

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE



JANUARY 2021

Owner: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Printer: Swadhin Chatterjee

Publisher: Manoj Das Gupta

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

And Printed from: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press,
No. 38, Goubert Avenue, Pondicherry, 605001, India

Editor: S. Ravi

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

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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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PRICE: Rs. 30.00

SUBSCRIPTIONS

INLAND

Annual: Rs. 200.00 (or 2 years – Rs. 400/-, 3 years Rs. 600/- etc.)

For 10 years: Rs. 1,800.00

Price per Single Copy: Rs. 30.00

OVERSEAS

Sea Mail: (valid for USA and Canada only)

Annual: \$35

For 10 years: \$350

Air Mail:

Annual: \$70

For 10 years: \$700

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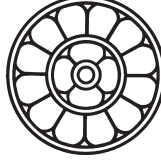
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Founding Editor: K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)
Associate Editors: HEMANT KAPOOR & RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXIV

No. 1

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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KHALED OF THE SEA¹
an Arabian romance

Prologue	Alnuman and the Peri
Canto I	The Story of Alnuman and the Emir's Daughter
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Canto III	The Companions of Alnuman 2
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Canto V	The First Quest of the Sapphire Crown
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Canto VIII	The Quest of the Snowbird
Canto IX	The Second Quest of the Sapphire Crown
Canto X	The Journey of the Green Oasis
Canto XI	The Journey of the Irremeable Ocean
Canto XII	The Journey of the Land without Pity
Epilogue	The Arabian and the Caliph

1. The handwritten manuscript of this poem is dated in three places: "Jan 1899" at the end of the Prologue, "Feb. 1899" in the middle of Canto I, and "March, 1899" at the end. (Editorial note in *CWSA*)

PROLOGUE**Alnuman and the Peri**

In Bagdad by Euphrates, Asia's river,
 Euphrates that through deserts must deliver
 The voices which of human daybreaks are
 Into the dim mysterious surge afar,
 The Arabian dwelt; after long travel he.
 Regions deserted, wastes of silent sea,
 Wide Ocean ignorant of ships and lands
 Never made glad by toil of mortal hands
 For he had seen, the Indian mountains bare
 Save of hard snow and the unbreathed huge air
 And swum through giant waters and had heard
 In those unhuman forests beast and bird,
 The peacock's cry and tiger's hoarse appeal
 Calling to God for prey, marked the vast wheel
 Of monstrous birds shadowing whole countries; he
 From Singhal through the long infinity
 Of southern floods had steered his shuddering ship
 Where unknown winds their lonely tumult keep.
 And he had lived with strong and pitiless men,
 Nations unhumanized by joy and pain,
 And he had tasted grain not sown by man
 And drunk strange milk in weird Mazinderan.
 Silent he was, as one whom thoughts attend,
 Distant, whom stiller hearts than ours befriend.
 He lived with memories only; no sweet voice
 Made the mute echoes of his life rejoice;
 No lovely face of children brought the dawn
 Into his home; but silent, calm, withdrawn,
 He watched the ways of men with godlike eyes
 Released from trammelling affinities.
 Yet was he young and many women strove
 Vainly to win his marble mind to love.
 One day when wind had fled to the cool north
 And the strong earth was blind with summer, forth
 The Arabian rode from great Bagdad and turned
 Into the desert. All around him burned
 The imprisoned spirit of fire; above his head

The sky was like a tyranny outspread,
The sun a fire in those heavens, and fire
The sands beneath; the air burning desire
And breathless, a plumb weight of flame; yet rode
The Arabian unfeeling like a god.
Three hours he rode and now no more was seen
Bagdad, the imperial city, nor aught green,
But the illimitable sands around
Extend, a silent world waiting for sound,
When in the distance he descried a grace
Of motion beautiful in that dead place.
Wondering he turned, but suddenly the horse
Pricked up his slender ears, swerved from the course
And pawing stood the unwilling air, nor heard
The guiding voice nor the familiar word.
Whinnying with wrath he smote the desert sand
And mocked the rein and raged at the command.
Then raised the man his face and saw above
No cloud with the stark face of heaven strove,
A single blaze of light from pole to pole.
Smiling the Arabian spoke unto his soul.
“Here too then are you strong, O influences
That trouble the earth and air and the strong seas!
Therefore I will not stay your gathering wings
Who watch me from the air, you living things,
But go to find whatever peril or wonder
Wait me of life above the earth or under.
Strange will it be if quiet Bagdad yield
More terror or more sweetness than in field
Has stayed me yet or in untravelled flood
Or mountain or the tiger-throated wood.”
So saying he grasped the strong and shaken mane
And set swift footing on the fiery plain.
At once the beast as if by sorcery
Strangely compelled, calmed his impetuous eye;
His angry tremor ceased and bounding wrath
Following unbidden in the Arabian’s path.
But he with silent toil the sands untried
Vanquishing through that luminous world and wide
Went a slow shadow, till his feet untired
The fruit of all his labour long acquired.

Before a mile complete he was aware
 Of a strange shape of beauty sitting there
 On a sole boulder in the level wild,
 Maiden, a marvellous bloom, a naked child;
 All like a lily from her leaves escaped
 The golden summer kissed her close and wrapped
 In soft revealing sunshine, — a sweet bareness,
 A creature made of flowers and choicest fairness;
 And all her limbs were like a luminous dream,
 So wonderfully white they burn and gleam,
 Her shoulder ivory richly bathed in gold,
 Her sides a snowy wonder to behold,
 Marble made amorous; her body fair
 Seemed one with the divine, translucent air,
 A light within the light, a glorious treasure,
 A thing to hold, to kiss, to slay with pleasure.
 This girl was not alone, but with her watched
 Two shapes of beauty and of terror hatched,
 A strong, fierce snake, round her sweet middle twined,
 A tigress at her lovely feet reclined.
 Dreaming on those tremendous sands she waited
 And often with that splendour miscreated
 Played thoughtfully, about her wondrous knees
 Binding the brilliant death or would increase
 The whiteness of her limbs with its fierce hues
 Or twine it in her tresses flowing loose.
 Below that other restless evil played,
 The fierce, sleek terror on the sands outspread.
 First of the wonderful three rose with a bound
 Waking the desert from its sleep with sound
 The tigress, but the Arabian strode more near
 As one who had forgotten how to fear
 And frowning like a god with kingly look
 He threatened the preparing death and shook
 His javelin in the sun. Back crouched the fiend
 Amazed nor could the steely light attend
 Nor that unconquerable glance; yet lowered
 To find her dreadful violence overpowered
 By any smaller thing than death; and he
 Heeded no more crouched limb nor stealthy eye.
 He on that flowerlike shape a moment gazed

As one by strange felicity amazed,
 Who long grown sorrow's friend his whole life grieves,
 Blest beyond expectation, scarce believes
 That joy is in his heart — so gazed, so laid
 At last upon the white and gleaming maid
 The question of his hands. O soft and real
 The nakedness he grasped, no marble ideal
 Born of the blazing light and infinite air,
 A breathing woman with lovely limbs and bare.
 Then with a strong melodious voice he cried
 And all his cheek was flushed with royal pride.
 "Thou then art mine, after long labour mine,
 O earthly body and O soul divine,
 After long labour and thy sounding home
 Hast left and caverns where thy sisters roam,
 O dweller where the austral tempest raves!
 O daughter of the wild and beautiful waves!
 Ah breasts of beauty! Ah delicious shoulder!
 Leading from bliss to bliss the hands that hold her,
 At length I grasp you then and snared at length
 The ivory swiftness of thy feet and strength
 Of this immortal body shaped for kings,
 O memory of sweet and dreadful things!
 Ah welcome to the streets that human tread
 Makes musical and joy of human bread
 Broken between dry hands and to the sight
 Of the untroubled narrow rivers, light
 Of lamps and warmth of kindled fires and man.
 Fairer shall be thy feet on greensward than
 On ocean rocks and O! more bright thy beauty
 For human passion and for womanly duty
 And softer in my bosom shalt thou sleep
 Than lulled by the sublime and monstrous deep.
 Much have I laboured; the resplendent face
 Of summer I have hated, as the days
 Went by and no delightful brook was found
 Sprinkling with earth's cool love the ruthless ground,
 And in my throat there was a desert's thirst
 And on my tongue a fire: I have cursed
 The spring and all its flowers: the wrathful cry
 Of the wild waters and their cruelty

I have endured, labouring with sail and oar
 Through the mad tempest for some human shore
 And fought with winds, and seen vast Hell aflame
 Down in the nether flood till I became
 Blind with the sight of those abysmal graves
 And deaf with the eternal sound of waves
 And all my heart was broken alone to be
 Day after day with the unending sea.
 And much on land I have laboured without moan
 Or weakening tears making my heart a stone.
 But thou art come and I shall hear no more
 By inexorable rocks the Ocean roar,
 Nor pine in dungeons far from pity or aid.
 But in far other prison, seaborne maid,
 Thy limbs shall minister to my delight
 Even as an ordinary woman's might.
 And I shall hear thy voice around my heart
 Like a cool rivulet and shall not start
 To see thee ivory gleaming and all night
 Shall feel thee in my arms, O darling white —
 With afterjoys that spring from these; the face
 Of childish loveliness shall light my days,
 About my doors the feet of children tread
 And little heads with jonquils garlanded,
 That often to sweetness win war-hardened eyes
 And hearts grown iron their soft masteries
 Compel and the light touch of little hands
 Bend sworded fingers to their sweet commands.
 O bright felicity, labour's dear end,
 Into my arms, into my heart descend.”
 So as he spoke, the silent desert air
 Lived with his gladness, and the maiden there
 Listened with downcast lids and a soft flush
 Upon her like the coming of a blush.
 But when he finished and the air was mute,
 She laughed with happy lips most like a flute
 Or voice of cuckoo in an Indian grove
 Waking the heart to vague delightful love.
 And with divine eyes gleaming where strange mirth
 A smiling mischief was, the living girth
 Of her delicious waist she suddenly

Unbound and by the middle lifting high
 Betwixt them shook. Hissed the fierce snake and raised
 Its jewelled hood for spotted radiance praised,
 Its jewelled hood to the dread leap distended:
 Sad limit of noble life, had that descended
 Since short his breath and evil, who that pang
 Experienced; but before the serpent sprang,
 Wrathful, the Arabian seized the glittering neck
 And twines of bronze burning with many a fleck
 Of coloured fire. His angry grasp to quell
 Vainly the formidable folds rebel:
 Not all that gordian force and slippery strength
 Of coils availed. Inanimate at length,
 The immense destroyer on the Arabian's wrist
 Hung in a ruin loose; and to resist
 His wrath of love none now might intervene,
 Nor she deny him. Yet with tranquil mien
 Smiling she sat and swept with noble gesture
 Her hair back that had fallen a purple investure
 Over her glowing grace. Strong arms he cast
 Around her naked loveliness and fast
 Showered kisses on her limbs whose marble white
 Grew woman with a soft and rosy light
 In each kissed place. "Deemedst thou then," he cried,
 "Bright fugitive, lovely wanderer with the tide,
 By shaking death before death-practised eyes
 My crown to wrest of strenuous enterprise,
 Thyself, thyself and beauty? O too sweet
 To touch our hard earth with thy faultless feet!
 Yet on hard earth must dwell. For with the ground
 Thy dreadful guardians who have fenced thee round
 Are equalled, and thyself, sweet, though thou shame
 The winds with swiftness or like mounting flame
 Strive all thy days in my imprisoning arms,
 Couldst burn thyself no exit. With alarms
 Menace and shapes of death; call on the flood
 For thy deliverance on these sands to intrude
 And lead thee to its jealous waters rude;
 But hands that have flung back the swallowing sea
 Shall stay and chastise and habituate thee
 To service due." He said and with the words

The power in his soul increased, as birds
 With sounds encourage love and like great waves
 Exulting, rose against the breasts he craves,
 So he engrossed the lovely limbs. Then grasping
 Her fair soft arm in one hand, the other clasping
 Her smooth desired thighs, from that rude seat,
 The grey sun-blistered boulder most unmeet
 To bear her snowwhite radiance, lifted. She
 As to his horse he bore her mightily,
 A little strove in his strong arms, but round
 Her lithe, reluctant limbs closer he bound
 His despot hands and on the saddle set
 Never with such sweet rider burdened yet.
 Then to his seat he sprang and musical
 His cry in that vast silence, wherewithal
 He urged his horse, which delicately went
 Arching its neck with joy and proud content.
 Great were the Arabian's labours; many seas
 He had passed and borne impossible miseries
 And battled with impracticable ills
 O'er uncrossed rivers and forbidden hills,
 Till nature fainted. Yet too little was this
 To merit all the heaven now made his.
 For she, earth's wonder hard to grasp as fire,
 She whom all ocean's secret depths admire,
 Laid her delicious cheek to his and flung
 Sweet, bare arms on his neck and round him clung:
 Her snowy side was of his being a part;
 Her naked breast burdened his throbbing heart,
 And all her hair streamed over him and the whiteness
 Of her was in his eyes and her soft brightness
 A joy beneath his hands, to his embrace
 And he was clothed with her as in a dress.
 Round them the strong recovered coils were rolled
 Of the great snake and with imperious fold
 Compelled their limbs together, and by their side
 Pacing the tigress checked her dangerous stride.
 So rode they like a vision. All the time
 She murmured accents as of linked rhyme
 Musical, in a language like the sea,
 Accents of undulating melody.

For sometimes it was like a happy noon
Murmuring with waves and sometimes like the swoon
Of calm, a silence heard, or rich by noise
Of rivers pouring with their seaward voice
And leaping laughters and sometimes was wild
And passionate as the sobbing of a child.
But often it was like the cold salt spray
On a health-reddened cheek and glad with day
And life and sad with the far-moaning call
Of wind upon the waters funeral.
Not on the lips of man might fashioned be
A language of such wild variety.
Now of that magic tongue no separate word
Was of Alnuman understood nor heard,
And yet he knew that of the caves she spoke
Where never earthly light of sunshine woke,
And of unfathomed things beneath the floods
And peopled depths and Ocean solitudes
And mighty creatures of the main and light
Of jewels making a subluminous night
Lower than even the dead may sink; and walls
Of coral and in what majestic halls
The naked seaborne sisters link their dance;
How sometimes on the shores their white limbs glance
In the mysterious moonlight; how they come
To river-banks far from their secret home;
And last she spoke of mighty Love that reaches
Resistless arms beyond the long sea-beaches
And mocks the barriers of the storm, and how
Pearls unattainable a human brow
Have decked and man, the child of misery,
Been mated with the sisters of the sea.
So on she murmured like a ceaseless song
Making the weary sands a rapture; long
The patient desert round them waits; nor soon
The sun toiled through the endless afternoon:
But they paced always like a marvellous dream,
And dreamlike in the eyes of man might seem
Such magic vision (had human eyes been found
In the sole desert void of sign or bound), —
The horse that feared its dread companion not;

The kingly man with brow of reaching thought
 And danger-hardened strength; fair as the morn,
 The radiant girl upon his saddle borne,
 Naked, a vision not of earth; the fell
 Serpent that twined about them, terrible
 With burning hues; and the fierce tigress there
 Following with noiseless step the godlike pair.
 Nor when to Bagdad and its streets they came,
 Did any eye behold. Only a name
 Was in the ears of the grim warders. Straight
 Like engines blind of some o'ermastering fate
 They rose, the mighty bolts they drew: loud jarred
 The doors unhearing with deaf iron barred
 And groaned upon their road; then backward swung
 Whirling and kissed again with clamorous tongue.
 Nor in the streets was any step of man,
 Before loud wheels no swift torchbearers ran
 Setting the night on fire; bright and rare
 The garlanded highshuttered windows, where
 Men revelled and sound into the shadows cast:
 All else was night and silence where they passed.
 So is the beautiful sea stranger gone
 To her new home, who now no more must run
 Upon the bounding waves nor feel the sun
 On wind-blown limbs, destined a mortal's bride.
 So is the strong Arabian deified
 In bliss. Moreover from the wondrous night
 When with those small beloved feet grew bright
 His lonely house, wealth like a sea swept through
 Its doors and as a dwelling of gods it grew
 In beauty and in brightness. All that thrives
 Costly or fragrant upon earth or lives
 Of riches in the hoarding ocean lost
 And all bright things with gold or gems embossed
 By Indian or by Syrian art refined
 And all rich cloths and silks with jewels lined
 Regal Bokhara weaves or Samarcand,
 Increased and gathered to Alnuman's hand
 And girls of glorious limb and feature he
 Bought for his slaves, of rose and ivory,
 Sweet Persians with the honey-hiding mouth

And passionate Arab girls and strong-limbed youth
 Of Tartar maidens for his harem doors.
 For now not vainly the fair child implores
 Of Shaikh or of Emir his love for boon,
 But with high marriage-rites some prosperous moon
 At last has brought into the marble pride
 Of that great house for envy edified.
 So in Bagdad the Arabian dwelt nor seemed
 Other his life than theirs who never dreamed
 Beyond earth's ken, nor made in sun and breeze
 Their spirits great with shock of the strong seas,
 Nor fortified their hearts with pains sublime
 Nor wrestled with the bounds of space and time.
 Like common men he lived to whom the ray
 Of a new sun but brings another day
 Unmeaning, who in their own selves confined
 Know not the grandeur which the mightier mind
 Inherits when it makes the destinies rude
 The chisel by which its marble mass and crude
 With God's or hero's likeness is indued.
 Yet this was also rumoured that within
 The sheath of that calm life he sojourned in
 An edge of flaming rapture was, that things
 Beyond all transitory imaginings
 Came to him secret and vast pleasures more
 Than frail humanity had dared to feel before.
 Since too much joy man's heart can hardly bear
 And all too weak man's narrow senses were
 For raptures that eternal spirits attain
 In sensuous heavens ignorant of pain.
 Yet even such raptures mortal man's could be
 Wed with the child of the unbounded sea.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 145-157)

THE STRESS OF THE HIDDEN SPIRIT

The world is a great game of hide and seek in which the real hides behind the apparent, spirit behind matter. The apparent masquerades as real, the real is seen dimly as if it were an unsubstantial shadow. The grandeur of the visible universe and its laws enslaves men's imaginations. "This is a mighty machine," we cry, "but it moves of its own force and needs neither guide nor maker; for its motion is eternal." Blinded by a half truth we fail to see that, instead of a machine without a maker, there is really only an existence and no machine. The Hindus have many images by which they seek to convey their knowledge of the relation between God and the world, but the idea of the machine does not figure largely among them. It is a spider and his web, a fire with many sparks, a pool of salt water in which every particle is penetrated by the salt. The world is a waking dream, an embodied vision, a mass of knowledge arranged in corporeal appearances expressing so many ideas which are each only a part of one unchanging truth. Everything becomes, nothing is made. Everything is put out from latency, nothing is brought into existence. Only that which was, can be, not that which was not. And that which is, cannot perish; it can only lose itself. All is eternal in the eternal spirit.

What was from of old? The spirit. What is alone? The spirit. What shall be for ever? The spirit. All that is in Space and Time, is He; and whatever there may be beyond Space and Time, that too is He. Why should we think so? Because of the eternal and invariable unity which gives permanence to the variability of the many. The sum of matter never changes by increase or diminution, although its component parts are continually shifting; so is it with the sum of energy in the world, so is it with the spirit. Matter is only so much mobile energy vibrating intensely into form. Energy is only so much spirit manifesting the motion that we call energy. Spirit is Force, Spirit Existence, — matter and energy are only motions in Spirit. Force and Existence made one in Bliss, Sachchidanandam, this is the eternal reality of things. But that Force is not motion, it is Knowledge or Idea. Knowledge is the source of motion, not motion of knowledge. The Spirit therefore is all, It is alone. Idea or Force, Existence, Bliss are only its triune manifestations, existence implying idea which is force, force or idea implying bliss.

The Spirit manifest as Intelligence is the basis of the world. Spirit as existence, Sat, is one; as Intelligence it multiplies itself without ceasing to be one. We see that tree and say "Here is a material thing"; but if we ask how the tree came into existence, we have to say, it grew or evolved out of the seed. But growth or evolution is only a term describing the sequence in a process. It does not explain the origin or account for the process itself. Why should the seed produce a tree and not some other form of existence? The answer is, because that is its nature. But why is that its nature?

Why should it not be its nature to produce some other form of existence, or some other kind of tree? That is the law, is the answer. But why is it the law? The only answer is that it is so because it is so; that it happens, why no man can say. In reality when we speak of Law, we speak of an idea; when we speak of the nature of a thing, we speak of an idea. Nowhere can we lay our hands on an object, a visible force, a discernible momentum and say "Here is an entity called Law or Nature." The seed evolves a tree because tree is the idea involved in the seed; it is a process of manifestation in form, not a creation. If there were no insistent idea, we should have a world of chances and freaks, not a world of law — there would be no such idea as the nature of things, if there were not an originating and ordering intelligence manifesting a particular idea in forms. And the form varies, is born, perishes; the idea is eternal. The form is the manifestation or appearance, the idea is the truth. The form is phenomenon, the idea is reality.

