The Mother* was published, there were many who wanted to understand it. So Mother made small groups and sent them to Anilbaran, and he explained to them in Bengali. If any special visitor came, he had to take Mother's permission to meet Anilbaran, but Anilbaran never went outside the Ashram gate.

About the Dining Room

We all saw Anilbaran for the first time when the Dining Room shifted from the Ashram main building to its present location [*Aroumé — on 4 January 1934*]. At that time the French Governor came there, and he wanted to listen to Bengali music. Then Mother came there and brought Anilbaran with her. That was the first time we saw Anilbaran going outside the Ashram gate. He sat by Mother's side and our singers — Sahana, Dilip, Ardhendu, Romen, — all sang and played music. Romen was the youngest of all. When his mother died, his father brought him here and went out for [*Government*] service.

When you came here, was the Dining Hall in the same place as now?

No. It was on that side of the Prosperity [*in the Ashram building*] which has now become the Cold Storage — that used to be the dining room for men. (It was beside the room where Prithwi Singh stayed.) From there the food was served. We all went there with our dishes. And for the ladies, it was the room which is now Harikant's office on this side [*Rosary House*], below Navajata's room.

The store room behind Pujalal's room and beside the Rosary House gate?

Yes. That was the ladies' dining room.

Then all came together?

As there were more men and few ladies, the men didn't get a place to sit while our side remained quite empty [*at Aroumé*]. Then one day they went and told Mother about it, and soon after that Mother brought everybody together. Otherwise, this side was for ladies and that side was for men. We all sat in that way. But I could never go in time. I used to eat at two o'clock because I went to the Dining Room only after ironing Mother's things and sending them upstairs.

Stitching and Embroidery

Did you ever work in the Dining Room?

No, Sri Aurobindo didn't send me there. I wrote to him that all were working and only I had no work. First, he didn't give me any reply. Then one day he wrote, "Mother doesn't create work for those who have the capacity to meditate." (You will see that in my letters. I have given them all to Jayantilal.) What else could I do? But I used to always do some stitching and embroidery for the Mother. Now Mother

would regularly sit with Lalita on the staircase at 2.30 [*in the afternoon*] and give work to her. So I used to go and wait there at that time and take Mother's instructions from Lalita — what to do, which colour Mother preferred, etc. When I didn't find Lalita, I asked Tajdar.

Mother of Chinmayi?

No, stepmother. She helped me a lot because I didn't know much English and French. French, I didn't know at all.

She knew good French?

She learnt it here, she learnt several languages. She spoke Bengali clearly like us. So one day Mother called me and said, "You have to make a carpet for this door so that I can stand on it after my bath. It should be big like that." I was dumbfounded. I said, "Yes, Mother, I am ready to do it. But where will I get such a big frame?" Mother replied, "You need not worry about it, I'll ask Pavitra to make it. You give him the measurement, and he will do it for you." I said, "All right, Mother, I am very happy."

After that Mother gave me two sizes, and I got the frames made by Pavitra. Each set had seven mats which had to be sewn with silk thread. Mother said, "This size is for keeping the kettle, this size is for keeping the bowls" and this size and that size, and this square and that oblong mat. The oblong one was spread near the bath tub by Datta or Pujalal and Mother used to step on it.

I made three sets. The entire day I had no other work. So I did that work day and night, and during work I would meditate for a few minutes. Whatever experiences I had during meditation, I noted down and wrote three or four times a day to Sri Aurobindo. I got the replies of my letters in the morning, and sometimes Nolini-da would give them to me in the evening.

In this way I passed two, three months. I had come directly from Burma and I didn't have enough clothes when I came here. When I went to Burma, I had thrown away all my belongings. I had told myself, "Let me see how my father keeps me there with only a single dress." So when I came here, I had brought with me only four saris, four blouses and three petticoats. I didn't have anything else. Before that I had only two saris. Before boarding the steamer, my brother had brought two saris for me from our shop.

After coming here, I thought, "Why don't I go to Benjamin and stitch a few clothes for myself?" and I took Mother's permission. Mother said, "Yes, yes, you can go there and stitch clothes for yourself — two, three, four, whatever you want." I worked from 2.30 to 4.30 for two hours. And seeing my work, Benjamin started giving me a lot of other work on the sewing machine. In those two hours I did a lot

of stitching work. He saw my work and regularly informed the Mother about it. He told her, “She does it very nicely, I needed a helper, so God has given me one.”

