

MOTHER INDIA

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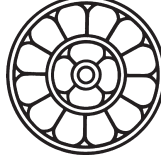
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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No. 6

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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A correction

The reference line on p. 7 of the May 2021 issue should have been:

(*Savitri*, Book VII, Canto III, CWSA, Vol. 34, pp. 488-89)

CREATION

Since Thou hadst all eternity to amuse,
O sculptor of the living shapes of earth,
O dramatist of death and life and birth,
World-artist revelling in forms and hues,

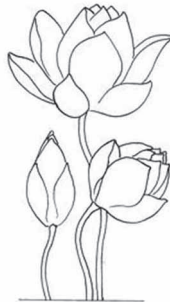
Hast Thou shaped the marvel of the whirling spheres,
A scientist passing Nature through his tubes,
And played with numbers, measures, theorems, cubes,
O mathematician Mind that never errs,

Building a universe from Thy theories?
Protean is Thy spirit of delight,
Craftsman minute and architect of might,
World-adept of a thousand mysteries.

Or forged some deep Necessity, not Thy whim,
Fate and Inconscience and the net of Time?

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 613)



A SYSTEM OF VEDIC PSYCHOLOGY

[A]

Prefatory.

The successes of European science have cast the shadow of their authority & prestige over the speculations of European scholarship; for European thought is, in appearance, a serried army marching to world-conquest and we who undergo the yoke of its tyranny, we, who paralysed by that fascination and overborne by that domination, have almost lost the faculty of thinking for ourselves, receive without distinction all its camp followers or irregular volunteers as authorities to whom we must needs submit. We reflect in our secondhand opinions the weak parts of European thought equally with the strong; we do not distinguish between those of its ideas which eternal Truth has ratified and those which have merely by their ingenuity and probability captivated for a short season the human imagination. The greater part of the discoveries of European Science (its discoveries, not its intellectual generalisations) belong to the first category; the greater part of the conclusions of European scholarship to the second. The best European thought has itself no illusions on this score. One of the greatest of European scholars & foremost of European thinkers, Ernest Renan, after commencing his researches in Comparative Philology with the most golden & extravagant hopes, was compelled at the close of a life of earnest & serious labour, to sum up the chief preoccupation of his days in a formula of measured disparagement, — “petty conjectural sciences”. In other words, no sciences at all; for a science built upon conjectures is as much an impossibility & a contradiction in terms as a house built upon water. Renan’s own writings bear eloquent testimony to the truth of his final verdict; those which sum up his scholastic research, read now like a mass of learned crudity, even the best of them no longer authoritative or valid; those which express the substance or shades of his life’s thinking are of an imperishable beauty & value. The general sentiment of European Science agrees with the experience of Renan and even shoots beyond it; in the vocabulary of German scientists the word “Philologe”, philologist, bears a sadly disparaging and contemptuous significance & so great is the sense among serious thinkers of the bankruptcy of Comparative Philology that many deny even the possibility of an etymological Science. There is no doubt an element of exaggeration in some of these views; but it is true that Comparative Philology, Comparative Mythology, ethnology, anthropology and their kindred “sciences” are largely a mass of conjectures, — shifting intellectual quagmires in which we can find no sure treading. Only the airy wings of an ingenious imagination can bear us up on that

shimmering surface and delude us with the idea that it is the soil which supports our movement & not the wings. There is a meagre but sound substratum of truth which will disengage itself some day from the conjectural rubbish; but the present stage of these conjectural sciences is no better but rather worse than the state of European chemistry in the days of Paracelsus. But we in India are under the spell of European philology; we are taken by its ingenuity, audacity & self-confidence, an ingenuity which is capable of giving a plausibility to the absurd and an appearance of body to the unsubstantial, an audacity which does not hesitate to erect the most imposing theories on a few tags of disconnected facts, a confidence which even the constant change of its own opinions cannot disconcert. Moreover, our natural disposition is to the intellectuality of the scholar; verbal ingenuities, recondite explanations, far-fetched glosses have long had a weight with us which the discontinuity of our old scientific activities and disciplined experimental methods of reaching subjective truth has exaggerated and our excessive addiction to mere verbal metaphysics strongly confirmed. It is not surprising that educated India should have tacitly or expressly accepted even in subjects of such supreme importance to us as the real significance of the Vedas and Upanishads, the half patronising, half contemptuous views of the European scholar.

What are those views? They represent the Veda to us as a mass of naturalistic, ritualistic & astrological conceits, allegories & metaphors, crude & savage in the substance of its thought but more artificial & ingenious in its particular ideas & fancies than the most artificial, allegorical or Alexandrian poetry to be found in the world's literature — a strange incoherent & gaudy jumble unparalleled by the early literature of any other nation, — the result of a queer psychological mixture of an early savage with a modern astronomer & comparative mythologist.

[B]

Is there or can there be a system of Vedic psychology? To us who are dominated today by the prestige of European thought and scholarship, the Vedas are a document of primitive barbarism, the ancient Vedanta a mass of sublime but indisciplined speculations. We may admit the existence of many deep psychological intuitions in the Upanishads; we do not easily allow to an age which we have been taught to regard as great but primitive and undeveloped the possibility of a profound and reasoned system in a subject in which Europe with all her modern knowledge has been unable to develop a real science. I believe that this current view of our Vedic forefathers is entirely erroneous and arises from our application to them of a false system of psychological and intellectual values. Europe has formed certain views about the Veda & the Vedanta, and succeeded in imposing them on the Indian intellect. The ease with which this subjugation has been effected, is not surprising; for the mere mass of labour of Vedic scholarship has been imposing, its ingenuity

of philological speculation is well calculated to dazzle the uncritical mind and the audacity & self-confidence with which it constructs its theories conceals the conjectural uncertainty of their foundations. When a hundred world famous scholars cry out, "This is so," it is hard indeed for the average mind and even minds above the average, but inexpert in these special subjects, not to acquiesce. Nor has there been in India itself any corresponding labour of scholarship, diligence & sound enquiry which could confront the brilliant and hazardous generalisations of modern Sanscrit scholarship with the results of a more perfect system and a more penetrating vision. The only attempt in that direction — the attempt of Swami Dayananda — has not been of a kind to generate confidence in the dispassionate judgment of posterity which must be the final arbiter of these disputes; for not only was that great Pundit and vigorous disputant unequipped with the wide linguistic & philological scholarship necessary for his work, but his method was rapid, impatient, polemical, subservient to certain fixed religious ideas rather than executed in the calm, disinterested freedom of the careful and impartial thinker and scholar. Judgment has passed on the Veda & Vedanta by default in favour of the scholastic criticism of Europe which has alone been represented in the court of modern opinion.

Nevertheless a time must come when the Indian mind will shake off the paralysis that has fallen upon it, cease to think or hold opinions at second & third hand & reassert its right to judge and inquire with a perfect freedom into the meaning of its own Scriptures. When that day comes, we shall, I think, discover that the imposing fabric of Vedic theory is based upon nothing more sound or lasting than a foundation of loosely-massed conjectures. We shall question many established philological myths, — the legend, for instance, of an Aryan invasion of India from the north, the artificial & unreal distinction of Aryan & Dravidian which an erroneous philology has driven like a wedge into the unity of the homogeneous Indo-Afghan race; the strange dogma of a "henotheistic" Vedic naturalism; the ingenious & brilliant extravagances of the modern sun & star myth weavers, and many another hasty & attractive generalisation which, after a brief period of unquestioning acceptance by the easily-persuaded intellect of mankind, is bound to depart into the limbo of forgotten theories. We attach an undue importance & value to the ephemeral conclusions of European philology, because it is systematic in its errors and claims to be a science. We forget or do not know that the claims of philology to a scientific value & authority are scouted by European scientists; the very word, Philologe, is a byword of scorn to serious scientific writers in Germany, the temple of philology. One of the greatest of modern philologists & modern thinkers, Ernest Renan, was finally obliged after a lifetime of hope & earnest labour to class the chief preoccupation of his life as one of the "petty conjectural sciences" — in other words no science at all, but a system of probabilities & guesses. Beyond one or two generalisations of the mutations followed by words in their progress through the various Aryan languages and a certain number of grammatical rectifications &

rearrangements, resulting in a less arbitrary view of linguistic relations, modern philology has discovered no really binding law or rule for its own guidance. It has fixed one or two sure signposts; the rest is speculation and conjecture. We are not therefore bound to worship at the shrines of Comparative Science & Comparative Mythology & offer up on these dubious altars the Veda & Vedanta. The question of Vedic truth & the meaning of Veda still lies open. If Sayana's interpretation of Vedic texts is largely conjectural and likely often to be mistaken & unsound, the European interpretation can lay claim to no better certainty. The more lively ingenuity and imposing orderliness of the European method of conjecture may be admitted; but ingenuity & orderliness, though good helps to an enquiry, are in themselves no guarantee of truth and a conjecture does not cease to be a conjecture, because its probability or possibility is laboriously justified or brilliantly supported. It is on the basis of a purely conjectural translation of the Vedas that Europe presents us with these brilliant pictures of Vedic religion, Vedic society, Vedic civilisation which we so eagerly accept and unquestioningly reproduce. For we take them as the form of an unquestionable truth; in reality, they are no more than brilliantly coloured hypotheses, — works of imagination, not drawings from the life.

Circa 1913

SRI AUROBINDO

(Vedic and Philological Studies, CWSA, Vol. 14, pp. 161-65)



WORD-FORMATION

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

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

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

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

SRI AUROBINDO

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

[This fragment is evidently all that was written of the proposed treatise mentioned in the second paragraph – Editorial Note in CWSA]



PROGRESS TO INTEGRALITY

... A return or a progress to integrality, a disappearance of the limitation, a breaking down of separateness, an overpassing of boundaries, a recovery of our essential and whole reality must be the sign and opposite character of the inner turn towards Knowledge. There must be a replacement of a limited and separative by an essential and integral consciousness identified with the original truth and the whole truth of self and existence. The integral Knowledge is something that is already there in the integral Reality: it is not a new or still non-existent thing that has to be created, acquired, learned, invented or built up by the mind; it must rather be discovered or uncovered, it is a Truth that is self-revealed to a spiritual endeavour: for it is there veiled in our deeper and greater self; it is the very stuff of our own spiritual consciousness, and it is by awaking to it even in our surface self that we have to possess it. There is an integral self-knowledge that we have to recover and, because the world-self also is our self, an integral world-knowledge. A knowledge that can be learned or constructed by the mind exists and has its value, but that is not what is meant when we speak of the Knowledge and the Ignorance.

An integral spiritual consciousness carries in it a knowledge of all the terms of being; it links the highest to the lowest through all the mediating terms and achieves an indivisible whole. At the highest summit of things it opens to the reality, ineffable because superconscient to all but its own self-awareness, of the Absolute. At the lowest end of our being it perceives the Inconscience from which our evolution begins; but at the same time it is aware of the One and the All self-involved in those depths, it unveils the secret Consciousness in the Inconscience. Interpretative, revelatory, moving between these two extremes, its vision discovers the manifestation of the One in the Many, the identity of the Infinite in the disparity of things finite, the presence of the timeless Eternal in eternal Time; it is this seeing that illumines for it the meaning of the universe. This consciousness does not abolish the universe; it takes it up and transforms it by giving to it its hidden significance. It does not abolish the individual existence; it transforms the individual being and nature by revealing to them their true significance and enabling them to overcome their separateness from the Divine Reality and the Divine Nature.

An integral knowledge presupposes an integral Reality; for it is the power of a Truth-consciousness which is itself the consciousness of the Reality. But our idea and sense of Reality vary with our status and movement of consciousness, its sight, its stress, its intake of things; that sight or stress can be intensive and exclusive or extensive, inclusive and comprehensive. It is quite possible — and it is in its own field a valid movement for our thought and for a very high line of spiritual achievement — to affirm the existence of the ineffable Absolute, to emphasise its sole Reality

and to negate and abolish for our self, to expunge from our idea and sense of reality, the individual being and the cosmic creation. The reality of the individual is Brahman the Absolute; the reality of the cosmos is Brahman the Absolute: the individual is a phenomenon, a temporal appearance in the cosmos; the cosmos itself is a phenomenon, a larger and more complex temporal appearance. The two terms, Knowledge and Ignorance, belong only to this appearance; in order to reach an absolute superconsciousness both have to be transcended: ego-consciousness and cosmic consciousness are extinguished in that supreme transcendence and there remains only the Absolute. For the absolute Brahman exists only in its own identity and is beyond all other-knowledge; there the very idea of the knower and the known and therefore of the knowledge in which they meet and become one, disappears, is transcended and loses its validity, so that to mind and speech the absolute Brahman must remain always unattainable. In opposition to the view we have put forward or in completion of it, — the view of the Ignorance itself as only either a limited or an involved action of the divine Knowledge, limited in the partly conscient, involved in the inconscient, — we might say from this other end of the scale of things that Knowledge itself is only a higher Ignorance, since it stops short of the absolute Reality which is self-evident to Itself but to mind unknowable. This absolutism corresponds to a truth of thought and to a truth of supreme experience in the spiritual consciousness; but by itself it is not the whole of spiritual thought complete and comprehensive and it does not exhaust the possibilities of the supreme spiritual experience.

The absolutist view of reality, consciousness and knowledge is founded on one side of the earliest Vedantic thought, but it is not the whole of that thinking. In the Upanishads, in the inspired scripture of the most ancient Vedanta, we find the affirmation of the Absolute, the experience-concept of the utter and ineffable Transcendence; but we find also, not in contradiction to it but as its corollary, an affirmation of the cosmic Divinity, an experience-concept of the cosmic Self and the becoming of Brahman in the universe. Equally, we find the affirmation of the Divine Reality in the individual: this too is an experience-concept; it is seized upon not as an appearance, but as an actual becoming. In place of a sole supreme exclusive affirmation negating all else than the transcendent Absolute we find a comprehensive affirmation carried to its farthest conclusion: this concept of Reality and of Knowledge enveloping in one view the cosmic and the Absolute coincides fundamentally with our own; for it implies that the Ignorance too is a half-veiled part of the Knowledge and world-knowledge a part of self-knowledge. The Isha Upanishad insists on the unity and reality of all the manifestations of the Absolute; it refuses to confine truth to any one aspect. Brahman is the stable and the mobile, the internal and the external, all that is near and all that is far whether spiritually or in the extension of Time and Space; it is the Being and all becomings, the Pure and Silent who is without feature or action and the Seer and Thinker who organises the world and its objects; it is the

One who becomes all that we are sensible of in the universe, the Immanent and that in which he takes up his dwelling. The Upanishad affirms the perfect and the liberating knowledge to be that which excludes neither the Self nor its creations: the liberated spirit sees all these as becomings of the Self-existent in an internal vision and by a consciousness which perceives the universe within itself instead of looking out on it, like the limited and egoistic mind, as a thing other than itself. To live in the cosmic Ignorance is a blindness, but to confine oneself in an exclusive absolutism of Knowledge is also a blindness: to know Brahman as at once and together the Knowledge and the Ignorance, to attain to the supreme status at once by the Becoming and the Non-Becoming, to relate together realisation of the transcendent and the cosmic self, to achieve foundation in the supramundane and a self-aware manifestation in the mundane, is the integral knowledge; that is the possession of Immortality. It is this whole consciousness with its complete knowledge that builds the foundation of the Life Divine and makes its attainment possible. It follows that the absolute reality of the Absolute must be, not a rigid indeterminable oneness, not an infinity vacant of all that is not a pure self-existence attainable only by the exclusion of the many and the finite, but something which is beyond these definitions, beyond indeed any description either positive or negative. All affirmations and negations are expressive of its aspects, and it is through both a supreme affirmation and a supreme negation that we can arrive at the Absolute.