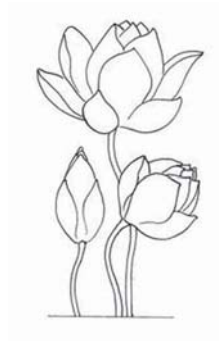
Therefore in all things the Hindu thinker sees the stress of the hidden spirit. We see it as Prajna, the universal Intelligence, conscious in things unconscious, active in things inert. The energy of Prajna is what the Europeans call Nature. The tree does not and cannot shape itself, the stress of the hidden Intelligence shapes it. He is in the seed of man and in that little particle of matter carries habit, character, types of emotion into the unborn child. Therefore heredity is true; but if Prajna were not concealed in the seed, heredity would be false, inexplicable, impossible. We see the same stress in the mind, heart, body of man. Because the hidden spirit urges himself on the body, stamps himself on it, expresses himself in it, the body expresses the individuality of the man, the developing and conscious idea or varying type which is myself; therefore no two faces, no two expressions, no two thumb impressions even are entirely alike; every part of the body in some way or other expresses the man. The stress of the spirit shows itself in the mind and heart; therefore men, families, nations have individuality, run into particular habits of thought and feeling, therefore also they are both alike and dissimilar. Therefore men act and react, not only physically but spiritually, intellectually, morally on each other, because there is one self in all creatures expressing itself in various idea and forms variously suitable to the idea. The stress of the hidden Spirit expresses itself again in events and the majestic course of the world. This is the *Zeitgeist*, this is the purpose that runs through the process of the centuries, the changes of the suns, this is that which makes evolution possible and provides it with a way, means and a goal. "This is He who from years sempiternal hath ordered perfectly all things."

This is the teaching of the Vedanta as we have it in its oldest form in the Upanishads. Adwaita, Vishishtadwaita, Dwaita are merely various ways of looking at the relations of the One to the Many, and none of them has the right to monopolise the name Vedanta. Adwaita is true, because the Many are only manifestations of the One. Vishishtadwaita is true because ideas are eternal and having manifested, must have manifested before and will manifest again, — the Many are eternal in the One,

only they are sometimes manifest and sometimes unmanifest. Dwaita is true, because although from one point of view the One and the Many are eternally and essentially the same, yet, from another, the idea in its manifestation is eternally different from the Intelligence in which it manifests. If Unity is eternal and unchangeable, duality is persistently recurrent. The Spirit is infinite, illimitable, eternal, and infinite, illimitable, eternal is its stress towards manifestation filling endless space with innumerable existences.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 64-67)



STANDARDS OF CONDUCT AND SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

The knowledge on which the doer of works in Yoga has to found all his action and development has for the keystone of its structure a more and more concrete perception of unity, the living sense of an all-pervading oneness; he moves in the increasing consciousness of all existence as an indivisible whole: all work too is part of this divine indivisible whole. His personal action and its results can no longer be or seem a separate movement mainly or entirely determined by the egoistic “free” will of an individual, himself separate in the mass. Our works are part of an indivisible cosmic action; they are put or, more accurately, put themselves into their place in the whole out of which they arise and their outcome is determined by forces that overpass us. That world action in its vast totality and in every petty detail is the indivisible movement of the One who manifests himself progressively in the cosmos. Man too becomes progressively conscious of the truth of himself and the truth of things in proportion as he awakens to this One within him and outside him and to the occult, miraculous and significant process of its forces in the motion of Nature. This action, this movement, is not confined even in ourselves and those around us to the little fragmentary portion of the cosmic activities of which we in our superficial consciousness are aware; it is supported by an immense underlying environing existence subliminal to our minds or subconscious, and it is attracted by an immense transcending existence which is superconscious to our nature. Our action arises, as we ourselves have emerged, out of a universality of which we are not aware; we give it a shape by our personal temperament, personal mind and will of thought or force of impulse or desire; but the true truth of things, the true law of action exceeds these personal and human formations. Every standpoint, every man-made rule of action which ignores the indivisible totality of the cosmic movement, whatever its utility in external practice, is to the eye of spiritual Truth an imperfect view and a law of the Ignorance.

Even when we have arrived at some glimpse of this idea or succeeded in fixing it in our consciousness as a knowledge of the mind and a consequent attitude of the soul, it is difficult for us in our outward parts and active nature to square accounts between this universal standpoint and the claims of our personal opinion, our personal will, our personal emotion and desire. We are forced still to go on dealing with this indivisible movement as if it were a mass of impersonal material out of which we, the ego, the person, have to carve something according to our own will and mental fantasy by a personal struggle and effort. This is man’s normal attitude towards his environment, actually false because our ego and its will are creations and puppets of the cosmic forces and it is only when we withdraw from

ego into the consciousness of the divine Knowledge-Will of the Eternal who acts in them that we can be by a sort of deputation from above their master. And yet is this personal position the right attitude for man so long as he cherishes his individuality and has not yet fully developed it; for without this view-point and motive-force he cannot grow in his ego, cannot sufficiently develop and differentiate himself out of the subconscious or half-conscious universal mass-existence.

But the hold of this ego-consciousness upon our whole habit of existence is difficult to shake off when we have no longer need of the separative, the individualistic and aggressive stage of development, when we would proceed forward from this necessity of littleness in the child-soul to unity and universality, to the cosmic consciousness and beyond, to our transcendent spirit-stature. It is indispensable to recognise clearly, not only in our mode of thought but in our way of feeling, sensing, doing, that this movement, this universal action is not a helpless impersonal wave of being which lends itself to the will of any ego according to that ego's strength and insistence. It is the movement of a cosmic Being who is the Knower of his field, the steps of a Divinity who is the Master of his own progressive force of action. As the movement is one and indivisible, so he who is present in the movement is one, sole and indivisible. Not only all result is determined by him, but all initiation, action and process are dependent on the motion of his cosmic force and only belong secondarily and in their form to the creature.

But what then must be the spiritual position of the personal worker? What is his true relation in dynamic Nature to this one cosmic Being and this one total movement? He is a centre only — a centre of differentiation of the one personal consciousness, a centre of determination of the one total movement; his personality reflects in a wave of persistent individuality the one universal Person, the Transcendent, the Eternal. In the Ignorance it is always a broken and distorted reflection because the crest of the wave which is our conscious waking self throws back only an imperfect and falsified similitude of the divine Spirit. All our opinions, standards, formations, principles are only attempts to represent in this broken, reflecting and distorting mirror something of the universal and progressive total action and its many-sided movement towards some ultimate self-revelation of the Divine. Our mind represents it as best it can with a narrow approximation that becomes less and less inadequate in proportion as its thought grows in wideness and light and power; but it is always an approximation and not even a true partial figure. The Divine Will acts through the aeons to reveal progressively not only in the unity of the cosmos, not only in the collectivity of living and thinking creatures, but in the soul of each individual something of its divine Mystery and the hidden truth of the Infinite. Therefore there is in the cosmos, in the collectivity, in the individual, a rooted instinct or belief in its own perfectibility, a constant drive towards an ever increasing and more adequate and more harmonious self-development nearer to the secret truth of things. This effort is represented to the constructing mind of man by standards of

knowledge, feeling, character, aesthesis and action, — rules, ideals, norms and laws that he essays to turn into universal dharmas.

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If we are to be free in the spirit, if we are to be subject only to the supreme Truth, we must discard the idea that our mental or moral laws are binding on the Infinite or that there can be anything sacrosanct, absolute or eternal even in the highest of our existing standards of conduct. To form higher and higher temporary standards as long as they are needed is to serve the Divine in his world march; to erect rigidly an absolute standard is to attempt the erection of a barrier against the eternal waters in their onflow. Once the nature-bound soul realises this truth, it is delivered from the duality of good and evil. For good is all that helps the individual and the world towards their divine fullness, and evil is all that retards or breaks up that increasing perfection. But since the perfection is progressive, evolutive in Time, good and evil are also shifting quantities and change from time to time their meaning and value. This thing which is evil now and in its present shape must be abandoned was once helpful and necessary to the general and individual progress. That other thing which we now regard as evil may well become in another form and arrangement an element in some future perfection. And on the spiritual level we transcend even this distinction; for we discover the purpose and divine utility of all these things that we call good and evil. Then have we to reject the falsehood in them and all that is distorted, ignorant and obscure in that which is called good no less than in that which is called evil. For we have then to accept only the true and the divine, but to make no other distinction in the eternal processes.

To those who can act only on a rigid standard, to those who can feel only the human and not the divine values, this truth may seem to be a dangerous concession which is likely to destroy the very foundation of morality, confuse all conduct and establish only chaos. Certainly, if the choice must be between an eternal and unchanging ethics and no ethics at all, it would have that result for man in his ignorance. But even on the human level, if we have light enough and flexibility enough to recognise that a standard of conduct may be temporary and yet necessary for its time and to observe it faithfully until it can be replaced by a better, then we suffer no such loss, but lose only the fanaticism of an imperfect and intolerant virtue. In its place we gain openness and a power of continual moral progression, charity, the capacity to enter into an understanding sympathy with all this world of struggling and stumbling creatures and by that charity a better right and a greater strength to help it upon its way. In the end where the human closes and the divine commences, where the mental disappears into the supramental consciousness and the finite precipitates itself into the infinite, all evil disappears into a transcendent divine Good which becomes universal on every

plane of consciousness that it touches.

This, then, stands fixed for us that all standards by which we may seek to govern our conduct are only our temporary, imperfect and evolutive attempts to represent to ourselves our stumbling mental progress in the universal self-realisation towards which Nature moves. But the divine manifestation cannot be bound by our little rules and fragile sanctities; for the consciousness behind it is too vast for these things. Once we have grasped this fact, disconcerting enough to the absolutism of our reason, we shall better be able to put in their right place in regard to each other the successive standards that govern the different stages in the growth of the individual and the collective march of mankind. At the most general of them we may cast a passing glance. For we have to see how they stand in relation to that other standardless spiritual and supramental mode of working for which Yoga seeks and to which it moves by the surrender of the individual to the divine Will and, more effectively, through his ascent by this surrender to the greater consciousness in which a certain identity with the dynamic Eternal becomes possible.

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There are four main standards of human conduct that make an ascending scale. The first is personal need, preference and desire; the second is the law and good of the collectivity; the third is an ideal ethic; the last is the highest divine law of the nature.

Man starts on the long career of his evolution with only the first two of these four to enlighten and lead him; for they constitute the law of his animal and vital existence and it is as the vital and physical animal man that he begins his progress. The true business of man upon earth is to express in the type of humanity a growing image of the Divine; whether knowingly or unknowingly, it is to this end that Nature is working in him under the thick veil of her inner and outer processes. But the material or animal man is ignorant of the inner aim of life; he knows only its needs and its desires and he has necessarily no other guide to what is required of him than his own perception of need and his own stirrings and pointings of desire. To satisfy his physical and vital demands and necessities before all things else and, in the next rank, whatever emotional or mental cravings or imaginations or dynamic notions rise in him must be the first natural rule of his conduct. The sole balancing or overpowering law that can modify or contradict this pressing natural claim is the demand put on him by the ideas, needs and desires of his family, community or tribe, the herd, the pack of which he is a member.

If man could live to himself, — and this he could only do if the development of the individual were the sole object of the Divine in the world, — this second law would not at all need to come into operation. But all existence proceeds by the mutual action and reaction of the whole and the parts, the need for each other of the

constituents and the thing constituted, the interdependence of the group and the individuals of the group. In the language of Indian philosophy the Divine manifests himself always in the double form of the separative and the collective being, *vyasṭi, samaṣṭi*. Man, pressing after the growth of his separate individuality and its fullness and freedom, is unable to satisfy even his own personal needs and desires except in conjunction with other men; he is a whole in himself and yet incomplete without others. This obligation englobes his personal law of conduct in a group-law which arises from the formation of a lasting group-entity with a collective mind and life of its own to which his own embodied mind and life are subordinated as a transitory unit. And yet is there something in him immortal and free, not bound to this group-body which outlasts his own embodied existence but cannot outlast or claim to chain by its law his eternal spirit.

In itself this seemingly larger and overriding law is no more than an extension of the vital and animal principle that governs the individual elementary man; it is the law of the pack or herd. The individual identifies partially his life with the life of a certain number of other individuals with whom he is associated by birth, choice or circumstance. And since the existence of the group is necessary for his own existence and satisfaction, in time, if not from the first, its preservation, the fulfilment of its needs and the satisfaction of its collective notions, desires, habits of living, without which it would not hold together, must come to take a primary place. The satisfaction of personal idea and feeling, need and desire, propensity and habit has to be constantly subordinated, by the necessity of the situation and not from any moral or altruistic motive, to the satisfaction of the ideas and feelings, needs and desires, propensities and habits, not of this or that other individual or number of individuals, but of the society as a whole. This social need is the obscure matrix of morality and of man's ethical impulse.

It is not actually known that in any primitive times man lived to himself or with only his mate as do some of the animals. All record of him shows him to us as a social animal, not an isolated body and spirit. The law of the pack has always overridden his individual law of self-development; he seems always to have been born, to have lived, to have been formed as a unit in a mass. But logically and naturally from the psychological viewpoint the law of personal need and desire is primary, the social law comes in as a secondary and usurping power. Man has in him two distinct master impulses, the individualistic and the communal, a personal life and a social life, a personal motive of conduct and a social motive of conduct. The possibility of their opposition and the attempt to find their equation lie at the very roots of human civilisation and persist in other figures when he has passed beyond the vital animal into a highly individualised mental and spiritual progress.

The existence of a social law external to the individual is at different times a considerable advantage and a heavy disadvantage to the development of the divine in man. It is an advantage at first when man is crude and incapable of self-control

and self-finding, because it erects a power other than that of his personal egoism through which that egoism may be induced or compelled to moderate its savage demands, to discipline its irrational and often violent movements and even to lose itself sometimes in a larger and less personal egoism. It is a disadvantage to the adult spirit ready to transcend the human formula because it is an external standard which seeks to impose itself on him from outside, and the condition of his perfection is that he shall grow from within and in an increasing freedom, not by the suppression but by the transcendence of his perfected individuality, not any longer by a law imposed on him that trains and disciplines his members but by the soul from within breaking through all previous forms to possess with its light and transmute his members.

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In the conflict of the claims of society with the claims of the individual two ideal and absolute solutions confront one another. There is the demand of the group that the individual should subordinate himself more or less completely or even lose his independent existence in the community, — the smaller must be immolated or self-offered to the larger unit. He must accept the need of the society as his own need, the desire of the society as his own desire; he must live not for himself but for the tribe, clan, commune or nation of which he is a member. The ideal and absolute solution from the individual's standpoint would be a society that existed not for itself, for its all-overriding collective purpose, but for the good of the individual and his fulfilment, for the greater and more perfect life of all its members. Representing as far as possible his best self and helping him to realise it, it would respect the freedom of each of its members and maintain itself not by law and force but by the free and spontaneous consent of its constituent persons. An ideal society of either kind does not exist anywhere and would be most difficult to create, more difficult still to keep in precarious existence so long as individual man clings to his egoism as the primary motive of existence. A general but not complete domination of the society over the individual is the easier way and it is the system that Nature from the first instinctively adopts and keeps in equilibrium by rigorous law, compelling custom and a careful indoctrination of the still subservient and ill-developed intelligence of the human creature.

In primitive societies the individual life is submitted to rigid and immobile communal custom and rule; this is the ancient and would-be eternal law of the human pack that tries always to masquerade as the everlasting decree of the Imperishable, *eṣa dharmāḥ sanātanaḥ*. And the ideal is not dead in the human mind; the most recent trend of human progress is to establish an enlarged and sumptuous edition of this ancient turn of collective living towards the enslavement of the human spirit. There is here a serious danger to the integral development of a greater truth upon earth and a greater life. For the desires and free seekings of the

individual, however egoistic, however false or perverted they may be in their immediate form, contain in their obscure shell the seed of a development necessary to the whole; his searchings and stumblings have behind them a force that has to be kept and transmuted into the image of the divine ideal. That force needs to be enlightened and trained but must not be suppressed or harnessed exclusively to society's heavy cart-wheels. Individualism is as necessary to the final perfection as the power behind the group-spirit; the stifling of the individual may well be the stifling of the god in man. And in the present balance of humanity there is seldom any real danger of exaggerated individualism breaking up the social integer. There is continually a danger that the exaggerated pressure of the social mass by its heavy unenlightened mechanical weight may suppress or unduly discourage the free development of the individual spirit. For man in the individual can be more easily enlightened, conscious, open to clear influences; man in the mass is still obscure, half-conscious, ruled by universal forces that escape its mastery and its knowledge.

Against this danger of suppression and immobilisation Nature in the individual reacts. It may react by an isolated resistance ranging from the instinctive and brutal revolt of the criminal to the complete negation of the solitary and ascetic. It may react by the assertion of an individualistic trend in the social idea, may impose it on the mass consciousness and establish a compromise between the individual and the social demand. But a compromise is not a solution; it only salves over the difficulty and in the end increases the complexity of the problem and multiplies its issues. A new principle has to be called in other and higher than the two conflicting instincts and powerful at once to override and to reconcile them. Above the natural individual law which sets up as our one standard of conduct the satisfaction of our individual needs, preferences and desires and the natural communal law which sets up as a superior standard the satisfaction of the needs, preferences and desires of the community as a whole, there had to arise the notion of an ideal moral law which is not the satisfaction of need and desire, but controls and even coerces or annuls them in the interests of an ideal order that is not animal, not vital and physical, but mental, a creation of the mind's seeking for light and knowledge and right rule and right movement and true order. The moment this notion becomes powerful in man, he begins to escape from the engrossing vital and material into the mental life; he climbs from the first to the second degree of the threefold ascent of Nature. His needs and desires themselves are touched with a more elevated light of purpose and the mental need, the aesthetic, intellectual and emotional desire begin to predominate over the demand of the physical and vital nature.¹

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 188-97)

1. This is the first portion of Chapter VII of Part I — 'The Yoga of Divine Works'. — Ed.

‘IN ME THOU HAST PUT THE WILL TO AN ENTIRE TRANSFIGURATION’

July 10, 1914

O Thou who eternally, immutably art, who consentest to Thy becoming in this world that Thou mayst bring into it a new Illumination, a new Impulsion, Thou art here, manifest Thyself more and more completely, always more perfectly; the instrument has given and gives itself to Thee with a fervent adhesion, a total surrender; Thou mayst reduce it to dust or transform it into a sun, it will resist nothing that is Thy Will. In this surrender lies its true strength and its true beatitude.

But why art Thou so considerate with the animality of the body? Is it because it must be given time to adapt itself to the marvellous complexity, the powerful infinity of Thy Force? Is it Thy Will that makes itself gentle and patient, is unwilling to precipitate things, leaves to the elements leisure to adapt themselves? . . . I mean — is it better thus or is it impossible otherwise? Is there here a particular incapacity which Thou dost tolerate with magnanimity or is this a general law which is an inevitable portion of all that has to be transformed? . . .

But it matters little what we think about it, since thus it is; the attitude alone is important: Should we fight, should we accept? And it is Thou who dictatest the attitude, it is Thy Will that determines it at each moment. Why foresee and contrive when it is enough to observe and to give a full adhesion?

The working in the constitution of the physical cells is perceptible: permeated with a considerable amount of force they seem to expand and to become lighter. But the brain is still heavy and asleep. . . . I unite myself to this body, O divine Master, and cry to Thee: Do not spare me, act with Thy sovereign omnipotence; for in me Thou hast put the will to an entire transfiguration.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, pp.197-98)

ON THREE APHORISMS OF SRI AUROBINDO

Jnana (Knowledge)

It is no use reading books of guidance if one is not determined to live what they teach.

Blessings

The Mother

1 — There are two allied powers in man: knowledge and Wisdom. Knowledge is so much of the truth, seen in a distorted medium, as the mind arrives at by groping; Wisdom what the eye of divine vision sees in the spirit.

Someone has asked me, “Why are the powers allied?”

I suppose that we are so used to seeing all the elements in man quarrelling among themselves that the idea of their being “allied” causes astonishment. But these quarrels are only apparent. All the powers which come from the higher regions are in fact necessarily allied — they are united, they have agreed to fight the Ignorance. And Sri Aurobindo says clearly enough — for those who understand — that one of these powers belongs to the mind and that the other belongs to the Spirit. This is precisely the profound truth that Sri Aurobindo wants to reveal in his aphorism: if the mind tries to obtain the second power, it is unable to do so, since it is a power that belongs to the Spirit and arises in the human being together with the spiritual consciousness.

Knowledge is something that the mind can obtain through much effort, although this is not the true knowledge, but only a mental aspect of knowledge; whereas Wisdom does not at all belong to the mind, which is altogether incapable of obtaining it, because, in fact, it doesn’t even know what it is. I repeat, Wisdom is essentially a power of the Spirit and it can arise only with the spiritual consciousness.

