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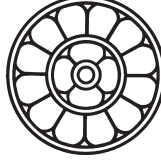
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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No. 4

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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KHALED OF THE SEA

an Arabian romance

(Continued from the issue of January 2021)

CANTO I

The Story of Almaimun and the Emir's Daughter¹

Now in great Bagdad of the Abbasside
The wanderer rests, to peace at last allied,
Whom storm so long had tossed to storm; and grace
Of love dwelt with him and the nobleness
Of hearts made golden by felicity,
Which is earth's preferable alchemy.
For other is from pain the metal wrought,
Anguish and wrestling in the coils of thought.
These strengthen, these the mind as marble hard
Make and as marble pure, which has not feared
To scourge itself with insight; but the stress
Of joy heightened to self-forgetfulness
Is sweeter and to sweeter uses tends.
With such felicity were crowned the friends
And lovers of Almaimun and increase
In the glad strength that grows from boundless peace.
And each as to her orb the sunflower burns
His spirit to his spirit's image turns.
Such puissance great well-poised natures prove
To mould to their own likeness all they love.
But where is she who lit his doubtful morn,
Whose sweet imagined shape each hour new-born
Brightened but to illumine, kindled each
Stray look with godhead and her daily speech
A far ethereal music made, for whom
He sought the wild waves and the peopled gloom

1. Here Sri Aurobindo altered the name "Alnuman" to "Almaimun". — (Editorial Note in CWSA)

Of the unseen? Must only she make moan?
 She in the crowded chambers is alone
 And closes eyes kept dry by anguished pride
 To wake in tears that hardly will be dried.
 Happy the heart and more than earthly blest
 That for those hands was meant where 'tis possessed,
 That to no alien house at the end has come
 But winging goes as to its natural home.
 The evening bird with no more simple flight
 Reaches its one unfailing nest at night.
 The heart which Fate not always here perverse
 With the one possible home out of an universe,
 Makes simply happy there secure shall dwell,
 Feeling that to be there is only well.
 And equal happy whether queenly chair
 Her portion or she kneel loose-girdled there
 And serve him as a slave. Alike 'tis heaven,
 Rule or obedience to the one heart given.
 So did not bright Zuleikha deem when she
 The temple was of his idolatry.
 Impatient of divine subjection, all
 Love's wealth was to her grace imperial
 Purple and diadems and earth's noblest gift
 But vantage her disdainful pride to lift.
 She was an Emir's daughter and her sire
 Clothed her in jewels and sublime attire,
 From silver dishes fed and emerald
 And in a world of delicate air installed
 So that her nature with these costly things
 Being burdened raised in vain its heavenward wings.
 From Koraish and the Abbasside he drew
 His stern extraction. Yet what brighter grew
 About his formidable name accursed
 Was a white fire of riches and the thirst
 Of poor men gazing with a bitter stealth
 On that impossibility of wealth.
 "Abdullah the Emir," so men would say
 Drawing their rags about them, "has display
 Of gold and silver and the sunlight fades
 At noon in his wide treasury and the shades
 Of midnight are more luminous there than birth

Of day upon the ordinary earth.
 He has rich garments, would the naked clothe
 From Bagdad to the sea, were he not loth:
 The leavings of his menials far exceed
 In Khorassan the labourer's sharpened need.
 And since by thee this fair display was planned,
 O God, yet from the beggar's outstretched hand
 He guards his boundless trust ignobly well,
 Just Lord, display to him the fires of Hell."
 And here another pressing from his eye
 His children's pining looks, made sad reply.
 "Richer his wealth than widest chambers hold,
 Not in the weary heaps of ingots told
 Entirely, nor the cloths Damascus yields,
 Nor what the seas give up, nor what the fields.
 He gathers ever with exhaustless hands:
 His camels heave across the endless sands.
 Through Balkh when to Caboul or Candahar
 The wains go groaning or the evening star
 Watches the pomp of the wide caravan
 Intend to provinces Arabian,
 Half is Abdullah the Emir's: and he
 Gets spices of the south and porphyry:
 His are the Chinese silks, the Indian work
 Saved hardly from the horsehooves of the Turk:
 From Balsora the ships that o'er the bar
 Reel into Ocean's grasp, Abdullah's are;
 Yemen's far ports are with his ventures full;
 Muscat transmits him horses, arms and wool.
 The desert rider hopes no richer prize
 To handle than Abdullah's merchandize;
 With joy the Malayan sea-robber hails
 His argosy and for his western sails
 The Moorish pirates all the horizon scan
 Upon the far Mediterranean.
 Yet though his losses make the desert great
 And Ocean a new treasury create
 From his sole rapine, yet untouched endure
 His riches by that vast expenditure.
 He takes but to increase his piles of gold,
 He gives but to recover hundredfold.

Thereby the poor increase. Wherefore I trust,
 When Azrael shall smite his limbs to dust
 And he upon that dolorous bridge is led
 Which, lord and peasant, all must one day tread,
 The bitter sword that spans the nether hell,
 He may be evened with the infidel.”
 And one might answer mid these wretched men
 Who quiet was from constancy to pain;
 “Curse him not either lest the Kazi find
 And God loose not the chains that he shall bind.”
 For he indeed was mighty in the town,
 A man acceptable in his renown;
 The mullahs to his will interpreted
 Their books and the law’s lightning from his head
 Glanced on the rash accuser; for his word
 Was Hédoya before the Kazi heard.
 But whence the fountain of his wealth might flow,
 Well did the sad and toiling peasant know.
 For he as governor in Khorassan
 Had held the balance betwixt man and man
 And justified his rule benevolent
 By rape and torture for their own good meant,
 The fallen rooftree and the broken door
 And rents wrung from the miserable poor.
 And now hemmed in with lustrous things and proud,
 Each day a pomp, each night with music loud,
 He blazed, however his eye a darkness cast
 And pleasure by his sense external passed.
 Yet joy he had over his gathered gold
 And in that one sweet maiden joy untold.
 Daughter of Nouredin the Barmecide
 Was she who bore this brightness, but when died
 Jaafar and all his house fell like a tower
 Loosened in the mutation of an hour,
 Abdullah found his foe an outlawed man,
 Proscribed, a heretic and Persian
 And slew him with the sword juridical
 Between his golden house and Allah’s wall.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 158-162)

STANDARDS OF CONDUCT AND SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

(Continued from the issue of January 2021)

The natural law of conduct proceeds from a conflict to an equilibrium of forces, impulsions and desires; the higher ethical law proceeds by the development of the mental and moral nature towards a fixed internal standard or else a self-formed ideal of absolute qualities, — justice, righteousness, love, right reason, right power, beauty, light. It is therefore essentially an individual standard; it is not a creation of the mass mind. The thinker is the individual; it is he who calls out and throws into forms that which would otherwise remain subconscious in the amorphous human whole. The moral striver is also the individual; self-discipline, not under the yoke of an outer law, but in obedience to an internal light, is essentially an individual effort. But by positing his personal standard as the translation of an absolute moral ideal the thinker imposes it, not on himself alone, but on all the individuals whom his thought can reach and penetrate. And as the mass of individuals come more and more to accept it in idea if only in an imperfect practice or no practice, society also is compelled to obey the new orientation. It absorbs the ideative influence and tries, not with any striking success, to mould its institutions into new forms touched by these higher ideals. But always its instinct is to translate them into binding law, into pattern forms, into mechanic custom, into an external social compulsion upon its living units.

For, long after the individual has become partially free, a moral organism capable of conscious growth, aware of an inward life, eager for spiritual progress, society continues to be external in its methods, a material and economic organism, mechanical, more intent upon status and self-preservation than on growth and self-perfection. The greatest present triumph of the thinking and progressive individual over the instinctive and static society has been the power he has acquired by his thought-will to compel it to think also, to open itself to the idea of social justice and righteousness, communal sympathy and mutual compassion, to feel after the rule of reason rather than blind custom as the test of its institutions and to look on the mental and moral assent of its individuals as at least one essential element in the validity of its laws. Ideally at least, to consider light rather than force as its sanction, moral development and not vengeance or restraint as the object even of its penal action, is becoming just possible to the communal mind. The greatest future triumph of the thinker will come when he can persuade the individual integer and the collective whole to rest their life-relation and its union and stability upon a free and harmonious consent and self-adaptation, and shape and govern the external by the

internal truth rather than to constrain the inner spirit by the tyranny of the external form and structure.

But even this success that he has gained is rather a thing in potentiality than in actual accomplishment. There is always a disharmony and a discord between the moral law in the individual and the law of his needs and desires, between the moral law proposed to society and the physical and vital needs, desires, customs, prejudices, interests and passions of the caste, the clan, the religious community, the society, the nation. The moralist erects in vain his absolute ethical standard and calls upon all to be faithful to it without regard to consequences. To him the needs and desires of the individual are invalid if they are in conflict with the moral law, and the social law has no claims upon him if it is opposed to his sense of right and denied by his conscience. This is his absolute solution for the individual that he shall cherish no desires and claims that are not consistent with love, truth and justice. He demands from the community or nation that it shall hold all things cheap, even its safety and its most pressing interests, in comparison with truth, justice, humanity and the highest good of the peoples.

No individual rises to these heights except in intense moments, no society yet created satisfies this ideal. And in the present state of morality and of human development none perhaps can or ought to satisfy it. Nature will not allow it, Nature knows that it should not be. The first reason is that our moral ideals are themselves for the most part ill-evolved, ignorant and arbitrary, mental constructions rather than transcriptions of the eternal truths of the spirit. Authoritative and dogmatic, they assert certain absolute standards in theory, but in practice every existing system of ethics proves either in application unworkable or is in fact a constant coming short of the absolute standard to which the ideal pretends. If our ethical system is a compromise or a makeshift, it gives at once a principle of justification to the further sterilising compromises which society and the individual hasten to make with it. And if it insists on absolute love, justice, right with an uncompromising insistence, it soars above the head of human possibility and is professed with lip homage but ignored in practice. Even it is found that it ignores other elements in humanity which equally insist on survival but refuse to come within the moral formula. For just as the individual law of desire contains within it invaluable elements of the infinite whole which have to be protected against the tyranny of the absorbing social idea, the innate impulses too both of individual and of collective man contain in them invaluable elements which escape the limits of any ethical formula yet discovered and are yet necessary to the fullness and harmony of an eventual divine perfection.

Moreover, absolute love, absolute justice, absolute right reason in their present application by a bewildered and imperfect humanity come easily to be conflicting principles. Justice often demands what love abhors. Right reason dispassionately considering the facts of nature and human relations in search of a satisfying norm or

rule is unable to admit without modification either any reign of absolute justice or any reign of absolute love. And in fact man's absolute justice easily turns out to be in practice a sovereign injustice; for his mind, one-sided and rigid in its constructions, puts forward a one-sided partial and rigorous scheme or figure and claims for it totality and absoluteness and an application that ignores the subtler truth of things and the plasticity of life. All our standards turned into action either waver on a flux of compromises or err by this partiality and unelastic structure. Humanity sways from one orientation to another; the race moves upon a zigzag path led by conflicting claims and, on the whole, works out instinctively what Nature intends, but with much waste and suffering, rather than either what it desires or what it holds to be right or what the highest light from above demands from the embodied spirit.

*

* *

The fact is that when we have reached the cult of absolute ethical qualities and erected the categorical imperative of an ideal law, we have not come to the end of our search or touched the truth that delivers. There is, no doubt, something here that helps us to rise beyond limitation by the physical and vital man in us, an insistence that overpasses the individual and collective needs and desires of a humanity still bound to the living mud of Matter in which it took its roots, an aspiration that helps to develop the mental and moral being in us: this new sublimating element has been therefore an acquisition of great importance; its workings have marked a considerable step forward in the difficult evolution of terrestrial Nature. And behind the inadequacy of these ethical conceptions something too is concealed that does attach to a supreme Truth; there is here the glimmer of a light and power that are part of a yet unreached divine Nature. But the mental idea of these things is not that light and the moral formulation of them is not that power. These are only representative constructions of the mind that cannot embody the divine spirit which they vainly endeavour to imprison in their categorical formulas. Beyond the mental and moral being in us is a greater divine being that is spiritual and supramental; for it is only through a large spiritual plane where the mind's formulas dissolve in a white flame of direct inner experience that we can reach beyond mind and pass from its constructions to the vastness and freedom of the supramental realities. There alone can we touch the harmony of the divine powers that are poorly misrepresented to our mind or framed into a false figure by the conflicting or wavering elements of the moral law. There alone the unification of the transformed vital and physical and the illumined mental man becomes possible in that supramental Spirit which is at once the secret source and goal of our mind and life and body. There alone is there any possibility of an absolute justice, love and right — far other than that which we imagine — at one with each other in the light of a supreme divine knowledge. There alone can there

be a reconciliation of the conflict between our members.

In other words there is, above society's external law and man's moral law and beyond them, though feebly and ignorantly aimed at by something within them, a larger truth of a vast unbound consciousness, a law divine towards which both these blind and gross formulations are progressive faltering steps that try to escape from the natural law of the animal to a more exalted light or universal rule. That divine standard, since the godhead in us is our spirit moving towards its own concealed perfection, must be a supreme spiritual law and truth of our nature. Again, as we are embodied beings in the world with a common existence and nature and yet individual souls capable of direct touch with the Transcendent, this supreme truth of ourselves must have a double character. It must be a law and truth that discovers the perfect movement, harmony, rhythm of a great spiritualised collective life and determines perfectly our relations with each being and all beings in Nature's varied oneness. It must be at the same time a law and truth that discovers to us at each moment the rhythm and exact steps of the direct expression of the Divine in the soul, mind, life, body of the individual creature.¹ And we find in experience that this supreme light and force of action in its highest expression is at once an imperative law and an absolute freedom. It is an imperative law because it governs by immutable Truth our every inner and outer movement. And yet at each moment and in each movement the absolute freedom of the Supreme handles the perfect plasticity of our conscious and liberated nature.

The ethical idealist tries to discover this supreme law in his own moral data, in the inferior powers and factors that belong to the mental and ethical formula. And to sustain and organise them he selects a fundamental principle of conduct essentially unsound and constructed by the intellect — utility, hedonism, reason, intuitive conscience or any other generalised standard. All such efforts are foredoomed to failure. Our inner nature is the progressive expression of the eternal Spirit and too complex a power to be tied down by a single dominant mental or moral principle. Only the supramental consciousness can reveal to its differing and conflicting forces their spiritual truth and harmonise their divergences.

The later religions endeavour to fix the type of a supreme truth of conduct, erect a system and declare God's law through the mouth of Avatar or prophet. These systems, more powerful and dynamic than the dry ethical idea, are yet for the most part no more than idealistic glorifications of the moral principle sanctified by religious emotion and the label of a superhuman origin. Some, like the extreme Christian ethic, are rejected by Nature because they insist unworkably on an impracticable absolute rule. Others prove in the end to be evolutionary compromises and become obsolete in the march of Time. The true divine law, unlike these mental

1. Therefore the Gita defines "dharma", an expression which means more than either religion or morality, as action controlled by our essential manner of self-being.

counterfeits, cannot be a system of rigid ethical determinations that press into their cast-iron moulds all our life-movements. The Law divine is truth of life and truth of the spirit and must take up with a free living plasticity and inspire with the direct touch of its eternal light each step of our action and all the complexity of our life issues. It must act not as a rule and formula but as an enveloping and penetrating conscious presence that determines all our thoughts, activities, feelings, impulses of will by its infallible power and knowledge.

The older religions erected their rule of the wise, their dicta of Manu or Confucius, a complex Shastra in which they attempted to combine the social rule and moral law with the declaration of certain eternal principles of our highest nature in some kind of uniting amalgam. All three were treated on the same ground as equally the expression of everlasting verities, *sanātana dharma*. But two of these elements are evolutionary and valid for a time, mental constructions, human readings of the will of the Eternal; the third, attached and subdued to certain social and moral formulas, had to share the fortunes of its forms. Either the Shastra grows obsolete and has to be progressively changed or finally cast away or else it stands as a rigid barrier to the self-development of the individual and the race. The Shastra erects a collective and external standard; it ignores the inner nature of the individual, the indeterminable elements of a secret spiritual force within him. But the nature of the individual will not be ignored; its demand is inexorable. The unrestrained indulgence of his outer impulses leads to anarchy and dissolution, but the suppression and coercion of his soul's freedom by a fixed and mechanical rule spells stagnation or an inner death. Not this coercion or determination from outside, but the free discovery of his highest spirit and the truth of an eternal movement is the supreme thing that he has to discover.

The higher ethical law is discovered by the individual in his mind and will and psychic sense and then extended to the race. The supreme law also must be discovered by the individual in his spirit. Then only, through a spiritual influence and not by the mental idea, can it be extended to others. A moral law can be imposed as a rule or an ideal on numbers of men who have not attained that level of consciousness or that fineness of mind and will and psychic sense in which it can become a reality to them and a living force. As an ideal it can be revered without any need of practice. As a rule it can be observed in its outsides even if the inner sense is missed altogether. The supramental and spiritual life cannot be mechanised in this way, it cannot be turned into a mental ideal or an external rule. It has its own great lines, but these must be made real, must be the workings of an active Power felt in the individual's consciousness and the transcriptions of an eternal Truth powerful to transform mind, life and body. And because it is thus real, effective, imperative, the generalisation of the supramental consciousness and the spiritual life is the sole force that can lead to individual and collective perfection in earth's highest creatures. Only by our coming into constant touch with the divine Consciousness and its absolute Truth

can some form of the conscious Divine, the dynamic Absolute, take up our earth-existence and transform its strife, stumbling, sufferings and falsities into an image of the supreme Light, Power and Ananda.

The culmination of the soul's constant touch with the Supreme is that self-giving which we call surrender to the divine Will and immergence of the separated ego in the One who is all. A vast universality of soul and an intense unity with all is the base and fixed condition of the supramental consciousness and spiritual life. In that universality and unity alone can we find the supreme law of the divine manifestation in the life of the embodied spirit; in that alone can we discover the supreme motion and right play of our individual nature. In that alone can all these lower discords resolve themselves into a victorious harmony of the true relations between manifested beings who are portions of the one Godhead and children of one universal Mother.

*
* *

All conduct and action are part of the movement of a Power, a Force infinite and divine in its origin and secret sense and will even though the forms of it we see seem inconscient or ignorant, material, vital, mental, finite, which is working to bring out progressively something of the Divine and Infinite in the obscurity of the individual and collective nature. This power is leading towards the Light, but still through the Ignorance. It leads man first through his needs and desires; it guides him next through enlarged needs and desires modified and enlightened by a mental and moral ideal. It is preparing to lead him to a spiritual realisation that overrides these things and yet fulfils and reconciles them in all that is divinely true in their spirit and purpose. It transforms the needs and desires into a divine Will and Ananda. It transforms the mental and moral aspiration into the powers of Truth and Perfection that are beyond them. It substitutes for the divided straining of the individual nature, for the passion and strife of the separate ego, the calm, profound, harmonious and happy law of the universalised person within us, the central being, the spirit that is a portion of the supreme Spirit. This true Person in us, because it is universal, does not seek its separate gratification but only asks in its outward expression in Nature its growth to its real stature, the expression of its inner divine self, that transcendent spiritual power and presence within it which is one with all and in sympathy with each thing and creature and with all the collective personalities and powers of the divine existence, and yet it transcends them and is not bound by the egoism of any creature or collectivity or limited by the ignorant controls of their lower nature. This is the high realisation in front of all our seeking and striving, and it gives the sure promise of a perfect reconciliation and transmutation of all the elements of our nature. A pure, total and flawless action is possible only when that is effected and we have

reached the height of this secret Godhead within us.