Then Mother’s brother was going to come here. He was a governor [*in French colonial Africa*] and he wanted to come and see the Ashram. So Mother told me, “I want four pillow covers.” Datta gave me everything and said, “You see, the finishing must be very fine.” I replied, “Okay, I shall try.” I finished them and after seeing my work, Mother said, “I will not allow her to work there anymore. She will do my work here.” Then one day Datta came to my work-place and brought me away from there. Benjamin became very angry, “Alone, she does three persons’ work. Who will do it now?” When it was reported to Mother, she said, “I will give him a worker.” So Mother brought me here after making Benjamin very angry.

And, you know, what work was I given? I was not given any embroidery work, nothing of the kind. Those days Mother used to dress in a sari at Pranam and wear a crown. And when she came, she often wore in a hurry the opposite side of the sari. So Mother gave me the work of making a big design on the inside of the sari. When we arranged and folded the saris after washing and ironing them, the design would be on the top so that Mother could wear the sari correctly when she took it in her hand. In this way, one by one, I made different designs on each and every sari of hers.

Mother was very happy and said, “Let her make blouses for me.” One day Datta came and said, “Mother wants you to do her blouses.” I looked at her for a moment. Both of us didn’t talk much. “You see, Lalita will cut the cloth and give it to you, and you stitch it. She will show you how many buttons to put — twelve buttons have to be put.” All of Mother’s blouses had an opening at the back. You all wear about 18 inches, but she wore 25 inches. So I started the work. One day she sent a message, “Go to Lalita and do the cutting of the blouse.” So I went there and did the cutting. I did everything quietly as I was ordered to do. Indeed, Mother gave me her own work. So I am extremely grateful to Mother.

One day, Datta, who was a *pucca* European lady, told me, “Look, you eat and do so many things wearing your sari, and you keep Mother’s dresses on top of it. I think that is not proper.” I said, “Yes, I also think so.” She said, “I will give you an apron, a very clean apron.” From that time onwards, I always worked keeping an apron below. Then she told me, “You see, you people put a lot of oil in your hair, don’t you? So when you stitch, don’t put your oily fingers on the material.” I replied, “I never put my oily fingers, I never do it.” From that day onwards, I stopped applying oil to my hair. For four years I stopped applying oil (*big laughter*).

About Datta (Dorothy Hodgson)

Who was Datta?

Datta was working in Japan. This is what she told me herself. When Mother went to Japan, there was a big garden of cherry flowers which she visited every day. Mother was an artist, so she liked to see them, and Datta also used to go there. In that way she gradually came close to Datta.

What was her real name?

Her real name was Dorothy [*Hodgson*]. She used to do all kinds of odd jobs. When the war came to an end and Mother was planning to go back to India, she asked Datta one day, “Would you like to come with me?” She said very gladly “Yes,” and came here with Mother. There too, Mother did not eat much. Datta used to prepare a small quantity of salad for her. One day Datta told me, “Mother was practically taking nothing. I used to prepare a little salad and she used to like it very much. Then she asked me if I would like to come with her and she brought me here.” Then Sri Aurobindo gave her the name “Datta — Entire self-giving”. Here also she prepared salad for the Mother and did all kinds of house work for her like bringing and taking things from here and there, deciding what had to be done, what needed to be changed, and so on. She was given a room upstairs in ‘Quadroze’ [*the house on the west of the Ashram main building*] where there was a kitchen and cooking was done for Mother. Mother’s clothes were also washed there.

She was given a room on this side and on the other side there was a big verandah. In the beginning Mother’s clothes were washed and ironed there. There was a big table for ironing and there were two cupboards in the corners where Mother’s food was kept. When I was given work, I was given the room behind it where Mother’s gowns were dried. Mother had quite a number of pillows and mats. Later there was a carpet everywhere, but at that time Mother lived like a pauper and mats were spread on the floor. Both Mother and Sri Aurobindo walked on the mats. When the mats became old, they were taken away and stacked in Datta’s room. Datta told me, “You can use them; keep them nicely because Sri Aurobindo has walked on them.”

Did you use them?

Yes, I sat on them; otherwise where would I keep Mother’s things? Datta also gave me quite a few pillows saying, “We shall change these pillows. You can use them if you want to lean or rest a little in the afternoon.” But I never rested in the afternoon, I only leaned back.

I worked there for many years. When my mother passed away in 1939, I didn’t stop working, but tears would roll down from my eyes. Datta did not have the courage to ask me why I wept. She went to the Mother and told her, “I never said anything harsh to her, but she goes on weeping and weeping while doing ironing and everything. Why Mother?” (*laughter*)

Mother told her, “Her mother has passed away. But has she come for work?”
 “Yes, Mother, she has come early in the morning at 6 o’clock.”