On the one side, then, presented to us as the Reality, we have an absolute Self-Existence, an eternal sole self-being, and through the experience of the silent and inactive Self or the detached immobile Purusha we can move towards this featureless and relationless Absolute, negate the actions of the creative Power, whether that be an illusory Maya or a formative Prakriti, pass from all circling in cosmic error into the eternal Peace and Silence, get rid of our personal existence and find or lose ourselves in that sole true Existence. On the other side, we have a Becoming which is a true movement of Being, and both the Being and the Becoming are truths of one absolute Reality. The first view is founded on the metaphysical conception which formulates an extreme perception in our thought, an exclusive experience in our consciousness of the Absolute as a reality void of all relations and determinations: that imposes as its consequence a logical and practical necessity to deny the world of relativities as a falsity of unreal being, a non-existent (Asat), or at least a lower and evanescent, temporal and pragmatic self-experience, and to cut it away from the consciousness in order to arrive at liberation of the spirit from its false perceptions or its inferior creations. The second view is based on the conception of the Absolute as neither positively nor negatively limitable. It is beyond all relations in the sense that it is not bound by any relativities or limitable by them in its power of being: it cannot be tied down and circumscribed by our relative conceptions, highest or lowest, positive or negative; it is bound neither by our knowledge nor by our ignorance, neither by our concept of existence nor by our concept of non-existence.

But neither can it be limited by any incapacity to contain, sustain, create or manifest relations: on the contrary, the power to manifest itself in infinity of unity and infinity of multiplicity can be regarded as an inherent force, sign, result of its very absoluteness, and this possibility is in itself a sufficient explanation of cosmic existence. The Absolute cannot indeed be bound in its nature to manifest a cosmos of relations, but neither can it be bound not to manifest any cosmos. It is not itself a sheer emptiness; for a vacant Absolute is no Absolute, — our conception of a Void or Zero is only a conceptual sign of our mental inability to know or grasp it: it bears in itself some ineffable essentiality of all that is and all that can be; and since it holds in itself this essentiality and this possibility, it must also hold in itself in some way of its absoluteness either the permanent truth or the inherent, even if latent, realisable actuality of all that is fundamental to our or the world's existence. It is this realisable actuality actualised or this permanent truth deploying its possibilities that we call manifestation and see as the universe.

There is, then, in the conception or the realisation of the truth of the Absolute no inherent inevitable consequence of a rejection or a dissolution of the truth of the universe. The idea of an essentially unreal universe manifested somehow by an inexplicable Power of illusion, the Absolute Brahman regarding it not or aloof and not affecting it even as it is unaffected by it, is at bottom a carrying over, an imposing or imputation, *adhyāropa*, of an incapacity of our mental consciousness to That so as to limit it. Our mental consciousness, when it passes beyond its limits, loses its own way and means of knowledge and tends towards inactivity or cessation; it loses at the same time or tends to have no further hold on its former contents, no continuing conception of the reality of that which once was to it all that was real: we impute to absolute Parabrahman, conceived as non-manifest for ever, a corresponding inability or separation or aloofness from what has become or seems now to us unreal; it must, like our mind in its cessation or self-extinction, be by its very nature of pure absoluteness void of all connection with this world of apparent manifestation, incapable of any supporting cognition or dynamic maintenance of it that gives it a reality — or, if there is such a cognition, it must be of the nature of an Is that is not, a magical Maya. But there is no binding reason to suppose that this chasm must exist; what our relative human consciousness is or is not capable of, is no test or standard of an absolute capacity; its conceptions cannot be applied to an absolute self-awareness: what is necessary for our mental ignorance in order to escape from itself cannot be the necessity of the Absolute which has no need of self-escape and no reason for refusing to cognise whatever is to it cognisable.

There is that unmanifest Unknowable; there is this manifest knowable, partly manifest to our ignorance, manifest entirely to the divine Knowledge which holds it in its own infinity. If it is true that neither our ignorance nor our utmost and widest mental knowledge can give us a hold of the Unknowable, still it is also true that, whether through our knowledge or through our ignorance, That variously manifests

itself; for it cannot be manifesting something other than itself, since nothing else can exist: in this variety of manifestation there is that Oneness and through the diversity we can touch the Oneness. But even so, even accepting this coexistence, it is still possible to pass a final verdict and sentence of condemnation on the Becoming and decide on the necessity of a renunciation of it and a return into the absolute Being. This verdict can be based on the distinction between the real reality of the Absolute and the partial and misleading reality of the relative universe.

For we have in this unfolding of knowledge the two terms of the One and the Many, as we have the two terms of the finite and the infinite, of that which becomes and of that which does not become but for ever is, of that which takes form and of that which does not take form, of Spirit and Matter, of the supreme Superconscient and the nethermost Inconscience; in this dualism, and to get away from it, it is open to us to define Knowledge as the possession of one term and the possession of the other as Ignorance. The ultimate of our life would then be a drawing away from the lower reality of the Becoming to the greater reality of the Being, a leap from the Ignorance to the Knowledge and a rejection of the Ignorance, a departure from the many into the One, from the finite into the infinite, from form into the formless, from the life of the material universe into the Spirit, from the hold of the inconscient upon us into the superconscient Existence. In this solution there is supposed to be a fixed opposition, an ultimate irreconcilability in each case between the two terms of our being. Or else, if both are a means of the manifestation of the Brahman, the lower is a false or imperfect clue, a means that must fail, a system of values that cannot ultimately satisfy us. Dissatisfied with the confusions of the multiplicity, disdainful of even the highest light and power and joy that it can reveal, we must drive beyond to the absolute one-pointedness and one-standingness in which all self-variation ceases. Unable by the claim of the Infinite upon us to dwell for ever in the bonds of the finite or to find there satisfaction and largeness and peace, we have to break all the bonds of individual and universal Nature, destroy all values, symbols, images, self-definitions, limitations of the illimitable and lose all littleness and division in the Self that is for ever satisfied with its own infinity. Disgusted with forms, disillusioned of their false and transient attractions, wearied and discouraged by their fleeting impermanence and vain round of recurrence, we must escape from the cycles of Nature into the formlessness and featurelessness of permanent Being. Ashamed of Matter and its grossness, impatient of the purposeless stir and trouble of Life, tired out by the goalless running of Mind or convinced of the vanity of all its aims and objects, we have to release ourselves into the eternal repose and purity of the Spirit. The Inconscient is a sleep or a prison, the conscient a round of strivings without ultimate issue or the wanderings of a dream: we must wake into the superconscious where all darkness of night and half-lights cease in the self-luminous bliss of the Eternal. The Eternal is our refuge; all the rest are false values, the Ignorance and its mazes, a self-bewilderment of the soul in phenomenal Nature.

Our conception of the Knowledge and the Ignorance rejects this negation and the oppositions on which it is founded: it points to a larger if more difficult issue of reconciliation. For we see that these apparently opposite terms of One and Many, Form and the Formless, Finite and Infinite, are not so much opposites as complements of each other; not alternating values of the Brahman which in its creation perpetually loses oneness to find itself in multiplicity and, unable to discover itself in multiplicity, loses it again to recover oneness, but double and concurrent values which explain each other; not hopelessly incompatible alternatives, but two faces of the one Reality which can lead us to it by our realisation of both together and not only by testing each separately, — even though such separate testing may be a legitimate or even an inevitable step or part of the process of knowledge. Knowledge is no doubt the knowledge of the One, the realisation of the Being; Ignorance is a self-oblivion of Being, the experience of separateness in the multiplicity and a dwelling or circling in the ill-understood maze of becomings: but this is cured by the soul in the Becoming growing into knowledge, into awareness of the Being which becomes in the multiplicity all these existences and can so become because their truth is already there in its timeless existence. The integral knowledge of Brahman is a consciousness in possession of both together, and the exclusive pursuit of either closes the vision to one side of the truth of the omnipresent Reality. The possession of the Being who is beyond all becomings, brings to us freedom from the bonds of attachment and ignorance in the cosmic existence and brings by that freedom a free possession of the Becoming and of the cosmic existence. The knowledge of the Becoming is a part of knowledge; it acts as an Ignorance only because we dwell imprisoned in it, *avidyāyām antare*, without possessing the Oneness of the Being, which is its base, its stuff, its spirit, its cause of manifestation and without which it could not be possible.

In fact, the Brahman is one not only in a featureless oneness beyond all relation, but in the very multiplicity of the cosmic existence. Aware of the works of the dividing mind but not itself limited by it, It finds its oneness as easily in the many, in relations, in becoming as in any withdrawal from the many, from relations, from becoming. Ourselves also, to possess even its oneness fully, must possess it — since it is there, since all is that — in the infinite self-variation of the cosmos. The infinity of the multiplicity finds itself explained and justified only when it is contained and possessed in the infinity of the One; but also the infinity of the One pours itself out and possesses itself in the infinity of the Many. To be capable of that outpouring of its energies as well as not to lose itself in it, not to recoil defeated from its boundlessness and endlessness of vicissitudes and differences as well as not to be self-divided by its variations, is the divine strength of the free Purusha, the conscious Soul in its possession of its own immortal self-knowledge. The finite self-variations of the Self in which the mind losing self-knowledge is caught and dispersed among the variations, are yet not the denials but the endless expression of the Infinite and have no other meaning or reason for existence: the Infinite too, while it possesses its

delight of limitless being, finds also the joy of that very limitlessness in its infinite self-definition in the universe. The Divine Being is not incapable of taking innumerable forms because He is beyond all form in His essence, nor by assuming them does He lose His divinity, but pours out rather in them the delight of His being and the glories of His godhead; this gold does not cease to be gold because it shapes itself into all kinds of ornaments and coins itself into many currencies and values, nor does the Earth-Power, principle of all this figured material existence, lose her immutable divinity because she forms herself into habitable worlds, throws herself out in the hills and hollows and allows herself to be shaped into utensils of the hearth and household or as hard metal into the weapon and the engine. Matter, — substance itself, subtle or dense, mental or material, — is form and body of Spirit and would never have been created if it could not be made a basis for the self-expression of the Spirit. The apparent Inconscience of the material universe holds in itself darkly all that is eternally self-revealed in the luminous Superconscient; to reveal it in Time is the slow and deliberate delight of Nature and the aim of her cycles.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Life Divine, CWSA, Vol. 22, pp. 659-68)



EUROPE AND ASIA

The London correspondent of a contemporary quotes, with the apposite change of a word, some verses from a poem by Wilfrid Blunt which so admirably express the basic motive of the Nationalist movement in India that we reproduce it here. It is often represented by our opponents that the cry for Swaraj is a mere senseless cry for freedom without any recognition of the responsibilities of freedom. This is not so. Those who have followed the exposition of the Nationalist ideal in *Bande Mataram* know well that we advocate the struggle for Swaraj, first, because Liberty is in itself a necessity of national life and therefore worth striving for for its own sake; secondly, because Liberty is the first indispensable condition of national development intellectual, moral, industrial, political (we do not say it is the only condition) and therefore worth striving for for India's sake; thirdly, because in the next great stage of human progress it is not a material but a spiritual, moral and psychical advance that has to be made and for this a free Asia and in Asia a free India must take the lead, and Liberty is therefore worth striving for for the world's sake. India must have Swaraj in order to live; she must have Swaraj in order to live well and happily; she must have Swaraj in order to live for the world, not as a slave for the material and political benefit of a single purse-proud and selfish nation, but as a free people for the spiritual and intellectual benefit of the human race.

The verses quoted are from a poem called "The Wind and the Whirlwind", addressed to England. England, by her oppression of the Asiatic peoples under her sway, by her selfish and ruthless exploitation of their wealth, by her refusal to allow them the chance of national life and free development, is sowing the wind, and she will reap the whirlwind in the loss of her Empire, perhaps in national decay and death.

"Truth yet shall triumph in a world of justice;
This is of faith. I swear it. East and West
The law of Man's progression shall accomplish
Even this last great marvel with the rest.

Thou wouldst not further it. Thou canst not hinder.
If thou shalt learn in time, thou yet shalt live.
But God shall ease thy hand of thy dominion
And give to these the rights thou wouldst not give.

The nations of the East have left their childhood.
Thou art grown old. Their manhood is to come;

And they shall carry on Earth's high tradition
 Through the long ages when thy lips are dumb,

Till all shall be wrought out. O lands of weeping,
 Lands watered by the rivers of old Time,
 Ganges and Indus and the streams of Eden,
 Yours is the future of the world's sublime.

Yours was the fount of man's first inspiration,
 The well of wisdom whence he earliest drew.
 And yours shall be the floodtime of his reason,
 The means of strength which shall his strength renew.

The wisdom of the West is but a madness,
 The fret of shallow waters in their bed.
 Yours is the flow, the fulness of man's patience,
 The ocean of God's rest inherited.

And thou, too, India, mourner of the nations,
 Though thou hast died today in all men's sight,
 And though upon thy cross with thieves thou hangest,
 Yet shall thy wrong be justified in right."

The view of the East as just emerging from its childhood and the West as old and senile, is contrary to received ideas, but there is a deep truth underlying it. The East is more ancient by many thousands of years than the West, but a greater length of years does not necessarily imply a more advanced age. The years which would mean only childhood to a long-lived species would bring old age and death to more ephemeral stocks. Asia is long-lived, Europe brief and ephemeral. Asia is in everything hugely-mapped, immense and grandiose in its motions, and its life-periods are measured accordingly. Europe lives by centuries, Asia by millenniums. Europe is parcelled out in nations, Asia in civilisations. The whole of Europe forms only one civilisation with a common, derived and largely second-hand culture; Asia supports three civilisations, each of them original and of the soil. Everything in Europe is small, rapid and short-lived; she has not the secret of immortality. Greece, the chief source of her civilisation, matured in two or three centuries, flourished for another two, and two more were sufficient for her decline and death. How few in years are the modern European nations, yet Spain is already dead, Austria death-stricken and suffering from gangrene and disintegration, France overtaken by a mortal and incurable malady, England already affected by the initial processes of decay. Germany and America alone show any signs of a healthy and developing

manhood. In the place which is left vacant by the decline of the European nations Asia young, strong and vigorous, dowered with the gift of immortality and the secret of self-transmutation, is preparing to step forward and possess the future. She alone can teach the world the secret of immortality which she possesses and in order that she may do so, she must reign.

Asia has been described by the Europeans as decrepit; they will find to their amazement and dismay that she is rather emerging into her age of robust and perfect manhood. It is true that she reached ages ago heights of science, philosophy, civilisation which Europe is now toilfully trying to reach and that afterwards there was a slackening down, loss and disturbance from which she is only now recovering, but there was no decay or decline. It was rather the disturbance, the temporary arrest, disorganization and derangement which marks the transition from boyhood to manhood. Her mighty civilizations, her great philosophies, her acute scientific observations and intuitions were the toys and games of her yet immature and imperfect powers, the light and easy play of a child-giant, and form merely a slight index of the far greater things she will accomplish in the coming days of her ripe strength and maturity. What she did, she did by the activity of intuition and imagination, the first free penetrating sympathy of a mind fresh from the divine source of life. She will now learn the scientific method of the adult and senescent West and apply it with a far greater force and ability to lines of development in which Europe is a bungler and novice.

The wisdom of the West is but a madness,
The fret of shallow waters in their bed.