The perfect supramental action will not follow any single principle or limited rule. It is not likely to satisfy the standard either of the individual egoist or of any organised group-mind. It will conform to the demand neither of the positive practical man of the world nor of the formal moralist nor of the patriot nor of the sentimental philanthropist nor of the idealising philosopher. It will proceed by a spontaneous outflowing from the summits in the totality of an illumined and uplifted being, will and knowledge and not by the selected, calculated and standardised action which is all that the intellectual reason or ethical will can achieve. Its sole aim will be the expression of the divine in us and the keeping together of the world and its progress towards the Manifestation that is to be. This even will not be so much an aim and purpose as a spontaneous law of the being and an intuitive determination of the action by the Light of the divine Truth and its automatic influence. It will proceed like the action of Nature from a total will and knowledge behind her, but a will and knowledge enlightened in a conscious supreme Nature and no longer obscure in this ignorant Prakriti. It will be an action not bound by the dualities but full and large in the spirit's impartial joy of existence. The happy and inspired movement of a divine Power and Wisdom guiding and impelling us will replace the perplexities and stumblings of the suffering and ignorant ego.

If by some miracle of divine intervention all mankind at once could be raised to this level, we should have something on earth like the Golden Age of the traditions, Satya Yuga, the Age of Truth or true existence. For the sign of the Satya Yuga is that the Law is spontaneous and conscious in each creature and does its own works in a perfect harmony and freedom. Unity and universality, not separative division, would be the foundation of the consciousness of the race; love would be absolute; equality would be consistent with hierarchy and perfect in difference; absolute justice would be secured by the spontaneous action of the being in harmony with the truth of things and the truth of himself and others and therefore sure of true and right result; right reason, no longer mental but supramental, would be satisfied not by the observation of artificial standards but by the free automatic perception of right relations and their inevitable execution in the act. The quarrel between the individual and society or disastrous struggle between one community and another could not exist: the cosmic consciousness imbedded in embodied beings would assure a harmonious diversity in oneness.

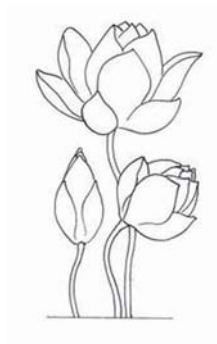
In the actual state of humanity, it is the individual who must climb to this height as a pioneer and precursor. His isolation will necessarily give a determination and a form to his outward activities that must be quite other than those of a consciously divine collective action. The inner state, the root of his acts, will be the same; but the acts themselves may well be very different from what they would be on an earth liberated from ignorance. Nevertheless his consciousness and the divine mechanism of his conduct, if such a word can be used of so free a thing, would be such as has

been described, free from that subjection to vital impurity and desire and wrong impulse which we call sin, unbound by that rule of prescribed moral formulas which we call virtue, spontaneously sure and pure and perfect in a greater consciousness than the mind's, governed in all its steps by the light and truth of the Spirit. But if a collectivity or group could be formed of those who had reached the supramental perfection, there indeed some divine creation could take shape; a new earth could descend that would be a new heaven, a world of supramental light could be created here amidst the receding darkness of this terrestrial ignorance.²

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 197-207)

2. *This is the remaining portion of Chapter VII of Part I — 'The Yoga of Divine Works'. — Ed.*



THE PRINCIPLE OF EVIL

The problem of evil is one that has taxed human thought and evolved various and conflicting solutions. To the rationalist who does not believe in anything not material, the problem does not exist. Everything is in nature as the result of evolution. Nature is blind and unintelligent and has therefore no conception of good or evil; the conception belongs to the human mind and is the result of the social sense and the ideas of pleasure and pain developed in human beings by a perfectly intelligible natural process. It is to men who believe in Intelligence as governing and developing the world that the problem exists. Why did evil come into existence and what is its purpose?

The unwillingness of the devout soul to admit that evil can have its existence in God, has led to variations of the Manichean theory which sees a double control in the world, God as the Principle of good and Satan as the Principle of evil. Those who regard the belief in the existence of an intelligent evil power as superstition, find the origin of evil in man who abuses his freedom and by his revolt and self-will gives birth to sin. This solution solves nothing, for it does not explain why there should have been a possibility of evil at all. Unless we limit our conception of God as the source and creator of all, that from which all proceeds, we must admit that evil as part of the economy of the world must have proceeded from Him no less than good. Even if we violently posit another creative force in the world limiting His universality, we shall have to assume that He, having the power to prevent evil, permits it; for He is omnipotent, and none can do anything except by the permission of His all-wise and overruling Providence. And if we limit the omnipotence of God, we reduce Him to a mere Demiurgus, a great Artificer of things struggling amongst forces over which He has not entire control. Such a conception is unphilosophical and contrary to the universal spiritual experience of mankind. The problem remains why, if He is God, All-Love, *sarvamaṅgalam*, He creates evil or, if He does not create it, permits it.

To our mind there is no escaping from the belief that, if God exists, He is All. All proceeds from Him; from what other source can it proceed? All exists in Him; in what other being or continent can it exist? Therefore evil must proceed from Him, evil must exist in Him. Since He is All-Wise, for all knowledge is His, it must exist for some wise and perfect purpose. Since He is All-Love, it must exist for good and not for anything which contradicts the good. Only, His is an infinite wisdom, ours a finite, His perfect, ours undeveloped. His is an infinite and all-wise love, ours a finite and unwise love, a love imperfectly informed by knowledge, full of *māyā*, attachment to passing happiness and pleasure. God's love looks beyond, ours fixes its eyes on the moment.

Experience must always be the basis of true knowledge, but it must be experience illuminated by true perception, not experience dominated by surface impressions. The experience of the mind which has compassed calm and is able to preserve its tranquillity under the most strenuous assaults of pain, misfortune and evil, is alone worth having. The mind which is not *dhīra*, which feels grief and thinks under the influence of affection and passion, even if it be noble affection and passion, cannot arrive at the *samyag jñānam*, the complete and perfect truth. Emotion is for the heart, it should not besiege the intellect; for the proper business of the intellect is to observe and understand, not to be obscured by the slightest prejudice, the least trace of feeling. One who is *dhīra* will look narrowly at every incident and, if he cannot see at once, wait for enlightenment as to its ultimate purpose and issue; so waiting, so calmly considering, the meaning of life dawns on the mind, an infinite purpose reveals itself in things small and great, in occurrences good and bad: omniscient Providence reveals itself in the fall of the sparrow and the death of the ant as well as in the earthquake that destroys great cities and the floods that make thousands destitute and homeless. Rudra and Shiva reveal themselves as one. The Yogin sees God in all things, not only in all beings but in all events. He is the flood, He is the earthquake, He is Death that leads to a higher life, He is Pain that prepares us for a higher bliss. This is a thing that cannot be argued; it has to be seen. *Paripaśyanti dhīrāḥ*. And sight is only possible to the calm heart and the unperturbed understanding.

The materialist is not wrong when he holds good and evil to be merely operations of Nature which she uses impartially and without making a distinction, and that the distinction is an evolution in the human mind. Evil is good disintegrating to prepare for a higher good. That which is now tyranny, was once necessary to consolidate human society. What was once an ideal state of society, would now be barbarous and evil. Morality progresses, religion widens with the growing manifestation of that which is divine in the human race. As with the individual, so with the race and the world, evil tends to good, it comes into existence in order that men may reject the lesser good and rise to the higher.

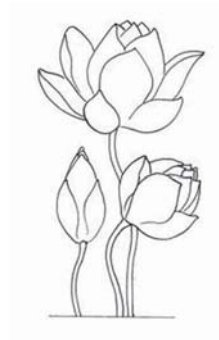
The problem of pain remains. Was it necessary that the process should be accompanied with pain to the individual? At one time the capacity for pain, physical and mental, was infinitely less than it is now, so little that it might be pronounced to be nil. It is a remarkable fact that disease, pain and grief have grown keener with the growing fineness of the human organisation. Obviously this can only be a temporary development necessary to prepare a higher race which shall rise above pain to a higher capacity for pleasure and happiness. The lower organisation resisted the *samskāra* of pain and grief by the coarseness of its composition, it rejected pain in the sense of not knowing it. The higher organisation of the future will not be below it, but rise above it. It was the knowledge of good and evil that brought grief and sin into the world; when that knowledge is surmounted, man will rise above grief and

sin. Before he ate the forbidden fruit, he had the innocence of the animal; when he shall cease to eat it, he will have the innocence of the God. Is it not so that in nature pain is a possibility which has to be exhausted and man has been selected as the instrument to bring it into existence, in a limited space, for a limited time, and work it out of the cosmos? In the light of this idea the Christian doctrine of the Son of Man on the cross acquires a new significance and man himself becomes the Christ of the universe.

Another question occurs. Is pain real or a shadow? The Vedantist believes that the soul is a part of God or one with God Himself, and cannot feel pain or grief, but only *ānanda*, bliss. The *jīva* or soul takes the *rasa*, the delight of the dualities, and it changes to bliss in his nature; but this is veiled by the ignorance and separates the *jīva* in his *svarūpa* from the mind and the heart. Pain is a negative *vikāra* or corruption of true experience in the mind, pleasure a positive *vikāra*. The truth is *ānanda*. But this is a knowledge for which mankind is not ready. Only the Yogin realises it and becomes *sama*, like-minded to pain and pleasure, good or evil, happiness or misfortune. He takes the *rasa* of both and they give him strength and bliss; for the veil between his mind and his soul is removed and the apparent man in him has become one with the *svarūpa* or real man. If mankind as a whole came too early by that knowledge, the evolution of the perfect good would be delayed. The utter sweetness of *dayā* and *prema*, pity and love, might never be extracted from the *līlā*.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 60-63)



‘WE WANT THE VICTORY OF TRANSFIGURATION!’

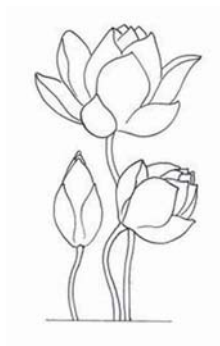
July 11, 1914

The entire physical being would like to be dissolved and reconstituted in an adoration that would have no bounds. O Lord, Thou who comest to touch Matter as the Messenger of the Supreme Power and Supreme Beatitude, Thou createst the conception of what the total realisation can be. And when the being believed it was definitively invested with Thy sublime mandate, Thou withdrawest, making it understand that it was only a promise, a token of what can be. Alas, what an imperfection in Matter it is that we cannot hold Thee! O Lord, use Thy omnipotence, work the miracle of Thy permanent Presence. . . . Why so much consideration? We must triumph or perish! . . .

Victory, victory, victory! We want the victory of Transfiguration!

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 199)



ON FIVE APHORISMS OF SRI AUROBINDO

4 — I am not a Jnani, for I have no knowledge except what God gives me for His work. How am I to know whether what I see be reason or folly? Nay, it is neither; for the thing seen is simply true and neither folly nor reason.

“I am not a Jnani . . .” The Jnani is one who follows the path of Knowledge, one who wants to realise Yoga exclusively through Knowledge, and who follows a purely intellectual path with the will to go beyond it and attain Knowledge, which is no longer intellectual, but spiritual. And Sri Aurobindo says: I am not a Jnani. . . . I do not seek knowledge. I have given myself to the Divine to accomplish His work and, by the divine Grace, at every moment I know what must be known in order to accomplish this work.

It is an admirable state; it is perfect peace of mind. There is no longer any need to accumulate acquired knowledge, received ideas which have to be memorised; it is no longer necessary to clutter one’s brain with thousands and thousands of things in order to have at one’s command, when the time comes, the knowledge that is needed to perform an action, to impart a teaching, to solve a problem. The mind is silent, the brain is still, everything is clear, quiet, calm; and at the right moment, by divine Grace a drop of light falls into the consciousness and what needs to be known is known. Why should one care to remember — why try to retain that knowledge? On the day or at the moment that it is needed one will have it again. At each second one is a blank page on which what must be known will be inscribed — in the peace, the repose, the silence of a perfect receptivity.

One knows what must be known, one sees what must be seen, and since what must be known and seen comes directly from the Supreme, it is Truth itself; and it completely eludes all notions of reason or folly. What is true is true — that is all. And one has to sink very low to wonder whether it is folly or reason.

Silence and a modest, humble, attentive receptivity; no concern for appearances or even any anxiety to be — one is quite modestly, quite humbly, quite simply the instrument which of itself is nothing and knows nothing, but is ready to receive everything and transmit everything.

The first condition is self-forgetfulness, a total self-giving, the absence of ego.

And the body says to the Supreme Lord: “What You want me to be, I shall be; what You want me to know, I shall know; what You want me to do, I shall do.”

3 October 1958

5 — If mankind only caught a glimpse of what infinite enjoyments, what perfect forces, what luminous reaches of spontaneous knowledge, what wide calms of our being lie waiting for us in the tracts which our animal evolution has not yet conquered, they would leave all and never rest till they had gained these treasures. But the way is narrow, the doors are hard to force, and fear, distrust and scepticism are there, sentinels of Nature, to forbid the turning away of our feet from her ordinary pastures.

What Sri Aurobindo has written, the words [“caught a glimpse”] which have been translated¹ as *entrevoiaient*, means to see something in its totality, but for a very brief moment. It is obvious that a constant vision of all these wonders would automatically compel you to set out on the path. It is also certain that a little fragmentary glimpse is not enough — it would not have enough weight to compel you to follow the path.

But if you had a total vision, however brief, you would not be able to resist the temptation of making the effort needed to realise it. But, in fact, the total vision is exceptional, and that is why Sri Aurobindo says to us: “If mankind only . . .”

To tell the truth, it very seldom happens that those who are ready, who are undoubtedly meant for realisation, do not have, at a certain moment in their lives, even if only for a few seconds, the experience of what this realisation is.

But even those whose destiny is certain have to struggle mightily, resolutely, against this “something” which one seems to take in with the very air one breathes: this fear, this dread of what may happen. And this is so stupid, because, in the final analysis, the destiny of each individual is the same: you are born, you live — more or less satisfactorily — and you die; then you wait for a certain length of time, and again you are born, you live — more or less satisfactorily — and again you die, and so on indefinitely, until you feel you have had enough of it.

Fear of what? Fear of coming out of the rut? Fear of being free? Fear of no longer being a prisoner?

And then, when you have enough courage to overcome this, when you say, “Come what may! After all, there’s not much to lose”, then you become wary, you wonder if it is reasonable, if it is true, if all that is not an illusion, if you are not just imagining things, if there is really any substance to it. . . . And mind you, this mistrust seems stupid, but you encounter it even in the most intelligent, even in those who have repeatedly had conclusive experiences — it is something that you take in with the food you eat, the air you breathe, your contacts with others; and that is why you can speak of the “tentacles of Nature”,² everywhere, in all things, like an octopus stealing in and catching you and binding you.

1. In the French text of *Thoughts and Aphorisms* read by the Mother.

2. The translation the Mother had before her was based on a text which read “tentacles of Nature” instead of “sentinels of Nature”.

Even when you have overcome these two obstacles, when the experiences are so strong that you can no longer doubt, that doubt becomes impossible — like doubting one's own life — then there remains something awful, petty, dry, corrosive: scepticism. And this is founded on human pride, that is why it lasts so long. You want to think that you are above all these things, "Oh, I am not one to fall into those traps! I am a reasonable man, I see things from a practical point of view; I'm not so easily deceived." It is awful! . . . It is sordid. But it is dangerous.

Even in moments of greatest enthusiasm, even when one is filled with an exceptional, marvellous experience — it rises from the lowest depths. It is ugly, slimy, disgusting. And yet it rises, and spoils everything.

To conquer it, one must be a mighty warrior. One must struggle against all the obscurities of Nature, against all her tricks, all her temptations.

Why does she do this? It is as if she were moving away from her own goal. But I have already explained this to you many times. Nature knows very well where she is going and what the outcome is. She wants it, but . . . in her own way. She does not feel that any time is being wasted. She has all eternity before her. She wants to follow her own way as she likes, meandering as much as she likes, going back on her tracks, straying from the straight path, starting the same thing all over again several times to see what will happen. And these enlightened cranks, who want to get there at once, as soon as possible, who thirst for truth, light, beauty, balance — they bother her, they urge her on, they tell her that she is wasting her time. Her time! She always replies, "But I have all eternity before me. Am I in a hurry? Why are you in such a hurry?" And again, with a smile: "Your haste is all too human; widen yourselves, become infinite, be eternal, and you will no longer be in a hurry."

There is so much fun on the way, for her . . . but not for everyone.

This is what happens when one sees things from a great height, from a great distance, when one's view is vast, almost infinite. Everything that upsets human beings and makes them suffer, disappears; so those who are very wise, who have abandoned life for the sake of higher wisdom tell you with a smile, "Why suffer? Come out of it and you will suffer no more." That is all very well individually but, in fact, if you think about others you may wish this rather tragic comedy would come to an end sooner. And it is very justifiable to feel tired of living like a beast at pasture, of roaming from one patch of grass to another, of ruminating in a corner, of having such narrow horizons and of missing all the splendours of life.

Perhaps it amuses Nature that we should be like that, but we are tired of it, we want to be different.

And that is it. When you have truly had enough of it and want things to be different, then you have the courage, the strength, the capacity to conquer these three terrible enemies: fear, doubt and scepticism. But I repeat, it is not enough to sit down one fine day, watch yourself be, and struggle with these things inside you once and for all. You have to do it and do it again and again and continue in a way

which seems almost endless, to be sure that you have got rid of it all. In reality, you are perhaps never truly rid of it, but there comes a time when inside yourself, you are so different that you can no longer be touched by these things. You can see them, but you see them with a smile, and at a simple gesture they go away, back to where they came from, perhaps a little changed, perhaps a little less strong, less obstinate, less aggressive — until the time when the Light is so strong that all darkness vanishes.

As for the marvels Sri Aurobindo tells us about, it is better not to describe them, because each individual feels them, undergoes them, experiences them in his own way — and for each person that is the best way. One must not adopt another's way, one must go one's own way, then the experience has its full value, its full inestimable value.

And finally, I wish that you may all have these experiences yourselves. And for that, faith, confidence, much humaneness and great goodwill are needed.

Open, aspire, and . . . wait. It will surely come, the Grace is there. It asks only to be able to work for everyone.

10 October 1958

6 — Late, I learned that when reason died then Wisdom was born; before that liberation, I had only knowledge.

Once again I must repeat that the form of these aphorisms is purposely paradoxical in order to give the mind a little shock and awaken it enough for it to make an effort to understand. One must not take this aphorism literally. Some people seem worried by the idea that reason must disappear for one to become wise. It is not that, it is not that at all.

Reason must no longer be the summit and the master.