Then Mother decided that I should do my work at home itself. Since then I am working from home. Before that I spent the whole day there; I used to come at 6 in the morning and go home at 9 at night. During that time a lot of clothes would come from Sri Aurobindo and Mother. Sri Aurobindo used to wear a dhoti and Motiben used to wash his dhoti. Then there were many pillow covers, bedsheets, bath towels and gowns from Mother’s bathroom. Only the saris were ironed by Tajdar, but if a sari had a special embroidery, then Vasudha would iron it. I have always seen Tajdar ironing Mother’s saris. She had a very fine hand. Wherever she saw a torn area or a hole, she used to repair it very beautifully. My work was becoming too much and I was getting very late for my lunch. When Nolina-di’s husband died, she went to Mother and asked for work and Mother said, “All right, she can go and help Swarna who has got too much work. She cannot concentrate on sewing and cutting.” So she joined me and did some washing and drying of clothes. And I took the clothes from her for ironing, and stitched the whole afternoon.

Now, what happened? The war hadn’t yet started. There were two Sindhi gentlemen running a shop here. One of them was Baliram and the other one was Turad. They sent a lot of georgette material to the Mother for selection, and she used to select the colours. Each sari was 6 rupees. For 7 years the price remained at 6 rupees. From the sari itself, I would cut a blouse piece. Those saris were not like our saris. Both ends of the saris had to be properly hem-stitched by drawing the yarn from the sari. It took me three days to stitch one sari and make one blouse (because there was also other work to do). Then if there was a design on the sari, Mother would tell me to do the same design on the *pallu*. If any work like this came up, then I worked day and night. Sometimes I worked till 11.30, 12 at night, and Datta accompanied me to my house as we were not allowed to go outside the gate after 11 p.m.

Where did you stay at that time?

I stayed in Ganapati House. Nirmala and I stayed upstairs together. I left that place after four years as I couldn’t sleep at night because Lila and Nirmala were constantly chatting on the terrace. So I wrote to Sri Aurobindo one day, “I will not be able to stay any longer in this house, as I cannot sleep at night after working the whole day. How can I then do fine needlework with my eyes?” He didn’t reply the first time. The second time he replied, “Yes, you can shift.”

Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo in Bengali

He wrote in English to you?

In the beginning he wrote in English. Then one day I wrote, “When I stayed outside, I needed to know about everything. But now that I am staying in the Ashram, I don’t need to know much. I will write and you can give me only a short answer, but I would like it to be in Bengali because I don’t want to get my letters read by anyone else. He wrote in such small letters that even Nolini-da found it difficult to read them. I was going to Premanand — he was the Librarian — and when he failed to decipher, we had to go to Amal. I somehow was not willing to do all that. Then when I insisted on Bengali, Sri Aurobindo said, “I am afraid I have forgotten writing in Bengali, but I will try.” From that time onwards, he began writing to me in Bengali. Around the same time he told Nirmala, “I am writing to Swarna in Bengali, I’ll try to write to you too in Bengali.” Esha [*Dilip Kumar Roy’s niece*] was coming here now and then. She was a small child and Sri Aurobindo wrote a few letters to her also in Bengali. But he started writing in Bengali to me first. He did not make any mistakes, he was simply afraid of writing in Bengali (*laughter*). There were a few Sanskrit words which I could not understand. For Bengali I never went to show my letters to anyone. I managed it by myself.

How did you address Sri Aurobindo?

That is another story. In the beginning, in 1925, we used to address him as Auro — in short form. Then in 1926, when he retired, Datta announced, “From now onwards he is Lord Sri Aurobindo, not Aurobindo Ghosh.” Since that time we began to write “Sri Aurobindo”. We used to call him “Sri Aurobindo”, but I addressed him as . . . you will get that in my letters (*laughing shyly*).

Tell us about it now.

Not only I addressed him as *Baba*, but also as *Premamoy*, *Snehomoy* — whatever I felt from within, as I had no one else but Him. When I first saw his photo, I saw his eyes moving in whichever direction my eyes moved. Since that time, I haven’t considered him a human being; I looked upon him as God. That is the reason why I wrote everything to him without hesitation and addressed him as *Prabhu*, *Bhagavan*, *Premamoy*, *Snehomoy*. You will get many more in my letters. Thus in this way things went on.

