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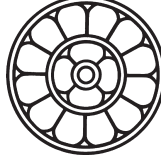
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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All correspondence to be addressed to:

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

Phone: (0413) 2233642

e-mail: motherindia@sriarobindoashram.org.in

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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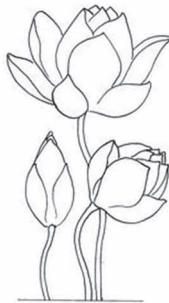
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OUTSPREAD A WAVE BURST

Outspread a Wave burst, a Force leaped from the unseen,
Vague, wide, some veiled Maker, masked Lighter of the Fire:
 With dire blows the Smith of the World
 Forged strength from hearts of the weak;
 Earth's hate the edge of the axe,
 Smitten by the gods,
Hewn, felled, the Form crashed that touched heaven and its stars.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 652)



KENA UPANISHAD

An Incomplete Commentary

Foreword

As the Isha Upanishad is concerned with the problem of God & the world and consequently with the harmonising of spirituality & ordinary human action, so the Kena is occupied with the problem of God & the Soul and the harmonising of our personal activity with the movement of infinite energy & the supremacy of the universal Will. We are not here in this universe as independent existences. It is evident that we are limited beings clashing with other limited beings, clashing with the forces of material Nature, clashing too with forces of immaterial Nature of which we are aware not with the senses but by the mind. The Upanishad takes for granted that we are souls, not merely life-inspired bodies — into that question it does not enter. But this soul in us is in relation with the outside world through the senses, through the vitality, through mind. It is entangled in the mesh of its instruments, thinks they alone exist or is absorbed in their action with which it identifies itself — it forgets itself in its activities. To recall it to itself, to lift it above this life of the senses, so that even while living in this world, it shall always refer itself & its actions to the high universal Self & Deity which we all are in the ultimate truth of our being — so that we may be free, may be pure & joyous, may be immortal, that is the object of the seer in the Kena Upanishad. Briefly to explain the steps by which he develops and arrives at his point and the principal philosophical positions underlying his great argument, is as always the purpose of this commentary. There is much that might & should be said for the full realisation of this ancient gospel of submission & self-surrender to the Infinite, but it is left to be said in a work of greater amplitude and capacity. Exegesis in faithful subordination to the strict purport & connotation of the text will be here as always my principle.

The First Part

The Self & the Senses

“By whom controlled, by whom commissioned & sent forth falleth the mind on its object, by whom yoked to its activity goeth abroad this chief of the vital forces? By whom controlled is this word that men speak, and what god set ear & eye to their

workings? That which is hearing within hearing, mind of the mind, speech behind the word, he too is the life of vitality & the sight within vision; the calm of soul are liberated from these instruments and passing beyond this world become Immortals . . . There the eye goes not & speech cannot follow nor the mind; we know it not nor can we decide by reason how to teach of it; for verily it is other than the known & it is beyond the unknown; so have we heard from the men that went before us by whom to us this Brahman was declared. That which is not uttered by speech, but by which speech is expressed, know thou that to be the Soul of things and not this which men here pursue. That which thinketh not by the mind, but by which mind itself is realised, know thou that to be the Soul of things, not this which men here pursue. That which seeth not by sight, but by which one seeth things visible, know thou that to be the Soul of things and not this which men here pursue. That which heareth not by hearing but by which hearing becomes subject to knowledge through the ear, know thou that to be the Soul of things & not this which men here pursue. That which liveth not by the breathing, but by which the breath becometh means of vitality, know thou that to be the Soul of things & not this which men here pursue.”

I

In order to understand the question with which the Upanishad opens its train of thought, it is necessary to remember the ideas of the Vedantic thinkers about the phenomena of sensation, life, mind and ideas which are the elements of all our activity in the body. It is noticeable that the body itself and matter, [the] principle of which the body is a manifestation, are not even mentioned in this Upanishad. The problem of matter the Seer supposes to have been so far solved for the inquirer that he no longer regards the physical state of consciousness as fundamental and no longer considers it as a reality separate from consciousness. All this world is only one conscious Being. Matter to the Vedantist is only one of several states — in reality, movements — of this conscious being, — a state in which this universal consciousness, having created forms within & out of itself as substance, absorbs & loses itself by concentration in the idea of being as substance of form. It is still conscious, but, as form, ceases to be self-conscious. The Purusha in matter, the Knower in the leaf, clod, stone, is involved in form, forgets himself in this movement of his Prakriti or Mode of Action and loses hold in outgoing knowledge of his self of conscious being & delight. He is not in possession of himself; He is not Atmavan. He has to get back what he has lost, to become Atmavan, and that simply means that He has to become gradually aware in matter of that which He has hidden from Himself in matter. He has to evolve what He has involved. This recovery in knowledge of our full and real self is the sole secret meaning & purpose of evolution. In reality it is no evolution, but a manifestation. We are already what we become. That which is still future in matter, is already present in Spirit. That which the mind

in matter does not yet know, it is hiding from itself — that in us which is behind mind & informs it already knows — but it keeps its secret.

For that which we regard as matter, cannot be, if the Vedantic view is right, mere matter, mere inert existence, eternally bound by its own inertness. Even in a materialistic view of the world matter cannot be what it seems, but is only a form or movement of Force which the Indians call Prakriti. This Force, according to the Upanishads, is composed in its action & capable in its potentiality of several principles, of which matter, mind & life are those already manifestly active in this world, and where one of these principles is active, the others must also be there, involved in it; or, to put it in another way, Force acting as one of its own principles, one of its movements, is inherently capable even in that movement of all the others. If in the leaf, clod, stone & metal life and mind are not active, it is not because they are not present, but because they are not yet brought forward (prakrita) and organised for action. They are kept concealed, in the background of the consciousness-being which is the leaf, stone or clod; they are not yet viṣu, as the Rigveda would say, but guha, not vyakta, but avyakta. It is a great error to hold that that which is not just now or in this or that place manifest or active, does not there & then exist. Concealment is not annihilation; non-action is not non-being nor does the combination of secrecy & inaction constitute non-existence.

If it is asked how we know that there is the Purusha or Knower in the leaf, clod or stone, — the Vedantin answers that, apart from the perceptions of the Seer & the subjective & objective experiences by which the validity of the perceptions is firmly established in the reason, the very fact that the Knower emerges in matter shows that He must have been there all the time. And if He was there in some form of matter He must be there generally & in all; for Nature is one & knows no essential division, but only differences of form, circumstance and manifestation. There are not many substances in this world, but one substance variously concentrated in many forms; not many lives, but one liver variously active in many bodies; not many minds, but one mind variously intelligent in many embodied vitalities.

It is, at first sight, a plausible theory that life & mind are only particular movements of matter itself under certain conditions & need not therefore be regarded as independent immaterial movements of consciousness involved in matter but only as latent material activities of which matter is capable. But this view can only be held so long as it appears that mind and life can only exist in this body & cease as soon as the body is broken up, can only know through the bodily instruments and can only operate in obedience to and as the result of certain material movements. The sages of the Upanishads had already proved by their own experience as Yogins that none of these limitations are inherent in the nature of life & mind. The mind & life which are in this body can depart from it, intact & still organised, and act more freely outside it; mind can know even material things without the help of the physical eye, touch or ear; life itself is not conditioned necessarily, and mind is not even

conditioned usually, though it is usually affected, by the state of the body or its movements. It can always and does frequently in our experience transcend them. It can entirely master & determine the condition of the body. Therefore mind is capable of freedom from the matter in which it dwells here, — freedom in being, freedom in knowledge, freedom in power.

It is true that while working in matter, every movement of mind produces some effect & consequently some state or movement in the body, but this does not show that the mind is the material result of matter any more than steam is the mechanical result of the machine. This world in which mind is at present moving, in the system of phenomena to which we are now overtly related, is a world of matter, where, to start with, it is true to say *Annam vai sarvam*; All is matter. Mind and life awaken in it & seek to express themselves in it. Since & when they act in it, every movement they make, must have an effect upon it and produce a movement in it, just as the activity of steam must produce an effect in the machine in which its force is acting. Mind and life also use particular parts of the bodily machine for particular functions and, when these parts are injured, those workings of life & mind are correspondingly hampered, rendered difficult or for a time impossible — & even altogether impossible unless life & mind are given time, impulse & opportunity to readjust themselves to the new circumstances & either recreate or patch up the old means or adopt a new system of function. It is obvious that such a combination of time, impulse & opportunity cannot usually or even often occur, — cannot occur at all unless men have the faith, the *nistha* — unless that is to say, they know beforehand that it can be done & have accustomed themselves to seek for the means. Bodies, drowned & “lifeless”, — nothing is really lifeless in the world, — can now be brought back to life because men believe & know that it can be done & have found a means to do it before the organised mind & life have had time to detach themselves entirely from the unorganised life which is present in all matter. So it is with all powers & operations. They are only impossible so long as we do not believe in their possibility & do not take the trouble or have not the clarity of mind to find their right process.

Life & mind are sometimes believed to descend, — or the hypothesis is advanced — into this world from another where they are more at home. If by world is meant not another star or system in this material universe, but some other systematisation of universal consciousness, the Vedantin who follows the Vedas & Upanishads, will not disagree. Life & mind in another star or system of this visible universe might, it is conceivable, be more free and, therefore, at home; but they would still be acting in a world whose basis & true substance was matter. There would therefore be no essential alteration in the circumstances of their action nor would the problem of their origin here be at all better solved. But it is reasonable to suppose that just as here Force organises itself in matter as its fundamental continent & movement, so there should be — the knowledge & experience of the ancient

thinkers showed them that there are — other systems of consciousness where Force organises itself in life and in mind as its fundamental continent & movement. — It is not necessary to consider here what would be the relations in Time & Space of such worlds with ours. Life & mind might descend, ready organised, from such worlds and attach themselves to forms of matter here; but not in the sense of occupying physically these material forms & immediately using them, but in the sense of rousing by the shock of their contact & awakening to activity the latent life & mind in matter. That life & mind in matter would then proceed, under the superior help & impulse, to organise a nervous system for the use of life and a system of life-movements in the nerves for the use of mind fit to express in matter the superior organisations who have descended here. It was indeed the belief of the ancients that — apart from the government of each living form by a single organised personality — such help from the worlds of life & mind was necessary to maintain & support all functionings of life & mind here below because of the difficulty otherwise of expressing & perfecting them in a world which did not properly belong to them but to quite other movements. This was the basis of the idea of Devas, Daityas, Asuras, Rakshasas, Pisachas, Gandharvas etc, with which the Veda, Upanishad & Itihasa have familiarised our minds. There is no reason to suppose that all worlds of this material system are the home of living things — on the contrary the very reverse is likely to be the truth. It is, probably, with difficulty & in select places that life & mind in matter are evolved.

If it were otherwise, if life & mind were to enter, organised or in full power, (such as they must be in worlds properly belonging to them) into material forms, those forms would immediately begin to function perfectly & without farther trouble. We should not see this long & laborious process of gradual manifestation, so laboured, so difficult, the result of so fierce a struggle, of such a gigantic toil of the secret Will in matter. Everywhere we see the necessity of a gradual organisation of forms. What is it that is being organised? A suitable system for the operations of life, a suitable system for the operations of mind. There are stirrings similar to those that constitute life in inanimate things, in metals — as Science has recently discovered, — vital response & failure to respond, but no system for the regular movement of vitality has been organised; therefore metals do not live. In the plant we have a vital system, one might almost say a nervous system, but although there is what might be called an unconscious mind in plants, although in some there are even vague movements of intelligence, the life system organised is suitable only for the flow of rasa, sap, sufficient for mere life, not for prana, nerve force, necessary for the operation in matter of mind. Apan is sufficient for life, vayu is necessary for life capable of mind. In the animal life is organised on a different plan and a nervous system capable of carrying currents of pranic force is developed as one rises in the scale of animal creation, until it becomes perfect in man. It is, therefore, life & mind awakening in matter & manifesting with difficulty that is the truth of this material

world, not the introduction of a ready made life entirely foreign to it in its own potentiality.

If it be said that the life & mind attaching themselves to matter only enter it by degrees as the system becomes more fit, putting more & more of itself into the body which is being made ready for it, that also is possible & conceivable. We are indeed led to see, as we progress in self-knowledge, that there is a great mental activity belonging to us only part of which is imperfectly expressed in our waking thoughts & perceptions — a sub-conscious or super-conscious Self which stores everything, remembers everything, foresees everything, in a way knows everything knowable, has possession of all that is false & all that is true, but only allows the waking mind into a few of its secrets. Similarly our life in the body is only a partial expression of the immortal life of which we are the assured possessors. But this only proves that we ourselves are not in our totality or essentiality the life & mind in the body, but are using that principle for our purpose or our play in matter. It does not prove that there is no principle of life & mind in matter. On the contrary, there is reason to believe that matter is similarly involved in mind & life & that wherever there is movement of life & mind, it tends to develop for itself some form of body in which securely to individualise itself. By analogy we must suppose life & mind to be similarly involved & latent in matter & therefore evolvable in it & capable of manifestation.

We know then the theory of the early Vedantins with regard to the relations of life, mind and matter & we may now turn to the actual statements of the Upanishad with regard to the activities of life & mind and their relation to the soul of things, the Brahman.

II

Mind

If the Upanishads were no more than philosophical speculations, it would be enough in commenting upon them to state the general thought of a passage and develop its implications in modern language and its bearing upon the ideas we now hold. Or if they only expressed in their ancient language general conclusions of psychological experience, which are still easily accessible & familiar, nothing would be gained by any minute emphasis on the wording of our Vedantic texts. But these great writings are not the record of ideas; they are a record of experiences; and those experiences, psychological and spiritual, are as remote from the superficial psychology of ordinary men as are the experiments and conclusions of Science from the ordinary observation of the peasant driving his plough through a soil only superficially known or the

sailor of old guiding his bark by the few stars important to his rudimentary investigation. Every word in the Upanishads arises out of a depth of psychological experience and observation we no longer possess and is a key to spiritual truths which we can no longer attain except by discipline of a painful difficulty. Therefore each word, as we proceed, must be given its due importance. We must consider its place in the thought and discover the ideas of which it was the spoken symbol.

The opening phrase of the Kena Upanishad, *keneshitam patati preshitam manah*, is an example of this constant necessity. The Sage is describing not the mind in its entirety, but that action of it which he has found the most characteristic and important, that which, besides, leads up directly to the question of the secret source of all mental action, its president and impelling power. The central and common experience of this action is expressed by the word *patati*, falls. Motion forward and settling upon an object are the very nature of mind when it acts.

Our modern conception of mind is different; while acknowledging its action of movement and forward attention, we are apt to regard its essential & common action to be rather receptivity of objects, than research of objects. The scientific explanation of mental activity helps to confirm this notion. Fixing its eye on the nervous system & the brain, the physical channels of thought, Physiology insists on the double action of the afferent and the efferent nerves as constituting the action of thought. An object falls on the sense-organ, — instead of mind falling on the object, — the afferent nerves carry the impact to the brain-cells, their matter undergoes modification, the brain-filaments respond to the shock, a message — the will of the cell-republic — returns through the efferent nerves and that action of perception, — whether of an object or the idea of an object or the idea of an idea, which is the essence of thinking — is accomplished. What else the mind does is merely the internal modification of the grey matter of the brain and the ceaseless activity of its filaments with the store of perceptions & ideas already amassed by these miraculous bits of organised matter. These movements of the bodily machine are all, according to Physiology. But it has been necessary to broach the theory of thought-waves or vibrations created by those animalcular amusements in order to account for the results of thought.

However widely & submissively this theory has been received by a hypnotised world, the Vedantist is bound to challenge it. His research has fixed not only on the physiological action, the movement of the bodily machine, but on the psychological action, the movement of the force that holds the machine, — not only on what the mind does, but on what it omits to do. His observation supported by that careful analysis & isolation in experiment of the separate mental constituents, has led him to a quite different conclusion. He upholds the wisdom of the sage in the phrase *patati manas*. An image falls on the eye, — admittedly, the mere falling of an image on the eye will not constitute mental perception — the mind has to give it attention; for it is not the eye that sees, it is the mind that sees through the eye as an instrument,

just as it is not the telescope that sees an otherwise invisible sun, but the astronomer behind the telescope who sees. Therefore, physical reception of images is not sight; physical reception of sounds is not hearing. For how many sights & sounds besiege us, fall on our retina, touch the tympanum of the ear, yet are to our waking thought non-existent! If the body were really a self-sufficient machine, this could not happen. The impact must be admitted, the message must rush through the afferent nerve, the cells must receive the shock, the modification, the response must occur. A self-sufficient machine has no choice of action or non-action; unless it is out of order, it must do its work. But here we see there is a choice, a selection, an ample power of refusal; the practical researches of the Yogins have shown besides that the power of refusal can be absolute, that something in us has a sovereign & conscious faculty of selection or total prohibition of perception & thought & can even determine how, if at all, it shall respond, can even see without the eye & hear without the ear. Even European hypnotism points to similar phenomena. The matter cannot be settled by the rough & ready conclusions of impatient Physiology eager to take a shortcut to Truth & interpret the world in the light of its first astonished discoveries.

Where the image is not seen, the sound is not heard, it is because the mind does not settle on its object — *na patati*. But we must first go farther & inquire what it is that works in the afferent & efferent nerves & insures the attention of the nerves. It is not, we have seen, mere physical shock, a simple vibration of the bodily matter in the nerve. For, if it were, attention to every impact would be automatically & inevitably assured. The Vedantins say that the nerve system is an immensely intricate organised apparatus for the action of life in the body; what moves in them is *prana*, the life principle, materialised, aerial (*vayavya*) in its nature and therefore invisible to the eye, but sufficiently capable of self-adaptation both to the life of matter & the life of mind to form the meeting place or bridge of the two principles. But this action of life-principle is not sufficient in itself to create thought, for if it were mind could be organised in vegetable as readily as in animal life. It is only when *prana* has developed a sufficient intensity of movement to form a medium for the rapid activities of mind and mind, at last possessed of a physical instrument, has poured itself into the life-movement and taken possession of it that thought becomes possible. That which moves in the nerve system is the life-current penetrated & pervaded with the habitual movement of mind. When the movement of mind is involved in the life-movement, as it usually is in all forms, there is no response of mental knowledge to any contact or impression. For just as even in the metal there is life, so even in the metal there is mind; but it is latent, involved, its action secret, — unconscious, as we say, and confined to a passive reception into matter of the mind-forms created by these impacts. This will become clearer as we penetrate deeper into the mysteries of mind; we shall see that even though the clod, stone & tree do not think, they have in them the secret matrix of mind and in that matrix forms are stored which can be translated into mental symbols, into perception, idea and word. But it is only as the

life-currents gain in intensity, rapidity & subtlety, making the body of things less durable but more capable of works, that mind-action becomes increasingly possible & once manifested more & more minutely & intricately effective. For body & life here are the *pratistha*, the basis of mind. A point, however, comes at which mind has got in life all that it needs for its higher development; and from that time it goes on enlarging itself & its activities out of all proportion to the farther organisation of its bodily & vital instruments or even without any such farther organisation in the lower man.

But even in the highest forms here in this material world, matter being the basis, life an intermediary and mind the third result, the normal rule is that matter & life (where life is expressed) shall always be active, mind only exceptionally active *in the body*. In other words, the ordinary action of mind is subconscious and receptive, as in the stone, clod & tree. The image that touches the eye, the sound that touches the ear is immediately taken in by the mind-informed life, the mind-informed & life-informed matter & becomes a part of the experience of Brahman in that system. Not only does it create a vibration in body, a stream of movement in life but also an impression in mind. This is inevitable, because mind, life & matter are one. Where one is, the others are, manifest or latent, involved or evolved, supraliminally active or subliminally active. The sword which has struck in the battle, retains in itself the mental impression of the stroke, the striker & the stricken and that ancient event can be read centuries afterwards by the Yogin who has trained himself to translate its mind-forms into the active language of mind. Thus everything that occurs around us leaves on us its secret stamp & impression. That this is so, the recent discoveries of European psychology have begun to prove & from the ordinary point of view, it is one of the most amazing & stupendous facts of existence; but from the Vedantist's it is the most simple, natural & inevitable. This survival of all experience in a mighty & lasting record, is not confined to such impressions as are conveyed to the brain through the senses, but extends to all that can in any way come to the mind, — to distant events, to past states of existence & old occurrences in which our present selves had no part, to the experiences garnered in dream & in dreamless sleep, to the activities that take place during the apparent unconsciousness or disturbed consciousness of slumber, delirium, anaesthesia & trance. Unconsciousness is an error; cessation of awareness is a delusion.

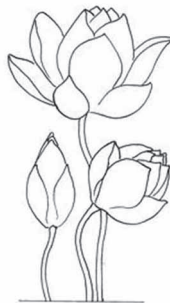
It is for this reason that the phenomenon on which the sage lays stress as the one thing important & effective in mental action here & in the waking state, is not its receptiveness, but its outgoing force — *patati*. In sense-activity we can distinguish three kinds of action — first, when the impact is received subconsciously & there is no message by the mind in the life current to the brain, — even if the life current itself carry the message — secondly, when the mind is aware of an impact, that is to say, falls on its object, but merely with the sensory part of itself & not with the understanding part; thirdly, when it falls on the object with both the sensory &

understanding parts of itself. In the first case, there is no act of mental knowledge, no attention of eye or mind; as when we pass, absorbed in thought, through a scene of Nature, yet have seen nothing, been aware of nothing. In the second, there is an act of sensory knowledge, the mind in the eye attends & observes, however slightly; the thing is perceived but not conceived or only partly conceived, as when the maidservant going about her work, listens to the Hebrew of her master, hearing all, but distinguishing & understanding nothing, not really attending except through the ear alone. In the third, there is true mental perception & conception or the attempt at perception & conception, and only the last movement comes within the description given by the Sage — *ishitam preshitam patati manas*. But we must observe that in all these cases somebody is attending, something is both aware & understands. The man, unconscious under an anaesthetic drug in an operation, can in hypnosis when his deeper faculties are released, remember & relate accurately everything that occurred to him in his state of supposed unconsciousness. The maidservant thrown into an abnormal condition, can remember every word of her master's Hebrew discourse, & repeat in perfect order & without a single error long sentences in the language she did not understand. And, it may surely be predicted, one day we shall find that the thing our minds strove so hard to attend to and fathom, this passage in a new language, that new & unclassed phenomenon, was perfectly perceived, perfectly understood, automatically, infallibly, by something within us which either could not or did not convey its knowledge to the mind. We were only trying to make operative on the level of mind, a knowledge we already in some recess of our being perfectly possessed.

From this fact appears all the significance of the sage's sentence about the mind.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Kena and Other Upanishads*, CWSA, Vol. 18, pp. 297-310)



‘IMMENSITY, INFINITUDE, WONDER. . . .’

July 4, 1914

O sovereign Force, O victorious Power, Purity, Beauty, supreme Love, grant that this being in its integrality, this body in all its totality may draw near to Thee solemnly and offer to Thee in a complete and humble surrender this means of manifestation abandoned perfectly to Thy Will, if not perfectly ready for this realisation. . . .

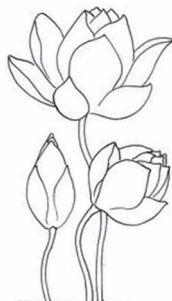
With the calm and strong certitude that Thou wilt one day accomplish the expected miracle and manifest in its fullness Thy sublime splendour, we turn to Thee in a profound rapture, and silently implore Thee. . . .

Immensity, Infinitude, Wonder. . . . Thou alone art and Thou shinest resplendent in all things. The hour of Thy fulfilment is near. All Nature is ingathered in a solemn concentration.

Thou answerest her ardent call.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 192)



LETTERS TO A CHILD

(Continued from the issue of March 2020)

[To one of the first children admitted to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram; he came at the age of ten. Interested as a youth in music, painting and poetry, he later became a teacher of music in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. He began writing to the Mother at the age of twelve.]

(In October 1938, at the age of eighteen, the sadhak left the Ashram for a period of eight years. The following letters were written while he was away.)

My dear child,

I have just received your letter of the 25th and I am glad to know you have recovered at last.

You tell me in your letter: “Mother, I do not want the world, not because I am afraid of my duty but because I want you.” I would like to tell you something about this. To be sure that you are meant for the Ashram life, it is necessary that the spiritual life and all the discipline it entails — in short, the search for and realisation of the Divine — must be the most important thing to you, the only thing worth living for.

For this feeling of *wanting me* can mislead you. Are you sure it is the Divine in me that you want? When you come back here and cannot see me (for, since Sri Aurobindo’s accident, I am no longer giving any “pranams” or interviews), won’t you feel once again that you are giving up all the pleasures that ordinary life can give, without getting anything much in exchange?

Of course, if you want to lead the spiritual life at any cost, that is another thing. But in that case, you will have to rely on the *inner* help, not on an outer and superficial help.

I am telling you all this so that you may not be disappointed once again after returning here.

Read my letter *very carefully*, think it over well to be sure that you have understood it completely, and when you have seen very clearly within yourself, write to me again.

My love and blessings are always with you.

Your mother who loves you.

30 March 1939

*

My dear child,

I received your letter and I have no objection to your going to study music for three years at Lucknow, since that is what you want.

However, I do not think it would be wise to come to Pondicherry in February, for once you are here you might again become troubled and uncertain, and that would arouse an unnecessary conflict in you.

Go to Lucknow, learn all you can there, and then you will be able to consider the problem and make a definite decision concerning your future.

My love, my help and my blessings will always be with you. Your mother.

11 January 1940

*

My dear child,

If you are so eager to come to the Ashram, you can come. But I must warn you about two things:

(1) Your vital will find no gratification here, as life has become very restricted in the present war conditions.

(2) You will live here, as all of us, night and day under the constant threat of a sudden bombardment.

If you do not mind these two dangers, you can come.

With my love and blessings.

10 April 1942

*

(In April 1946, the sadhak returned to the Ashram, where he has remained ever since. The following letters were written after his return.)

O my sweet mother,

Accept my gratitude for having shown me the true path. Give me the strength to reject everything that comes from outside. May your will be done.

My love and blessings are with you to guide you on the way.

4 June 1946

*

My sweet mother,

I want to be closer to you in my heart and in all my being. Give me the power to give myself completely to you. Stay with me always.

Yes, my dear little child, I am always with you to help you, to support you, to guide you. By doing your work with conscientiousness, honesty and perseverance, you will feel my presence closer and closer to you.

With my blessings.

29 June 1946

*

My sweet mother,

The more I look into myself, the more discouraged I am, and I don't know whether there is any chance of my making any progress. It seems that all the obscurities and falsehoods are rising up on every side, inside and outside, and want to swallow me up. There are times when I cannot distinguish truth from falsehood and I am then on the verge of losing my mind.

Still, there is something in me which says very weakly that all will be well; but this voice is so feeble that I cannot rely on it.¹

My faults are so numerous and so great that I think I shall fail. On the other hand, I have neither the inclination nor the capacity for the ordinary life. And I know that I shall never be able to leave this life. This is my situation right now. The struggle is getting more and more acute, and worst of all I cannot lie to you. What should I do?

Do not torment yourself, my child, and remain as quiet as you can; do not yield to the temptation to give up the struggle and let yourself fall into darkness. Persist, and one day you will realise that I am close to you to console you and help you, and then the hardest part will be over.

With all my love and blessings.

25 September 1947

*

Be sincere, always sincere, more and more sincere.

Sincerity demands of each one that he express only the truth of his being.

26 January 1950

*

1. The Mother underlined the words "all will be well" and wrote beside them: "This is the voice of truth, the one you must listen to."

Sweet Mother,

I feel that something is wrong and you are very displeased with me.

It is the very first proposition that is wrong, I am *not* displeased with you — so all that follows cannot be correct.

*

I will be very pleased to know the real cause of your discontent and shall try my best to remove it. I cannot tell you how it pains me to know that you are displeased with me on any account.

There is no real cause because there is no discontent. Your pain is quite gratuitous, so you would [do] better [to] get rid of it immediately.

With my love and blessings.

12 December 1953

*

Sweet Mother,

I pray, please do not be vexed by my letter. I on my part can bear anything except your displeasure. I feel you are very vexed with me for some reason I cannot yet understand. What is it you want me to do? What is your will? I cannot express how deeply I feel your displeasure. Do you want more work from me — more discipline, more right attitude? I am a bundle of failings; please pardon them for I am human. Please pardon me for what I have done and let me know what mistakes I have committed.

I am *not* vexed, I am *not* displeased — this impression of yours is quite false and imaginary — it may be the result of a bad conscience, but you must learn once and for all that whatever mistakes people commit, it cannot vex me nor displease me. If there is bad will or revolt, Kali may come and chastise but she always does it with love.

So, throw away all this nonsense and try to be quiet and happy.

With my love and blessings.

23 March 1954

*

My dear child,

“He who chooses the Infinite has been chosen by the Infinite.”

Never forget this promise of Sri Aurobindo and keep courage in spite of all difficulties. You are sure to reach the goal, and the more you keep confidence, the quicker it will come.