For a very long time in life, until one possesses anything resembling Knowledge, it is indispensable that reason be the master, otherwise one is the plaything of one's impulses, one's fancies, one's more or less disordered emotional imaginings, and one is in danger of being very far removed not merely from wisdom but even from the knowledge needed for conducting oneself acceptably. But when one has managed to control all the lower parts of the being with the help of reason, which is the apex of ordinary human intelligence, then if one wants to go beyond this point, if one wants to liberate oneself from ordinary life, from ordinary thought, from the ordinary vision of things, one must, if I may say so, stand upon the head of reason, not trampling it down disdainfully, but using it as a stepping stone to something higher, something beyond it, to attain to something which concerns itself very little with the decrees of reason; something which can allow itself to be irrational because it is a higher irrationality, with a higher light; something which is beyond ordinary

knowledge and which receives its inspirations from above, from high above, from the divine Wisdom.

That is what this means.

As for the knowledge of which Sri Aurobindo speaks here, it is ordinary knowledge, it is not Knowledge by identity; it is knowledge that can be acquired by the intellect through thought, through ordinary means.

But once again — and in any case we shall have occasion to return to this when we study the next aphorism — do not be in a hurry to abandon reason in the conviction that you will immediately attain to Wisdom, because you must be ready for Wisdom; otherwise, by abandoning reason, you run a great risk of falling into unreason, which is rather dangerous.

Many times in his writings, particularly in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo warns us against the imaginings of those who believe they can do sadhana without rigorous self-control and who heed all sorts of inspirations, which lead them to a dangerous imbalance where all their repressed, hidden, secret desires come out into the open under the pretence of liberation from ordinary conventions and ordinary reason.

One can be free only by soaring to the heights, high above human passions. Only when one has achieved a higher, selfless freedom and done away with all desires and impulses does one have the right to be free.

But neither should people who are very reasonable, very moral according to ordinary social laws, think themselves wise, for their wisdom is an illusion and holds no profound truth.

One who would break the law must be above the law. One who would ignore conventions must be above conventions. One who would despise all rules must be above all rules. And the motive of this liberation should never be a personal, egoistic one: the desire to satisfy an ambition, aggrandise one's personality, through a feeling of superiority, out of contempt for others, to set oneself above the herd and regard it with condescension. Be on your guard when you feel yourself superior and look down on others ironically, as if to say, "I'm no longer made of such stuff." That's when you go off the track and are in danger of falling into an abyss.

When one truly attains wisdom, the true wisdom, the wisdom Sri Aurobindo is speaking of here, there is no longer higher and lower; there is only a play of forces in which each thing has its place and its importance. And if there is a hierarchy it is a hierarchy of surrender to the Supreme. It is not a hierarchy of superiority with regard to what is below.

And with human understanding, human reason, human knowledge, one is unable to discern this hierarchy. Only the awakened soul can recognise another awakened soul, and then the sense of superiority disappears completely.

True wisdom comes only when the ego disappears, and the ego disappears only when you are ready to abandon yourself completely to the supreme Lord

without any personal motive and without any expectation of profit — when you do it because you cannot do otherwise.

17 October 1958

7 — What men call knowledge is the reasoned acceptance of false appearances. Wisdom looks behind the veil and sees. Reason divides, fixes details and contrasts them; Wisdom unifies, marries contrasts in a single harmony.

All that Sri Aurobindo writes about knowledge, reason, Wisdom is said in order to bring us out of the rut of conventional thinking, and, if possible, make us perceive the reality behind the appearances.

As a general rule, with a few very rare exceptions, men are content to observe more or less accurately everything that happens around them, and sometimes within themselves, and to classify all these observations according to one superficial system of logic or another. And they call this organisation, these systems, “knowledge”. It has never occurred to them, they have not even begun to perceive that all the things they see, touch, feel, experience, are false appearances and not reality itself.

The constant, general argument is, “But I see it, I touch it, I feel it — consequently it is true.”

They should, on the contrary, tell themselves, “I see it, I touch it, I feel it — consequently it is false.” We are at opposite poles and there is no way of coming to an understanding.

For Sri Aurobindo, true knowledge is precisely Knowledge by identity, and wisdom is the state one achieves when one is in this true knowledge. He says it here: Wisdom looks behind the veil of false appearances and sees the reality behind it. And Sri Aurobindo emphasises that when one defines something with the superficial, outer knowledge, it is always in opposition to something else; it is always by means of a contrast that one explains what one sees, feels, touches — and does not understand.

Reason always sets one thing against another and compels you to make a choice. People whose thought and reason are clear see all the differences between things. It is rather remarkable that reason can only work through differences; it is because one perceives the difference between this and that, one act and another, one object and another, that one makes decisions and that reason works.

But it is precisely true Knowledge, Knowledge by identity and the wisdom which results from it that always see the point where all apparently contradictory things harmonise, complement each other, form a perfectly coherent, coordinated whole. And naturally that changes entirely the point of view, the perception, and the consequences in action.

The first absolutely indispensable step is not to repeat, more or less mechanically and without quite knowing what you are saying, that “appearances are false”. You say it because Sri Aurobindo has told us so — but without really understanding it. And yet, when you want to understand something, you continue to look, to observe, to touch, to taste and to feel, because you believe there are no other means of observation. It is only when you have had the experience of the “reversal of consciousness”, when you have gone behind these things, when you can feel, experience, in the most concrete manner, their illusory appearance, that you are able to understand. But, unless you have had the experience, you can read all the aphorisms, repeat and learn them, have faith in them and still not perceive: they have no reality for you. All these appearances remain the only way of coming into contact with the outer world and of becoming aware of what it is. And sometimes you can spend a whole lifetime learning how things are in their appearances and be considered very cultured, very intelligent, highly knowledgeable, when you have observed all this in detail and remembered all that you have observed or learnt . . .

Strictly speaking, you can, when you have worked hard, have some slight effect on these appearances, change them a little — this is how, through science, you learn to manipulate matter — but there is no true change and there is no true power. And when you are in that state, you are wholly convinced that there is nothing you can do to change your character. You feel trapped in a kind of fatalism that weighs you down, you know neither whence nor how; you are born like this, in such and such a place, into such and such an environment, with such and such a character, and you get through life as best you can, adapting to things without having much influence on them, and trying to mitigate the drawbacks of your own character without having the power to transform it. You feel caught in a net, you are the slave of something of which you are unaware. You are the plaything of circumstances, of unknown forces, of a will you do not submit to, but which constrains you. Even the most rebellious are slaves, because the only thing that liberates you is precisely the act of passing behind the veil and discovering what lies beyond it. Once you have seen, you know who you are and once you have established your true identity, you have the key to the true transformation.

We read, we try to understand, we explain, we try to know. But a single minute of true experience teaches us more than millions of words and hundreds of explanations.

So the first question is: “How to have the experience?”

To go within yourself, that is the first step.

And then, once you have succeeded in going within yourself deeply enough to feel the reality of that which is within, to widen yourself progressively, systematically, to become as vast as the universe and lose the sense of limitation.

These are the first two preparatory movements.

And these two things must be done in the greatest possible calm, peace and

tranquillity. This peace, this tranquillity brings about silence in the mind and stillness in the vital.

This effort, this attempt must be renewed very regularly, persistently. And after a certain lapse of time, which may be longer or shorter, you begin to perceive a reality that is different from the reality perceived in the ordinary, external consciousness.

Naturally, by the action of Grace, the veil may suddenly be rent from within, and at once you can enter the true truth; but even when that happens, in order to obtain the full value and full effect of the experience, you must maintain yourself in a state of inner receptivity, and to do that, it is indispensable for you to go within each day.

24 October 1958

8 — Either do not give the name of knowledge to your beliefs only and of error, ignorance or charlatanism to the beliefs of others; or do not rail at the dogmas of the sects and their intolerance.

The dogmas of sects and the intolerance of religions come from the fact that the sects and religions consider their beliefs alone to be knowledge, and the beliefs of others to be error, ignorance or charlatanism.

This simple movement causes them to set up what they believe to be true as dogma and to violently condemn what others believe to be true. To think that your knowledge is the only true one, that your belief is the only true one and that others' beliefs are not true, is to do precisely what is done by all sects and religions.

So, if you are doing exactly the same thing as the sects and religions, you have no right to mock them. You do the same thing without being aware of it because it seems quite natural to you. What Sri Aurobindo wants to make you understand is that when you say, "We are in possession of the truth and what is not this truth is an error" — though you may not dare say it in such a crude way — you are doing exactly the same thing as all the religions and all the sects.

If you objectify a little you will see that you have spontaneously, without realising it, established as knowledge everything you have learnt, everything you have thought, everything which has given you the impression of being particularly true and of major importance; and you are quite ready to contradict any different notion held by those who say, "No, no, it is like this, it is not like that."

If you watch yourself in action, you will understand the mechanism of this intolerance and you will immediately be able to put an end to all these useless discussions. This brings us back to what I have already told you once: the contact which you have had with the truth of things, your personal contact — a contact which is more or less clear, profound, vast, pure — may have given *you*, as an

individual, an interesting, perhaps even a decisive experience; but although this contact may have given you an experience of decisive importance, you must not imagine that it is a universal experience and that the same contact would give others the same experience. And if you understand this, that it is something purely personal, individual, subjective, that it is not at all an absolute and general law, then you can no longer despise the knowledge of others, nor seek to impose your own point of view and experience upon them. This understanding obviates all mental quarrels, which are always totally useless.

Obviously, the first part of the aphorism can be taken as advice, but this is not what Sri Aurobindo meant when he wrote it; he wanted to make us conscious of the error we make ourselves but ridicule in others. This is a habit with us, not only in this particular case, but in all cases. It is rather remarkable that when we have a weakness — for example a ridiculous habit, a defect or an imperfection — since it is more or less part of our nature, we consider it to be very natural, it does not shock us. But as soon as we see this same weakness, this same imperfection, this same ridiculous habit in someone else, it seems quite shocking to us and we say, “What! He’s like that?” — without noticing that we ourselves are “like that”. And so to the weakness and imperfection we add the absurdity of not even noticing them.

There is a lesson to be drawn from this. When something in a person seems to you completely unacceptable or ridiculous — “What! He is like that, he behaves like that, he says things like that, he does things like that” — you should say to yourself, “Well, well, but perhaps I do the same thing without being aware of it. I would do better to look into myself first before criticising him, so as to make sure that I am not doing the very same thing in a slightly different way.” If you have the good sense and intelligence to do this each time you are shocked by another person’s behaviour, you will realise that in life your relations with others are like a mirror which is presented to you so that you can see more easily and clearly the weaknesses you carry within you.

In a general and almost absolute way anything that shocks you in other people is the very thing you carry in yourself in a more or less veiled, more or less hidden form, though perhaps in a slightly different guise which allows you to delude yourself. And what in yourself seems inoffensive enough, becomes monstrous as soon as you see it in others.

Try to experience this; it will greatly help you to change yourselves. At the same time it will bring a sunny tolerance to your relationships with others, the goodwill which comes from understanding, and it will very often put an end to these completely useless quarrels.

One can live without quarrelling. It seems strange to say this because as things are, it would seem, on the contrary, that life is made for quarrelling in the sense that the main occupation of people who are together is to quarrel, overtly or covertly. You do not always come to words, you do not always come to blows — fortunately

— but you are in a state of perpetual irritation within because you do not find around you the perfection that you would yourself wish to realise, and which you find rather difficult to realise — but you find it entirely natural that others should realise it.

“How can they be like that? . . .” You forget how difficult you find it in yourself not to be “like that”!

Try, you will see.

Look upon everything with a benevolent smile. Take all the things which irritate you as a lesson for yourself and your life will be more peaceful and more effective as well, for a great percentage of your energy certainly goes to waste in the irritation you feel when you do not find in others the perfection that you would like to realise in yourself.

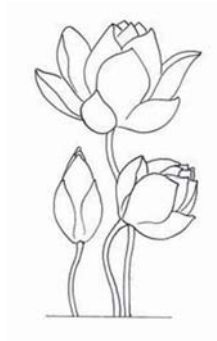
You stop short at the perfection that others should realise and you are seldom conscious of the goal you should be pursuing yourself. If you are conscious of it, well then, begin with the work which is given to *you*, that is to say, realise what you have to do and do not concern yourself with what others do, because, after all, it is not your business. And the best way to the true attitude is simply to say, “All those around me, all the circumstances of my life, all the people near me, are a mirror held up to me by the Divine Consciousness to show me the progress I must make. Everything that shocks me in others means a work I have to do in myself.”

And perhaps if one carried true perfection in oneself, one would discover it more often in others.

7 November 1958

THE MOTHER

(*On Thoughts and Aphorisms*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 10, pp. 9-23)



ON RELIGIONS

A few days ago, I said something about Muslims and Israelites, and F noted it down. . . . The impression it made on me (what should I say?) . . . The whole life is gone, at any rate: it's hollow, dry, like an empty shell — well, the impression is of an unlit lamp. A lightless lamp! (*Mother laughs*) Here it is anyway:

The Muslims and Israelites represent the two religions in which faith in God is the most extreme. Only, the Israelites' faith is in an impersonal God, while the Muslims' faith is in a personal God.

Their enmity perhaps exists only because they are neighbours! . . .

I should add that it was a reply to a letter B wrote to ask me all kinds of questions, in particular: "Why? These two nations being neighbours, why do they hate each other so much?"

. . . That curse on the Jews is a Christian story, it has nothing to do with the Muslims.

Violence and enmity . . . When brothers hate each other, they do so much more intensely than others do. Sri Aurobindo said: "Hatred denotes the possibility of a much greater love."

The Arabs have a passionate nature. They live almost exclusively in the vital and its passions and desires, while the Israelites live mostly in the mind, with a great power of organisation and realisation, something quite exceptional. The Israelites are intellectuals with an exceptional will. They are not sentimental, that is to say, they don't like weakness.

The Muslims are impulsive, the Israelites are reasonable.

This is not the conflict that will decide the future of our civilisation.

(Rough notation of June 15, 1967)

Yes, he ended his letter with: "This conflict which must decide the present civilisation . . ." So my last sentence is in answer to that. . . .

(June 21, 1967)

(A month later, a disciple sent Mother the following letter, in English, on the same subject:)

. . . At present the working is going on with direct Supramental Force. Its immediate action on the world of selfishness, strife and disharmony is not

encouraging. We see everywhere clashes; the world is going on in the old way as usual, perhaps worse. One is reminded of the old legend that the first thing that arose from the churning of the Ocean of Life was poison. Nectar came last. . . .

(July 19, 1967)

(Mother replied thus, in English:)

It looks evident that if the transformation undertaken could be achieved in its totality, the necessity of another world war would no more exist.

But purposely, for the sake of the work, the future is not revealed. So your question cannot be answered. Thus for everyone the wisest is to open oneself as much as possible to the force that is pressing for manifestation, to keep sincerely an ardent aspiration and an unshaken faith . . . and wait patiently for the result.

(July 27, 1967)

* * *

Just these last few days (because of all kinds of things — of people and things that come), I have been increasingly seeing that the human concept of divine Omnipotence is the concept of an omnipotence that would operate without rhyme or reason, through a succession of whims, senselessly — that’s what people call “Omnipotence”: being able to do the most stupid things at will.

Obviously, that doesn’t quite conform to a higher Harmony (!) Yet human beings are like that: if the god they worship or want to manifest isn’t willing to do, to execute whatever comes into their heads in a totally incoherent and arbitrary way, he isn’t all-powerful!

I am magnifying it to make it more easily perceptible; it’s not like that: they deceive themselves (if you tell them that, they protest), but they deceive themselves, and it comes to what I’ve just said.

When you succeed in going into that Consciousness of Harmony (but not an individual or local harmony), a universal Harmony — even ultra-universal, as the universe is only one part of it — then values are completely changed, completely. . . .

(Mother shakes her head and remains in contemplation)

All things are so simple and at the same time so *complex*. . . .

For instance, that relationship of simplicity (like the one a child has) in which you very simply ask for the thing you feel the need for, but without mental complications; without explanations, without justifications, without all that useless farrago — simply, “Oh, I would like . . .” You have, for instance, quite a special

feeling towards someone or something and you would like that someone or something to be perfectly harmonious, happy (which physically is expressed by good health or favourable circumstances), and so, spontaneously, simply, you say, “Oh! . . .” you pray, “Oh, may it be like that!” And it happens. Then the thought, the general human thought: “This has happened, therefore it’s the expression of the Truth.” And it’s made into a principle: “This is true, this is the way things must be.” But up above, in that Consciousness — that global Consciousness — in that total Harmony, those things in themselves, in their material expression (“good health,” “favourable circumstances”) are of no more than minor importance, so to say, of almost non-existent importance: things may be this way or that or this (they may be a hundred different ways), without its making any difference to the Harmony; but this particular way is chosen because of the simple, pure, naive beauty of the aspiration — that is lovely, that is powerful in its simplicity. And, you know, without mental complication, without hypocrisy of any sort, any pretense of any sort: very simply, but from a luminous, pure, loving heart, without any egoism, “just like that.” So that’s a lovely light which has its place; and because of it, things may be this way or that (good health, favourable circumstances), it doesn’t matter, it’s unimportant. Human beings only attach importance to the external form, to what has manifested; they say, “Oh, this is true, since it is” — and it’s . . . a passing breath of air. But the cause of it, its origin has a place in that total, universal Harmony: a disinterested goodwill, love devoid of egoism, trust that doesn’t argue or reason, simplicity — ingenuous simplicity for which evil doesn’t exist. If we could catch hold of that and keep it . . . The trust for which evil doesn’t exist — not “trust” in what takes place here: trust up above, in that all-powerful principle of Harmony.

(Long silence, then Mother says this prayer:)

Glory to You, O Lord, all-triumphant Supreme,
Grant that nothing in us shall be an obstacle to Your work,
Grant that everything in us may be ready for Your manifestation.

July 5, 1967

* * *

*(At the end of a conversation, Mother shows the disciple
a note she wrote the same morning:)*

“Instead of excluding each other, religions should complement each other.”

Sri Aurobindo said that to me; it’s so simple, so simple!

I was looking at all those religions, seeing them as facets, innumerable facets

that harden and brace themselves against each other, and he seemed to be saying, “Well, put it all together, it will be so simple!”

Just one sentence, not one word too many.

July 12, 1967

* * *

The word [*Jew*] has so often been used as an insult . . .

Anyway, thanks to that, probably because that note was published, things have been brought back into the atmosphere, and this morning there was a very, very concrete experience somewhere. . . .

It’s a strange thing, as if suddenly emerging from a conventional atmosphere of thought, which is like a terrestrial atmosphere (I don’t mean it’s an ordinary thought, I mean it’s in the field of human mentality). And there is, above, something that sees things quite differently. As if . . . Yes, things are ordinarily seen like this (*gesture from below upward*), while “that” sees like this (*gesture from above downward*), so when you enter there, you see things that you know here (you know them, they aren’t new), but you see them with a totally different vision. And naturally, the notation is also done differently. . . . (*Mother looks for a note*)

It came in two ways. Those things are *seen*, you understand, seen. Words come afterwards to try and transcribe what was seen. The first thing that came was thus:

“Christians divinise suffering to make it a means of the earth’s salvation.”

Then it came with just a small difference — these are subtleties, but . . . From an intellectual standpoint, these are subtleties without value, but up there you seem to be almost touching the heart of things, that is, the essence — the deeper essence of events. So then, it came quite simply, like this:

“Christianity *deifies* suffering to make it the instrument of the earth’s salvation.”

It’s hard to explain because it’s the state of consciousness that is different. . . . Now it’s a memory, but at that time it was a vision — a very, very deep vision, very sharp, naturally exceeding all that occurred on earth, but also all the ways of expressing what occurred. The personality of Christ and so on — it was all so different! And it became, yes, I might say symbolic, but that’s not it. . . . At the same time, it placed this religion among all the others, in a very defined place in the earth evolution — in the evolution of the earth *consciousness*.