Stitching Dresses for Mother

When I shifted to the house where Auroform is now, Mother gave me the entire house. The name of the house was ‘Clairon Number 2’. I stayed there for 11 years. There was an ironing table and I did all my work there. After seeing my work, one day Mother told Lalita, “She is doing fine work, so she can be my dress-maker. Show her how to cut this gown and coat; she will pick it up.” Lalita showed it to me one day and told me a little grudgingly in front of Datta, “Mother says you are to be her only dress-maker. She doesn’t want us to do anything.” I didn’t give any reply and kept quiet, but I learnt whatever was shown to me. Later she gave me work with a French lady who taught me how to sew and wash silk, satin, chiffon and georgette material. I went to her, but she didn’t teach me for many days, she taught me only for two or three days.

Which French lady?

I don’t know her actual name. We knew her as Sarala. They were a married couple, Suchi and Sarala. Suchi died after falling down and breaking his head. Sarala grieved a lot, so Mother told her, “I’ll give you four good students to whom you will teach sewing, and you will remain happy — Swarna, Lalita, Savitri, and . . .¹ She taught us for a few days, but all the others left. I remained with her because I wanted to work. I said to myself, “Let anybody say anything to me, I want to learn Mother’s work, I want to do Mother’s work.” So I stayed on. She showed me everything except cutting. She said, “That is my work.” Mother had herself told her to show me, but she did not show it. So I said, “All right. Then you do the cutting, I will do the stitching.” Later she was given a room upstairs in Dupleix House, where Sri Aurobindo’s father-in-law Bhupal Bose had stayed.

About Bhupal Bose (Sri Aurobindo’s father-in-law)

Bhupal Bose was a great devotee, but could not stay in the Ashram because he was unable to eat Dining Room food (*laughter*). He had a digestion problem. That is why Mother told those who prepared food for Sri Aurobindo, “I will provide you all the vegetables. They have to be boiled a little and given to Bhupal Bose.” But nobody listened to her, since everyone wanted to do only Mother’s work, and nobody wanted to do his work.

But Mother herself told them to do this work!

1. Audio not clear. The last name could not be made out.

Mother couldn't do anything about it. Nowadays, so much food comes from the Dispensary; those days there was nothing. At that time Nirod was our doctor, and he always took more interest in poetry than his patients (*laughter*). It was not his fault. When he came he told Mother in the very beginning, "I'll do everything except being a doctor." So he got work in the Building Department with Chandulal. And he would take a stool and sit with a book in the middle of the road (*laughter*).

About Dr. Upendranath Bannerji

Then there was our old doctor whose name was Upendranath — grandfather of Tarun [*tabla teacher in the School*]. We knew him as Mother's doctor, not as Upendranath. He would become very angry when we called him Mother's doctor. He said, "Never speak like that. She is Mother Almighty, Ma Bhagavati, so never call me Mother's doctor." Just like when Nirmala told Bhupal Bose that he was Sri Aurobindo's father-in-law. He immediately said, "Never talk like that. He is my Guru." Nirmala was completely taken aback. Bhupal Bose used to teach English to Nirmala, and I was taught by the doctor.

How long did Bhupal Bose stay in the Ashram?

When I came to the Ashram, Bhupal Bose was already here. I don't know exactly when he came.

Then he left?

Yes. His stomach gradually became very bad and nobody came forward to help him. Then Mother herself told him that she was helpless. So he had to leave, and he died after he left Pondicherry. Bhupal Babu was a perfect gentleman and a very humorous person. He arranged to bring many of his grandchildren's books here for Nirmala and told her to read them. I was being taught by the old doctor and he told me, "What can I teach you? Whatever I teach you, the very next day you talk to me as if you are teaching me (*laughter*). One day he gave me Sri Aurobindo's book "Kshamar Adarsha" [*The Ideal of Forgiveness*] and told me, "You write this article in your own language and show it to me tomorrow." I wrote the whole thing at night in my language and showed it to him the next day. He was simply amazed at my language and exclaimed, "Have you so much knowledge of Bengali? Are you a poetess?" I replied, "I am a worker. I only work." At that time, he was taking care of the Dispensary.

Suddenly one day he got the news that he had to attend the marriage of his sister's daughter, and he was sent travelling expenses. Mother said, "Don't go." He replied, "What am I to do when they have written like this?" Then Mother said,

“You decide.” So he left, and when he left, Mother brought Nirod to the Dispensary.