With my love and blessings.

26 January 1956

*

(The following letters are undated. Most were written between 1932 and 1938 during the sadhak's first stay in the Ashram.)

Do not torment yourself, my dear child, and fear nothing; my grace will always be with you and never fail you. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that you will not succeed in this life; on the contrary, I see in you the signs of a vocation. And since you have resolved to be patient, the difficulties will surely be overcome.

Love from your mother.

*

Your going away will not help in the least. Exterior means are useless; it is the “inside” that must change. Keep your resolution and my help will work.

With my love and blessings.

*

My little mother,

I shall be so happy when all the clouds and shadows are dissolved. I want a new life.

My dear child,

You are quite right in wanting a new life, and you may be sure that I shall do my best to help you in that. I am quite sure that perseverance in study and the acceptance of a discipline of work and order in life will be a powerful help to you in renewing yourself.

All my love is with you to help you and guide you.

*

My dear child,

Will and energy can be cultivated just as the muscles are: by exercise. You must exercise your will to be patient and your energy to reject depression. I am always near you to help you with all my love.

*

You need not worry and must continue as you are doing except, perhaps, that you must not allow your superficial and somewhat too light exterior being to interfere and spoil your endeavour, as it does during marching for instance.

The most important [thing] is a steady, quiet endurance that does not allow any upsetting or depression to interfere with your progress. The sincerity of the aspiration is the assurance of the victory.

With my love and blessings.

*

My mother,

It is a lack of energy that is preventing me from painting. Give me a strong energy. I want the inner and outer silence — peace in all my being, from the innermost part to the outermost. Peace, peace in all my being. I cannot express this in proper words and it is becoming melodramatic. Pardon my mistake.

I don't find your expression melodramatic and there is nothing to pardon. I know that it is from lack of energy that you cannot paint. But I can give you all the energy needed; you have only to open yourself and receive and you will see that the source is inexhaustible. It is the same thing for peace and for all the true things you can aspire for.

Love from your mother.

*

My dear mother,

I don't know what to do. I want to open to you, but something prevents me from opening.

My dear child,

You find it difficult to open because you have not yet made the resolution to allow my will, and not your own, to govern your life. As soon as you have understood the need for this, everything will become easier — and you will at last be able to

acquire the peace you need so much.

I am always with you in this effort and aspiration.

*

Mother,

The vital has become very, very bad. Today especially it is very rebellious.

You did not reply to my last letter. Do you mean that it isn't necessary to make the vital peaceful?

I did not answer because what I say seems to have no effect. If you would express clearly, *in a precise way*, the nature of the revolt, it would help you very much to get rid of it, because it is a way of opening yourself which allows the light to enter into the obscurity and illumine it.

*

Mother,

There is a depression. And most often I feel that my mind is tired. I don't know why. Today, my vital too is in terrible revolt. What can I do?

It is the same tiredness as that of the muscles when they do not work enough. Inactivity is just as tiring as over-activity. Not to work enough is just as bad as working too much.

The vital is a most bothersome character who prefers to be bad rather than to go unnoticed. You must teach him that he is not the master of the house.

*

Mother,

I don't know what to do with this vital. Will you please stop it?

SRI AUROBINDO: Do not accept it when it comes and do not believe what it says. Do not act according to its indications. Then it will not be difficult to stop it.

And when Sri Aurobindo tells you something, the first thing to do, and the most important if you want to conquer the difficulty, is to *obey*.

*

My dear child,

This craving for strong experiences belongs to the vital; it is a very frequent tendency in those whose vital is insufficiently developed and seeks violent sensations in the hope of escaping from its heaviness and inertia. But it is an ignorant movement, for violent sensations can never be a remedy; on the contrary, they increase the confusion and obscurity.

The only remedy lies in opening to the higher forces in order to let them do in the vital their work of organisation and classification, of light and peace.

Love from your mother who is always there ready to help you.

*

My dear mother,

You are displeased with me, aren't you? I feel so sad. What can I do? I stumble at every step.

No, my dear little child, I am not displeased — why should I be? I understand your difficulties and I know your goodwill; I know that you want to do well, that you want to conquer, and that you aspire to overcome the weaknesses. When they come, you should not think that I am displeased, but on the contrary that I am always with you, supporting you, protecting you, encouraging you with an unvarying love and tenderness.

*

My dear child,

I am always with you to help you and protect you.

Do not allow yourself to be dominated by vain imaginations. The peace is there in the depths of your heart; concentrate there and you will find it.

Love from your mother.

*

My dear sweet mother,

Transform my whole nature. I shall be what you want me to be. Give me your peace, your silence in my heart. I cannot express everything in words, but, mother, you know everything.

Yes, I understand you very well, my dear child, and my affection is always with you and it wants you to have a vast and lasting peace, a deep and luminous silence, a calm and concentrated force, and the immutable joy that comes from a constant

contact with the Light.
With all my love.

*

*My sweet mother,
I want a deep peace — a very deep peace. I feel that I am always in your arms.*

Yes, it is good to stay in my arms; there you will find the peace you aspire for so much, and also a repose from which the true energies come.
My love enfolds you and embraces you always.

*

*My sweet mother,
Light, more light. Enlighten me. Now I know that you are the greatest power. My mother, take me into your heart, dissolve the obstacles.*

My dear child,
Always nestle in my heart which is always ready to welcome you, in my arms which are always ready to enfold you, and fear no obstacles — we shall dispel them all.
With all my love.

*

*O my dear mother,
Take me into your heart. No, no, I don't want these miserable falsehoods.
Take me into your heart.*

I am always taking you into my heart, but what can I do if you run away from there? You must remain quiet in my arms if you want me to be able to help you.

*

*Mother,
Make me more peaceful.*

Each time that you feel restless you ought to repeat, speaking inside yourself without exterior sound and thinking of me at the same time:

“Peace, peace, O my heart!” Do it steadily and you will be pleased with the result.

My love and blessings.

*

My dear child,

The peace is upon you; allow it to penetrate you, and in the peace you will find the light, and the light will bring you the knowledge.

With all my love. Your mother.

*

My dear child,

How happy I shall be the day when you always feel strong and happy in all circumstances.

With all my love.

THE MOTHER

(Concluded)

(Some Answers from the Mother, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 16, pp. 139-50)



Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

1. Yes.
2. No.
4. Yes.

Very good.

25 June 1935

* * *

INWARD

All night long
I see the flames afar,
But I voyage inward
In a boat of star.

Deep and deeper,
Beyond your loves and hates —
A cool dream laden
With silver freights,

My lonely calm
Follows a rapture-breeze,
Until I wander
Dazzling seas.

Billows of light
Rise up and press me down;
In a golden beauty
My silvers drown.

Past all gloom
My voyager heart’s in-drawn,
One with eternal
Depths of dawn.

Sri Aurobindo —

Is there genuine inspiration in this poem and has it the true qualities of a sonnet?
I don't suppose a certain lyricism is in itself a fault, but . . .

DISLOYALTY

Sweet Calm! forgive the many times I hurled
My hard undreamful glance upon Thy face:
Forgive the irreparable nights and days
I gloried in Thy farness from the world.
Forgive the folly that pronounced Thee far —
Thou whom all creatures breathe or else they die:
Life of our life, yet hidden to our eye
Because we have forgotten that each scar

Brim with Thy God-hue, just as every glow
Of joy is but Thy blossoming in our heart!
Even forgive sad hours when all too low
And earth-born I have felt, deeming Thou wert
Too heaven-high — as if time-changes could
Mar my soul's birth from Thy eternal Motherhood!

true

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

It is very fine.

26 June 1935

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

‘THEIR EARTHLY FOOD’ — THE MOTHER’S KITCHEN

(Continued from the issue of May 2020)

**No separate kitchen yet for Them.
Inmates prepared items for Them and offered to the Mother.**

Sahana writes:

A few days after my arrival, I got permission to cook for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. There was then no separate kitchen for them. With the Mother’s permission the inmates would cook something at their homes, some every day, others on two days or once a week and so on, again without any rigidly fixed rules. Neither was there any direction given to us how to cook (of course, it was all vegetarian diet).

Whatever was prepared with devotion was acceptable to them, they ate very little. However I used to cook twice a week. What a joy it was! I would also now and then go to the Mother to learn something about cooking and she would tell me quite readily, specially when I wanted to prepare some French dish. We knew their usual meal-time and we would accordingly carry our food-offerings on a tray and leave them at a particular place meant for them or give them into Champaklal’s hands. In the evening we brought back the dishes and partook of the Prasad left for us.

(*At the Feet of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo*, pp. 15-16)

Lalita came here in 1927. She writes that she and Sahana who arrived at the end of 1928.

. . . used to do a little cooking for the Mother, as taught by Her. Sahana used to prepare daily a plate of cheese sandwiches and take it to the Mother, whereas I used to prepare *Ragi* biscuits. Sri Aurobindo liked what both of us made. We also had our special days of cooking. I prepared mushrooms (*Les Champignons de Paris*), baked macaroni and vermicelli as taught by the Mother, as well as took some stuffed olives and asparagus for Sri Aurobindo.

(*Mother India*, 1994)

In the book *Champaklal Speaks* we find a photograph of Bansidhar, Nolineswar and Kantilal cooking on a Primus stove on the ground floor verandah of the Library

House. Nolineswar prepared *luchis* for Sri Aurobindo.

Bansidhar writes:

One Bengali *sadhak* used to send cooked food for Sri Aurobindo. Sometimes my brother Kanti-bhai and I would also lend our hand in preparing it. Dara has taken photographs of that occasion. When it pleased him, Dara also did some cooking himself. He always prepared something new. Those days were feast days for the *sadhaks* of the Ashram.

(*Advent*, February 1994)

Moti-ben, Champaklal’s aunt, who came in 1927 also used to prepare some items for Sri Aurobindo. According to her recollections some of the dishes prepared by her were:

Bhajias (*Pakodas* made from *ajwain* leaves), potato-*vadas* and small sweet *puddas* (pancakes). Moti-ben observes that “he liked the *puddas* very much and used to eat a good number of them at times; of *bhajias*, potato-*vadas* and *puri*, he used to eat only two or three pieces. Once he got some kidney trouble and the Mother stopped him from eating the *puddas*. I made *puddas* without sugar, but he did not like them. At about 4 p.m. I carried to his room walnuts, cashew nuts, almonds and raisins fried in ghee.

(*Mother India*, February 1995, pp. 119-22)

Prasad

In Indian culture, offering food to the Deity is a sacred function and when that ceremony is over devotees receive a little of it as prasad. We find the same custom was followed by the devotees as well as the disciples here. Food offered to Sri Aurobindo by individuals was later always shared by others as prasad. This custom continued as long as food was offered to Sri Aurobindo.

Moti-ben prepared pancakes (*malpuwa*) for Sri Aurobindo for taking with his tea. The dishes sent by Moti-ben included the bowl in which he used to keep a portion of the pancakes for us as prasad. Moti-ben cut the pancakes into small pieces so we could all receive a small share of the prasad.

Bansidhar says:

I may say something more about the prasad. In those days Sri Aurobindo’s younger brother Barin-da used to cook for him. After Sri Aurobindo had his lunch, the leftovers were brought downstairs. From them Barin-da used to take a portion and the rest was sent to Haradhan as prasad. Haradhan used to stay in the room where Madhav Pandit’s books are displayed at present. Haradhan

would distribute what he received as prasad to a few sadhaks who would gather in his room to receive it.

(*Advent*, February 1994)

Pavitra had arrived in Pondicherry in December 1925. He stayed in a room in Rosary House. In July 1926 he shifted from Rosary House to an adjoining one, Secretariat House, which was situated on the northern side of the Ashram courtyard. He stayed in a small room with an open terrace on the first floor of Secretariat House. Meditation House and this one had a common wall and were touching each other. Thus, it was possible to go from Pavitra's terrace to the Mother's bathroom, which was situated in the western most corner of Meditation House. Soon Pavitra started preparing some dishes for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

We get some idea from Mrityunjay's report regarding his cooking in the early 1930s:

There was a chair and also a small table which Pavitra used for preparing salads for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He could make a variety of salads — true French salads. Simply to watch him at work was to learn a chapter of human life. What a clean and orderly arrangement of every detail: the utensils in position, the water in the bowls, the knives and forks and spoons, the apron and towels, the salt and pepper, vinegar and oil, and then the vegetables, some boiled, some raw, some soaked in salt since the day before, and lastly the plates with a big jug of water — all set-up as if in a scientist's laboratory. At any moment the Mother will come. He has to hurry up. The time is 1.00 pm. . . . It is time to go. Crossing the terrace Pavitra accompanies the Mother through her bathroom door, carrying four or five bowls, one above the other, covered with saucers; they contain Sri Aurobindo's lunch.

(Shyam Kumari, *How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, Volume 2, pp. 30-31)

Regarding cooking in the general kitchen, Sahana writes:

The sadhikas took up the cooking a year or two after my arrival (1928) and I used to cook twice a week. The entire cooking work had to be done by oneself. No servants were available to help us. And as I was a little liberal in the use of oil and ghee Sri Aurobindo once jokingly said: "If Sahana were to cook, the Ashram would turn insolvent in three months!"

(*At the Feet of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo*, p. 7)

Some time in 1930 when Tara and Lila came and joined the Ashram, they requested the Mother to give them the charge of the kitchen. On receiving the Mother's

sanction they took up the responsibility of the work. All work was done by them and no servant was allowed to enter the room. The cooking was done in earthen pots. Once one of the earthen pots broke and the hot boiling rice with water fell on Tara’s legs. So they were scalded badly. Tara says: “The Mother, instead of pacifying me, scolded me saying, ‘Couldn’t you be careful?’; from then on brass pots were introduced for cooking.”

Tara started enquiring (1932) and seeking guidance for the preparation of some items. The question was sent to the Mother, but the directions were sometimes given by the Mother and sometimes by Sri Aurobindo. Here are some touching examples of the same as recorded by Tara:

To a certain question Sri Aurobindo replied on behalf of the Mother: “A sauce with saffron, coriander, cumin, black seeds as was written for the cabbage. If there are a few tomatoes to add in the sauce, it will be better.”

To another question, “How to prepare the sauce, Mother?”

Sri Aurobindo: “Dissolve the rice flour in a small quantity of cold liquid — and little by little add the hot milk, stirring all the time, bring to boiling point and then mix with the cooked greens and mashed potatoes.”

On one occasion when she wanted to know why the Mother did not say anything regarding the food offered, the Master wrote:

“No instruction needed. You do it very well. Mother could not suggest anything better.”

(Narayan Prasad, *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 18)

These small details go to show the interesting fact which becomes evident from the above quotations, that though Sri Aurobindo had withdrawn from the outer scene of the Ashram life, yet even such small matters of everyday life were brought to his notice and the guidance for these came from the Mother as well as from Sri Aurobindo.

All the items prepared for the day in the general kitchen would be arranged on a dish, which was carried by Aurobindobala upstairs to the Mother.

General Dining Room for the inmates

A kitchen for everyone was already established in 1927, now we find the mention of a common Dining Room also in 1927.

Prior to 1933 the Dining Room, Kitchen, Dispensary, Library, Workshop all were within the precincts of the main Ashram building. . . . There was no counter. Food was kept in a dish in a cupboard. Dyuman meditated before and after his dining room work.”

(Narayan Prasad, *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 22)

In 1927 the Mother came to the Dining Room after her work at noon, and gave to each of us a dish of food herself, putting bananas in it.

(*Ibid.*, p. 62)

Dyuman and Charu carried the prepared food from the kitchen to the Dining Room. Food was served by the *sadhaks*. At that time there were sixty-seventy inmates. Of these *sadhikas* were not more than a dozen. Those who did not come to the general dining room for their meals, and for the few *sadhikas* who were there, the food was served on an enamel dish covered with another one. Maids served the food to each one's room.

(*Ibid.*)

We get a more complete picture of the workings of the Dining Room in 1930 from Mrityunjoy's reminiscence:

The Dining Room in those days (in the early 1930s) was on the Northwest corner inside the ashram compound, not even a room but a small tiled shed only, where not more than fifteen people could sit together and eat. No visitor was allowed there, only the *sadhaks* went there for food, and that also in two batches, due to shortage of space. Servants carried food to the guests in their room. There were only enamelled pots, not even tiffin-carriers. After some time I was given the opportunity to go there for some light work, evidently with the approval of the Mother, to spread the carpets (actually narrow mats) and arrange the Japanese-style small tables on the floor, but not to take my own food there. After three months someone left. There was a vacant seat, so I was given permission to take food there. This was the first time since I came to the Ashram (1929) that I had a chance to eat in the Dining Room. The experience was no less solemn than going for meditation. We would all go in and take our seats as the bell was rung; the same bell perhaps that is rung today in the palatial building that is now our Dining Room. An incense stick was lit to add to the sacred atmosphere, and each one would turn to his dish prayerfully in an attitude of offering the food to the Divine within. I do not say that this atmosphere was maintained three meals of the day. I was told that it had been far more intense before when the Mother used to come to the Dining Room herself every day and tasted each item which was then taken by all as Prasad.

But after some time that opportunity was also lost. Apparently due to the Mother’s lack of time, but actually because of a general failure in maintaining the attitude pure enough. Later Sri Aurobindo wrote that people’s attitude towards food was responsible.

(*Breath of Grace*, p. 63)

What was the type of meals the inmates had at that time? We get some idea of it from Sahana’s writings:

Three meals were served every day. A big bowl of phosco that had a taste similar to cocoa but ever so much more tasty. A few slices of toast and one banana. The dining room was a longish, average sized room with a tiled roof, situated at the North-Western corner of the main building. Among those who served our meals was Nolini, dishing out our phosco and toast. At mid-day we were given some rice and two courses of cooked vegetable or one of vegetable and another of *dal* (lentils), as a variation on some days we were served with *khichree* and several kinds of vegetables fried in butter. A big bowl of curd and two bananas were a regular feature. One could also have bread instead of rice or even bread and rice if one so wanted. The evening meal, before darkness spread its cloak over the land, consisted of bread, a vegetable dish or *dal* and a big bowl of milk. Two or three times a week we got rice cooked in milk and sweetened — the quantity served was as much as the usual bowl of milk. There were some who did not sit at meals in the dining-room. These [individuals] and the sadhikas were served in their room by maid-servants

(*Breath of Grace*, pp. 112-13)

From an article by Margaret published in an old issue of the Bengali journal *Bartika*, we learnt that by 1933 there was a separate Dining Room for ladies also, situated in one of the southern rooms of the Rosary House. About twelve seats were kept arranged there and inmates had their meals in a few separate batches. Each one had a fixed seat. Swarna came in 1933 and as a newcomer was not aware of the rule and she sat in a place meant for another person! This created some misunderstanding! She felt let down and wrote to Sri Aurobindo: “You have brought me to the Ashram and you have not fixed my place in the dining room?” From the following day this rule was no longer followed in the Dining Room.

Thus we find now that different dining areas for men and women were finally established.

The present building of the Dining Room was taken on rent in 1933 and after needed repairs the kitchen and the dining arrangements within the Ashram compound were shifted to this new building. The Dining Room was opened on January 4, 1934 by the Mother. Similar to the custom of sending the cooked food to the Mother

— when the kitchen was in the Ashram premises — food cooked here would also be sent to the Mother daily.

Champaklal records that in 1935:

The Mother tells Dyuman: “Today is Wednesday, there is special cooking in the kitchen. And it is your birthday. So you will tell Tara to make some special dishes.” And so eleven dishes in all were cooked.

(*Champaklal Speaks*, p. 101)

This would mean that Tara was in charge of the cooking in the new Dining Room.

Sri Aurobindo's regular cup of tea

Right from 1910 it was recorded that tea was prepared daily for Sri Aurobindo. Later we find that many of his disciples also used to take tea. We get a very interesting insight on this subject in the writings of Champaklal and others. Champaklal says:

Mother said to me once that she did not like people in the Ashram taking tea. Then she added: “I don't like it. But I cannot forbid them because Sri Aurobindo himself takes tea. . . .” Speaking of Sri Aurobindo's tea, which he stopped after his accident in 1938, let me tell you he was never particular about it. Look at this small note in my files:

Mother, this night Sri Aurobindo has not taken his tea. Is there anything wrong in the milk or in the tea? Anything wrong in the person concerned? Or in me? 30.10.1932

“No. I must have forgotten about it.” *Sri Aurobindo*

So you see, this was his attitude to tea as indeed to many other things. I remember Mother tried once to stop the distribution of tea in the Ashram but that could only be for a short period. It had to be resumed and it continues. At first it used to be distributed by me through Kamala, then through Rajangam. Thereafter it is being done by Ravindra.

(*Champaklal Speaks*, p. 88)

On the same subject of tea, Bansidhar recollects:

Champaklal used to prepare tea for Sri Aurobindo and he himself took it to the Mother, who then gave it to Sri Aurobindo. After some time this privilege was

given to me. I had to prepare the tea by 8.00 in the evening. When I opened the door of the passage, the Mother used to come there and take the tea-pot from me. Sri Aurobindo added sugar and milk before drinking it. At night he used to write replies to the letters sent by sadhaks and then he took his tea. I believe the tea used at that time was Chinese because it came in Chinese boxes; later on it was the turn of the Indian tea. In the morning I would bring back the tea-pot with the dishes to be used for breakfast.

(*Advent*, February 1994)

Here is another report on the same subject of tea from Nirodbaran:

It was a well-known fact that Sri Aurobindo was fond of a daily cup of tea. The accident had upset that long-standing habit. Now the question was taken up. Dr. Manilal proposed that Sri Aurobindo should take a cup of Marmite during the day as well as tea. Sri Aurobindo would not take both. I do not remember whether he took Marmite at all, but I distinctly remember that he was taking tea. I also had a personal reason for this recollection, for I was, and even now am, a lover of tea, if not a mild addict. But Sri Aurobindo's way of drinking tea was rather odd; he had to drink it from a feeding cup! Could anyone relish a fine beverage taken out of a feeding cup, I wondered! Before the accident whenever we heard the tinkling sound of his spoon at midnight from his corner room, we used to say, "Sri Aurobindo is having tea!" One day he suddenly declared, "I won't take tea any more!" Thus a life-long habit was given up in an instant!

(*Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 13)

Sahana (1928) says:

Nobody cooked at home except for tea which they prepared on their stoves. The tea leaves were supplied according to the fixed quota, as was done with all other things.

(*At the Feet of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo*, p. 16)

Some persons who cooked food for Sri Aurobindo in the year 1935 and later

In 1935 when the present northern block of Meditation House was completed the Mother started using it. Pavitra was allotted a room on the western side of this building. There were three rooms which he used as his laboratory, his own bedroom and his office. Pavitra continued preparation of some items for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. He prepared different types of sandwiches as well as salads. When artichokes and asparagus were available he would cook them also. Mrityunjy (1929)

helped him to prepare pulps and juices of some raw vegetables like carrots, radishes etc. Pavitra prepared dishes in the small antechamber in his office.

Some others who offered food to the Mother on a regular basis were:

Datta had a kitchen in her own room where she prepared food for the Mother, *i.e.* salad and soup as also some boiled vegetables which were used by Pavitra for preparing salads. In the afternoon she prepared some vegetables and soup for Sri Aurobindo also. She had a team of three other ladies working with her. There was Nishtha (Miss Margaret Wilson), the daughter of the U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, who would wash the dishes used by the Mother and Jwalanti, Madame Monod-Herzen, an Italian lady, would wipe them. Swarna used to carry the trays of vessels to the terrace for wiping them there.

Rajangam prepared soup for the Mother.

Amiya and Nalina (Sahana's sisters) and Mridu who "were selected by the Mother for their good cooking, which Sri Aurobindo specially liked", regularly prepared Bengali dishes for Sri Aurobindo.

Shanta-ben and Achanchal-ben sometimes prepared some Gujarati items for Sri Aurobindo.

Krishnamma and Rukmani prepared South Indian dishes.

Kiran Kumari, used to work in the Mother's Room. She would also cook from time to time some vegetables, tomatoes, spinach etc. as directed by the Mother. This she did on a heater in a room on the first floor of the Meditation House. She remembers having prepared a few times one special item of lotus-seeds, for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. This is a special delicacy prepared in her community.

Bratati (Milli) regularly cooked some dishes for the Mother.

Ila Sen, Sarala Ganguli, Mona Pinto, Alice and Ali Hydari would often cook something special for the Mother.

In the 1940's Ravindra served various fresh vegetable juices and preparations of fruits. He also prepared for the Mother fresh cream and butter.

We have mentioned here the names of only a few persons who cooked for the Mother. There must have been many others. Apart from the regular ones, devotees during their visits to the Ashram occasionally prepared dishes of their choice and were full of satisfaction and gratitude of getting this rare opportunity of offering their cooking to the Lord.

Bibha remembers that Tara had a separate room in the Dining Room premises which she used exclusively for cooking something for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Within a week of her arrival in 1941, Bibha was called to this room. Tara knew that Bibha could do clay modeling. So she was asked by Tara to mould a small lotus out of mashed potato mixed with beetroot juice. When done the little red lotus was placed in a glass bowl at the centre of which a small bowl containing soup for Sri Aurobindo was kept by Tara. Bibha says that Tara used to carry a small tray wherein were arranged in small bowls various preparations for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

This she would carry to Pavitra’s office door. The Mother would herself open the door of Pavitra’s office to receive this tray and as Tara entered the room with her tray, the Mother would put an arm around her shoulder, close the door and both of them would go together into her room. The Divine’s way of showing her love and appreciation for the devotee’s work of love!

The small kitchenette on the first floor of the Library House was maintained for preparing soup for the Mother. There was as yet no separate Kitchen for preparing their food.

Dyuman given charge of food and serving Them

Dyuman arrived in 1927 and he was given work in the general Dining Room which was within the Ashram premises.

Till August 1930 the Dining Room was under the charge of S [Satyendra], a *sadhak* from Gaya. Venkatraman brought things for him from the market. Afterwards the purchasing work was entrusted to Bal Subramanya, the man next to shoulder the responsibility for the whole affair who was then serving bananas under S. When Dyuman found that the supply of bananas was not good enough he asked the Mother if he could buy them himself. . . . In January 1933 when Bala Venkatraman wanted to go from here the Mother asked Dyuman if he could do the marketing. . . . In order that everything might be done under the Mother’s guidance Dyuman began to report to her the day’s working. . . . These intimations, when signed by Sri Aurobindo, were acted upon.

(Narayan Prasad, *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, p. 20)

By 1933-34, the Mother put Dyuman in charge of food. Right from the beginning he tried to find out what dishes Mother liked, or needed for Sri Aurobindo and he provided them. The development of the Ashram Dining Room as well as the Mother’s Kitchen was possible due to his complete collaboration and dedication to the Mother. He later recollected about his work:

We served her fresh tomato-juice regularly. One day in 1971, she said, “Dyuman, this juice is from Bangalore tomatoes. They must be using chemical fertilisers and insecticides.”

“Yes, Mother,” I replied.

“Then it is not good for my health, isn’t it so? In that case do not give it to me.”

“All right, Mother,” I said.

Then I told her, “Mother, I think there are some tomatoes grown at Gloria

without these things. I will go there immediately and bring some to show you. If you like them, juice can be made from them.”

I went and brought the tomatoes and showed them to her. She liked them and said she would take the juice.

We followed what was good for her health. And what was good for her body was good for the universal body. That is why we ventured into making this farm . . . (Gloria farm). Thirty years have passed since Gloria came to me. I did not take it up as an agricultural work in the ordinary sense. Matter has to reveal the spirit, and the first condition for this is a peaceful, loving and harmonious atmosphere. And a perfect harmony has developed between me and the whole of Gloria. I have planted a hundred mango trees of the Baiganpalli variety at Gloria for I want each Ashramite to get one mango a day during the season. Now some of them are bearing fruit and in 1989 juice from their fruits was served at the Dining Room.

In her youth the Mother drank a lot of milk, but later on, for some years she did not drink it. One day, while I was serving her another drink, I carried some milk with me, hoping that she could consent to drink a little of it.

She asked me, “What is that?”

I answered “Milk.”

She said, “Then put some in this drink.”

And thus she started to drink milk once more. . . . At first she would not drink orange-juice. Then we planted some orange trees at Lake Estate. From the oranges we got from those trees I prepared some juice for the Mother.

She tasted it and asked, “Have you put sugar in it?”

“No, Mother” I replied.

“But it is so sweet!” she exclaimed.

From then on she started to drink orange-juice. But I had to be very careful to avoid serving her oily foods.

This topic of food for the Mother has brought a flood of memories. Half a century back one day, at about 3 or 3.30 p.m., the Mother was having her lunch. Either Nolini or Amrita told her that C was not taking her food.

“Why?” the Mother enquired.

“Because there are no potatoes in her food,” was the reply.

The Mother saw me passing by and called, “Dyuman, I have potatoes in my dish, why does not C have them? She must have them.”

I replied, “Yes, Mother.”