The experience lasted for a half-hour, but everything, everything was different — different not in its appearance, different in its deeper significance. . . . Was the

difference in my active consciousness? I don't know. I mean, did I make contact with a region of consciousness that was new to me? Possibly. But it seemed to me a wholly different vision of the earth and man's history.

During the experience I remembered what Sri Aurobindo had written:

“Men love suffering, therefore Christ still hangs on the cross in Jerusalem.”

And that was like . . . (*smiling*) a sort of foam of thought quite on the surface, all the way up, bathed in the light from above, and like the intellectual way of expressing what I was seeing (*gesture from above downward*), which came from above. . . . From the point of view of light, it was a very interesting experience.

And seen from above, what was the story like?

You see, Sri Aurobindo says, Man loves suffering, therefore Christ still hangs on the cross in Jerusalem, then I said, Christianity (I mean the universal, or anyway terrestrial, origin of what expressed itself on earth as the Christian religion), the action of this religion on earth has been to “deify suffering” because men *needed* to understand — not only to understand but to feel and adhere to the *raison d'être* (the universal *raison d'être*) of suffering on earth as a means of evolution. We might, basically, say that they sanctified suffering so it may be recognised as a means indispensable to the evolution of the earth.

So now, that action has been exploited to the full and more, and ought to be gone beyond, and that's why it must be left behind in order to find something else.

You also said once, “It is not a crucified but a glorified body that will save the world.”

Yes. Then a Christian sent me a picture of Christ on the cross, and just above, the risen Christ in his ascent heavenward — that's how they take it!

It all happens on the heights.

Yes, heavenward.

(Long silence)

Have you sometimes had that kind of very global vision in time and space, in which each thing takes its own place and everything is coordinated by a total consciousness? . . . (It must be new for me only.) It is a knowledge-vision. My consciousness, the consciousness there (*gesture above and around*) is constantly a consciousness of

action. Since the beginning of those creative bursts of Love, it has been a consciousness of action, always action — action, action, perpetual action. Ultimately, constant creation. But this morning, it wasn't action: it was (*laughing*) the “observation,” I might say, the observation of that action as a sort of vision, as you would look at a picture, you know. Instead of being on the highest intellectual plane, the plane that has absolute comprehension and puts each thing in its place, it was . . . (how can I explain it?). It's a knowledge through subjective vision. Not the vision of something foreign to you: it's the same state of consciousness as the one of the doer, but instead of only doing, you see at the same time. That was this morning's experience. It was rather new, in the sense that I only had it now and then, just like that, but never with that totality, that clarity and that sort of absoluteness. It is the sensation of a self-evident, absolute, indisputable knowledge — it's not “trying to express something: it's *seeing*. Seeing, really seeing, but seeing . . . not one thing after another: seeing everything at a glance, a totality in space and in time. And every detail with total precision, which makes it possible to write a thing like this [the note on Christianity].

To be clear, I should tell the whole thing. Yesterday I had an opportunity to speak to someone about this constant presence of Sri Aurobindo, here, who sees, says, acts all the time. Then, after I had spoken, I wondered, “How is it that this brain . . .” Because, I think I told you, when Sri Aurobindo left his body, several times, several days in a row, I remained standing near his bed for one or two hours, and I felt — *materially* felt — what came out of his body enter mine. To such a point that I remember having said, “Well, if anyone denies afterlife, I have proof it exists.” So I thought, “Why does this brain [Mother's] go on working according to its usual routine now that the consciousness of the Presence is constant?” Then this morning I had this experience, and while having the experience, I felt, “This is how Sri Aurobindo used to see!” (*Laughing*) That must be it! . . . And for some time I have noticed that as soon as, for this or other bodies, for events or . . . as soon as something is formulated (neither a desire nor an aspiration, but something like the living perception of a possibility that *should* be realised — it comes at times), it gets done! It gets done automatically and instantly. So this morning, for, oh, a half-hour, the impression was so charming, so pleasant: “Ah, there we are! *This* is how we should see things!”

Afterwards I had to be busy with other things, but it's still there. And the question was, “Why? Why isn't there in this brain the capacity to perceive and transcribe things . . . as he had it?”

And so the conclusion. I've always heard it said (I don't know if it's true) that men think in a certain way and women in another. On an external level, the difference is not visible, but the attitude — the mental attitude — is perhaps different. The mental attitude on the *Prakriti* side is always action, always action; the mental attitude on the *Purusha* side is conception: conception, overall vision, and also observation,

as though it observed what the Prakriti had done and saw how it was done. Now I understand that. That's how it works. Naturally, no man (here on earth) is exclusively masculine and no woman is exclusively feminine, because it has all been mixed together again and again. Similarly, I don't think any one race is absolutely pure: all that is over, it's been mingled together (which is another way to re-create Oneness). But there have been *tendencies*; it's like that note about Israelites and Muslims, it's just a manner of speaking; if I were told, "This is what you said," I would reply, "Yes, I said that, but I can also say something else and a lot of other things!" It's a way of selecting certain aspects and putting them to the fore with an action in view (it's always with an action in view). But for the moment, everything is like that, mixed and mingled together with a view to general unification — no one nationality is pure and separate from others, that no longer exists. But to a certain vision, each thing has its essential role, its *raison d'être*, its place in universal history. It's like that very strong impression that the Chinese are lunar, that when the moon grew cold, some beings managed to come to the earth, and those beings are at the origin of the Chinese nation; but now there only remains a trace — a trace which is the memory of that distinctiveness. And it's everywhere the same thing: if you look at individuals in every nation, you find in every nation a bit of everything, but with the memory . . . the memory of a specificness which has been its *raison d'être* in the great terrestrial unfolding.

(Mother goes into a contemplation)

He was here, so present, so concrete — Sri Aurobindo. Did you feel him?

I stopped because of the time.

When he comes like that, you are inside — not outside, but inside. He is like that, enfolding. You are inside.

A part of your atmosphere (*gesture above the disciple's head*) is absolutely, absolutely one, like that, without any difference.

July 29, 1967

* * *

*(Mother comes across the note she wrote
on Christianity and commented on July 29.)*

“Christianity *deifies* suffering to make it the instrument of the earth's salvation.”

You know, it came to me as a discovery. . . . The whole religion, instead of being seen like this (*gesture from below*), was seen like that (*gesture above*) . . . Here is what I mean: the ordinary idea of Christianity is that the son (to use their language),

the “son of God” came to give his message (a message of love, unity, fraternity and charity) to the earth; and the earth, that is, the governing classes, which weren’t ready, sacrificed him, and his “Father,” the supreme Lord, let him be sacrificed in order that his sacrifice would have the power to save the world. That is how they see Christianity, it’s the most comprehensive idea — the vast majority of Christians don’t understand anything whatsoever, but I mean that among them there may be, there may perhaps be (among the cardinals, for instance, who have studied occultism and the deeper symbols of things) some who understand a little better . . . anyway. But according to my vision (*Mother points to her note on Christianity*), what happened was that in the history of the evolution of the earth, when the human race, the human species, started questioning and rebelling against suffering, which was a necessity to emerge more consciously from inertia (it’s very clear in animals, it has become very clear already: suffering was the means to make them emerge from inertia), but man, on the other hand, went beyond that stage and began rebelling against suffering, naturally also against the Power that permits and perhaps uses (perhaps uses, to his mind) this suffering as a means of domination. So that is the place of Christianity. . . . There was already before it a pretty long earth history — we shouldn’t forget that before Christianity, there was Hinduism, which accepted that everything, including destruction, suffering, death and all calamities, is part of the one Divine, the one God (it’s the image of the Gita, the God who “swallows” the world and its creatures). There was that, here in India. There was Buddha, who on the other hand, was horrified by suffering in all its forms, decay in all its forms, and the impermanence of all things, and in trying to find a remedy, concluded that the only true remedy is the disappearance of the creation. . . . Such was the terrestrial situation when Christianity came in. So there had been a whole period before it, and numbers of people beginning to rebel against suffering and trying to escape from it with such methods. Others deified it and thus bore it as an inescapable calamity. Then came the need to bring down on earth the concept of a deified, divine suffering, a divine suffering as the supreme means to make the whole human consciousness emerge from Unconsciousness and Ignorance and lead it towards its realisation of divine beatitude, but not — not by refusing to collaborate with life, but *in* life itself: accepting suffering (the crucifixion) in life itself as a means of transformation in order to lead human beings and the entire creation to its divine Origin.

That gives a place to all religions in the development from the Inconscient to the divine Consciousness.

It isn’t just a little remark noted down in passing: it’s a vision. One can always present it as something conceived mentally, but it’s not that; it’s not that, but it was, if you like, a necessity in the development. And it puts things in their *true* perspective.

Islam was a return towards sensation, beauty, harmony in the form, and the legitimisation of sensations and joy in beauty. From a higher viewpoint, it wasn’t quite of a superior quality, but from a vital viewpoint, it was extremely powerful,

and that's what gave them so much power to spread, to appropriate, seize, dominate. But what they did is very beautiful — all their art is magnificent, magnificent! It was a flowering of beauty. . . . Then there were others — it all comes one after another. And every religion came as a stage in the development and the relationship with the Divine, to lead the consciousness towards a oneness which is a totality and not a removal from a whole reality so as to obtain another. The need for totality, completeness, is what caused those religions to come like that, one after another.

Seen in that light, it's very interesting.

Instead of looking at it from below, there was all of a sudden an overall vision from the highest height of how it was all organised with such a clear consciousness, such a clear will, each thing coming just when it was necessary so nothing would be overlooked and everything might come out, emerge from that Unconsciousness, and grow increasingly conscious. . . . And so, in this immense history, the earth history, Christianity finds its place — its legitimate place. That has a double advantage: for those who despise it its value is restored, and as for those who believe it's the only truth, they are made to see that it's only one element among others in the whole. There.

That's why I found it interesting — because it was the result of a vision, and that vision came because I started concerning myself with religions (started again, to tell the truth, because I was very familiar with that subject in the past). And when I was asked questions on the Israelites and the Muslims, I looked and said, "Here is their place. Here is their place and their *raison d'être*." Then, one day I said to myself, "Well, it's true indeed! Seen in that way, it's obvious: Christianity is like a rehabilitation of suffering as a means of development of the consciousness."

And so Sri Aurobindo's sentence assumes its whole value. . . . Christianity came because men were rebelling against grief and trying to escape from the world in order to escape from grief. . . . Then, with the years going by and the unfolding, men took a liking to suffering! And because they love it (see how Sri Aurobindo's sentence becomes clear), "Christ still hangs on the cross in Jerusalem." It assumes its full significance.

August 12, 1967

* * *

This morning, for two hours, I had what I believe to be really the most wonderful experience in my life from the point of view of knowledge-vision. And it was so total . . . from the most essential perception of That which is beyond the creation down to the perception of the body's cells, from high to low. And in every plane, the vision of the creation.

It went on for two hours. I walked about, had my wash — it didn't matter in the least, on the contrary there was, added to that, the knowledge of how the body can

act without disturbing the state of consciousness.

Afterwards, there was a slight flagging, because there came . . . I can't say the memory (it wasn't a memory), but all the complaints: the same thing as at the balcony on the darshan day — the human attitude towards the Supreme is only to complain and demand . . . complain and demand and complain . . . That's all. It came back. Before, the whole vision was there like that (*gesture from high to low*), it was magnificent, magnificent: each and every thing, the entire human history, the entire history of intellectual and material evolution, everything like that, everything in its place. It was really fine. And afterwards, there came that wave of complaints.

It was as if the body were asking, "What attitude" (that's what provided the link), "What attitude should I have? What should I do? . . ." Because there was the vision of life, death, of all circumstances, everything was there. The full knowledge of everything. Oh, the whole part about death was very, very interesting, and how mankind has tried to understand, how there have been all kinds of solutions (that is, partial attitudes), and all of it was part of the Whole.

So the conclusion . . . Oh, at that time I could have said many things about all the different intellectual and even spiritual attitudes of mankind. . . . There aren't big differences. The spiritual (what's commonly called "spiritual") boils down to the whole attempt at finding the Divine again by annulling the creation — that's what has been regarded as spiritual life (that's why the word got distorted). To annul the creation in order to find the Divine again. . . . And then, *now*: the vision of now. We are obviously drawing nearer to the moment of possibility — that is clear. It's a question of time — of course, it can't be on the human scale, but we are on the borderline.

And as I said, the body asked . . . oh, it had such a wonderful moment! A moment, a few minutes, when it *knew* how it ought to be. It was magnificent. Then the experience came. Till then, it was inexpressible: it was lived, it was a living consciousness, but the mind had become very quiet, so it was inexpressible. Then there came back that great complaint from the world, and the experience started being expressed (*Mother looks for a note*). It started being expressed, because it isn't just the anonymous demand of thousands of people: it's virtually a shower of letters, questions, demands from people who believe . . . they believe they are part of the Work, of the Action, they believe they have given themselves, and they ask all sorts of questions — and such futile questions — which to them are of crucial importance, but which are so puerile, stupid, unimportant: how to start a business, the date of its inauguration, a name for a house, a message for a meeting. . . . And what goes on, it's a deluge from every side. So it all was seen in the new attitude — not "new," the consciousness was fully there, there had been a whole tendency to increasingly adopt that attitude, but now it was *known*, fully known: what one must be, how one must be. So I came down abruptly to reply to all that.

For some time there had been swarms of questions from people — I refused,

just refused to answer; I would reply with some joke or other: “I am not a fortune teller,” or “It’s none of my concern, none of my business.” Jokes, and sometimes I would say, “Ah, let them leave me alone, that’s childishness.” And people who think they are very dedicated, for instance a man who has already given at least ten lakhs of rupees (he knows it only too well, but still he did give them!) and who wants to work to bring more — but then, his questions . . . So instead of replying with a quip (that was my last experience: it’s like dictated answers, but they are quips), this morning something came in English (*Mother reads her note*):

We are not here to make our life easy and comfortable. We are here to find the Divine, to become the Divine, to manifest the Divine.

What happens to us is the Divine’s outlook, it is not our concern.

The Divine knows better than us what is good for the progress of the world and our own.

Everyone comes and complains and complains — that so-and-so has robbed him, that his wife doesn’t love him, that his brother has betrayed him, that . . . All the idiotic stories by the hundreds, you understand, a deluge.

* * *

You understand, behind this whole earth evolution, there is, with a greater or lesser degree of consciousness (it’s an unexpressed need rather than a precise consciousness), the need to live the Divine — or to put it differently, the need to live divinely. And it is clear that what was translated into different religions was solutions found individually (“found,” and perhaps partially lived); and here [in India], there was this solution: in order to really become the Divine again, the creation should be done away with. That is, the Nirvanic solution. And instinctively — instinctively — mankind felt death to be the negation of the Divine. But like every negation, it had the capacity to lead and open the way. The solution of Christianity wasn’t quite new, it was the adaptation of an ancient solution: a life in other worlds — which was translated into that quite childish conception of heaven. But that was a conception for public use: a life in the presence of the Divine, exclusively taken up with the Divine, and so you would sing and . . . Touchingly simple. Anyway, they conceived of a world (not a material one) in which a divine life had been realised. In the ancient Indian traditions, there had also been a first hint of divine worlds, as a sort of reaction to that Nirvanism — if we want to be divine, we must stop being, or if the Divine wants to be pure, he must stop manifesting! . . . So all that was like clumsy attempts to find the means, and perhaps at the same time like inner preparations, to make people capable of really making contact with the Divine. Then there was that great reaction of the cult of Matter, which has been *very* useful to knead it and

make it less unconscious of itself: it has forcibly brought consciousness back into Matter. So perhaps all that has been a sufficient preparation for the moment of the Total Manifestation to have come (*gesture of descent*).

This morning, during the experience, the body felt the whole bliss of the condition, but it was very conscious of its incapacity to manifest, very conscious in such a perfect peace, like this (*gesture with the palms of the hands open upward*), in which there wasn't even the intensity of the need. It was simply a vision of how things were, how the condition was. And it was something like this: the conditions of the earth are such, the conditions of the substance are such that a local and momentary manifestation, as an example, is not impossible, but the transformation that would make possible the new Manifestation of the supramental being — and not just as an isolated case, but with its place and role in earth life — does not appear to be immediate. That was the impression.

And there was no anguish to know or anything of the sort, there was simply a very calm vision of things, absolutely devoid of almost any need: it was like this (*same gesture with palms open*), as peaceful as can be, smiling, calm, with a sense of eternity. . . . All that in this body, which was totally and entirely conscious of its incapacity. Naturally, the body, for its part, very clearly feels it neither knows nor is able to know or will or do: simply like this (*gesture with palms open*), as peacefully open, receptive, surrendered as possible. And that was the result.

And it always ends in the same way: "What You will."

But with a very clear vision that a collective transformation sufficient to create a new species on earth still seems some way off . . . without any estimate of the length of time, but not immediate.

The fact is certain.

The fact is certain — it's not a possibility, but a *fact*. But as for what's translated in the human consciousness in terms of time, that can't be estimated, it can't be calculated.

August 19, 1967

THE MOTHER

(Excerpts from the Mother's conversations with a disciple)

“THE REAL YOU” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

Are these lines too conversational or have they some saving intensity? If they are really worth showing, I should like Mother to give them a look.

Draw near, O Love, draw very very near,
For I would see your visage full and clear:
A distant adoration cannot ease
My heart's unbearable burning chastities.
Am I grown pure that I may worship nought
Save an elusive sweetness in my thought?
The white soul-dream but beckons you to trace
Upon its solitary calm your face —
Your limbs of utter intimacy, Love!
And no mere flush of joy looming above.
The real you, imperishably fair
Compared with whom our flesh is thin as air —
Body of light which makes all forms of clay
Dim replicas of its prefiguring play —
Let my unworlded eyes touch the true line
Of that primordial passion. O divine
Lover, I am now stripped of all I see,
That you may lose invisibility!

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

It is very good. The intensity is there.

8 April 1935

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

GOVERNOR BARON'S MEETING WITH JAWAHARLAL NEHRU¹ ON 27 MAY 1947 AT NEW DELHI

(1)

[*Extract from Record of Nehru's interview with M. Baron, Governor of French India, and M. Henry-Paul Roux, French Chargé d'Affaires in India, at New Delhi. Published in Selected Works of Nehru, Vol. 2, pp. 571-573.*]

The Governor spoke about the French Government's desire to develop cultural institutions in Pondicherry and a kind of a university. The idea was that this university should serve India by bringing French culture here and should serve France by bringing Indian history and culture to the French. He added that the French Government wanted to know our reactions to this before they started on this scheme. He referred to political developments in India which would inevitably affect Pondicherry. In Pondicherry there were two sentiments: the sentiment of India as a motherland to which they were attracted, and another sentiment of attachment to France as a result of many hundreds of years of union with France and French culture. While there was a desire for union with India, there was also a desire to continue this cultural attachment with France. He suggested that Pondicherry (and presumably Chandernagore, etc.) might become parts of the Union of Free India, but at that same time there might be a kind of dual nationality for the people there so that they might be both citizens of the Indian Union and for some purposes citizens of France.