It would have been interesting to ask what Sri Aurobindo means when he speaks of “the truth seen in a distorted medium”. First of all, what is this “distorted medium”, and what does the truth become in a “distorted medium”?

As always, what Sri Aurobindo says can have several levels of meaning — one is more specific, the other more general. In the most specific sense, the distorted medium is the mental medium which works in ignorance and which is therefore unable to express truth in its purity. But since life as a whole is lived in ignorance, the distorted medium is also the earth-atmosphere which, in its entirety, distorts the truth seeking to express itself through it.

And here lies the most subtle point of this aphorism. What can the mind arrive

at by groping? We know that it is always groping, seeking to know, erring, returning upon its previous attempts and trying again . . . Its progress is very, very halting. But what can it grasp of the truth? Is it a fragment, a piece, something which is still the truth, but only partially, incompletely, or is it something which is no longer the truth? That is the interesting point.

We are used to being told — perhaps we have also repeated many times — that one can only have partial, incomplete, fragmentary knowledge which therefore cannot be true knowledge. This point of view is rather trite: one need only to have studied a little in life to be aware of it. However, what Sri Aurobindo means by “the truth seen in a distorted medium” is far more interesting than that.

Truth itself takes on another aspect; in this medium it is no longer the truth, but a distortion of the truth. Consequently, what can be seized of it is not a fragment which would be true, but an aspect, the false appearance of a truth which has itself melted away.

I am going to give you an image to try to make myself understood; it is nothing more than an image, do not take it literally.

If we compare the essential truth to a sphere of immaculate, dazzling white light, we can say that in the mental medium, in the mental atmosphere, this integral white light is transformed into thousands and thousands of shades, each of which has its own distinct colour, because they are all separated from one another. The medium distorts the white light and makes it appear as innumerable different colours: red, green, yellow, blue, etc., which are sometimes very discordant. And the mind seizes, not a little fragment of the white light of the white sphere, but a larger or smaller number of little lights of various colours, with which it cannot even reconstitute the white light. Therefore it cannot reach the truth. It does not possess fragments of truth, but a truth that is broken up. It is a state of decomposition.

The truth is a whole and everything is necessary. The distorted medium through which you see, the mental atmosphere, is unsuited for the manifestation or the expression or even the perception of all the elements — and one can say that the better part is lost. So it can no longer be called the truth, but rather something which in essence is true, and yet no longer so at all in the mental atmosphere — it is an ignorance.

So, to summarise, I shall say that knowledge, as it can be grasped by the human mind, is necessarily knowledge in ignorance, one could almost say an ignorant knowledge.

Wisdom is the vision of truth in its essence and of its application in the manifestation.

12 September 1958

2 — Inspiration is a slender river of brightness leaping from a vast and eternal knowledge; it exceeds reason more perfectly than reason exceeds the knowledge of the senses.

A certain number of the questions you have asked are alike: “Why did Sri Aurobindo say it like this?” — one thing or another.

I could reply, “He said it like this because he saw it like this.” But, to begin with, one thing should be understood; these are definitions given by Sri Aurobindo, definitions which he gives mostly in a paradoxical form to compel us to think.

There are dictionary definitions, which are the ordinary explanations of words as they are commonly understood. These do not make you think. What Sri Aurobindo says, however, is said in order to break up the usual conception, to bring you in touch with a deeper truth. In this way a whole lot of questions are eliminated.

The effort one must make is to try to find the deeper knowledge, the deeper truth that Sri Aurobindo has expressed in this way, which is not the usual way of defining a word.

I shall select some questions: the first one, which interested me because it comes from a thoughtful person, concerns the word “knowledge” and compares the way Sri Aurobindo has used the word in this aphorism with the way he used it in the aphorism we read last week.

When, in last week’s aphorism, Sri Aurobindo opposed — as one might say — “knowledge” to “Wisdom”, he was speaking of knowledge as it is lived in the average human consciousness, the knowledge which is obtained through effort and mental development, whereas here, on the contrary, the knowledge he speaks of is the essential Knowledge, the supramental divine Knowledge, Knowledge by identity. And this is why he describes it here as “vast and eternal”, which clearly indicates that it is not human knowledge as we normally understand it.

Many people have asked why Sri Aurobindo said that the river is “slender”. This is an expressive image which creates a striking contrast between the immensity of the divine, supramental Knowledge — the origin of this inspiration, which is infinite — and what a human mind can perceive of it and receive from it. Even when you are in contact with these domains, the portion, so to say, which you perceive, is minimal, slender. It is like a tiny little stream or a few falling drops and these drops are so pure, so brilliant, so complete in themselves, that they give you the sense of a marvellous inspiration, the impression that you have reached infinite domains and risen very high above the ordinary human condition. And yet this is nothing in comparison with what is still to be perceived.

I have also been asked if the psychic being or psychic consciousness is the medium through which the inspiration is perceived.

Generally, yes. The first contact you have with higher regions is a psychic one. Certainly, before an inner psychic opening is achieved, it is difficult to have

these inspirations. It can happen as an exception and under exceptional conditions as a grace, but the true contact comes through the psychic; because the psychic consciousness is certainly the medium with the greatest affinity with the divine Truth.

Later, when one has emerged from the mental consciousness into a higher consciousness beyond the mind, beyond even the higher mind, and when one opens oneself to the Overmind regions, and through the Overmind to the Supermind, one can receive inspirations directly. And naturally at that point they become more frequent, richer, if one may say so, more complete. There comes a time when inspiration can be obtained at will, but this obviously demands considerable inner development.

As we have just said, this inspiration from regions far above the mind surpasses in value and quality the highest achievements of the mind, such as reason. Reason is certainly at the apex of human mental activity. It can review and control the knowledge acquired with the help of the senses. It has often been said that the senses are altogether defective instruments of knowledge, that they are incapable of perceiving things as they are, that the information they supply is superficial and very often faulty. When it is fully developed, the human reason knows this and does not trust the knowledge of the senses. It is only if one is infrarational, if I may say so, that one believes that all one sees, hears, or touches is absolutely true. As soon as one is developed in the region of higher reason, one knows that all these notions are almost essentially false, and that one can in no way rely on them. But the knowledge one receives from this supramental or divine region surpasses all that can be conceived or understood by reason, at least to the same extent that reason surpasses the knowledge of the senses.

Several questions concern a practical point: “How to develop the capacity for inspiration?”; “What are the conditions needed to receive inspiration and is it possible to have it constantly?”

I have already replied to this. When one opens oneself to the supramental regions, one puts oneself in the right state for receiving constant inspirations. Until then, the best method is to silence the mind as much as possible, to turn it upwards and to remain in a state of silent and attentive receptivity. The more one is able to establish a silent, perfect calm in the mind, the more one becomes capable of receiving inspirations.

It was also asked whether inspirations are of different qualities.

In their origin, no. They always come down from the regions of pure Knowledge and penetrate whatever part of the human being is most receptive, best adapted to receive them — but these inspirations may apply to different domains of action. They can be inspirations of pure knowledge, they can also be inspirations that contribute to one’s effort to progress, and they can also be inspirations for action which help in the practical and outer realisation. But the question here is the use one

makes of the inspiration, rather than of the quality of the inspiration — the inspiration is always like a drop of light and truth which succeeds in penetrating the human consciousness.

What the human consciousness does with this drop depends on the attitude, the need, the occasion, the circumstances; it does not alter the essential nature of the inspiration but it does alter the use one makes of it, its practical application.

Some of the other questions concern the difference between inspiration and intuition. They are not the same thing; but I think that we will have the opportunity of returning to this subject in the course of our reading. When Sri Aurobindo tells us what he considers intuition to be, we shall come back to it.

In a general and almost absolute way, if you truly wish to profit from these readings, as from all of Sri Aurobindo's writings, the best method is this: having gathered your consciousness and focused your attention on what you are reading, you must establish a minimum of mental tranquility — the best thing would be to obtain perfect silence — and achieve a state of immobility of the mind, immobility of the brain, I might say, so that the attention becomes as still and immobile as a mirror, like the surface of absolutely still water. Then what one has read passes through the surface and penetrates deep into the being where it is received with a minimum of distortion. Afterwards — sometimes long afterwards — it wells up again from the depths and manifests in the brain with its full power of comprehension, not as knowledge acquired from outside, but as a light one carried within.

In this way the faculty of understanding is at its highest, whereas if, while you read, the mind remains agitated and tries to understand at once what it is reading, you lose more than three-quarters of the force, the knowledge and the truth contained in the words. And if you are able to refrain from asking questions until this process of absorption and inner awakening is completed, well, then you will find that you have far fewer questions to ask because you will have a better understanding of what you have read.

19 September 1958

3 — When I speak, the reason says, “This will I say”; but God takes the word out of my mouth and the lips say something else at which reason trembles.

When Sri Aurobindo says “I”, he speaks of himself and of his own experience. We would like to be able to say that what he says is symbolic and that it could apply to many people, but unfortunately this is not so at all.

This experience, of not saying what you had meant to say when you speak, but something else, is very common; but it is the opposite of what Sri Aurobindo speaks of here. That is to say, when you are sitting calmly at home using your

reason to its full extent, you decide to say this or that, that this is the reasonable thing, but all too often, when you begin to speak, it is the lower impulses, the unreasonable emotions and the vital reactions which take hold of the tongue and make you say things which you should not say.

Here it is the same phenomenon, but, as I said, the other way round. Instead of infrarational impulses which make you speak with excitement and passion, it is, on the contrary, an inspiration coming from above, a light and a knowledge greater than those of the reason which take hold of the tongue and make you say things that you would have been incapable of saying even with the most enlightened reason.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that “the reason trembles” because these higher truths always appear in the human domain as paradoxes, revelations contrary to reason; not because reason is incapable of understanding what comes from the higher regions, but because these revelations are always ahead of, very much ahead of, that which reason has understood or accepted. What the human reason of today finds reasonable has been paradoxical and mad in the past; and probably — one may say, certainly — these unexpected, paradoxical, revolutionary revelations which are manifesting now and making the reason tremble, will in time to come be very reasonable knowledge, which in turn will tremble before new revelations.

It is this sense of something which is always moving, progressing, being transformed, that Sri Aurobindo is trying to give us with these compact phrases which for a time shake our understanding of things. It is to push us forward, to give us the sense of the complete relativity of all that manifests in the world, and of this universe which is always in motion, ever moving towards a higher and greater Truth.

For us, right now, the supramental transformation is the expression of the highest truth, it is the revolution we must bring about on earth; and certainly this revolution must be felt as an absolute by the majority of human beings, otherwise they will not be able to bring it about. But Sri Aurobindo insists that we should not forget that this absolute is still relative and that any manifestation must always be relative with regard to an Absolute which is even more absolute — the Unmanifest that will manifest later.

26 September 1958

THE MOTHER

(*On Thoughts and Aphorisms*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 10, pp. 1-9)

ON THE TRIUMPH OF THE GOOD AND THE TRUE

[Mother begins by commenting upon a question written by a disciple.]

“Sweet Mother, it is said that always the good and the true triumph, but we see that often in life it is otherwise. The wicked win, seem somehow to be protected from suffering.”

(Mother laughs, then remains silent.) People always confuse two ideas. It is from the universal and spiritual point of view that, not positively the “good” as men understand it, but the True, the Truth, will have the last word; it goes without saying. That is to say, finally the Divine will be victorious. That is what is said, what all who have lived a spiritual life have said — it is an absolute fact. Men, in translating it, say, “I am a good boy, I live in accordance with what I think to be true, therefore, all existence should be good for me.” *(Mother laughs)* First of all, one’s own appreciation of oneself is always doubtful, and then, in the world as it is now, all is mixed, it is not the Law of Truth that openly manifests itself to the half-blind human consciousness — it will not even understand it. I mean, to be more exact, that it is the supreme vision that is realising itself constantly, but its realisation in the mixed material world does not appear to the ignorant human sight as the triumph of good, what men call good and true. But (to say it in a joking way) it is not the fault of the Lord, it is the fault of men! That is to say, the Lord knows what he is doing, and men do not understand it.

In a world of truth, all would be just as it is now perhaps, but it would be seen differently.

Both. There would be a difference. It is the present ignorance and obscurity in the world that give a deforming appearance to the divine Action; and that naturally must tend to disappear; but it is also true that there is a way of seeing things which . . . one might say, which gives another meaning to their appearance — the two are there, like this (*gesture of intermixture*).

(Silence)

You always come back to this, that man’s judgment is wrong — wrong because his vision of things is wrong, is incomplete — and necessarily this judgment must have wrong results.

The world is perpetually changing, perpetually; not for a second is it like itself,

and the general harmony expresses itself more and more perfectly; therefore nothing can remain as it is and in spite of all appearances to the contrary, the *whole* is always constantly progressing; the harmony is becoming more and more harmonious, the truth becoming more and more true in the Manifestation. But to see that, one must see the whole, and man sees only . . . not even the human domain, but only his personal domain, quite small, quite small, microscopic — he cannot understand.

It is a double thing that is going on completing itself (*same gesture of intermixture*) and with a mutual action: as the Manifestation becomes more conscious of itself, its expression perfects itself, becomes also more true. The two movements go together.

(*Silence*)

It was one of the things that was seen very clearly the other day, when there was this Consciousness of Knowledge: when the Manifestation will have sufficiently emerged out of the Inconscient so that all this necessity of struggle, created by the presence of the Inconscient, becomes progressively more and more useless, it will disappear quite naturally, and progress, instead of being made through effort and struggle, will begin to be made harmoniously. That is what the human consciousness foresees as a divine creation upon earth — it will still be only one step. But for the present step, it is a kind of harmonious attainment that will change the universal progress (which is ceaseless) into a progress through joy and harmony instead of a progress through struggle and suffering. . . . But what was seen is that this feeling of insufficiency, of something that is not complete and is not perfect, that, one must foresee, will exist for a very long time — if the notion of time remains the same, that I do not know. But all change implies time, does it not? It may not be translated by time as we conceive it, but it does imply a succession.

All these so-called problems — all the while one receives, in this way, questions and questions and problems of the mind (all problems in the Ignorance, is it not so?) — problems for the earth-worm. As soon as you emerge up there, such problems do not exist any more. There are no more contradictions. Contradictions always come from the inadequacy of vision and the incapacity to see a thing from all points of view at the same time.

In any case, to bring the question down to earth, no sage at any time, I think, has ever said: “Be good, and all will go well with you externally” — because it is a stupidity. In a world of disorder, in a world of falsehood, to hope for that is not reasonable. But you can have, if you are sufficiently sincere and whole and entire in your way of being, you can have the inner joy, the full satisfaction, whatever the circumstances, and that nobody and nothing has the power to touch.

26 August 1967

THE MOTHER

(*Notes on the Way*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 11, pp. 75-77)

“PLATONIC” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

Here are some blank verses. Your critical estimate, please?

PLATONIC

The body’s fire takes birth to fill a void
The half-awakened soul leaves in all love;
But when the inward dream is molten gold
Undrossed by gloom, what need for flesh to burn?
Lip-parted quietudes listening afar,
The hours go drunken with a honeyed hum
Of heart-beats round immortal fragrances
In a }
Of } spirit wideness sown with spirit stars.¹ |
Our full delight has room for not one kiss!
What deeper union shall our passions claim
Now that the god within stands glowing nude —
With all the flesh-garb sunk, a weight of sleep?

(Amal’s question in the margin:)

1. Which is preferable? There is an “Of” beginning the previous line also.

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

1. “In” is immeasurably the better form.

The verse is good, the poetry also — though perhaps the rhythm of the last line is a little inconclusive as a closing cadence. The four lines marked are very fine.

26 October 1935

*

Sri Aurobindo —

I have recast my blank verses, trying to be more compact and suggestive.

The body’s fire is born to fill a void
The half-awakened soul leaves in all love —

But our delight has room for not one kiss!
 Lip-parted quietudes listening afar,
 The hours go drunken with a honeyed hum
 Of heart-beats round immortal fragrances
 In a spirit wideness sown with spirit stars.
 We build no more, to catch undying Beauty,
 A transitory tangle of hot limbs;
 For { now the single God in us stands bare!
 { we have bared the single God in us!

Or do you prefer

- 1) For now shines forth the single God in us.
- 2) We have laid bare the single God in us.

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

“For now the single God in us stands bare”

But I am not sure that this new close is better; the “hot limbs”, well, I don’t feel warm to them. Only I don’t remember the original version there, so can’t quite say, but I think it was better here at least.

27 October 1935

*

Sri Aurobindo —

Here’s another version, making the “best” of both the readings. How does the poem as a whole as well as in detail affect your critical sense now?

The body’s fire takes birth to fill a void
 The half-awakened soul leaves in all love —
 But our delight has room for not one kiss!
 Lip-parted quietudes listening afar,
 The hours go drunken with a honeyed hum
 Of heartbeats round immortal fragrances
 In a spirit wideness sown with spirit stars.

We build no more, to catch undying Beauty,
 A transitory tangle of desire.
 Does flame ache to possess its own warm gold
 Or billow strain to seek its foamy blue?
 What shall we thirst for, whither shall we burn,

falls

Now that the flesh-garb¹ ~~sinks~~ — a weight of sleep —

one bare

And the ~~single~~ God in us stands glowing ~~nude~~?

(Amal’s question in the margin:)

1. Should “flesh-garb” be in the plural to point the contrast with the “single God”?

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

1. Yes, it would be clearer.

It is very good now — a harmonious whole with a perfect evolution of the thought.

29 October 1935

PLATONIC

The body’s fire takes birth to fill a void
 The half-awakened soul leaves in all love —
 But our delight has room for not one kiss!
 Lip-parted quietudes listening afar,
 The hours go drunken with a honeyed hum
 Of heartbeats round immortal fragrances
 In a spirit wideness sown with spirit stars.

We build no more, to catch undying Beauty,
 A transitory tangle of desire.
 Does flame ache to possess its own warm gold
 Or billow strain to seek its foamy blue?
 What shall we thirst for, whither shall we burn,
 Now that the flesh-garbs fall — a weight of sleep —
 And the one God in us stands glowing bare?

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

DOCUMENTS ON MAURICE SCHUMANN'S VISIT TO PONDICHERY IN SEPTEMBER 1947¹

Among the interviews granted to public figures by Sri Aurobindo the first one was in September 1947, followed by a few others at a later date. It was a great concession on his part to break his self-imposed seclusion. A prominent French politician Maurice Schumann was deputed by the French Government as the leader of a cultural mission to see Sri Aurobindo and pay him homage from the French Government and to propose to set up at Pondicherry an institute for research and study of Indian and European cultures with Sri Aurobindo as its head. I was happily surprised to hear this great news, great in the sense that Sri Aurobindo had at all consented to the proposal, for I hailed it as an indication of his future public appearance. The fact that it came on the heels of India's Independence pointed to her role as a dominant power in the comity of nations, as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo. It seems Sri Aurobindo asked the Mother in what language he should speak to the delegates. The Mother replied, "Why, in French! You know French!" Sri Aurobindo protested, "No, no! I can't speak in French." The Mother, Sri Aurobindo and the French delegates were closeted in Sri Aurobindo's room and we don't know what passed among them.

Nirodbaran
(*Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, p. 251)

In 1929 Sylvain Levy, the French indologist, met Sri Aurobindo and in September 1947 Maurice Schumann, a representative of the French government, and Monsieur Baron, the Governor of French India, spoke with Sri Aurobindo about a proposed Franco-Indian cultural institution they hoped to set up under the directorship of Sri Aurobindo.

A. B. Purani
(*The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 239)

Maurice Schumann, of the MRP (Mouvement Républicain Populaire), visited Pondicherry, sent by the French Government to pay his respects to Sri Aurobindo and to see on what basis the cultural co-operation between India and France, with this town as the centre and the Ashram as the heart, could be created. Sri Aurobindo met him and I suppose on his return to France he will write about his visit. Perhaps it will have some effect. He is a frank and intelligent man, capable of understanding

1. For more details on this aspect of Pondicherry history, refer to my article in two parts in *Mother India*, May & July 2020.

Sri Aurobindo's aim; a Jew converted to Catholicism, but certainly broadminded, something of a politician already, but an idealist all the same.

Pavitra

(*Itinéraire d'un enfant du siècle*, pp. 213-14;
Translation in *Mother India*, June 2011, p. 403)

Maurice Schumann's Speech in the Ashram School (The 26th of September, 1947. Text revised by Maurice Schumann)

The High Commissioner (François Baron)

Presents Maurice Schumann, his friend since 1942 when he met him in London and who played an important role in the liberation of France by spreading the ideal of free France all over the world.

He then became the leader of an important political party which stood not only for Christian values but also for change, the "Mouvement Républicain Populaire".

Maurice Schumann

"We had hardly met for an hour and François Baron was already talking to me about Pondicherry and the Ashram. He had started introducing me to you. So I read a few books of Sri Aurobindo, and I dreamed of coming here and meeting Him. This dream has been fulfilled today.