Here is the story of potatoes. At that time the Second World War was at its height. The Government had requisitioned all the potatoes for the use of the army. Not a kilo was to be had in the markets. Though the Mother ate sparsely and had no preferences I wanted to get some potatoes for her. So during the war, I imported potatoes from Egypt and instead of six paise paid one rupee

per kilo for them.

Olive-oil was required for the dressing of the salad for the Mother. During the war it was not to be had in India. I learnt that it was available in Singapore. We got a barrel of three hundred kilogrammes. Then we bought sterilised bottles, emptied the oil from the drum into the bottles and machine sealed them with golden foil and after wrapping them in straw, packed them in boxes. Whenever Pavitra needed it, we supplied pure olive-oil.

Sri Aurobindo liked the juice of grape-fruits. It was not available in India. Even during the war whenever there was a possibility we imported grape-fruits from Egypt, South Africa and Australia.

At one stage the Mother began to like fresh grapes. In those days it was only fifty paise per kilogramme. We got fresh seedless grapes from Chaman, Afganistan, reported to be the best in the world. As we found it was difficult to get them throughout the year, we felt the necessity of a cold storage and made one for fruits. Ravindra was handling the fruits. He kept apples and grapes in the cold storage from season to season.

During the struggle for Pondicherry's independence, the freedom fighters of Pondicherry put up road blocks and did not allow anything to come in by road. I was short of grapes for the Mother. As the freedom fighters did not block the trains, I told my servant, "Go to Kodaikanal. Buy half a ton of grapes and bring them back by train." I did not hesitate to put so much money in the hands of a servant. Next day he brought the grapes."

(Shyam Kumari, *How They Came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, 1960, pp. 33-35)

On another occasion, Dyuman records:

I never gave Mother anything to eat without first tasting it to make sure it was good and safe. The doctor told Mother when she was unwell that chicken soup would be good for her. She said that if Pranab would agree she would take it provided there was no meat-piece in it. As I tasted everything beforehand I have tasted chicken also.

(*Mother India*, 1992)

(*To be continued*)

CHITRA SEN

ON THE MANIFESTO OF THE FRENCH INDIA SOCIALIST PARTY

(Continued from the issue of May 2020)

The next big event that happened in French India was the Chandernagore referendum held on 20th June 1949, which went totally in favour of merger with India. A Press correspondent went a week before the referendum to Nolini Kanta Gupta, the Ashram Secretary, to ask about Sri Aurobindo's opinion in the matter. We don't know what exactly Nolini Kanta Gupta said but the Press reporter wrote that Sri Aurobindo favoured the merger with India. This news item was reported in six newspapers and finally published in the *Mother India* of 25th June, 1949 by its scholarly editor Amal Kiran, one of the early disciples of Sri Aurobindo. One would suppose then that the Press reporter had got the right information from Nolini Kanta Gupta, but a clarificatory note of Sri Aurobindo written in the third person to Amal Kiran says that the published statement did not adequately represent his views. I quote the full text below:

Amal,

June 27 1949

I sent you a telegram asking you to withhold the spokesman's statement. It was not to be republished. The statement does not adequately represent Sri Aurobindo's views. It overstresses one point and leaves out others which are as important, but I see that you have already featured it in *Mother India*. Anyway Sri Aurobindo doesn't want anything further to be written about his view on the French India question; what is done is done but in future he wishes to remain silent unless an imperative need arises for a statement. Just now Sri Aurobindo does not want strong attacks to be made on the policy of the Congress Government as by their action they have removed many of the difficulties of the Asram and all that it needs for its institutions are coming in freely as a result of special orders given by the Madras Government so he does not want to figure as their enemy or opponent. Certain things in their attitude may seem doubtful but he does not want them too much stressed at present unless it becomes very necessary to do so.¹

One would tend to conclude from the above passage that Sri Aurobindo was against the merger of Chandernagore with India, and by extension of the same

1. Sri Aurobindo, "On French India and on Pakistan", *Autobiographical Notes*, pp. 515-16.

attitude, against the merger of the rest of French India with India. The reason why he thus wished to remain silent at this point and not differ with the policy of the Congress Govt. of India seems to be the security and well-being of the Ashram, which was facing then an acute shortage of food and other essential supplies. But one would wonder why Sri Aurobindo, who was himself a revolutionary and had played a major role in the early phase of the freedom movement of India (1906-1910), would support the colonial occupation of French India!

A long letter found in the documents of Purushottam Reddiar, President of the French India National Congress, throws considerable light on Sri Aurobindo's political position.² The letter written by an anonymous Ashramite on 28th June 1949 (the very next day of Sri Aurobindo's clarification to Amal Kiran) replies in great detail to the allegations levelled against the Ashram by Purushottam Reddiar in a letter to Rajkumar, Secretary of the Foreign Dept., All India Congress Committee in Delhi.³ The letter of the Ashramite quotes Sri Aurobindo's statement of 20th August 1947 (referring to the attack on the Ashram on 15th August 1947) and goes on to say that the writer has reason to believe that Sri Aurobindo still maintained the same position even after the referendum of Chandernagore on 20 June 1949. It would mean that Sri Aurobindo still supported the manifesto of the French India Socialist Party despite the wrong use that was being made of it by the French colonial administration and in spite of the corrupt politicians who had taken over the party after the resignation of Counouma's group from the Council of Administration. One would at first wonder why an Ashramite would make a statement that shows Sri Aurobindo in such poor light, but the explanation that follows, which I quote below, is quite convincing to those who are familiar with Sri Aurobindo's spiritual teachings:

This is what was given out to the press on the 20th August 1947 in the name of Sri Aurobindo, and this, I have reason to believe, is the considered opinion of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother today also. They are not politicians, they do not change opinions, — if that can be called opinion. Because the spiritual truth and knowledge in which they live give them a direct perception, a perception of identity, which can stand the challenge of the whole world against it. They cannot be mistaken, but neither do they dictate, nor perform miracles; they take nature as it is — an immense mass of conflicting forces and conditions, and out of that they arrive at the result of a higher consciousness on earth and a higher state, working slowly with unimaginable patience. They do not change their opinion, but they do change their method of working, according to the nature of the response they get. The only lamentable part is that, we do not

2. Purushottam Reddiar's papers, National Archives of Pondicherry.

3. *Ibid.*

understand at times, neither do we care to approach them with an attitude of respect that common sense demands; we are overconfident about their mistakes and we begin throwing mud on them!⁴

Thus at this point Sri Aurobindo did not support the merger of French India with India, but neither did he support the continuation of French colonial rule. It was as if he kept the failed international scheme in suspension and waited for better times. Sri Aurobindo's political position has to be understood essentially from a spiritual point of view, and one must keep in mind that he was attempting to bring in human unity rather than taking sides in a political conflict. When Pondicherry presented an extraordinary political opportunity for a unique experiment of internationalism, he readily supported the group of politicians who were under his influence and sought his guidance. But when things went wrong, he withdrew his tacit support to their party and waited for more favourable circumstances, looking for other means of fulfilment. In other words, the immediate political aim was not the primary objective; the fulfilment of the ideal of human unity and the spiritual synthesis of cultures was the larger intent behind his stand. Even his political stand was limited and private and did not extend to the institutional backing of the Ashram, which always remained officially neutral in its political stand. So when the news item of his support for the merger of Chandernagore was erroneously published, his position (or rather the lack of it) was misunderstood, but he remained silent and made no further public pronouncements, which naturally gave the impression that he supported the merger. It would have been, moreover, pointless to speak of human unity at that juncture when the liberation of Chandernagore from French rule was a *fait accompli*.

The experiment of internationalism was carried forward later by the Mother after Sri Aurobindo passed away on 5th December 1950. On 24th April 1951 the Mother presided over the Sri Aurobindo Memorial Convention which passed the resolution to establish "The International University Centre" that was later renamed "Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education." In the Ashram *Bulletin* of April 1952, the Mother set forth the basic aims of the University Centre, which are essentially the same as those of Auroville which she founded in 1968; in fact, the latter seems to be an extension of the former, though on a much larger scale. The ideal of the unity of mankind, the study of different civilisations of the world, the presentation of cultural pavilions belonging to different countries, a cultural synthesis based on a higher principle — all these ideas were well formulated by the Mother at the time of the opening of the Ashram University, and an earnest effort was made at that time to give them a practical shape. In other words, the failure of the international project of the Cité Universitaire in Pondicherry did not deter Mother from renewing

4. *Ibid.*

the experiment of human unity in a different way. She established the International University Centre in 1951, and followed it up several years later by an even more ambitious experiment at human unity by founding the international city of Auroville in 1968.

The next document I would like to present is Sri Aurobindo's Note on the draft of a bill⁵ which was submitted in the French National Assembly by Lambert Saravane. Sri Aurobindo's Note is dated 12th February 1950 and is addressed to Sanat Bannerji, who was the Indian Consul of Pondicherry at that time. The draft bill basically reflects Lambert Saravane's *volte face* in his political stand after the rigged municipal elections of October 1948. Saravane, who was totally disappointed by the way the elections were fraudulently conducted by the French Govt., changed his political stand to demanding "autonomy for French India within the Indian Union in close collaboration with France". For this to happen, he proposed that France should willingly transfer its sovereignty over the four towns of French India to India without any referendum, and have a special relationship with India by which it can maintain its cultural influence in Pondicherry. Saravane had earlier stood for "autonomy for French India within the French Union in close collaboration with India", which is the reverse of what he demanded later. Ironically, as he was the elected deputy of Pondicherry from 1946-51, he played a key role in putting up both the proposals for discussion in the French National Assembly.

Sri Aurobindo's comments on the draft bill show a very practical understanding of politics unlike the impression of being only a mystic visionary that most people have of him. He raised two technical objections to the bill tabled by Saravane, one regarding the levying of customs duties by Pondicherry, for which there will not be scope if the previous Customs Union between France and India was going to be re-established. At this point of time the Customs Union had lapsed and Pondicherry had become a smugglers' paradise. Gold, diamonds, watches, liquor, silk and other costly articles were imported freely and sold at a high premium without paying any duties in the surrounding Indian territory. This led not only to a huge loss of revenue to the Indian Govt. but also to a depreciation of Indian currency in foreign markets. The Indian Govt. then responded with retaliatory measures by restricting the import of essential supplies into French India, which caused a general state of panic among its residents. It was in this context that Sri Aurobindo made the following comment:

I presume that the old Customs will be reestablished at the Port and there will be none between the Territory and the rest of India: only, certain limited rights will be given for the introduction of goods from France to be carefully restricted to the amount necessary for local use; if so, there can be no scope for any levy of Customs by the local authority.⁶

5. Sri Aurobindo, "Note on a Projet de loi", *Autobiographical Notes*, pp. 495-96.

6. Sri Aurobindo, *Ibid.*, p. 495.

The second comment is about referring to the U.N.O. any differences that may arise in future between the Indian Govt. and the state of Pondicherry which had considerable autonomy in Saravane's proposal. Sri Aurobindo says that Pondicherry will not be able to refer any violations of the treaty to the U.N.O. once it has subordinated itself to the Indian Union, because then the state of Pondicherry will have no independent existence of its own. The intervention of the U.N.O. could be only in matters concerning India and France, not between Pondicherry and India.

The third comment of Sri Aurobindo, though made in the specific context of Pondicherry politics of that period, is applicable to Indian politics in general and right up to the present times. It shows Sri Aurobindo's profound disenchantment with democratic politics and a total distrust of politicians. He says what is important is not the political system but the "type of politicians and party leaders" who use the system. Democracy by itself cannot ensure good governance, for it can become "a paper constitution" in the hands of corrupt politicians who will "make use of their opportunities to pervert everything to their own profit". Only "the right type of men in the right place" can ensure good governance. This comment of Sri Aurobindo, written before even the first general elections of independent India, is remarkably prophetic of what happened later to Indian politics. His solution to the problem of corruption in a democratic system is equally prophetic and relevant to present day politics. He says people will learn political discipline and make the right use of democratic institutions "only after a long lapse of time". It is worth quoting at length this comment of Sri Aurobindo:

. . . if nothing is changed in local conditions and freedom is left for a certain type of politicians and party leaders to make use of their opportunities to pervert everything to their own profit, how are they to be prevented from prolonging the old state of things, in which case the Territory would easily be turned into a sink of misgovernment and corruption and things will become worse even than in the past. Only a strong control, a thorough purification of the administration and a period of political discipline in which the population could develop public spirit, the use and the right use of the powers and the democratic institutions placed at their disposal, could ensure a change for the better and even that only after a long lapse of time. It cannot be ensured by a paper constitution; the right type of men in the right place could alone ensure it.⁷

The specific context of this comment could be elaborated, though I have already referred to the state-sponsored smuggling and political thuggery of Goubert and his men, who controlled the French India Socialist Party after the resignation of the group of Saravane and Counouma. The large-scale smuggling of contraband goods

7. *Ibid.*, p. 496.

to the surrounding Indian territory had caused a huge loss of revenue to the Indian Govt. But it had also become a problem to the French Govt. when the Indian Govt. retaliated by the choking of essential supplies to Pondicherry. The panic created thereby was not at all favourable for France to win the referendum, for the people of Pondicherry realised how dependent they were on India for their basic necessities. Yet the French Govt. did not sign the Customs Union because it did not want to displease Goubert and his men on whom it entirely depended to win the referendum for France. Goubert, who was a perfect example of political opportunism, took full advantage of the helplessness of the French Govt. to his own profit and kept postponing the referendum, even as he professed his wholehearted support for France. He also kept the Indian Govt. in suspense by making false promises of supporting the merger with India. While he thus kept the political problem in abeyance, his men made a quick fortune even while the people of French India went through a period of acute scarcity. It was in this context that Sri Aurobindo wrote that "if nothing is changed in local conditions and freedom is left for a certain type of politicians and party leaders" French India "would easily be turned into a sink of misgovernment".

This was indeed the sordid state of affairs in Pondicherry, and things went from bad to worse until Goubert became so powerful that even the French Govt. could not control him. In March 1954 Governor Ménard instituted a probe against him for embezzlement of public funds and arrested his four principal agents who were manipulating all the government auctions to their own profit. Goubert, who was well prepared for this eventuality, turned overnight into an Indian patriot, changed his name to E. G. Pillai, and passed a resolution in the municipal councils in favour of merger with India without any referendum. All the parties supporting merger with India, including the Communists led by Subbiah, now joined in the merger movement. One commune after another in the suburbs of Pondicherry was liberated by Goubert's and Subbiah's men and a temporary administration put in place. Pondicherry town itself witnessed a procession and demonstration on the 7th and 8th of April by workers of the Communist Party and volunteers of the French India Students' Congress. The Police intervened, dragged down the Indian flag that had been hoisted, and made a number of arrests. On the 13th of April another demonstration was organised by various Congress groups under the leadership of Sellane Naicker. The Police lathi-charged them and took several people into custody. Around the same time, a satyagraha movement was launched in Karaikal to rally the masses for the merger. Prominent leaders of the Karaikal National Congress participated in a procession defying the ban on public demonstrations. The police snatched the Indian flag they were carrying and those who resisted were severely beaten up. On the 28th of April, following an incident of firing by the French police in which three Communists were killed, Cherukallai, an enclave of Mahé, was liberated by the Mahajana Sabha led by I. K. Kumaran who then hoisted the Indian flag on the

police station. In the next ten days a few more enclaves came under the control of the Mahajana Sabha and a temporary council of administration was formed. There followed a brief lull in the merger movement due to the announcement of talks between France and India from the 14th of May at Paris.

In this late hour when the merger movement was irreversible, the French Govt. came up with the proposal of a condominium, a joint administration of French India by both the governments of India and France. How impractical was the proposal at this stage was demonstrated by the wrangle over the division of powers between France and India in the talks that followed. Moreover, the joint administration was only meant for the interim period prior to the referendum. The main disagreement was with regard to who would be in charge of the Police, the Judiciary and the Treasury during the interim period, because that would give the preliminary advantage and enable one to create the necessary conditions to win the referendum. The India Govt., which by now was too familiar with the bogus elections of French India, naturally did not agree to the advisory role without any power that was offered to it by France. The condominium proposal was thus categorically rejected by the Indian Govt. and all the parties who supported the merger, including the French India Socialist Party and the Communists.

The merger movement renewed with greater force when the talks failed to make any headway in the first week of June. Yanam was the first to be liberated on the 13th of June thanks to the efforts of Dadala Ramanayya, the sub-inspector turned freedom fighter. The next to fall was Mahé. On the 6th of July volunteers of the Mahajan Sabha invaded the town and hoisted the Indian flag over the roof-tops. The Mahé administrator, unable to handle the situation, left by a merchant ship on the 16th of July after handing over charge to the President of the Mahajana Sabha. In Karaikal, the satyagraha was renewed and volunteers of the United Merger Front courted arrest. Students of the Karaikal Modern College sat on a fast which was given up on 30th July. Around the same time five students of the French India Students' Congress sat on a relay fast in Pondicherry. Yet the French Govt. refused to concede defeat, and ordered the police to rough up the very goons who had earlier terrorised those who wanted the merger with India.

Two major events finally sealed the fate of French India and accelerated the process of decolonisation. The first was the shocking defeat of the French army in the battle of Dien Bien-Phu against the Viet Minh in May 1954, which marked the close of the Indochina war during which France lost more than 90,000 soldiers.⁸ The second was the coming to power of Mendès-France, a liberal-minded president, in June 1954. Negotiations which had so far failed due to the intransigence of the French Govt. were taken up again with the Indian Govt. in the beginning of October. It was at last agreed that there would be no referendum, but that all the elected

8. http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/guerre_d_Indochine/124937

members of the Representative Assembly and the Municipal Councils of French India would vote to decide the future status of French India on October 18 at Kijour. The voting was a foregone conclusion and 170 members voted for merger with India as against only 8 who chose to remain within the French Union. The instrument of transfer was then signed on the 1st of November 1954 by Pierre Landy and Kewal Singh, putting an end to 240 years of French rule in India.

The above-mentioned facts are well-known and have been recounted in great detail by others. So I would rather draw the attention of the reader to the actual proposals and promises that were made to the people of French India by both the governments at various stages before the *de-facto* merger took place on the 1st of November 1954. In this respect, the manifesto of the French India Socialist Party which was drafted by Sri Aurobindo played a key role in the granting of a special status to Pondicherry by India. As we know, French India became first the State of Pondicherry coming directly under the central administration of the Indian Union before it became Union Territory after the States Reorganisation Act of 1956. There was no outright merger with the neighbouring states of India as happened to Chandernagore, which was merged with West Bengal and turned overnight into an unimportant mofussil town without preserving its French identity. Once it was agreed in June 1948 to hold a referendum to decide whether French India will remain in France or merge with India, both the governments vied with each other to inveigle the people of French India by promising to grant a good measure of autonomy within their respective frameworks. The Jaipur resolution of the Congress in December 1948 was the first official statement of the Indian Govt. to promise this special status to French India provided the referendum went in favour of merger with India. I quote the relevant portion below:

The Congress realises that during this long period administrative, cultural, educational and judicial system have grown up in these foreign possessions, which are different from those prevailing in the rest of India. Any change over therefore must take these factors into consideration and allow for a gradual adjustment which will not interfere with the life of the people of the areas concerned. The Congress would welcome the present cultural heritage of these possessions to be continued in so far as the people of those possessions desire and for a measure of autonomy to be granted, wherever possible, so as to enable the people of those possessions to maintain their culture and institutions with the larger framework of free India.⁹

The content of the above passage matches very closely with the third paragraph of the manifesto of the French India Socialist Party which I quote below:

9. Ajit K. Neogy, "Decolonization of French India" (1997), p. 125.

French India has developed different institutions of its own, political, administrative, judicial, educational, it has its own industries, its own labour legislation and other differentiating characteristics. . . . If French India is to enter the Indian Union, it should not be in this way but as an autonomous unit preserving its individual body and character.¹⁰

As we can see, the Jaipur resolution promised the people of French India some measure of autonomy within the larger framework of India to maintain its culture and identity as opposed to autonomy within the French Union in close association with India which the manifesto had sought. I will trace broadly the events that led to the Jaipur resolution.

The French Govt. kept proposing various degrees and versions of autonomy for French India within the French Union right from the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1946. But the reforms that it brought were either nominal or lagged far behind the expectations of the people. In October 1946 a decree was passed replacing the Conseil Général with the Representative Assembly so that French India could have its own elected representatives who could participate in the local government. On 12th August 1947 another decree was passed providing for a Council of Government, three members of which could be elected by the Assembly while the remaining three were to be appointed by the Governor. In practice, however, Governor Baron let the Assembly choose all the six councillors. But the reforms still fell short of the expectations of the people of French India. In the session of 28th September 1947 of the Representative Assembly, in which Maurice Schumann was present, Counouma (who was in charge of Finance and Education) expressed his dissatisfaction with the reforms, even as he promised to collaborate with the French Govt. and hoped for further reforms. He observed that though a certain financial control and a considerable economy was the result of the recent reforms, the Law Department and the Police were still not under their control. A little later in November 1947, overtaken by the nationalist movement in Chandernagore, the French Govt. made another hasty proposal of turning the five cities of French India into a federation of Free Cities within the French Union. The decree was not promulgated when the Pondicherry Assembly threatened to resign *en masse* because it would then become redundant.¹¹ In November 1948, Baron announced the proposal of co-suzerainety in the Pondicherry Assembly, by which the Free Cities would be ruled jointly by France and India. It was in response to this that the Jaipur resolution was drafted in December 1948 promising a certain measure of autonomy to French India within the larger framework of India.

But politics is not only about promises but their implementation on the ground, and the French Govt. made a mockery of the promises and proposals it made to the

10. Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes*, pp. 483-84.

11. David Anoussamy, "L'Intermède français en Inde" (2005), p. 135.

people of French India. The post-war reforms did give some power to the elected representatives, but the French Govt. could always manipulate the elections as the Police and Judiciary were under their control, apart from other powers that it never let go. An indirect colonial rule therefore continued through its stooges who became the so-called elected representatives of the people due to its official patronage, without which it was not possible to win the elections. The turning point of Pondicherry politics in the events leading to the merger in November 1954 was no doubt the rigged municipal elections of 24th October 1948 which brought Goubert and his men to power with the support of the government machinery. It was then that the Indian Govt. realised with a shock that a fair referendum was not possible under the French Govt. and regretted that it had so naively agreed to it. The lifting of the Customs Union in April 1949 and the large-scale smuggling that followed in its wake brought things to a point of no return, and the French Govt. had to face the inevitable consequences of ignoring for too long the venality of the very party it had brought to power and counted upon to win the referendum for France. In the end Goubert politically outmaneuvered the French Govt. in the typical style of the modern-day politician who has no qualms about switching sides at the opportune time. When Goubert changed sides and the merger movement picked up momentum with the support of other nationalist parties, it was too late for the French Govt. to save the situation, and it had to reconcile itself to the face-saving device of the voting at Kijour which went overwhelmingly in favour of India.

More than sixty years have passed after the *de-facto* transfer of Pondicherry to India, and one is tempted to explain retrospectively the failure of the scheme of the French India Socialist Party. On the Indian side one could say that Nehru, with his love for the French language, was at first open to the idea of cultural collaboration and even dual citizenship to a certain extent. The spontaneous wish that he expressed in August 1947 of Pondicherry being “a window of French culture” is well-known and has been the cause of much fascination among visitors from other parts of India. But his initial enthusiasm for the scheme did not last long as communal violence erupted with the partition of British India and he had to face the formidable problem of the integration of more than 500 odd princely states into the Indian Union. Relations with the French Govt. got embittered when he realised how he had naively played into its hands by agreeing to a referendum to decide the future of French India. When the political situation deteriorated, he had several opportunities to simply take over French India or even formally accept to take over the areas which pro-merger groups had already captured, as happened in Mahé in October 1948 and Yanam in June 1954. But he disappointed these revolutionaries by playing the role of the international statesman instead of being the practical nationalist, which is one reason why the merger movement took eight long years to reach its culmination.¹²

12. Claude Arpi, *La Politique Française de Nehru*, 2002.

On the other hand, the French Govt. was in a dilemma after the War in which the colonies had played a major role in liberating France. It was morally and politically obliged to show in return its generosity towards them, but had it really stood by the ideals of the French revolution, granted the people of the colonies the same civic rights as its metropolitan citizens and converted the Empire into a real federation, France would have faced the risk of becoming “a colony of its own colonies”. This apprehension was voiced by Edouard Herriot of the Radical Party in August 1946 at a crucial stage of the drafting of the constitution of the Fourth Republic.¹³ The rejection of this demand for equality and fraternity for the colonies eventually determined the course of events leading to the dismantling of the French Empire and the formation of a number of independent nations in Africa and Asia. In the specific case of Pondicherry, where the French Govt. had not much to lose except prestige, it used cultural collaboration with India as a political strategy rather than as a genuine effort at international co-operation. It used it only as a cover or a tactics to continue its colonial occupation, but had it deftly handled the political situation instead of taking the usual recourse to repression and electoral manipulation to preserve the status quo at any cost, things might have worked out differently, and certainly a lot of bad blood would have been avoided between the two nations.

As to the manifesto written by Sri Aurobindo, one could admit that it was idealistic and perhaps impractical at the time when it was written (in 1947). But it does not seem so out of place at present (in 2020) especially after the formation of the European Union in which 28 countries have come together to have a common administration as opposed to the only two (France and India) that were proposed by Sri Aurobindo’s manifesto. Incidentally, Sri Aurobindo discussed the possibility of the European Union long back in his book *The Ideal of Human Unity*, which was serialised chapter-wise in the *Arya* from 1915 to 1918. In developing his thesis of the inevitable political unity of the world in a distant future, he speculated on the various forms by which world unity could be achieved, and one of them was by an intermediate phase of continental groupings, such as the “United States of Europe”. Dual citizenship is now accepted in many other countries too, in the sense that one can be a citizen of the country where one has settled without renouncing the citizenship of the country of one’s origin. Even multiple citizenship is permitted so that one can have several passports at the same time — this was unthinkable 70 years back.

Finally, let us not forget that the manifesto was written at the time of French decolonisation and when India was passing through the most difficult phase of the integration of the states. Those conditions no longer exist. The French have left India for good, except for the vestiges of French culture that remain in the form of

13. Paul Isoart, *Les chemins de la décolonisation de l’empire colonial français, 1936-1956*, p. 24 (edited by Charles-Robert Ageron); see also [http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche/\(num_dept\)/3874](http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche/(num_dept)/3874)

a few educational and research institutions. India is at present a strong and centralised nation and will never consider sharing power over its own territory (however small it may be) with other countries. So the close collaboration between India and France as proposed by the manifesto is quite inapplicable to the current situation of Pondicherry. The desire for Franco-Indian harmony has to therefore find other means to fulfil itself rather than to look back at a lost opportunity which will never be repeated. The overall lesson that can be learnt from the history of the freedom movement of French India is that the noble aim of international harmony is often used as a pretext for the domination of one country or race over another, and that until the need for universal harmony is genuinely felt in the hearts and minds of people, we will have to wait patiently and prepare ourselves for the hour when we can call ourselves truly citizens of one world with diverse cultures.

(Concluded)

RAMAN REDDY

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

(Continued from the issue of May 2020)

1. KINDNESS AND COMPASSION

(Part 9)

In the previous chapters we discussed Sri Aurobindo’s renouncing of a comfortable career, and instead shouldering an immense burden by joining the nationalist and revolutionary movement as one of its most prominent leaders, in order to liberate India and uplift his countrymen at a time when the populace never imagined that Indian independence was possible. In addition to his courage and his love for his Motherland, it was his compassionate and selfless nature that impelled him to make this tremendous sacrifice.

We shall continue with the theme of Sri Aurobindo’s gentlemanliness and chivalry in the rough and tumble of politics. Politics is largely a dishonest and ruthless occupation, yet Sri Aurobindo was an epitome of civility and decency, at the same time never compromising with his principles or ideals. Sri Aurobindo was well aware of the overwhelming obstacles of being a political leader. He once wrote in a letter:

[Chittaranjan] Das told me it was impossible to lead men in politics or get one’s objects without telling falsehoods by the yard and he was often feeling utterly disgusted with himself and his work, but supposed he would have to go through with it to the end.¹

In a declaration the Mother gives an idea of the murkiness of politics:

Sri Aurobindo withdrew from politics; and, in his Ashram, a most important rule is that one must abstain from all politics — not because Sri Aurobindo did not concern himself with the happenings of the world, but because politics, as it is practised, is a low and ugly thing, wholly dominated by falsehood, deceit, injustice, misuse of power and violence; because to succeed in politics one has to cultivate in oneself hypocrisy, duplicity and unscrupulous ambition.²

1. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 24.

2. CWM, Vol. 13, 2nd Ed., pp. 122-23.

Whilst acting in the clamorous field of politics, Sri Aurobindo advocated and practised the Aryan ideal of self-restraint: not being impulsive or losing one's temper, acting instead from "calmness and politeness." In April 1907, he wrote:

The Japanese have an excellent habit of keeping anger out of their speech and reserving all their strength for acts; they will express their disapproval of you with great plainness, indeed, but also with wonderful calmness and politeness. The Samurai used to rip up his enemy very mercilessly but also very politely; he did it as a duty, not out of passion.