I said I appreciated what he had said about the dual sentiment among the people of Pondicherry. So far as we were concerned we naturally wanted a united India without any foreign bases or extra-territorial rights. We would like French possessions in India to be absorbed in the Indian Union, not by compulsion but because we felt that the people there would naturally desire this to be done. We would like this to be left to the decision of the people. The other proposal about a dual nationality was a novel one which required full examination as to how far it was practicable. We would certainly like Pondicherry with its long past of French culture to continue its cultural attachment to France. Possibly some means would be devised to maintain this or some similar connection, which would not come in the way of Pondicherry being a full member of the Indian Union.

1. For more details on this subject, read the article "On the Manifesto of the French India Socialist Party" in the issues of May & June-July 2020 of *Mother India*.

I further pointed out that a free India would be a federation of autonomous units. It was possible that even within a federating unit there might be smaller autonomous areas forming cultural or linguistic units. While we desired to maintain the unity of India and a strong Central Government, we were anxious not to come in the way of the variety of India and the cultural autonomy of its different regions.

On the whole Mon. Baron agreed with what I said. I reminded him of what he had stated on a previous occasion about the people of Pondicherry being free to join the Union of India if they so choose.

(2)

Two Personal Documents of Historical Importance (related to the meeting of 27 May 1947)

Statement by Surendra Mohan Ghose

Almost immediately after India's independence on August 15, 1947, which coincided with Sri Aurobindo's seventy-fifth birthday, I received at Calcutta a telegram from Sri Aurobindo signed for the first time with his own name. It asked me to come at once to Pondicherry.

I came. When I met him, he explained to me his ideas on the relationship to be brought about between independent India and the French possessions in the Indian sub-continent. Then he told me that the Governor-General of French India, Monsieur Baron, had already gone to Delhi to discuss a proposal for integration under certain significant conditions. Sri Aurobindo asked me to proceed to Delhi, meet M. Baron and take him to Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel and Maulana Azad.

I left for Delhi and met M. Baron. I took him to all the leaders above-named and explained to each of them the ideas of Sri Aurobindo.

Pandit Nehru called a meeting of the Working Committee and personally reported the talk he had held with M. Baron. The Working Committee appreciated Sri Aurobindo's ideas and welcomed M. Baron's proposal. If the success had not been prevented, a New Age of internationalism both for India and the world would have dawned long ago.

I should like M. Baron to confirm this report of mine which is meant to provide an important piece of historical information.

Statement by François Baron

I agree with the above report. But I should like to make some explanatory remarks. I did not go to Delhi in my official capacity as Governor-General of French India. Although I held the highest Government post in the French colonies I was never imbued with the spirit of Colonialism. And I carried my proposal to Delhi in my strictly personal capacity as a representative of French Culture and Literature to which I had myself made some contribution. I also went as one who agreed with the vision of one of India's most luminous sons: Sri Aurobindo. I was in favour of the ultimate establishment of India's sovereignty over the existing French possessions but the integration was essentially to be of a cultural type and bring one into close rapport the great liberal traditions of France and the great spiritual traditions of India. The important fusion in French India between the two cultures should continue and increase. Pondicherry and other prominent French places were to be windows of India upon France and windows of France upon India.

As a French patriot I would always fly the Tricolour over my residence in India but I would simultaneously raise over my residence the Indian flag. A double or multiple symbol of human culture would be my ideal.

After discussing my proposal with the Indian leaders, it was my plan to submit to the French Government the results of my unofficial talks and try to help the New Age for which Sri Aurobindo stood.

Mother India, August 1976, p. 648

(3)

Governor Baron's letter to the Ministry of Colonies (mentioning the meeting of 27 May 1947)

Sri Aurobindo's Ashram at Pondicherry

Some people either misinformed about things in India or full of religious sectarianism have thought of reproaching me more or less discreetly for going to Sri Aurobindo's Ashram at Pondicherry.

Sri Aurobindo, as Romain Rolland has said and many of the most enlightened minds of France and England, is the greatest thinker of India and the reserved but effective inspirer of the political leaders of the country who always remember him as the founder of the nationalist movement in his youth.

It is like reproaching a Greek in the ancient times for visiting Plato or Pythagoras.

Whatever it be, to be an admirer, if not a disciple, of Sri Aurobindo is a moral

surety that opens with sympathy the doors of an Indian heart.

As far as I am concerned, I understood this in Delhi and M. ROUX was also a witness to it. For an Indian it is an indisputable guarantee of honesty and sincerity. A Governor of French India, even if he were an agnostic, would be neglecting his duties if he doesn't take into account the enormous advantage that Pondicherry has by the presence of this Ashram. All the doors were opened for me and all the confidential conversations because I was guided by one of the big leaders of the Congress, SURENDRA MOHAN GHOSH, president of the Bengal Congress and disciple of Sri Aurobindo from whom he had received express orders to facilitate my task.

Apart from that, the Ashram run by two remarkable Frenchmen: Madame ALFASSA, sister of the old Governor General and Mr. Barbier SAINT-HILAIRE, former student of polytechnic, favours our presence in Pondicherry and helps a lot by its schools and its influence (there are more than 500 disciples and innumerable devotees from all classes of Indian society) to spread the culture and friendship of France.

It should be noted and emphasised that not to take into account the considerable part played by spiritual values in this country, wanting out of sectarianism to ignore or depreciate them, is not to recognise India and heading towards sure disaster even in the political field.

Compiler's Note

It was not after the 15th of August 1947 (as mentioned in Surendramohan Ghose's statement published in the *Mother India* issue of August 1976), but in May 1947 that he got a telegram from Sri Aurobindo to come immediately to Pondicherry.² Surendramohan then sent his reply to Sri Aurobindo through a telegram dated 23.05.47 from Calcutta, saying that he would be reaching Pondicherry the next day. Another telegram dated 27.05.47 from Delhi says that he has met Charles François Baron, Governor of French India, and will arrange his meetings with Congress leaders. (This means he must have left immediately for Delhi after meeting Sri Aurobindo and receiving instructions from him in Pondicherry.) Baron and Henri Roux, French Chargé d'Affaires in India, had a meeting with Jawaharlal Nehru on the 27th of May 1947. It was in this interview that Nehru found the proposal of dual nationality "a novel one which required full examination" to see how far it was practicable. He hoped that "some means would be devised to maintain" French culture in Pondicherry, "which would not come in the way of Pondicherry being a full member of the Indian Union." Baron then met Maulana Abul Kalam Azad who

2. Information gathered from Surendramohan Ghose's papers .

told him that “since he (Baron) had given shelter to the greatest man (Sri Aurobindo) of India, his dreams would materialise.” Surendramohan then tried to arrange Baron’s meetings with Mahatma Gandhi, Acharya J. B. Kripalani, Rajendra Prasad and Sardar Patel. Baron, who was happy with the progress of his work, was to return to Pondicherry on Sunday. Surendramohan’s letter dated 06.06.47 tells Nolini Kanto Gupta to inform Baron that the Congress Working Committee had discussed Baron’s proposals and was in his favour. Soon after this, O. P. Ramaswami Reddiar, Premier of the Madras Presidency, wrote a letter to Nehru expressing the fear that “the authorities of the French settlements were trying to maintain their hold under some pretext or other.” Nehru replied to him on the 23rd assuring that “his policy obviously [was] for the union of these parts with the rest of India.”³ He only had some talks with the French Ambassador and the Governor of Pondicherry and had not received any formal proposals from the French Govt. This tallies with Baron’s statement published in *Mother India* in which he says he went to Delhi “in my strictly personal capacity as a representative of French Culture and Literature” rather than in his official capacity as Governor-General of French India.

Baron clarifies another important issue in his statement in *Mother India*, as to who would actually rule French India in his proposed scheme. He was “in favour of the ultimate establishment of India’s sovereignty over the existing French possessions but the integration was essentially to be of a cultural type.” His use of the words “ultimate sovereignty” would imply that the “immediate control” of French India was not to be in the hands of India. With whom then would this secondary power vest? The Manifesto of the Socialist Party which Baron supported, vested this power to the Representative Assembly of French India. The State of Pondicherry itself would enjoy full autonomy within the French Union of which it was a “freely consenting” unit. In “The Scheme for a French India Constitution” (another handwritten draft relating to the Manifesto and forming part of the same scheme), Pondicherry State could even opt out of the French Union with a two-thirds majority in the Representative Assembly. This political arrangement, which was conceived far ahead of its times, could naturally succeed only on cultural lines and with the willing participation of France, French India and India. It would have interested all three parties and heralded the “New Age for which Sri Aurobindo stood”, as Baron says at the end of his statement.

Nehru’s remark in the interview that free India would be “a federation of autonomous units” and there was the possibility of “smaller autonomous areas forming cultural or linguistic units” even within a federating unit, should be taken in its proper historical context. He told this to Baron on 27 May 1947, giving him hope

3. *Selected Works of Nehru*, Second Series, Vol. 3, p. 411.

that French India could be one such autonomous unit. But Nehru would not have said the same a week later, after the British Prime Minister announced the Partition of British India on the 3rd of June 1947. The preponing of the transfer of power to India from June 1948 to 15 August 1947 galvanised the process of the unification of India by the accession of the princely States and the strengthening of the Central Government in order to meet national emergencies arising out of the communal situation and the large scale immigration of refugees from Pakistan. A federation with a weak centre, as envisaged by the Cabinet Mission proposal (including its variants), was basically conceived to satisfy the Muslim League and avoid the Partition of British India into two States. But now that the demand for Pakistan had been fulfilled, the weak centre was no more necessary for India, especially when the need of the hour was a strong central administration. I quote a passage from Bipan Chandra's *India after Independence*:

On 3 June, the Mountbatten Plan was announced which made it clear that India was to be partitioned. This completely altered the perspective of the Constituent Assembly, as the Cabinet Mission Plan, the essence of which was a compromise with the League, was no longer relevant. (p. 41)

The decision of the Constituent Assembly to have a federal constitution with a strong Centre was occasioned also by the circumstances in which it was taken. A strong central government was necessary for handling the situation arising out of the communal riots that preceded and accompanied Partition, for meeting the food crisis, for settling the refugees, for maintaining national unity and for promoting social and economic development, which had been thwarted under colonial rule.

However, in the initial months of its existence, before Partition became an accepted fact, the Constituent Assembly did not express itself in favour of a strong central government. The Union Powers Committee of the Assembly, headed by Nehru, had in its first report provided for a very weak central government. But once the decision on Partition was taken and announced on 3 June 1947, the Constituent Assembly considered itself free of the restraints imposed by the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946, and moved quickly in the direction of a federation with a strong Centre. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, while introducing the Draft Constitution, explained why the term 'Union of States' was preferred over 'Federation of States'. The Drafting Committee wanted to make it clear that though India was to be a federation, the federation was not the result of an agreement by the States to join in a federation and that the federation not being the result of an agreement, no state has the right to secede from it. The federation is a Union because it is indestructible. Though the

country and the people may be divided into different States for convenience of administration, the country is one integral whole, its people a single people living under a single imperium derived from a single source. (p. 51)⁴

I have quoted at length on this turning point in the history of the Indian constitution in order to give the background of Nehru's remark on federal India, because it can easily be misinterpreted today as going against national interest. One often tends to look at the past from the vantage of the present and find fault in it without knowing the compulsions under which public figures such as Nehru acted in the past. At that point of time India was facing the nightmare of a total balkanisation of the country with the possibility of roughly 565 princely States declaring independence, their territories ranging from States as large as Hyderabad State under the Nizam's rule to others with only a few hundred acres of land or even less. The provinces which came under direct British rule and spoke a dozen languages had to be also satisfied, so that they do not pull in different directions. It was in this chaotic situation prior to the declaration of the Partition of India that Nehru made the remark on autonomy for French India, which he retracted within a month.

Sri Aurobindo devotes two long paragraphs of the Manifesto of the French India Socialist Party⁵ on the uncertain situation in India in June 1947. He says that "without having any precision about the future States of India and our [*French India's*] place among them it would be utter folly to break our social, cultural, administrative and judicial structure" and join immediately the Indian Union. He hopes that the Partition will resolve "the fierce dissensions, violent and ruinous disturbances and sanguinary conflicts of recent times." But this was not certain and the conflict and tension might continue between the two new States that would be formed in the near future, resulting into even an "open war", and "into such a condition of things French India would not care to enter". It would rather preserve its own dual character, which was Indian at its basis with a superstructure of French education and culture. Therefore it would rather seek a close association with the Indian Union than merge with it in a suicidal way. And if it would enter the Indian Union it should be as "an autonomous unit preserving its individual body and character".

The specific historical context in which this Manifesto was written, that is, during the difficult and trying times after the announcement of the Partition of British India into two States, is often not taken into account by those who easily accuse Sri Aurobindo of being anti-national, just as Nehru could be accused in the same way

4. Bipan Chandra, *India after Independence*, pp. 41; 51-52.

5. Sri Aurobindo, "The Future Union", *Autobiographical Notes*, pp. 481-91.

for his remark on federal India to the French Governor on 27 May 1947. This transitory period of uncertainty and conflict has to be kept in mind and given due consideration before such passing comments are made.

There remains to explain the French India Socialist Party's demand of "complete autonomy within the French Union". During the War, France had capitulated to the German army and its colonies had provided lakhs of soldiers (especially from Africa) who fought bravely on the side of the Allies. It was in this situation of defeat that De Gaulle reached out gratefully to the colonies in the famous Brazzaville conference in January 1944 and declared a policy of assimilation and association instead of being merely possessions of the French Empire. But he still did not grant them full autonomy and the right to become independent nations. After France was freed from the Germans at the end of the War, its colonies naturally demanded full autonomy within the French Union. The first constitution of the Fourth Republic of France, which was rejected in April 1946, expressed considerable idealism in its preamble but left things vague with regard to the exact nature of the federal relationship of the colonies with metropolitan France. When the second and final draft of the constitution of October 1946 was being drafted, the native deputies from the colonies who had been elected to the French National Assembly, pushed for complete autonomy within the French Union, but failed to do so due to lack of sufficient representation. The deputies of metropolitan France also realised that a truly federal government (according to the ideals of the French revolution) would mean the end of the French Union itself and the colonies would simply overwhelm it by sheer numerical strength. Thus all they did was to press for half-hearted reforms, such as the setting up of Representative Assemblies in the colonies and giving them some powers without really handing over the reins of local administration. The excuse was that the colonies were not sufficiently ready to govern themselves. This brought about much dissatisfaction among the people of the colonies who felt betrayed by France for the invaluable help they had provided during the War. It brought in front the hardliners who were willing to seize power through violence than seek for it in vain through legislative methods. France could never realise in time that the winds of nationalism blowing across its colonies would soon prove to be too strong to handle in the old colonial way. It was only after much conflict and clash with the colonies that it finally relinquished the notion of the French Empire and replaced it with the concept of the French Community which did not last long, because most of the member states chose to become independent.

It is in the above context that the French India Socialist Party demanded "complete autonomy within the French Union" in June 1947. To expect its members not to do so at that point of time is to ignore the history of French decolonisation, and to accuse them of being anti-national for not choosing to merge with India is to ignore Indian history. For India had not even become independent at that time and

was facing the threat of a total balkanisation, apart from the Partition which its leaders had bitterly accepted. Even from the nationalist point of view, the Manifesto sought a close association with India because of the common culture and ethos that the people of French India shared with the rest of the country. Thus there is not much scope to accuse the founders of the French India Socialist Party for not being willing to merge with India at that time.

However, there is one aspect of the Manifesto that need not be contextually explained to make things look more acceptable, because it was far ahead of its times — the earnest desire for international unity and co-operation, of which we hear so much today in present day European politics. The Manifesto demanded “complete autonomy within the French Union” while maintaining at the same time “a close association with the Indian Union”. But it also sought to bring about a cultural collaboration between France and India in a spirit of internationalism. It is this proposal of Pondicherry becoming a place for international collaboration that is unique to the Manifesto written by Sri Aurobindo. I quote one of the last paragraphs of the Manifesto:

The final logical outcome of the dual situation of the French Indian people would be a dual citizenship under certain conditions through which French India could be in the French Union and participate without artificial barriers in the life of India as a whole. The present state of International Law is opposed to such a dual citizenship but it would be the natural expression of the two sides of our life situated as we are in India and having the same fundamental nationality, culture and religion and social and economic life but also united for a long time by cultural influences and a historical connection with France. It may well be that such arrangements might become a natural part of the development and turn towards greater unity between peoples and the breaking down of old barriers which began at San Francisco and a not unimportant step in the movement towards the removal of the old separatism, oppositions and incompatibilities which are the undesirable side of nationalism and towards international unity and the growth of a new world and one world which is the future of humanity.

A talk of Padmanabhan COUNOUMA given in the Ashram School on 26 January 1974 makes some surprising revelations on the Manifesto. As he was himself involved in this particular phase of the history of French India and was in fact a founding member of the French India Socialist Party, one can safely assume that he was one of the “young nationalists” that he refers to in the passage below:

As you know, even at that time, Sri Aurobindo was not limited to one country.

He had very broad conceptions, and the group that came under Sri Aurobindo's protection and was inspired by him, attempted at first a theory of double nationality. A pamphlet was drafted by these young nationalists on the subject of double nationality — it was something that can be called today wonderful. Why wonderful? Because what they wrote was entirely rewritten by Sri Aurobindo, and the theory of double nationality can be taken now as Sri Aurobindo's theory. If France and India had accepted it, it would have been a first step towards internationalism. . . . It is during this period that Maurice Schumann came here, the great Maurice Schumann who later became famous in foreign affairs. He came here to consult Sri Aurobindo on how to make this town a University Township, and if we had followed his advice, it would not have been a town belonging to so and so, but simply a University Township. What is curious is that Sri Aurobindo accepted to guide this University from his chamber, and so it would have been a University with spiritual resources. Unfortunately events happened too fast and things could not be pursued further.⁶

Counouma, as we know, later became the first Managing Trustee of Sri Aurobindo Ashram after the Mother's passing in November 1973. So if he, a person who normally exercised the utmost discretion in such matters, said this publicly in an open talk, one need not doubt the authenticity of his statements regarding the Manifesto that Sri Aurobindo wrote. He also says why matters could not be pursued further, though without elaborating the details.

These details are well-recorded now and, with a little study of Pondicherry history, can be put together to form a cogent account in favour of Sri Aurobindo and the founding members of the French India Socialist Party who were under his influence. It is true that their idealistic Manifesto was finally used to prolong French colonial rule with the help of local goons who happened to be members of the same Party. But it is also true that those members of the Party, namely Lambert Saravane, Counouma and Dr. André, who were under Sri Aurobindo's influence, resigned from it at the time of the Municipal elections of 24 October 1948, so that the Party which they had founded with such noble intentions simply went into the hands of unscrupulous politicians. The reason for their resignation was that the French Govt. along with Edouard Goubert and his group (who henceforth became the leaders of the same Party), wanted to rush through the Municipal elections after creating an atmosphere of fear and threat among all those who supported the merger with India. The Municipal elections were to be held prior to the referendum that would decide whether French India would remain within the French Union or merge with India. As the date and modalities of the referendum were to be decided by the freshly

6. Translated from the original French talk given by Counouma in the Ashram School on 26 January 1974.

elected municipal councillors, it was therefore crucial to win the Municipal elections so that one could get the advantage of being the ruling party in conducting the referendum, which would make all the difference between victory and defeat. I quote two passages from the *Decolonization of French India* by the late historian Ajit Neogy:

Meanwhile, the election fever, accompanied by violence, threat and intimidation, had reached its peak. A feeling of subdued fear had overtaken the people of Pondicherry. In Karaikal too the pro-merger elements had been facing increasing pressure from the hoodlums of Goubert backed by the administration. It was at that juncture the three ministers of COUNUMA group, who had developed serious differences with Baron on the fixation of the date of election, resigned on 21 October because they considered "team work has become impossible" and the Governor's voice was becoming "decisive" in every case. Saravane informed the French Minister of Foreign Affairs stating that "narrow partisan attitude of the Governor has forced the three councillors to resign" and requested him to take all necessary measures for engendering confidence and pacifying the situation.