I also dreamed of seeing the coming together of our two cultures because the ideal that inspired Free France which gathered around General De Gaulle was very close to what independent India desired and realised.

We gathered around this ideal because Free France was not merely fighting to liberate France, but the entire world, from Nazi domination which wanted to first submit Europe and then all the people of the world to its tyranny.

France then, like India today, was fighting for the cause of liberty, impelled not by immediate necessities but the spirit which transcends and rules over men and events.

During an outing, my friend Baron indicated a vast expanse and spoke to me about his dream of seeing there the buildings of a University where French and Indian students, side by side, would dedicate themselves to the study of different aspects of their respective life and culture.

One should be able have such dreams. For it is by realising them that we can follow the example of those great initiates who sought for the living principles behind the achievements of the world. It is by uniting not only our countries, not merely our two flags, but uniting our two cultures that we can bring a little more of the spirit to man.”

* * *

The Pondicherry Assembly Session of 28th September 1947

Presided by M. C. Balasoubramanien

SUMMARY — Reception of Mr. Schumann, Delegate of the French Republic — Presentation of the Council of Government

The Representative Assembly of French India summoned by its President on Sunday, the 28th of September, 1947, gathers in the regular hall of proceedings of the Hotel de Ville.

Present:

Mm. C. Balasoubramanien,	President
Paquirissampoullé,	Vice President
Madimchetty,	”
Goubert Edouard,	”
GnanaVennemani,	Secretaries
Haji Mohamed Ismail,	”
Balakichenane,	”
Adimoulanaiker,	
Z. André,	
Dartnell,	
Deivassigamany,	
Ecquecori Dotto,	
Gaudart Pierre,	
Kamichetty,R	
Latchoumanassamy,	
Latour Joseph, Latour Paul,	
Madavane,	
Mougamadou Ibrahim Marécar,	
Mougamadou Issoup,	
Moultoucoumarapparety,	

Mouttoussamy,
 Nagamoultou,
 Patmanabin Counouma,
 Rattinassababady,
 Léon Saintan,
 Saravane Lambert,
 Sinivasspoullé,
 Sivassoupiramaniapoullé,
 Soucénadin,
 Sudhansu Sekhor Dotto,
 Valiavittil Govinin,
 Vanéméry Pourouchottamin.

Absent:

Arun Chandra Dutt,
 Cailacha Soubbaya,
 Clémenceau Mourougassamy,
 Debendranath Dash,
 Narayanassamy,
 Ramassamy Ayer,
 Sailendra Kumar Mukerji,
 Sandrasségarettay
 Visvanadane

At 10.45 near the entrance of the hall of proceedings, the President of the Assembly receives Governor Baron who is accompanied by M. Schumann, delegate of the Government of the Republic, the Consul of the Indian Union, civil authorities and military personnel.

At the sound of the Police Band playing the “Marseillaise” they take the seats reserved for them.

The President of the Assembly, Mr. Balasoupramanien, opens the session by praising M. Schumann for his heroic action during the war. He expresses his gratefulness to Governor Baron for the tact and generosity with which he didn't take advantage of the powers conferred on him by the Decree of 12th August 1947. The Decree had permitted him to choose 3 members of the Council of Government. He proceeds to read the Governor's letter addressed to the Representative Assembly of French India:

To the President,

“I would like to prove the Government’s confidence, in the Assembly, in the free exercise of democratic rights and in the elected members’ zeal for public welfare, by asking them to choose themselves the six Councillors of the Government who henceforth, will govern French India with the collaboration of the Commissioner of the Republic.”

After having read the names of the six members of the Council of Government of French India: Mr. Sivassoupiramaniapoullé, Dr. André, Mr. Counouma, Mr. Goubert, Mr. Latchoumanassamy, Mr. Deivassigamany, the President of the Assembly expresses himself in the following terms:

Gentlemen, the Councillors of the Government,

My hearty congratulations! At the same time, permit me to give you a word of advice in carrying out your new functions which, though highly responsible, shouldn’t be the cause of any alarm. I invite you to work with the Assembly and the Heads of the Services in a spirit of collaboration and mutual confidence.

As we all have been elected by the public, it is our duty to be impartial in the exercise of our functions.

Then Mr. Counouma, newly elected to the Council of Government takes the floor of the house and declares on behalf of the Council:

Mr. President and Gentlemen,

While thanking my new colleagues for laying their confidence in us I would like to draw again your attention to the fine gesture of Governor Baron. He has let the Assembly elect the six members of the Council and thus allowed the formation of a cabinet fully accountable to the elected representatives of the people.

One question which has lately been a topic of controversy is whether the Assembly would accept the reforms brought by the Decree of 12th August 1947. This has been decided by an almost unanimous vote yesterday when the six members of the Council of Government were elected. The Assembly has shown clearly its desire to govern the country by its own representatives.

First of all, I would like to give the reasons which, according to me, have impelled us to accept the new political and administrative statute granted to us.

It has evidently some advantages. The budget is freed of compulsory expenses and the Representative Assembly is now the sole master of the country's finances. France has no more the power to impose on us an administrative staff used to be a burden on our budget.

At this point, I would like to thank the members of the parliament and above all, my friend Saravane, who had so much difficulty to get the new reforms. It is still too soon to thank him because as yet he has been able to fulfil only in part the dream that haunted us in College, that of a free French India, master of its own destiny.

Secondly, the budget has been lightened by about seven lakhs of rupees by the fact of France taking the charge of the payment of a certain number of officials.

Full financial control to the elected authorities and a considerable economy are, in short, the two indisputable advantages that have resulted from the reforms.

Let us now analyse the newly instituted Council of Government.

By law, the Assembly can elect only 3 members to this body, the three others being nominated by the Commissioner of the Republic, who is the President of the Council of Government. This means that the Administration has always the upper hand, because in case of differences, it is very improbable that the members the Governor has chosen himself would vote against him. The other three elected members would only be in a position to ratify the decisions taken despite or even against their wishes.

Article 4 of the Decree lays down that the Commissioner of the Republic can give charge of a Public Service to a member of the Council of Government, when the expenditure of the Public Service is entirely borne by local finances.

But there is a reservation here. The Law Department and the Police do not come under the administration of the Councillors of Government. Because France pays in part for the maintenance of these services, we are bereft of all control over them.

Moreover, it is the Governor who decides as to whether or not to give charge of a Public Service to the Councillors. Thus the reforms are useful only if they are carried out by a liberal and democratic minded Governor.

I must make it clear publicly that we have agreed to collaborate with the

Administration today and under the present circumstances, because we have a Governor, who apart from being a great French patriot, is also a great friend of India, understands the aspirations of the people and willingly shares his powers with its representatives.

In his opening speech in the Assembly he has often repeated that the Commissioner of the Republic is a friend and a guide and that the Administration of this country belongs to us. We should not hesitate in front of such definite assurances. Those who love their country must take up its reins. This is what the Assembly decided to do in spite of some who wanted to reject the reforms in order to create a sense of insecurity and turmoil because that serves the purpose of their destructive ideology.

Moreover, as practical politicians, we cannot refuse what has been given to us. Nothing prevents us from demanding for more radical reforms or even cease to collaborate in case our liberties are infringed upon.

Here I am reminded of the words of a great Hindu leader, who said when the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms were proposed: "Don't refuse what is given to you. If you are fighting for the 16 annas of a rupee and if you get only fourteen, don't refuse the fourteen annas. Take them and fight for the remaining two annas!"

It is in this spirit that we accept the reforms proposed today. While demanding further reforms, our collaboration also will be sincere since it suits the interests of our country which needs right now a stable and uniform government.

I thank cordially the French Government and all the friends of India in the French Parliament who have granted us this new political and administrative statute.

At the same time, I reiterate that the people of French India are not satisfied by the Decree of 12th August, 1947. What the people demand is complete autonomy from the political, administrative and financial point of view, for it is only then that they can choose their own destiny.

Certain people pretend that one cannot be serious of bringing reform and a separate Government to French India which is territorially so small as compared to the vast Indian nation. But it must be remembered that our problems have a capital importance because intellectuals all over the world follow the events in Pondicherry, where from his retreat, the Master works to manifest a new consciousness in man and transform this imperfect life which is what has been human life till today.

Pondicherry is a place hallowed by the presence of Sri Aurobindo.

Governor Baron then declares:

“We have worked together the last 18 months and have made a long way on the road to liberty. Every year the 15th of August will be celebrated in French India like the 14th of July and it will be observed as a festival of France and India.

The new reforms brought by the French Government were given with the sincere intention of giving all power to the people. The 44 members of the Representative Assembly represent the legislative power that you already have. The six members of the Council of Government freely elected by you, represent the executive body. This makes you now masters of your own country.

In 18 months we have come a long way. Colonialism, like the reign of the Great Moghuls, is defunct. The Ordinance of 1840, that old war-horse, has been buried along with Colonialism. We can even stuff it with hay and make it not only the symbol of what is gone but also the spirit of France which stood always for the liberty of all people.

We have now passed from the direct administration of the Governor to free self-government by the people's representatives. The principles announced at Brazzaville have now become a reality. Destiny has changed its face.

I am no longer the head of a Colony, but a Representative of the French Republic and the French Union. From now on I am only an adviser, a guide and an arbiter.

Certainly, all government implies an opposition, but this opposition though useful, should not be mechanical, but active and constructive. French India must discover its own truth. I hope that the seven of us, surrounded and followed by the 44 members of the Assembly, will be able to march together, side by side and on an equal footing, to discover this truth.

But I don't want to prejudice you about the future of French India. I am only its head and we are not the only ones interested in its destiny. We have also to let the politicians of Delhi decide its fate and see what best suits the interests of the people of Pondicherry, of India and France. As you have now attained political maturity you have now the right to express your aspirations and interests and these can influence the discussions at Delhi.

The historic mission that you have been entrusted with, that of French India in

this divided world, is a mission of friendship. It is a great privilege that the East and the West can meet in this little corner of India. French India should be a catalyst of the spirituality and culture of India and France. The French Indians freely associating with France should be like one hand of India clasping the other hand of France.

And in this unique situation, French India, like the rich ancient cities of Venice, Florence and Athens, should prosper for its inhabitants, be an instrument of culture and be a place of peace and unity at the service of India, France and Humanity, for the solution to the problem of French India has not only a local and national but also an international implication.”

Long live France!
Long live India!
(Applause)

Governor Baron then praises Maurice Schumann who is sent by the French Government on a mission of friendship to India. “Mr. Schumann,” declares Governor Baron, “is a representative of the new France which believes in the importance of spirituality. Mr. Schumann, who has always fought for just causes, will surely defend the cause of French India and that of Franco-Indian friendship in Paris.”

Mr. Schumann then declares:

“I have been the witness of a historic day, because France today has confirmed to the world that the government in French India is in the hands of the people. Though it is a historic occasion, it is not the only one of its kind. It maintains an ancient French tradition, that of remaining faithful to the charter of 1789 it gave to the world and which has been a common fund of knowledge for all free and great nations.

The French Union is based on a free consent of the people without which no fraternal community could last. The people of French India participate in the life of France and are responsible for its government because all the overseas' deputies have contributed to the framing of the French Constitution and have voted for it along with the deputies elected in France.

India and France have many spiritual values in common. Both would like to reconcile social justice with political liberty, without sacrificing one for the other. Both would like to improve the present condition of humanity. Both feel the necessity of peace. France martyred and bleeding from the war and India rising and building herself, both have a common need for peace. They should work like brothers in

Pondicherry to fulfil this mission of peace. In between the two super powers that menace the world, there is a place for intellectuality and spirituality. India is by providence that place here, just like France in Europe, to remind the world of the importance of spirituality. As no nation can succeed unhelpt in this mission, France and India should work together to fulfil it in Pondicherry. Any human endeavour becomes worth mentioning in history only when it exceeds the barriers of nationality and civilisation.

India and France are like two branches of one and the same tree, the tree of humanity. We have to be faithful to that ancient tree of indivisible humanity.

French India should be the meeting place for a synthesis of two great civilisations and should, above all, set the example of human unity to the world.

For we believe like in India that human unity is inevitable, we believe in it despite the present realities, because 100 tons of present realities are not worth one ounce of truth. In 1940 it was the realists who abandoned hope. Those who finally won were those who fought realities. In 1947, our fight continues for we are sure of the final victory and the unity of the world.

France has understood the immense value of the message of India, its message of peace and brotherhood. Here I must tell you how interested are the youth and elite of France in the works of great Indian philosophers! In the metros of Paris one can often see young Frenchmen pull out small books from their pockets, the likes of which we see here in the Ashram, and I can tell you that great thinkers and great poets like Sri Aurobindo, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, evoke an enthusiastic response among the cultured youth of France. India and France pursue the same ideal; they should therefore cooperate for the advent of peace in the world. A great French thinker, Marechal Lyautev and a great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore have declared the same thing without knowing each other: 'One cannot do anything great in this world without a little love.' French India should represent this love at the service of India and humanity."

Long Live India!
 Long Live France!
 (Applause)

At the end, Lambert Saravane speaks:

"I thank the French Government on behalf of the Representative Assembly for the generous reforms that it has brought to French India.

It was not because of nationalism nor racism that we have demanded these reforms and fought for our rights. It was to fulfil our own personality, to put in practice what French education itself has taught us in the liberal tradition of the French Revolution.

What we want is to follow France and at the same time preserve our tradition, our heritage, our personality, which makes us children of both France and India. We will work such that French India will become a land of friendship.

Beyond these troubled and bleeding times we know that what had really assured and assures even now the permanence and greatness of India, are those places where breathes the Spirit, like Taxila and Nalanda, the centres of spirituality which are the heart of India. We would like to listen to one such heart beating in French India. Pondicherry should be such a spiritual centre by the presence of Sri Aurobindo, and a cultural one too by the presence of France, at the service of India, France and humanity. Pondicherry should be a land of Franco-Indian friendship firmly based on spiritual roots that draw from the deepest Indian traditions and regenerated by the revolutionary spirit of France.”

Long Live India!
Long Live France!
(Long Applause)

After the members of the Assembly pay their respects to Governor Baron, he along with the delegate Maurice Schumann, are then accompanied by the President to the gate of the Hotel de Ville.

The President: “Gentlemen, the programme for the day is over. I end today’s session.”

The session ends at 11 hours 45 minutes.

The Secretary,
Gnana Vennemany

The President,
C. Balasubramanien

Compiler’s Note

The session of 28th September 1947 of the Pondicherry Representative Assembly is of special interest to the disciples and admirers of Sri Aurobindo. It would be indeed difficult to find another session in the history of pre-independent or even post-

independent India in which Sri Aurobindo's name is uttered with so much reverence, and intellectual and spiritual culture given such a high place in public affairs. What was the personal background of those who spoke with such fervour on this occasion? I will briefly narrate how they were all influenced by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother before I proceed with the political backdrop of this event.

(1) Charles François Baron, Governor of Pondicherry

Baron first came to Pondicherry as a Labour Inspector in 1937.² One evening he met Dilip Kumar Roy on the beach and the two conversed on music, poetry and spirituality. Dilip soon became a means of contact with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and he referred Baron's ideas on surrealist poetry to Sri Aurobindo for his comments. Those were the days when the disciples of the Ashram wrote daily to the Master and received his replies the next day. So Sri Aurobindo's replies on surrealism, made in the context of Nirodbaran's dream poetry, were keenly discussed among the Ashram poets. Baron was soon profoundly influenced by Sri Aurobindo's teachings and had the darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on the 21st of February 1937.³ His first visit to Pondicherry left a deep and indelible mark on him, and when he returned as Governor of Pondicherry in April 1946 after the War, his admiration for Sri Aurobindo had all the more increased and he went out of his way to "help the New Age for which Sri Aurobindo stood",⁴ as he himself said once. It is therefore not surprising that when he and Maurice Schumann met Sri Aurobindo on the 27th of September 1947, he knelt down in front of him and showed the reverence of a disciple for his Master.⁵

(2) Maurice Schumann, who had been sent by the French Government to make Pondicherry a centre of a cultural synthesis of the East and West, was no stranger to Indian culture and spirituality. The Bhagwad Gita had once been a bedside book for him and he had read a few works of Sri Aurobindo even before he came to Pondicherry in September 1947. He was introduced to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and Yoga by none other than Baron whom he met in London in 1942 — both joined De Gaulle in the Free France movement at the time of the Nazi occupation of France during World War 2.⁶ Schumann became the official spokesman of the French government in exile and his daily broadcasts on the BBC French Service lifted up the spirit of the

2. Subbiah V, *Saga of Freedom of French India* (1990), p. 234.

3. Sri Aurobindo's Correspondence with Dilip Kumar Roy and Nirodbaran in February 1937.

4. *Mother India*, August 1976, p. 648.

5. Interview of Schumann with Auroville International, France — *Mother India*, December 1989, pp. 785-791.

6. Maurice Schumann's Speech in the Ashram School on 26th September, 1947.

French people in the years 1940-44. After the War he spent several years in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later played an important role in the formation of the European Economic Union.⁷

(3) Lambert Saravane was introduced to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy in the thirties by one Professor Zyromski at the Sorbonnes University in France where he had gone for his higher studies. When he returned to Pondicherry, he became an earnest disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.⁸ Saravane was a popular professor of History in the Collège Colonial (presently Lycée Français), and he along with Padmanabhan Counouma and Dr. André formed a group of staunch nationalists who at the same time valued French culture. They formed the French India Socialist Party in 1947 and proposed a novel scheme for French India which was drafted by Sri Aurobindo himself.⁹ The scheme sought for autonomy within the French Union in close collaboration with the Indian Union, and was quite compatible (though not the same) with the promise of a genuine federal government made by France to its colonies after the War. In November 1946 Saravane, with the help of the Communist party, was elected as deputy from French India to the French National Assembly for a period five years.

(4) Padmanabhan Counouma, who held the prominent post of "Conservateur des Hypothèques" (equivalent to the present day Registrar) in the Pondicherry Govt., came in touch with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the thirties. Amrita, who often went to Counouma for legal consultation on behalf of the Ashram, was one day sent by Mother to ask Counouma for a convenient time to meet him. Counouma responded by saying, "How can I give a time to Mother? I'll come immediately!" When he met the Mother, she formally shook hands with him and made him sit on a chair. When he met the Mother for the second time, Counouma removed his chair and sat at her feet, and she blessed him.¹⁰ There began a life-long relationship of devotion and service to the Mother which ended by him becoming the Managing Trustee of Sri Aurobindo Ashram after the Mother's passing in November 1973. According to him, it was the Mother who encouraged him to enter Pondicherry politics in 1947, and it was she who advised him and his associates to resign from the Assembly when things took a very bad turn during the municipal elections of October 1948.

7. [http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche/\(num_dept\)/6359](http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche/(num_dept)/6359)

<https://www.nytimes.com/1998/02/11/world/maurice-schumann-86-dies-voice-of-france-during-war.html>

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maurice_Schumann

8. Biographical Note by Raj Saravane, son of Lambert Saravane.

9. Sri Aurobindo, "The Future Union", *Autobiographical Notes*, CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 481-91.

10. Samyukta Reddy, 'Counouma, A Personal Memoir', *Mother India*, November 1991.

The Political Background

There was a spurt of political activity in French India as the day of India's independence (15 August 1947) approached. The demand for merger with India arose with such violence that Governor Baron flew to Calcutta to convince Gandhi that France would soon negotiate with India. Gandhi admonished the agitators in a prayer meeting for "taking the law into their hands" instead of "acting through constitutional means."¹¹ The West Bengal Govt. intervened in the case of Chandernagore (which was part of French India) and managed to suspend the satyagraha movement which had been launched there by the Communists. In Pondicherry, a public meeting was held on the 10th of August defying the Govt. ban on processions and public meetings. A resolution was passed by all parties demanding the immediate merger of French India with India. Karaikal and Mahe followed suit and the situation would have further deteriorated but for the timely joint declaration of India and France on the 28th of August 1947.¹² The declaration expressed the willingness of both the governments to settle things amicably, keeping in view the long standing "historical and cultural ties" between them. This gave a much needed breather to the French administration of Pondicherry which was totally unprepared to face the situation.