Sri Aurobindo then adds:

But of our emotional, sentimental race, so long accustomed to find its outlet in speech, nothing so heroic can be expected.³

Those who interacted with or closely observed Sri Aurobindo were aware of his unshakable calm composure. Satish Chandra Mukherji, Sri Aurobindo's successor as Principal of Bengal National College, who was aware of his predecessor's political activities, remarked:

To my knowledge he never at all excited anybody to violence: he was hardly in the habit of speaking much.⁴

Whilst Sri Aurobindo was teaching at the Bengal National College, he was also editing the *Bande Mataram*. A colleague in the *Bande Mataram* office remarked that Sri Aurobindo once worked for more than two days at a stretch without sleep or rest, yet he was well-tempered throughout.⁵

Even in times of crisis Sri Aurobindo remained serene. Upendrachandra Bhattacharya, who was present at the time of Sri Aurobindo's arrest in the Alipore Bomb Case, writes:

While the people were excited beyond limit surveying his condition, he sat absolutely aloof, calm and quiet.⁶

A year later, Sri Aurobindo was acquitted. Immediately on his release from Alipore jail he was taken to the residence of Chittaranjan Das where his cousin,

3. CWSA, Vol. 6, pp. 308-09.

4. Manoj Das, 'Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi', *Mother India*, January 2016, p. 38 (Deposition of P.W. No. 122; The Alipore Conspiracy Case documents).

5. *Ibid.*, December, 2013, p. 1029.

6. *Ibid.*, March 2015, p. 250.

Sudhiranjan Das, observed that Sri Aurobindo did not betray the slightest sense of exhilaration in his moment of victory against such a formidable opponent. On the odd occasion he spoke to Chittaranjan Das, Sudhiranjan remarked: “There wasn’t the slightest trace of excitement in it.”⁷

Sri Aurobindo’s composure was blended with endurance and equality, and as a result he developed a calm that was deep and pervasive. Mrinalini Devi had once told her cousin that she practised endurance as part of her sadhana, since Sri Aurobindo asserted that this virtue would help her overcome conflicts.⁸

On equality and endurance on the path of Yoga Sri Aurobindo writes:

This equality cannot come except by a protracted ordeal and patient self-discipline; so long as desire is strong, equality cannot come at all except in periods of quiescence and the fatigue of desire, and it is then more likely to be an inert indifference or desire’s recoil from itself than the true calm and the positive spiritual oneness. Moreover, this discipline or this growth into equality of spirit has its necessary epochs and stages. Ordinarily we have to begin with a period of endurance; for we must learn to confront, to suffer and to assimilate all contacts. Each fibre in us must be taught not to wince away from that which pains and repels and not to run eagerly towards that which pleases and attracts, but rather to accept, to face, to bear and to conquer. All touches we must be strong to bear, not only those that are proper and personal to us but those born of our sympathy or our conflict with the worlds around, above or below us and with their peoples. We shall endure tranquilly the action and impact on us of men and things and forces, the pressure of the Gods and the assaults of Titans; we shall face and engulf in the unstirred seas of our spirit all that can possibly come to us down the ways of the soul’s infinite experience. This is the stoical period of the preparation of equality, its most elementary and yet its heroic age. . . . The gain of this period of resignation and endurance is the soul’s strength equal to all shocks and contacts.⁹

Sri Aurobindo believed that the Aryan is a “true gentleman”, with traits such as self-restraint and nobility. He writes:

The nations of Europe, taken in the mass, are still semi-civilized . . . The Hindu on his side distastes violence in action, excess in speech, ostentation or effusiveness in manner; he demands from his ideal temperance and restraint as

7. *Ibid.*, July 2016, p. 535 (Sudhiranjan Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo Smritikatha’ in Sri Aurobindo Smriti, edited by Biswanath Dey).

8. *Ibid.*, November 2012, p. 889 (Shailendra Basu, *Sri Aurobindo Sahadharmini Mrinalini Devi Smritikatha* - translated from Bengali).

9. CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 226.

well as nobility, truth and beneficence; the Aryan or true gentleman must be . . . restrained in action and temperate in speech.¹⁰

A. B. Purani, an admirer of Sri Aurobindo from his Baroda days and who later attended on him for twelve years, considered that Sri Aurobindo was the “highest embodiment of Aryan culture.”¹¹

Amongst all the political leaders in the freedom struggle, Bal Gangadhar Tilak recognised Sri Aurobindo to be the most mature and composed of all. As the leader of the Nationalist Party, Tilak was particular about the decisions being taken in the freedom struggle. His biographers G. P. Pradhan and A. K Bhagwat noted:

He did not want the decision of the opportune moment to be entrusted to a less mature person. . . . He thought that only Sri Aurobindo and himself could take such a momentous decision. He knew that a revolutionary action was too serious a matter to be decided by anyone except those who attain a philosophical calm of mind.¹²

Feroz Chand, in his *Lajpat Rai — Life and Work*, affirms the statement of Pradhan and Bhagwat:

Aurobindo Ghose was by many looked upon as the person sharing with Tilak the responsibility, work and privilege of shaping nationalist politics.¹³

Sri Aurobindo and Tilak had a high respect for each other. Sri Aurobindo spoke of Tilak as a

. . . man who has suffered and denied himself for his country’s sake and never abased his courage nor bowed his head under the most crushing persecution . . .¹⁴

Historian Tara Chand writes that Sri Aurobindo’s “hatred to foreign rule was as intense as the feeling of a son who sees a monster sitting on the breast of his mother with a dagger in his hand.”¹⁵ Yet, Tara Chand adds:

10. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 189.

11. ‘Correspondence about Sri Aurobindo between K. M. Munshi and A. B. Purani’, *Mother India*, August 1971, p. 715.

12. Nilima Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo – The Soul of India’, *Mother India*, December 1993, p. 877.

13. Feroz Chand, *Lajpat Rai – Life and Work*, September 1978, p. 226.

14. CWSA, Vol. 6, pp. 116-17.

15. Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. 3, 1972, p. 151.

He had a lofty sense of national dignity and reacted strongly against unmanly conduct. . . . But he did not allow his indignation to betray him into saying anything unbecoming or vulgar, or overstep the bounds of law, as distinguished from the executive decrees of haughty administrators.¹⁶

Interestingly, on the subject of vital education, the Mother has said:

For one who has developed a truly refined taste will, because of this very refinement, feel incapable of acting in a crude, brutal or vulgar manner. This refinement, if it is sincere, brings to the being a nobility and generosity which will spontaneously find expression in his behaviour . . .¹⁷

Nirodbaran observed that Sri Aurobindo was always gentle during his conversations and interactions with his disciples. Even in his criticism there was never any element of scorn or dislike:

. . . in all other things, he kept his tranquil spirit, his impersonal way. He never raised his voice, he looked down or in front when he talked, and he talked very slowly, did not insist on his point, while a benign sweetness softened his countenance. When he criticised men or countries, there was no contempt or malice in his expression. He saw the Forces of which men are nothing but poor puppets. His divine compassion was over all. The impersonal again, saw all with an equal eye.¹⁸

Let alone civility and calmness, there was a graciousness when Sri Aurobindo acted in the political field. Lala Lajpat Rai's paper, *Punjabee*, spoke of Sri Aurobindo being "endowed with the highest qualities of both head and heart",¹⁹ whilst Tilak admired Sri Aurobindo's "sattwic temperament".²⁰ Interestingly, the head of the Shankaracharya sect, a follower of Tilak, writes:

It was the year 1908. I was a student then. I lived in Maharashtra. All of us young men were followers of Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Our political thinking was influenced by his speeches and writings. As much as we revered Tilak Maharaj, so much was our reverence for Sri Aurobindo. If I give you just one example, you will realise how high our regard for Sri Aurobindo was. In those days we used to read the *Gita* regularly. In the *Srimad Bhagavat Gita*, whenever the

16. *Ibid.*

17. *CWM*, Vol. 12, 2nd Ed., p. 21.

18. Nirodbaran, 'Sri Aurobindo as Guru', *Mother India*, October 2006, p. 812.

19. Cited in Sujata Nahar, *Mother's Chronicles*, Book V, p. 360.

20. Cited in Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., p. 119.

word *Bhagavanuvacha* (said the Lord) occurred, we struck out that word and substituted for it in ink the words *Aurobindo Uvacha* (said Sri Aurobindo). This is what Sri Aurobindo meant to us.²¹

In his book, published in 1929, historian Jyotish Chandra Ghose²² noted Sri Aurobindo's amiable and gentle disposition:

This 'fire-spark' as we know him was a man of medium height and could be called short of stature and of average thickness, looking almost like a child. He was amiable in disposition and was mild, gentle in his manners; when he would speak, he would do so in soft musical accents and his words in a private conversation had the effect of soothing the troubled nerves of the hearer, not by virtue of its intellectual impressiveness but by a sort of ethereal transmission of psychic, spiritual fluid, so to say.²³

Sri Aurobindo's personality was an intriguing blend of gentle demeanour and idealism and was one of the reasons why the patriotic youth of the country idolised him. Bhupendranath Dutta — a worker at *Yugantar* — remarked that the young revolutionaries saw Sri Aurobindo as "simple, idealistic and affectionate,"²⁴ while Ram Chandra Probhu, an associate of the revolutionary Upendranath Banerjee, writes that Sri Aurobindo was a "saintly soul yet withal burning with a true patriot's passionate enthusiasm, such as I have rarely seen."²⁵ Nirodbaran has noted that "the young revolutionaries adored him".²⁶

Furthermore, the revolutionaries and nationalists trusted and respected Sri Aurobindo. By the virtue of his calm demeanour and sweet temperament, he came from Baroda to Bengal on several occasions to mediate when rivalries amongst the revolutionaries arose. In 1902, Sri Aurobindo sent Jatin Banerjee and Barin to Bengal in order to prepare the revolutionary societies. When a tussle ensued between them, Sri Aurobindo came from Baroda to settle their discord. There was no element of favouritism, whatsoever, towards his younger brother, Barin.²⁷ Similarly, when there

21. Nolinikanto Sarkar, *Asa Jaor Majkhane* (translated from Bengali by Aniruddha Sircar), *Mother India*, June 2004, p. 516.

22. A. B. Purani in his *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 369, writes: "In refreshing contrast to the biographers that have not been able to grasp the significance of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual endeavour, S. Jyotish Chandra Ghosh shows a remarkable understanding even in the year 1927 or 1928."

23. Jyotish Chandra Ghose, *Life-Work of Sri Aurobindo*, 1st Ed., 1929, pp. 19-20.

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

25. 'C. P. Beachcroft's Judgment in the Case of Arabinda Ghose at the Alipore Bomb Trial', dated 6.5.1909, *Mother India*, August 1998, p. 548 (sourced from the Sri Aurobindo Archives).

26. Nirodbaran, 'Sri Aurobindo – Perfect Gentleman', *Mother India*, August 1970, pp. 408-09.

27. See Barindra Kumar Ghose, *Agniyug*, (translated from Bengali); papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

was a dispute between Abinash Bhattacharya and Barin in the editing of *Yugantar* Sri Aurobindo felt Abinash was in the right and ruled in his favour.²⁸ Whilst at Baroda, Sri Aurobindo also acquainted himself with the Bengal revolutionary movement initiated by Okakura, P. Mitter and Sarala Ghosal, and even helped them. “But there was always a quarrel going on among the members”, remarked Sri Aurobindo, “so I organised them and reconciled their quarrels and went back to Baroda. Again a quarrel broke out, again I came and reconciled them”.²⁹ Then sometime in 1906-07, Sri Aurobindo visited a branch of Anushilan Samiti at Shibpur to reconcile differences between their members.³⁰ In 1909, shortly after his release from Alipore jail, Sri Aurobindo successfully unified all the separate revolutionary groups, barring Satish Basu of Calcutta Anushilan Samiti.³¹ Even Pulin Bihari Das, a prominent leader of the Anushilan Samiti in Eastern Bengal, who disliked Barin although they were fellow-prisoners at the Andamans Cellular jail, admitted that Sri Aurobindo was the common bond amongst the different revolutionary groups:

The impact of the name of Aurobindo was no doubt considerable. Even though the separate groups of revolutionaries scattered over Khulna, Jessore, Midnapore, Bankura, Rangpur etc. functioned independently, they sang the glory of Aurobindo and though they went their own way, spoke as if they were following Aurobindo! . . .

It was the influence of Aurobindo that made the working talents of the *Yugantar* group collect arms and ingredients for making bombs.³²

Let us recount a few interactions which the patriotic youth had with Sri Aurobindo. Apropos his first meeting with Sri Aurobindo, Bhupendranath Dutta reminisced going to the mess where Sri Aurobindo was staying with Jatindranath Banerjee. At the time of his arrival, tea was being served to some of Sri Aurobindo’s guests. Although Bhupendranath Dutta was a stranger and much younger than him, Sri Aurobindo courteously invited him, “Would you like some tea?” to which Bhupendranath readily replied, “Yes.”³³

Although Sri Aurobindo was constantly busy, Hemendra Prasad Ghose was struck by his warmth and cordiality when he first met him:

28. See Abinash Bhattacharya, ‘Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, July 2012, p. 533 (Originally published in *Galpa-Bharati*, Vol. 6, 1950-51, pp. 829-50; translated from Bengali and reproduced in *Srivantu*, Nov.1984).

29. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 502.

30. See Prabhakar Mukherji, ‘Sri Aurobindo in the Suburbs of Calcutta’, *Mother India*, December 1959, p. 113.

31. See Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, January 2017, p. 32 (Pulin Bihari Das: Amar Jeeban Kahini – translated from Bengali).

32. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, October 2013, p. 851.

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

While he was staying in the Bande Mataram office in the house of Raja Subodh Chandra Mullick, I took the opportunity to get myself acquainted with him with a letter of introduction from our leader Bipin Chandra Pal. I was cordially received by Aurobindo who kindly remarked that I had no need to carry a letter of introduction. During my brief visit I could notice that his mind was terribly exercised over the question of complete liberation of the Motherland.³⁴

Charu Chandra Dutt remarked that Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary attendants had the "daily experience of his sweet temper and his beautiful smile."³⁵

Since we have touched upon Sri Aurobindo as a much-loved revolutionary leader, it is interesting to know what the British thought of him in this respect. Sir Stafford Cripps, a potential rival to Winston Churchill for premiership in 1942, had succeeded Churchill as the leader of the House of Commons and Clement Atlee as Lord Privy Council in early 1942. In March 1942, Cripps was sent by Churchill to India as an envoy of the British government to announce the details of a proposal offering Dominion status to India (self-government) in exchange for India's loyalty to the British war effort. He was then a member of the exclusive War Cabinet. Foreseeing that Dominion status would help the unity of India, Sri Aurobindo, in contrast to the other leaders, publicly supported Cripps' proposal. In a rare public pronouncement, he sent a long telegram on 31 March 1942 to Cripps. His gracious message read:

I have heard your broadcast. As one who has been a nationalist leader and worker for India's independence though now my activity is no longer in the political but in the spiritual field, I wish to express my appreciation of all you have done to bring about this offer. I welcome it as an opportunity given to India to determine for herself and organise in all liberty of choice her freedom and unity and take an effective place among the world's free nations. I hope that it will be accepted and the right use made of it putting aside all discords and divisions. I hope too that a friendly relation between Britain and India replacing past struggles will be a step towards a greater world union in which as a free nation her spiritual force will contribute to build for mankind a better and happier life. In this light I offer my public adhesion in case it can be of any help in your work.³⁶

34. Akshoy Kumar Dutta, *Bengals's Fight for Freedom*, p. 30; papers at the Sri Aurobindo Archives.

35. Charu Chandra Dutt, 'My Friend and my Master', *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, pp. 123-24.

36. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 469.

Such was Sri Aurobindo's stature as a former political leader that Cripps not only took cognisance of the telegram but promptly telegraphed him the very next day expressing his gratitude to Sri Aurobindo's message. He wrote:

I am most touched and gratified by your kind message allowing me to inform India that you who occupy a unique position in the imagination of Indian youth are convinced that the declaration of His Majesty's Government substantially confers the freedom for which Indian Nationalism has so long struggled.³⁷

Cripps' message is an obvious acknowledgement of Sri Aurobindo's nobility and dignity. In addition, the following points come to one's attention:

- a) The English are a very reserved race; for an important member of the ruling British Government to state that he was "most touched and gratified" reflects that Cripps was emotionally moved by Sri Aurobindo's message. Furthermore it reflects the utter respect and regard he had for Sri Aurobindo.
- b) Cripps has given Sri Aurobindo a magnificent accolade by stating, "you who occupy a unique position in the imagination of Indian youth". Here again the tenor of the message also underlies the sheer admiration Cripps had for Sri Aurobindo.
- c) Cripps has not only given Sri Aurobindo an exclusive place in the history of the Indian independence struggle but he also obliquely legitimises the resistance offered by Sri Aurobindo as a revolutionary leader against the British Government.

Sri Aurobindo retired from politics at a young age of 37 years, yet the British thought he was a brilliant politician. Indeed, Sri Aurobindo was a serious threat to the British government and was constantly hounded by them, both during and after his political career; charged with sedition twice and conspiracy to wage war against the King for which he was almost sentenced to death. Such was the psychological impact on the British government that the Lt. Governor of Bengal, Sir Andrew Fraser referred to Sri Aurobindo being "the principal adviser of the revolutionary party".³⁸ Fraser then continues, "He is the ring leader. He is able, cunning, fanatical," and then adds in exasperation, "see what the man has done; see the length to which he is prepared to go; see the skill with which he has used his human tools".³⁹ Fraser's successor Sir Edward Baker considered Sri Aurobindo as "our most conspicuous

37. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 469, footnote.

38. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., p. 139.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 137-38.

and most dangerous opponent,” and that “his influence has been pernicious in the extreme.”⁴⁰ The Viceroy of India and Governor-General of India, Lord Minto, the successor to Lord Curzon, used the phrase “celebrated Arabindo”⁴¹ and told the Secretary of State, Lord Morley that “it was well known that Arabindo was the most dangerous man with whom we had to deal.”⁴² Sri Aurobindo once remarked: “Lord Minto said that he could not rest his head until he had crushed Aurobindo Ghose. He feared that I could start the revolutionary movement again”.⁴³ Lord Morley used phrases like “famous Arabindo”⁴⁴ and “the redoubtable Arabinda”.⁴⁵ Yet, it is apparent that the top officials in the bureaucracy were also fascinated by Sri Aurobindo’s personality, intelligence, command of the English language, strength of character and his ability to sway the masses. The Lt. Governor of Bengal, Sir Andrew Fraser, in a confidential note to the Viceroy, Lord Minto, gave a brief account of Sri Aurobindo’s career right from childhood and regrets the “deplorable blunder” of the authorities for excluding a “clever, a distinguished student and very successful in his examinations” from the I.C.S. on account of riding!⁴⁶

Interestingly, the Mother has spoken that even an abominable person has a certain inner nobility that can recognise greatness in a truly noble person. Alluding to the presence in the psychic centre in human beings, the Mother has said that

. . . there is a nobility in the being, a great purity, a great love of beauty, which is so powerful that even the most wicked and criminal people are forced to acknowledge a truly beautiful or heroic or selfless act.⁴⁷

Curiously, in a complete turnaround the British Government represented by Sir Stafford Cripps metamorphosed Sri Aurobindo from a hostile revolutionary into a noble and heroic leader.

A similar analogy to Cripps’ praise of Sri Aurobindo concerns Sri Aurobindo’s alma mater. Following the Alipore Bomb Trial in 1908-09, Sri Aurobindo’s name was struck off the rolls of the students who had studied at King’s College, Cambridge.⁴⁸ In an ironical twist of fate, King’s College, in their Annual Report of 1951, eulogised him:

40. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

43. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, p. 96.

44. See Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., p. 146.

45. See Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 456.

46. See Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., p. 138.

47. *CWM*, Vol. 15, 2nd Ed., p. 299.

48. See Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., p. 103.

. . . At King's he was a Scholar, and Prizeman, and in 1892 was placed in the 1st Class of the Classical Tripos. While at Cambridge he also published some poems, Songs of Myrtilla, and passed the examination into the Indian Civil Service with record marks in classics. . . . That so quick and sensitive a young Indian mind should have felt drawn at that time to politics, however, was natural, for Bengal was in a ferment over the controversies with which Curzon's Viceroyalty had ended; and in 1906 Aurobindo moved to Calcutta. There as the Principal of the Bengal National College and as Editor of *Bande Mataram*, he advanced rapidly to the spearhead of the nationalist agitation . . . he underwent the extraordinary change which converted India's foremost young political 'activist', the patriot-hero of those days, into the famous sage and recluse. Of the eminence that he attained during those three decades, not only as a contemplative or mystic, but as an academic philosopher, critic and literary craftsman there can be no question. Books and articles flowed steadily from his pen . . . his *Essays on the Gita* (1916-18) and his monumental *The Life Divine*, in particular are works of very high distinction. . . . At his death on December 5, 1950, aged 78, the Press throughout India was filled with columns in his praise, to the exclusion of much ordinary news; President Prasad, Prime Minister Nehru, the Governors of States, and many leading public men wrote copiously in eulogy and reminiscence; and within a few hours, at Pondicherry, 60,000 people had filed past his bier. His gifts of spirit and of intellect had plainly been of the loftiest quality, and to this was added the romance of a unique career. Some would say that his position, among the great men produced by the new India of this century, is equalled only by that of Gandhi and Tagore.⁴⁹

On the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's birth centenary, 1972, the wife of late Sir Stafford Cripps, Isobel Cripps, was requested to contribute an article. She wrote:

Stafford was very much heartened by Sri Aurobindo's unequivocal message to him. He was especially touched by the fact that Sri Aurobindo offered his public adhesion to the proposals of the Parliamentary Mission and that his message was given wide publicity:

. . . Some of the most eminent political leaders of India subsequently admitted the folly of rejecting the proposal of the British Parliamentary Mission. But I am not surprised that the unerring vision of a spiritual mystic of Sri Aurobindo's stature saw the reality of the situation and that he recommended strongly the acceptance of the proposals.⁵⁰

49. 'King's College, Cambridge, on Sri Aurobindo, *Mother India*, August 1988, pp. 503-04.

50. 'A Letter', *Mother India*, December 2008, p. 1158.

Let us just pause for a moment and dwell upon Cripps' tribute that Sri Aurobindo occupied "a unique position in the imagination of Indian youth". Bhupendranath Dutta, a revolutionary who worked at *Yugantar*, writes that Sri Aurobindo "was a young leader of the workers who resided as an ideal in their hearts,"⁵¹ while Suresh Chandra Deb, who worked at *Bande Mataram*, writes how the younger generation was inspired by Sri Aurobindo:

We of the generation that grew up under his piercing eyes, caught fire from his flaming words. . . . He showed us the way out of bewilderment; we learnt to understand what Indian Nationalism stood for and the ideal of the "Karma-Yogin".⁵²

Birendra Chandra Sen (1891-1970) — the youngest of the revolutionaries transported to Andamans Cellular Jail (for seven years) in the Alipore Bomb Case and who later permanently settled in the Ashram in the 1960s — too, writes of Sri Aurobindo being the idol of the youth:

Sri Aurobindo was one of the greatest thinkers of his day. . . . there was a time when his name was on all lips, and young Bengal looked for his views on the living issues of the day with eagerness and expectancy.

. . . . When I joined the Bengal National College in December 1906, Sri Aurobindo was already known to me by name and reputation. . . . As we belonged to the Secondary stage we saw little of him. But we were conscious of his presence and felt proud of him. We were also aware that he was one of the front-rank leaders of the nationalist group though comparatively young of age.

. . . . Lal-Bal-Pal — as the late Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal were sometimes popularly known — were the acknowledged leaders of this group, but Sri Aurobindo was the idol of this younger generation and represented the sum-total of their aspiration.⁵³

Indeed, Tilak knew that Sri Aurobindo had a special place in the hearts of the youth. Tilak's biographers, G. P. Pradhan and A. K. Bhagwat, wrote in their *Lokmanya Tilak*:

51. *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, p. 106 (Bhupendranath Dutta, *Aurobindo Smarane* – translated from Bengali).

52. Sujata Nahar, *Mother's Chronicles*, Book V, p. 376.

53. *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, p. 429 (Article by Birendra Chandra Sen).

Tilak knew that Aurobindo symbolised a new force in Indian politics and he was aware that Aurobindo could and did rouse in hundreds of young men a desire to sacrifice everything for the sake of the motherland.⁵⁴

Although Sri Aurobindo was of an earlier generation, Jawaharlal Nehru acknowledged that he emboldened the youth:

His whole career in active politics was a very brief one, from 1905 to 1910 when he retired to Pondicherry . . . During these five years he shone like a brilliant meteor and created a powerful impression on the youth of India.⁵⁵

Nehru's political rival, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, wrote: "In my undergraduate days (1913-15) Arabinda Ghose was easily the most popular leader in Bengal".⁵⁶

Writer and Nobel Laureate Romain Rolland considered Sri Aurobindo as a political and spiritual great. He wrote: "His aim was to mould the character of Bengal youth".⁵⁷ Historian Tara Chand, who undertook a detailed study on the Indian freedom struggle, observed:

Aurobindo Ghose lighted the fiery torch which warmed youthful hearts and sent the blood tingling through the veins.⁵⁸

Professor Jyotish Chandra Ghose⁵⁹ writes in his *Life-Work of Sri Aurobindo*, published in 1929:

Meek as a lamb in the ordinary pursuits of life, he roared as a lion, a man Divinely inspired, when he had to work as a public man. This even balance between the two extremes was the great secret of his popularity and his power over the politically-minded, middle-class intelligentsia and specially over the patriotic youths of the country. Here we want to impress it clearly on all that it was not the mere externals of his life that charmed and captivated the imagination of the people but it was the inner light and spiritual power which he had acquired by his long and arduous pursuit of yoga, which had created the sweet balance

54. Cited in Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., pp. 205-06.

55. *Sri Aurobindo and The Cripps Mission*, edited by Sunanya Panda, 1st Ed., p. 99.

56. Nilima Das, 'Sri Aurobindo – The Soul of India', *Mother India*, May 1996, pp. 397-99.

57. Romain Rolland, *Prophets of the New India*, (translated by E. F. Malcolm-Smith), p. 499.

58. Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. 3, 1972, pp. 376-77.

59. A. B. Purani in his *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 369, writes: "In refreshing contrast to the biographers that have not been able to grasp the significance of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual endeavour, S. Jyotish Chandra Ghosh shows a remarkable understanding even in the year 1927 or 1928."

in him, which produced the divine rhythms in all his movements — his speech, his writings, his opinions, his forceful and persuasive eloquence of measured words in the councils of deliberations. This was the man of the hour who had come to take his rightful place in the God-ordained movement for the self-fulfilment of the Indian people.⁶⁰

Elsewhere, Professor Jyotish Chandra Ghose writes:

The nationalist leaders of those days walked hand-in-hand in equal comradeship, sharing in the spirit, the joys and sorrows with the youths of the land. It was this intimate spiritual fellowship with his soldiers based on an inner tapasya which made Sri Aurobindo universally popular with the young generation of his day.⁶¹

The ruling British Government too was acutely aware of Sri Aurobindo's influence on the youth. In August 1909, British parliamentarian, J. D. Rees, asserted in the House of Commons that although deportation without trial was autocratic, the Government should deport Sri Aurobindo as he commanded a great sway on the youth.⁶² Even after Sri Aurobindo retired from politics the British Empire rued the fact that Sri Aurobindo had become an icon amongst the youth. In May 1910, the Viceroy of India, Lord Minto, lamented to the Secretary of State for India, Lord Morley that Sri Aurobindo "has an unfortunate influence over the student class".⁶³ In January 1911 the new Viceroy of India, Lord Hardinge, complained, to the Secretary of State for India, Earl of Crewe, that "the writings of Arabindo Ghose have produced such a baneful impression on the educated youth of this country."⁶⁴

F. C. Daly, Deputy Inspector General, Special Branch, in his *Note on the Growth of the Revolutionary Movement in Bengal 1905-1911* wrote thus about Sri Aurobindo:

. . . He cleverly interpreted the *Bhagwat Gita* to fall in with his doctrine, and developed the minds of his young followers with the idea that any action is justifiable, if its object be the attainment of some benefit to humanity; that death is no more consequence to a man than changing suit of clothes; and that every man has within him the power of a god, if by meditation and self-abnegation he likes to develop it.⁶⁵

60. Jyotish Chandra Ghose, *Life-Work of Sri Aurobindo*, 1st Ed., 1929, pp. 20-21.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

62. See Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., p. 149.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

64. Prithwindra Mukherjee, 'Some Documents on the Indian Revolutionary Movement and Sri Aurobindo', *Mother India*, September 1971, p. 534.

65. F. C. Daly, *Note on the Growth of the Revolutionary Movement in Bengal 1905-1911* (See *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, p. 7).