About the Ashram Dispensary

At that time, what was our Dispensary? It was a small room beside the present Reception Room [*in the Ashram building*], where a few medicines were kept, and Dayashankar took care of it. He was not an actual doctor, but he used to sit there and prescribe some common medicines. When this house [*present Dispensary*] was taken and the old doctor left, Mother told Nirod to reserve this place for the Dispensary and gave him a room to live there. The inside room was his living room and the outside room was the Dispensary. The room on this side was used for boiling soup and other things.

The Soup Ceremony and the Mother’s Illness

Two big soup containers were brought down for the soup distribution and kept in the present Reception Hall. All the sadhaks and sadhikas assembled there with their cups. Mother came down by the staircase from the Prosperity side and sat there [*on the eastern side*], placed both her hands on the pot and meditated. After meditation she opened her eyes and gave the soup with a smiling face to all those who came. When all had taken the soup, she left. Now this stopped before I came here.² Why? It seems a workman gave a bunch of bananas while Mother was going to Prosperity — this is what my sisters told me. And through those bananas we don’t know what kind of impure force he transmitted that the Mother stopped Pranam for two months and the soup distribution too was stopped. The sadhaks could not see Mother at all. After two months Mother started giving Pranam, but the soup was stopped. At that time Datta served the Mother day and night and made her all right.

Mother became unwell?

She had pain in both the legs due to an attack of hostile forces.

Swarna-di, how did the soup taste? Was it much tastier than the present day soup?

The soup in those days was not like the soup we have nowadays. It used to be really

2. Swarna-di came to the Ashram on 11 August 1933. Mother fell seriously ill on 19 October 1931 and all her collective activities were suspended for about a month. Collective meditation and Pranam were resumed in the morning on 17 November 1931. The soup ceremony in which Mother herself gave soup to the sadhaks of the Ashram was never taken up again, though the soup was still prepared and distributed among the disciples of the Ashram.

tasty. Nowadays they don't put any leek. But in those days vegetables used to come from Bangalore. The leek was big like cabbage and had such a wonderful flavour. It was not possible to prepare soup without leek. With leek, there were onions, cabbage, carrots, and the soup was prepared in the room upstairs. Where you go now to collect the chit for visiting Sri Aurobindo's room — there you will see many almirahs. Vegetables were kept inside those almirahs for preparing soup, and the soup containers were also kept there.

Bansidhar-bhai's place?

Yes. Yes. The new almirahs which were made for Bansidhar were used for his purpose, but the old ones were for soup things. Soup used to be really tasty, and after having a cup of soup, one did not need any milk. Then that stopped. . . .

* * *

Sri Aurobindo never wanted Mother to do such hard work. He wanted her to go upstairs and stroll there for half an hour after working the whole day. But people began seeing Mother from here and there even at that time. One could have been easily satisfied by seeing Mother coming down or going up and let her stroll peacefully and go on with one's own meditation. That would have been good. Sri Aurobindo wanted to reduce Mother's work. We came to know from Datta, "Mother has no time to take her food." The moment some work came up, she had to leave without taking her food. There was a heater on which Chinmayi heated everything and kept it ready for Mother before calling her. Mother would be tying her hair or else eating a little and the remaining food Chinmayi would heat and put in small containers, and then suddenly Mother would leave. I have seen Chinmayi pleading with her, "Mother, please take this", but she would not listen to anybody. She took very little, and the remaining food became Prasad. That used to go to Chinmayi, Pavitra and others, and whatever Mother found good, she kept aside for Sri Aurobindo.

Ashram Gate Duty

Did Mother give food to Sri Aurobindo? Have you seen it?

Yes, I saw it once, because after the accident the door was kept open. Earlier, it used to always remain closed. Even the main gate of the Ashram was kept closed. One man sat at the gate with a chair and meditated. He opened it when the upper part of the gate was pushed. Otherwise the gate was always kept closed. If there was a visitor, he would make the person sit in the outside verandah and go and inform

Nolini-da. Then Nolini-da would come and decide whether he should be taken inside or not. There were many kinds of restrictions. All that was necessary because there were constantly three C.I.D men sitting at the corners of the street. The C.I.D men did all kinds of things. They entered the Ashram in disguise for gathering internal information. That is why these restrictions were required. Once the news came that there was going to be a police raid at the time of Darshan to know, “Why is there such a long line? What is happening from morning till evening, etc.?”

Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

There was such a big line in those days?