A month later Maurice Schumann landed at Pondicherry, paid his homage to Sri Aurobindo on behalf of the French Govt. and spoke to him about the proposal of building a University in Pondicherry to study Aryan and Dravidian civilisations. Pondicherry was to be a window of French culture in India and be the centre of a cultural synthesis of the East and West.¹³ Schumann then visited Chandernagore where he found the situation even more untenable than the four other towns of French India — Pondicherry, Yanam, Karaikal and Mahé.¹⁴ On the 6th of October, the French Govt. handed over the *loges* (small commercial outposts) to the Indian Govt. The *loges* were a regular nuisance to the Govt. of India because they were used as safe havens by smugglers and remained beyond the jurisdiction of the Indian Govt. So their cession to India came as a conciliatory gesture from the side of the French Govt. On the 8th of October, Schumann, Henri Roux (French Chargé d'Affaires in Delhi) and Baron had a meeting with Jawaharlal Nehru in which they had lengthy discussions over the possibilities of dual citizenship, cultural collaboration and a condominium for French India. Nehru's response was favourable to the project of cultural collaboration, but he found the idea of dual citizenship impractical.¹⁵ He had been quite sympathetic to the idea earlier in May 1947 in an unofficial talk with

11. Gandhi, Collected Works, Vol. 89, pp. 29-30.

12. Ajit Neogy, *Decolonization of French India*, p. 59.

13. Agence France Presse, Pondicherry, 27 September 1947.

14. Interview with Schumann, *Mother India*, December 1989, pp. 785-791.

15. Ajit Neogy, pp. 67ff.

Baron and Roux.¹⁶ The difficulties of post Partition must have surely been the cause of the change of attitude in October. India was then struggling to build a strong centre and facing the most difficult problem of the integration of the princely States, so one can naturally understand Nehru's lack of enthusiasm for an autonomous French India within the Indian subcontinent.

In an interview taken in December 1988 by three members of Auroville International France,¹⁷ Schumann himself was quite frank about the political aim of his visit to Pondicherry. His mission, in his own words, was "to persuade the Government of independent India not to proceed with the annexure of [French India] immediately and by force" and it "was thanks to Sri Aurobindo that this mission miraculously succeeded." When the interviewer asked him about the political part of his interview with Sri Aurobindo, he answered:

The political part was the simple fact of being received. . . . The papers had only to report, 'M. Maurice Schumann, a deputy in the French Assembly, sent to India on an official mission by the government of M. Paul Ramadier, yesterday had a private interview of one hour with Sri Aurobindo.'

Thus it was enough that he simply met Sri Aurobindo, who had credibility in the eyes of Indian politicians, to make the Indian Govt. not support the merger movement of French India with the Indian Union.

But was the proposal of the University and the meeting with Sri Aurobindo only a diplomatic exercise by which Schumann succeeded in his mission? Let us go back to the origins of the proposal. Schumann actually didn't propose anything new. Baron had been enthusing over the idea of building a University for a cultural synthesis of the East and the West right from his very first speech as Governor of Pondicherry in April 1946.¹⁸ The University was part of the total proposal of a unique political arrangement of France with India, as elaborated by the manifesto of the French India Socialist Party. That is what Schumann meant when he said in the interview that it would have given France the "time to establish [French India] under the French Union, and later to keep it, by agreement with India." Baron had canvassed for "cultural autonomy" for French India with both the Govts of India and France. This would have demanded some sacrifice from both parties. The French Govt. in particular would have had to sacrifice a little of its "material sovereignty" over French India in return for cultural autonomy or, what Baron termed as "a vast intellectual sovereignty".¹⁹ But we know from history that during this period France

16. Nehru, Second Series, Vol. 2, pp. 571-73.

17. *Mother India*, December 1989, pp. 785-91.

18. Ajit Neogy, pp. 20-21.

19. Ajit Neogy, p. 41.

had converted its Empire into a quasi-federal Union and never proceeded towards a truly federal setup. It was not prepared to relinquish any sovereignty whatsoever over its colonies. This intransigence led to bloody confrontations in the colonies, especially in Indochina and Algeria, causing the eventual downfall of the Fourth Republic. How could the French Govt. then be so liberal only in the case of French India? There is thus sufficient scope to dismiss Schumann's visit to India as a mere political gimmick to buy time. But one need not agree with such a simplistic interpretation of events which essentially sees events only in retrospect from the present point of view rather than attempts to understand the play of forces at that time.

The fact is that during that period (1946-47) the French Govt. did intend to implement Baron's scheme of turning Pondicherry into a cultural window. Schumann's visit was actually Baron's success in making the French Govt. propose officially to the Indian Govt. what he had already proposed unofficially to Nehru in May 1947. The sudden surge of political activity in French India with the approach of India's independence actually helped him, for the French Govt. was ready to concede only half-hearted reforms and nothing more until the very first week of August 1947. Baron's scheme coincided with the immediate political necessity of averting the "first snip in the colonial web"²⁰ of France and setting a bad precedent to the other French colonies. Pondicherry would have not only been a cultural window but also a model of "intelligent decolonisation", as Schumann said later in his interview.

Baron had lobbied in Paris for the acceptance of his cultural plan. Marius Moutet, the French Overseas Minister endorsed his plan in September 1946. Moutet thought that it might "guarantee the permanence of the French establishments in India". Though it was not yet possible due to paucity of funds, it was "high time to make preliminary studies."²¹ Henri Roux, French Chargé d' Affaires in Delhi, referred to Baron's solution in July 1947 in a letter to Georges Bidault, Minister of External Affairs. Roux even suggested the voluntary surrender of the French settlements to India before it was too late. This might "create a stir in the rest of the French Union" but it could be justified by the special conditions of the French India settlements. They were after all tiny dots in the vast Indian subcontinent, and France would only be returning back to India its own territorial pockets. In exchange, France could secure a commercial treaty, a cultural convention, the induction of French expertise and a special status for Pondicherry. Meanwhile, Bazin, the Administrator of Chandernagore, kept informing the French authorities how fast the town was slipping out of his control. The situation had become so desperate that it was now a question

20. Interview of Patrick Pitoeff with Governor Ménard on 30 August 1985.

<http://cidif2.go1.cc/index.php/lettres-du-c-i-d-i-f/16-lettre-n-4/1596-la-fin-des-comptoirs-francais-de-linde>

21. Ajit Neogy, p. 27.

of personal safety. He suggested immediate negotiations with Delhi for a joint Indo-French declaration recognising the right of the people of Chandernagore to merge with India. It was now too late for reforms and only the “unconditional departure of the French” would satisfy the local people. Baron’s plan therefore was politically intelligent and not without ministerial support. It could not only save France from “brutal eviction” from the Indian subcontinent, but add to French prestige. Pondicherry might have actually set a good and not a bad precedent as the Overseas Ministry feared it would to the other colonies of France.

Schumann’s meeting with Sri Aurobindo was at a critical juncture in history and held a great promise for Pondicherry. There was also a strong probability of the promise being fulfilled. A liberal minded man like Baron with a profound sympathy for Indian culture was the Governor. Enlightened and honest politicians — Saravane, Counouma and Dr. André — were at the helm of local affairs, unlike the later leaders of the French India Socialist Party. The French Govt. supported Baron’s cultural plan which, in spite of being idealistic, was politically wise. Maurice Schumann, the deputy sent to Pondicherry by the French Govt., had read the Bhagwad Gita and “The Life Divine” of Sri Aurobindo. On the Indian side, Nehru was sympathetic to the proposal of dual nationality in May 1947. He had even suggested that some means could be devised for Pondicherry to maintain its cultural attachment to France, while being at the same time a full member of the Indian Union.²² The Congress Working Committee had then approved of the cultural plan in July 1947. With such a combination of favourable circumstances and with “the right type of men in the right place”,²³ one would actually wonder why the proposal didn’t come through!

Several things came in the way of its success and the favourable circumstances didn’t last long. From the Indian point of view, the Partition and the problem of the integration of the princely States made the politicians more wary than ever. It explains Nehru’s lack of enthusiasm for Schumann’s proposal in October 1947. On the side of the French Govt., there was no political urgency to settle the French India problem once the immediate danger of forcible annexure was averted by diplomatic means. Lastly, and perhaps the most important of all, was the policy of political expediency followed by the French Govt. When it supported Goubert at the expense of Saravane and Counouma, things were bound to go awry after some time. Though it was politically expedient to do so because the former could win the referendum for the French Govt., it proved to be disastrous in the long run. Goubert dictated terms to the French Govt. and made Baron’s proposal a mere sham of Franco-Indian collaboration and a clever strategy to stay in power. This ruined all chances of what would have otherwise been a unique political arrangement between France and

22. Nehru, *Second Series*, Vol. 2, pp. 571-3.

23. Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes*, CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 496.

India, and perhaps led to the establishment of a Cité Universitaire in Pondicherry, which would have been a dream-come-true project of international collaboration and harmony.

RAMAN REDDY

MESSAGE FOR THE INAUGURATION OF A
FRENCH INSTITUTE AT PONDICHERRY

In any country the best education that can be given to children consists in teaching them what the true nature of their country is and its own qualities, the mission their nation has to fulfil in the world and its true place in the terrestrial concert. To that should be added a wide understanding of the role of other nations, but without the spirit of imitation and without ever losing sight of the genius of one's own country. France meant generosity of sentiment, newness and boldness of ideas and chivalry in action. It was that France which commanded the respect and admiration of all: it is by these virtues that she dominated the world.

A utilitarian, calculating, mercantile France is France no longer. These things do not agree with her true nature and in practising them she loses the nobility of her world position.

This is what the children of today must be made to know.

4 April 1955

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – I, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 379)

MY STORY WITH PONDICHERRY

I went out very early on my first morning in Pondicherry. I walked without plan through the tree-lined streets and towards the sea, the coral-orange and pink dawn light coming in over the Bay of Bengal spilling onto the fishing boats and the black granite rocks heaped on the shoreline and the high villa walls covered with bougainvillaea. The day felt primed, at once serene, enticing, intense and full of possibilities.

My story with Pondicherry began 40 years ago when I was a student in Chicago and I was led, whether by chance or instinct or recommendation I cannot now recall, to a book in a university library by Rishi Sri Aurobindo, of whom I knew nothing. It had a pale-blue hardback cover and was crudely printed. From this distance all I can remember is the sense of excitement with which I read, and the aura that came from the prose — of intelligence, vision, ambition and soul. It all seemed unaccountably serious, and somehow necessary.

Coincidences began to accrue. People I met by chance spoke of Sri Aurobindo. More texts by him came my way. I found out that, in the 1880s, he'd lived a few streets from where I was based in London a century later. He'd been a revolutionary and a seer, a poet and a social theorist, a philosopher and an experimenter in the expansion of human consciousness. No one role precluded the other. Unlike other Eastern wise men at the time, he journeyed into the world rather than away from it.

I learned that he spent his final years in Pondicherry, where an ashram had been established in his name. I'd like to know more about him, I thought. I'd like to go to Pondicherry to find out. But all the other events in my life intervened.

Aurobindo Ghose was born in Calcutta in 1872, the son of a doctor who dispatched him to England at the age of seven with the admonition to stay away from Indians. His father felt that India was too saturated with ritualistic religiosity and was in need of Western rationality and enlightenment. He nevertheless posted newspaper clippings to the boy about the depredations of the British in the Raj. Aurobindo learned Latin, Greek and French, wrote poems, contemplated his father's clippings and had a spectacular career in Classics at Cambridge before returning to India at the age of 21, a mute in his country's languages, an immigrant clueless about its traditions and ways.

Back home, he studied the holy texts — the Vedas and the Upanishads — learned the languages, met the people and came to sense that his own development and that of India were one. "I look upon my country as the mother," he wrote. "What would a son do when a demon sitting on the breast of his mother is drinking her blood?"

In the two decades that followed, he formed his own revolutionary movement

against the British occupation. He was charged with sedition on three occasions, one for a bomb attack on a magistrate that had him jailed during the year-long trial. Each time he was acquitted and each time he re-entered the fray, moving Governor-General and Viceroy Lord Minto to describe him as ‘the most dangerous man we have to contend with’. The British wanted to send him to the Cellular Jail in the Andaman Islands, hoping never to see him again, but he went to Pondicherry, where the French gave him refuge. He was 38 years old, and would remain there for the rest of his life.

The Portuguese, Danish, Dutch and British had all been to Pondicherry as colonists or traders, but the city, at least its seaboard side, takes its note from the French, who came for textiles and spices in 1673. The Dutch designed the grid, the British flattened it and periodically occupied it, but over time the French prevailed and did not hand it back to India until 1954. You see their presence in the white and gold cathedral on Mission Street, in the statues of Dupleix and Joan of Arc, and in the blue ceramic street signs bearing such names as Dumas and Romain Rolland. You hear it in the songs of children coming from the *lycée* on rue Victor Simonel. The French consulate, French Institute and the old Governor-General’s residence are all prominently placed. It was known as the Riviera of the East, a plum assignment for Indophiles in French colonial days. France is still in the food, the architecture, the games of *boules* played by local Tamils.

Set in a union territory enclave within the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, the city — officially renamed Puducherry (New Town in Tamil), known to intimates as Pondy, but still called by most of the world Pondicherry — now has three-quarters of a million inhabitants. Most are Tamil, with the Tamil sector beginning at a canal on the western border of the French Quarter. Step over any canal bridge and the decibels rise. There are some oases of calm: in the Muslim neighbourhood around rue Kazy where there is a grand and beautiful mosque and where the homes, sustained by labourers’ wages from Qatar and Dubai, look like New Orleans town houses, with their teak columns and verandahs; and in the Botanical Gardens to the southwest where Ang Lee’s *Life of Pi* was shot. But otherwise it’s jasmine sellers and street tailors, flowing saris and swarms of beeping motorbikes and thousands of food stalls and shops.

Most visitors here will pass their time in the French Quarter, set just back from the promenade along the seafront. Here, if they are Europeans new to the country, their passage into India can proceed with gentle, familiar steps. The streets are shaded, the light dappled, the sounds and scents are those of the sea. The old-world elegance is crumbling slightly but still present, and has been reinvented and democratised. Once-residential courtyards thick with greenery and sweet-smelling flowers now house cafes and restaurants where French meets Indian and other South Asian cooking. There are ice-cream parlours, art galleries, boulangeries, antiques emporia and boutiques. You can also get a massage, or have hot oil poured on your third eye

in an Ayurvedic treatment centre. There are hotels in the French Quarter that rethink their colonial-mansion settings, in some cases with innovative contemporary design and in others with resurrections of the past.

There are parts of the area where the noise increases and the populace is more dense — along the promenade and the canal, around Bharati Park and particularly at the Manakula Vinayagar Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Ganesh. But most of it has a pleasing and mysterious calm. Wander aimlessly and come upon places by chance, the rhythm intensifying and easing in a way that feels musical.

When Sri Aurobindo first stepped back on to Indian soil after arriving from England — despite his years away — he felt a profound and inexplicable peace. By the time he got to Pondicherry, he had taken up yoga; learned from a Maharashtrian yogi how to control the movement of thoughts into his brain, and seen Krishna in his prison cell — in the murderers and thieves, the jailers and prosecuting lawyers, and in the walls and bars. In Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo lived with his fellow revolutionaries on a pittance and produced, in a titanic literary convulsion, thousands of pages of work of rare vision, erudition and eloquence, then withdrew into a house on rue François Martin, where he conducted audacious experiments with his own mind.

With him went a French lady once given to occultism named Mirra Alfassa but later called by him, and everyone else in their environs, The Mother. She became his spiritual partner and public voice. Gandhi and Nehru beseeched him to leave his refuge in Pondicherry and return to the struggle for independence, but he saw no one, save his disciples, The Mother and, just once, the great poet Rabindranath Tagore. “Aurobindo, accept salutations from Rabindranath,” wrote the poet. “India will speak through you to the world.” Sri Aurobindo left his body, as his disciples put it, on 5 December 1950.

The Mother lived on in Pondicherry for another 23 years. She was a tennis-playing artist and a spiritual leader in her own right, but also an organisational genius of uncanny energy up until her death at the age of 95. She set up industries, hospitals and schools where children designed their own curricula and never wrote exams. The Sri Aurobindo Society — anarchist in form, organic in growth, with no imposed hierarchies — has expanded this work with projects that reach all sectors of public life and hundreds of thousands have been affected.

The Mother saved her boldest act for last: an experimental city called Auroville to be built on a wasteland north of Pondicherry, designed in a spiralling galaxy pattern with the French architect Roger Anger. She wrote a charter declaring that the place would belong to no one and would be devoted to human unity and evolution and the realisation of the divine in action. Delegates from 124 countries attended its inauguration on 28 February 1968. A massive englobed meditation centre called the Matrimandir — gold without, white within — now sits at the heart of Auroville, like a village church. The galaxy city as envisioned by The Mother hasn't yet grown

around it, but there are about 2,500 permanent residents from over 40 countries, and Auroville is alive with experiments in energy, social economy, architecture and agriculture. When I was there, its citizens were preparing for Prime Minister Modi's attendance at its 50th birthday celebrations.

In Pondicherry you will see Indian veterans of the French colonial wars of the 1950s and 1960s and red-robed pilgrims arriving by bus to be blessed by Brahmin priests at Lord Ganesh's temple. You will see travellers curious about this small slice of French India and those passing through on their way to the Chola Dynasty temple at Villianur.

You will also see ashram disciples, young residents of Auroville in town for supplies, solitary voyagers reading philosophical texts as they eat breakfasts in their hotels. People are rightly charmed by Pondicherry, but there is more than charm to be found here and it all goes back to the lifelong quest of one man. I felt the charm myself as I walked the streets, but also an other-worldly sweetness, a preponderance, an inrush of ideas. People who have been looking for something and not found it, who are dissatisfied but still optimistic, have come here as if magnetised. I have met some of these people, in Pondicherry and elsewhere.

In 1956, while a student at Stanford University, Michael Murphy read of the ashram in Pondicherry and, unlike me, actually went, returning to California to co-found the renowned Esalen Institute in Big Sur and write numerous books on human potential. I remember how, over lunch with him in Sausalito back in 2004, he described Sri Aurobindo by asking me to "imagine Thomas Jefferson with the contemplative capacities of Saint John the Divine".

The poet and novelist Anu Majumdar was led by a dream she had in Calcutta and has lived in Auroville for 36 years, where I met her and her husband Pierre Le Grand, an engineer and artist from Paris, who heard about "some crazy people gathered around an old woman they called The Mother" and decided to have a look. Michael Weston, formerly of pop band the Lilac Time, and his classical Indian dancer wife Rekha Tandon came to Pondicherry by way of London and Odisha and a chance detour from Chennai, and suddenly found everything falling into place. "It felt like destiny," said Michael when we met up at their home. "We are doing the work we always wanted to do, in the house we always wanted to live in. There's the spiritual dimension we'd been looking for all our lives. And it's here in this wonderful place of great coffee and croissants."

Later that first morning I met my guide, Mr. Boniface, who told me the story of the city and explained the colour coding of its buildings — yellow for the French, white for the Indian government and grey for the Ashram. In the French Institute he showed me the extraordinary near-microscopic texts written on palm leaves and then led me around the Manakula Vinayagar temple.

On rue François Martin Mr. Boniface told me to remove my shoes and leave them with an elderly woman. We crossed the street and entered a building painted

grey. I followed him through a courtyard and into a further one, at the centre of which was a polished stone rectangle filled with flowers. I was somewhat aware of people gathered around in an atmosphere of solemnity. I wasn't thinking. I was walking, and watching Mr. Boniface's back. I expected that soon we would stop and he would explain what this place was. But before we did I began to weep. I had no understanding of this, and still don't. It had not been provoked by a thought, a memory or something I saw that had touched me. There was no sadness in it, only something like gratitude. It went on for 10 or 15 minutes, during which time I came to realise that the flower-filled stone rectangle was the grave, or *samadhi*, of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

I cannot claim, as Michael and Rekha and Anu and Pierre might, that I had found my home. But when I did get home, to Poland where I live, I had with me as a gift from the Ashram a stack of books by and about Sri Aurobindo that reach from the floor nearly to my knee. I am reading them. It's a beginning, 40 years on.

TIMOTHY O'GRADY

A day will come, I hope, when we shall be able to tell freely and truly all that Sri Aurobindo's Presence has meant for the town of Pondicherry. . . .

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – I, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 375)

DOCTOR BABU — MY GRANDFATHER

I

[The dates and data given here are accurate to the best of my knowledge, but since everything is written from memory I am fully open to any corrections and suggestions from my readers.

This article is on my grandfather Dr. Upendra Nath Banerjee. But I make haste to point out at the very outset that there were two Upendra Nath Banerjees, a fact that is a common source of confusion to many. The first Upendra Nath Banerjee — the senior of the two — was associated with Sri Aurobindo in Bengal during the revolutionary days in the first decade of the century, and was exiled to the Andamans with Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Sudhir Sarkar and others. He also stayed with Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry during the 1920s. The junior Upendra Nath Banerjee, my grandfather, born on March 14, 1880, was associated with Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry in the 1920s and after, and was known as Doctor Babu; it is upon him that this article is written.]

There are special moments in one's life, moments that may be as simple and insignificant as the falling of a leaf on an autumn evening or as grandiose and overwhelming as the first contact with the splendour of one's soul. These moments are so deeply stamped on one's being that they remain for a long time — sometimes for the whole of one's life.

That morning — it was about a quarter of a century ago — my grandfather sent me with a letter to meet one of the elderly sadhaks of the Ashram. Little did I know then that this was to be one of those unforgettable moments in my life, not an overwhelming one, but unforgettable all the same.