This shallowness proceeds from the fact that the West has developed materially and on the surface, but has not sought for strength and permanence in the deeper roots of life of which our outer activity is only a partial manifestation. The fundamental difference between East and West has been exemplified more than once in recent times. What European nation could have changed its whole political, social and economic machinery in a few years like Japan, with so little trouble, with such thoroughness and science, with the minimum of disturbance to its national economy? The phenomenon is so alien to European nature and European experience that even to this day Western observers have been unable to understand it. Japan is a “weird” nation, that is all the conclusion they can come to on the subject. What European nation again would deal so swiftly, directly and earnestly with its own national vices as the Chinese are dealing with the opium vice in China? The very idea that China really meant it, was incredible to English observers. And well it might be, for one can imagine what would be the fate of any such attempt to deal with the national vice of drunkenness in England. If India is unable to show such signal triumphs, it is because she has been disorganized by the merciless pressure of the alien rule and

all her centres of strength and action destroyed or disabled. Yet even so, she has shown and is still showing signs of a prolonged and unconquerable vitality such as no nation subject for an equally long time has evinced since history began. It is this moral strength, this ability to go to the roots, this gift of diving down into the depths of self and drawing out the miraculous powers of the Will, this command over one's own soul which is the secret of Asia. And he who is in possession of his soul, the Scripture assures us, shall become the master of the world.

Calcutta, July 3rd, 1907

SRI AUROBINDO

(Bande Mataram, CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 572-76)



THREE PARTS OF THE ONE KNOWLEDGE

In the spiritual knowledge of self there are three steps of its self-achievement which are at the same time three parts of the one knowledge. The first is the discovery of the soul, not the outer soul of thought and emotion and desire, but the secret psychic entity, the divine element within us. When that becomes dominant over the nature, when we are consciously the soul and when mind, life and body take their true place as its instruments, we are aware of a guide within that knows the truth, the good, the true delight and beauty of existence, controls heart and intellect by its luminous law and leads our life and being towards spiritual completeness. Even within the obscure workings of the Ignorance we have then a witness who discerns, a living light that illumines, a will that refuses to be misled and separates the mind's truth from its error, the heart's intimate response from its vibrations to a wrong call and wrong demand upon it, the life's true ardour and plenitude of movement from vital passion and the turbid falsehoods of our vital nature and its dark self-seekings. This is the first step of self-realisation, to enthrone the soul, the divine psychic individual in the place of the ego. The next step is to become aware of the eternal self in us unborn and one with the self of all beings. This self-realisation liberates and universalises; even if our action still proceeds in the dynamics of the Ignorance, it no longer binds or misleads because our inner being is seated in the light of self-knowledge. The third step is to know the Divine Being who is at once our supreme transcendent Self, the Cosmic Being, foundation of our universality, and the Divinity within of which our psychic being, the true evolving individual in our nature, is a portion, a spark, a flame growing into the eternal Fire from which it was lit and of which it is the witness ever living within us and the conscious instrument of its light and power and joy and beauty. Aware of the Divine as the Master of our being and action, we can learn to become channels of his Shakti, the Divine Puissance, and act according to her dictates or her rule of light and power within us. Our action will not then be mastered by our vital impulse or governed by a mental standard, for she acts according to the permanent yet plastic truth of things, — not that which the mind constructs, but the higher, deeper and subtler truth of each movement and circumstance as it is known to the supreme knowledge and demanded by the supreme will in the universe. The liberation of the will follows upon the liberation in knowledge and is its dynamic consequence; it is knowledge that purifies, it is truth that liberates: evil is the fruit of a spiritual ignorance and it will disappear only by the growth of a spiritual consciousness and the light of spiritual knowledge. The division of our being from the being of others can only be healed by removing the divorce of our nature from the inner soul-reality, by abolishing the veil between our becoming and our self-being, by bridging the remoteness of our individuality in Nature from the

Divine Being who is the omnipresent Reality in Nature and above Nature.

But the last division to be removed is the scission between this Nature and the Supernature which is the Self-Power of the Divine Existence. Even before the dynamic Knowledge-Ignorance is removed, while it still remains as an inadequate instrumentation of the spirit, the supreme Shakti or Supernature can work through us and we can be aware of her workings; but it is then by a modification of her light and power so that it can be received and assimilated by the inferior nature of the mind, life and body. But this is not enough; there is needed an entire remoulding of what we are into a way and power of the divine Supernature. The integration of our being cannot be complete unless there is this transformation of the dynamic action; there must be an uplifting and change of the whole mode of Nature itself and not only some illumination and transmutation of the inner ways of the being. An eternal Truth-Consciousness must possess us and sublimate all our natural modes into its own modes of being, knowledge and action; a spontaneous truth-awareness, truth-will, truth-feeling, truth-movement, truth-action can then become the integral law of our nature.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Life Divine, CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 653-55)



‘LET THE MIND LEARN TO BE SILENT . . .’

July 13, 1914

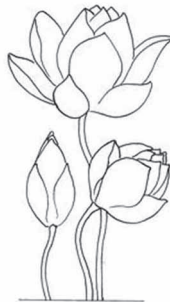
Patience, strength, courage, calm and indomitable energy. . . .

Let the mind learn to be silent, let it not be eager to profit immediately by the forces which come to us from Thee for the integral manifestation. . . .

But why hast thou chosen for the expression of Thy Will the poorest element, the most mediocre, the most imperfect? . . .

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 201)



A CONVERSATION OF 14 APRIL 1929 AND SOME EXPLANATIONS

What are the dangers of Yoga? Is it especially dangerous to the people of the West? Someone has said that Yoga may be suitable for the East, but it has the effect of unbalancing the Western mind.

Yoga is not more dangerous to the people of the West than to those of the East. Everything depends upon the spirit with which you approach it. Yoga does become dangerous if you want it for your own sake, to serve a personal end. It is not dangerous, on the contrary, it is safety and security itself, if you go to it with a sense of its sacredness, always remembering that the aim is to find the Divine.

Dangers and difficulties come in when people take up Yoga not for the sake of the Divine, but because they want to acquire power and under the guise of Yoga seek to satisfy some ambition. If you cannot get rid of ambition, do not touch the thing. It is fire that burns.

There are two paths of Yoga, one of *tapasyā* (discipline), and the other of surrender. The path of *tapasyā* is arduous. Here you rely solely upon yourself, you proceed by your own strength. You ascend and achieve according to the measure of your force. There is always the danger of falling down. And once you fall, you lie broken in the abyss and there is hardly a remedy. The other path, the path of surrender, is safe and sure. It is here, however, that the Western people find their difficulty. They have been taught to fear and avoid all that threatens their personal independence. They have imbibed with their mothers' milk the sense of individuality. And surrender means giving up all that. In other words, you may follow, as Ramakrishna says, either the path of the baby monkey or that of the baby cat. The baby monkey holds to its mother in order to be carried about and it must hold firm, otherwise if it loses its grip, it falls. On the other hand, the baby cat does not hold to its mother, but is held by the mother and has no fear nor responsibility; it has nothing to do but to let the mother hold it and cry *ma ma*.

If you take up this path of surrender fully and sincerely, there is no more danger or serious difficulty. The question is to be sincere. If you are not sincere, do not begin Yoga. If you were dealing in human affairs, then you could resort to deception; but in dealing with the Divine there is no possibility of deception anywhere. You can go on the Path safely when you are candid and open to the core and when your only end is to realise and attain the Divine and to be moved by the Divine.

There is another danger; it is in connection with the sex impulses. Yoga in its process of purification will lay bare and throw up all hidden impulses and desires in you. And you must learn not to hide things nor leave them aside, you have to face

them and conquer and remould them. The first effect of Yoga, however, is to take away the mental control, and the hungers that lie dormant are suddenly set free, they rush up and invade the being. So long as this mental control has not been replaced by the Divine control, there is a period of transition when your sincerity and surrender will be put to the test. The strength of such impulses as those of sex lies usually in the fact that people take too much notice of them; they protest too vehemently and endeavour to control them by coercion, hold them within and sit upon them. But the more you think of a thing and say, "I don't want it, I don't want it", the more you are bound to it. What you should do is to keep the thing away from you, to dissociate from it, take as little notice of it as possible and, even if you happen to think of it, remain indifferent and unconcerned.

The impulses and desires that come up by the pressure of Yoga should be faced in a spirit of detachment and serenity, as something foreign to yourself or belonging to the outside world. They should be offered to the Divine, so that the Divine may take them up and transmute them.

If you have once opened yourself to the Divine, if the power of the Divine has once come down into you and yet you try to keep to the old forces, you prepare troubles and difficulties and dangers for yourself. You must be vigilant and see that you do not use the Divine as a cloak for the satisfaction of your desires. There are many self-appointed Masters, who do nothing but that. And then when you are off the straight path and when you have a little knowledge and not much power, it happens that you are seized by beings or entities of a certain type, you become blind instruments in their hands and are devoured by them in the end. Wherever there is pretence, there is danger; you cannot deceive God. Do you come to God saying, "I want union with you" and in your heart meaning "I want powers and enjoyments"? Beware! You are heading straight towards the brink of the precipice. And yet it is so easy to avoid all catastrophe. Become like a child, give yourself up to the Mother, let her carry you, and there is no more danger for you.

This does not mean that you have not to face other kinds of difficulties or that you have not to fight and conquer any obstacles at all. Surrender does not ensure a smooth and unruffled and continuous progression. The reason is that your being is not yet one, nor your surrender absolute and complete. Only a part of you surrenders; and today it is one part and the next day it is another. The whole purpose of the Yoga is to gather all the divergent parts together and forge them into an undivided unity. Till then you cannot hope to be without difficulties — difficulties, for example, like doubt or depression or hesitation. The whole world is full of the poison. You take it in with every breath. If you exchange a few words with an undesirable man or even if such a man merely passes by you, you may catch the contagion from him. It is sufficient for you to come near a place where there is plague in order to be infected with its poison; you need not know at all that it is there. You can lose in a few minutes what it has taken you months to gain. So long as you belong to humanity

and so long as you lead the ordinary life, it does not matter much if you mix with the people of the world; but if you want the divine life, you will have to be exceedingly careful about your company and your environment.

What is the way to establish unity and homogeneity in our being?

Keep the will firm. Treat the recalcitrant parts as disobedient children. Act upon them constantly and patiently. Convince them of their error.

In the depths of your consciousness is the psychic being, the temple of the Divine within you. This is the centre round which should come about the unification of all these divergent parts, all these contradictory movements of your being. Once you have got the consciousness of the psychic being and its aspiration, these doubts and difficulties can be destroyed. It takes more or less time, but you will surely succeed in the end. Once you have turned to the Divine, saying, "I want to be yours", and the Divine has said, "Yes", the whole world cannot keep you from it. When the central being has made its surrender, the chief difficulty has disappeared. The outer being is like a crust. In ordinary people the crust is so hard and thick that they are not conscious of the Divine within them. If once, even for a moment only, the inner being has said, "I am here and I am yours", then it is as though a bridge has been built and little by little the crust becomes thinner and thinner until the two parts are wholly joined and the inner and the outer become one.

Ambition has been the undoing of many Yogis. That canker can hide long. Many people start on the Path without any sense of it. But when they get powers, their ambition rises up, all the more violently because it had not been thrown out in the beginning.

A story is told of a Yogi who had attained wonderful powers. He was invited by his disciples to a great dinner. It was served on a big low table. The disciples asked their Master to show his power in some way. He knew he should not, but the seed of ambition was there in him and he thought, "After all, it is a very innocent thing and it may prove to them that such things are possible and teach them the greatness of God." So he said, "Take away the table, but only the table, let the tablecloth remain as it is with all the dishes upon it." The disciples cried out, "Oh, that cannot be done, everything will fall down." But he insisted and they removed the table from under the cloth. Lo, the miracle! The cloth and all that was upon it remained there just as though the table was underneath. The disciples wondered. But all on a sudden the Master jumped up and rushed out screaming and crying, "Nevermore shall I have a disciple, nevermore! Woe is me! I have betrayed my God." His heart was on fire; he had used the divine powers for selfish ends.

It is always wrong to display powers. This does not mean that there is no use for them. But they have to be used in the same way as they came. They come by union with the Divine. They must be used by the will of the Divine and not for

display. If you come across someone who is blind and you have the power to make him see — if it is the Divine Will that the man shall see, you have only to say, “Let him see” and he will see. But if you wish to make him see simply because you want to cure him, then you use the power to satisfy your personal ambition. Most often, in such cases, you not only lose your power but you create a great disturbance in the man. Yet in appearance the two ways are the same; but in one case you act because of the Divine Will and in the other for some personal motive.

How are we to know, you will ask, when it is the Divine Will that makes us act? The Divine Will is not difficult to recognise. It is unmistakable. You can know it without being very far on the path. Only you must listen to its voice, the small voice that is here in the heart. Once you are accustomed to listen, if you do anything that is contrary to the Divine Will, you feel an uneasiness. If you persist on the wrong track, you get very much disturbed. If, however, you give some material excuse as the cause of your uneasiness and proceed on your way, you gradually lose the faculty of perception and finally you may go on doing all kinds of wrong and feel no uneasiness. But if, when once you feel the least disturbance, you stop and ask of your inner self, “What is the cause of this?” then you do get the real answer and the whole thing becomes quite clear. Do not try to give a material excuse when you feel a little depression or a slight uneasiness. When you stop and look about for the reason, be absolutely straight and sincere. At first your mind will construct a very plausible and beautiful explanation. Do not accept it, but look beyond and ask, “What is it that is behind this movement? Why am I doing this?” Finally you will discover, hidden in a corner, the little ripple — a slight wrong turn or twist in your attitude that is causing the trouble or disturbance.

One of the commonest forms of ambition is the idea of service to humanity. All attachment to such service or work is a sign of personal ambition. The Guru who believes that he has a great truth to teach to humanity and who wants many disciples and who feels uncomfortable when the disciples go away or who seizes on anybody that comes and tries to make him a disciple, is evidently following nothing but his ambition. You must be able, if you are ready to follow the divine order, to take up whatever work you are given, even a stupendous work, and leave it the next day with the same quietness with which you took it up and not feel that the responsibility is yours. There should be no attachment — to any object or any mode of life. You must be absolutely free. If you want to have the true yogic attitude, you must be able to accept everything that comes from the Divine and let it go easily and without regret. The attitude of the ascetic who says, “I want nothing” and the attitude of the man of the world who says, “I want this thing” are the same. The one may be as much attached to his renunciation as the other to his possession.

You must accept all things — and only those things — that come from the Divine. Because things can come from concealed desires. The desires work in the subconscious and bring things to you which, although you may not recognise them

as such, nevertheless do not come from the Divine but from disguised desires.

You can easily know when a thing comes from the Divine. You feel free, you are at ease, you are in peace. But when something presents itself to you and you jump at it and cry out, "Oh, at last I have it", then you can know for certain that it does not come from the Divine. Equanimity is the essential condition of union and communion with the Divine.

Does not the Divine sometimes give what you desire?

Certainly. There was a young man who wanted to do Yoga. But he had a mean and cruel father who troubled him very much and tried to prevent him from doing it. He wished ardently to be free from the father's interference. Soon the father fell ill and very seriously; he was about to die. Whereupon the other side of the boy's nature rose up and he loudly bewailed the misfortune and cried, "Oh, my poor father is so ill! It is such a sad thing. Alas, what shall I do?" The father got well. The young man rejoiced and turned once more to Yoga. And the father also began again to oppose and torment him with redoubled violence. The son tore his hair in despair and cried, "Now my father stands in my way more than ever." The whole thing is to know exactly what one wants.

The Divine always brings with it perfect calm and peace. A certain class of Bhaktas, it is true, present generally a very different picture; they jump about and cry and laugh and sing, in a fit of devotion, as they say. But in reality such people do not live in the Divine. They live largely in the vital world.

You say that even Ramakrishna had periods of emotional excitement and would go about with hands uplifted, singing and dancing? The truth of the matter is this. The movement in the inner being may be perfect; but it puts you in a certain condition of receptivity to forces that fill you with intense emotional excitement, if your external being is weak or untransformed. Where the external being offers resistance to the inner being or cannot hold the entirety of the Ananda, there is this confusion and anarchy in expression.