Yes, in those days the line was long because people offered pranam at Sri Aurobindo’s feet and then at Mother’s feet. It took a long time as they both gave blessings, one by one. Also there were many who kept staring at them after their pranam. Once Sri Aurobindo himself spoke to Nolini-da about ‘Bhaater’ Charu — you must have seen him, he was Jogu’s uncle. He was serving rice in the Dining Room and came to be known as ‘Bhaater’ Charu. He was a very angry and strict person. You know what he did? He did one pranam in the middle also (*laughter*). One day Sri Aurobindo told Nolini-da, “What is the necessity of Charu doing another pranam?” Nolini-da told this to Amrita-da. When I went to serve them tea, Amrita told me, “Have you heard this? Sri Aurobindo is asking: “Why is Charu doing the third pranam?” (*big laughter*) At that time, Dilip Roy was also there. When he went, *he took a long time*; he would take 5 minutes, 7 minutes. Finally, after the accident, Nolini-da had to control the queue. He stood on one side and Champaklal stood on the other side.

Did Sri Aurobindo ever speak during Darshan?

Sri Aurobindo never spoke. He would say something to Nolini after an hour or an hour and a half, and Nolini would get up and close the door. They were sitting constantly in one position. So after the door was closed, he would perhaps adjust his dress or arrange the shawl which might have slipped down. Nolini went and kneeled before them and had a short discussion. Then after some time, when all the arrangements were made, he came out and opened the door. In this way, Nolini went quite a few times, and it is only at that time that Sri Aurobindo spoke. Otherwise, Sri Aurobindo never spoke during Darshan. He observed everyone from there — who came in from the door on this [*west*] side. At the end came the Dining Room in-charge, Madanlal.

Is he the person who worked in the Generator Room? Is it the same Madanlal?

Yes, he was in-charge of the Dining Room. He worked there for many years. Then Keshav-ji replaced him. When Minoo came here, she first started working in the Dining Room under Madanlal. Once Madanlal's mother and wife came to Pondicherry to take him back with them. They were wearing *ghagra* [*long skirts decorated with mirrors*] and big anklets, and a flower vase got tilted by the skirt and water spilled all over the place. I was behind the two ladies. Seeing this, I couldn't stay quiet. I was quite new at that time and had only a few darshans. I went and quickly picked up the flowers and soaked up the water with my own sari. Sri Aurobindo saw everything.

All this happened inside Sri Aurobindo's room?

In the Darshan Room. After the Darshan Room was decorated, flower vases were kept on both sides, not so much on that side [*north*]³ as we all went out from there. That is why the lady's skirt touched the vase and the vase got tilted.

Contact with Sri Aurobindo and how Swarna-di came to the Ashram

Swarna-di, you did not tell us how you came to Pondicherry.

That is my personal affair. [*addressing the interviewer*] You came to learn about the Ashram of that time.

Yes, but could you tell us how you came in contact with Sri Aurobindo there.

At that time when I went to Minoo's house [*meaning her husband's house — Minoo was her daughter*], I saw a photo of Sri Aurobindo, a statue of Radha and Krishna, and a photo of Vivekananda. I was a great devotee of Vivekananda. I was a Vaishnav and loved Radha and Krishna very much. But I did not know Sri Aurobindo though I kept looking at his photo. I did pranam to him when I woke up in the morning and at night when I went to bed. So one night a gentleman came from our centre.

Where did this incident take place?

Chittagong. There is a centre at Shakpura called Vidyapith. The house of Minoo's father was situated near this centre. One night a gentleman came from that centre. He spoke about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I was occupied inside my room, but

3. During this period the sadhaks and devotees entered the Darshan Room, bowed down at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and came out from the door on the north of the Darshan Room. After Sri Aurobindo's accident in November 1938, the entrance of the Darshan Room was blocked by an offering box, so that the sadhaks and devotees could only have the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from a distance.

afterwards I came to know that the Mother does this and Sri Aurobindo does that, etc. When this gentleman entered the house, he saw Sri Aurobindo's photo and said, "You have Sri Aurobindo's photo here!" We said, "Yes, we have had it for many years." It is then that I realised that Sri Aurobindo *was still living*. Earlier, I did not understand much; I thought that Sri Aurobindo was no more, like Swami Vivekananda. After knowing that he was still there, a change started happening within me. Next day in the afternoon when no one was there, and I was about to rest after doing my pranam to his photo, I noticed that his eyes turned in whichever direction I turned my eyes. I was stunned and did not know what was happening to me. From that moment onwards, I decided that I will go only to Him.

Then I came to my mother's place from that house. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo and he gave me some assurance. He told me to continue the sadhana that I was already doing and enquired, "Do your parents have sufficient money to look after you? Let me know." My parents replied, "Yes, we have enough money to look after her." Then Sri Aurobindo wrote to my father, "If she leaves her husband, he will give her a lot of trouble. You will have to bear with that." My father replied, "I want my daughter to stay in peace." That is why I always stayed with my mother.