The youth idolised Sri Aurobindo for his self-sacrifice, idealism, integrity, courage and gentle demeanour. Besides his character traits, Sri Aurobindo's writings and speeches also inspired the youth, he instilled a sense of idealism and courage in them. For instance in a May 1907 *Bande Mataram* article he wrote:

The Japanese when they teach Bushido to their boys do not rest content with lectures or a moral catechism; they make them practise Bushido and govern every thought and action of their life by the Bushido ideal. This is the only way of inculcating a quality into a nation, by instilling it practically into the minds of its youth at school and College until it becomes an ingrained, inherent, inherited national quality. This is what we have to do with the modern ideal of patriotism in India. We have to fill the minds of our boys from childhood with the idea of the country . . .⁶⁶

And in a speech at Bombay on 15th January 1908, Sri Aurobindo stressed that a “noble ideal” should always be impressed upon the students:

Let us learn from Japan how to awaken the national spirit among the people by a contemplation of the heroic deeds of our ancestors. Let us bear in mind that we have a debt to discharge not only towards our ancestors but also to our posterity. If such a noble ideal is steadily kept before our mental vision, we shall see that our nation will give birth to great philosophers, statesmen and generals. This ideal has been kept in view in guiding the movement for national education in Bengal. In teaching geography we impress upon the minds of our students that India is their Motherland, that Maharashtra produced Shivaji, that the Punjab was once ruled by Ranjitsingh, and that the Himalaya gave shelter to our ancient Rishis. History and philosophy, too, are taught in a similar manner with a view to awaken the spirit of nationality amongst the pupils.⁶⁷

In a *Bande Mataram* article, dated 18th March 1907, Sri Aurobindo endeavoured to enliven the youth:

It is high time we abandoned the fat and comfortable selfish middle-class training we give to our youth and make a nearer approach to the physical and moral education of our old Kshatriyas or the Japanese Samurai.⁶⁸

66. CWSA, Vol. 6, p. 455.

67. SABCL, Vol. 27, p. 67.

68. CWSA, Vol. 6, p. 223.

Just to get a glimpse on how Sri Aurobindo's nobility impacted the student community, let us cover the *Bande Mataram* Sedition Case, an event which occurred two months after he resigned from Baroda State. On 8 June 1907 the Government warned the editor of *Bande Mataram* for using language which could incite violence and lawlessness. Thereafter matters took a turn for the worse, Sri Aurobindo, expecting to be prosecuted, resigned on 2nd August, 1907 as Principal of Bengal National College, lest the College should suffer on that account. On the 16th of that month, on hearing that a warrant had been issued for his arrest, Sri Aurobindo on his own accord went to the Police to surrender himself. He was, however, released on bail the next morning.⁶⁹

Following Sri Aurobindo's resignation as Principal, the students of Bengal National College showered their affection and gratitude on him. A report from the *Dawn* read:

On the 22nd August last the students and teachers of the Bengal National College in meeting assembled expressed their heart-felt appreciation of the eminent qualities as a teacher of Sri Aurobindo Ghose, their late beloved Principal, and recorded their deep regret at his resignation . . . of the high office which he had filled with such conspicuous ability and so much personal sacrifice to himself during the first year of the existence of the college. They also expressed their heart-felt sympathy with him in his present troubles . . . It was further resolved that a photograph of the late principal be taken to be hung in the college hall. Accordingly the next day Sri Aurobindo Ghose was invited to come over to the college premises to be photographed. When the boys of the college and school came up to their beloved principal one by one, bowed at his feet and garlanded him it was a sight for the gods to see! This touching manifestation of the feeling in the hearts of the boys at this sudden shock of parting with their beloved principal under such peculiar circumstances, brought tears to the eyes of all present, as it revealed the true inwardness and sanctity of the bond of friendship that binds the pupil to his teacher. After the photographs were taken, Sri Aurobindo Ghose was entertained by the boys to a sumptuous lunch in the Hindu style. The teachers then requested him on behalf of the boys to speak to them some words of advice. In response to the desire of the boys to hear from him he delivered in a voice choked with emotion a soul-stirring address . . .⁷⁰

69. See Nilima Das, 'Sri Aurobindo – The Soul of India', *Mother India*, May 1993, pp. 356-57 (Haridas & Uma Mukherjee, *Origins of the National Education Movement*, p. 155).

70. *Ibid.*, p. 357.

During his trials in the Sedition case, Sri Aurobindo's self-sacrifice was not lost on his former pupils. In a show of solidarity, the students of Baroda College sent this message:

We the students, past and present, of the Baroda College, in a meeting assembled, convey our warmest sympathy to our late Vice-Principal Mr. Ghose in his present trouble.⁷¹

Even students in far away Japan wrote to Sri Aurobindo:

We have read with deep regret that you have been in some trouble in connection with your progressive paper *Bande Mataram*. Our regard for your high abilities and sincere patriotism cannot be well expressed in a letter like this. Suffice it to say that we look upon men like you as our true leaders . . . Your writings, which are fully 'National' have been always appreciated by young men who, in their turn, are also becoming 'National' in spirit by and by. We sympathise with you from our very heart in your present troubles and hope you will go through these trying "ordeals" calmly, believing in Him who will crown our efforts with complete success at not a very remote date.⁷²

Sri Aurobindo's patriotism and self-sacrifice reminds one of a quote from Helen Keller, the deaf-blind author and political activist whose autobiography has been adapted both for film and stage:

Life is an exciting business, and most exciting when it is lived for others.⁷³

Sri Aurobindo was acquitted in the *Bande Mataram* Sedition Case on 23rd September 1907. A few months later the students of Baroda College were overjoyed that Sri Aurobindo, after attending the Surat Congress Conference, visited Baroda. The Principal of Baroda College, Mr. Clarke, had issued orders to the students that they were not to meet Sri Aurobindo nor attend his speeches. But as soon as Sri Aurobindo passed the College, the students rushed out, unharnessed the horses and pulled his carriage themselves in a procession, shouting slogans till they reached the house of Khaserao Jadhav, his host in Baroda.⁷⁴ The Maharaja however, was

71. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 245.

72. 'A Letter to Sri Aurobindo from Indian Students in Japan during his Political Career', *Mother India*, August 1974, p. 564.

73. Website: https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/helen_keller_121771/23.12.19

74. See Manoj Das, 'Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi', *Mother India*, September 2014, p. 726 (Barindrakumar Ghose, *Atmakahini* (Bengali), D. M. Library, Kolkata).

more welcoming and twice invited Sri Aurobindo to the Palace. Sri Aurobindo accepted the first invitation but declined the next!⁷⁵

Over the next few days Sri Aurobindo delivered four lectures at Baroda. A student remarked, “We used to go and sit two hours before time.”⁷⁶ Another report states that Sri Aurobindo delivered two speeches on the political situation in India at the Vankaneer Theatre and a third one, a few days later at Manik Rao’s gymnasium. A. B. Purani had attended all the three lectures. In between the second and third speech Sri Aurobindo had vanished for a few days and was not to be located. This was the time he was alone with Lele at Sardar Majumdar’s house where, after three days of meditation, he attained Nirvana — a complete silence of the mind. And that was Sri Aurobindo’s final sojourn in Baroda.⁷⁷

After Sri Aurobindo resigned from the post of Principal of Bengal National College Satish Chandra Mukherji succeeded him. After his acquittal in the *Bande Mataram* Sedition Case, Sri Aurobindo rejoined the college voluntarily as a professor. Sri Aurobindo’s magnanimity comes to the fore when he jumped to the defence of his successor when a report in the *Basumati* accused Mukherji of clinging to the post of Principal and not handing back the post to Sri Aurobindo after his acquittal. On 30th March, 1908, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

We have noticed a paragraph in the last issue of *Basumati* which may lead to some misunderstanding in the public mind and needs therefore to be corrected. The *Basumati* practically charges the National Council with disregarding the claims of Srijut Aurobindo Ghose to reoccupy the post of Principal and Srijut Satish Chandra Mukherji, who has done so much to organise the College, with clinging to the post to the exclusion of his colleague. We are able to state the real facts. Srijut Aurobindo Ghose left the College when he was implicated in the *Bande Mataram* sedition trial and a conviction seemed, from the temper of the authorities, to be a foregone conclusion. He expressed in his letter of resignation a readiness to rejoin his duties at some future date if the Council thought his services required. After his acquittal the Executive Committee at an early date passed a resolution appointing Srijut Aurobindo Ghose a Professor of History and Political Science in the College, but as the result of a special request from Srijut Aurobindo himself to the Secretary to excuse him from the onerous duties of a Principal which he had neither the time nor, as he himself thought, the necessary capacity to discharge, the post of Principal was not included in the reappointment. Srijut Satish Chandra Mukherji had no hand or voice in the matter; he had taken the post of Principal with reluctance and

75. See A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 100.

76. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1st Ed., p. 82.

77. See Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, pp. 433-40.

holds it now as a duty until it pleases the Executive Committee to relieve him. Many groundless rumours have been afloat from time to time about the National College, and it is a pity that they should be printed without previous verification. Srijut Aurobindo Ghose sent in his resignation spontaneously, and would certainly not have returned if, as it was at one time persistently rumoured, he had been compelled to retire; and his return as Professor and not as Principal was also due to his own unwillingness to accept the latter charge. Neither the National Council nor anyone else can be held responsible in either case.⁷⁸

Two months earlier, in a speech in Bombay, Sri Aurobindo had also generously praised Satish Mukherjee:

I spoke to you the other day about National Education and I spoke of a man who had given his life to that work, the man who really organised the National College in Calcutta, and that man also is a disciple of a Sannyasin, that man also, though he lives in the world, lives like a Sannyasin.⁷⁹

Although Sri Aurobindo was replaced by Satish Mukherjee as Principal of Bengal National College his attitude towards him was always fair, kind and gracious. As the Mother once said:

Gentleness: always gracious and wishing to give pleasure.⁸⁰

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

78. CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 983-84.

79. Nilima Das, 'Sri Aurobindo – The Soul of India', *Mother India*, April 1993, p. 297.

80. CWM, Vol. 14, 2nd Ed., p. 176.

IMPRESSIONS OF JAPAN

You ask me for my impressions about Japan. To write on Japan is a difficult task; so many things have been already written, so many silly things also . . . but these more on the people than on their country. For the country is so wonderful, picturesque, many-sided, unexpected, charming, wild or sweet; it is in its appearance so much a synthesis of all the other countries of the world, from the tropical to the arctic, that no artistic eye can remain indifferent to it. I believe many excellent descriptions have been given of Japan; I shall not then attempt to add mine, which would certainly be far less interesting. But the people of Japan have, in general, been misunderstood and misinterpreted, and on that subject something worth saying remains to be said.

In most cases foreigners come in touch with that part of the Japanese people which has been spoiled by foreigners, — a Japan of money-makers and imitators of the West; obviously they have proved very clever imitators, and you can easily find here a great many of those things which make the West hateful. If we judge Japan by her statesmen, her politicians and her businessmen, we shall find her a country very much like one of the Powers of Europe, though she possesses the vitality and concentrated energies of a nation which has not yet reached its zenith.

That energy is one of the most interesting features of Japan. It is visible everywhere, in everyone; the old and the young, the workmen, the women, the children, the students, all, save perhaps the “new rich”, display in their daily life the most wonderful storage of concentrated energy. With their perfect love for nature and beauty, this accumulated strength is, perhaps, the most distinctive and widely spread characteristic of the Japanese. That is what you may observe as soon as you reach that land of the Rising Sun where so many people and so many treasures are gathered in a narrow island.

But if you have — as we have had — the privilege of coming in contact with the true Japanese, those who kept untouched the righteousness and bravery of the ancient Samurai, then you can understand what in truth is Japan, you can seize the secret of her force. They know how to remain silent; and though they are possessed of the most acute sensitiveness, they are, among the people I have met, those who express it the least. A friend here can give his life with the greatest simplicity to save yours, though he never told you before he loved you in such a profound and unselfish way. Indeed he had not even told you that he had loved you at all. And if you were not able to read the heart behind the appearances, you would have seen only a very exquisite courtesy which leaves little room for the expression of spontaneous feelings. Nevertheless the feelings are there, all the stronger perhaps because of the lack of outward manifestation; and if an opportunity presents itself, through an act, very modest and veiled sometimes, you suddenly discover depths of affection.

This is specifically Japanese; among the nations of the world, the true Japanese — those who have not become westernised — are perhaps the least selfish. And this unselfishness is not the privilege of the well-educated, the learned or the religious people; in all social ranks you may find it. For here, with the exception of some popular and exceedingly pretty festivals, religion is not a rite or a cult, it is a daily life of abnegation, obedience, self-sacrifice.

The Japanese are taught from their infancy that life is duty and not pleasure. They accept that duty — so often hard and painful — with passive submission. They are not tormented by the idea of making themselves happy. It gives to the life of the whole country a very remarkable self-constraint, but no joyful and free expansion; it creates an atmosphere of tension and effort, of mental and nervous strain, not of spiritual peace like that which can be felt in India, for instance. Indeed, nothing in Japan can be compared to the pure divine atmosphere which pervades India and makes of her such a unique and precious country; not even in the temples and the sacred monasteries always so wonderfully situated, sometimes on the summit of a high mountain covered with huge cedar trees, difficult to reach, far from the world below. . . . Exterior calm, rest and silence are there, but not that blissful sense of the infinite which comes from a living nearness to the Unique. True, here all speaks to the eyes and mind of unity — unity of God with man, unity of man with Nature, unity of man with man. But this unity is very little felt and lived. Certainly the Japanese have a highly developed sense of generous hospitality, reciprocal help, mutual support; but in their feelings, their thoughts, their actions in general, they are among the most individualist, the most separatist people. For them the form is predominant, the form is attractive. It is suggestive too, it speaks of some deeper harmony or truth, of some law of nature or life. Each form, each act is symbolical, from the arrangement of the gardens and the houses to the famous tea ceremony. And sometimes in a very simple and usual thing you discover a symbol, deep, elaborated, willed, that most of the people know and understand; but it is an exterior and learnt knowledge — a tradition, it is not living truth coming from the depth of spiritual experience, enlightening heart and mind. Japan is essentially the country of sensations; she lives through her eyes. Beauty rules over her as an uncontested master; and all her atmosphere incites to mental and vital activity, study, observation, progress, effort, not to silent and blissful contemplation. But behind this activity stands a high aspiration which the future of her people will reveal.

9 July 1917

THE MOTHER

(*Words of Long Ago*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 2, pp. 152-54)

ON THE 1919 EPIDEMIC

. . . The origin of the microbes and their support lie in a disharmony, in the being's receptivity to the adverse force. I will tell you a story. I do not know whether I have already told it to you, but I am going to tell you now for it will give you an illustration.

I was in Japan. It was at the beginning of January 1919. Anyway, it was the time when a terrible flu raged there in the whole of Japan, which killed hundreds of thousands of people. It was one of those epidemics the like of which is rarely seen. In Tokyo, every day there were hundreds and hundreds of new cases. The disease appeared to take this turn: it lasted three days and on the third day the patient died. And people died in such large numbers that they could not even be cremated, you understand, it was impossible, there were too many of them. Or otherwise, if one did not die on the third day, at the end of seven days one was altogether cured; a little exhausted but all the same completely cured. There was a panic in the town, for epidemics are very rare in Japan. They are a very clean people, very careful and with a fine morale. Illnesses are very rare. But still this came, it came as a catastrophe. There was a terrible fear. For example, people were seen walking about in the streets with a mask on the nose, a mask to purify the air they were breathing, so that it might not be full of the microbes of the illness. It was a common fear. . . . Now, it so happened I was living with someone who never ceased troubling me: "But what is this disease? What is there behind this disease?" What I was doing, you know, was simply to cover myself with my force, my protection so as not to catch it and I did not think of it any more and continued doing my work. Nothing happened and I was not thinking of it. But constantly I heard: "What is this? Oh, I would like to know what is there behind this illness. But could you not tell me what this illness is, why it is there?" etc. One day I was called to the other end of the town by a young woman whom I knew and who wished to introduce me to some friends and show me certain things. I do not remember now what exactly was the matter, but anyway I had to cross the whole town in a tram-car. And I was in the tram and seeing these people with masks on their noses, and then there was in the atmosphere this constant fear, and so there came a suggestion to me; I began to ask myself: "Truly, what is this illness? What is there behind this illness? What are the forces that are in this illness?" I came to the house, I passed an hour there and I returned. And I returned with a terrible fever. I had caught it. It came to you thus, without preparation, instantaneously. Illnesses, generally illnesses from germs and microbes take a few days in the system: they come, there is a little battle inside; you win or you lose, if you lose you catch the illness, it is not complicated. But there, you just receive a letter, open the envelope, hop! puff! The next minute you have the fever. Well, that evening I had a terrible fever. The doctor was called (it was not I who called him),

the doctor was called and he told me: "I must absolutely give you this medicine." It was one of the best medicines for the fever, he had just a little (all their stocks were exhausted, everyone was taking it); he said: "I have still a few packets, I shall give you some" — "I beg of you, do not give it to me, I won't take it. Keep it for someone who has faith in it and will take it." He was quite disgusted: "It was no use my coming here." So I said: "Perhaps it was no use!" And I remained in my bed, with my fever, a violent fever. All the while I was asking myself: "What is this illness? Why is it there? What is there behind it? . . ." At the end of the second day, as I was lying all alone, I saw clearly a being, with a part of the head cut off, in a military uniform (or the remains of a military uniform) approaching me and suddenly flinging himself upon my chest, with that half a head to suck my force. I took a good look, then realised that I was about to die. He was drawing all my life out (for I must tell you that people were dying of pneumonia in three days). I was completely nailed to the bed, without movement, in a deep trance. I could no longer stir and he was pulling. I thought: now it is the end. Then I called on my occult power, I gave a big fight and I succeeded in turning him back so that he could not stay there any longer. And I woke up.

But I had seen. And I had learnt, I had understood that the illness originated from beings who had been thrown out of their bodies. I had seen this during the First Great War, towards its end, when people used to live in trenches and were killed by bombardment. They were in perfect health, altogether healthy and in a second they were thrown out of their bodies, not conscious that they were dead. They did not know they hadn't a body any more and they tried to find in others the life they could not find in themselves. That is, they were turned into so many countless vampires. And they vampirised upon men. And then over and above that, there was a decomposition of the vital forces of people who fell ill and died. One lived in a kind of sticky and thick cloud made up of all that. And so those who took in this cloud fell ill and usually got cured, but those who were attacked by a being of that kind invariably died, they could not resist. I know how much knowledge and force were necessary for me to resist. It was irresistible. That is, if they were attacked by a being who was a centre of this whirl of bad forces, they died. And there must have been many of these, a very great number. I saw all that and I understood.

When someone came to see me, I asked to be left alone, I lay quietly in my bed and I passed two or three days absolutely quiet, in concentration, with my consciousness. Subsequently, a friend of ours (a Japanese, a very good friend) came and told me: "Ah! you were ill? So what I thought was true. . . . Just imagine for the last two or three days, there hasn't been a single new case of illness in the town and most of the people who were ill have been cured and the number of deaths has become almost negligible, and now it is all over. The illness is wholly under control." Then I narrated what had happened to me and he went and narrated it to everybody. They even published articles about it in the papers.

Well, consciousness, to be sure, is more effective than doctors' pills! . . . The condition was critical. Just imagine, there were entire villages where everyone had died. There was a village in Japan, not very big, but still with more than a hundred people, and it happened, by some extraordinary stroke of luck, that one of the villagers was to receive a letter (the postman went there only if there was a letter; naturally, it was a village far in the countryside); so he went to the countryside; there was a snowfall; the whole village was under snow . . . and there was not a living person. It was exactly so. It was that kind of epidemic. And Tokyo was also like that; but Tokyo was a big town and things did not happen in the same fashion. And it was in this way the epidemic ended. That is my story.

Now this brings us naturally to the cure. All that is very well, we now have the knowledge; so, how to prevent illnesses from coming, first of all, and when the illness does occur, how to cure it?

One may try ordinary means and sometimes that succeeds. It is usually when the body is convinced that it has been given the conditions under which it must be all right; it takes the resolution that it must be all right and it is cured. But if your body has not the will, the resolution to get cured, you may try whatever you like, it won't be cured. This also I know by experience. For I knew people who could be cured in five minutes, even of a disease considered very serious, and I knew people who had no fatal illness, but cherished it with such persistence that it did become fatal. It was impossible to persuade their body to let go their illness.

And it is here that one must be very careful and look at oneself with great discrimination to discover the small part in oneself that — how to put it? — takes pleasure in being ill. Oh! there are many reasons. There are people who are ill out of spite, there are people who are ill out of hate, there are people who are ill through despair, there are people . . . And these are not formidable movements: it is quite a small movement in the being: one is vexed and says: "You will see what is going to happen, you will see the consequences of what he has done to me! Let it come! I am going to be ill." One does not say it openly to oneself, for one would scold oneself, but there is something somewhere that thinks in that way.

So there are two things you have to do when you have discovered the disorder, big or small — the disharmony. Firstly, we said that this disharmony creates a kind of tremor and a lack of peace in the physical being, in the body. It is a kind of fever. Even if it is not a fever in general, there is localised fever; there are people who get restless. So the first thing to do is to quieten oneself, bring peace, calm, relaxation, with a total confidence, in this little corner (not necessarily in the whole body). Afterwards you see what is the cause of the disorder. You look. Of course, there are many, but still you try to find out approximately the cause of this disorder, and through the pressure of light and knowledge and spiritual force you re-establish the harmony, the proper functioning. And if the ailing part is receptive, if it does not offer any obstinate resistance, you can be cured in a few seconds.

It is not always the case. Sometimes there is, as I have said, a bad will: you are more or less on strike, at least you want the illness to have its consequences. So, that takes a little more time. However, if you do not happen to be particularly ill-willed, after some time the Force acts: after a few minutes or hours or at the most some days you are cured.

Now, in the case of special attacks of adverse forces, the thing gets complicated, because you have not only to deal with the will of the body (note that I do not admit the argument of those who say: "But as for myself I do not want to be ill!", for your consciousness always says that it does not want to be ill, one must be half-crazy to say, "I want to be ill"); but it is not your consciousness that wants to be ill, it is some part of your body or at the most, a fragment of the vital that has gone wrong and wishes to be ill, and unless you observe with a good deal of attention you do not notice it). But I say that the situation gets complicated if behind this there is an attack, a pressure from adverse forces who really want to harm you. You may have opened the door through spiritual error, through a movement of vanity, of anger, of hatred or of violence; even if it is merely a movement that comes and goes, that can open the door. There are always germs watching and only waiting for an occasion. That is why one should be very careful. Anyhow, for some reason or other, the influence has pierced through the shell of protection and acts there encouraging the illness to become as bad as it can be. In that case the first means is not quite sufficient. Then you have to add something; you must add the Force of spiritual purification which is such an absolutely perfectly constructive force that nothing that's in the least destructive can survive there. If you have this Force at your disposal or if you can ask for it and get it, you direct it on the spot and the adverse force usually runs away immediately, for if it happens to be in the midst of this Force it gets dissolved, it disappears; for no force of disintegration can survive within this Force; therefore disintegration disappears and with it that also disappears. It can be changed into a constructive force, that is possible, or it may be simply dissolved and reduced to nothing. And with that not only is the illness cured, but all possibility of its return is also eliminated. You are cured of the illness once for all, it never comes back. There you are.

Now, this is the general picture; on the details could be written books and books. I have given you only general explanations.

Considering the causes you have told us about, one should be always ill!

But in ordinary life, most of the time, people are almost always ill — except a few who escape for reasons of a different order that we shall explain one day. There are very few people who are not more or less ill all the while. But even in ordinary life, if within you there is trust, goodwill, a kind of certitude, this kind of inner confidence, oh! as there is in most children perhaps (I do not know, for, after all, those we see

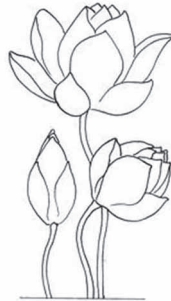
here are fairly exceptional), however, there is a trust in life, they are young and they have the feeling that the whole life is before them. Very few things are behind, everything is in front. So that gives them a kind of self-confidence, that pulls them out.

Otherwise, I do not know, in the ordinary life I have known very few people who did not complain of having at least some physical ailment which they carried always with them. . . . You know perhaps that play of Jules Romains, *Doctor Knock*, in which he says that a healthy man is a patient unaware of his sickness. It is usually true. When you are sufficiently busy not to be all the while occupied with yourself, you do not notice it, but it is there.

22 July 1953

THE MOTHER

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INTERVIEWS IN JAPAN

An Evening with Madame Nobuko Kobayashi in Kyoto, Japan.

I had sent an airmail letter to Madame Kobayashi from India, as I did to Dr. Ohkawa. But I received no reply. I was to have left for Kyoto along with other delegates on the morning of 7th September, 1957. I therefore sent her a reminder from Tokyo and intimated to her that I would stay in Miyako Hotel in Kyoto and that I could kindly be informed of her convenience at that address.

In the train, on my way to Kyoto the next morning along with my fellow-delegates, I received a telegram from Madame Kobayashi: "Wrote to Miyako Welcome." I now felt sure that I could meet the Madame and bow down to her. We reached Kyoto some time in the afternoon and there was a large crowd at the station, waiting to have a look at the delegates. A number of cameras clicked and there was a flutter around the president of the congress, Monsieur Chamson. I was told later by Madame Kobayashi that she had a desire to attend the station to see me. But she gave up the idea as she knew there would be a big crowd at the station, to see the PEN [*an international association of writers*] delegates and that, after all, she might not be able to spot me out. Her adopted daughter attended instead, just to catch a glimpse of the delegates. We were taken in buses to our respective hotels. Miyako Hotel was situated on an eminence surrounded by green hills on two sides. It was a wonderful place, with fine Buddhist paintings on its walls, a spacious dining hall overlooking a part of the town nestling in the valley below and picturesque hills around mantled with green and covered with trees. Adjacent to the dining hall was an antique garden with all the delicate fantasy of a typical Japanese landscape garden, forest, island and even a waterfall. There was also a swimming pool attached to the hotel. It was, altogether, a most attractive place of residence.

I was taken to my room in the hotel, not by one of the hotel management, but by a press representative. The fact is that, when I was lounging outside the PEN conference hall in Tokyo, a press representative had sat by my side and chatted with me for a few minutes. As I learned later, he represented the Kyoto Press. He asked me whether I favoured the idea of one government for the whole world. I happened to remark, with Sri Aurobindo's *The Ideal of Human Unity* in my mind, that the ideal of a free world-union was acceptable to me, rather than a centralised World-State. This reply seemed to attract him. He further asked me what should be the objective of the government of a country in the present context. I told him, remembering what Sri Aurobindo had said in *The Human Cycle*, that the Scandinavian form of democracy and socialism was the one best suited to world conditions today. And I said that, if the religion of humanity was to fulfil itself in the life of the race,

there must be an awakening of the soul in man. There must be an attempt on his part to live from his soul and not from his ego. These and other things had probably drawn him to me and, now that he had a freer time in Kyoto and probably because he wanted to write about it in the Kyoto Press, he had sought me out to give finishing touches to the interview. There was a cameraman with him who photographed me in my room according to the pressman's instructions and we sat talking for a while.

I mention this because, when we called on Madame Kobayashi the next evening, almost the first thing she told me was that she had read an account of the interview in a Kyoto newspaper, "The awakening of the soul in man and the attempt of each individual to live from his soul and not from his ego — this is exactly what we have been telling our people", she said.

I asked the desk porter for my letters after the pressman left. There sure enough was Madame Kobayashi's letter, awaiting my arrival. It read as follows: "I was so much pleased to receive your letter from India, and you are the Mother's spiritual child! I am looking forward with much pleasure to meet you and hope to hear about your respectful Mother. She was my dear, intimate friend, it is wonderful.

I shall be free 7th, 8th, also 9th. I wonder, you have so many nice invitations, which I think you had better not miss. So please consider your programme and let me know by telephone.

Sunday morning we have the meeting, so, may be in the afternoon, or Monday afternoon or evening.

Will you come to my house, not so far from Miyako Hotel? I will draw the map where my house is.

All news when we meet.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,
Nobuko Kobayashi

P.S. Did you get the telegram this morning on the train. I was so sorry there was delay in answering your letter. I will tell you the reason why it was delayed, when we meet."

I was delighted. The invitation that Madame referred to were functions at which the PEN delegates were invited, the tea ceremony and reception by Ura Senke, grand Master of the Tea Ceremony, the luncheon given by the Governor and Mayor of Kyoto in Tenryuji Temple, etc. I ran to my room and telephoned Madame Kobayashi [using] the number given by her in the letter. A gentle and silvery voice greeted me across the wires and there was delight in it, with a disarming touch of frankness and good humour. I announced myself and my arrival, thanked her for her affectionate letter and told her that the most precious thing for me was to see her. I spoke to her about Dr. K. R. S. Iyengar and his work and said that we would

call on her together. I added that I would drop the entertainment at Nomura Villa and spend the evening of Sunday, 8th September, with her. She wondered what she could offer us, since her servant would be out on Sunday. I said that the whole of Japan was looking after us and that she should not worry in the least about treating us. I added that we would be delighted to have a cup of tea with her.