You must have a strong body and strong nerves. You must have a strong basis of equanimity in your external being. If you have this basis, you can contain a world of emotion and yet not have to scream it out. This does not mean that you cannot express your emotion, but you can express it in a beautiful harmonious way. To weep or scream or dance about is always a proof of weakness, either of the vital or the mental or the physical nature; for on all these levels the activity is for self-satisfaction. One who dances and jumps and screams has the feeling that he is somehow very unusual in his excitement; and his vital nature takes great pleasure in that.

If you have to bear the pressure of the Divine Descent, you must be very strong and powerful, otherwise you would be shaken to pieces. Some persons ask,

“Why has not the Divine come yet?” Because you are not ready. If a little drop makes you sing and dance and scream, what would happen if the whole thing came down?

Therefore do we say to people who have not a strong and firm and capacious basis in the body and the vital and the mind, “Do not pull”, meaning “Do not try to pull at the forces of the Divine, but wait in peace and calmness.” For they would not be able to bear the descent. But to those who possess the necessary basis and foundation we say, on the contrary, “Aspire and draw.” For they would be able to receive and yet not be upset by the forces descending from the Divine.

In the case of some persons who turn to the Divine it happens that every material prop or everything they are fond of is removed from their life. And if they love someone, he also is taken away.

It is a thing that does not happen to all. It happens to those that are called.

Whatever difference there is between the West and the East in relation to spiritual life lies not in the inner being or nature, which is an invariable and constant thing, but in the mental habits, in the modes of outer expression and presentation which are the result of education and environment and other external conditions. All people, whether occidental or oriental, are alike in their deepest feelings; they are different in their way of thinking. Sincerity, for example, is a quality which is the same everywhere. Those who are sincere, to whichever nation they belong, are all sincere in the same way. Only the forms given to this sincerity vary. The mind works in different ways in different peoples, but the heart is the same everywhere; the heart is a much truer reality, and the differences belong to the superficial parts. As soon as you go deep enough, you meet something that is one in all. All meet in the Divine. The sun is the symbol of the Divine in the physical nature. Clouds may modify its appearance, but when they are no longer there, you see it is the same sun always and everywhere.

If you cannot feel one with somebody, it means you have not gone deep enough in your feeling.

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 4-12)

* * *

“There are two paths of Yoga, one of tapasyā (discipline) and the other of surrender.”

Once you interpreted my vision as Agni, the fire of purification and tapasyā producing the Sun of Truth. What path do I follow? What place has tapasyā in the path of surrender? Can one do absolutely without tapasyā in the path of surrender?

There is a *tapasyā* that takes place automatically as the result of surrender and there is a discipline that one carries out by one’s own unaided effort — it is the latter that is meant in the “two paths of Yoga”. But Agni as the fire of *tapasyā* can burn in either case.

The Mother says that the first effect of Yoga is to take away the mental control so that the ideas and desires which were so long checked become surprisingly prominent and create difficulties.

They were not prominent because they were getting some satisfaction or at least the vital generally was getting indulged in one way or another. When they are no longer indulged then they become obstreperous. But they are not new forces created by the Yoga — they were there all the time.

What is meant by the mental control being removed is that the mental simply kept them in check but could not remove them. So in Yoga the mental has to be replaced by the psychic or spiritual self-control which could do what the vital cannot, only many Sadhaks do not make this exchange in time and withdraw the mental control merely.

“The strength of such impulses as those of sex lies usually in the fact that people take too much notice of them.” What are the other impulses referred to?

It refers to strong vital impulses.

“The whole world is full of the poison. You take it in with every breath.”

How long is a Sadhak subject to this fear of catching contagion? I feel I won’t catch such a contagion now. Is my feeling trustworthy?

I don’t know that it is. One has to go very far on the path before one is so secure as that.

The Mother says: "One who dances and jumps and screams has the feeling that he is somehow very unusual in his excitement; and his vital nature takes great pleasure in that." Does she mean that one should be usual instead of unusual in one's excitement during spiritual experience?

The Mother did not mean that one must be usual in one's excitement at all — she meant that the man is not only excited but also wants to be unusual (extraordinary) in his excitement. The excitement itself is bad and the desire to seem extraordinary is worse.

"But to those who possess the necessary basis and foundation we say, on the contrary, 'aspire and draw.'"

Does this capacity to aspire and draw indicate a great advance already made?

No. It is a comparatively elementary stage.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 302-04)

* * *

"There are two paths of Yoga, one of tapasyā (discipline) and the other of surrender."

What is surrender?

It means that one gives oneself entirely to the Divine.

Yes, and then what happens? If you give yourself entirely to the Divine, it is He who does the Yoga, it is no longer you; hence this is not very difficult; while if you do tapasya, it is you yourself who do the yoga and you carry its whole responsibility — it is there the danger lies. But there are people who prefer to have the whole responsibility, with its dangers, because they have a very independent spirit. They are not perhaps in a great hurry — if they need several lives to succeed, it does not matter to them. But there are others who want to go quicker and be more sure of reaching the goal; well, these give over the whole responsibility to the Divine.

"The first effect of Yoga, however, is to take away the mental control, and the hungers that lie dormant are suddenly set free; they rush up and invade the

being. . . . What you should do is to keep the thing [the sex impulse] away from you, to disassociate from it, take as little notice of it as possible and, even if you happen to think of it, to remain indifferent and unconcerned."

This is much more difficult than to sit upon a difficulty! It is much more difficult to stand back from the difficulty, to look at it as something which does not concern you, which does not interest you, does not belong to you, which belongs to the world and not to you — but it is only by doing this that you can succeed. This demands a kind of liberation of spirit and a confidence in your inner being: you must believe that if you take the right attitude, it is the best that will happen to you; but if you are afraid when something unpleasant happens to you, then you can do nothing. You must have this confidence within you, whatever the difficulty, whatever the obstacle. Most of the time, when something unpleasant happens, you say, "Is it going to increase? What other accident is yet going to happen!" and so on. You must tell yourself, "These things are not mine; they belong to the subconscious world; naturally I have nothing to do with them and if they come again to seize me, I am going to give a fight." Naturally you will answer that this is easy to say but difficult to do. But if truly you take this attitude of confidence, there is no difficulty that you will not be able to conquer. Anxiety makes the difficulty greater.

Evidently there is one difficulty: in your conscious being something does not want the difficulty, wishes sincerely to overcome it, but there are numberless movements in other parts of your consciousness of which you are not conscious. You say, "I want to be cured of that"; unfortunately it is not sufficient to say "I want", there are other parts of the consciousness which hide themselves so that you may not be busy with them, and when your attention is turned away these parts try to assert themselves. That is why I say and shall always repeat, Be perfectly sincere; do not try to deceive yourself, do not say, "I have done all that I could." If you do not succeed, it means that you do not do all that you can. For, if you truly do "all" that you can, you will surely succeed. If you have any defect which you want to get rid of and which still persists, and you say, "I have done all that I could", you may be sure that you have not done all that you should have. If you had, you would have triumphed, for the difficulties that come to you are exactly in proportion to your strength — nothing can happen to you which does not belong to your consciousness, and all that belongs to your consciousness you are able to master. Even the things and suggestions that come from outside can touch you only in proportion to the consent of your consciousness, and you are made to be the master of your consciousness. If you say, "I have done all that I could and in spite of everything the thing continues, so I give up", you may be already sure that you have not done what you could. When an error persists "in spite of everything" it means that something hidden in your being springs up suddenly like a Jack-in-the-box and takes the helm of your life. Hence, there is only one thing to do, it is to go hunting

for all the little dark corners which lie hidden in you and, if you put just a tiny spark of goodwill on this darkness, it will yield, will vanish, and what appeared to you impossible will become not only possible, practicable, but *it will have been done*. You can in this way in one minute get rid of a difficulty which would have harassed you for years. I absolutely assure you of it. That depends only on one thing: that you truly, sincerely, want to get rid of it. And it is the same for everything, from physical illnesses up to the highest mental difficulties. One part of the consciousness says, "I don't want it", but behind there hides a heap of things which say nothing, do not show themselves, and which just want that things continue as they are — generally out of ignorance; they do not believe that it is necessary to be cured, they believe that everything is for the best in the best of worlds. As the lady with whom I had those conversations used to say, "The trouble begins as soon as you want to change." A great French writer has repeated this and has made out of it his pet theory: "Misery begins when you want to perfect yourself; if you do not wish to perfect yourself, you won't have any misery!" I may tell you that this is absolutely wrong, but there are, all the same, things in you that want absolutely to be left alone, not to be disturbed in any way: "Oh! What a nuisance you are, leave us alone!"

"The whole world is full of the poison [doubt, hesitation, depression]. You take it in with every breath. If you exchange a few words with an undesirable man or even if such a man merely passes by you, you may catch the contagion from him. . . . So long as you belong to humanity and so long as you lead the ordinary life, it does not matter much if you mix with the people of the world; but if you want the divine life, you will have to be exceedingly careful about your company and your environment."

To try to solve this problem ascetics used to go away into forests and sit under a tree; there, of course, they had not to fear any contagion from other human beings. But it is very difficult to go to the very end of this resolution, for it quickly gets known that a saint is sitting under a tree in meditation, and immediately everybody rushes there! Not only does he not escape from the difficulty, but he increases it, for there is not a thing more dangerous than to teach others. You know just a little and you begin to teach others, and you are immediately compelled to say more than you know, because people put questions to you which you cannot answer, unless you are a hero of silence. In the world, those who want to pass themselves off as spiritual teachers — when people come and ask them something they do not know, they invent it. Therefore, if in your inner discipline you begin to pretend, you may be sure of falling into the worst hole — of all things pretence is the most ruinous. In the world you may perhaps pass for what you are not, for people allow themselves to be easily deceived, and that will not lead you to a catastrophe (although if you exaggerate, it always leads to a catastrophe), but in the spiritual world, you don't

have to deal with human beings, you have to deal with the Divine; it is impossible for you to pretend that you are this or that, for the Divine knows better than you, doesn't He? He knows what you are and it is not what you will say which will influence Him.

In all spiritual disciplines the first thing that you are taught is not to narrate your experiences to others. If you need to clarify your mind, tell your experiences to your spiritual teacher and to no one else, and even before your spiritual teacher you must be very careful. When you present or explain to him what has happened in you, if you observe yourself closely, you will see that there are things in you of which you are not wholly aware; in your experiences often there are gaps, interruptions in the continuity (it is extremely difficult to get at the continuity of consciousness and to follow the movement to the end); then, if you narrate your experience without wanting to add anything whatsoever, without failing in sincerity, even so you put in what is not there. When people come and tell me something, an inner event, they find me at times inattentive, not attaching much importance to what I am being told — it is not that, it is that I listen to what is within, I see what is perfectly exact and the little facts that have been added. And it is because of this that generally I do not encourage these things. I know that people may feel relieved, comforted, if they can tell me what has happened, but then one must come with a wonderfully scientific spirit. A scientist would never tell you, “It is this”, “It is that”, unless he has made all the possible experiments to have the proof of what he says. And for spiritual things one must follow the same method. Instead of saying, “I did that, things happened like that”, one must say, “I had the impression that . . . things seemed to be like this” and “It looked as if there was a connection between this and that . . .” and not only as a conversational phrase, but as something which expresses truly a mental state. If you seek for a clarification, you yourself must not explain the thing in advance, for once you have given me the explanation, I have no longer any explanation to give you! You bring me flowers, for instance, flowers of all kinds, but you do not arrange them, you tell me, “Here I bring you some flowers, it is for you to make a bouquet out of them.” In this way, it is much more easy for me, isn't it? I can take those that I need and give you the explanation of what's happened! But if you bring me a ready-made bouquet where I see flowers which are not flowers, which are imitations, I have nothing to tell you, for I need solely things which are so to say “pure”. Therefore, remember this advice: I am always ready to listen to you but do not bring to me ready-made things. Give me the exact record of what has happened and even so you may be sure that as soon as there is a mental transcription, the mind always knows how to fill up the holes — it likes things to be logical, continuous; and without your knowing it, quite spontaneously it supplies elements which were missing in your experience. I do not blame anyone, I know that it is a spontaneous phenomenon. One must be extremely attentive in order to be quite exact and precise.

Is it not dangerous to say, "My movements are not mine, I have not to think of them"?

Yes, evidently, if you say, "I can do nothing, that belongs to Nature, the movement has to follow its natural course", you do exactly what I have told you not to do, you make use of the Divine as a fine cloak to cover the satisfaction of your desires. But the opposite movement, "I am good for nothing because such an idea has crossed my mind" is equally wrong, isn't it?

Naturally, if an impulse happens to come to you which you do not want, the first thing to do is to will that it does not come again; but if, on the contrary, you do not sincerely want it to disappear, then keep it, but do not try to do yoga. You should not take the path unless you have resolved beforehand to overcome all difficulties. The decision must be sincere and complete. You will notice, besides, as you gradually advance, that what you believed to be complete is not so, what you considered to be sincere is not so, and then you will progress little by little; but to succeed you must have as total a will for progress as possible. If you have this will and if an impulse seizes you with violence, keep the will firm, your being must not vacillate; you must expect these things to come, but when they come, tell yourself, "Well, they come from below, I do not want them to recur, they are not mine." This is not the same thing as saying, "Let it go, since it is Nature."

There must already be a beginning of realisation in the vital for it to revolt against the impulses that come to it. Most human beings and even those who expect to do yoga say, as soon as the impulse comes, "It is quite all right, there is nothing to do, it is all right." Then, if something in you revolts, if something says, "I don't want it", that is the higher part of your being. What takes the resolution to do yoga is not your body or your vital, not even your mind, it is the higher part of your mind or it is your psychic being. It is that alone which can take the resolution — your body does not know very well what it is all about, your vital looks at the beginning of transformation with some anxiety, the mind with its ideas declares, "This can be done in that way, can be explained like this", and so on. So if you have made a resolution, it comes from the higher part of your being, and it is upon this that you have to take your support, not upon anything else — that is the "I". And it must understand in the end that it is not a personal "I", but universal and divine.

But is it not the vital itself which finally should take the decision to change?

I may assure you that the vital, left to itself, will never take the decision to be transformed — it is quite satisfied with itself and, over and above this, being an accomplice of the mind, the mind will furnish it with all possible explanations for whatever it does. People who live in their vital consciousness are, even when they do not say so, always very satisfied with themselves. They are also very satisfied

with all that happens to them and they always say of their impulses, “How interesting it is, how interesting!” So, if you wait for the vital to take the decision, you may have to wait for a long time!

You must teach your vital that it must obey. Before feeling any satisfaction, it must understand that it has nothing else to do but obey. That is why I say that it is not very easy to begin the yoga; if you are not sincere, do not begin.

The body is very obedient; truly it tries to do its best, but it does not know whom to obey, for generally it is not in direct contact with the higher being or the psychic. Impulses come to it directly from the mind or from the mind clothed with the vital, and it does what they desire. Before the vital takes a decision (and I have told you, it is not very easy for it to take a decision), a light must begin to dawn in the highest part of the mind, a light which puts you in touch with a higher consciousness or with your psychic, and it is upon this light that you must take your support to explain things to the mind, to the vital and finally to the body.

5 February 1951

(*Questions and Answers 1950-1951*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 4, pp. 72-79)

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“The outer being is like a crust. In ordinary people the crust is so hard and thick that they are not conscious of the Divine within them. If once, even for a moment only, the inner being has said, ‘I am here and I am yours’, then it is as though a bridge has been built and little by little the crust becomes thinner and thinner until the two parts are wholly joined and the inner and the outer become one.”

Have you ever thought of unifying your being? Have you been disturbed, sometimes, to see that now you are one person, at other times another, at one time you want to do one thing, at another time you cannot do it, that you find yourself facing an individuality which you can call *yourself* and yet at the same time there are many parts of this individuality which escape you?

I have not attempted the unification of the different personalities which may be in me, but I have tried to put them face to face, the good opposite the bad, and I have never found in the good a sufficient dynamism to fight against the bad.