I suppose it was nine or ten in the morning. The day was bright and sunny. The door was open, though a curtain covered the opening. For courtesy's sake, I knocked lightly on the door, and said as softly as I could: "May I come in?"

"Come in! Come in! Don't wait there! Come in!" replied a voice from inside.

Pushing the curtain aside, I stepped in. The sadhak by now had turned around in his chair and was looking towards the door. As soon as his eyes met mine, his enquiring look gave way to a benign smile, as he burst out in a warm-hearted tone, "Ah! The grandson of Doctor Babu! Come in! Come in, young hero! Come in!" His face was very bright and had the radiance of a smile that expressed nothing but love and gentleness, a love and gentleness such as only the wise have. To be frank, I was quite embarrassed, but at the same time rather proud that I should be so loved and

honoured by this august old sadhak; for I was a mere kid of twelve or thirteen. But the thought that I should be honoured not for any achievements of my own, but for the reputation of my grandfather, was so thoroughly embarrassing that I didn't know quite what to do with my hands and legs. The sadhak bade me sit on a chair that was too high for me; my little legs could hardly reach the floor. Taking this as an excuse, I began to swing my legs to and fro and I thought I was feeling better. But this feeling of well-being was short-lived.

“Don't move your legs! Don't be so fidgety!” the sadhak gently commanded. “You know,” he added, “your grandfather never got excited, he never fidgeted. He was among the quietest of men and had great self-control.” My swinging, of course, stopped at once; my legs virtually froze.

The sadhak was no longer smiling, but his face and voice expressed a deep reverence for my grandfather. He spoke again:

“Always be quiet. You know, your grandfather had such a deep personality that he could cure patients just by sitting at their bedside, without the use of any medicine. At times he looked as unshakable as the rock of Gibraltar.”

I was deeply moved, to say the least. His words were a revelation to me. I knew that my grandfather was respected by all, but this was the first time I had met someone who adored him. I knew also that my grandfather was a doctor — but now I began to understand what a remarkable doctor he was.

I looked around the room. The furniture was starkly simple; everything was spotlessly clean. There was a table with a neat white cloth spread over it and two stools. There was a bookshelf with neatly arranged books of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. There was, on the floor, near the centre of one of the walls, a shining china flower-vase of a pale blue hue; in it was a single tiny sunflower in front of two long fern leaves. This Spartan simplicity spoke of the refined and unassuming nature of the sadhak. From the big mango tree behind the house, a coppersmith bird was sending out its monotonous cry: cop . . . cop . . . cop . . . cop . . . cop . . . as regularly as the beeps of some electronic device. For the rest, there was utter silence. A cool breeze from the window touched my forehead and I thought I was fortunate to be sitting in this profound atmosphere.

When I looked back at the sadhak, his head was turned away from me. His eyes were fixed on the window, but he was not looking at it. A metre or two beyond the window, where the garden began, a ‘Victory’ creeper full of big bright yellow flowers seemed so bursting with health that it was a pleasure to fix my eyes on it; but the sadhak was not looking at it either. Still beyond, over the thicket-fence I could see the infinity of the sky — a single sheet of dazzling sapphire blue; but he wasn't looking at that either. In fact, he was in an indrawn state — he wasn't looking at anything in particular. Then slowly he spoke once more, this time in a voice so distant that it seemed as if he were a being from another world.

“You know, once the Mother was severely ill. So ill that it was a touch-and-go

affair. There wasn't a doctor in Pondicherry who could do anything for Her. Specialists were brought from Madras; they couldn't cure Her. Then Sri Aurobindo called for your grandfather. Doctor Babu came, saw the Mother, diagnosed Her ailment and She was cured within twenty-four hours." The old man paused for a while, and then said softly, almost in a whisper, half to himself, half to me: "Truly great men are here in Pondicherry among us, and not just out there in the world!"

There was such gravity in his words that for a fraction of a second my eye of vision seemed to have opened up. I could clearly see my grandfather's stern face with a stethoscope stuck in his ears, grimly leaning over a bed as the Mother lay limp and frail. I could see Sri Aurobindo standing behind my grandfather, extending His invisible arms of Grace and Power, and gods standing motionless and goddesses shedding tears. Far off in a dark corner stood the Devil, gnashing his teeth and foaming at the mouth because the biggest prey of his life, The Divine Mother, was slowly but steadily slipping out of his grip.

I left the room with a heavy heart. All this in a single morning was too much for me. Besides, I was remorseful; my grandfather was known to everybody but *me*. Oof! I felt so foolish. Nearer the temple, further from God. Foolish indeed! I pricked all over.

When I arrived home, I was determination itself. From head to foot I was charged with the resolve to hear the full story. I stormed into my grandfather's room and exploded: "*Dadu*, is it true that you cured the Mother in just twenty-four hours when all the doctors had failed?" I wailed so loudly that my mother rushed into the room quite alarmed. And my grandfather? Well, he removed his eyes from *The Life Divine*, looked at me, smiled, and went back into his book. When I was younger, I used to pour cold water on cats just to see how cowed down they would be. That smile of my grandfather gave me a wet-catish feeling!

To decide to get something and actually to get it are two separate things. My grandfather had a Teutonic reticence. He was given to contemplation and study, not to speech. So my readers should understand that what I am going to write now was not got in one sitting, not at all. Not even in several sittings. Plainly speaking, it was not obtained in any "sitting", but collected drop by drop, not in a big bowl but in the smallest of crucibles, through sixteen years of my stay with him. Sometimes he would only answer "Yes" to a question of mine. Sometimes only "No". Sometimes I would collect a sentence or two while strolling with him in the Botanical Garden that he liked so much; often he would go there in the evening for a walk, a man of eighty, and I, a lad of twenty, walked by his side. Perhaps at the sight of the setting sun, which made the tall trees look like sentinels from the past, he would be moved, and I would be the beneficiary. But most of my precious drops were collected on our terrace, where he sat every evening towards the end of his life, to watch the sun set. It is my opinion that he had some special affinity with the setting of the sun and the creeping in of the evening. Often he would go to the terrace quite early, while

the sun was still high, and stare at that sun almost unblinkingly, till water rolled down his cheeks. He had such a stout heart and so grave a face that everyone assumed it was the heat of the sun that made the water run. But, well, I have known him for too long and I have another notion. For it was on such evenings — though it happened very rarely — that he would give me a hint of how ominous it was that day when he looked on the Mother's failing body and had a hand in changing destiny. I shall try to put my grandfather's story as much as possible in the first person.

“I came to know about Sri Aurobindo from the monthly magazine Sri Aurobindo used to write — *Arya* — and so I wrote a letter or two to Him. Then, in the early 1920's, when Barin, Sudhir and others were released from the Andamans, I wrote once again to Barin, this time expressing my wish to come here and meet Sri Aurobindo. But I never expected to get a call from Him so dramatically. It was in January 1925; the early hours of the night had passed — it was about 10:30 p.m. My daily reports were completed. My faithful compounder and driver, Dhamri, was tidying up the clinic. I was a bit tired. Then suddenly a postal-carrier in khaki dress brought me a telegram. It read:

MIRRA ALFASSA SERIOUSLY ILL COME AT ONCE.

Barindrakumar Ghosh

“These words set my head on fire. With lightning speed, things started happening in my chest, the meaning of which I neither understood nor had the disposition to understand. I turned the telegram over. Yes, it was from Pondicherry.

“I decided to leave at once. I signed a few blank cheques and handed them over to Dhamri, so that he could take care of your grandmother. Then I arranged my attaché case with the necessary medical things for the journey. But it was not easy to decide what to take, for I did not know the nature of the malady. I decided to take one bottle of alcohol, one bottle of ether, one bottle of a purgative,¹ some cotton-wool, and all the things necessary for bleeding, a common practice of those days. And of course I took my stethoscope.”

I remember my grandfather once told me: “As far as instruments go, the stethoscope has proved to be the greatest weapon in our armory in our grim battle against the Devil.”

At that time my grandfather was practising in a small town named Mirzapur, situated in the centre of North India. From Mirzapur there was no direct train to

1. This purgative was an extremely pungent-tasting liquid, unwelcome to grown-ups and a sheer terror to children. My grandfather had mentioned its name to me many times, but I have forgotten it. I had the misfortune of tasting it once and I can assure the reader that its effect was devastating.

Madras. On enquiry he found that a train bound for Calcutta was due shortly at the Mirzapur railway station. It was an express and would not halt at the small station for long. He asked Dhamri to get his *ekka* — a one-horse double-seater carriage — ready at once. Such was the fire burning in his bosom that he didn't even care to say good-bye to my grandmother; nor did he think of what food he would have the next day.

The *ekka* leaped forward with the cracking of the whip. I can clearly see my granddad in my mind's eye — and what a granddad he was! Sitting up straight, immovable as his own unshakable will, being driven to the station by a totally confused Dhamri, who begged him to stop this journey, begged him at least to say farewell to my grandmother, begged him to go back and touch the forehead of little sleeping father, who was only ten at that time. But oh! Above all, I can see my grandfather's unblinking eyes.

*

[At this point, I would like to draw the attention of my readers in general, and that of young readers in particular, to certain details, lest there should be any misunderstanding. In those days Sri Aurobindo was not known as Sri Aurobindo; he was Aurobindo Ghosh and most of the time was referred to by his initials, A.G. Barindra, however, used to address his brother as Sejda. Even so, in these pages I shall always refer to him as Sri Aurobindo. Likewise the Mother was not known as the Mother, but as Mirra; her full name was Mirra Alfassa. But for me She will always be the Mother and I shall call her so. Nor was there any 'Ashram' in those days, but for convenience I shall use the word freely. Also I would ask the readers to remind themselves that we are far back in the chronicle of time — in the mid-1920s, almost sixty years ago, a time when the streets were deserted, the houses few and the population very small. In fact, in 1910 when Sri Aurobindo arrived, it was, in his words, a 'dead city'. And in 1925, even if was not fully dead, it was not much more than half dead. The readers should also remember that at this time the science of medicine was not so developed as now — modern sophisticated facilities were not yet available, not yet heard of. This town, in short, had very little. It is against this backdrop of such elementary conditions that the reader must picture this story.]

When the train drew into the railway station of Pondicherry two days or so later, my grandfather put his head out of the window of his compartment. He saw the whole length and breadth of the platform, completely deserted, but for one man. It was Sri Aurobindo's brother, Barindra Kumar Ghosh. Barin looked young and energetic. He was neatly dressed. His face was serious, his disposition grave. At the sight of his stern face, my grandfather melted into thin air and disappeared: in his place a

doctor appeared, a doctor not yet heard of, not yet reputable, and yet a doctor on whom none other than Sri Aurobindo was to pin his last hope. And this doctor's experienced eyes told him that day on the platform: "Here is a messenger from the house of a patient where things are not happy." They did not shake hands, they did not smile at each other, they did not even exchange a word of greeting. Barindra simply said, "Shall we move?" And the doctor replied, "Yes." His greatest journey as a man of medical science was on.

An army attacking a foe and a doctor attacking an illness have one thing in common — both seek early information about their enemy; this helps them to plan their strategy better. My grandfather was no exception to this rule. As soon as he and Barin were seated in one of those antique three-wheeled rickshaws called "push-push" because they were pushed from behind and directed with a rod by the occupant, my grandfather enquired about the Mother's illness. I shall try to relate as accurately as possible the gripping account which Barin gave to my grandfather and which my grandfather later reported to me.

Barin said:

"The French lady named Mirra first met Sri Aurobindo in 1914, when I was not here. Then in 1920, She came back and settled here, and we have all been doing Sadhana. Recently, however, She fell ill. One peculiarity of Her nature is that even though She is endowed with remarkable occult powers, She will help everyone else, but will do nothing for Her own body. She has had a fever for several days; it increased till it reached 106 degrees, even with an ice-bag on her forehead! She has a severe pain in the chest, and a hammering pulsation in her head. She has not taken food for several days. We have tried everything possible. We tried a local Indian doctor. We tried also a French doctor. But all in vain. The fever just wouldn't go down. Finally, Sri Aurobindo asked us to call the most well-known doctor in Madras. Though we could ill-afford it, we called him and paid not only his visiting charges but his car-fare up and down. This doctor diagnosed a 'serious condition of the heart' and advised immediate hospitalisation. Sri Aurobindo is putting all his yogic force upon Her, but without any apparent result. The air is thick with misgivings and I have never seen my brother in such a mood as he is in now. He has stopped seeing people and almost stopped talking to us. He is seen pacing up and down the verandah most of the time. I don't know what will happen."

Thus ended Barin's narration. There was no further talk, and my grandfather fell to musing.

Usually, any fever falls below 106 degrees within a few hours after applying an ice-bag. It was quite strange that this one did not. My grandfather suspected meningitis, but kept his private conjecture to himself and did not speak a word. One thing, however, continued to puzzle him: Sri Aurobindo also had great occult powers. Why then was he not able to cure Her by His yogic force? "What is so amiss, what is so amiss?" my grandfather kept asking himself.

His private guesses about the nature of the Mother's malady, his quandary over the ineffectivity of Sri Aurobindo's powers, his worry about the seriousness of the illness itself — all weighed so heavily upon him that when the "push-push" reached the Ashram gate, my grandfather was an embodiment of concentration.

At the entrance of the Ashram there were no 'Silence' creepers as there are today, nor was the Mother's symbol atop the gate, and the gate itself was only a small door — so the view from the first-floor verandah down to the road was clear. It is my opinion that from the very moment the doctor was in sight, Sri Aurobindo was keenly watching him from the verandah and taking thorough measure of the depth of this young man. At the same time, I believe, He was pouring down on him His infinite grace and opening up that absolute power of intuition which would prove to be infallible in his diagnosis of the Mother's illness a few minutes hence.

I once asked my grandfather: "How did you feel when you entered the Ashram?"

He answered in a serious tone: "The atmosphere was tense. In fact, it was so tense that it almost hit me physically. I have been to the homes of many patients, but never have I felt such a gripping tension."

Just inside the gate, on the ground-floor verandah, there were a few chairs and benches kept exactly as they are kept today; on them were seated Nolini Kanta Gupta, A. B. Purani and a couple of others. None of them spoke, none of them smiled, none of them greeted him. My grandfather neither expected it nor did he care. He was too deeply imbued with a sense of responsibility, too deeply absorbed to bother about social formalities. Barindra Kumar took him near the chairs and quietly pointed out the staircase to their left — the same by which we go upstairs every year on the 1st of January to get our calendars. From the gestures Barindra made, it was clear to my grandfather that neither Barindra nor anyone else had permission to go upstairs. The doctor knew that from here on he was alone. But was he really alone? I doubt it.

I have never seen my grandfather become nervous, so I am sure that he was not the least nervous as he went up the staircase, step by step. But with each step he climbed, he knew and he told himself that on this day he was appearing for the "toughest exam" of his medical career, a day on which all his knowledge and all his experience would be put to the ultimate test. Holding his attaché case in his left hand and supporting himself on the railing with the right, he steadily looked up as he climbed. He held his breath, not knowing what the Yogi would look like; what he would say; not knowing either how the patient, Mirra, would behave! The atmosphere grew more and more quiet, more and more penetrating. Then suddenly, after the first turn of the staircase he saw Sri Aurobindo standing up there, looking at him. Just that one look, and this humble doctor knew from deep in his heart that he had passed his "exam" — from here on, it was a mere walk-over. He knew that the patient was cured and knew too that he was only an instrument. The Supreme

Doctor was the One who stood in front of him with a stature of Himalayan strength and mighty poise. A grateful man fell at His feet. Sri Aurobindo touched his head and blessed him.

When he stood up, Sri Aurobindo had turned his gaze and was looking off towards what is now the girls' boarding. Sri Aurobindo remained silent for a while, letting my grandfather recover his poise, and then spoke:

“The diagnosis given to me by the doctor from Madras is suspect. I want an exact diagnosis.”

In the meantime an English lady, Miss Dorothy Hodgson, perhaps the first European to come to the Ashram and stay for good, had come to the doorway of the room behind the verandah. The Mother had named her Dutta, “The offered one”, and made her Her personal assistant. Dutta led my grandfather into the Mother's chamber.

The Mother lay limp on Her back with a big ice-bag tied to Her forehead with a red muslin scarf. Her eyes were closed. As soon as my grandfather entered, his tiger eyes were quick to observe things that Barin had not told him about. He noticed that the colour of the Mother's left foot was perceptibly darker than of the right — a clear sign of thickening and poisoning of the blood. He did not draw any conclusions yet, but he knew, with his impeccable acumen, which way to guide his diagnostic probe.

Contrary to what one would expect, my grandfather did not go near the bed, but actually moved away from it — he went and stood at the far corner of the room. This, however, was not a tactical move, but a precautionary step: he wanted to dust his leather case in order to make sure that none of the cinders gathered during the railway journey would reach the Mother. All this time, Dutta, clad in a sparkling white sari, her head bowed slightly down in true Indian style, stood at a respectful distance; but through every limb of her woman's body she expressed that she was ready to carry out the slightest command of the doctor. With her help, the attaché case was cleaned. A chair was brought and placed near the head of the Mother.

From the moment my grandfather had entered the room, he had been possessed of the queer notion that the Mother was constantly watching him even though Her eyes were closed. Of course, he had been already told by Barin of Her remarkable powers; but could they still be active even in Her illness? The seriousness of Her condition was evident at the first sight of Her body. Her face was so heavily flushed that any experienced doctor would know that the fever was high. Added to this was the severe pain in the chest, the hammering sensation in Her head, the lack of food for several days, plus something more serious that had not yet been detected. Could Her occult powers still be active with all this physical agony? My grandfather did not doubt his feeling; but how was it possible? And now his confusion was worse confounded when the Mother opened Her mouth unasked just at the moment when my grandfather brought the thermometer near Her face. I can only imagine that he

was the most nonplussed doctor on earth that day.

For such a serious case, the doctor did not trust his sense of time. Taking his watch, he let a full minute pass before removing the thermometer from the Mother's mouth. Barindra Kurnar had been right. The thermometer read 106 degrees! He felt the ice-bag with his fingers; it was fairly full. Then from his leather case he withdrew his greatest weapon — the stethoscope, fixed it to his ears and leaned forward. How he had proceeded at that point in his examination he never told me, and I never felt like asking him. Thus it remains anybody's guess and will remain so for ever. I will hazard none. Let that which neither he nor the Mother ever told remain unknown for ever.

Next, my grandfather took a writing pad from Dutta on which he wrote the details of his findings — details that would completely change Sri Aurobindo's course of occult working.

First he wrote the Mother's name at the top left and at top right the date. Just below it, he wrote: "Fever 106 degrees by my thermometer." And below that, a startling entry: "The heart is all right. It is healthy and normal and is working perfectly well." If the above statement was startling, what he wrote next would have to be called daring and astounding: "The real cause of the malady does not lie in the chest region, but below the knee of the left leg. It is an acute form of gout. I have never seen such severe swelling before." And beneath this, he wrote the time and signed his name: "Upendra Nath Banerjee."

When my grandfather went back to the verandah Sri Aurobindo was still standing exactly where he had left Him. The doctor was a bit surprised. For often, during his diagnosis, he had felt that Sri Aurobindo was standing behind him. My grandfather handed his report to Sri Aurobindo.

Once I asked my grandfather why he hadn't suggested any treatment below his diagnosis, as is the usual practice with doctors. He told me, "I had full faith in Sri Aurobindo's powers. I knew He would cure Her."

The room assigned to my grandfather was in the corner house that is part of the embroidery department building; it is opposite our present Post Office. A few minutes after his entrance into the room, there was a gentle tap on the door. It was Dutta. A Dutta almost completely hidden behind a host of towels, linen, dhotis, punjabis, bags — everything that this empty-handed doctor needed for survival, indeed for decent living. If I am permitted to guess, I would say that these things were brought under the Mother's instruction, if not under Her own inspection. For they were so precise in detail that I do not see how it could be otherwise. Not only was there a bedsheet and a pillow cover with which Dutta made the bed ready, and a white linen cloth that she spread neatly on the table, but other small items such as a toothpick and a little container with tooth-powder! In my opinion the Mother must have noticed how impeccable the doctor was in his work and, as his host, She was not to be outdone. Dutta then left; but in a short while she was back, this time as a

stewardess with a simple but class cuisine. Did not the Mother supervise these arrangements? I refuse to believe She did not, bed-ridden though She was.

It is not given to any man, however bright he may be, to measure the personality of Sri Aurobindo. But still we can form some idea from the following account of what tremendous occult powers he had command of and with what lightning speed he could use them.

Dutta left my grandfather's room with the bowls, plates and spoons. (She would not let him wash them, murmuring such apologies as, "No, no, no, please — please let me do it.") Grandfather went to bed to take some rest, though he did not expect to get any sleep. I suppose no doctor does when his patient's condition is critical. But this time, the goddess of sleep had other notions, and he dozed off.