The tea ceremony was on, the same evening (i.e. Saturday evening). We enjoyed it in spite of Typhoon Number 1 which had brought about a downpour of rain and which banged the windows and shook the walls when we were having dinner at Ura Senke's after the tea ceremony. There was the closing session of the Congress at Tenryuji Temple the next morning (Sunday) and lunch after that in the spacious halls of the temple. We were then whirled about on a sightseeing tour of Kyoto and we were back at Miyako Hotel by six o'clock in the evening. We had promised to be at Madame Kobayashi's between 6.30 p.m. and 7 p.m.

I found on my return that Madame Kobayashi had telephoned for me when I was away, in the afternoon. I got into telephonic touch with her again and learnt that she had rung up to say that she had arranged for dinner and that Dr. Iyengar and myself should dine with her and not take food elsewhere that evening. I agreed joyfully and both Dr. Iyengar and myself set for Madame Kobayashi's taking with us the map she had drawn for our guidance.

We soon realised that, though the map was perfect, we were not and the best way to reach the destination in time was to get into a taxi and put the map in the driver's hands. He rushed through one or two lanes at break-neck speed, for Japanese drivers are speed-fiends, probably because the traffic is one-way on the roads in the cities. We had discussed the map with some students who were waiting for a bus by the roadside. They tried their utmost to be helpful to us. But they could not convey their thoughts in English and we were left bewildered by their gestures and their earnestness. The taxi-driver drove past two or three narrow lanes, took several turns from one lane into the other, discussed for a considerable while with a vegetable vendor whose shop stood at a point at which one lane opened into another and finally stopped before a modest-looking house, feeling sure that the house was Madame Kobayashi's. Kyoto is a charming city in spite of these narrow lanes. It is more Asiatic than Tokyo and more ancient.

Madame Kobayashi came out into the pretty front garden bordering on the lane when she heard the sound of the taxi horn. We bowed down to her, took off our shoes and followed her into a neat little drawing room. It was a cosy house, though it looked unimposing from outside and the drawing room had been furnished with taste. Madame's adopted daughter welcomed us with a smile and brought us green tea. As we were told later, the Kobayashis had no children and Madame had adopted this girl as her own daughter. And she added: "Your Mother does not know this." The adopted daughter had studied in a college in Tokyo under a famous poetess, Mrs. Miyoko Goto, whose husband, we were told, was tutor to the Crown

Prince. The poetess was to put up with the Kobayashis the next evening, after returning from the trip to Nara. The poetess was one of the PEN delegates. I sought her out the next day at Nara and introduced myself to her as a guest of the Kobayashis the previous evening. She promised to send me some of her poems in English translation — four of them — for being translated into Indian languages. It had happened that, on Sunday morning, at the time of the closing session of the Congress in Tenryuji Temple, I was sitting next to the poetess and had been rather struck by her appearance and demeanour. She had with her, her daughter of school-going age, a pretty little girl in red clothes and skirt. It somehow occurred to me that this very person might be Mrs. Miyoko Goto. And I was right.

I had taken with me the mounted and coloured photograph of the Mother which had remained undelivered at Dr. Ohkawa's. And I presented it to Madame Kobayashi. She appreciated it very much and placed it on the mantelshelf, a spot where it could indeed be the cynosure of all eyes in the drawing room.

The daughter entered soon with her pretty little baby which was about a year old. Madame took the baby in her arms and fondled it. We were introduced to this recent arrival and I took the baby in my arms and moved about the room with it. The baby stared hard at me, but was silent. Dr. Iyengar then received the baby in his arms. The baby stared harder still. A second Indian face was probably too much for it and the baby started crying loudly and inconsolably. Its mother came and took the baby away. But it was a long time before the baby could be restored to its former calm, for its cries upstairs were still audible when we had sat down for dinner.

Madame Kobayashi's son-in-law returned from the day's work when we were still having our green tea. A nice young man, he was very friendly. He was mostly upstairs, probably helping his wife to look after the child and came downstairs to bid us good-bye when we rose to go.

We soon settled down to a wonderful and heart-easing conversation. What struck me was the frank and unassuming way in which Madame spoke to us. Free from sentimental prolixity or emotional excess of any kind, her talk yet proceeded from the very depths of her heart, like a little mountain stream. Her voice faltered only once, when she referred to the death of her husband in 1926. The Mother had come to Kyoto in 1917 and left in 1919. Dr. Okhata, Madame's master in the art of still-sitting, died in 1921. Madame then took up the work of conducting the still-sitting group and of editing the monthly devoted to an exposition of still-sitting, work which had been done so far by Dr. Okhata and her husband. She took up her album and showed several photographs of the annual gatherings of the group. Madame Kobayashi also showed one or two photographs of herself with the Mother and Paul Richard, the latter with a beard and shawl in the manner of Tagore. She then went inside and produced a sketch of herself in colour, done by Mother. It was mounted and framed and was a wonderful sketch. Mother seemed to bring out in it the very soul of Madame Kobayashi. Madame was now seventy-one. The sketch

was done nearly thirty-eight years ago. But it brought out the eager inquiry, the innocence, the candour, the cheerfulness and good humour of Madame Kobayashi in a beautiful manner.

Madame also showed us the photographs and the diary sent to her from the Ashram, the diary with quotations from *Savitri*, sent with blessings and signed by the Mother. Among the photographs was the one, a copy of which I had seen at Dr. Ohkawa's, in which the Mother is seen with Japanese visitors in Golconde.

I asked Madame about the postscript in her letter, her promised explanation regarding the delay in replying to me. She said that, when my letter arrived, she had just received a thousand copies of her monthly, which had been revived now after the War, for it had to cease publication all these years. The letter got mixed up with all these copies and she could not trace it. But my second letter had enabled her to reply to me immediately. She asked me how many hours would it take to go to India by plane, the route and all that.

Madame Kobayashi also told us a few things about herself. I have written about some of them elsewhere. It was Paul Richard that first contacted Madame Kobayashi's husband, for he was known by his work with the still-sitting group in Kyoto. And Mother contacted Madame Kobayashi. Madame told me that she had collaborated with someone else in translating a Japanese literary work into English and that it had been published, possibly in England. I asked her what was done at the meetings of the still-sitting group. She said that the Indian yogic system was a complicated one, but that the technique observed in the still-sitting group was simple. It consisted in concentrating on the navel and it promoted physical well-being as well as spiritual progress. I expressed a desire that after dinner, we might be taught how to do it according to the tradition of the still-sitting group. She asked me what was being done in the Ashram. I answered that Mother mostly spoke to us through her silence and each sadhak was free to pursue his own methods under the guidance of the Mother; and that, in the evening, after physical exercises, concentration was practised for half an hour in the presence of the Mother by such sadhaks and visitors as were present then. Madame agreed to sit still with us for half an hour after dinner.

Dinner was ready. For the daughter of the house came in with her little baby and told us so. The baby was quiet now, but it started staring hard at us again. We passed through a little corridor with the kitchen to our left and there, in front of the kitchen, was the dining room. We sat down on the rush-mattress floor around a low, square table and I was reminded of the Ashram dining hall and the way we ate there. But dinner was brought here in round wooden boxes of delicate lacquer work, finely designed and painted and placed in trays. There were two or three boxes in each tray. We took the lid off this pot-luck and discovered soup in one and rice and vegetables in the other. There was some fish in it. Dr. Iyengar hesitated a little and Madame immediately went into the kitchen and returned with a generous supply of bread and butter. We had a hearty meal.

The rectangular space, next to that of the dining hall without any wall between, was the tea-room. We were told that the still-sitting group had its sittings there. The tea-room in every Japanese house is a place for sipping green tea and for quiet contemplation. We sat there after dinner, Dr. Iyengar and myself, with Madame Kobayashi sitting in front of us. In her own simple and unostentatious way, Madame showed us how to do it. She sat in a kneeling posture, with her legs touching her back. We did accordingly. She rested the palms of her hands on the abdomen and held the wrist of her left hand with the right palm. We also did so and she corrected our style where necessary. She said: "Think that your head is above the roof and concentrate on the navel." I happened to breathe a little hard as I had a bad cold and Madame said with a smile: "Our breathing should not be heard. You might be sitting with five thousand people in meditation and your breathing should not be heard."

It was nearly 9 p.m. when we adjourned to the drawing room. In the letter that I wrote to Madame from India, I had expressed a desire to see the house in which the Mother lived when she was in Kyoto. She asked us whether we desired to see the rooms and we joyfully agreed. Madame phoned for a taxi and, in a few minutes we were on our way to the Mother's living rooms in Kyoto. The daughter of the house was also eager to join us and the son-in-law stayed at home, looking after the baby which had not yet been induced to sleep.

The house in which Mother lived nearly thirty-eight years ago has now been turned into a tea-house. A tea-house in Tokyo is a quite a different thing. It has probably degenerated into a rendezvous for shady characters and an infamous centre for sex-intrigues. But in Kyoto, where ancient Japanese culture is still intact, a tea-house is partly a hotel affording bed and breakfast to visitors and partly a convenient meeting place for marital negotiations by intending parties. Madame told us that we might not be able to see the rooms if a visitor was putting up there. She added that some years ago, Shri Tandon had gone there to see the living rooms of the Mother and that, he could not see them because of visitors. But he had snapped the rooms from outside with his camera. As Madame went inside to talk to the ladies who ran the tea-house, we waited, eager to know our fate. Luckily, there was no visitor and we followed Madame Kobayashi into the house. A small verandah led to the room in which the ladies stood, with a staircase to the left. We went up the staircase and Madame told us that it had been considerably widened now. But the staircase that led to the second floor was still steep and narrow, as before. It led us to the small living room in which Mother used to meditate and Madame Kobayashi told us that she also used to meditate here with the Mother. There were considerable alterations in other parts of the house. But the meditation room remained the same, but for a window enlarged into a door.

It was a pretty room, with mild-yellow rush-mattresses glued to the floor and a low, round lacquered table placed in the middle of the room which had beautiful

designs on it in yellow and red. We sat round the table for a while and I could not resist the desire to go into myself and pray for a few minutes. It was, for me, a sacred room, as sacred as the innermost shrine of a temple. I sent out a prayer to the Mother from Kyoto to Pondicherry, expressing my gratitude to her for having vouchsafed me to spend a few minutes in what might be called the laboratory in which her mission was shaped before she came to India to make India her permanent home. The younger Kobayashi thought I was about to compose a poem. Madame Kobayashi asked me smilingly whether I was composing one. I had soared past all poetic compositions into those untrodden regions of consciousness where the substance of poetry itself boils at white heat. I replied that I might compose a poem about it, but later.

It was half in dream and half in reverie that I went downstairs along with the others. We bade goodbye to the ladies of the tea-house and got into the taxi. Madame Kobayashi talked to them a minute longer and possibly passed some money into their hands. We dropped the Kobayashis at their house and took leave of them. The son-in-law also came out to bid us goodbye. We bowed down to Madame Kobayashi as children would to a mother and the younger Kobayashi watched us intently as we were doing so. This Indian style of salutation was probably new to her. And we returned to Miyako Hotel, radiantly happy, with the words of Madame Kobayashi ringing in our ears in reply to our request to her to visit Pondicherry: "It will not be long before I come."

*

II

*An evening with Dr. S. Ohkawa at Nakatsu.
(Aike, Kanagawa, Japan)*

It was the first of September, 1957 and nearly three o'clock in the afternoon. Tokyo was very bright that day and even a little warm. I had just returned from a visit to the International House and was relaxing in my room in Diichi Hotel when I received a phone call. It was from Mr. Katoh about my intended visit to Dr. Ohkawa.

The International House of Japan owes its origin to a group of intellectual leaders in Japan. They were stimulated by the views of Mr. J. D. Rockefeller when he visited Japan in 1951. Having collected funds so as to meet the conditions of a generous grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Committee organised for the purpose incorporated this House on 27th August 1952 and its new building, opened in 1955, which has a wonderful landscape garden at its back, provides facilities for residence and study for Japanese and foreign scholars and thinkers. The House renders assistance to individuals as well as organisations in activities calculated to

promote international cultural exchange and intellectual cooperation (2, Torilzaka-machi, Azabu, Minato-ku, Tokyo).

There is another interesting institution, called the Asian Cultural Library (No. 534, Shinkawa, Mitaka city, Tokyo). It has been founded recently as a centre of research in Asian culture and its management is also planning to build an Asian Culture College.

Mr. Katoh is working in the imports section of the Dainan-Koosi, Ltd. in Tokyo. I had written air-mail letters to Dr. Ohkawa as well as Madame Kobayashi at the address given to me by Shri Nolini, before leaving India. I reached Tokyo on the evening of 30th August 1957 and had not heard so far from either of them. A remarkable thing happened in the meanwhile. Dr. Ohkawa is about seventy-one now and he lives a retired life in a village called Nakatsu in the Kanagawa Prefecture. He has gone blind a year or two [earlier] and has been bed-ridden for a few months. Madame Ohkawa said later, and she desired that this fact should be particularly conveyed to the Mother, that her husband has still a vivid visual memory. For instance, he knows what is the sixth book on the third row on the shelf and asks for it when, occasionally, a relative of his goes there to read aloud to him.

But when my letter reached Dr. Ohkawa, and naturally I wrote it in English, there was none there at home or in the village, who could read it. But it happened that a professor friend of his from Tokyo had called on him the same day in his village and Dr. Ohkawa showed the letter to him and got it read by him. He then requested the professor to get into touch with Katoh on his return to Tokyo and get him to guide me and accompany me to Nakatsu. Katoh has been an ex-pupil of both of these professors. He has a great regard for Dr. Ohkawa and goes to Nakatsu once or twice a year to see him. He was there last July and he had now phoned me up on receiving the message from the professor.

It should perhaps be mentioned here that Dr. Ohkawa was himself a professor. He used to teach the history of the British colonies in a university in Tokyo. He had written a book on the history of the South Manchurian Railway and another on the soul of Japan. Obviously, the latter is not a professional contribution but a labour of love.

When Katoh broached his mission to me, I requested him to come over to Diichi Hotel immediately. As I would be busy on all the ensuing days, I asked him whether we could call on Dr. Ohkawa that very day. As it was a Sunday and his office was closed, Katoh readily agreed. I rang up Dr. K. R. S. Iyengar who was in Imperial Hotel and who also was desirous of calling on Dr. Ohkawa. He promised to get ready immediately. In a few minutes we were in a taxi and soon boarded an electric train.

It was a wonderful railway journey through picturesque scenery for nearly an hour and a half. About 5.30 p.m. we alighted at a station called Ron-Atsugi. I found that railway stations here have name boards in Japanese as well as in English. Katoh

told me that, during the Second World War, signposts in English letters were removed and that the teaching of English in schools too was discontinued. That is why, Katoh explained, young boys and girls spoke such poor English nowadays. He was, perhaps, apologising for his own generation. But he need not have done so, for he spoke fairly intelligibly, though a little slowly.

Waiting at a neat little bus stand near the station were a number of buses. We found that the bus for Nakatsu was to leave after about half an hour. We sauntered for a while and I thought we should have a cup of tea. But only green tea was available in the restaurants that were there in the neighbourhood. After we had green tea, Katoh left us at the bus stand and went to ring up Dr. Ohkawa and inform him of our arrival. He did not tell us, but he must have requested Madame Ohkawa to keep tea ready for us. For we found a warm cup of tea and a bit of cake awaiting us when we went to Dr. Ohkawa's.

The bus made its way, with rich paddy fields grown in the famous Japanese way on either side and green fields of mulberry plants fenced in with tea shrubs. Katoh told us that this area was noted for its silk industry. And he also explained that, in the villages, each family grew its own tea. (We found tea shrubs growing in the backyards of several houses in Nakatsu). When the bus passed through what looked like a forest, we noticed here and there bamboo groves, cherry trees and twisted pines. The bus moved uphill for a considerable part of the journey till we came to the top of the mountain on which Nakatsu is situated. The mountain has been split into two by a river which meanders its way through the gorge below.

We got down from the bus and moved along a village path that lay through mulberry fields for two furlongs or so to reach Nakatsu. Small wooden houses, with roofs thatched with reeds here and there, confronted us when we reached the village. Opposite some of these houses, in open courtyards covered by roofs, lay bullocks and oxen, after the day's work in the fields. They bellowed now and then and there was nothing typically Japanese about it. It was the universal language of these animals all over the world.

Here, right on one edge of the gorge, was the ancient mansion in which Dr. Ohkawa lived. Katoh told us that it was built about two hundred years ago by the very architect who had planned the palace of the emperor of Japan at that time. It was a beautiful ancient manor house, typically Japanese, somewhat like an old sardar's *wāda* that we see in India. Large wooden doors opened the way to a spacious courtyard beyond which stood the living rooms. We entered the house and, turning to the left, we saw Madame Ohkawa waiting at the door of a spacious parlour to welcome us. She knelt down on the floor in the most natural and graceful manner and welcomed us, saying "Dojo, dojo". We bowed to her in Japanese style, removed our shoes and followed into the parlour which was panelled in the most tasteful manner with wood and decorated with paper work. In a niche to the right was a statue of the Buddha and Madame explained that it had been made of white India

wood though it had turned black now. She could not speak English and Katoh, with his slow and meditative English, was our interpreter. It was an exquisite statue, revealing an unmatched meditative expression on the face of the Buddha, and a little desk in the front of it lay a rosary of beads. The professor's desk was also there and a few paintings were hung on the wall. But we were eager to see Dr. Ohkawa. We turned right, and left again, and facing a large verandah and backyard, was a small room, with a door opening towards the dining room and the kitchen. This was the room in which Dr. Ohkawa lay in bed, with his spectacles on. He got up with a little difficulty when we were announced into his presence and bowed to us as he sat on his bed. He had been ill for a few months and Katoh has told us that, under medical advice, Dr. Ohkawa could not be engaged in conversation for more than an hour. I bowed down to him as I would to the Mother and introduced Dr. Iyengar to him. There was a glow on his face and he was very happy to receive us. Katoh engaged Madame Ohkawa in conversation and she soon went and brought the tea and cake for us and put it on the low table placed near the professor's cot. There were three or four chairs around the table and we all sat down.

I think we were there for about three quarters of an hour, though it was difficult to notice how time passed. Punctuated by asthmatic coughs now and then but with great enthusiasm and a bright glow on his face whenever questions were asked, the professor spoke in fairly good English. It was difficult to remember that he was blind. He wore gold-rimmed glasses and there was nothing unusual about his eyes. I offered to give him a copy of the brochure on Sri Aurobindo University and a mounted and coloured photograph of the Mother. He gently stayed me with a gesture of his hand. I did not realise even then that he was blind. I thought about it only later when Katoh told me about it. I left the brochure on his cot. But I brought back the photo with me. That was the only one I had with me on my journey and besides the professor told me that he had received several from the Ashram, including a photograph of the Mother in Japanese dress. I did not remember to have seen this photograph of the Mother in Japanese dress. Dr. Ohkawa spoke to Madame and she opened a number of brown paper covers kept in a wooden box near by. After sorting out several letters and small packets contained in those covers, Madame Ohkawa produced the photograph. I had seen it before, but it had not struck me that it was a picture of the Mother in Japanese dress, till now, and indeed after coming here and seeing several Japanese ladies wearing the traditional kimono. Among the other photographs sent from the Ashram was one in which the Mother is seen in Golconde with Japanese visitors.

The professor used to refer to the Mother as Madame Mirra Richard and he spoke of her and Monsieur, Paul Richard, with great enthusiasm. Dr. Iyengar happened to remark that he did not know much about the recent movements of Paul Richard. The professor then asked Madame Ohkawa to produce the letter received recently from Paul Richard. She dived into the brown covers again, and aided by

Katoh in her search, she found it and handed it over to the professor. The letter was passed on to me. It was written in October, 1956 from Durham, North Carolina, U.S.A. The substance of the letter was as follows:

Dear Friend,

I saw you in dream the other day and I was thinking of you. I happened to learn that a countryman of yours was lecturing here in the university and I attended the lecture (I was told by the professors that this was a Japanese writer on architecture). After the lecture was over, I learnt from this unknown friend that you were doing well and that the work undertaken by you and other friends in Japan was progressing well. For my part, I am glad that my dreams of a new Asia have come true. I have spent a number of years in the spiritual desert of America, but I am happy that a new Asia is being born. Please convey my affection to all our friends.

Affectionately yours,
Paul Richard

I read out the letter and the professor enjoyed listening to it again. He said that the phrase which had struck him the most in the letter was the reference to the 'spiritual desert of America'. And he laughed heartily over it.

In the course of the conversation which followed, and part of which has been presented elsewhere, the professor told us that he had been on the black list of the British Government in those days, for harbouring Indian revolutionaries like Rash Behari Bose and Gupta. The professor had studied Indian philosophy at the Tokyo Imperial University. He also spoke of Miss Hodgeson who was in Tokyo the same time as Mother was and added that she had probably joined the Ashram later. Her fiancé died before they could marry and she had resolved never to marry, after that. She wore a locket round her neck, containing a miniature picture of her fiancé. He also remarked that the Mother used to translate into English the articles written in French by Paul Richard for the *Arya*.

When we rose to go, as it was bus-time, the professor shook hands warmly with us and said that he was very, very happy to have met us. He asked us to remember him to the Mother.

Madame Ohkawa had all the grace of a refined Indian lady brought up in the midst of old world courtesies. She was solicitous and helpful without being fussy and had charming ancient manners. One could see she had a great affection and admiration for her husband. When I was bending down to touch the professor's feet while bidding good-bye, she beckoned to me and suggested that I should just bow to him in the Japanese way. As it was already dark and the lane from the house to the bus road was narrow and muddy, she came with us, torchlight in hand, to leave us at the bus stand. She was very communicative and asked Katoh to tell us that the

Mother should be informed that, though her husband had lost his eyesight, he had a strong visual memory. While passing through the parlour, it happened that we just casually peeped towards the dining room where the maid was laying the table, to see what it was like. Madame noticed it and said that she would have very much liked us to stay there for the night and have dinner with them. She added she knew how to prepare Indian curries, having learnt the art from Rash Behari Bose and Gupta when they stayed with them. We gratefully excused ourselves, as we were to be busy with the PEN Congress session the next morning.

One or two groups of Japanese girls passed by, probably on to the next village. They were talking and laughing heartily and there seemed to be no fear of any kind for any one, though there were no lights along the road. Some of them took us to be Americans, probably because we were tall.

At the point where the village wall touched the road was a small poster, supported on a wooden post, indicating bus timings. Dr. Iyengar remarked that the poster would not have been allowed to remain in its place even for a day in India. Madame Ohkawa flashed the torchlight on it to verify the timing of our bus. On the other side of the lane and touching the road was a Buddhist cemetery, with a number of gravestones jutting out of the ground. We had drawn together there, under the shade of a tree, as there was a slight drizzle. Katoh showed the cemetery to us and said that Buddhism and Shintoism were almost the same religions since they were professed by different members in the same family. Christianity, however, was separate. I learnt later that there had been a strong movement afoot, sometime back, giving Shintoism the status of a State religion and that one or two Shinto universities were functioning still. The essence in Shintoism seems to consist in ancestor-worship and formulas, centuries old, seem to have synthesised the two creeds, at least in the eyes of a large majority of people in Japan. Seventy-five per cent of the people are Buddhists and about twenty-five per cent Christian.

We were waiting for the bus. Madame Ohkawa sauntered freely into the cemetery, touching this stone and that, to see whether the bus was coming. She did this most naturally, while all the time, I was thinking of Tom O'Shanter.

The Ohkawas had no children. With a blind and ailing husband on her hands, Madame Ohkawa still looked radiant and happy. She would not leave us till we were actually seated in the bus, though she had to return home all alone in the dark. I bowed down and touched her feet when the bus arrived and left for the railway station with my friends.

It was an unforgettable evening that I spent with the Ohkawas.

V. K. GOKAK

(Loving Homage, Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir, Calcutta, 1958, pp. 227-52)

THREE PROSE POEMS

(1)

And I asked Madame Kobayashi: tell us what you know of the Mother. And she said candidly: she came here to learn Japanese and to be one of us. But we had so much to learn from her charming and unpredictable ways.

She was a sweet friend. She was clever, very clever. An artist to her finger-tips, she would not mind drawing a colour-sketch of mine, which I have treasured to this day.

Both of us were young. And both of us were peering to glimpse a lovelier landscape and gaze at a bluer sky. She revered a master from the ancient land of Buddha. And she felt sure that his was the gospel of the morrow, the Veda of the dawning day. Her eyes glistened with a new delight and wonder when she spoke to me of him.

But I was a Buddhist, my master, had taught me the mystery of meditation, the still sitting of the lovely statue at Nara. My husband, a surgeon, had given up opening the abdomens of men. He counselled them instead to go to Nature for a cure and to sit still in the manner of Okhata, to brood on the navel-lotus that folds or unfolds the health of body and soul.

But your Mother said that the land of the spirit was one. She meditated with me in her lovely attic. We sat together and explored our inner depths, each in her own way. She made me realise that we thought the same thoughts and beheld the same vision.

I loved her dearly. Have you seen those lovely wisteria flowers trailing down the roof of the Kasuga shrine at Nara? We call them *hooji*. My friend loved those flowers. She was one with them. She called herself *hoojiko*, when she thought of having a Japanese name. My first name is Nobuko. *Nobu* means 'faith'.

There comes a crisis in every man's life and shatters all his dreams. He goes through life, his soul a clod, unless he rebuilds them again. And it was my fate to walk through a desert for a while.

My friend left Kyoto. My master passed away two years after she left. And my husband died a few years later. We had no children. I was left alone in this wide, wide world to pick my way and to choose my dreams.

My parents desired that their widowed daughter should live with them in Tokyo. The members of the still-sitting group, which had its branches all over Japan, insisted that I should continue in Kyoto and carry on the work of my master and my husband.

Kyoto was my home. Here was my life work, my mission, awaiting accomplishment. I stepped into the void created by the demise of my master and my husband.

I welcomed the men of diverse faiths that were eager to learn the art of sitting still. We had weekly sittings and fortnightly sittings. We had our monthly journal and our annual sessions. Still-sitting centres sprang up all over Japan and five thousand men and women could be seen sitting in meditation at the annual session. All work has its tribulation and mine too had its own. When the Second World War came, the centres were diminished in number. The journal had to cease publication. My father died in Tokyo in an air-raid. I brought my aged mother from Tokyo, to look after her. I revived the journal when the War was over. The centres are coming up again. I have worked thirty-seven years, not in vain. Some friends advised me to go to England as there were a number of maladed minds there as a result of the war and in need of help. But Japan is no better and my work lies here in the country of my birth.

Numerous were the sceptics that questioned the utility of still-sitting and the vanity of brooding over the navel lotus. But they are coming round one by one, now that the American scientists are speaking of the diaphragm going up and down!

Yes, I should love to come to India and go to Pondicherry. But that can only be when my mother does not need my help any longer.

I think, now and again, of writing to my friend. I wish to send her a copy of my journal. Do you think she will read my letter? Will she reply? I do not know, for now she has become the Mother!

And when I see her again, I will put both my arms around her and cling to her, feeding my starved love of thirty seven long years. Will the members of your Ashram be angry with me if I behave that way? For, she is now — the Mother!

Yes. She is the Mother to you, but always a dear, dear friend of mine. It was my great good fortune that, in this strange but explicable world, I should have met this jewel of my heart and this friend of my soul. The perfume of those two years, when we lived like twin roses on the same stalk, lingers like incense around the divine altar and sways serenely in the sanctuary of my mind.

(2)

And we asked Ohkawa: tell us what you know of the Mother.

A light broke from his blind eyes like the blank splendour of the mild moon.

And he replied smilingly: I shall tell you of the Mother and of the great life we lived in the dawn-days of Asia.

I drank deep of Indian thought when I was young and I dreamed of a new Asia. I harboured Rash Behari Bose and Gupta in exile.

I attended every meeting at which an Indian scholar spoke. I went and listened to him in the hope of finding my soul.

In the *Japanese Observer*, before the First World War, I had read about Sri Aurobindo. I asked for his address, but in vain.

It happened one day that Hara Prasad came to Japan. He spoke on Indian philosophy.

I went and listened to him. I was one of the fifty men and women who attended. Among them was a young lady who stirred me to my depths.

Something in her drew me to her, — call it grace, call it the immutable light of the polar star that makes the magnet point to its own centre.

A fragrance was wafted from her to me as from Paradise, sweet with the scent of immemorial days.

There was a light in her eyes as of the great morning of the world that was about to dawn.

The lecturer spoke clearly, even eloquently. I heard him mechanically. But my soul was listening eagerly to the silence in her depths and straining to catch a glimpse of the vastnesses in her soul.

I saw Hara Prasad the next morning. And what was my surprise when he said that this very lady had desired to see me!

I was thrilled.

I was moved to the very roots of my heart.

I met her as a brother and friend and was privileged to be her fellow-worker, not realising what great cause I worked for and with what success beyond my dreams.