Have you never thought that your judgment of what is “good” and “bad” was a purely human judgment? And that it might not necessarily tally with the judgment of the divine Presence within you? The “bad” things you could not get rid of were probably things not in their place, things not properly balanced, and it would be a

great pity if they were eliminated because, perhaps, a part of your energy and of your divine Presence would disappear at the same time. People who do not do yoga under the direction of a guide follow ordinary moral notions and at times they feel very perplexed because with all their goodwill they do not get the expected result; that happens because generally they wish to approve of their being instead of transforming it and because moral notions are very bad. In the work of unification of the being, you must needs have imagination enough to be able to put the movements you have, the movements you wish to keep, to put them before what you are capable of imagining as most akin to the divine Presence; naturally, at first it is only an imagination quite far from the truth, but it would help you to get out a little from moral narrowness and also from the limitations of your consciousness. For example, you have the idea of putting what you are and what you do before a consciousness which is at once infinite and eternal. These two words do not perhaps make much sense at the beginning, but they compel you to break the limits and to put yourself in front of something which surpasses you so much on every side that its judgment cannot be the same as that of a human mentality. One must begin absolutely like that. If you try to analyse yourself according to moral principles, you may be sure of going contrary to the divine plan. Not that the Divine is amoral, mark that, but this is not a kind of morality that mankind understands at all, it is not the same.

“Ambition has been the undoing of many Yogis. . . .

“A story is told of a Yogi who had attained wonderful powers. He was invited by his disciples to a great dinner. It was served on a big low table. The disciples asked their Master to show his power in some way. He knew he should not, but the seed of ambition was there in him and he thought, ‘After all, it is a very innocent thing and it may prove to them that such things are possible and teach them the greatness of God.’ So he said, ‘Take away the table, but only the table, let the table-cloth remain as it is with all the dishes upon it.’ The disciples cried out, ‘Oh, that cannot be done, everything will fall down.’ But he insisted and they removed the table from under the cloth. Lo, the miracle! The cloth and all that was upon it remained there just as though the table was underneath. The disciples wondered. But all of a sudden the Master jumped up and rushed out screaming and crying, ‘Nevermore shall I have a disciple, nevermore! Woe is me! I have betrayed my God.’”

This is a temptation that every teacher meets at each step, for the very simple reason that ordinary humanity, in a general way, not being in personal contact with the divine powers, understands nothing of what an illumined consciousness may be and asks for material proofs. It is on this demand that most religions are established and, for reasons which I may very frankly call “political”, they have put at the

origin of their religion a more or less considerable number of miracles as having been performed by the founders, and they have thus more or less crudely encouraged among ignorant people the taste, the necessity for seeing what they call “miracles” in order to believe in the divine power of a person. This is an extraordinary ignorance, because it is not at all necessary to have a divine power or consciousness to perform miracles. It is infinitely more easy to perform miracles with the help of small entities of the vital world who are material enough to be in touch with the physical world and act upon it, than to live in the consciousness of the higher regions and to work upon Nature only through the intermediary of all the other domains. It has been repeated over and over again to all human intellects that the proof of a being’s divinity is that he can raise the dead, cure maladies, and do many other things of the same kind (except making a fool wise).¹ Well, I guarantee that this is not a proof; it proves only one thing, that these “Masters” are in contact with the powers of the vital world and that with the help of those beings they can perform these miracles, that’s all. If one relies upon that to recognise the superiority of a man, one would make a glaring mistake. Naturally, there are other religions which are established on revelations made to their founders. These revelations are more or less happy mental transcriptions of the knowledge they received. This is already of a higher order but it is not yet a proof. And I would finally say, the human demand for proofs is not at all favourable to one’s development. Because the true divine power has organised the world according to a certain plan and in this plan there was no question of things happening in an illogical way; otherwise from the very beginning the world would have been illogical and it is not so. Men imagine for the most part one of two things, either that there is a material world to which they belong, that all comes from there, all returns there and all ends there — these are the unbelievers — or, the believers, most of them, that there is something which they call “God” and then the physical world, and that this physical world is the creation of that God who knows what he is doing or does what he wants; and the confusion lies in saying that everything happens by a kind of arbitrariness, natural or supernatural. There are very few people who know that there exists in the universe an infinite number of gradations and that each one of these gradations has its own reality, its own life, its own law, its own determinism, and that the creation did not come about “like that”, by an arbitrary will, in an arbitrary way but is a deploying of consciousness and each thing has evolved as a logical result of the preceding one. I am telling you all this as simply as I can, you see, it is a very incomplete expression, but if I wanted to tell you the story exactly as it is, it would be a little difficult to make you understand.

1. Mother added later: This is a Mohammedan story, I believe. As it was said that Jesus raised the dead, healed the sick, made the dumb speak, gave sight to the blind, one day an idiot was brought to him, to be made intelligent and Jesus ran away! “Why did you run away?” he was asked. “I can do everything,” he answered, “except give intelligence to an idiot.”

Only I would like you to know my conclusion (I have already spoken about it several times, more or less in detail), it is this: each one of these numberless regions has its own very logical determinism — everything proceeds from cause to effect; but these worlds, although differentiated, are not separate from each other and, by numerous processes which we may study, the inner or higher worlds are in constant contact with the lower or external worlds and act upon these, so that the determinism of one changes the determinism of the other. If you take the purely material domain, for instance, and if you notice that the material laws, the purely material laws are altered by something all of a sudden, you ought to say that it was a “miracle”, because there is a rupture of the determinism of one plane through the intervention of another, but usually we do not call this a miracle. For example, when the human will intervenes and changes something, that seems to you quite natural, because you have been accustomed to it from your childhood; you remember, don’t you, the example I gave you the other day: a stone falls according to the law of its own determinism, but you wish to interrupt its fall and you stretch out your hand and catch it; well you ought to call this a “miracle”, but you don’t because you are used to it (but a rat or a dog would perhaps call it a miracle if they could speak). And note that it is the same for what people call a “miracle”; they speak of a “miracle” because they are absolutely ignorant, unaware of the gradations between the will which wants to express itself and the plane on which it expresses itself. When they have a mental or a vital will, the thing seems quite natural to them, but when it is a question of the will of a higher world — the world of the gods or of a higher entity — which all of a sudden upsets all your little organisation, that seems to you a miracle. But it is a miracle simply because you are unable to follow the gradations by which the phenomenon took place. Therefore, the Supreme Will, that which comes from the very highest region, if you saw it in its logical action, if you were aware of it continually, it would seem to you altogether natural. You can express this in two ways: either say, “It is quite natural, it is like this that things must happen, it is only an expression of the divine Will”, or, each time you see on the material plane an intervention coming from another plane, you ought to say, “It is miraculous!” So I may say with certainty that people who want to see miracles are people who cherish their ignorance! You understand my logic, don’t you? These people love their ignorance, they insist upon seeing miracles and being astounded! And that is why people who have done yoga seriously consider it altogether fatal to encourage this tendency; hence it is forbidden.

There is a “miracle” because you do not give people time to see the procedure by which you do things, you do not show them the stages. Thus, some men have reached higher mental regions and do not need to follow step by step all the gradations of thought; they can jump from one idea to a far distant conclusion without the intermediary links; this is usually called intuition (it is not altogether an “intuition”; it is that the idea, to begin with, is at a great height and from there these people can

see while descending the whole totality of things and consequences without passing through all the gradations as ordinary human thought is obliged to do). It is an experience I have had; when I used to speak with Sri Aurobindo, we never had the need to go through intermediary ideas; he said one thing and I saw the far off result; we used to talk always like that, and if a person had happened to be present at our conversations he would have said, “What are they talking about!” But for us, you know, it was as clear as a continuous sentence. You could call that a mental miracle — it was not a miracle, it was simply that Sri Aurobindo had the vision of the totality of mental phenomena and hence we had no need to waste a good deal of time in going through all the gradations. For any person capable of following the line, the thing would have been quite natural and logical; for ignorant people it was a “miracle”.

“They [powers] have to be used in the same way as they came. They come by union with the Divine. They must be used by the will of the Divine and not for display.”

If you use power to show that you possess it, it becomes so full of falsehood and untruth that finally it disappears. But it is not always thus, because, as I said at the beginning, when it concerns a power like the power of healing or the power of changing an altogether external thing — of making an unfavourable circumstance favourable, of finding lost objects, all these countless little “miracles” which are found in all religions — it is much more easy and even more effective to do these “miracles” with the help of the entities of the vital world which are not always recommendable, far from it; and then these beings make fun of you. This begins very well, very brilliantly, and usually finishes very badly.

I know the story of a man who had a few small powers and indulged in all kinds of so-called “spiritualist” practices, and through repeated exercises he had succeeded in coming into conscious contact with what he called a “spirit”. This man was doing business; he was a financier and was even a speculator. His relations with his “spirit” were of a very practical kind! This spirit used to tell him when the stocks and shares would go up and when they would come down; it told him, “Sell this”, “Buy that” — it gave him very precise financial particulars. For years he had been listening to his “spirit” and had followed it, and was fantastically successful; he became tremendously rich and naturally boasted a lot about the spirit which “guided” him. He used to tell everybody, “You see, it is really worthwhile learning how to put oneself in contact with these spirits.” But one day he met a man who was a little wiser, who told him, “Take care.” He did not listen to him, he was swollen with his power and ambition. And it was then that his “spirit” gave him a last advice, “Now you can become the richest man in the world. Your ambition will be fulfilled. You have only to follow my direction. Do this: put all that you have into this transaction

and you will become the richest man in the world.” The stupid fool did not even realise the trap laid for him: for years he had followed his “guide” and succeeded, so he followed the last direction; and he lost everything, to the last penny.

So you see, these are small entities who make fun of you, and to make sure of you they work these little miracles to encourage you, and when they feel that you are well trapped, they play a fine trick upon you and it is all over with you.

We have said that there is only one safety, never to act except in harmony with the divine Will. There is one question: how to know that it is the divine Will which makes you act? I replied to the person who put to me this question (although this person did not agree with me) that it is not difficult to distinguish the voice of the Divine: one cannot make a mistake. You need not be very far on the path to be able to recognise it; you must listen to the still, small peaceful voice which speaks in the silence of your heart.

I forgot one thing: to hear it you must be absolutely sincere, for if you are not sincere, you will begin by deceiving yourself and you will hear nothing at all except the voice of your ego and then you will commit with assurance (thinking that it is the real small voice) the most awful stupidities. But if you are sincere, the way is sure. It is not even a voice, not even a sensation, it is something extremely subtle — a slight indication. When everything goes well, that is, when you do nothing contrary to the divine Will, you will not perhaps have any definite impression, everything will seem to you normal. Of course, you should be eager to know whether you are acting in accordance with the divine Will, that is the first point, naturally, without which you can know nothing at all. But once you are eager and you pay attention, everything seems to you normal, natural, then all of a sudden, you feel a little uneasiness somewhere in the head, in the heart or even in the stomach — generally one doesn’t give it a thought; you may feel it several times in the day but you reject it without giving it any attention; but it is no longer quite the same; then, at that moment, you must stop, no matter what you may be doing, and look, and if you are sincere, you will notice a small black spot (a tiny wicked idea, a tiny false movement, a small arbitrary decision) and that’s the source of the uneasiness. You will notice then that the little black spot comes from the ego which is full of preferences; generally it does what it likes; the things it likes are called good and those it does not are called bad — this clouds your judgment. It is difficult to judge under these conditions. If you truly want to know, you must draw back a step and look, and you will know then that it is this small movement of the ego which is the cause of the uneasiness. You will see that it is a tiny thing curled back upon itself; you will have the impression of being in front of something hard which resists or is black. Then with patience, from the height of your consciousness, you must explain to this thing its mistake, and in the end it will disappear. I do not say that you will succeed all at once the very first day, but if you try sincerely, you will always end with success. And if you persevere, you will see that all of a sudden you are relieved of a mass of

meanness and ugliness and obscurity which was preventing you from flowering in the light. It is those things which make you shrivel up, prevent you from widening yourself, opening out in a light where you have the impression of being very comfortable. If you make this effort, you will see finally that you are very far from the point where you had begun, the things you did not feel, did not understand, have become clear. If you are resolved, you are sure to succeed.

This is the first step towards unifying yourself, becoming a conscious being who has a central will and acts only according to this will, which will be a constant expression of the divine Will. It is worth trying.

And I may tell you from my personal experience that there is nothing in the world more interesting. If you begin making this effort you will find that your life is full of interest — you know, of the ordinary life of people at least a third is a kind of dull boredom (I say a third, but for some two-thirds of the day is a dull boredom), and all that gets volatilised! Everything becomes so interesting, the least little thing, the least casual meeting, the least word exchanged, the least thing displaced — everything is full of life and interest.

8 February 1951²

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1950-1951*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 4, pp. 80-89)

2. The conversations of 10 and 14 February 1951 are also based on the conversation of 14 April 1929. These will appear in the next issue of *Mother India*. — Ed.



“DISCLOSURE” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

As these blank verses are freshly written it is all the more difficult for me to assess their value. Perhaps they are not moulded sufficiently and are a little disjointed too. Kindly comment on them in your usual enlightening way.

DISCLOSURE

Stoop your calm beauty — let your shining hair
Uncoil its ages of high secrecy
To float upon dull earth the frankincense

an

Your face of love burns to some¹ infinite sky.

breast

Fill life with mystic rondures of your bosom¹
And all that worship dreamed unknowable
Bare through your body's perfect universe.
O mate the sculptor-vigil of our gloom
With those superb clay-lines that sing your soul:
Then every stroke of time shall carve to birth
mirroring
Immortal moods lit by² your ecstasy.

(Amal's questions written in the margins:)

1. Which word is right?
2. Is “mirroring” a more satisfying expression than “lit by”?

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

1. “an” — “breast”
2. No.

Very fine poetry. Blank verse rhythm very good. There is no disjuncture.
Illumined Higher Mind.

1 April 1937

DISCLOSURE

Stoop your calm beauty — let your shining hair
 Unveil its ages of high secrecy
 To float upon dull earth the frankincense
 Your face of love burns to an infinite sky.
 Fill life with mystic rondures of your breast
 And all that worship dreamed unknowable
 Bare through your body's perfect universe.
 O mate the sculptor-vigil of our gloom
 With those superb clay-lines that sing your soul:
 Then every stroke of time shall carve to birth
 Immortal moods lit by your ecstasy.

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

Blank verse is the most difficult of all English metres; it has to be very skilfully and strongly done to make up for the absence of rhyme, and if not very well done, it is better not done at all.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Poetry and Art, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 129)

‘DAMN FINE’

[On 9.11.1938, Nirodbaran sent a recently-composed poem to Sri Aurobindo, as usual with a note.]

This time, Sir, the poem looks to me damn fine. I know you will say, “Well, well!” — but we have very rarely agreed on any point! But does it really leave your plexus cold?

Very fine, yes, and perfect in expression; but I don’t know about damn fine, for that is a tremendous superlative. Such a solemn phrase should only be used when you write something equalling Shakespeare at his best.

10.11.1938

Guru, “Shakespeare at his best”? The very name of Shakespeare makes my breath shake with fear, and to talk of equalling him at his best, oh. People will call me mad, Sir. If someone else had told me that, I would have called him mad! But I don’t know what to say to you! You stagger me so much!

Well, but look at logic. G.B.S. declares himself the equal, if not superior, of Shakespeare. You write better poetry than Shaw ever did (which is easy because he never wrote any). So you are the equal (if not superior) of Shakespeare.

But, if I remember aright, some of my lines you have called “damn fine”! So?

Did I indeed? Then, logically, it must have been equal to the best of Shakespeare, otherwise it couldn’t have been so damned. This is also logic.