My husband often troubled me and our family by bringing outsiders to our house. Ours was a joint family — my mother, Madhuri's mother and our younger uncle. The families of all the three brothers were staying together, and it was a big joint family. My husband troubled us all by bringing outside people to our house, but my uncle tolerated everything. One day they threatened my uncle by saying, "We are driving you out of our society. You have no place in our society. How can such a young married girl be kept at home?" My uncle replied, "Do whatever you like, but I'll protect my daughter at the cost of my life. My daughter is the light of my house. She has illumined the entire house." So he kept me under a strict watch. Coming downstairs or going out of the house was all stopped. They took great pains to keep me safe.

Sri Aurobindo had written, "Do not mix with anyone. Henceforth, my force will help you from here. The sadhana of all those in your centre is going on at the same level. But I have raised you to a higher level and your adhar has opened up." And he wrote about such spiritual things. I too saw in meditation the play of colours and all the six chakras started opening in me. The whole body became charged with light and I could see on what level each chakra was working. When I wrote about this to Sri Aurobindo, he was very pleased. From that time onwards, he told me not to mix with anybody. "You must meditate all alone and I hope your mother will help you in this matter."

Truly speaking, my mother and uncle helped me a lot. My uncle was my mother's student and he was manager of the house. I was there for six years. Then when Minoo was six years old, I told him that I could not stay there anymore and I wanted to go to the Ashram. I wrote to my father who was at that time staying in

Burma, “I have stayed here for such a long time, now I would like to leave.” He used to visit us once in two or three years. He didn’t know much about spirituality, so he came and took me with him. He said, “I don’t want to send such a young girl alone. If you want to meditate, I have kept a huge mansion ready for you by the seashore. You can stay there and meditate.” My father thought I would forget the Divine after seeing all that, so he forcibly took me away. My brother at that time was studying Chartered Accountancy in Rangoon, and he visited us during the holidays. He told me, “You have made a mistake. Why did you come here? You cannot escape from the clutches of my father.” Inwardly, I was already broken down, but I almost collapsed after hearing this from my brother. Then once again I braced myself up saying, “The Divine is always with me, He will make some arrangement.” My father took me to stay in his personal bungalow in a beautiful place on top of a mountain. I was free to do anything there. But I wept there all day and night and wrote letters to Sri Aurobindo — that was the work I did there all day (*laughter*). And my brother posted my letters.

Then as days passed, my father thought that I would probably change my mind. One day he told my brother Sudhir, “She must see now what I have kept ready for her. You take her there.” He took me there and I saw there three big bungalows side by side, with no connection with anyone — one for me, another for my brother and the third one for my sister. Each one was like a palace, and I was taken to my palace.

A middle-aged Marwari called Narayan was staying there with his family. His shop was in the outer portion of the house. I don’t know what my father told him, but he said, “Didi, here people eat in your father’s name and even stand and sit down in his name. You are the daughter of that person, and you are going to stay here.” I did not give him any answer. His wife brought a dish with cucumber and bread which we partook of. He also gave me an umbrella with an ivory handle which I brought back with me.

On the way back my brother asked me, “How did you like it?”

I replied, “*Dhuut!* There is nothing worth liking.” Then we returned home and I started crying again (*laughter*).

My father secretly asked my brother, “What have you shown her? Why is she still crying?” (*laughter*)

He replied, “I have shown her whatever you told me to show.”

“What did she say?” my father asked.

“She did not say anything. I don’t know what is happening within her,” was my brother’s reply.

My father asked, “But why? Why didn’t she say anything?”

As for me I felt like crying as long as I didn’t go to my God. I cried day and night and it continued like that. . . . I think it’s over now. (*Swarna-di pauses as if the story is over.*)

But you didn't finish. What happened after that?

I kept on crying, and one day my brother brought a letter for me.

You corresponded with Sri Aurobindo from there?

Yes. The letter was from Nolini-da to my father. He wrote: "Why have you kept her body imprisoned there? Her soul is here. Release her." On reading this, my father got worried as he thought I would change my mind after seeing all the wealth and luxury and the huge mansion on the seashore. But that never happened, nothing changed; on the contrary Sri Aurobindo told him to release my body as my soul was in the Ashram. So he became quiet. I kept on weeping downstairs and he could hear me from upstairs. At that time my father was suffering from high fever — the temperature had gone up to 106 degrees. I did not go up, nor did I sleep, and I wept incessantly at night. Then one day, at 5 o'clock in the morning, he told my brother, "Go and ask her what she wants. She has wept the whole night." My brother didn't want to ask me. He said I would only repeat the same thing. So my father told my brother, "Go and tell her that I am calling her." He came and called me, and I went with him.