The resignation of the COUNUMA group from the Council of Administration dealt a terrible blow to the administrative experiments the French Government had been making in French India since a year ago to placate the people. It embarrassed Baron and considerably undermined the credibility of the French in India. The dissociation of the COUNUMA group from the Pondicherry Council of Administration vindicated the fact that any hotchpotch system of government as was set up in French India could not be a better substitute for the democratic aspirations of the people. It also clearly established that the Ashram group represented by COUNUMA and others were not Baron's men. The Ashram group had a clear stand towards the French position in India and they did not hesitate to quit the Council of Administration when they found it impossible to adjust with an administration which was following a policy damaging to the interests of the Government of India. (p. 106)

The decision to hold the elections on 24 October was taken at a meeting of the Council of Administration held on 7 October in undue haste. It was not an unanimous decision. The Council of Administration was equally divided on the matter of fixing the date. Three of the six members — André, COUNUMA and Lakshmanaswami Reddiar — were opposed to holding the elections under the present circumstances and without arriving at an understanding with the Government of India. The other group consisting of Goubert, Deivasigamani Gramani and Sivasubramania Pillai of Karaikal insisted on holding the elections during the last week of the month, that is, on 24 October. Baron

exercised his casting vote in favour of Goubert's group. (p. 103)⁷

Readers who are not familiar with the role of Governor Baron in Pondicherry history might be surprised at why he cast his vote in favour of Goubert's group despite being so closely associated with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Baron by then was following a policy of political expediency under the pressure of the French Government. He supported whatever was immediately favourable to France without caring for the long term consequences of his decision. He was also powerless to act on his own because of his superiors in the Overseas Ministry, who wanted to win the referendum at all cost, regardless of the violent and unfair methods used against the pro-merger parties. There is an interesting passage on Baron in a letter by an Ashram sympathiser on this whole episode of the failed plan of the French India Socialist Party:

But the whole situation grew worse, when M. Baron gradually failed to retain the purity of his purpose. He became completely eclipsed and unbalanced and not only doubted but began to speak against Sri Aurobindo, that his spiritual vision was unrealistic and imaginary and that he had personal motives behind his work etc. Right up to the last day of his stay in Pondicherry, his car was to be seen at the Ashram gate. People were now experiencing his mishandling of the French Indian political situation, so they thought that it was all due to the Mother, who must be supporting his errors.

So it was due to the mishandling of the political situation by the French Govt. that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother found themselves on the wrong side, and the Ashram had to bear the brunt of local hostility. The Ashram was misconstrued as supporting the new and unprincipled leaders of the French India Socialist Party who were against the merger of French India with India for their own selfish reasons. Thus the wonderful Manifesto that Sri Aurobindo had written was misused by the French Govt. in the name of cultural collaboration to merely prolong colonial rule. Nevertheless, there is a silver lining to the stormy events that put the Ashram under a cloud of suspicion during this period.

Once it was decided in June 1948 that a referendum would be held to decide upon the future of French India, both the French and Indian Govts vied with each other to grant some kind of autonomy within the ambit of their respective constitutions to satisfy the people of French India. The result was that in the end, through this political tug-of-war and perhaps because of it, French India got a special status after its merger with India, instead of its four towns being turned overnight into insignificant suburbs of their respective States, as happened in the case of Chandernagore. French

7. Ajit K. Neogy, *Decolonization of French India* (1997).

India first became the State of Pondicherry in November 1954, at the time of the *de-facto* merger with India, and then became Union Territory after the States Reorganisation Act of 1956. The credit for having received this special focus and attention from the Centre should certainly be given (even if it be indirectly) to the futuristic Manifesto that Sri Aurobindo wrote for the French India Socialist Party.

RAMAN REDDY

... behind all the external circumstances and necessities of which we are more easily aware in Nature, there is always an internal necessity in the being, a will and a design in Nature itself which precedes the outward signals of its development and in spite of all obstacles and failures must in the long end inevitably get itself realised.

Sri Aurobindo

*(The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination,
CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 556)*

DOCTOR BABU — MY GRANDFATHER

(Continued from the issue of January 2021)

II

In the month of February, the month of the Mother's birth anniversary, *Mother India* published an article in which I recounted how my grandfather was instrumental in curing the Mother. That happened in 1925. And now, in the month of August, the month of Sri Aurobindo's birth anniversary I am happy that it is publishing a new article about how my grandfather was instrumental in curing Sri Aurobindo. This happened most probably in 1930.

In 1925 Sri Aurobindo called my grandfather to cure the Mother. In 1930 it was the Mother who called my grandfather to cure Sri Aurobindo. In 1925, we witnessed the giant occult powers of Sri Aurobindo and their lightning speed of action. In 1930, we shall see the Mother's tact and lightning speed in dealing with material details to effect a cure. In 1925 we saw what trust Sri Aurobindo had in my grandfather. In 1930, we shall see what trust the Mother had in him. In 1925, my grandfather cured the Mother, but came to know also the might of Sri Aurobindo. In 1930, he cured Sri Aurobindo, but came to know too the might of the Mother. And now, in 1985, sixty years later, a grandson is privileged to reveal to his readers the might of the two and the humble dedication of the third.

I cannot recollect the exact date. Either my grandfather never told me, or else I have forgotten. But for the time in general, I am sure that it happened somewhere between January 8, 1927 and March 1934. And to this conclusion I have arrived by inference, not by recollection. I know on the authority of an elderly sadhak that Sri Aurobindo moved from Library House, (more precisely from the floor above our present reception room) to His final room (the one we now call Sri Aurobindo's room) on January 8, 1927. And my grandfather diagnosed Him in the central corridor adjacent to His room (where we now wait on birthdays before entering His room) the event could not have occurred before that year. And because my grandfather stayed in the Ashram as a doctor only up to March 1934, the incident was impossible after this month.

Since I know that some of my readers will be aggrieved over my vagueness with data, I feel I owe them an explanation. First of all, I never asked my grandfather anything with the mind of a biographer. Thus I didn't jot down such prosaic details and dates in the manner of a meticulous historian. Secondly, my grandfather didn't care for these things himself. He would either be vague with them or remain silent when asked about them. But the reason for these lapses lies in the predilection of

my grandfather and my own predilections too. Let me explain.

The lunch hours would often be the ideal time for asking him a question or two. But every day is not a Sunday, and every lunch hour is not the right hour. I would have to feel for the right moment. Sometimes for days, sometimes for weeks, sometimes even for months, the right hour would be absent. And then, one day, when I was least expecting it, the day would be right and the moment would be ripe and I would know that I would get what I wanted. Thus I would put to him a question that had been clearly formulated in my mind long back. We would sit on the floor for lunch, and our plates would be placed on a low bench covered with white linen. He would sit with his characteristic poise and nobility, and we two brothers would sit on either side of him. A white apron would be tied to his neck hiding his long silver beard and his big abdomen. He would listen to my question but not answer at once. My question, I knew, had set him in a profound mood of recollection. He would look down steadily at his plate, maybe pick up a grain of rice from the apron covering his abdomen, and then, before taking up the next spoonful, speak. He never spoke more than a sentence or two at a time, but the impact would be tremendous. The words would be charged with such punch and gravity that I could feel, indeed almost see, Sri Aurobindo pacing up and down the corridor outside His room. For me it would be more than the corridor we see on our birthdays. It would be a long stretch of endless vista that would be bathed in a sparkling blue light like a massive chunk of a glowing crystal. And bathed in that light I would see my grandfather, silent and immaculate in appearance due to the compassion and Himalayan poise of the Master. And the Mother? Yes, I would see Her too, witnessing the Guru and His humble disciple-doctor in action.

On other days grandfather's words would not be filled with powerful overtones, but with an undertone of respect and adoration for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. On these days such feelings would course through his words that our lunch room hardly seemed like a lunch room any more. The whole area would be so filled with an air of reverence and holy silence that no sound, however jarring, would appear jarring to us; it would rather enhance the profundity of the stillness. In the kitchen annexe my grandmother would pour 'ladies-fingers' into a cauldron of boiling oil for frying because she wanted to serve them hot. Soon she would enter the room with a dish in her hand. Feeling the atmosphere, her face would glow with a smile of deep happiness as she would pass the three of us one by one, pouring the still-sizzling contents onto our plates. Then, without a word, she would sit down with her back against the wall to inhale the sweetness of the air. Our cat, Bhajahari, would fold himself into a lump, tuck his tail neatly by his side, and look at us suspiciously. Veteran thieves look upon sages as nuts. It is likely that on these days Bhajahari looked upon us as nuts completely cracked.

Well, my predilections made me seek this atmosphere, not dates and other data.

On other days my grandfather would go to the terrace to see the sun set. My

readers will recollect that dusk and my grandfather had a special affinity. At these times, when the day's work was done and the birds were returning to their nests, I do not know what Spirits he would commune with. I never asked him that. But often his face would take on a deep red colour and then I would be in doubt; for I would not know whether his flushed face was a reflection of the emotion of his depths or merely the reflection of the western sky gaily painted with orange and vermilion. These were trying moments for me. On the one hand I didn't feel like disturbing him with questions; it would be selfish of me to put them. On the other, I didn't want to miss these opportunities to soak my being in the vision of yore. Indeed who can resist the temptation of collecting nectar when by nectar one grows in health?

On these "sunset" days, except for him and me, our house would usually be empty — everyone would be away at the Playground. At times I would pace up and down on the terrace, at others, I would bring a mat, unroll it, and wait patiently.

After 1958, when the Mother stopped going to the Playground, my mother and grandmother would often join us. And, of course, on some of these days our cups would get filled to overflowing, as question after question would pour forth from my mother, grandmother and me, long after the sun had set; and at last we would know that to ask any more would be to go beyond the pure thirst for knowledge into mere intellectual prattling. Then we would roll up our mats and leave the velvet night to the terrace and enter our rooms from where the yellow electric light would look so warm and inviting. A honey-cool breeze would tug at the tender shoot of my grandmother's creeper hanging from the rotting wooden shade. The lizard of the terrace would send out its raucous *chick . . . chick . . . chick . . .* perhaps in appreciation of the moon and the night. And for hours thereafter, I would spend my time in golden reverie.

Now let me share with my readers the precious facts I have collected. One day a messenger informed my grandfather that the Mother wanted to see him. The message was clear: the doctor was to go straight up the Meditation Hall staircase. The Mother would be waiting for him at the landing. The messenger was simple and innocent: little could my grandfather know from him about the seriousness of the call. But with his doctor's instinct he knew the water was running deep. When the Mother means business, why any doctor, even a fool, ought to know that the air is vibrant with implications other than what meets the eye.

In an emergency call a doctor feels at ease if the messenger can give him some hints about the nature of the call. Even a single sentence of accurate information helps him to reach the spot in a prepared frame of mind. But this time the caller was mum and my grandfather was a worried man. He couldn't even decide whether to take his stethoscope with him or not. He left in a hurry. He didn't realise then that he had nothing to worry about. For, he was going to doctor the Supreme Doctor Himself and none other than the Divine Mother would be his guide.

The Mother, waiting at the staircase landing, didn't release the news at once to my grandfather, but started with preliminaries, saying, "Doctor, are you a skin specialist?" Grandfather was not a skin specialist and said so, but added that since the skin occupies an important chapter of medical studies he might be of help if the problem was minor. The Mother remained silent for a long time and then said something that struck my grandfather like a thunderbolt:

"Sri Aurobindo seems to be suffering from some skin disease. I want your suggestion."

I have said this news struck him as a thunderbolt. But why? The reader must remember that these were the formative years of our Ashram and the sadhaks, young in experience and age, were under the impression that their Guru was immune from diseases. They could not imagine Him suffering from illness. Printed books were few in number and His letters, dealing with the problems and sufferings of, as Avatar, were not yet published. Our forerunners did not enjoy the poise of knowledge that we do today.

An idle mind is the devil's workshop. My grandfather's mind was now a bit idle. If allowed to remain idle, a depression could sprout in it as quickly as a mushroom on a dank log. But wasn't the Divine Mother his guide? Depression? Pooh! It is said that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. But the Mother didn't believe in this. Her motto was "All in all, or not at all." She chose to shoot Her arrow with such deadly accuracy that two birds could be in Her hand at once in this instance. She wiped out both my grandfather's depression and the Master's ailment in a single shot. Before the doctor had a chance to slump into despair, She said: "Will it be possible for you to see Him once?"

A doctor is a strange conglomerate of many personalities. He has to be a humanitarian, a stark materialist, a staunch anatomist and a stout hard-worker all rolled into one. To him a human body, young or old, man or woman, is a human body, nothing less and nothing more. The moment the Mother spoke this last sentence, my grandfather's questioning mind bade him a hasty good-bye and his doctor's spirit girded up its loins. His little depressions were forgotten in an instant as he realised, to his chagrin, that he did not have the correct instrument with him to diagnose Sri Aurobindo's trouble. He excused himself and went away to get it.

My readers will recollect that in 1925, for diagnosing the Mother's ailment, the stethoscope had proved to be the great weapon; but now, not the stethoscope but a high-powered magnifying glass was to prove to be the same.

When my grandfather came back, he was a changed man. Not only was he well-equipped to make the right diagnosis, his heart and mind were well equipped too to meet his Guru. He had met Him last privately on November 23, 1926 — a long time ago. Yes, he was ready, well equipped.

The Mother, on seeing him return, went up the staircase without a word, and my grandfather followed. What a strange experience it must have been for him. So many times before he had mounted that same staircase, either alone to meet the Mother or in a queue on Darshan days to see Sri Aurobindo. But today, when none else knew it, She was leading him alone into the secret chamber of the Prophet of the Supermind.

In those days a heavy curtain used to block off the corridor from the first chamber. The Mother drew it aside and gestured to Her doctor to enter that land of magic and mystery.

In 1925, when he had entered the Mother's room, his tiger eye had noticed that Her left foot had been unusually dark and his infallible intuition had prompted him to surmise that the cause of Her malady had lain not in Her chest, as other doctors had suspected, but in Her leg. This time the moment he entered the corridor the same tiger eye sprang into action with an intuition that again proved to be infallible. He noticed that there were big livid pink patches along His waist line, particularly near the floating ribs just above His dhoti. He felt at once that these were not eruptions of some kind or the result of any skin disease but bruises. With intuition as one's guide, knowledge comes first, then comes analysis and verification.

The doctor got ready for his diagnosis. It ought not to have been difficult. Sri Aurobindo was pacing up and down and my grandfather had only to ask Him to stand still for a moment to examine Him. But the atmosphere was tremendous, the silence was intense and to say anything just then would have been blasphemous. For this was not the mere silence of a golden noon nor the dead silence of midnight nor the gentle silence of a wood. To call it pin-drop silence would be a simpleton's understatement. My grandfather found the corridor charged with such massive stillness that even the walls and furniture and floor and ceiling seemed to have been hushed to rapt attention as He walked up and down. To talk, to make even the slightest sound would be an indiscretion, a breach of trust. The Master, as grandfather had never seen before, had His eyes half closed. The impact of the Power He radiated was such that it knocked my grandfather speechless. Had he been a good doctor, but a bad sadhak, he might have asked Sri Aurobindo to stop walking. Had he been a bad doctor but a good sadhak, he might have closed his eyes and sat down for meditation. But the rub lay in the fact that he was both a good doctor and a good sadhak. So what did he do?

The secret of success in life often lies in the art of finding the solution of a problem within the problem itself. Aware of this, grandfather made his sadhak spirit ten times stronger so that he might not disturb his Guru even for a fraction of a second and at the same time he made his doctor spirit ten times more pragmatic. He decided to examine Sri Aurobindo in His walk.

At first grandfather tried to examine Sri Aurobindo's wounds with his magnifying glass each time the Master passed by him. He thought that several efforts at such

scrutiny would reveal the exact nature of the malady. But they did not. That system needs precise timing and coordination which works well in the realm of sports, but not so well in that of the Spirit. A boxer knows how to punch his practice ball in time, a cricketer knows how to strike the ball in rhythm, a footballer knows how to time his half-volley kicks. But Sri Aurobindo's corridor did not turn out to be a suitable terrain for exhibiting one's sporting genius. The light in the corridor especially was too subdued to permit any accurate diagnosis. Grandfather could not ask the Mother to open wide the windows of the other rooms nor did he care to put on the lights.

When this failed he struck upon a second plan — a plan as risky as it was daring: his idea was to step into Sri Aurobindo's line of walk and examine Him non-stop while marching behind Him. This was risky because of two unpardonable prospects: the first, and more fearful of the two, was the possibility of his feet touching Sri Aurobindo's, the second was the chance that his lens might touch Him — a callousness he would never pardon himself for. And yet he was determined to execute his plan. Daring indeed!

The Mother's doctor knew well the difference between a foolhardy risk and a calculated one. The former is indulged in by the impetuosity of the thoughtless; the latter is undertaken by the wise after a careful consideration. The doctor observed that Sri Aurobindo's walk had a definite pattern. He noticed that Sri Aurobindo walked a fixed distance, with numbered steps, and that His steps and turns were also measured and followed a fixed pattern. Sri Aurobindo walked up to the east end of the corridor, stopped turned clockwise, paused and walked back towards the west end where my grandfather was standing. On reaching this end he stopped, turned anti-clockwise this time, paused again and walked back to the east end. His walk had a general pattern of light steps and there were four pauses in each cycle.

To approach Supermind one has to cross its three stages — Vijnana, Prajnana, Sanjnana. To approach the Prophet of Supermind my grandfather also had to cross three stages: volition, observation, action. Volition of course was there. Observation had been completed. Now only action remained. Grandfather waited patiently at the west end for the right moment. Then, with the stars in conjunction, Sri Aurobindo came and stopped at this side. The doctor plucked up courage, steadied his will and stepped in lightly behind his Guru. The Guru-disciple march began.

What a sight it must have been! The Guru marching ahead and the disciple following Him, step for step, speed for speed, turn for turn. How I would love to have been there to witness this never-in-a-lifetime sight. As it turned out, however, only the Mother witnessed the sight. She had stood without a word, in front of the curtain, from start to finish.

I have said above that Sri Aurobindo's walk had a fixed pattern. While this is substantially true, from the moment the doctor had entered the corridor and from his own walk behind the Guru, he had noticed that there were variations in this

pattern. Sometimes Sri Aurobindo would slow his speed sometimes hasten it. What is more, He would often drift away from the straight line of walking and His waist would graze the edges of the furniture, sometimes gently but sometimes hard, so hard that it amounted almost to knocking against them.