11.11.1938

I give you the lines which you have called “damn fine”, Sir! (8.8.38)

*“While the whole universe seems to be a cry
To the apocalypt-vision of thy Name.”*

Mm, yes, I can’t deny the fineness — but perhaps I ought not to have damned it without proper regard to Shakespeare.

I know your enthusiasm will abate now, and perhaps you will only say, "Yes, they are very satisfying!"

Why do you object to a poem being called satisfying? It is high praise.

Or will you say that yesterday's "damn fine" can't be equal to today's, what? I find your remarks extremely mysterious, which justifies your being a "Mystery-Man"!

What remarks? On Shakespeare? They were logical, not mystic.

...

12.11.38

By the way, I am surprised to see that in spite of 3 marginal lines over the whole poem, you call it only "very fine". Not a mysterious remark?

How is it mysterious? What do you expect three lines to come to then? Damn fine? That would be Shakespeare.

NIRODBARAN

(Collected Poems of Nirodbaran with Sri Aurobindo's Comments and Corrections, Vol. 2, pp. 1223-225)

It might be said of Shakespeare that he was not predominantly an artist but rather a great creator, even though he has an art of his own, especially an art of dramatic architecture and copious ornament . . .

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Poetry and Art, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 69)

INTERVIEW WITH BIREN PALIT

On 11 January 1987

(Continued from the issue of May 2021)

[Birendra Sekhar Palit (27.02.1906-16.06.1987) came to the Ashram on 25 July 1930 at the age of 24 and died at the ripe age of 81, a few months after this interview. Biren-da spent a lifetime doing binding work, which he first learnt in Chittagong upon the instructions of Sri Aurobindo. After he settled down in the Ashram, he started the Binding Department of the Ashram on the ground floor of the Guest House. Later, when the New Bindery¹ was opened in the south-east corner of the Dining Room, Biren-da was shifted to the Binding Section of the Ashram Press. People remember him as a short old loveable man with long curly hair, proceeding slowly on the beach road with a twinkle in the eyes. Clad in a white dhoti that covered his upper body, he represented quintessentially the first generation of disciples who dedicated themselves to the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother without any reserve, and yet claimed to be only humble seekers on the way. Biren-da was also a poet and knew Bengali well — Nolini-da used to give his Bengali articles to him for proof-reading. He left his family at the age of 14 and joined the Prabartak Sangha of Motilal Roy in Chandernagore. His contact with Sri Aurobindo, at first through Barin Ghose and later through Nolini-da, began in 1922. After coming to the Ashram, he had the privilege of corresponding directly with the Master. What is of special interest in this interview is Biren-da's narration of the early days of sadhana in the Ashram under the direct guidance of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. At the same time, one cannot but admire his remarkable adaptability to the later phases of Ashram life during which he never lost his unflinching optimism.]

Physical Mother and Divine Mother

R: Did Mother ever come to your room?

1. The person who was given charge of the New Bindery was another Biren-da, Biren Chunder, (1915-1997) a boxer and Physical Education trainer. He was also Pranab-da's teacher. He had, besides, many more sides to him.

Mother came to the Guest House where I worked before. As it is, the house was used for classes. She took her classes there. She came there without telling me and started asking me this and that.

S: Mother herself stayed in the Guest House. You were in one portion on one side.

I was on the ground floor.

R: Have you ever gone for a drive with Mother?

No.

R: Did your mother visit the Ashram?

My mother passed away long before I came here.

R: Nobody from your family came here?

My elder brother came once. Then my nephew came, that is, my brother's son. He came not once, but several times.

R: After coming here, did you ever feel like going out?

No.

R: You did not have any attachment?

Family attachment, I never had. From the time I joined the Prabartak Sangha, I disconnected myself from my family. In those days this happened not just with me, but almost all of us had no connection with our families. On the contrary, I can say I feel a more intimate relation with you all. I may not be talking with you, but I feel as if we are children of the same family.

S: A relation develops even without talking.

I could not tell you any outer incident, but truly speaking I received everything from Mother and Sri Aurobindo, much more than I would have received from my physical parents. In this regard, I recall an incident. There was a life-size portrait of the Mother which was done by a Japanese artist. Mother gave it to me for repair — it was old and badly torn. While pasting the paper behind, air bubbles got in and I

felt very bad. I went to Nolini-da and told him the whole thing. The painting was sent to Mother and Mother immediately said, “The mistake is mine; I should have told him how to do it. Small strips of paper should have been cut and pasted instead of using one big sheet.”

Then I wrote to Mother, “You said the mistake is yours, but if my physical mother had been there today, she would have given me a nice beating. *(laughter)* Sri Aurobindo was divine — he was as if made of butter, so soft was his being. If one saw the Mother outwardly, one could see how much she was concerned about each and everyone. At the same time she was the Divine Mother in the physical, a combination of both. And what a perfect physical mother she was. The human mother has many drawbacks, but she was a perfect physical mother. Perfect physical mother and Divine Mother!

Darshan and Soup

Once I was not well and I went for Darshan. You know the difference between Mother and Sri Aurobindo at Darshan time was that Sri Aurobindo’s eyes always remained open, and he would see who is coming, who is going. The moment we entered the hall, we saw his eyes fixed on us, and we did not see Mother. Once I went and returned after doing pranam to them. Then Mother opened her eyes and asked, “Did Biren come?” Sri Aurobindo replied, “Yes, he came, he has done pranam and left.” Somebody came and told me this later.

Those days we did not go as in a procession, one after the other. Our time was fixed.

We did not simply go and wait there. We were asked our name and time, and we went according to a list. That list was kept with Sri Aurobindo. The moment we had his Darshan, Sri Aurobindo lifted the list and saw who is coming next. Of course, later on he recognised us. It was a very tiring work for Sri Aurobindo and it took a long time.

You must have heard that there were days when Mother could not come out because she was in trance.

You also have seen it? *(asking Sachin-da)*

S: Somebody is standing with flowers in front of the Mother. She receives the flowers and then goes into trance, and the petals start dropping one by one.

R: Really?

S: A sight worth seeing indeed.

At soup time, Mother had to attend to calls. She would close her eyes and we all waited for soup with the cup in our hands after doing pranam. This happened several times. Once it happened that Mother gave soup with the ladle, but the pot was empty.

R: Did the soup ever spill on her sari?

I did not want to say it, but yes, it happened. Instead of pouring the soup in the cup, she poured the soup on her sari and the cup remained empty in her left hand. As her eyes were closed, she did not realise it. And sometimes, as I said, she returned the empty cup to the person who gave it back to her again.

R: Did she herself sip it?

No, no. She sipped when she used to come to the Dining Room — that was some time back.

R: I am asking about the soup.

No, she did not sip. A friend of mine called Upen Mukherjee had come here. When the soup was being served, he told Mother to make it into Prasad and give it to him. Mother smiled and shook her head, meaning that she did not want to do it. That had stopped. She did not sip the soup. But when she used to come to the Dining Room, she charged the dish. I don't know how she did it as I have never seen it, I simply heard about it. That was in the Dining Room when she charged the dishes, and the dishes used to be on her lap. Similarly with flowers, when she distributed flowers in the morning, she gave the same flowers to each and everyone. Only, sometimes, they used to be different. I think she gave different flowers to boys and girls. To boys she gave one type, to girls she gave another type.

R: I heard Mother looked at each person in a different way at Darshan time.

Yes, that happened very often. It could even be physically noticed.

S: Her look was penetrating like an arrow.

R: Did she solve your problems when she looked at you?

Yes. I will give you one example. Say, I am writing to Mother about some problem. When the letter is half written, then a feeling comes that there is no need to write the letter anymore. All the letters that Sri Aurobindo replied to — I am astonished how

he answered those letters. I was myself unable to understand the Bengali letters, and Sri Aurobindo was answering those letters. And he replied exactly, just what was necessary for the individual. I think writing was a mere excuse. So many letters in one night! He once wrote to me, “I am overwhelmed with correspondence.” I wrote to him, “You can stop the correspondence in one day if you want to do it.” He wrote back, “It is not as simple as you think. The problems that we have to deal through the letters will increase if we stop corresponding.”

Ashram Then and Now

R: Did you face any difficulties after coming here?

Difficulties we all have as we are human beings — that is very common. I don't know when we will be able to surpass them. In one of Mother's writings she says that each and every nature is a guillotine. Without the Divine Grace, it is difficult to escape the guillotine. That is why there will always be difficulties.

R: So all have difficulties. It is not that everything can be easy.

No, no. It can never be easy. If at all it has been easy for somebody, then it is because he has surpassed them in another life. But in this life it cannot be easy.

R: Do you see a big difference between that time and now?

No, I don't feel the difference because in the field of sadhana it is always the same. There is no difference between that time and now as far as that goes. Mother is the same even now as she was then. Even now, if we are receptive, we receive what the Mother wants to give and, if we are not ready, we don't receive from her. Mother is always ready to give, and that is not merely words but a vivid truth. The Mother is waiting to give the moment we are ready to receive.

R: There are people who say that the present Ashram is much diluted in its atmosphere.

That is with regard to the outside life. Nothing has happened to the life of the sadhak. It makes no difference to the one who is doing sadhana, since his relation is not with that, but with Mother. The outside world has not much to do with sadhana.

R: But is it not different in the workplace?

There also it is the same. All the obstacles that were there earlier still remain today. In the outside world, the difficulties are due to the relations of men with each other. Man remains the same person today, but that is not the important thing. The important thing when I am doing sadhana, is my relation with Mother. There is no difference there. Mother is the same now as when she was in her physical body. My relation with Mother remains intact as long as I am open to her; if I forget and go far from Mother, then the result is likewise. It depends upon the condition of each individual.

R: True, but all who came here earlier were serious sadhaks.

What does that matter? Whoever does sadhana now has to be serious. Even now there are serious people in the Ashram.

R: Yes, but there are very few.

How does that matter? You are serious in your way, I am serious in my way. I have my relation with Mother, you have your relation with Mother.

R: Don't you feel that the present life in Ashram is becoming too externalised?

That is happening, but so too there are sadhaks in the Ashram who are going deep within. Is everyone in Ashram getting externalised? Among the students of our School, there are so many fine boys and girls. The thing that is most important is to love Mother and to remain open to Mother. That depends mainly on the consciousness and love, these two things. There are so many fine students like that. We cannot hope all to be the same, and that cannot be noticed externally. Not only it is difficult for others to know, but sometimes the person himself does not know about it. I was telling somebody: take a farmer who is ploughing the land. Just as the rays of the sun fall where there is no obstacle, similarly, if that farmer is prepared inwardly, if he has devotion for the Divine and has a pull towards the Divine, he will receive the Divine's touch, something that he is himself not aware of. But as he does not wear a red robe, he is not recognised as a sadhak, but the Divine descends wherever there is some preparation. So also we don't know what is happening in our own boys and girls.

Virabhadra

S: Tell us about the incident of solving the riddle. While a sadhak was driving the bullock cart, it fell into a ditch and Mother scolded him — I forget his name. She became very angry and started scolding him and he kept on smiling.

Oh, I see, Virabhadra. That is as follows. Here, in the Ashram, in the beginning there were two cows which were given by the father of Dayakar. Do you know him?

R: Yes, Satyakarma.

Earlier his name was Ram Reddy. Sri Aurobindo named those two bullocks Tejas and Ojas. They were very beautiful bullocks. We had no other transport those days except a cart, and Virabhadra was the driver of the cart. One day, when Virabhadra was driving the cart, it fell into a ditch. So when he went to the Mother for pranam, she was very angry. And when Mother became angry or rather showed her anger, one could see the crown on her head shaking — Mother used to wear a crown. The more Mother glared at him, the more Virabhadra kept on smiling. Mother went upstairs and told them, “I cannot do anything with him. The more I become angry, the more he smiles at me.”

S: Did he not say that he was solving a riddle?

That is another day. Mother asked Virabhadra, “How did you manage it?” He replied, “Mother, I was solving a riddle.” He was a mathematician. So by the time he solved the riddle, the cart fell into a ditch. I’m not sure whether he is still there or not. He often came to the Ashram with his upper body bare.

R: Is he no more in the Ashram?

He was in the Ashram for some time, but it is a long since he left the Ashram. His son is now Professor of Mathematics either in the Madras University or in the Tagore Arts College. He came first in Mathematics in Madras University. After all, he was Virabhadra’s son!

‘Pagla Suren’²

There are sadhaks about whom we can write, such as Virabhadra, Mridu, Nanchand — father of Shanti and Nagin. They don’t come under the common category.

R: You mean they were a little eccentric! (laughter)

2. Surendralal Biswas (born 29.03.1903, died 03.03.1985, joined the Ashram on 14.02.1930) was called ‘Pagla Suren’ by some of the Ashramites because of his abnormal behaviour. It was a pitiable sight to see him rushing about in a frantic manner and complaining how he was being constantly harassed by his neighbours.

Also Suren.

R: Oh, Pagla Suren! Was he all right before?

He was absolutely all right! He had rare experiences. I have not seen such a profound sadhak before.

R: Really?

Yes. Here you could not see anything in him. But in the beginning, that is, in 1920 when Gandhiji started his strike (the Non-Cooperation Movement) . . . We were the first ones to strike. We taught India how to strike. We left our school and went to the villages to break more schools. We first finished ours and then we went to break other high schools in the villages. It is at that time that Suren came with students from his village and joined us.

We used to have *adda* till late at night and Suren was afraid to go home alone. So I accompanied him upto his house. The very same Suren, in order to come out of his fear, sat the whole night in the cremation ground. The fire was burning and he was all alone there with nobody around. Finally, he became totally fearless, he didn't fear anything. Even here, with all the difficulties he had, he did not fear anybody.

Another thing I remember was that he did not speak with anybody for months and for years. He would come and sit with us at the dining table, finish his food and leave. The food that we had at that time is not worth mentioning. Some days there was only rice with one chilli and one onion. The reason was that we all had left our families and there was no one to support us. There was one Mohini-da, who was a school-master, from whom we received a little help. The house we stayed in was called 'Sadhan Badi' [*house for sadhana*]; this was before the Ashram was started. Krishnashashi was there — his name occurs in Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's writings.

One day Suren had fever, it was something like malaria. He ate practically nothing or very little. He used to come and sit with us, do some work and leave. One day he wanted to visit Kotao village for some financial matters. Kotao was nearly 8 miles from Sadhan Badi. So I told Suren, "How will you go? Your physical condition is so bad; you are having fever every day." Suren replied, "I don't need much physical intake to go here and there, I can draw any amount of energy from the Universal." He was that kind of a person.

Barin-da used to send us letters on sadhana from Sri Aurobindo. Barin-da used to write to us, "Don't express any kind of emotion in your letter if you want Sejda to listen to your letter." Sejda means Sri Aurobindo. Very often, there were experiences of sadhana in everyone's letter. Suren too followed the conditions given by Barin-da. Sri Aurobindo gave us a general method; not many books on sadhana had come

out in those days.

Suren's mother was a widow — she stayed and died here in the Ashram. In the beginning she was against Suren. But later she herself started doing sadhana at home. As Suren was with us, she informed him, "I have also started doing sadhana and have had some experiences; come and note them down." Suren himself did not go, he sent me instead. In some letters of Sri Aurobindo, it is mentioned that there are ladies in our Ashram who have had Upanishadic experiences. I think Suren's mother was one of them.

R: Her name was . . . ?

Indrakumari.

R: How was Suren after coming here?

Suren got into problems there itself. When one begins the sadhana, nothing much happens if one makes mistakes. But as one advances in sadhana and makes mistakes, then things can become very serious. Something of that kind happened to Suren too. He lost his head there itself.

R: Oh, I see, there itself?

Yes, he really suffered. It is at that time that one suffers. It is enough that he came out of it alive. Suren was a great friend of mine. I remember one day, when we went for an outing, he told me after we returned, "You know, when we were coming back, I saw flowers dropping on us." Then another day, he told me, "When I sit, fairies come and play in front of me." So these stories are worth telling, but he had vast experiences which cannot be described.