She and her friends dreamed of a new Asia, a new world. They were in living touch with another who dreamed dreams and saw visions in the ancient land of the Buddha. That was Sri Aurobindo himself. I was destined to work with the collaborators of the very seer whose whereabouts I could not know.

I was drawn into the magic circle of their light and, all unconscious, I lived on the very edge of heaven.

We lived together for a year. We sat together in meditation every night for an hour. I practised Zen and they practised yoga. But these twin paths led us to the same mountain heights.

You would like to know, my young friend, what struck me about your Mother.

She had a will that moved mountains and an intellect sharp as the edge of a sword.

Her thought was clarity itself and her resolve stronger than the roots of a giant oak.

Her mystic depths were deeper than the ocean. But her intellect was a plummet that could sound her deepest depths.

An artist, she could paint pictures of unearthly loveliness. A musician, she enchanted my soul when she played on an organ or guitar. A scientist, she could formulate a new heaven and earth, a new cosmogony.

I do not know what Mira had not become or was not capable of becoming.

But to me she was a sister and comrade in spirit.

That is how I know her.

You would like to know whether I have measured her vision and assessed her spirit.

But I was her friend, an intimate member of the family. I was her brother.

You have known her as the Divine. And the Divine I have known as a friend and sister. She was beautiful in western clothes. And she looked surpassingly lovely when she wore a kimono. If I could but see, I would surely have said that she looked equally lovely in an Indian saree.

To measure is to be apart and to assess is to be far away. Distance alone can ensure description.

How could I, who lived in the very heart of Fujiyama, tell you about the volume of its fire and flame and the dimensions of its light?

(3)

And we asked Madame Ohkawa: tell us what you know of the Mother.

And she replied saying: I knew her very well. She was one of those blessed spirits that one learns to love heart and soul.

She came from the far-off land of France. But it was my feeling that she was all along, like me, a daughter of Japan. I could swear that she was my very sister whenever she wore a kimono.

It was for a brief while that she sojourned here. But great was my happiness when I lived with her. And when she went away, there was a mist in my eyes like the autumnal mist that hangs over Tokyo and on the ocean around.

I do not know what it is to be a mother. But I probably know more than any other what it is to be a sister.

I sometimes feel that I should have cooked and sent more dishes to Mira when she was here. That would have made me happier still.

I often think of her, as of a sister in a far-off land. A fellow-countryman of yours was here some years ago. I gave him a wicker lamp, made of bamboo, to be presented to Mira. Did he ever give it to her?

I feel that I should send a gift with you to her. But how do I know? How can I be sure that it will reach her? It is better that I wait and give it to Mira when I meet her again!

V. K. GOKAK

*(Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual No. 17,
Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir, Calcutta, 1958, pp. 164-70)*

THE MOTHER'S STAY IN JAPAN: FURTHER FINDINGS¹

“One formulates one’s aspiration, lets the true prayer spring up from one’s heart, the prayer which expresses the sincerity of the need. And then . . . well, one will see what happens.”²

The Mother

It all began in the year 2018. The very name of Japan conjures a land of beauty and perfection in our minds. For me it was no less a dream to visit this country; more so because the Mother spent four years of her life in Japan. I was very keen on visiting it during the centenary of the Mother’s final coming to Pondicherry, between 2019 and 24th April, 2020. I started planning my visit to this wonderful land of beauty. My aspiration met with Her grace and everything was miraculously arranged to help me make it possible.

“All can be done if the God touch is there.”³

Savitri

My trip to Japan in May 2019 (the start of the centenary year of the Mother’s coming to Pondicherry) made me come across new findings of her four-year stay there. On 21st May, 2019 Kiyohito Kitagawa, a monk friend who had visited the Ashram around the year 1990 to study Sri Aurobindo and Buddhism, took me to the place where I thought the Mother had stayed in Kyoto. I had completely lost touch with him and had no clue about his address; it was in an incredible manner that I could contact him. Thanks to him, I could meet Madam Atsuko Kobayashi, the grand-daughter of Nobuko Kobayashi who graciously welcomed us and shared the script of Seizasha or the Silent Sitting Meditation (practised by the Mother along with Nobuko Kobayashi her close friend) and the photographs of the house where Nobuko Kobayashi resided from 1932 onwards. Presently, the house of Atsuko is a new construction in place of the original house of Nobuko Kobayashi which was demolished in 2016. Apparently, the Mother never visited that house as Nobuko moved into it (1932) after her husband’s demise many years after she left Japan.

1. The present article was the introduction to the programme arranged in the Hall of Harmony of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in Pondicherry in March 2020.

2. *CWM*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 9, p. 375.

3. *Savitri*, p. 3.

Formerly, during the late 90's, my brother had visited Japan and met Nobuko's daughter, Midori Kobayashi (now no more), who graciously gave him the original letters of the Mother written to Madame Nobuko Kobayashi.

Letters of the Mother to Nobuko Kobayashi:

1. 73 Myogadanimachi, koishikawaku Tokio, April 18th, 17

Dear Mrs. Kobayashi

Excuse me for being so late in answering your kind letter, but I hoped you would come to Tokio for the cherry blossoms and that we should have the pleasure of seeing you at home.

But you did not come and so I write to ask if all is going on well with you and Dr. Kobayashi.

Also, we are without news from Mr. Pearson since a very long time and we should be very glad to hear what is becoming of him. It would be quite kind of you to send me a word of news and tell me by the same occasion if Mr. Pearson is still with you in Kyoto or if he is up at Koyasan.

We are delighted with the cherry trees and find them very beautiful.

With our best remembrances and wishes for Dr. Kobayashi and yourself.

Very sincerely

[signed]

*

2. Tokio, April 28th 17

Dear Mrs. Kobayashi

We were so glad to receive your kind letter and to hear the good news of you and Mr. Pearson.

We are truly happy at the thought of seeing him soon, and we hope he will let us know his arrival two or three days beforehand, so that we may make arrangements to receive him.

For the moment we do not think of going to Kioto, but all the same we hope to see you soon.

With our kindest remembrances for Dr. Kobayashi and yourself,

Very sincerely

[signed]

*

3. Tokio, November 1st, 17

My dear Mrs. Kobayashi

I am so very sorry that you will not come with Dr. Kobayashi in November! So much the more because, after you left and I tried to finish the miniature from the photograph, I discovered that it would be impossible; the photograph being not clear and precise enough to be used as a document. Then, what I am to do? . . . The picture had such a good beginning, it is a pity to leave it unfinished . . . Will you not be touched by such good reasons? I hope so, and that we shall see you soon.

We so much enjoyed your last visit.

Happy at the thought of meeting Dr. Kobayashi soon.

With our kindest remembrances for you both.

Very affectionately

[signed]

*

4. Kioto, Dec, 19th 17

Dear Mrs. Kobayashi

I am so sorry to hear that you are still in bed. All the same I hope that you will soon be quite well, and that it will be possible to finish the miniature. I shall be so pleased to work at it. Please let me know when you will be able to let me come to your home for that.

We have decided, after all, to settle in the little house where we are at present; it is not so big but convenient enough. Now the little room upstairs is arranged and Mr R has started working once more. He is now very busy and thinks no more of going out. So he is sorry but it will not be possible for him to come to see Dr. Kobayashi on Saturday afternoon.

Many thanks for the good advice about the police. Dr. Hirsch told us that the question had been settled long ago and that we had nothing more to do now.

Hoping to see you soon, With our best remembrances

Yours

[signed]

*

5. Tokio, Jan, 16th, 19

My dear friend,

It is such a long time since I received news from you, that I am beginning to be anxious. I hope you have not caught cold once more. . . .

Here, we are facing a little difficulty for the moment; because the proprietor of our house told us that he needed the house for the 15th of February and asked us to vacate it for that date.

So we are very much puzzled about what to do. Because of the lessons we are giving in various schools, we are trying to find a house in Tokio or in the near neighbourhood; but it is terribly difficult to find, in such short time, a suitable house!

If we could find somewhere a nice and well situated temple, we always think of retiring there for some time. But we have so much luggage! It must be a large temple, because we need a lot of space.

Also we thought of finding, from now, the place where we could spend our summer and go there immediately, instead of removing twice. . . .

Can you give us a good suggestion for one of these three things? It would help us very much.

Hoping that all is going well with you and Dr. Kobayashi.

*With best love from
[signed]*

Have you ever received a small parcel we sent you for the new year? . . .

*

6. Sendagaya 902, May 17th, 19

My dear friend

I am so glad to hear from you. You remained indeed a long time without writing. I always hoped you were coming soon to Tokio and that it was the reason of your silence. But I see I was mistaken and I am sorry of it.

We saw Mr. Hirasawa several times since his disaster. He seems to have taken it quite philosophically. Now he has taken a house not very far from ours, and likes it much better than the former one. As he received many presents from his relatives and friends, the only true loss for him was his pictures; and, as I told him, the "fabric" is still living and can work again.

Our garden looks so nice with the new leaves. It is a pity you cannot see it! We have also many vegetables in our kitchen-garden and, of course, they are the best you can find in Tokio!

*Hoping to hear soon from you.
 With the most affectionate thoughts of both to both.
 Best love from
 [signed]*

*

7. Sendagaya 902, Friday 21st. [1919]

My dear friend

Many thanks for your kind letter and all the interesting news you give us in it. Please, next time you see Mr. Nishida, tell him that we often think and speak of him and that we send him our best remembrances.

Thank you also for the suggestion about the curtains, but since you left Tokio the weather is so bad and the sun shows itself so rarely that Mr. R. thinks no more of curtains now. It will be for a little later on.

We have such a horrid wind here since three days! I hope it is better in Kioto. I fear all the nice flowers will be blown away from the trees.

Kumachan is all right now and gives you his paw to thank you for your kindness.

Hoping you are quite well and Dr. Kobayashi too.

With our most affectionate thoughts for both and my best love for you.

Yours

[signed]

*

If we follow the dates on the letters we can figure out the years and months of the Mother's stay in Tokyo and Kyoto. We can then safely infer that the Mother probably stayed in Kyoto only about 13 months from 1917 December to 1919 January, that is mainly the whole year of 1918.

I got to meet two scholars, Prof. Tishio Akai and Dr. Kurita Hidehiko, both commissioned by the Japanese government to research on 'Indo Japanese Cultural Ties' between the two World Wars. In their research the Mother appears as a prominent figure. I readily took the opportunity to invite them to the Ashram the coming year, that is, 2020 February/March to present their findings of the Mother's stay in Japan. Before we read their papers, I would like throw light upon an important detail that I came upon through my communication with them regarding the probable location of the Mother's house in Kyoto. The house that has been visited by a few disciples from Ashram is at Shichijo, a likely area where the Mother must have resided. According to the scholars, it is very improbable that it is the same house that the Mother resided

in, as a hundred years have passed and buildings have been reconstructed a couple of times over at that place. However, they admit that the Kobayashi couple might have had their house around there as there is more evidence to trace its whereabouts due to the practice of Silent Sitting Meditation being continued for many years. Therefore, according to them it is likely that the Mother visited their home and might have even sat for meditation with Nobuko Kobayashi but may have not necessarily lived there. She probably lived in a rented apartment near about as is indicative through her letter to Nobuko, her friend. Here is my correspondence with Prof. Tishio Akai and Dr. Kurita Hidehiko who shared with me the information about the Mother's letter to Nobuko.

I reproduce here the exact email correspondence in order to maintain authenticity.

[5:15 AM, 3/2/2020] Akai Tishio Japan: *In the letter dated 13th, Nov. 1917 (letter No 8 - not shown above) the Mother wrote to Nobuko, she mentioned thus:*

In a few days, you will receive the visit of our good friend Dr. Alcan Hirsch who is going to Kyoto, where he will stay for some time — he is appointed by the Japanese government to organise and supervise the Senrio Kaishaat Ajikawaguchi.

He intends to take a house, for him and perhaps also for us . . . as, if he finds one suitable, we think of coming to Kyoto for a few weeks.

I told him that you were a very kind and obliging friend and that you would certainly help him in his search and make things easier.

Hoping that I have not been indiscreet and that we may meet soon.

With our kindest remembrances for Dr. Kobayashi and yourself

[signed]

(Copied as in the original letter)

*

[5:16 AM, 3/2/2020] Akai Tishio Japan: *From this I had the hypothesis.*

Kurita Hidehiko castanea1127@gmail.com Jan 30,2020,4:04

The place called “(Kami) ninomiyacho” is the place where Sanzaburo and Nobuko lived before Sanzaburo passed away. That means that the Mother lived either in Sanzaburo and Nobuko's house together or in a place near their house. Sanzaburo is Dr. Kobayashi, husband of Nobuko.

*

Kurita Hidehiko castanea1127@gmail.com Feb 8, 2020, 8:34 PM
to me, Toshio

Dear Chhalamyigaru,

To be more accurate, I will show you a list of the time and place in which the Mother lived in Japan as following.

In May 1916, Mirra and Paul arrived at the Port of Yokohama.

From 1916 to 1917, they lived in Myōgadani, Tokyo.

On October 1916, Mirra and Paul met Ōkawa Shūmei after a talk of Hara Prasad.

On November 1917, Mirra sent a letter to Kobayashi Nobuko from Tokyo. The letter says that Mirra and Paul were looking for a house in Kyoto and going to come to Kyoto for a few weeks.

From 1917 to 1919, they lived in Ninomiyachō, Kyoto with Kobayashi Sanzaburo and Nobuko or near the place where they lived.

From 1919 (February) to 1920, they lived in Sendagaya, Tokyo, with Ōkawa Shūmei.

In February 1920, they departed from the Port of Kobe.

According to the latest information which you sent me, her address was "Nobuji Suzuki 902 Sendagaya Tokyo". I think that this address was from 1919 to 1920. But, I do not know who Nobuji Suzuki is. This name is apparently different from Ōkawa Shūmei.

Sincerely,

Hidehiko

*

Toshio Akai murgan@iris.eonet.ne.jp Thu, Jan 23, 6:04 AM to me,

Chhalamayigaru

When the Mother visited Kyoto for the first time in 1917, she probably stayed [at] Dr. Kobayashi's personal residence in Shichijo for a while. The residence no longer exists and was substituted long ago by a hotel or something like that. It is the place the map you shared with us yesterday is pointing to. (Ref. Map)

We are not sure where she lived later, but inferable strongly is that she didn't stay permanently with Dr. Kobayashi. Hidehiko has discovered the Mother's letter written in 1917 (letter No 8) from Tokyo addressed to Nobuko Kobayashi, in which the Mother asked Nobuko to find a house to live in Kyoto for her friend an Alcan Hirsch (a strange name but it is written so) and she and Paul Richard might live

with this gentleman. We don't know how this plan went, but circumstantial evidences strongly suggest she rented a house (or rooms) by herself and lived there. Probably her apartment was not far from Kobayashi's home in Shichijo.



After the death of Dr. Kobayashi, Nobuko gave up the residence in Shichijo (probably together with the clinic her husband ran near Toji Temple) and moved in several places in Kyoto, and eventually settled in Yoshida, near the National University of Kyoto, in 1932. In 1947, she renovated the place into a building mainly for Silent Sitting practitioners and named it Seizasha. Later her granddaughter Atsuko san divided the property into several plots and sold them except the place where she built a new house to live. This is the place where your colleagues/family visited before (when the old Seizasha building was still standing), and Atsuko san introduced you last year (after the Seizasha building was demolished).

*Best regards
Akai, Toshio*

*

The date for the paper presentation by the scholars was fixed for March 2nd, 2020 in the Hall of Harmony, SAICE well in advance. As Her Grace would have it, both the scholars cancelled their trip to Ashram a month before for genuine personal reasons. But, thankfully Dr. Helena Čapková, (Associate Professor at Ritsumeikan Univer-

sity). another research scholar who is part of their team came down for the event and presented their papers alongside her own.

The three papers were titled as follows:

1. "The Mother's Four Years in Japan, a few visible and many invisible" by Prof. Tishio Akai
2. "Kobayashi Nobuko and Still Sitting Meditation" by Dr. Kurita Hidehiko
3. "Universal Beauty — Japanese Aesthetics: The Golconde and Antonín and Noémi Raymond" by Prof. Helena Čapková.

All of them are historical and archival and contain details of interest, especially to us disciples of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo during this historical centenary of the Mother's final arrival to Pondicherry.

Another wonderful detail was communicated by Prof. Tishio Akai regarding the Mother's photograph with Rabindranath Tagore standing along with a few others in front of Buddha's statue, which was a mystery to us till date.

WhatsApp communication:

[6:48 AM, 2/28/2020] Akai Tishio Japan: *Good morning Madam. Here is a new discovery.*

[6:50 AM, 2/28/2020] Akai Tishio Japan: *This picture has been thought to be taken in 1916 somewhere in Kyoto, but no one could figure out where it was.*

[6:52 AM, 2/28/2020] Akai Tishio Japan: *The huge Buddha statue standing behind Tagore and the Mother is conspicuous, but it couldn't be identified with any of existing statues.*

[6:56 AM, 2/28/2020] Akai Tishio Japan: *A few days before, my colleague Shin-ichi Yoshinaga (Hidehiko's guru) asserted that this picture was taken in the garden of Kyoto Hotel, one of the most prestigious and international accommodation in the interwar years, and the precise date of shooting is, not in 1916, but Feb. 5, 1917.*

[7:03 AM, 2/28/2020] Akai Tishio Japan: *The hotel was requisitioned by Occupying Army after Japan's surrender to the Allies and the garden was made vacant probably due to the confusion of the surrender. The Buddha statue was probably removed then and new generation didn't remember the existence of the statue itself.*

All those disciples of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo who have a sincere aspiration to work for Her in any manner experience miracles on their journey as one walks the 'sunlit path'. Importantly, what I have also come to realise is that the physical stay and details (however interesting) of the Mother's stay in Tokyo and Kyoto, hold a much greater truth of her spiritual voyage than the outer facts of it.

“Our human knowledge is a candle burnt
On a dim altar to a sun-vast Truth; . . .”

“For Truth is wider, greater than her forms.
A thousand icons they have made of her
And find her in the idols they adore;
But she remains herself and infinite.”

Savitri

CHHALAMAYI REDDY

What is the value of the Formless unless it has stooped to Form? And on the other hand what truth or value has any form except to represent as in a mask the Indefinable and Invisible?

From what background have all these numberless forms started out, if not from the termless profundities of the Incommensurable? He who has not lost his knowledge in the Unknowable, knows nothing. Even the world he studies so sapiently, cheats and laughs at him.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 143)

BEFORE GOLCONDE — JAPAN, THE MOTHER AND ANTONÍN AND NOÉMI RAYMOND

Introduction

In previous times, the Western appreciation of Japan was based less on scholarship as we would understand it today than on a fantastical idea of the Orient, which fused together elements of Asian culture more broadly.¹ Japanese art was widely believed to possess universal aesthetic qualities that could revitalise modern art. This idea, rather than a direct experience of Japan, was to be the enduring inspiration for many artists and writers. According to the distinguished British art critic Roger Fry in an article written in 1910,² their aim was to create a new work of art that expressed those fundamental qualities, rather than to adhere faithfully to the original. The idea of Japanese universalism was promoted most notably by the American scholar Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853-1908), who lived and worked in Japan for a number of years and wrote prolifically about its art. He predicted ‘the Future Union of East and West’, and argued that Japanese people had interwoven art into their lives so perfectly that it had become natural to them, and hence universal.³

The Mother in Japan

Mirra Richard/the Mother and Paul Richard (1874-1967) lived in Japan during WW I. Their four years of exile in Japan were filled with activities that fuelled Asian and Japanese radical nationalism. But not only that, the Japanese sojourn was crucial for Mirra on the path to her becoming the Mother of the Pondicherry Ashram. As a trained artist, Mirra was extremely sensitive to the Japanese artistic sensibility, and the study of Japanese arts determined her long-term aesthetic preference. Her ideas about beauty and Japanese arts resonated with Fenollosa’s, as outlined above. Many of her quotes have survived that capture her observations about Japan, such as: “*For four years, from an artistic point of view, I lived from wonder to wonder,*” “*Beauty rules over Japan as an incontestable master,*” and that Japanese art teaches “*the unity of art with life*”.⁴ Here Mirra became involved in her elaborate exploration of

1. See Ian Littlewood, *The Idea of Japan: Western Images, Western Myths* (Chicago, Ill.: Ivan R Dee, 1996).

2. Roger Fry, ‘Oriental Art’, *The Burlington Magazine* 17/85 (1910), 3-4.

3. Cecilia L. Rosenow, ‘Pictures of the Floating World: American Modernist Poetry and Cultural Translations of Japan’ (University of Oregon Department of English and the Graduate School, PhD Dissertation, 2002), 95-6 and 126. Also see Ernest Francisco Fenollosa, ‘The Nature of Fine Art: I’, *The Lotos* 9 (1896), 663-73; and Ernest Francisco Fenollosa, ‘The Nature of Fine Art: II’, *The Lotos* 10 (1896), 753-62.

4. The Mother, *The Mother on Japan*: Compiled from the works of the Mother (Auroville, Prisma, 2013).

flowers and their spiritual significance. According to her friend Nobuko Kobayashi, with whom she practised still-sitting meditation, Mirra started referring to herself as Fujiko (Wisteria). She was inspired by the wisteria flowers on the roof of the ancient Shinto shrine. Wisteria/Fuji is also a pun on fuji — undead or immortal and Fuji, the sacred mountain. Another friend and collaborator of the Richards, Shumei Okawa (1886-1957), said of Mirra:

“... You know Mount Fuji ... you can't appreciate it in full when you are very near, when you are too close ... some distance is needed. ... from a distance, ah! it is grand, it is breath-taking, it is sublime! She was like Mount Fuji, Mirra was. ...⁵

The Richards and Japanese media

Shumei Okawa and his wife lived together with the Richards in Tokyo in order to facilitate the work they did together, primarily writing, translation and publication of books and pamphlets.⁶ Okawa was a university professor, Zen practitioner and an active sympathiser with the Indian liberation movement. He was also a member of the Black Dragon Society and ‘the leading spirit of the Pan-Asiatic movement in Japan ... a person of considerable influence, who is deeply interested in Indian affairs and is bitterly opposed to British rule in India’ — according to a Government of India document reporting the publication of ‘a photograph of Arabindo Ghosh and a eulogistic article on his work’ by Okawa in *Asia Jiron*.⁷

Paul Richard's work quickly proliferated especially among the Japanese intelligentsia, and placed the Richards on the cultural map of the Japanese capital. Shortly upon her arrival in Japan, Mirra was approached by a journalist from the *Fujoshinbun* newspaper for an interview, but instead she sent the manuscript *Woman and the War*, which was published on 7th July 1916. She also sent her painting, a self-portrait, which was published in the same newspaper two months later together with a text written by a journalist entitled *A truly dedicated woman*. This image of the Mother was forgotten until recently.⁸ The article by Mirra conveyed her ideas relating to feminism and women in society generally. She highlighted issues she was passionate about such as the natural equality of the sexes, the importance of collaboration and the specific dispositions of each of the sexes, such as female spirituality.

5. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *On the Mother* (Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1952): 174.

6. For more details see Yukiko Sumi Barnett, “India in Asia: Okawa Shūmei's Pan-Asian Thought and His Idea of India in Early Twentieth-Century Japan,” *Journal of the Oxford University History Society* 1 (2004): 1-23.

7. SAAR (Sri Aurobindo. Archives and Research), December 1994, 240.

8. Mirra Paul Richard, *Woman and the War*, *Fujoshinbun*, 7th July 1916, 5; Unsigned-newspaper journalist, *A truly dedicated woman*, *Fujoshinbun*, 29th September 1916, 1.

Pavitra as a connecting link

The Mother shared an immense admiration and dedicated exploration of Japanese art not only with Fenollosa, but also with the leading designers of her project, the place of meditation, the Ashram dormitory, Golconde; with Noémi (1889-1980) and Antonín (1888-1976) Raymond. Their commonly shared enchantment with Japan was indeed a common ground, but there was also a key connecting person, Philippe Barbier St. Hilaire (1894-1969) later known as Pavitra, who was a secretary of the Mother and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. They met in Japan where Pavitra worked for one of the Raymond's clients, Hajime Hoshi (1873-1951), who founded a pharmaceutical school in 1922 that complemented his growing pharmaceutical empire. Hoshi commissioned the young Antonín Raymond to design the campus. The monumental, concrete building of the auditorium was a great success and still stands in Tokyo to this day, as a testimony to this fruitful partnership. Pavitra and the Raymonds shared friends with an interest in arts and esotericism, many of whom were members of a study group that became the base for the new Theosophical Society lodge in Tokyo, the Orpheus, established on 22nd May 1924. This lodge was led by Philippe Barbier St. Hilaire for a few months. Philippe's view of his life and career was changing, and soon, following an invitation to visit a monk, he went to Tibet in 1924 and then via Theosophy circles to Pondicherry, to begin to work with Sri Aurobindo Ghose.

Pavitra and Noémi Raymond's correspondence

The beginnings of the Golconde project can be found in the extensive correspondence between Pavitra and Noémi Raymond. They wrote to each other in French between 1927 and 1966.⁹ Until 1933, the architectural practice of the Raymonds featured only sporadically in the letters. The first significant mention dealt with a remarkable project, the Raymonds' new summer house in Karuizawa. A few photographs featuring the house and the family were enclosed. The project was later considered one of the best pre-war residential realisations and was included in the book *Antonín Raymond, His works in Japan*, published in 1935.¹⁰ The project garnered international interest, and even was associated with a scandal involving no less a figure than the famous architect, Le Corbusier.¹¹ Noémi further shared a text with Pavitra, later published in a book,

9. This correspondence has only recently become available to scholars since February 2017. I am grateful to the archivist Bob Zwicker, the Ashram (SAA), for allowing me to research it and to my friend Gilles Guigan for his kind assistance.

10. SAA (Sri Aurobindo Archives), Noémi to Pavitra, 17th September 1933.

11. For more details: Helena Čapková, 'Influence of Spirit and Not of Form: Antonín Raymond, Le Corbusier, and Architectural Piracy in the Transwar Era'. In S. Inaga ed. *A pirate's view of world history: a reversed perception of the order of things from a global perspective* (Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2017) 85-93.

that referred to the ideological programme or philosophy of the Raymonds' Atelier. The return to simplicity and the innovative usage of traditional Japanese building principles inspired their work, which in this way was an encapsulation of ideas and mechanisms of Japanese culture. This French draft of the later published text can be interpreted as a trigger that launched in motion the commission of Golconde.

Conclusion

A year later, in September 1934, Pavitra asked for more examples of the Raymonds' work that he could show to the Mother. Noémi was delighted to oblige.¹² A few months later, Pavitra approached Noémi with a proposal to design a three-storied building for 45 sadhaks.¹³ The project developed and the Raymonds visited Pondicherry to supervise the construction process in 1938. According to their testimonies, they found in the Ashram an alternative and a partner in their spiritual study, as well as in their ambition to design a new modernist structure that would be rooted in Eastern tradition, or rather that could overcome the duality between East and West and bridge them in a new, universal style.¹⁴ The Golconde dormitory is a hybrid structure that was built harmoniously into the colonial landscape of the Puducherry harbour. This architectural success has received praise from an international specialist audience, yet its unconventional design cannot be assigned exclusively to the genius of its designers, but also to the contemporary intrinsic connections within transnational artistic and spiritual networks.

HELENA ČAPKOVÁ

12. SAA, Pavitra to Noémi 1st September 1934, and Noémi to Pavitra 31st October 1934.

13. SAA, Pavitra to Noémi 7th June 1935.

14. See Noémi Raymond's greeting to the Annual convention, published in: *Theosophical Quarterly*, Volume 35, n. 3, 1938, 245.

Neither for soul nor universe is extinction the goal, but for one it is infinite self-possessing and for the other the endless pursuit of its own immutably mutable rhythms.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 144)

THE MOTHER'S FOUR-YEAR STAY IN JAPAN

A RESEARCH NOTE¹

Namaste, good evening, brothers and sisters of Aurobindo Ashram and the friends of mine in India.

It's a great honour for me to be given an opportunity to read a paper on the memorable occasion celebrating the Mother's Centenary Year of Her return to Pondicherry. Due to matters too private to reveal here, I am not able to share physically this notable moment with you. This is very regrettable, but permission is given me to share my recorded message with you, and the sense of honour I'm having now apparently surpasses my regret.

So, it's better for us to begin with a simple question: "What was the Mother doing in Japan?" The answer is also simple: "We don't know." Apart from the plain facts like the date of her arrival (it was in May, 1916) and departure (February, 1920), or the places where she predominantly lived (in Tokyo from 1916 to 1917, in Kyoto to 1919, and again in Tokyo for the rest of the days), not much is known to us. The number of the materials reliable enough to follow her footprints is too small, and reproducing her life in Japan from those evidences is by no means easy.