Suddenly he was jarred awake by shouts of joy and exuberance. The shouts were so sudden and loud that for a second or two he lost his bearings. He thought he was in Mirzapur. But, no, it was Barindra Kumar who was shouting. He was accompanied by A. B. Purani, a young and extremely energetic-looking man. My grandfather dashed to the window. On seeing him, Barin threw up his hands in the air as would a boy at a cricket match rooting for LBW! And Purani was full of smiles. Barindra Kumar shouted, "Doctor Babu, Mother's fever has gone down to 104 degrees. Just now Dutta reported it to us. It's fantastic, fantastic!"

Sri Aurobindo had done it. The gloom of the morning had passed and the air, which just an hour ago had been thick with doubt, was now gay. Everyone was jubilant. And though he had never told me so, I am sure my grandfather's heart was also vibrant with joy: the tip of the balance had tilted. Did some gods shower flowers from heaven and the devil claw his own cheeks? I can't say.

Late that afternoon, someone told my grandfather that Sri Aurobindo wanted to see him. This time when he entered the Ashram, the atmosphere was markedly different. The tension of the morning no longer existed and the people sitting on those chairs were relaxed and smiling. The doctor also noted another change in their demeanour: the moment he entered, everyone stood up. But this show of respect did not make him proud, for his psychological make-up was of another dimension. This mark of respect simply redoubled his assurance that the Mother was getting better. Once again he went up by the staircase and once again was surprised to find Sri Aurobindo standing at the same place in the same way. Sri Aurobindo smiled and then spoke a sentence that speaks volumes about the humility of the Great. He said: "Upen, your patient seems to be doing well. I think you have done it."

My grandfather, of course, didn't fall for that line. He knew too well who was whose patient and who was whose doctor. He remained silent.

Dutta too was standing there, at the same place as in the morning. She led him to the Mother's chamber. The Mother was lying just as in the morning. At the very sight of Her, my grandfather knew that She was out of danger. Her face was less flushed, Her foot less dark; and the overall atmosphere was lighter. After a check-

up, he wrote:

“Fever 103 degrees.

“The swelling has lessened, the foot is much shrunken. There is a marked improvement in the blood circulation.

“The ice-bag can be removed.”

I have rarely seen my grandfather exuberant — his was a quiet disposition. With his venerable appearance, with his long silver hair and his neatly combed beard reaching down to the big bulge of his heavily built body, he often reminded me of the fabulous Wise Men of the East; but the like of him I have never seen before or since. From such a person, exuberance is never expected. But in this case, there was an exception, an exception that, in my presence at least, he made once and once only — it was when he told me how he found the Mother the next morning. As he described the scene, how loudly he laughed, like a boy! His whole body shook, his abdomen bobbed up and down, and the part of his cheeks that were visible above his beard formed into round little dimples. Well, all this makes me say that he was not just exuberant, but over-exuberant.

Grandfather spoke in Bengali, and it is always a tricky job to translate the wonderful eloquence of one language into another, but I will try my best.

“O my boy, my boy!” he exclaimed, “when I entered the room the next morning She was sitting bolt upright on Her bed. Yes, yes — bolt upright! And before I could believe my eyes, She said, ‘Come in, doctor.’ And as She looked at me, She was smiling too. Ho! The illness and the fever and the devil and his brood, all, all had flown quite out of the room. Ho — yes! She was absolutely all right !”

As he spoke to me, my grand-dad was a boy full of mirth and laughter.

From that day he came to be known as Doctor Babu, and ever afterwards the Ashramites knew him as their beloved Doctor Babu. Soon he had to leave, but within six months or so he was back, this time accompanied by his elder sister — another dynamic personality — and stayed on through almost the whole of 1926.

After Sri Aurobindo withdrew on the 24th of November that year, he went back to Mirzapur; but he returned to the Ashram off and on, whenever he could, and always he was known to Sri Aurobindo as “the Mother’s doctor” and referred to by the Mother as “my doctor”. And then later, many years later, when my brother and I came to the Ashram and called him *Dadu*, the Bengali word for grandfather, he was known to my generation as *Dadu*, one of the most honoured and loved persons to live in the Ashram.

Many are the adventures he had with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and the sadhaks of the Ashram, both as a doctor and as a sadhak, the account of which would make yet another chapter of the unrecorded history of our Ashram, but none, I should say, as momentous as the one told above.

Many questions of our life remain unanswered, many problems remain unsolved. The problem of death, for instance, and the problem of suffering are a

mystery to us. We can at most hazard guesses or answer them philosophically or quote our Gurus, but to our own experience they remain unanswered, and will remain so for a long time to come. If this is true, then is it not even more true that the mysteries of the spiritual life are ten times more mysterious and ten times more insoluble? Why, in this case, did so many doctors fail to diagnose the cause of the Mother's fever? Why did even Sri Aurobindo fail to cure Her? Why, for an acute form of gout, did the Mother feel pain in Her chest and none in Her leg? And why out of a hundred and one doctors, did my grandfather have to travel thousands of kilometres to cure Her? And then, how did Sri Aurobindo work to cure the Mother? How was He able to cure Her so completely in just one day? Who can probe these problems and give us the last word?

As I have said, we can only hazard guesses — nothing more. Could it be that the Devil was waging a last-ditch battle and successfully misleading the doctors? Could it be that the Devil knew that the only way to pull Sri Aurobindo down was to remove the Divine Mother? Could it be that the other doctors were misled just so that the Mother's own child could arrive? Did all this happen only so that She might hear from Her son that mysterious voice of the deep: "Wake up, mother, wake up, I have come. Never shall I leave thee" — words that only a son knows how to speak and only a mother knows how to understand?

Once again I see my grandfather as he spoke to me that day. He is seated on a big, sparkingly white divan, surrounded by a rarefied air, the lower part of his body clad in a shining dhoti, his upper part bare and glowing with an ethereal luminosity. I see the same smiling face, the same silver beard, the same silver hair, the same dignity and poise — and I say to him: "*Dadu*, it is for you that the Mother fell ill and survived and it is because of you that we could all come here."

But I see him shaking his head gently from side to side, and saying: "Not at all, not at all. I was only an instrument . . . only an instrument."

TARUN BANERJEE

(*Mother India*, January 1985 & February 1985)

THE DIVINE MANDATE

Going down memory lane, I still recollect the beatific vision of the Mother seated on her regal chair in the present meditation hall in the Ashram main building, giving darshan to one and all. This was during the late fifties and the sixties of the last century. All the devotees stood in a queue patiently awaiting the face-to-face tryst with the Divine. The atmosphere was celestial and blissful. The Mother developed a spiritual rapport with all her visitors in course of the first meeting itself. Her spiritual vision pierced through each human being and peered into the corridors of each one's soul. She took cognisance of the whole 'being' wrapped outwardly by the body. With infinite compassion she perceived the trials and tribulations of each person and absorbed their difficulties without their knowing. Our "Suffering was lost in her immortal smile." She established a personal one-to-one relationship with each devotee. Then onwards, she took the responsibility of the spiritual journey of each devotee. My unpretentious grandma never missed these darshans unless she was extremely unwell. An exclusive connection between her and the Mother crystallised, as did the bonding between the Mother and each devotee who came into proximity with her.

The Mother used to give darshan from the balcony on rue Saint Gilles at 6 a.m. every day. Later, on Darshan days, it would be from the balcony opposite the Ashram dispensary on rue François Martin. The devout thronged the thoroughfare well in time to behold her and bask in her consciousness during those precious minutes. The Mother showered her grace and compassionate gaze on the seekers aspiring for her benediction. Concurrently with her gracious look, she assimilated the characteristics of each disciple. Instantaneously she registered their psyche in her 'Divine Computer' for monitoring their progress and evolution. During these darshans each individual felt that the Mother was looking directly at him or her at some point or the other. This visual interaction gave infinite solace to everyone assembled there. Each one sensed the development of a personal and individual bonding with her. They could discern that their soul's needs were addressed, and they were secure under her exclusive care. We could construe this as the first step towards the spiritual unfolding of one's consciousness. My simple grandma never missed these darshans as far as possible. The Mother established a sublime connection with my grandma too, taking her under her protection, as she did with all her children.

In the early years, when the Mother was with us in her physical form, we looked upon her as our own mother. We have seen her playing tennis, laying the foundation stone of the sugar factory, teaching children, talking to people, smiling at them, listening to them and being involved in day-to-day chores of administration with incredible grace and elegance. And during this phase, without our realising it,

she became familiar with every individual soul around her. Not that she knew closely only the people physically near her. She keenly followed the life journeys of one and all; from the simple commoner to the highest of dignitaries who came in touch with her. This affinity developed in the most mystical manner as described in the two preceding paras. My grandma was a humble beneficiary of this blessed kinship, grace, benevolence and compassion of the Supreme Mother. The affiliation was profound and infinite. For the benefit of the Mother's children, I wish to narrate the sequence of events that corroborated this phenomenon, which culminated in a blissful finale.

This event relates to the early sixties. My grandma, a devotee of the Mother, fell ill. Doctor Nripendra diagnosed her as having leukaemia (blood cancer). He visited her periodically, and one evening when her condition finally deteriorated, he declared that it was time for her to leave the terrestrial world. He did not give her much time and briefed the family members accordingly. We immediately informed my cousin, Laljibhai Hindocha, about grandma's critical condition. He always held grandma in high esteem. Blessed with direct access to the Mother and without wasting any time, he hurried towards the Ashram to meet the Mother. He apprised her of the developments and appealed for her blessings. Giving him a knowing look, the Mother looked deeply into his eyes and gently confided in him, "I am working on her. Please come and meet me tomorrow morning." So saying, Maa went into a trance. Perplexed but thoughtful, Laljibhai withdrew. The next day, at the earliest, he left to meet the Mother. Maa welcomed him warmly, placed a handful of flowers in his hands and asked Laljibhai to place them on my grandma's chest. Clutching the sacred flowers in his hands, he left immediately to see my grandma who had survived the night. Addressing my grandma as Nanima, Laljibhai asked her if she recognised him. Opening her eyes slowly, my grandma looked at him with ageless innocence and said, "Laljibhai, you have come? I was waiting for you." Trembling with emotions and tears welling in his eyes, Laljibhai informed grandma that Maa had sent her blessings and flowers. Grandma gave a feeble smile and nodded. Placing the flowers on grandma's chest as per the Mother's directions, Laljibhai cradled her frail hand in his. Within a few minutes grandma departed with a blissful smile on her face. Grandma's unuttered need was fulfilled. The personal connectivity established by the Mother with my grandma manifested in all its glory! The divinely ordained emotional farewell that followed was graceful, tranquil and dignified. I realised that when you run alone it's called race; but when God runs with you, it's called Grace!

Grandma was fortunate and privileged to be escorted to the next world by the Mother. More than that, the event showed that Maa treated all her children equally and monitored their progress. Today, tears flow down my cheeks when I recall how mystic spiritual forces vetoed scientific reasoning. The Sweet Mother, the eternal optimist, delayed Yamraj (the God of Death) by over 12 hours. How she made him wait for the Divine Intervention is beyond the realm of reasoning. This overwhelming

nostalgic reminiscence in the mind's corridors always brings in me a spontaneous overflow of gratitude to the Divine. Laljibhai's role in my grandma's 'nirvanic' send-off cannot be overestimated.

It is said that time effaces memory. But memories associated with the Divine always linger both in our conscious and subconscious mind to give peace. This was a cosmic script composed by the Divine.

Notwithstanding that this episode relates to the period of the Mother's physical presence, the truth remains that her grace continues to flow even today because of her omnipresent companionship. Even after the Mother left her body, she continues to shower her grace and benefaction on one and all. Even today a seeker aspiring for her grace and love gets a subtle sign of her presence in some form or the other. The manifestations leave an indelible mark on the seeker's psyche, assuring him that the Unmanifest Presence has enveloped him in her arms, establishing a one-to-one relationship. Each one of us becomes a unique repository of her consciousness. Her ways are unique and unfathomable. Trying to reason out her actions would be a futile exercise and best left to her discretion.

She alone knows what is good for us.

There is no question of questioning the Divine Mandate.

If it is accepted unconditionally it is bound to usher into our life perpetual bliss and well-being.

LALIT N. MODI

Lalit Modi passed away in October. He had sent us this article in September. — Ed.

Never forget that you are not alone. The Divine is with you helping and guiding you. He is the companion who never fails, the friend whose love comforts and strengthens. Have faith and He will do everything for you.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – II, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 14, p. 9)

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

(Continued from the issue of December 2020)

1. KINDNESS AND COMPASSION

(Part 14)

This is the concluding part in the section ‘Kindness and Compassion’. Earlier we had seen how many of Sri Aurobindo’s family members, friends, associates, acquaintances, students and revolutionary comrades had observed his gentle, kind and generous nature. Even when participating in the turbulent field of politics, a vocation full of duplicity and crookedness, Sri Aurobindo’s dignified presence was palpable. Furthermore he was the ultimate idealist who never compromised with his principles and besides made many untold sacrifices for the country. In addition we have seen that he was not only sensitive in discerning the nobility and goodness in others — including the common man — but also empathetic to the sufferings of the downtrodden and the ill-fated.

Indeed, Sri Aurobindo’s compassionate and selfless nature was prominent and consistent right through his political days. In February 1908, he wrote in the *Bande Mataram*:

. . . spiritual freedom can never be the lot of many in a land of slaves. A few may follow the path of the Yogin and rise above their surroundings, but the mass of men cannot ever take the first step towards spiritual salvation. We do not believe that the path of salvation lies in selfishness. If the mass of men around us is miserable, fallen, degraded, how can the seeker after God be indifferent to the condition of his brothers? Compassion to all creatures is the condition of sainthood, and the perfect Yogin is he who is *sarvabhutahite ratah*, whose mind is full of the will to do good to all creatures. When a man shuts his heart to the cries of sufferings around him, when he is content that his fellow-men should be sorrowful, oppressed, sacrificed to the greed of others, he is making his own way to salvation full of difficulties and stumbling-blocks. He is forgetting that God is not only in himself but in all these millions.¹

1. CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 875-76.

In the first part of this series we had said that Sri Aurobindo's dignified conduct could serve as a model for any aspirant, for has not Sri Aurobindo written, "Adore and what you adore attempt to be."² In concluding this section let us explore more deeply how an aspirant can reach this goal.

A gentleman's nature or temperament is wholly or at least predominantly made up of the sattwic guna. Sri Aurobindo encouraged good conduct and has mentioned that morality and the sattwic stage are a necessary step to spirituality. In a discussion with his disciples he said:

Of course, all can't go beyond morality. So their theory is true in their own field. It is a mental rule and so long as one cannot come in contact with the dynamic Divine source of action in himself, one has to be guided by some law of conduct — otherwise one might take up the attitude: "There is no virtue and no sin, so let us sin merrily."

What Krishna says in the Gita: *sarvadharmān parityajya* — abandoning all laws of conduct, is said at the end of the Gita and not in the beginning. And then that is not alone; there is also *māmekam sharanam vraja* — take refuge in Me alone. But before one finds within oneself the guidance of the dynamic Divine, one has to have some rule to guide himself. Most people have to pass through the Sattwic stage and the moral rule is true so far as these people are concerned. It is only a very few that can start above it.³

Sri Aurobindo has written:

We cannot get beyond the three gunas, if we do not first develop within ourselves the rule of the highest guna, sattwa.⁴

Sri Aurobindo himself revealed to a disciple that he had a sattwic temperament during his younger days. The disciple had actually asked Sri Aurobindo: "People of sattwic temperament in the ordinary life behave practically in the same manner as sadhaks who realise spiritual peace as a result of Yoga. Can it be said that in sattwic people the peace descends but in a hidden manner? Or is it due to their past lives?" He replied:

Of course they have gained their power to live in the mind by a past evolution. But the spiritual peace is something other and infinitely more than the mental peace and its results are different, not merely clear thinking or some control or

2. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 527.

3. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, pp. 647-48.

4. CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 280.

balance or a sattvic state. But its greater results can only be fully and permanently manifest when it lasts long enough in the system or when one feels spread out in it above the head and on every side stretching towards infinity as well as penetrated by it down to the very cells. Then it carries with it the deep and vast and solid tranquillity that nothing can shake — even if on the surface there is storm and battle. I was myself of the sattvic type you describe in my youth, but when the peace from above came down, that was quite different. *Sattvaguna* disappeared into *nirguna* and negative *nirguna* into positive *traiguṇyātīta*.⁵

In a letter Sri Aurobindo writes:

The sattvic nature has always been held to be the most apt and ready for the spiritual life, while the rajasic nature is encumbered by its desires and passions. At the same time, spirituality is something above the dualities, and what is most needed for it is a true upward aspiration. This may come to the rajasic man as well as to the sattvic.⁶

And to another disciple he writes:

It is possible for anyone to attain to a complete and living faith in the Divine if he has the sincere will to do so, even though he may not be sattvic in his nature; but, if he is sattvic, it will be easier for him — he will not be hampered by doubts and revolts such as afflict the rajasic man on his way.⁷

It is interesting to note what Sri Aurobindo has said about the definitive sattvic man, Rama, and his role as an Avatar:

It was not at all Rama's business to establish the spiritual stage of that evolution — so he did not at all concern himself with that. His business was to destroy Ravana and to establish the Ramarajya — in other words, to fix for the future the possibility of an order proper to the sattvic civilised human being who governs his life by the reason, the finer emotions, morality or at least moral ideals, such as truth, obedience, cooperation and harmony, the sense of honour, the sense of domestic and public order, to establish this in a world still occupied by anarchic forces, the Animal Mind and the powers of the vital Ego making its own satisfaction the rule of life, in other words, the Vanara and the Rakshasa.

5. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 45.

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

7. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

This is the meaning of Rama and his life-work . . . It was his business to be not necessarily a perfect, but a largely representative sattwic Man . . .⁸

In the *Essays on the Gita*, Sri Aurobindo writes:

. . . in the action of the modes itself there must be some means, some leverage, some *point d'appui*, by which we can effect this transformation. The Gita finds it in the full development of the sattwic guna till that in its potent expansion reaches a point at which it can go beyond itself and disappear into its source. The reason is evident, because sattwa is a power of light and happiness, a force that makes for calm and knowledge, and at its highest point it can arrive at a certain reflection, almost a mental identity with the spiritual light and bliss from which it derives. The other two gunas cannot get this transformation, rajas into the divine kinetic will or tamas into the divine repose and calm, without the intervention of the sattwic power in Nature. The sattwic quality is a first mediator between the higher and the lower nature.⁹

Sri Aurobindo continues:

To develop sattwa till it becomes full of spiritual light and calm and happiness is the first condition of this preparatory discipline of the nature.

That, we shall find, is the whole intention of the remaining chapters of the Gita. But first it prefaces the consideration of this enlightening movement by a distinction between two kinds of being, the Deva and the Asura; for the Deva is capable of a high self-transforming sattwic action, the Asura incapable. We must see what is the object of this preface and the precise bearing of this distinction. The general nature of all human beings is the same, it is a mixture of the three gunas; it would seem then that in all there must be the capacity to develop and strengthen the sattwic element and turn it upward towards the heights of the divine transformation. That our ordinary turn is actually towards making our reason and will the servants of our rajasic or tamasic egoism . . . But we actually see that men, at least men above a certain level, fall very largely into two classes, those who have a dominant force of sattwic nature turned towards knowledge, self-control, beneficence, perfection and those who have a dominant force of rajasic nature turned towards egoistic greatness, satisfaction of desire, the indulgence of their own strong will and personality which they seek to impose on the world, not for the service of man or God, but for their own pride, glory and pleasure. These are the human representatives

8. *Ibid.*, Vol. 28, p. 491.

9. *Ibid.*, Vol. 19, pp. 468-69.

of the Devas and Danavas or Asuras, the Gods and the Titans. This distinction is a very ancient one in Indian religious symbolism.¹⁰

Sri Aurobindo further writes:

On one side there can be a sublimation of the sattvic quality, the culmination or manifestation of the unborn Deva, on the other a sublimation of the rajasic turn of the soul in nature, the entire birth of the Asura. The one leads towards that movement of liberation on which the Gita is about to lay stress; it makes possible a high self-exceeding of the sattwa quality and a transformation into the likeness of the divine being, *vimokṣāya*. The other leads away from that universal potentiality and precipitates towards an exaggeration of our bondage to the ego. This is the point of the distinction.

The Deva nature is distinguished by an acme of the sattvic habits and qualities; self-control, sacrifice, the religious habit, cleanness and purity, candour and straightforwardness, truth, calm and self-denial, compassion to all beings, modesty, gentleness, forgivingness, patience, steadfastness, a deep sweet and serious freedom from all restlessness, levity and inconstancy are its native attributes.¹¹

Let us now briefly touch upon the subject of behaviour that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo had expected from us. Once, some teachers had expressed to the Mother their concern over lack of discipline, good manners and right behaviour of a few students. She replied:

I insist on the necessity of having good manners.¹²

She has also said:

We are expected to give to the world an example of better life but surely *not* of misbehaviour.¹³

And a notice written by Sri Aurobindo, put on the Ashram notice-board, indicated that he did not approve of rude behaviour. The notice read:

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 469-70.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 471.