R: Did all this happen before coming to Ashram?

S: No, it was after coming to the Ashram. But, in spite of catastrophes, he stuck to the path up to the end and maintained an attitude of faith.

That is absolutely certain! Even at that time I saw that he understood what a sadhak ought to understand. (*addressing Sachin-da*) Do you remember when both of us went to see him in JIPMER hospital after his eye operation? Suren told you, "You can come, but do not bring Biren with you. What will he do by coming here?" It was useless on my part to go there. We have a social rule to go and see a patient, but as a matter of fact it is not at all necessary. So Suren had the right attitude. But he also behaved in a crazy manner and people called him mad.

S: People see only his crazy behaviour because that is a good diversion for them. As that gets exhibited externally, naturally they don't know the other side of him.

Dayakar³

Shanti⁴ and Romen⁵ came at a very young age to the Ashram. Romen was Nolini-da's student. Shanti was Premanand's student, and Nolini-da taught Dayakar.

R: I have heard that Dayakar was very mischievous.

Yes, he was. By mischievous, I mean, there are boys who are like that, they don't do mischief intentionally. Dayakar used to go to Sanjiban to learn painting in the Guest House. I too was there at that time — Sanjiban was at first working with me. One day Dayakar did some mischief and Sanjiban shut him up in the room and closed the door. So Dayakar took a knife and started cutting the cane mesh [*of the door*]. He was 13 years old.

R: I heard that one day Dayakar removed the chair when Nolini-da was about to sit on it.

Dayakar? I don't know whether he did that to Nolini-da, but in the early days, nobody addressed the elders with "da". So Dayakar too addressed him as Nolini. That happened only after Bengali families came to the Ashram.

S: Bengalis add 'da' to address their elders.

We don't call by name anyone elder in age. Here too, in the South, they don't call by the name. So, I was talking about Nolini-da. It was Nolini-da's birthday and Dayakar went and asked him, "Nolini, why are you wearing such clean clothes today?" Nolini-da replied, "Do I wear dirty clothes on other days?" Dayakar replied, "No, but today it is very special." Then he himself realised and said, "Oh, I see, today is your birthday."

3. Dayakar was only 3 years old when he first came to the Ashram with his parents in August 1930. After a few more brief visits, he stayed in the Ashram from August 1933 to October 1949, that is, from the age of 6 to 22. As there were only a few children in the Ashram during the thirties, he became the favourite of all and Mother bestowed much attention on him to keep him happy and occupied.

4. Shanti Doshi (brother of Nagin Doshi) was 13 when he came to the Ashram in November 1930.

5. Romen Palit was only 10 when his father Rajani Palit left him in the Ashram in July 1930.

There is another incident that somebody told me about Nolini-da's dress. It happened when he was young. One day, while he was dressing, he found that his kurta did not match with his dhoti; the kurta was cleaner than the dhoti, so he rolled on the floor to make both look the same. (*laughter*)

R: But is the incident of Dayakar removing the chair true?

I have not heard about it, but I can say that it is not impossible for Dayakar. . . . Now Dayakar has become so nice, so sober.

R: I heard Nolini-da had a lot of patience. It seems he fell down, but he got up and continued the class as if nothing happened.

Yes, in such an incident, that is what is needed. He had that much patience. One might be annoyed, and that might get expressed. But one loses one's consciousness if one becomes angry. You are hurting your own consciousness even if you get annoyed. By that, neither you nor I nor Dayakar is going to gain. We have to think how things can be rectified. That is why Nolini-da is considered to be Their student.

Pavitra

R: Do you remember anything about Pavitra-da?

I knew Pavitra very well. He was very straight. A fine personality! Have you seen him?

R: Yes, I have seen him.

His nature was like that. When we wanted to send a message to Mother, we used to send it through Nolini-da or Amrita or Pavitra. Nolini-da, while conveying the message, used his own discretion, but Pavitra was just a messenger, he would not take any responsibility. He would say whatever had been told to him. Pavitra was of that type. Amrita was friendly with everyone.

There were different types of incidents. For instance, somebody sent some mangoes to Sri Aurobindo. After sending the mangoes, he wrote to Sri Aurobindo, "I've sent you some mangoes, how did you like them?" But the mangoes were not very good, so Mother sent them to the Dining Room. But Sri Aurobindo asked Mother, "Where are the mangoes that have been sent for me?" Mother immediately sent somebody to the Dining Room and had them brought back.

Tea in the Ashram

(Biren-da starts making tea for us)

Once I went to Nolini-da when he was taking tea. Nolini-da asked me, “Do you take tea?” and he himself replied for me, “I have it when I get it, but otherwise not.” But I replied. “Even if I get I don’t take it, I am against tea right from the beginning.” When I was a child I had read in an article by P. C. Ray — you must be knowing P. C. Ray?

R: P. C. Ray?

He was a brilliant scientist, a world-famous scientist of that time. He went on the wrong path by becoming Gandhiji’s disciple.

Bapi:⁶ He had done some original work on some salts of mercury in the 19th century.

For several reasons, he was dead against tea, but he himself drank plenty of tea. (*laughter*) The tea that he used was also very strong and he took much more in quantity — his own students told me. Ardhendu (the chemist) and Nolini Sarkar were his students. Nolini-da said that when he and P. C. Ray were going around for public work, P. C. Ray always carried a kettle with him. For preparing high quality tea, it is well known that the decoction should never be overboiled. Tea has to be added when the water begins to boil and the kettle has to be immediately brought down — I am speaking of Darjeeling tea. We generally put one spoon of tea, but he put three spoons and continued to boil it. So Nolini-da asked him, “What are you doing?” He replied, “I am taking tea. You people don’t take tea, so you don’t know.” That was the argument. It is the same with me. At first I was against tea, but later I myself started taking it. Several times we speak from our ideas, but what happens is just the reverse.

Often Mother had to concede to things that she was against. For example, Mother was against tea. But she was giving tea in the Ashram. She did not encourage drinking tea, but she still gave it to the sadhaks. Rajangam was distributing the tea.

Oh, I missed out the actual incident. I told Anilkumar to give up tea and finally I myself got into the habit and found there was a good side to it. My idea was that tea causes constipation. But it actually acts in the reverse way — one has motion after tea. I had an operation and had no motion for quite some time, and it helped

6. Munindranath Sharma, known as ‘Bapi’.

me. Once Pantulu (father of Bhavatarini) asked Mother, “Mother, they work late in the Press after five o’clock. They need to be given some refreshment.” So Mother sanctioned tea and mixture.

Mother’s Way of Working

B: That was her way of working.

They were like that, their view was so vast. What the Mother did not allow became sometimes necessary in certain situations. I remember one incident. One day, Mother was distributing flowers and the flower was “Conquest over Greed”. I used to sit right in front of the Mother. She started giving the flower to us, one after the other, as we did pranam to her. Flowers were kept on a dish and, as far as I remember, it was most probably Rajangam who stood with the flower dish, and gave each time a flower in Mother’s hand as she gave it to us. Mother was distributing the same flower to everybody, but the moment Dayakar came, Mother kept aside the flower “Conquest over Greed” and gave him another flower. Now, do you understand? Dayakar did not need “Conquest over Greed”. (*laughs*)

R: Because Dayakar was a small boy.

Yes, small indeed, but it is not the age that matters, Mother had various reasons.

R: Why did not Dayakar need that flower?

Maybe he needs to follow some other path, just as children here are given non-vegetarian food. It is not yet time for them to give up non-vegetarian food. When one grows older and feels like giving it up on one’s own will, one will give it up. I don’t know whether Dayakar still continues to take non-veg food. But I know for sure that Dayakar and others had non-vegetarian food earlier.

Now listen to another interesting incident. Did I tell you about the easy-chair and the lady who brought a shawl for me? She wanted to give me a shawl and Sri Aurobindo told me that I must not pay and take it only if she was willing to give it to me free — “You take it as Mother’s shawl.” In those days, Sri Aurobindo’s letters could not be read without a magnifying glass and even with that not many could read them. Nolini-da could read them and there was also a person called Premanand who could read them.

Things were terribly cheap those days in the Pondicherry market. One could get a cycle for 15 rupees, a flask for 10 annas and a box of silk material for 8 annas. So I bought a magnifying glass for a few paise. As usual we told everything to

Mother and Sri Aurobindo. A sadhak called Atal, who later worked in Maret Garden, told me, "Give me your magnifying glass." I told the Mother about it and Sri Aurobindo told me to give him the glass if he was ready to pay the price for it. But he told me not to accept the shawl from the lady if I had to pay. So it is better not to discuss about what he says to whom. In short, Mother wants all of us to follow the path.

Did I tell you about the incident of Amrita? Amrita gave me two rupees and told me, "Mother forgot yesterday to give you money, so she is giving it to you today." At the same time when she gave the money at Prosperity time, she used to ask the person what he will do with the money. The person himself told me that the Mother was well aware that he will go to market the moment he received the money. *(laughter)*

(Concluded)

SACHINDRA NATH CHATTERJEE, MUNINDRANATH SHARMA, RAMAN REDDY

(Translated from Bengali by ALOKA GHOSH)

What should be the true necessities of a sadhak? Should he buy things from outside? With what idea is pocket money given to us?

The idea, when the arrangement was made, was simply to see how and in what spirit the sadhaks dealt with money when they had any at their disposal.

The *necessities* of a sadhak should be as few as possible; for there are only a very few things that are real necessities in life. The rest are either utilities or things decorative to life or luxuries.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 759)

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

(Part 17)

(Continued from the issue of May 2021)

SECTION 2. SIMPLICITY AND AUSTERITY

Another facet of Sri Aurobindo’s simplicity, despite having been educated in one of the most elite institutions in the world, was that he never paid attention to his sartorial style.

Dinendra Kumar Roy, when he first met Sri Aurobindo in Calcutta in 1898 at the residence of Sri Aurobindo’s uncle, Krishna Kumar Mitra, was completely taken aback to see this brilliant Cambridge scholar clad in coarse khadi clothes with the end of his dhoti hanging loose and wearing old-fashioned Indian slippers with their toe ends curved up. Roy’s surprise was stark since Sri Aurobindo, having spent fourteen years of his childhood and young adult life in England, had been steeped in English culture, whilst the norm of many foreign-returned students was to wholly adopt a Western way of life, in spite of their stay in Europe being of a far lesser duration. Roy remarked, “Had someone pointed out the hills of Deoghar and told me, ‘These are the Himalayas’, I would have been less surprised and confounded.”¹

After this meeting both of them travelled to Deoghar and stayed at Sri Aurobindo’s maternal grandfather, Raj Narayan Bose’s house, before they departed for Baroda.

As regards Sri Aurobindo’s formal wear, Dinendra Kumar Roy writes in *Aurobindo Prasanga*:

Aurobindo never cared about dressing up: he had nothing to do with stylishness. Even when he went to the royal court, he went in his ordinary clothes. He did not own any expensive shoes, shirts, ties, collars, flannels, linen or any of the innumerable sorts of coats, hats and caps that people wear. I never saw him wear a European hat. He used the sort of hat that is generally known in this area as the *Piraali topi*.²

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

2. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st Ed., 2006, pp. 16-17 (Dinendra Kumar Roy, *Aurobindo Prasanga* – Translated from Bengali by Maurice Shukla).

In a separate Bengali article, Dinendra Kumar Roy writes that in the two years that he stayed with Sri Aurobindo he never saw him wearing expensive dresses or shoes.³ Instead of European clothes, Sri Aurobindo preferred wearing the local dress. The first time Charu Chandra Dutt met Sri Aurobindo, at the Baroda railway station, he noticed that Sri Aurobindo was wearing the Indian official dress and turban. When this was told to Sri Aurobindo years later he replied, “Turban? Does he mean Palleri cap? . . . I don’t remember. It is true that at times I used to put on the Marathi dress.”⁴

While teaching at Baroda College, Sri Aurobindo did also wear white drill suits.⁵

Basanti Mitra writes about her Aurodada: “There wasn’t the slightest pomp or show in his dress.”⁶ Rajaram N. Patkar, who was close to Sri Aurobindo, was intrigued by his spartan lifestyle:

He was remarkably simple in his mode of living. He was not at all fastidious in his tastes. He did not seem to care much either for his food or dress, because he never attached any importance to either. Any dish served to him at his meal time was welcome to him. Similarly about his dress — I never saw him visiting the cloth market for making selection of cloth for his dress as he had no choice to make. At home he was clad in plain white sadara and dhoti . . .⁷

Speaking about the sadara and dhoti, Rajaram N. Patkar narrates a rather delicate encounter between Sri Aurobindo and the Maharaja:

Once, I remember, the Maharaja sent for him. . . . He was busy with some important matter and told the messenger that he was busy and would go to the Maharaja when he would be free. Evidently Maharaja did not like this reply, but being fully aware of Aravind’s independent nature, he drove straight to Aravind’s bungalow and his ADC announced to Mr. Ghose that Maharaja had come. Mr. Ghose was not prepared to receive him, but as he had no time to change his dress, he at once came down and received the Maharaja in his usual simple home costume viz — Sadara and Dhoti. The Maharaja who had all Western etiquettes about him, shook hands with Mr. Ghose with an expression of apology for having disturbed him. Mr. Ghose then conducted him to his receiving room downstairs — which was barely furnished to receive such a

3. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *Reminiscences of the Days of Yore* (Translated from Bengali article *Sekaler Smriti*); sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

4. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 498.

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

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

7. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 62.

personage. They were then closeted together for nearly an hour and none knew for what purpose.⁸

When necessary Sri Aurobindo could be straightforward with the Maharaja and this was a facet of his simplicity and sincerity. In a later chapter we shall examine Sri Aurobindo’s forthrightness with the Maharaja.

After Sri Aurobindo had resigned from the Baroda State Service, G. H. Gokhale, a student of Baroda College, accidentally met him during a train journey from Bombay to Poona — probably in January 1908 when he was on a political tour of Maharashtra. Gokhale writes: “He at once recognised me and chatted cordially for a few moments.” Gokhale noticed that Sri Aurobindo had changed from his English dress and other formal wear, to the traditional kurta and dhoti.⁹

And at the *Bande Mataram* office, Nirmal Dutt, a fourteen-year-old assistant-boy, observed Sri Aurobindo’s indifference to his appearance:

His dress at this time was one of the plainest: an ordinary coat buttoned up to the neck and a common dhoti. It seemed nobody cared to clothe him properly, while he himself was too preoccupied to give attention to it. He seemed oblivious of his body even.¹⁰

Another staff member at the *Bande Mataram* office, Balai Dev Sharma, recalls Sri Aurobindo’s simple sage-like presence:

A group of our people (of *Yugantar*) used to study the *Gita* under his tutelage. We went there every morning and used to see him seated in the west side verandah, a dhoti flapped around the neck and with a shirt in the winter season. He started with the divine vision of Sanjay. From spiritual science to physical science — all the profound knowledge and wisdom of the world flowing out of his throat like the stream of the river Bhagirathi.¹¹

Bhupendranath Dutt, who worked at the other revolutionary newspaper, *Yugantar*, reflected: “Anyone returning from England in those days and wearing dhoti was something very shocking — I was very eager to see this Swadeshi leader.”¹² And Nagendrakumar Guharoy, who was close to the K. K. Mitra family and was

8. Reminiscences of Rajaram N. Patkar dated 30 September 1956; sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

9. See Reminiscences of Ganesh Hari Gokhale, sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

10. Nirmal Dutt, ‘My Recollections of Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, August 1977, p. 601.

11. *Sri Aurobindo Path Mandir Annual*, 2012, p. 117.