I am of the strong opinion that no sadhak, however advanced he may be in the path of yoga can fully measure Sri Aurobindo or His method of working. But still I would like to imagine two things about Him — that He was above pain and that, when He chose to do so, he could withdraw Himself from all physical awareness. I have come to these conclusions from the following facts related to me by my grandfather. To start with, Sri Aurobindo's eyes were half closed; next, He neither encouraged nor discouraged my grandfather in his diagnostic work — in fact He didn't even give a hint that He knew of his presence; third, He didn't talk to the Mother either; fourth, the existence of the tremendous atmosphere of silence; finally, Sri Aurobindo's seeming total oblivion of these knocks to his own body — all these add up. But who knows? Maybe He was taking the bull by the horns; maybe He was trying to bridge the gulf between a total awareness and a total unawareness of the body? At any rate, I hold to my opinion that it is not possible for us to measure Him. Dolls of salt trying to measure the depth of the ocean — impossible!

In 1925, grandfather had written down his diagnostic report and handed it to Sri Aurobindo. This time his report to the Mother was oral. After Doctor Babu was satisfied that he had examined Sri Aurobindo to his satisfaction he stepped out of the line of his walk and spoke to the Mother. He spoke either in the adjacent room where the Mother's chair is now kept or on the staircase. I can't recollect where. His report was a startling one, quite contrary to the Mother's assumption.

Grandfather told Her:

“It is not any skin disease or case of eruptions. These are bruises, almost wounds, which He has incurred while walking, by His repeated knocks against the furniture in the corridor.”

The Mother listened attentively and then looked serious. We in the 1980's cannot imagine the problems of the 1920's or 1930's. The prospect of the bruises turning septic was looked upon as grave by one and all, for septic infection was a big killer in those days. Penicillin, that magic antibiotic had not yet been discovered. After an operation the patient sometimes died not because of the insufficient skill of the surgeon or of the undeveloped surgical technique but because of the septic infection arising after the surgery. And even with simple septic sores on the surface of the body, the doctors did not take chances. Both the Mother and my grandfather, born very much in the last century, knew well, too well indeed, of the serious consequences of surface wounds left unattended. The Mother therefore asked for Her doctor's advice, but added:

“Do you have any suggestion other than medicine?”

The doctor had a ready answer. He said: “What I cannot manage, You can. Please ask Sri Aurobindo to leave the corridor and walk in His own room. The length of both is the same, so He should have no objection.”

The Mother put Her head down and looked thoughtful. Then after a silence She said in a reflective mood, almost to Herself: “To disturb Sri Aurobindo . . .” and left Her sentence incomplete. Then suddenly She looked up and said: “All right, I will call you later.”

On his way back home, my grandfather guessed what the Mother would do: She would keep on observing Sri Aurobindo till She knew that She could talk to Him without disturbing His concentration. Then She would tell Him what the doctor had suggested. And Sri Aurobindo, unable to refuse the Mother’s request, would oblige. A neat plan. Or was it?

The next morning a messenger came to see grandfather. Yes, the Mother wanted to see him. He was exceedingly happy because he had not expected to succeed so quickly. She met him at the staircase landing and said:

“I have made an arrangement. See whether this is satisfactory to you or not.”

As on the previous day She entered first and pulled aside the curtain. What the doctor saw, well, was nothing very encouraging. He saw that Sri Aurobindo was still pacing up and down in the corridor. His heart sank. The Mother had failed to move Him away from that treacherous passageway. The atmosphere was still as intense as the day before, but the doctor was in no mood for it. At this point, however, he suddenly saw a twinkle in the Mother’s eyes as She stood there, still holding the curtain open; he knew that something was up. Suspending his dejection, grandfather quietly entered the corridor, and, good heavens! — his mouth fell open. Within the last twenty-four hours the Mother had removed each and every piece of furniture in the corridor. Sri Aurobindo was still walking there, yes, but in an empty corridor.

The saying goes: ‘If Mohammad does not go to the mountain, the mountain will go to Mohammad.’ The Mother changed it slightly and made the formula: ‘If Sri Aurobindo cannot be moved from the path of the furniture, the furniture must be moved from the path of Sri Aurobindo.’ Unique was the doctor, unique was the Guru, unique was the Mother and unique was the cure — astounding!

After a week She called Doctor Babu again. Needless to say that except for the scar marks, the wounds had completely healed.

*

I know, I am sure, that every god-man in the past suffered from illnesses and injuries. But proper historical records of them are missing. Thus we do not know of them — perhaps the physicians of these spiritual giants were not grandfather or perhaps their grandsons had missed the point. . . .

I have often indulged in reveries, and in these day-dreams I have seen how the spiritual stalwarts of ancient India fared when taken ill. I have seen Sri Krishna lying in a bower in the ancient city of Vrindavan. He is indisposed. It is mid-day. His worried emissary has gone out to call His private Vaidya. The Vaidya comes and enters the bower. It is spring and the heavenly wood is in festive mood. The trees are in bloom and the air is soaked in fragrance. Radha stands at the head of Sri Krishna and looks anxiously at the Vaidya. Sri Krishna smiles at His doctor. From His body radiates a blue aura — His occult light. The cuckoos sing wildly and a spotted deer stands nearby with tears in her eyes; today she hasn't received the pat on her back from her Lord and knows that something is amiss. The Gopis, as beautiful as the spring, stand round Him, their hands clasped in agony, as they pray in holy silence for a quick recovery of their Lord. The Vaidya leans down and . . . that's all. At this point my day-dream ends. I can't see any more. I can't see what is his diagnosis, how he arrived at his diagnosis, what is the nature of the malady. I can't see how Sri Krishna is cured.

I often do have the same reveries, though in lesser purity about our ancient sages, and Rishis; and King Manu, and Raja Janaka. And every one of the visions stops short of the diagnosis and the methods of cure, the moment I come to them. Coming down from the spiritual to the occult, how often I have dreamt of a Pharaoh falling ill. When it is midnight Amen Hotep's minister gently taps at the door of the man of medicine. They walk secretly to the palace when the Egyptians are fast asleep. A strong wind from the Sahara, still hot, strikes their faces; they wince and their robes flutter. Amen Hotep's mother stands at her son's head with dignity. The ladies move out as the physician enters the bedroom. The maidens, wearing long gowns, raise a hymn of praise to their sun-god, Ra, as the doctor feels Amen Hotep's pulse and then . . . again, that's all. I can see no more. How can I? How shall I dream any further, how shall I dream any more when not a single sentence of accurate description of these medical procedures is to be found in the pages of history?

Were those doctors gifted with intuitive powers? Were the cures obtained by occult means or by medical treatment? Were the illnesses real, in the first place, or were they mere surface signs of occult and spiritual causes? We cannot be sure. Or is it so? Can we not guess, guess on the basis of the reports left to us by our Guru's physician? Don't know. At least I guess, I guess often and I guess to my satisfaction.

TARUN BANERJEE

(*Mother India*, August and September 1985)

“LIFE OF PREPARATION AT BARODA” — SRI AUROBINDO, THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN¹

(Part 15)

(Continued from the issue of January 2021)

SECTION 2. SIMPLICITY AND AUSTERITY

Sri Aurobindo was a brilliant student in school and an exceptional scholar at Cambridge. Yet, this did not affect his bearing in terms of his simplicity, sincerity and humility. The Mother has said,

As the mind develops, the simple and pure sincerity of the child disappears. It must be replaced with a more conscious, more spiritual sincerity — the psychic sincerity.²

At Baroda, notwithstanding his scholarly achievements, exceptional literary talents and a privileged position in the Baroda State Service, Sri Aurobindo was seen to be an embodiment of simplicity and austerity.

Dinendra Kumar Roy notes that at Baroda Sri Aurobindo was very “simple in worldly matters”.³ He also writes that Sri Aurobindo’s “laughter was like a child’s, simple, liquid and soft.”⁴

Sri Aurobindo’s appointment in the Baroda Service was providential since the Maharaja of Baroda happened to be in London just after Sri Aurobindo completed his studies at King’s College, Cambridge. The Maharaja was duly impressed by this Cambridge scholar who had passed the notable I.C.S. examination. That Sri Aurobindo was very simple during his stay in England:

It is strange how things arrange themselves at times. When I failed in the I.C.S. riding test and was looking for a job, exactly at that time the Gaekwad happened to be in London. . . . But I left the negotiations to my eldest brother and James

1. As the article evolves around Sri Aurobindo’s life in Baroda and thereabouts, in which his gentlemanly attributes get reflected, the title has been slightly modified.

2. *CWM*, Vol. 17, 2nd Ed., p. 124.

3. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st Ed., 2006, p. 25 (Dinendra Kumar Roy, *Aurobindo Prasanga* – Translated from Bengali by Maurice Shukla)

4. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Cotton. I knew nothing about life at that time. And the Gaekwad went about telling people that he had got an I.C.S. probationer for just 200 rupees.⁵

Indeed, the Mother, after being shown a painting by a sadhak artist of Sri Aurobindo as a boy, remarked:

His nature’s spontaneous simplicity and freshness have come out very well; he came to this world with these virtues. His inner beauty is visible in front. He had no idea of worldly life.⁶

Sri Aurobindo’s family members have also commented about his simple nature. His cousin sister, Basanti Mitra, writes: “Aurodada was a very simple man.”⁷ And Barin, whilst narrating an incident in his political life, has written that the “simplicity of Aurobindo was natural and quite unostentatious.”⁸ Sukumar Mitra, Sri Aurobindo’s young cousin, writes that “he always repaid me in kind my childish playfulness”.⁹

Sri Aurobindo was known to be a simple, kind and calm person by his family and relatives. This becomes evident in an extract from a letter to Mrinalini Devi where he explains that his involvement in revolutionary activities is nothing but an effort to liberate his country:

After listening to what my aunt said, you formed the idea that some wicked people had dragged your simple and innocent husband onto the bad path. But it was the innocent husband of yours who brought these people and hundreds of others onto that path — be it bad or good — and will yet bring thousands and thousands of others onto that same path. I do not say that the work will be accomplished during my lifetime, but it certainly will be done.¹⁰

Sri Aurobindo was immensely valued by the Maharaja, but he preferred to lead a plain and quiet life, immersing himself in reading or writing poetry during his leisure time. Sri Aurobindo “was usually invited to breakfast with the Maharaja at the Palace”¹¹ and wrote important letters and speeches for him, yet he was indifferent to the grandeur of the Court. On the odd occasion he participated in a function in the Palace like the reception for Dr. S. K. Mullick.¹² Another Palace event which he

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

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

7. Basanti Chakravarty (née Mitra), ‘Our Aurodada’, *Srinwantu*, April/August 1984, p. 85.

8. *Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research*, December 1980, p. 219.

9. See Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 73.

10. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 82.

11. CWSA, Vol 36, p. 42.

12. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 47.

attended was a lecture of Swami Paramhansa Maharaj Indraswarup.¹³ When a manuscript by a biographer was submitted to Sri Aurobindo, he replied:

He states that I was invited to all the dinners and banquets — well, I never went to any State-dinner or banquet. Only I used to be called privately to dinner and I attended.¹⁴

Once, a biographer sent a note to Sri Aurobindo for his corrections. The note read: “Sri Aurobindo always loved a plain and unostentatious life and was never dazzled by the splendour of the court. Invariably he declined invitations to dinners and banquets at the palace though he received them repeatedly.” Sri Aurobindo responded:

Sri Aurobindo had nothing to do with the Court; he does not remember to have received any such invitations.¹⁵

Significantly, Sri Aurobindo did not correct the biographer’s phrase: “Sri Aurobindo always loved a plain and unostentatious life”.

Similarly, Baroda had an Officers’ Club which was patronised by the Maharajah and though Sri Aurobindo enrolled himself as a member he hardly went to the Club even on special occasions.¹⁶

Even after Sri Aurobindo entered his thirties and was immersed in the freedom struggle, his simplicity, in spite of the hubbub and duplicity that exists in the political field, remained an intrinsic part of his personality. Abinash Bhattacharya, Sri Aurobindo’s political associate from 1903, and his attendant in 1907-08, wrote:

Those who came in touch with Aurobindo were captivated by his simple, childlike laughter and behaviour.¹⁷

In the same article Abinash Bhattacharya reiterates:

Those who got the chance to come close to him and speak with him went away deeply impressed by his simple beautiful laughter; his childlike bearing left a mark on every heart.¹⁸

13. See CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 108.

14. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 121.

15. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 38.

16. See A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 8.

17. Abinash Bhattacharya, ‘Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, July 2012, p. 531.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 539.

Sri Aurobindo’s other attendant, Sudhir Kumar Sarkar, has spoken of “Sri Aurobindo’s simple and easy manner”.¹⁹ He further writes:

Sri Aurobindo used to mingle with us unreservedly, eating, sleeping, talking and joking with us! There was no barrier at all. At that time so much liberality appeared a little too much for me.²⁰

Although Sri Aurobindo was their leader, elder and far more accomplished, both Abinash Bhattacharya and Sudhir Kumar Sarkar were struck by Sri Aurobindo’s simplicity and magnanimity since he treated them as friends.

The Mother has written:

Humility: adorable in its simplicity.²¹

The Mother has also said:

The greater beings are always the most simple and modest.²²

Another revolutionary, Bhupendranath Dutta, Vivekananda’s youngest brother, who worked at *Yugantar*, writes that Sri Aurobindo

. . . was a young leader of the workers who resided as an ideal in their hearts. No one knew the details of his life and nor did anyone attempt to know as well. They looked upon him as a young renouncer. He lived simply and mixed with all.²³

And Ram Chandra Probhu, an associate of the revolutionary Upendranath Banerjee, speaks of Sri Aurobindo

. . . as a simple, childlike, saintly soul yet withal burning with a true patriot’s passionate enthusiasm, such as I have rarely seen.²⁴

19. Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 1989, p. 90.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

21. *CWM*, Vol. 14, 2nd Ed., p. 151.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Bhupendranath Dutta, *Aurobindo Smarane* (translated from Bengali). Quoted in *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*. Compiled by Anurag Banerjee, p. 100.

24. ‘C. P. Beachcroft’s Judgment in the Case of Arabinda Ghose at the Alipore Bomb Trial, Dated 6.5.1909’, (Bejoy Krishna Bose, ‘The Alipore Bomb Trial’), *Mother India*, August 1998, p. 548.

Sri Aurobindo was a quiet person and did not socialise much. However, he did take delight whilst interacting with his close friends. In 1906-07 Suresh Chandra Deb, who worked as an assistant at the *Bande Mataram*, observed Sri Aurobindo’s simple joyous nature:

Now and then I found him with friends — Subodh Chandra Mullick, Charu Chandra Dutt, Surendranath Halder, Bijoy Chandra Chatterjee, Rajatnath Roy, Hemendra Prasad Ghosh, Jogendra Krishna Basu — when he opened out; and still do I appear to hear the tinkling laughter that expressed the joy of his heart at the temporary release from the burden of thought and responsibility generally felt by him. . . . Now and then there was small talk, and Sri Aurobindo extracted the utmost pleasure from it.²⁵

The *Bande Mataram* office was fighting for a great national cause and Sri Aurobindo disapproved when there was any indiscipline or inefficiency in the office, yet he never expressed his annoyance.²⁶ As regards his political career, he said, “When I differed in anything, I used to say very few words and remain stiff, simply saying, ‘I don’t agree.’”²⁷

Also, one does not hear of Sri Aurobindo having quarrelled with anybody. The Mother has stated:

To express Harmony, of all things Simplicity is the best.²⁸

Even during a thorny and tense time of incarceration in the Alipore Bomb Trial, Nolini Kanta Gupta notes that Sri Aurobindo was engrossed in his *sadhana*, yet “occasionally he too did not hesitate to join in our childish pranks.”²⁹

Abinash Bhattacharya also writes of Sri Aurobindo’s comportment in Alipore jail:

Once, when I was passing out some of Hem’s biscuits, I noticed that Aurobindo-babu was awake. I stuffed three or four biscuits into his hands. He chortled with delight like a child, stretched out on the floor and started munching them. During our free time we sat in a circle with Aurobindo-babu and played “wordmaking”.³⁰

25. Suresh Chandra Deb, ‘Sri Aurobindo as I Knew Him’, *Mother India*, 15th August 1950, p. 7.

26. See Upendranath Banerjee, *Aurobindo Prasanga* (translated from Bengali); sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

27. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 111.

28. *CWM*, Vol. 14, 2nd Ed., p. 151.

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

30. Abinash Bhattacharya, ‘Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, July 2012, p. 536.

The conditions in Alipore jail were harsh and unhygienic, yet Sudhir Kumar Sarkar writes of Sri Aurobindo’s easy and serene demeanour in the midst of it all:

His face resembled that of a child’s, without any lines of thought or anxiety, a tender face perpetually filled with a happy smile. His eyes were full of profound peace and tranquility. His smile was unlike ours; it was expressed in the glance of his eyes. His body exuded a fragrance like that of a baby’s tender body.³¹

The revolutionaries loved and revered Sri Aurobindo. And like their leader, they too had a sweet simplicity about themselves, perhaps they imbibed at least some of it from him. Nolini Kanta Gupta writes about his own experiences in Alipore jail:

In fact our laughter and fun, our mirth and play, and our sweet simplicity had astonished them all. We had a Court Inspector, an elderly Muslim gentleman, who would almost burst into tears as he looked on us. “How dare you laugh and play?” he used to say, “you have not the least idea of the terror you have to face. You do not know what kind of life it is in the Andamans”. . . For this show of sympathy, the gentleman had to suffer punishment. His promotion was stopped or perhaps he was dismissed from the service. The man who was captain of the English guard used to say, “You are strange specimens. You look so tender and soft, and so simple and sweet in your manner! How could you ever commit such heinous crimes? I have lived in Ireland and have seen the Irish patriots, I have had to deal with them. But they were poles apart from you in their looks and their manner. They were harsh and rude and hard; one could know at once what kind of people they were.”³²

If we fast forward in time to the Pondicherry years, we see that simplicity was an inherent characteristic of Sri Aurobindo’s nature. Nolinikanto Sarkar, who accompanied Andamans deportee, Hrishikesh Kanjilal, to meet Sri Aurobindo in 1921, writes of this meeting:

The first impression I had of Sri Aurobindo was of a very simple man, a little dark, of medium build, with long hair, beard and moustache. He had a very calm, soothing expression on his face and his great, bright eyes always seemed to look into the beyond. He was simply dressed in a clean, white dhoti and wore a pair of chappals.³³

31. Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 1989, p. 101.

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

33. Nolinikanto Sarkar, *Asa Jaoar Majkhane*, translated from Bengali by Aniruddha Sircar as ‘Between the Arrival and the Departure’, *Mother India*, November 2004, p. 1031.

T. Kodandarama Rao — who was present in the Ashram during the 1920s and also at the time of Sri Aurobindo’s siddhi day on 24th November 1926 — wrote of Sri Aurobindo’s undemanding and easy nature:

In 1921, in the Guest House where the Master and we — about ten disciples — were living, there was only a common lavatory and a common bare bathroom. The Master along with others made use of these. It was wonderful to see how he finished these ablutions in less than five minutes’ time.