My father asked me, "Do you really want to go?"

I replied, "Yes."

"You want to leave me in this state with 106 degrees of temperature? Who will look after me?"

I replied, "Shishir-da will take care of you. I have come only now. Who was looking after you before I came?"

He asked me again, "Will you leave me in this condition?"

I replied, "Yes."

Then my father said, "But I cannot send you alone. Ask Sudhir if he is ready to accompany you. If he goes, he will accompany you, arrange for Mother's darshan and bring you back with him. Call Sudhir." My brother came and my father asked him whether he would be able to get Mother's darshan for me and bring me back.

Sudhir replied, "Yes, I will." It was already 5:30. My brother and myself hurriedly took a couple of clothes and came away. I picked up Minoo and we reached the bank near the steamer. Suddenly my brother remembered that there were two saris in the shop, so he went back and brought them for me. That's all. *(Swarna-di pauses as if the story has ended.)*

Then what happened? It was decided that you would come back after Darshan.

After some time Sri Aurobindo himself sent a telegram. My father's fever turned into typhoid. One side of his body got paralysed. He sent an urgent telegram to Sri

Aurobindo, “I am seriously ill, please send back my children.” Sri Aurobindo wrote back, “Swarna has permanently settled here. Sudhir will stay here for some time.” He never felt it was necessary to inform me of what he wrote.

Didn't Sudhir protest?

Sudhir had got permission before me, but he had never informed my father.

But was he allowed to stay in the Ashram?

He stayed with me here for four years.

After that he left?

My brother was the only son, and my mother wanted that he at least passed his M.Sc. exams. But because he was in the revolution, he could not be kept at home as he was constantly harassed by the police. That is why, after finishing his I.S.C. he left for Rangoon to study Chartered Accountancy. It was then that he brought me from there. That was the end of his studies. Here he did Mother's work. Mother loved him a lot. She said he was a very sincere boy. I cannot give you a record of the number of jobs he did here — he did so much work!

Did your father become all right?

Who kept up with the news! When he got Sri Aurobindo's telegram, all the photos of Mother and Sri Aurobindo were removed. When I was there, my room had been turned into a temple, and Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's photos were nicely decorated. There was a table in a corner of the room, and Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's photos were kept on it and beautifully decorated. I would stay there at night and sit and meditate there in the morning. My mother too regularly worshipped those photos. But when I went away my father got annoyed and ordered them to remove everything. My father was respected and worshipped like a god in his locality. Apart from helping poor people, he also helped many social organisations, and those people looked after him and saved his life. But my relationship with him was completely cut off [*until he came here*].

Your father never came here?

Yes, he came and stayed here for six months.

Your mother?

My mother couldn't come as she suddenly died of cholera.

Your father must have had Sri Aurobindo's darshan. When did he come?

It was during war time. He came by the last steamer that brought passengers from Burma to Calcutta.

So at that time he had Sri Aurobindo's darshan?

Yes. He fell at Mother's feet and started weeping so much that I got worried about Mother's dress getting spoilt (*loud laughter*). I became stiff and kept standing by his side. Mother too was looking at me and smiling. My father was not getting up, and tears were rolling from his eyes.

He was weeping because of you?

No, no. He recognised the Mother as the Supreme Mother, which he had never realised before. That is why he fell down at Mother's Feet and there was an uninterrupted flow of tears. Not a single word came out of his mouth; he kept weeping. Mother told him that he had very good children. Truly speaking, I was worried because Mother never liked tears on her dress (*laughter*).

It means your father got totally changed. Did he again call you back?

No. He said, "I could never imagine that the Ashram was like this." In those days in the Ashram all the ladies stayed and dined separately, and it was the same with men too. Men could not visit ladies' houses, nor could ladies visit men's houses. There were many rules. My father was of the older generation, so he liked this very much. He said, "I never knew that there was such a nice arrangement in Mother's Ashram. I have visited many Ashrams." My father was the board member of many institutions. Among these were Shantiniketan, Prabartak Sangha and many more. He was a member of those institutions, so he knew a lot about what was going on inside them. But he never expected to come across such strict rules as in this Ashram.

*(Interview by Aloka Ghosh and Raman Reddy;
translation from the original Bengali by Aloka Ghosh)*



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