One example is the precise address where she lived in Kyoto. There is serious confusion about it. Once it was believed that she lived with her friend Nobuko Kobayashi in the huge house near the Imperial University of Kyoto, but it is impossible [because] that house itself was built seven years after the Mother's departure. My friend Mrs. Chhlamayi Reddy asked me and Dr. Kurita to figure out the exact place. All we were able to discover is that initially she stayed in the personal residence of Dr. Kobayashi, Nobuko's husband, in the place called Shichijo, more than four kilometres south from the afore-mentioned address. We are not even sure if she lived here permanently. Presumably she was a tenant of a modest apartment Dr. Kobayashi found for her, and they changed a room on the second floor of the house into a tea room, in which the picture I'll show you later was taken. The ground for my surmise is the Mother's letter Dr. Kurita found among the documents Madame Kobayashi left. In the letter to Nobuko dated 13th November 1917, she asked Madame Kobayashi to find a house to live for her friend named Dr. Hirsh, with whom she might share the house later. But this is not a decisive evidence and nothing to assure my hypothesis further has been found so far.

In Japan, the Mother seemed to spend a placid and humble life, and I believe that being not conspicuous was her wish. Biographically speaking, it's after her second

1. A slightly shortened version of the original paper. The photographs referred to in the text could not, unfortunately, be reproduced.

visit to India and the separation from Paul Richard that the Mother came to the fore, known extensively to the public, I mean. Before that, not only in Japan but in her life in France and in the community of the Cosmic Movement in Algeria, her name was known only to a limited people, mostly the members of occult circles. Several acquaintances or friendships she established in those days were barely maintained after she settled permanently in Pondicherry, as observed in the case of Irma de Manziarly, a French theosophist lady who asked the Mother to make arrangements to visit the Still Sitting Society when she toured Japan in 1923. Manziarly's visit can be confirmed by multiple sources including the Mother's letter which Madame Kobayashi kept personally to the end of her life, and the personal diary recorded by DT Suzuki, a famous scholar of Zen Buddhism and friend of Dr. Kobayashi.

Despite the lack of concrete evidence, I strongly suggest that the Mother, Manziarly, and Alexandra David-Néel, the explorer who entered Tibet in 1912 as the first European woman, knew each other while living in Paris, and somehow Philippe Barbier Saint-Hilaire was linked with some of or, all of them.² As you know well, Saint-Hilaire is the real name of Pavitra and this devotee of Sri Aurobindo once belonged to a small Theosophical Lodge while staying in Japan, and whose members were closely related with DT Suzuki and his wife Beatrice Lane.

In the earlier part of her life, the Mother accompanied a specific mentor, and her effort was chiefly directed to the communication with a spiritual entity, and to record the interplay between her and the entity; to interpret the communication and make it public, was the work of her mentor. This is particularly true for her Cosmic Movement years, when she was a member of a spiritual community gathering around an enigmatic man called Max Théon, of which I have no time to speak in detail. Thus, her life in Japan is assumed to have been spent chiefly for contemplation and meditation, and little time was saved for expressing something outwardly.

Arguably, this is the reason why the documents recording her life in Japan are hard to find. Probably, something important is still kept unnoticed in the archive of the Ashram. It's quite likely but making an investigation of it is not my current business. It should be our next step. Although absent here, both Dr. Kurita and me are very eager to do so before long. Today, I shall explain the nature of materials we currently have, and an approach to reconstruct the Mother's life in Japan by using them.

I should emphasise again that the primary sources enabling us to trace her actions in Japan are very few in number. Only on a few occasions, did she make public her own idea. One of the few exceptions is "Woman and the War", an article she contributed to a newspaper for Japanese ladies, in which she prophesied the equality

2. Vrekhem records David-Néel's visit to Pondicherry in 1911, probably just before her entering Tibet. George van Vrekhem, *Beyond the Human Species, the Life and Work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother* (1998), 40.

of two opposing genders of human beings.³ This was printed soon after her arrival in Japan, and this suggests that someone who had known her before mediated between her and the publisher. I haven't yet examined the issue of the newspaper in which her article was printed, but a study extended in this direction might lead us to a new discovery, and the problem whether she wrote more of this kind of review will be revealed. Another case of her writing printed in Japanese media is entirely different from this, which I shall discuss later.

The second type of the primary source is mention of the Mother's as recorded in other persons' memoir, diaries, or letters, — and most of them are unpublished. Two of her Japanese friends, Shumei Ohkawa and Nobuko Kobayashi, are the authors of these records. The materials Madame Kobayashi left after her death, in particular, *Mama's Notes*, a lovely little collection of her memories, are exceedingly important in terms of including her relationship with the Mother in Japan and her visit to her old friend in Pondicherry in 1960. I dare not go further into this field, as I believe this is where Dr. Kurita develops his discussion.

In contrast to Madame Kobayashi who was only known to a limited number of people interested in meditation practices like Zen Buddhist or of Still Sitting, Ashumei Ohkawa, another Japanese who remembered her well, was an iconic figure in the interwar history of Japanese nationalistic ideology. He was one of the leading ideologues of Pan-Asianism, the political principles endorsing Japan's territorial expansion, and by the very reason he was prosecuted as a class-A war criminal in Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, held after Japan's surrender to the Allies. Like Madame Kobayashi, Ohkawa visited the Mother in Pondicherry later.

Ohkawa's friendship with the Mother is worthy of note in terms that the empathy for Indians who suffered immensely from British atrocity bound both of them. The unification of Asian people to compete with the dominant power of Western Imperialism was the idea they shared with each other. It is no coincidence that they first met at a lecture on Hindu philosophy made in 1916 by an Indian named Hari Prasad Shastri. Ohkawa was sure that he saw the Mother there for the first time, while her presence in the lecture with her husband Paul Richard is confirmed by the list of the attendees.⁴

This is the story generally accepted but I'm rather suspicious about the reliability of it. Unfortunately, not enough time is given to me to discuss it in detail, but I think Ohkawa had known of the Mother's arrival in Japan before this incident, and he learnt of it through a certain human network, specific but not entirely revealed to

3. George van Vrekhem, *The Mother, the Story of her Life* (2000), 176. This article is now contained in *Works of Long Ago* (CWM 2:143 ff.), but originally printed in *Fujoshinbun* in 1911.

4. This lecture was held by Waseda University's Indology Society to commemorate the society's decennial. *The Waseda Bulletin* reports that the title of Shastri's speech was "On Atma", and the name of Mirra Richard was registered in the participants' list together with Shumei Ohkawa. *Waseda Gakuho* [*The Waseda Bulletin*], Dec., 1916.

the ordinary people's eyes. This network also attracted to it a lot of Indians, those living either in India or outside, and in Japan they were sympathisers of the Independent Movement, and the major components of them were Indian students studying in Japanese colleges, and refugees like Rash Behari Bose.

We have to remind ourselves that this story of mine refers to the years when the political tension between Japan and Britain was rising. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, a treaty concluded in 1902, was originally ratified to restrain Russia's southward expansion, and thereby Japan's annexation of Korea was tolerated in exchange for Japan's reconfirmation of British dominance over the Indian subcontinent, but it was entering its terminal stage. Although the Japanese Government was still bound legally by the treaty and therefore obliged to deport Indian Freedom Fighters who sought political asylum in Japan, a lot of Japanese people, including Pan-Asianist intellectuals, profoundly sympathised with Indian refugees and harboured them. Ohkawa was prominent among them.

The acquaintance with Ohkawa soon involved Paul Richard in the political circle called Black Dragon Society. Together with Ohkawa, he edited the society's English journal, *The Asian Review*, and published several books on political science. His purpose was to analyse the contemporary world geopolitically, but it was heavily coloured by his idea of unifying the Asian peoples, the notion he derived from his spiritual ruminations. Interestingly, *To the Japanese Nation*, the volume he published in 1917, contains several versions in other languages, among which the English one was translated by the Mother. Apart from the feminist essay I mentioned earlier, this is the only publication to my knowledge she got printed during her stay in Japan.

How can this be interpreted? Did she only supplement or correct the linguistic paucity of her husband? Or, as her biographer van Vrekhem suggests, did she guide her husband silently when he acted politically? Although no evidence is available to answer directly this question, it is likely that they teamed up to express their vision of a united Asia, just as they cooperated together when publishing the journal *Arya* for Sri Aurobindo in 1914 at Pondicherry.⁵

Paul Richard's smooth involvement in the political movement in Japan seems to be not only due to Ohkawa's efforts. I assume he had already been aware of the assistance Richard and the Mother made to Sri Aurobindo, together with their deportation from Pondicherry, when he saw them for the first time at Hari Prasad Shastri's lecture. This easily explains the rapid friendship he established with them. A couple of months after their arrival, they came to live with Ohkawa in his house of Koishikawa, Tokyo. We are altogether not wrong to assume the existence of a certain network which made Ohkawa aware of the coming of Richard and his wife, and it was nothing but the network of Theosophists, and this prompts our eyes to an Irishman called James Cousins and a small cell of the Theosophical Society he began

5. Sachidananda Mohanty, *Cosmopolitan Modernity in Early 20th-Century*, Routledge (2015), 60.

in Tokyo in 1919.

Cousins came to Japan to teach English literature in Keio Gijuku University in 1919. The University is said to have invited him according to the recommendation made by Rabindranath Tagore, who knew Cousins as the editor-in-chief of *New India*, the newspaper by which Annie Besant the President of the Society made public her political agenda. Cousins recorded his meeting with Richard and the Mother in Japan in several places in his travelogue and autobiography, but their relationship was possibly not as accidental as Cousins attempted to make us believe in his records. Cousins and Richard were strongly bound together in their cooperative efforts as advisers for the Black Dragon Society's journal *The Asian Review*. They both sought to lessen British interests in Asia, particularly on the Indian subcontinent.

The Theosophical Society is the hub to which many characters of my story were linked. The Mother's old friend Irma de Manziarly visited Japan through this network, and Dr. Kobayashi's acquaintance DT Suzuki and his wife Beatrice were the members of the Lodge Cousins launched in Tokyo. The Mother's secretary Pavitra once belonged to another Lodge in Tokyo, the cell originated from the mother organisation, when he was still Saint-Hilaire. Perhaps Annie Besant had noticed Richard and the Mother long before and tried to draw them to her side. We should not forget that she was then the President of Indian National Congress. It is strongly suggested that Cousins' contact with them in Japan accorded with Besant's agenda.

Inasmuch as Richard's actions are concerned, we inevitably surmise that his visit to Japan was highly politically motivated. His vision of the unification of Asian peoples harmonised well with the ideology the Pan-Asianists in Japan propagated, and their doctrine excused well Japan's ambition of territorial expansion which collided with British supremacy in many parts of the Asian continent. When Richard came to Japan, the Japanese Government had enough reason to harbour Indian Freedom Fighters who sought political asylum in Japan, in spite of the strong persuasion for their deportation that the British Government made on the grounds of Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

Accordingly, during the Mother's stay, Japan was an arena where Imperialist forces fiercely fought with each other, although the battle itself was hidden from the eyes of ordinary people. Relatively well-known is the effort made by Indian residents in Japan when they supported Subhas Chandra Bose in reorganising the Indian National Army, and this was not possible without the patronage of the Japanese Government. But all were not equally patriotic as they seemed to be. The secret documents recently discovered in the British Foreign Office reveal that several Indians then staying in Japan were British agents who reported each action of Indian refugees to the British Embassy. Hari Prasad Shastri, in whose lecture the Mother first met Shumei Ohkawa, was one such informer.

The degree to which the Mother was concerned with in this world of espionage is not known to us, but one hypothesis is that the unreliability and confusion persistent

in the Indian community made her choose a life unnoticed among common Japanese people. However, we are sure that her life was not idle. The material on hand reveals that she shared the opportunity of meditation with Ohkawa, and with Madame Kobayashi. Ohkawa recalls that they “sat together in meditation every night for an hour. I practised Zen and they practised yoga.”⁶ More important is that she was by no means hesitant to learn another method and spiritual meaning of meditation she didn't know before. [. . .]

In conclusion, I must say again that much about the Mother's 4 years' stay in Japan is hidden from us. Nevertheless, this period was no doubt the preparation period for her spiritual development. How it bloomed widely after her second visit to Pondicherry is known to all of you, and I have nothing to add to it. Presumably, the next step we have to take is to compare the materials we have with those contained in the Ashram's archives. We have enough reason to look forward to the day when we can visit you next time.

Thank you so much for your kind attention.

TISHIO AKAI

6. Vrekhem, 173.

Existence, not annihilation is the whole aim and pursuit of existence.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 144)

KOBAYASHI NOBUKO AND THE STILL SITTING MEDITATION

Introduction

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen in Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Firstly I would like to thank you all for coming here today. Unfortunately, because of my unavoidable work, I am not able to be here. However, thanks to Professor Čapková's kindness, I'd be glad to have the opportunity to share my study on Nobuko Kobayashi (1886-1973), one of the Mother's best friends in Japan on a memorable day for celebrating the Mother's Centenary Year of Her Return to Pondicherry.

Nobuko was born in Tokyo in 1886, graduated from Women's Higher Normal School in 1904. After graduation, she got married to a surgeon, Sanzaburō Kobayashi and lived in Hawaii for about four years and a half. In 1908, she returned to Japan and spent the rest of her days in Kyoto, where she met the Mother and spent some time with her. Perhaps, the Mother and Nobuko became close friends because of their shared deep interest in meditation. So, for Nobuko, what was meditation, to be more specific, the Still Sitting Meditation¹ (jp. *seiza*). In this paper, I will start with some information on the meditation.

1. Torajirō Okada and his Still Sitting Meditation

The Still Sitting is a meditation technique that prevailed among the Japanese in the early 20th century. It was a very simple style meditation, just sitting down on your folded legs, keeping the prescribed breathing and posture while concentrating on one's lower abdomen which is called "*tanden*" (the spot which is believed to be an internal storage of elixir about three inches below the navel in Chinese Taoist tradition) in Japanese. Its founder was Torajirō Okada (1872-1920). He was neither a Buddhist monk nor a Christian priest but an agricultural reformer. However, in 1901, he suddenly stopped his agricultural business and went to the United States for studies. After returning to Japan in 1905, he launched his new project of cultivating human beings not plants, the Still Sitting Meditation. Around 1910, a famous business magazine *Jitsugyō no Nihon* (meaning "Business Japan" in English) featured Okada's Still Sitting Meditation and it gained many followers. In addition, a Christian socialist Naoe Kinoshita (1869-1937) became an ardent disciple of Okada and recommended the Still Sitting to his fellow socialists. At that time, because Kinoshita was very well

1. *Seiza* has various translations including "Silent Sitting", "Quiet Sitting", and "Still Sitting". The Mother used the last one. I will adopt "the Still Sitting Meditation" here, for following the Mother's translation and making it clear that it was a kind of meditation.

known through his socialism and writings, his absorption in the Still Sitting became an incentive that young people who were interested in social activities and literature began to practise the meditation. In the next year, every morning the general Still Sitting meeting started in Nippori, Tokyo, and individual Still Sitting meetings also increased. The number of the Still Sitting meetings which Okada directly instructed reached 77 places at least. He attended all of them every week; therefore he went on rounds to 11 places every day from early morning until night. There was no holiday for Okada. His Still Sitting Meditation attracted various people, especially the intellectuals, from students to teachers and university professors, from socialists to Pan-Asianist activists, from artists, writers, and journalists to social elites including politicians and business leaders.

The most important one of those Still Sitting meetings is Nakamuraya, a well-known bakery which Aizō Sōma (1870-1954) and Kokkō Sōma (1876-1955) run. Nakamuraya was also a salon for leading artists such as Rokuzan Ogiwara (1879-1910), Kōtarō Takamura (1883-1956), Tsune Nakamura (1887-1924), Teijirō Nakahara (1888-1921), and a Russian poet Vasili Eroshenko (1890-1952). Moreover, through Pan-Asianist activists including a leader of the nationalist movement Mitsuru Tōyama (1855-1944) and the founder of the Black Dragon Society Ryōhei Uchida (1874-1937), it internationally interacted with political activities such as the anti-colonialism and independence movement. For example, it provided shelter to Indian revolutionary leader Rash Behari Bose (1888-1945), who got married to the Sōmas' daughter, Toshiko, later. The Still Sitting Meditation permeated this network through Nakamuraya.

The Still Sitting Meditation was supported by different people, because Okada did not attribute his philosophical roots to any traditional religion or ideology but, conversely, insisted that the meditation is the universal essence of all religions or ideologies. Okada tried to go beyond the dichotomy between the East and the West and emphasised the inner spirituality that spontaneously emerged from each individual to cultivate a new culture and nation. Although it was generally popular as a method of healing and training body and mind, Okada's Still Sitting attracted intellectuals who felt a sense of contradiction between modernisation and the fetters of their own traditions.

2. Sanzaburō Kobayashi and Saisei Hospital

Although Okada mainly worked in Tokyo, the Still Sitting meetings were also held in other places which he visited a few time every year for instructing. As one of those, there was the Still Sitting meeting at the Saisei Hospital in Kyoto, whose director was Sanzaburō Kobayashi (1863-1926)², Nobuko Kobayashi's husband.

2. Hidehiko Kurita, "Shūkyō to Igaku o Koete, Saisei Byōinchō Kobayashi Sanzaburō no Chiryōron [Beyond Religion and Medical Science: Kobayashi Sanzaburō's Ideas on Healing]" *Annual Journal of Tohoku Religiology*, vol. 7, 2011.

Sanzaburō was one of the most skillful surgeons in Japan at that time. After passing the National Examination for Medical License in Japan, he went to the USA to study surgery further at Cooper medical college (now Stanford medical college) in 1887. He obtained a Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) in 1891 and then practised medicine in Hawaii. His enthusiasm for the improvement of his surgical skill had not yet waned, so he went to England and Germany to study further. His skills had become so refined that he became the first man among Japanese to succeed in doing a brain operation³. Although he had originally ignored religion, when he suffered from an endemic disease in Hawaii and met a Buddhist missionary, he changed from being non-religious into an ardent believer of Buddhism. Eventually, he offered to help and plan the establishing of the first Buddhist charity hospital, the Saisei Hospital, in Japan and raised funds for it in Hawaii. After it was established, he was installed as the director of Saisei Hospital in 1909.⁴

As well as philanthropic activities in the hospital, Sanzaburō's treatment policy of combining religion and science attracted public attention. This treatment was similar to what is known as psychotherapy at present, but, at the time when Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis had not completely been established yet, these efforts by a proven medical doctor were considered as reconciliation between religion and science, or as a new science. Therefore, not only in Japan but also overseas, there were also those who were interested in his treatment technique and hospital management. The Fabian Society's Sydney Webb (1859-1947) visited Saisei Hospital and interacted with Sanzaburō. A scholar of comparative religions Elizabeth Anna Gordon (1855-1925), who advocated the close relationship between Mahayana Buddhism and early Christianity, not only donated to Saisei Hospital, but also directly received Sanzaburō's treatment in the hospital. Merriman Colbert Harris (1846-1921), a Missionary Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, favoured Sanzaburō's activities and sent letters and donations to him.

However, because Sanzaburō himself suffered from neurological disease, he felt increasingly that his religious psychotherapy was inadequate. It was at the time that he found the way to live by Okada's Still Sitting. In 1911, Sanzaburō told Nobuko to meet Okada when she visited her parents' home in Tokyo. Nobuko went to the General Still Sitting meeting in Nippori, received the guidance directly from Okada, and enjoyed a very comfortable feeling. She told Sanzaburō the effect of the meditation and he also went to Tokyo to visit Okada. Because Sanzaburō realised its effectiveness on his health, he tried the method with his patients who were suffering from chronic diseases and could not be helped by medicine. As a result, the Still Sitting got adopted positively in his treatment. He invited Okada to Kyoto every summer and winter, and

3. Ki Kimura, "Kobayashi Sanzaburō Shōden," *Kaki no mi*, 1926, pp. 12-15.

4. Saise Hospital was greatly influenced on other Buddhist charity hospitals then, but it began to decline due to financial reasons after Kobayashi passed away, and closed in 1946 (Naoki Nakanishi, *Bukkyō to iryō, fukushi no kindaiishi*, Hōzōkan, 2004, pp. 83-84).

began the Still Sitting meetings at Saisei Hospital from 1912.

In Tokyo, after Okada's sudden and early death in 1920, many of the Still Sitting meetings were closed and its popularity seemed on the wane. However, Sanzaburō kept holding the Still Sitting meeting in Kyoto and more earnestly practising the meditation, referring to Okada's words like "it is wrong to try to extend one's life span through the Still Sitting. Everyone has his own life. The Still Sitting cultivates the life to the end, as if Nature drops a matured persimmon".⁵ Kobayashi wrote two books on his treatment by the Still Sitting method in 1920's, which appealed to many people who sought relief.

3. The Establishment of the Still Sitting Society

Since she met Okada, Nobuko also had earnestly practised the Still Sitting. In 1924, Sanzaburō asked Nobuko to instruct the Still Sitting for female patients in Saisei Hospital. She seemed to find this job very rewarding. However, eight months later, Sanzaburō suddenly passed away. After working at the hospital as usual, he fell down in front of Nobuko. According to Nobuko, his complexion was better than usual. The sudden death, without getting sick, was what Sanzaburō considered the ideal death of those who kept the Still Sitting Meditation. However, his followers mourned his death and compiled a collection of memorial tributes titled *A Persimmon*.

After Sanzaburō passed away, Nobuko was depressed and laid up in bed for a long time. Although someone recommended that she should return to her parents' home in Tokyo, she stayed in Kyoto and, inheriting Sanzaburō's will, decided to launch the Still Sitting Society in 1927. Here is a part of its prospectus:

We would like to get together and publish a magazine titled *Seiza* (meaning Still Sitting) to study and experience the relationship between health, religion, and arts and so on.

The master, Okada, founded the Still Sitting Meditation and then Dr. Kobayashi applied to many the Still Sitting approach from the medical viewpoint. His books, *the Mystery of Life* and *Vis Medicatrix Naturae*, show how that saved many of his brothers.

We publish this magazine as part of the memorial project for Dr. Kobayashi, and are eager to keep in touch with our comrades in various places.⁶

Thanks to Nobuko's and her daughter Midori's effort, the magazine *Seiza* continued until 2007. The magazine allowed the scattered Still Sitting meetings across the country to recognise and cooperate with each other. According to the magazines in

5. Nobuko Kobayashi, "Seizasha no Ayumi," Nobuko Kobayashi (ed.), *Seiza eno Michi*, Seizasha, 1963, pp. 438-439.

6. *Seiza* vol. 1, no. 1, 1927.

1931, there were the thirty-five Still Sitting meeting places in Japan, two in Dalian, and each one in Korea, Taiwan, and Manchuria. Of course, the Still Sitting meeting also held its own meetings four times a week at Nobuko's house and, under the auspices of the Still Sitting Society two big meetings a year, where the Still Sitting's comrades from all over the country gathered. In addition, the Still Sitting Society compiled the words of Okada, who did not leave a book, published a book titled *Okada Torajirō's Analects*, and introduced his thoughts to the public.

For Nobuko, Okada's Still Sitting was the complete meditation which anyone cannot change. What Nobuko paid close attention to was to strictly maintain the way of the Still Sitting Meditation, which Okada established and Sanzaburō conveyed, in its original form so as not to be confused with the other meditations. Therefore, she strongly criticised her disciple who, as a psychologist, tried to reform the Still Sitting in terms of clinical psychology, and quickly disapproved of her elder comrade's statement that the master Okada had died without fulfilling his life's ambition. Through her strong determination and powerful activities, the Still Sitting Society led the movement of the Still Sitting Meditation after Okada's death and played a role in passing on it to later generations. Without Nobuko, Okada's Still Sitting Meditation would not have been transmitted to the present.

4. People around Nobuko and the Still Sitting

As contrasted to Nobuko's rigorous attitude to her comrades, she was also a very sociable person, interacting widely and internationally with those who had different ideas and beliefs. I will give the example of a few of her friends.

One of the most prominent of her friends is D. T. Suzuki (1870-1966). Around 1930, some foreigners came to Suzuki for learning Zen Buddhism and he was urging them to practise the Still Sitting under Nobuko before starting zazen. Through this, a pioneer of American Zen Buddhism, Ruth Fuller Everett (1892-1967, later R. F. Sasaki), a German philosopher Eugen Herrigel (1884-1955), a later yoga practitioner Georgia Foreman, an American Buddhist populariser Dwight Goddard (1861-1939), and a British novelist L. Adams Beck (1862-1931) and so on had a friendship with Nobuko. In the Rinzai school to which Suzuki originally belonged, it is said that excessive zazen practice often causes a nervous disorder called "Zen sickness" and "tanden" breathing is effective for healing it. Therefore, probably, Suzuki regarded the Still Sitting as a kind of treatment for "Zen sickness". But, this is obviously different from Okada's point of view, because he criticised Zen and thought that spiritual and physical salvations, or religious and medical reliefs, must not be separated.

Suzuki's idea on the Still Sitting seemed to influence Ruth Fuller Everett, who is well known for creating and running the first Zen temple in the United States. According to her biography, Suzuki taught her a technique of breathing and sitting for

controlling the mind, which she called “beginner’s zazen”⁷. This probably means the Still Sitting Meditation. For Nobuko, of course, the Still Sitting was never the “beginner’s zazen” but the complete meditation. Surprisingly, however, Nobuko did not appear to dispute the views of Suzuki and Everett.

Furthermore, I will also mention a novelist L. Adams Beck, who wrote a lot of historical romance and books on theosophy, Buddhism, and Oriental mysticism under several names including E. Burlington and Louisa Moresby. When she was taught the Still Sitting by Nobuko, Beck hated the way of sitting of the Still Sitting Meditation and preferred sitting cross-legged, and even encouraged Nobuko to meditate cross-legged. Of course, Nobuko shudderingly refused it. Although Beck’s view of meditation is not clear, she did not understand Nobuko’s faith in the Still Sitting. However, Nobuko and Beck’s friendship was so deep that, when Nobuko translated and published the classic Japanese literature, *The Sketch Book of the Lady Sei Shonagon* from the British publisher John Murray, Beck fully cooperated in translating and publishing it and contributed the preface to it.

Although various ideas and practices on meditation were going round, Nobuko interacted and maintained close relations with those who had different beliefs. In Nobuko’s character, there were both of rigorous and flexible aspects and the depth of the gap between them made the Still Sitting Society quite unique.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to mention the relation between the Mother and Nobuko. According to Nobuko’s notes left in the Still Sitting Society, the Mother and Nobuko first met, when a great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), being accompanied by the Mother and Paul Richard, went to Saisei Hospital to converse with Sanzaburô in 1917. Since the end of the year, the Mother and Paul had lived in Kyoto for around a year,⁸ and she and Nobuko became very friendly.

As Professor Akai stated, Mira seemed to understand deeply the Still Sitting Meditation. In this respect, the Mother was different from Suzuki, Everett, and Beck. That might have come from the fact that the Mother directly met Okada at a Still Sitting meeting, experienced the meditation, and heard his thoughts. The Mother observed, referring to *tanden*, that Okada said “one could think here in the stomach”, which is “the seat of the vital force.”⁹ This expression was Okada’s favourite phrase. While the Mother basically saw the Still Sitting as a kind of remedy, she seemed to think

7. Isabel Stirling, *Zen Pioneer: The Life & Works of Ruth Fuller Sasaki*. Emeryville, CA: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2006, pp. 14-15.

8. Thanks to the information which Chhalamyi garu offered, I was able to make clear the period for which the Mother and Paul lived in Kyoto.

9. Nilima Das (comp.), K. D. Sethna (ed.), *Glimpses of the Mother’s Life*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1978, pp. 194-195.

that the Still Sitting had something similar to her own meditation, yoga. In Nobuko's recollection, "we sat together and explored our inner depths, each in her own way. She made me realise that we thought the same thoughts and beheld the same vision."¹⁰ They apparently respected each way as a meditation which led to "the same thoughts" and "the same vision" and, at the same time, they did not confuse each way and resolutely went on their own different paths: on the one hand, Sri Aurobindo's way and, on the other hand, Okada's one. They were thoroughly faithful to what they believed in and, therefore, they played a directing role in driving each meditation movement. As it were, "the same thoughts" and "the same vision" did not only sink in their inner depths but also manifested in their parallel role in the different movements. Because of such corresponding ways of living, however far apart they were, their friendship was so deep and long-lasting that the Mother invited Nobuko to India in 1960.

That is all for my presentation. Thank you all for listening.

KURITA HIDEHIKO

10. *Ibid.* p. 193.

Precisely because God is one, indefinable and beyond form, therefore He is capable of infinite definition and quality, realisation in numberless forms and the joy of endless self-multiplication. These two things go together and they cannot really be divided.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 145)



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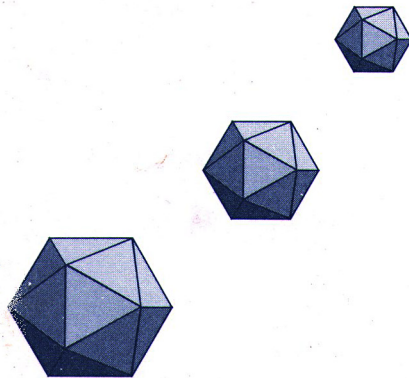
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