12. *CWM*, Vol. 12, 2nd Ed., p. 154.

13. *Ibid.*, Vol. 13, 2nd Ed., p. 115.

There have been several instances recently in which members of the Asram have been rude and overbearing in their behaviour to the French police when they come to the Asram in connection with the registration of new arrivals. There can be no possible excuse for this kind of conduct, especially as the police authorities have agreed to our own proposals in the matter and we have undertaken to help them with all necessary information. Sri Aurobindo has already given a warning against making trouble for the Asram with the authorities; it ought not to be necessary to repeat it.

Especial care must be taken during these days when many are arriving from outside. If the police come for information, they must not be sent rudely away; they should be asked to wait and information must immediately be given to Purani who will deal with the matter.¹⁴

And in a prayer given to a sadhak, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

May I henceforth with a firm determination cast away from me my faults and defects and may I do it with energy and perseverance till I succeed entirely. May I get rid of all arrogance, quarrelsomeness, self-esteem and vanity, disobedience and revolt against the Mother, hatred and rancour against others, violence of speech and conduct, falsehood, self-assertion and demand, discontent and grumbling. May I be friendly to all and without malice against anyone. May I become a true child of the Mother.¹⁵

In 1954, the Mother released a statement to the employees of the Ashram, which concluded with:

It goes without saying that for admission to live in this ideal place the essential conditions that need to be fulfilled are good character, good conduct, honest, regular and efficient work and a general goodwill.¹⁶

And in an announcement dated 9th May 1957, the Mother stressed the importance of being genuinely polite, gentle and courteous:

The Mother wants that the people responsible for receiving the visitors should always be very polite and gentle in their behaviour towards them. High and low, young and old, whether they are well-dressed or ill-clad, all should always be received properly with benevolence and good behaviour. It is not necessary

14. CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 534-35.

15. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 843.

16. CWM, Vol. 13, 2nd Ed., p. 176.

that the better dressed people may be more fit for being received well in this Ashram. It should not be that we give more care to the people with a motor car than to an ordinary man looking like a beggar. We must never forget that they are as much human as we are and we have no right to think that we are at the top of the scale.

And our politeness should not be merely an outer form, stiff politeness, so to say. It must be something coming from within. Whatever may be the difficulties and whatever may be the circumstances — Mother fully knows even to the minutest detail the circumstances, when we lose our temper and get irritated in our work, and knowing that fully well she says — whatever may be the circumstances, rudeness or curt behaviour is never permissible.

There are difficulties in our way, but Mother says that as a rule our difficulties and our troubles are always such that we do have the capacity of overcoming them. If we can remain at our best we shall always be able to tackle the situation without losing control. Remember, each time we lose control of ourselves, each time we get angry or we have to use the outer means of keeping discipline, it means that at that moment we have fallen low and we could not rise up to the situation. In everything, in every way, it boils down to one rule — always endeavour to make progress, try to be your true self. Even if you have not been able to do it today you must be able to do it tomorrow. But the full effect must be there. Never forget in your action that you are representing the Ashram. People will judge the Ashram from your behaviour. Even if you have to say No, even if you have to reject somebody's request, you can do it with all politeness and courtesy. Try to help each one. Even if others are rude to you, it is not a reason for you to do likewise. If you behave in the same way as the outsiders do, then what is the fun of your being here.¹⁷

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 and will protect him from many base and perverse movements.¹⁸

Indeed, the Mother has emphasised abstinence from crudity in speech, conduct and deeds:

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 167-68.

18. *Ibid.*, Vol. 12, 2nd Ed., p. 21.

True strength and protection come from the Divine Presence in the heart.

If you want to keep this Presence constantly in you, avoid carefully all vulgarity in speech, behaviour and acts.¹⁹

As regards the rules of speech, Sri Aurobindo has lucidly written:

The psychic self-control that is desirable in these surroundings and in the midst of discussion would mean among other things:

(1) Not to allow the impulse of speech to assert itself too much or say anything without reflection, but to speak always with a conscious control and only what is necessary and helpful.

(2) To avoid all debate, dispute or too animated discussion and simply say what has to be said and leave it there. There should also be no insistence that you are right and the others wrong, but what is said should only be thrown in as a contribution to the consideration of the truth of the matter. I notice that what you report *X* as having said in this discussion had its truth and what you said was also true, so that really there should have been no dispute.

(3) To keep the tone of speech and the wording very quiet and calm and uninsistent.

(4) Not to mind at all if others are heated and dispute, but remain quiet and undisturbed and yourself speak only what can help things to be smooth again.

(5) If there is gossip about others and harsh criticism (especially about sadhaks), not to join — for these things are helpful in no way and only lower the consciousness from its higher level.

(6) To avoid all that would hurt or wound others.²⁰

Sri Aurobindo was asked by one of his attendants on the subject of conduct, the principles that should be followed in our behaviour whilst dealing with others. He replied:

If we have the right attitude other things come by themselves. But the right attitude is itself secondary. What is important is the inner state. Spiritual and ethical principles are quite different, for everything depends on whether it is done for the sake of the Spirit or for ethical reasons. One may observe mental control in his dealings, but his inner state may be quite different. For example, he may not show anger, but within he may be ruffled. In the true inner control the inner peace is not disturbed and goodwill towards others is retained. It is

19. *Ibid.*, Vol. 14, 2nd Ed., p. 206.

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

the psychic control that is required and when that is there the right attitude follows in one's external behaviour. Conduct must flow from within outwards and the more one opens to the psychic influence, the more it gains over the outer nature. Mental control may or may not lead to the psychic control. In people of a sattwic type it may be the first step towards it.²¹

When further questioned about the method to get psychic control, Sri Aurobindo replied:

By constant remembrance, consecration of oneself to the Divine, rejection of all that stands in the way of the psychic influence. Generally it is the vital being that stands in the way with its desires and demands. But once the psychic opens, it shows at every step what is to be done.²²

The Mother has said:

And this psychic being gives to man true love, charity, compassion, a deep kindness, which compensate for all his external defects.²³

For a harmonious living sans conflict or disturbance, Sri Aurobindo has written:

It is true that anger and strife are in the nature of the human vital and do not go easily; but what is important is to have the will to change and the clear perception that these things must go. If that will and perception are there, then in the end they will go. The most important help to it is, here also, for the psychic being to grow within — for that brings a certain kindness, patience, charity towards all and one no longer regards everything from the point of view of one's own ego and its pain or pleasure, likings and dislikings. The second help is the growth of the inner peace which outward things cannot trouble. With the peace comes a calm wideness in which one perceives all as one self, all beings as the children of the Mother and the Mother dwelling in oneself and in all. It is that towards which your sadhana will move, for these are the things which come with the growth of the psychic and spiritual consciousness. Then these troubled reactions to outward things will no longer come.²⁴

21. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, pp. 46-47.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

23. *CWM*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, p. 360.

24. *CWSA*, Vol. 31, p. 275.

Since the psychic change also expresses itself outwardly in our behaviour and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have repeatedly stressed the necessity and importance of finding our psychic being, we are reproducing a few extracts from their writings on how to find the psychic being or on how to bring it forward:

One can concentrate in any of the three centres which is easiest to the sadhak or gives most result. The power of the concentration in the heart-centre is to open that centre and by the power of aspiration, love, bhakti, surrender remove the veil which covers and conceals the soul and bring forward the soul or psychic being to govern the mind, life and body and turn and open them all — fully — to the Divine, removing all that is opposed to that turning and opening.

This is what is called in this yoga the psychic transformation. . . .²⁵

*

The concentration in the heart and the concentration in the head can both be used — each has its own result. The first opens up the psychic being and brings bhakti, love and union with the Mother, her presence within the heart and the action of her Force in the nature.²⁶

*

The psychic being is in the heart centre in the middle of the chest (not in the physical heart, for all the centres are in the middle of the body), but it is deep behind. When one is going away from the vital into the psychic, it is felt as if one is going deep deep down till one reaches that central place of the psychic. The surface of the heart centre is the place of the emotional being; from there one goes deep to find the psychic. The more one goes, the more intense becomes the psychic happiness which you describe.²⁷

*

The concentration in the heart is what brings about the opening of the psychic . . .²⁸

*

25. *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, p. 307.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 326.

27. *Ibid.*, Vol. 30, p. 341.

28. *Ibid.*, Vol. 29, p. 310.

For the opening of the psychic being, concentration on the Mother and self-offering to her are the direct way. The growth of Bhakti which you feel is the first sign of the psychic development. A sense of the Mother's presence or force or the remembrance of her supporting and strengthening you is the next sign.²⁹

*

The direct opening of the psychic centre is easy only when the ego-centricity is greatly diminished and also if there is a strong bhakti for the Mother. A spiritual humility and sense of submission and dependence is necessary.³⁰

*

There is no approved method of bringing forward the psychic being. It depends on the aspiration, the growth of faith and devotion, the diminution of the hold of the mental and vital ego and their movements . . .³¹

*

Aspiration constant and sincere and the will to turn to the Divine alone are the best means of bringing forward the psychic being.³²

*

You are here to contact your soul, and that is why you live. Aspire persistently and try to silence your mind. The aspiration must come from the heart.³³

*

If there is the will to surrender in the central being, then the psychic can come forward.³⁴

*

29. *Ibid.*, Vol. 30, p. 321.

30. *Ibid.*, Vol. 32, p. 163.

31. *Ibid.*, Vol. 30, p. 360.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *CWM*, Vol. 14, 2nd Ed., p. 6.

34. *CWSA*, Vol. 30, p. 361.

Go within, plunge inside and there you will get the contact of your psychic being.³⁵

*

To become conscious of the psychic being, one must want to do so, make one's mind as silent as possible, and enter deep into the heart of one's being, beyond sensations and thoughts. One must form the habit of silent concentration and descent into the depths of one's being.³⁶

*

What is the best method to find the Divine who is in each of us and in all things?

Aspiration.

Silence.

Concentration in the solar plexus³⁷ region.³⁸

*

... I hope that within a few days you will see my whole nature engrossed only in feeling, thinking, acting round the word "Mother".

That would of itself be the psychic stae.³⁹

Having explored some facets of his life as a young man in Baroda and Bengal we can see that Sri Aurobindo was not only a gentleman but also an idealist. Further, Sri Aurobindo's life of preparation in Baroda led to his love for humanity getting universalised. An aphorism of his, written about four years after he left Bengal reads:

To feel & love the God of beauty and good in the ugly and the evil, and still yearn in utter love to heal it of its ugliness and its evil, this is real virtue and morality.⁴⁰

35. Huta, *Mother You Said So*, p. 113.

36. *CWM*, Vol. 16, 2nd Ed., p. 399.

37. The Mother is probably referring to the heart region.

38. *CWM*, Vol. 14, 2nd Ed., p. 41.

39. *CWSA*, Vol. 32, p. 469.

40. *Ibid.*, Vol. 12, p. 428.

When the Mother was asked about this aphorism: “How can one help to cure the evil and the ugliness that one sees everywhere? Through love? What is the power of love? How can an individual phenomenon of consciousness act on the rest of mankind?” She replied:

How can one help to cure evil and ugliness? . . . One may say that there is a kind of hierarchy of collaboration or action: there is a negative help and a positive help.

To begin with, there is a way that might be called negative, the way provided by Buddhism and kindred religions: not to see. First of all, to be in such a state of purity and beauty that you do not perceive ugliness and evil — it is like something that does not touch you because it does not exist in you.

That is the perfection of the negative method. It is quite elementary: never to notice evil, never to speak of the evil in others, not to perpetuate these vibrations by observation, by criticism, by insistence on what is bad. That is what the Buddha taught: each time you speak of an evil, you help to spread it.

This barely touches the problem.

Yet it should be a very general rule. But people who criticise have an answer for that; they say, “If you do not see the evil, you will never be able to cure it. If you leave someone in his ugliness, he will never get out of it.” This is not true, but that is how they justify their behaviour. So in this aphorism Sri Aurobindo forestalls these objections: it is not because of ignorance or unconsciousness or indifference that you do not see the evil — you are quite capable of seeing it, even of feeling it, but you refuse to help to spread it by giving it the force of your attention and the support of your consciousness. And for that you must yourself be above this perception and feeling; you must be able to see the evil or the ugliness without suffering from it, without being shocked or disturbed by it. You see it from a height where these things do not exist, but you have the conscious perception of it, you are not affected by it, you are free. This is the first step.

The second step is to be *positively* conscious of the supreme Good and supreme Beauty behind all things, which sustains all things and enables them to exist. When you see Him, you are able to perceive Him behind this mask and this distortion; even this ugliness, this wickedness, this evil is a disguise of Something which is essentially beautiful or good, luminous, pure.

Then comes the *true* collaboration, for when you have this vision, this perception, when you live in this consciousness, it also gives you the power to *draw* That down into the manifestation, to the earth, and to bring It into contact with what now distorts and disguises, so that little by little this distortion and this disguise are transformed by the influence of the Truth that is behind.

Here we are at the very summit of the scale of collaboration.

In this way it is not necessary to introduce the principle of love into the explanation. But if you want to know or understand the nature of the Force or the Power that enables or brings about this transformation — particularly where evil is concerned, but also with ugliness to a certain extent — you see that love is obviously the most potent and integral of all powers — integral in the sense that it applies in all cases. It is even more powerful than the power of purification which dissolves all bad will and which is, as it were, the master of the adverse forces, but which has not the direct power of transformation. The power of purification first dissolves in order to allow the transformation afterwards. It destroys one form in order to be able to create a better one, whereas love need not dissolve in order to transform; it possesses the direct power of transformation. Love is like a flame that changes what is hard into something malleable and even sublimates this malleable thing into a kind of purified vapour — it does not destroy, it transforms.⁴¹

At Baroda Sri Aurobindo embarked on the path of Yoga in 1904, not with the purpose of personal salvation but to free his motherland from foreign rule. Later Sri Aurobindo's love and compassion would widen to embrace not only his beloved countrymen but the entire world. As early as 1909 or perhaps even earlier Sri Aurobindo had foreseen revolutionary changes for mankind. He gave an interview to the Tamil weekly journal *India*, edited by the great Tamil poet Subramania Bharati. We reproduce an extract, published in its issue of September 18, 1909:

Aravinda continued to answer with great grace the several questions put to him by our correspondent. Finally our correspondent started speaking about the present confused state of India. When he asked Aravinda some questions in this regard, he gave this Divine answer:

“There will be an upheaval. There are signs to indicate its coming. The year 1906 completes 5000 years of Kaliyuga, and a new age has begun with the year 1907. The upheaval will have developed well enough to be visible to all. It will be complete in a further period of four to five years.”

Correspondent: “What kind of upheaval is it?”

Aravinda: “The upheaval will be one of revolutionary change, a great step; the low will be raised and the high brought down. There will be change, change,

41. *CWM*, Vol. 10, 2nd Ed., pp. 71-72.

everywhere — change in Government, change in our people; new resolves, new thoughts, new ways for all actions.”⁴²

Curiously, about his childhood Sri Aurobindo has revealed:

At the age of eleven Sri Aurobindo had already received strongly the impression that a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary changes was coming in the world and he himself was destined to play a part in it. . . .⁴³

In his Bengali essay, ‘The Ideal of Forgiveness’ — published in the *Dharma* in February 1910 — Sri Aurobindo not only brought to light the unparalleled nobility of Rishi Vashistha but in his conclusion revealed:

Such seers and saints once lived in India. Such was their ideal of forgiveness. Such power one could gain by askesis as would hold the Earth in space. Rishis are taking birth in India whose lustre will dim the radiance of the seers of the past, who will bring to India a glory greater than she has ever known before.⁴⁴

And later when a disciple expressed his utter despair about the world conditions:

Q: I am disconcerted at what is happening in the world. Everywhere misery is rampant, people are losing faith in everything and even the intellectuals like Tagore, Russell and Rolland are clamouring for an end of the age. How is it that things should be marching headlong into a quagmire such as this? I sometimes fear that eventually you and the Mother will retire into an extra-cosmic Samadhi leaving the wicked world to sink or swim as best it can. Perhaps that would be the wisest course — who knows?

Sri Aurobindo answered:

I have no intention of doing so — even if all smashed, I would look beyond the smash to the new creation. As for what is happening in the world, it does not upset me because I knew all along that things would happen in that fashion, and as for the hopes of the intellectual idealists I have not shared them, so I am not disappointed.⁴⁵

42. *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, pp. 380-81. (Article from the Tamil weekly, *India*, 18 September 1909)

43. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 32.

44. Sri Aurobindo, ‘Ideal of Forgiveness’, (translation from Bengali of Sri Aurobindo’s ‘Kshamar Adarsha’ by Arabinda Basu, *The Chariot of Jagannatha*, 2014, p. 23).

45. *SABCL*, Vol. 26, p. 165.

In another instance a disciple asked: “It seems that wherever one turns one sees the same humanity — with all its ignorance and incapacity” to which Sri Aurobindo replied:

Of course. That’s what I have been telling you all along. It is not without reason that I am eager to see something better in this well-meaning but woe-begone planet.⁴⁶

Sri Aurobindo’s compassion was of such magnitude that he felt the salvation of others was as important as one’s own. In *The Life Divine* he writes:

But even if our personal deliverance is complete, still there is the suffering of others, the world travail, which the great of soul cannot regard with indifference. There is a unity with all beings which something within us feels and the deliverance of others must be felt as intimate to its own deliverance.⁴⁷

And in another letter to a disciple Sri Aurobindo writes:

It is only divine love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of its darkness towards the Divine. The Gallio-like “Je m’en fiche”-ism (I do not care) would not carry me one step; it would certainly not be divine. It is quite another thing that enables me to walk unweeping and unlamenting towards the goal.⁴⁸

We end this section with an aphorism of Sri Aurobindo:

So long as a cause has on its side one soul that is intangible in faith, it cannot perish.⁴⁹

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

46. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 290.

47. *Ibid.*, Vol. 21, p. 422.

48. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 46.

49. *Ibid.*, Vol. 12, p. 458.



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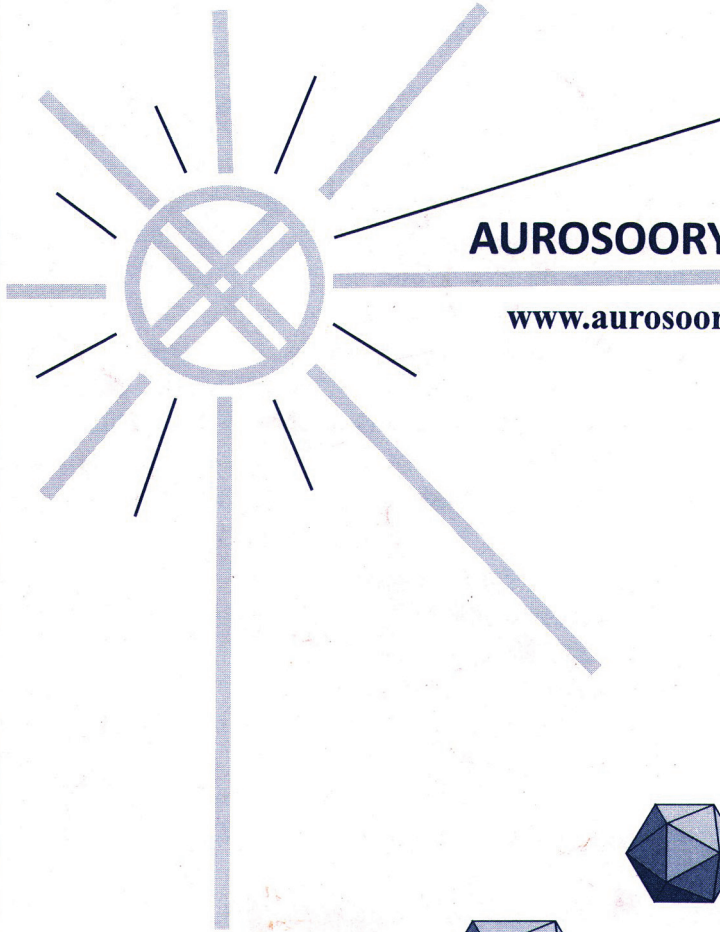
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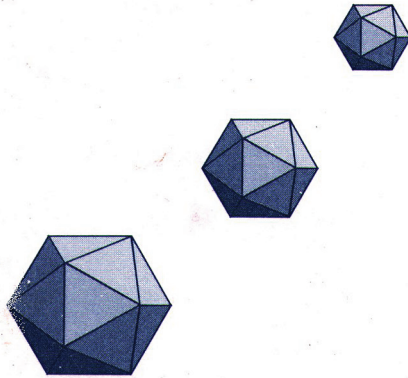
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