I have given some details regarding the external habits and personality of the Master to show how he was very simple and equanimous to the touches of Nature. This does not mean that he decried or criticised those who led a luxurious life. A person may lead a rich or a poor life, but it must be done with the consciousness that all is Divine and one must not be attached to either.³⁴

Sri Aurobindo’s attitude of being non-critical of others is also another side to the simplicity and purity of his nature. At Baroda a person, considered to be a loudmouth and a rogue by Dinendra Kumar Roy, used to visit Sri Aurobindo, yet Sri Aurobindo used to receive him cordially and never expressed a disapproving word about him.³⁵

Sri Aurobindo valued the trait of simplicity in others as is evident from his statement on Swami Brahmananda, of whom he had a high opinion:

Nobody who knew Brahmananda would doubt any statement of his — he was a man of perfect simplicity and truthfulness and did not seek fame or to impose himself.³⁶

Nirodbaran observed that Sri Aurobindo appreciated the attribute of simplicity and straightforwardness. When Sri Aurobindo suffered a serious thigh fracture in 1938, a group of disciples was selected by the Mother to attend on him. Nirodbaran writes that after a few days

. . . a personal relation had now grown between the Guru and the disciples; the sense of awe and distance had vanished. In this respect, Dr. Manilal must be considered our vanguard. His age, profession, charming childlike nature melted the apparently frosty reserve of the Master.³⁷

34. *Breath of Grace*, edited by M. P. Pandit, 2011, pp. 46-47.

35. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st Ed., 2006, p. 50.

36. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 15.

37. Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2005, p. 15.

And Nirodbaran’s description of Sri Aurobindo’s relation with Dr. Manilal makes interesting reading:

His talks with Dr. Manilal deserve special notice. The doctor had medical and worldly experience. The Mother considered him a master in his own field. But he still had a child-soul in him and it talked freely with Sri Aurobindo. The Guru with an equal paternal or friendly smile would listen to his prattle. His long rigmarole on Jainism that would bore us, would amuse him and after the doctor had departed, Sri Aurobindo would naively ask Purani how far Manilal’s knowledge of Jainism was sound and dependable. It was most entertaining to see how Sri Aurobindo used to dodge, tease, play with him, yet obey his medical injunctions! “Oh! Dr. Manilal is coming! I must hang my leg!” he would exclaim and we in turn utter, “You seem to be afraid of Dr. Manilal!” The tone, one would feel, was that of a comrade chatting with another; the doctor’s age, position and nature evoked from the Guru a response in tune with them. Sri Aurobindo once remarked that he was very simple and frank like a child.³⁸

During Dr. Manilal’s darshan visits to the Ashram he felt free not only to ask Sri Aurobindo endless questions or sought clarifications but also shared his knowledge about various things, many times seeking the Lord’s affirmation or opinion. Occasionally the questioning was quite simplistic and even childish but the ever-patient Guru never discouraged Dr. Manilal and often used humour as a counter.

Some of the conversations between Sri Aurobindo and Dr. Manilal are worth mentioning here:

SRI AUROBINDO: You want an easy path?

DR. MANILAL: More than an easy path; we want to be carried about like a baby. Not possible, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: Why not? But you have to be a genuine baby!³⁹

In another instance, Sri Aurobindo asked Dr. Manilal, “Have you never felt your inner being?”

DR. MANILAL: I have, Sir. I told you how I had found it and then lost it through fear. I felt as if I were going to die.

SRI AUROBINDO (*laughing*): Ah, I forgot that tragedy!

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 234-35.

39. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 5.

DR. MANILAL: At one time I felt as if my head were lying at the Mother’s feet. What does that mean, Sir?

SRI AUROBINDO: It is the experience of the psychic being. So you had the psychic experience.

DR. MANILAL: But unfortunately I couldn’t recognise it. (*Laughter*)⁴⁰

During one particular visit Dr. Manilal had complained to Sri Aurobindo about his shoulder pain, following which a disciple referred to President Roosevelt’s speech where he had raised the issue of ‘freedom from care’. Sri Aurobindo asked Manilal:

SRI AUROBINDO: Freedom from care? Is it material or spiritual freedom? Take for instance Manilal’s shoulder. Material freedom would mean freedom from pain, while spiritual freedom would mean it does not matter even, if there is pain. Which do you want, Manilal?

DR. MANILAL: Both, Sir! (*Laughter*)⁴¹

And a tantrik-cum-astrologer, a friend of a disciple, had cast Sri Aurobindo’s horoscope and predicted that in 1947 Sri Aurobindo would become the *ekachatra adhipati* (unchallenged sovereign of the whole world). A dialogue took place where one can sense Sri Aurobindo’s fondness for Dr. Manilal:

SRI AUROBINDO: 1947? Then I will do things quicker than Hitler! (*Turning to Dr. Manilal*) What post will you have Manilal?

DR. MANILAL: Nothing, Sir.

SRI AUROBINDO: No, you must have something to do.

DR. MANILAL: Sir, I’ll be at your feet, Sir, humbly.

SRI AUROBINDO: I’ll make you the Chief of the World Medical Service.⁴²

Apropos Sri Aurobindo’s simplicity, Nirodbaran recounted his experience to a group of Ashram School students, after having seen a film in the Playground that depicted Krishna:

Since I identified Sri Krishna with Sri Aurobindo, seeing Sri Krishna’s personality at that time and Sri Aurobindo’s personality as I knew it, I couldn’t reconcile the two. I had seen Sri Aurobindo as very gentle, nay tender, almost child-like, sometimes a “bholanath”, and here was a different person: a charioteer, a shrewd statesman, a man of action, an encourager of violence.⁴³

40. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

41. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2013, p. 1015.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 1024.

43. Nirodbaran, ‘The Mahabharata War and Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, December 1969, p. 688.

Nevertheless, despite Sri Aurobindo’s gentle nature, his political career illustrates that he was a daring revolutionary leader and an outstanding political strategist so much so that even the British government was extremely wary of him.

Sri Aurobindo’s simplicity was also blended with self-denial. If we go back in time to his days in England, we see that he faced hardship and poverty at a very young age. Let us examine this in some detail. Sri Aurobindo and his two elder brothers first lived at Manchester in the house of their guardian, William H. Drewett, a Congregationalist clergyman. But Mr. Drewett migrated to Australia and left the young brothers in the care of his mother. Subsequently, tragedy struck. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The three brothers lived in London for some time with the mother of Mr. Drewett but she left them after a quarrel between her and Manmohan about religion. The old Mrs. Drewett was fervently Evangelical and she said she would not live with an atheist as the house might fall down on her. Afterwards Benoybhusan and Aurobindo occupied a room in the South Kensington Liberal Club where Mr. J. S. Cotton, brother of Sir Henry Cotton, for some time Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, was the secretary and Benoy assisted him in his work. Manmohan went into lodgings. This was the time of the greatest suffering and poverty. Subsequently Aurobindo also went separately into lodgings until he took up residence at Cambridge.⁴⁴

Incidentally, James Cotton’s elder brother, Sir Henry Cotton (1845-1915), an I.C.S. bureaucrat, was a friend of Sri Aurobindo’s father — both had made arrangements for Sri Aurobindo’s posting in Bengal after he passed the I.C.S. examination.⁴⁵ Sir Henry Cotton was an Indian sympathiser, and when he was Commissioner of Assam, he remarked, “The resources of India will vie with those of America itself . . . yet no country is more poor than this.”⁴⁶ In his *New India* he said that the partition was “part and parcel of Lord Curzon’s policy to enfeeble the growing power and destroy the political tendencies of a patriotic spirit.”⁴⁷ Historian Tara Chand writes that Henry Cotton, O’Grady, Ramsay MacDonald supported the nationalist demand which was also supported by publicists like Henry Nevinson, Henry Brailsford, Samuel Ratcliffe and Wilfred Scaven Blunt.⁴⁸

And on the matter of the government releasing some Indian political deportees in 1909, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Karmayogin*: “Sir Henry Cotton and some of

44. CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 27-28.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

46. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 289.

47. Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., p. 159.

48. Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. III, p. 357.



Sri Aurobindo (seated) with his brothers Manomohan and Benoy Bhushan in Darjeeling, 1877



St Paul's School, London

his colleagues were always ever-hopeful about the effect of their pressure, and their expectations were more than once disappointed.”⁴⁹

After Sri Aurobindo’s acquittal, the celebrated founder of the Labour Party, Mr. Keir Hardie, brought to the attention of the Under Secretary of State, on behalf of Sir Henry Cotton, that the speeches that were produced in court as evidence in the Alipore Bomb Case against Sri Aurobindo were considered by the judge nothing objectionable and seemed to advocate nothing more than the regeneration of the country.⁵⁰

Reverting to the Drewett family, Mr. Drewett was a Churchman, who, Sri Aurobindo remarked, never used to meddle in matters regarding religion “because he was a man of common sense.” “But he went away to Australia,” he added.⁵¹ His mother though, the fanatically inclined Mrs. Drewett, used to take Sri Aurobindo to church and tried to indoctrinate the three brothers. Sri Aurobindo elaborates how they were abandoned at a tender age and we can discern how he stoically bore it:

When we were staying in London this old lady used to have daily family prayers and reading of some passage from the Bible. One day Manmohan said something about Moses which made her wild. She said she did not want to live under the same roof with unbelievers, and went to live somewhere else. I felt infinitely relieved and grateful to Manmohan. We were then entering upon the agnostic stage in our development.⁵²

Sri Aurobindo’s relief in getting away from the clutches of Mrs. Drewett is perhaps explained by a fellow King’s College classmate of Sri Aurobindo, Mr. Lepper, who wrote of

. . . long continued overdoses of a narrow type of Christianity inflicted on him, doubtless with excellent intentions, by some probably devout old ladies, into whose care, I believe, he had been committed when a young boy at school in London. The effect of this dosing was naturally to make him a confirmed pantheist, with a quite understandable dislike of Christian Missionaries.⁵³

However, in James Cotton we had a man who had a lot of goodwill towards the “abandoned” brothers, especially Sri Aurobindo. When Sri Aurobindo deliberately disqualified himself from his appointment in the I.C.S., James Cotton took the

49. CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 269.

50. See Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., pp. 149-50.

51. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 394.

52. *Ibid.*

53. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 34.

initiative to write to Sir A. G. Macpherson in order to win his sympathy, with the hope that Sri Aurobindo would be given a last chance. An extract of the letter dated 19th November, 1892, reads:

His excuse (such as it is) is that want of money prevented him from taking the needful lessons in riding . . . He tells me that he did turn up at Woolwich for the examination, half an hour late.

It happens that I have known Mr. A. A. Ghose and his two brothers for the past five years, and that I have been a witness of the pitiable straits to which they have all three been reduced through the failure of their father, a Civil Surgeon in Bengal and (I believe) a most respectable man, to supply them with adequate resources. In addition, they have lived an isolated life, without any Englishman to take care of them or advise them.

. . . should the Secretary of State feel himself able to give Mr. Ghose one more chance, I undertake to provide the necessary expenses of riding lessons, journeys to Woolwich etc., and further to do my best to see that his conduct to the Commissioners is regular and becoming.⁵⁴

As regards James Cotton and his attempt to get him another chance in the I.C.S., Sri Aurobindo notes:

James Cotton, brother of Sir Henry (who was a friend of Dr. K. D. Ghose) . . . introduced Sri Aurobindo to the Gaekwar. Cotton became secretary of the South Kensington Liberal Club where two of the brothers were living; Benoybhusan was doing some clerical work for the Club for 5 shillings a week and Cotton took him as his assistant; he took a strong interest in all the three brothers and when Sri Aurobindo failed in the riding test, he tried to get another chance for him (much against the will of Sri Aurobindo who was greatly relieved and overjoyed by his release from the I.C.S.) and, when that did not succeed, introduced him to the Gaekwar so that he might get an appointment in Baroda.⁵⁵

A. B. Purani writes: “Cotton’s help to the three brothers in their difficulty is an unforgettable obligation,”⁵⁶ especially since their father’s remittances had completely ceased during their time in London. One can somewhat understand why Dr. K. D. Ghose was unable to remit monies; he was maintaining his house where he was serving and another for his wife, Sarojini and Barin at Rohini. Added to this was his generous temperament where he never refused anyone who approached him for

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 326-27.

55. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 34.

56. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 14.

help. But his young sons suffered in the bargain.

Elsewhere speaking about his appointment at the Baroda State Service, Sri Aurobindo has alluded to James Cotton: “I think I applied for it when the Gaekwar was in England. Sir Henry Cotton’s brother asked me to do it and through his influence I came in contact with the Gaekwar.”⁵⁷ Sri Aurobindo also mentions: “Cotton afterwards came on a visit to Baroda and saw Sri Aurobindo in the College.”⁵⁸

A. B. Purani, who visited England in 1955 to gather information of Sri Aurobindo’s early life in England, writes:

The period at 128, Cromwell Road [September 1887 to April 1889] was perhaps the most trying of Aurobindo’s stay in England. They were all so hard pressed. . . . During this period Aurobindo used to get a slice or two of bread and butter and a cup of tea in the morning and in the evening only a penny saveloy (a kind of sausage). For nearly two years he had to go practically without dinner at that young age. He had no overcoat to protect him from the rigours of the London winter and there was no heating arrangement in the office where he slept, nor had he a proper bedroom.⁵⁹

Nirodbaran writes that Sri Aurobindo’s father was initially sending remittances to his sons in England but

. . . suddenly something went amiss: they found themselves in great penury. All the three brothers were almost stranded; the father for some mysterious reason stopped their allowances. Gray’s *Elegy* says about some poor people: “Chill penury . . . froze the genial current of their soul”. That was not the case with Sri Aurobindo. He took it calmly, quietly, in spite of 2 or 3 hard years, missing a square meal, living on some sandwiches, 3 cups of tea, some sausages, and in the cold climate of London without sufficient warm clothing.⁶⁰

Such was the gravity of Sri Aurobindo’s economic deprivation in England that even Dinendra Kumar Roy learnt about it in Baroda. He writes:

Aurobindo and his elder brother, the poet Manmohan, were in great financial difficulty in England. Aurobindo told me that sometimes it was difficult for them even to leave the house because their creditors were always after them. Aided by nothing but their intelligence and fortitude, the two brothers made it

57. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2013, p. 955.

58. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 34.

59. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 14.

60. Nirodbaran, ‘Sri Aurobindo – Perfect Gentleman’, *Mother India*, August 1970, p. 407.

through these trials and were able to return to their country without losing their respect.”⁶¹

The journalist Henry Nevinson — whom Sri Aurobindo had met and even referred to — wrote in his *The New Spirit of India* that Sri Aurobindo “had brought himself up amid poverty in Manchester, St Paul’s School in London, and at Cambridge.”⁶²

When a disciple asked Sri Aurobindo if his father was sending him money regularly, he replied:

In the beginning. But afterwards he sent less and less and ultimately he stopped altogether. I had my scholarship at Cambridge but that was not enough to cover the fees and other expenses. So once the tutor wrote to him about money. Then he sent the exact sum for the fees and wrote a letter lecturing me about extravagance! (*Laughter*).⁶³

Alluding to this period, when he was studying at St Paul’s School, London, Sri Aurobindo noted: “This was the time of the greatest suffering and poverty.”⁶⁴ Sri Aurobindo has also said that in England there were times that he and his brothers “had not even one sufficient meal a day”.⁶⁵ Fortunately the principal of St Paul’s School was so impressed by Sri Aurobindo’s brilliance that he was quickly promoted to the higher classes and this reduced his schooling period in London by some years and thus lessened his burden.⁶⁶ Similarly, he completed his B.A. in college (in first class) in two years instead of the usual three years. A classmate said, “Apparently none of his friends were in a position to maintain him at Cambridge for that third year.”⁶⁷

Even after completing school and earning a scholarship of £80 per annum at King’s College, Sri Aurobindo suffered from a paucity of funds. The scholarship was not enough for his maintenance, yet he financially helped his brothers with this money. Earlier, Manmohan too had a scholarship of £80 per annum at Oxford but he told his friend Laurence Binyon that it was not enough to sustain him.⁶⁸ In November 1892, G. W. Prothero, a senior fellow at King’s College who was later knighted and became the president of the Royal Historical Society, wrote to James

61. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st ed., 2006, p. 9.

62. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., pp. 9-10.

63. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 624.

64. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 28.

65. *Talks by Nirodbaran – December 1969 to July 1970*, edited by Sunayana and Maurice, 2018, p. 219.

66. See A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, pp. 8-9.

67. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 34.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Cotton expressing his deep disappointment that an exceptional student like Sri Aurobindo was rejected for the I.C.S. on a flimsy premise. The letter reveals that Sri Aurobindo’s college lifestyle for the two years in Cambridge “was simple and penurious in the extreme”. Here is an excerpt:

Moreover the man has not only ability but character. He has had a very hard and anxious time of it for the last two years. Supplies from home have almost entirely failed, and he has had to keep his two brothers as well as himself, and yet his courage and perseverance have never failed. I have several times written to his father on his behalf, but for the most part unsuccessfully. It is only lately that I managed to extract from him enough to pay some tradesmen who would otherwise have put his son into the County Court. I am quite sure that these pecuniary difficulties were not due to any extravagance on Ghose’s part: his whole way of life, which was simple and penurious in the extreme, is against this: they were due entirely to circumstances beyond his control. But they must have hampered him in many ways, and probably prevented him from spending enough on horses to enable him to learn to ride. I can fully believe that his inability to keep his appointment at Woolwich was due to the want of cash.⁶⁹

After Sri Aurobindo deliberately disqualified himself from the I.C.S. he was persuaded, against his will, by his eldest brother Benoybhusan and James Cotton not to forsake this golden opportunity and make an appeal to the Secretary of State for India, Earl of Kimberley. We reproduce an extract of this letter which reflects the daunting adversity that Sri Aurobindo faced from the age of twelve to twenty years:

I was sent over to England, when seven years of age, with my two elder brothers and for the last eight years we have been thrown on our own resources without any English friend to help or advise us. Our father, Dr. K. D. Ghose of Khulna, has been unable to provide the three of us with sufficient [funds] for the most necessary wants, and we have long been in an embarrassed position.⁷⁰

Sri Aurobindo was the first I.C.S. probationer to lose the appointment because of failing the riding test. He was indifferent to administrative work and success and thus the lure of a plum post of prestige and privilege could not tempt him, even though he was in dire need of money. Fortunately he received his I.C.S. stipend arrears of £150, from which he cleared his outstanding debts before returning to India.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 327-28.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Thinking that Sri Aurobindo had hardly faced real hardship, a disciple told him that he led a relatively easy life. Sri Aurobindo replied:

But what strange ideas again — that I was born with a supramental temperament and had never any brain or mind or any acquaintance with human mentality — and that I know nothing of hard realities. Good God! my whole life has been a struggle with hard realities, from hardship and semi-starvation in England through the fierce difficulties and perils of revolutionary leadership and organisation and activity in India to the far greater difficulties continually cropping up here in Pondicherry, internal and external. My life has been a battle from its early years and is still a battle . . .⁷¹

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

71. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 44.

On the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's centenary, many people will come to the Ashram. What can we do to show them the reality of the Ashram?

Live it. Live this reality. All the rest — talking, etc. — is of no use.

How to prepare ourselves for it?

By communion with the psychic being, the incarnate Divine, deep within us,

an intense aspiration,
a perfect concentration,
a constant dedication.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – I, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 148)



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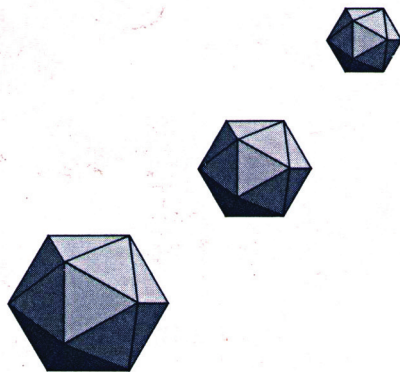
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