12. See Bhupendranath Dutta, *Aurobindo Smarane* (translated from Bengali); sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

one of the persons who assisted Sri Aurobindo’s escape from Chandernagore to Pondicherry, recalled seeing Sri Aurobindo at Subodh Mullick’s mansion: “There is not much of orderliness in Sri Aurobindo’s dress. His shirt, dhoti and shoes were of the commonplace type. He wore ordinary indigenous dhoti, tennis cuff twill shirt and chappals.”¹³

Amongst the political leaders Bal Gangadhar Tilak said, “If one sees him, one won’t think it was Aravinda . . . so weak of body and so simple in dress and bearing,”¹⁴ while Barin noted: “All his life he wore nothing but his country-made *dhoti*, *piran* (Indian shirt) and an *urani* (shawl) with gold threads in its border.”¹⁵

We read in *Savitri*:

Bare, simple is the sylvan hermit-life;
Yet is it clad with the jewelry of earth.¹⁶

The spartan dhoti confounded Britishers. Churchill had referred to the dhoti-clad Gandhi as the “half naked fakir”, and the scribe Henry Nevinson too found the dhoti an unusual garment. Sri Aurobindo told his attendants: “Nevinson went to see Tilak who met him wearing a dhoti. Reporting the meeting, Nevinson said, ‘Mr. Tilak met me *naked* in his loin-cloth.’” (*Laughter*)¹⁷

Nevinson had met Sri Aurobindo at the Congress Conference at Surat towards the end of December 1907 after which Sri Aurobindo came to Baroda to deliver some speeches. Though the Baroda winter is rather severe, Sri Aurobindo had no woollens and was clad only in a cotton dhoti and shirt. His friend Sardar Mazmudar presented him a Pashmina shawl to protect him from the cold.¹⁸

Months later, during the historic Alipore Trial, Sudhir Sarkar comments about Sri Aurobindo’s ascetic dressing sense:

He used to go to court wearing his dhoti tightly tucked up in the manner of working men. He would put on his cotton shawl drawing one end below his right arm and throwing it over his left shoulder. Was this the dress or manner of one who could have become a district magistrate in the I.C.S.? Rather he looked like a mendicant, a fakir!¹⁹

13. *Sri Aurobindo Path Mandir Annual*, 2012, p. 117.

14. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 379.

15. Nilima Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo – The Soul of India’, *Mother India*, November 1993, p. 802.

16. CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 402.

17. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 658.

18. Nirodbaran, *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, p. 79.

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

Incidentally, about the ascetic’s ochre dress, Sri Aurobindo remarked to a disciple:

I don’t know that wearing the Sannyasi dress would help for one can wear the dress and yet be full of desires. But I have no objection if it helps you as a symbol or a reminder.²⁰

After his acquittal in the Alipore Trial some young men of the *Yugantar* party used to visit Sri Aurobindo at his uncle’s (K. K. Mitra) house for reading the Gita. In the winter cold Sri Aurobindo sat on the verandah with his hands crossed clad only in a dhoti and a shirt. One day he got so absorbed while expounding the Gita that he went on until one o’clock. Sarojini came out with the food. Then the young men knew that it was his lunch time and they left him; only then did he eat.²¹

In January 1910, Sri Aurobindo granted an interview to the Tamil nationalist paper *India*. The correspondent wrote his impressions of Sri Aurobindo:

He lived a very simple life, and put on an ordinary appearance with his dhoti and shirt; but his eyes were afire with grace and knowledge and a halo of mysterious peace pervaded where he lived.²²

T. Kodandarama Rao writes of Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry in the 1920s: “Clad in a dhoti in all seasons of the year, he was equal to heat and cold.”²³

Sri Aurobindo’s plain style of living and self-denial extended not only to clothes and other personal belongings but also in matters of food. Dinendra Kumar Roy recounts:

Baroda food did not suit me but he was used to it. The food was sometimes so bad that it was difficult to put it in one’s mouth! But he just swallowed it without ever complaining to the cook. . . . The cook sometimes prepared chutney too. But it was inedible because what he made was either too hot or too salty. The way he cooked meat was neither curry nor *kalliya* — neither liquid nor dry. Too much spice often made it inedible.²⁴

Dinendra Kumar Roy then writes how they get out of this unpalatable situation:

20. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 761.

21. See A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 124.

22. ‘An Interview with Sri Aurobindo in 1910’, *Mother India*, August 1987, p. 469.

23. *Breath of Grace*, edited by M. P. Pandit, 2011, p. 46.

24. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st Ed., 2006, p. 19.

Since Aurobindo was very partial to Bengali cuisine we recruited a cook from Bengal — a young man from Bankura district. We thought that he had consented to come as far as Baroda out of an adventurous spirit, but when we tasted his cooking we realised that it would not stand a chance in Bengal. But Aurobindo ate whatever he cooked. This made the cook even more wayward.²⁵

However, Sri Aurobindo never complained, let alone admonish the cook, neither for his waywardness nor for his below par culinary skills. Later in 1899, the homesick cook returned to Bengal and Sri Aurobindo adapted to what was locally available. In contrast to Bengali cuisine, the Baroda food that was served to him over the years was far from satisfactory, yet he quietly tolerated it. Basanti Mitra noted that Sri Aurobindo “was detached about food too. He was happy with whatever you gave him.”²⁶ But Mahratti cuisine, which was quite common in Baroda, was not Sri Aurobindo’s cup of tea. He once humorously commented:

I took one mouthful and only one. Oh God! sudden hell-fire in the mouth could not have been more surprising. Enough to burn down the whole of London in one wild agonising swoop of flame!”²⁷

Afterwards in August 1902, he wrote to Mrinalini Devi: “I am glad your father will be able to send me a cook when you come. I have got a Maratha cook, but he can prepare nothing properly except meat dishes.”²⁸ Whilst Sri Aurobindo found Marathi food too hot, Gujarati food was too rich in ghee. Later, he had dinner at Tilak’s place — possibly when he stayed with him in his Poona house during his Maharashtra political tour in January 1908 — which consisted of rice, puri, legume (*daal*) and vegetables. He liked it for its “spartan simplicity”.²⁹

On Sri Aurobindo’s dietary habits, Dinendra Kumar Roy writes:

He preferred Bengali cuisine and often praised it. We normally had a vegetable dish, a fried dish, *daal*, meat or fish, and bread and rice. He ate more bread than rice. The rice he ate was so little that he did not mind its absence I guess! He found it difficult to eat meat twice a day, so he took meat at one meal and fish at the next.³⁰

25. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

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

27. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 13.

28. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 146.

29. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 46.

30. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st ed., 2006, p. 19.

Roy also writes that Sri Aurobindo used to read the newspaper while he ate his lunch.³¹ At times Sri Aurobindo used to get so absorbed in his reading that he would forget his meal. Rajaram Patkar narrates an incident during dinner:

Once I had to communicate a message to him when he was engrossed in a book. I had to wait for over fifteen minutes just in front of him before he diverted his attention to me. One evening his servant brought his meal dish . . . Aravind Babu simply said *Accha* [very well]. After about an hour or so, the servant came again to remove the dish, but to his surprise he found the dish untouched lying on the table as it was. He dared not disturb his master and he quietly came to me and told me about it. Then I had to go to his room to do the unpleasant task of reminding him of the waiting meal. He then gave a pleasant smile and hurriedly went to the table and within about ten minutes finished his job of feeding his belly and resumed his work. Such was his love for reading. When he was enjoying his intellectual feast, which was certainly more palatable to him than his everyday rice and curry, there was no wonder that he should care more for the former.³²

With the passage of time Sri Aurobindo’s diet changed. Referring to the period about 1905, Sri Aurobindo mentions:

It was at that time that I gave up meat diet and found a great feeling of lightness and purification in the system. Meat is a rajasic food. That is why the Kshatriyas did not give it up. Vivekananda recommended it to Indians because it gives a certain force and energy in the physical. From Tamas you go into Rajas, Vivekananda was not quite wrong.³³

Around this time R. C. Dutt, I.C.S., invited Sri Aurobindo for dinner. He told his disciples:

Once R. C. Dutt called me to dinner and was surprised to find that I was taking only vegetarian diet, while he could not live without meat. With the vegetarian diet I was feeling light and pure. It is only a belief that one can’t do without meat; it is a question of habit.³⁴

Sri Aurobindo revealed to his attendants how he gave up meat:

31. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

32. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, pp. 62-63.

33. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 613.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 608.

I was very much attached to meat. In order to get rid of the attachment, I used to give up meat for a long period, then take it up again and again give it up until I got rid of the attachment.³⁵

Sri Aurobindo was asked, “Is not meat injurious to the body, Sir?” He replied: “Depends on the person. Of course it makes the body heavy, I mean the subtle body.”³⁶ On another instance, Sri Aurobindo was asked “if there is any difference in quality between a vegetarian diet and a meat and fish diet,” the following conversation ensued:

SRI AUROBINDO: A meat and fish diet is good for fighters. But it makes the body-consciousness heavy — I mean the psychological stuff of that consciousness.

NIRODBARAN: You have said before that the nature of food doesn’t matter much in Yoga and that people here used to eat everything.

SRI AUROBINDO: Yes, but all the same it has that effect.³⁷

In early 1905, Sri Aurobindo, with his friends Deshpande and Madhavrao Jadhav, visited Chandod — a pilgrimage town on the banks of Narmada — and then continued, a few miles away, to Swami Brahmananda’s Ashram at Ganganath where they discussed some spiritual matters with the late Swami’s disciple. Rajaram Patkar notes:

After this trip I saw a marked change both in Aravind Babu and Deshpande. Both of them changed their life altogether. They started worshipping the Goddess and taking only one meal — a pure vegetarian meal — a day; both started living a life of austerity. But between the two I saw a greater change in Aravind Babu. He was never as free with me as he used to be before. He looked serene and calm with the gravity of a man of ripe old age.³⁸

Towards the end of Sri Aurobindo’s stay at Baroda, his food habits became basic and austere. Rajaram Patkar observed:

In these days he did not take any cooked food in the evening but used to take fruit — mostly plantains — and a cup of milk. This kind of austere life continued to the day he left Baroda.³⁹

35. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2013, pp. 1004.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 954-55.

37. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 265.

38. See A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, pp. 64-65.

39. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 196.

Sri Aurobindo and Debabrata Bose toured some districts in Bengal to observe the political consciousness of the people. “We lived simply on plantains,” said Sri Aurobindo.⁴⁰ Even “during his political days”, notes Nirodbaran, “while on tour, he lived simply on bananas. And he recommended it by saying that it was very good and wholesome food.”⁴¹ Sri Aurobindo has told his attendants: “Once in Calcutta I lived for a long time on rice and bananas only. It is a very good diet.”⁴² Balai Dev Sharma, a student in Bengal National College, writes: “As far as I remember he used to take *Habisyanna* (raw rice cooked in earthen pot sprinkled with ghee). This food used to be cooked on the southern side verandah in a portable oven.”⁴³

On the day of departure from Baroda for Calcutta on 2nd March, 1906, Sri Aurobindo hints to Mrinalini Devi his decisive spiritual turn. His distinctive trait of not causing inconvenience to others is also noticeable in the letter:

At any rate I shall reach Calcutta on Monday. I don't know where I will stay. It may not be possible to stay at Na-mashi's [*fourth maternal aunt, Lilavati Mitra*]. I have given up fish and meat. I may not eat them again in my life. But why should Na-mashi listen to that? Besides it would not be good if I could not find a secluded place. I have to do a number of things alone for an hour and a half in the morning and an hour and a half in the evening. All that cannot be done in front of others.⁴⁴

When Sri Aurobindo arrived in Calcutta in early March 1906 he perhaps took temporary shelter for a few days at the *Yugantar* office at Kanaidhar Lane before he shifted to Raja Subodh Mullick's palatial residence at 12, Wellington Street, where he stayed for about six months.⁴⁵ However, when he was acquitted in the Alipore Bomb Case in May 1909 and until he departed from Bengal in February 1910, he stayed at his Na-mashi's house.

In the judgment in the Alipore Bomb Case, Judge C. P. Beachcroft, too, noted Sri Aurobindo's vegetarian turn: “Another indication of his religious ideas is shown in his having given up meat and fish.”⁴⁶ Sukumar Sen, a close friend of Raja Subodh Mullick's family and a share-holder in the Company which floated *Bande Mataram*, notes that Sri Aurobindo “is a vegetarian; he won't touch animal meat of any kind.”⁴⁷

40. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 623.

41. *Talks by Nirodbaran – December 1969 to July 1970*, edited by Sunayana and Maurice, 2018, pp. 54-55.

42. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 608.

43. *Sri Aurobindo Path Mandir Annual*, 2012, p. 117.

44. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1st Ed., p. 68.

45. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 219.

46. C. P. Beachcroft's Judgment in the Case of Arabinda Ghose at the Alipore Bomb Trial, Dated 6.5.1909, *Mother India*, August 1998, p. 543 (Bejoy Krishna Bose, *The Alipore Bomb Trial*).

47. Manoj Das, 'Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi', *Mother India*, January 2016, pp. 37-38 (Deposition of P.W. No. 122; The Alipore Conspiracy Case documents).

However, on different types of food Sri Aurobindo has commented:

At the same time I must say that the abstinence from rajasic or tamasic foods does not of itself assure freedom from the things they help to stimulate. Vegetarians, for instance, can be as sensual and excitable as meat-eaters; a man may abstain from onions and yet be in these respects no better than before. It is a change of consciousness that is effective and this kind of abstention helps that only in so far as it tends to create a less heavy and more refined and plastic physical consciousness for the higher will to act upon. That is something, but it is not all; the change of consciousness can come even in spite of non-abstinence.⁴⁸

From the last quarter of 1907 to just after the first quarter of 1908, Abinash Bhattacharya looked after Sri Aurobindo’s household. He recounts:

He was always in a meditative state. . . . It is easy to imagine how difficult it was for such a man to look after his domestic affairs. Food or clothing did not matter to him. He ate whatever was there. There were holes in his shoes but he did not notice. He did not concern himself with the household at all. I had to look after everything. He got 150 rupees a month from the National College, but it did not always come and finally it stopped altogether. Sometimes I borrowed from Hemendraprasad Ghosh and then tried to pay him back at my convenience. . . . Aurobindo-babu normally ate rice and dal with us, but after Lele’s arrival he just took a boiled potato or a boiled plantain with a small portion of rice. I conferred with *Baudi* (Mrinalini Devi) and arranged to have some ghee put in his rice. On Shivaratri day, all of us fasted and went to Belur Math. When the evening Prasad was distributed Aurobindo-babu noticed I was wondering whether to eat it or not, and said: “Eat up, eat up.”⁴⁹

Referring to the same period, Hemendra Prasad Ghose, a writer at *Bande Mataram*, notes:

I remember how on several occasions our dear and beloved friend Shyam Sunder, who was never careful about money himself, came to me late in the morning — after he had gone away from the tea table in my house — with Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya whom we used to call “Chief’s housewife”, to tell me that a few rupees were wanted to purchase rice for Aurobindo’s house.⁵⁰

48. CWSA, Vol. 31, pp. 434-35.

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

50. Hemendra Prasad Ghose, ‘Reminiscences of Aurobindo Ghose’, *Orient Illustrated Weekly*, 27 February 1949; sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

Apropos the time in early 1908, Sukumar Mitra observed: “When in Scott’s Lane, he lived on fruits and rice only.”⁵¹ Soon after, during the Alipore Trial, Sudhir Sarkar noticed that Sri Aurobindo became oblivious to the food served to him. He writes:

In the afternoon we were given refreshments at the dock in the court — *puris*, *sandesh* and *pan* (betel leaves). Sri Aurobindo would eat them all together — *puri* and betel leaves both! — so I had to help him eat properly. . . . I smelt his head, I fed him, I washed his face.⁵²

About a year later, prior to his political retirement in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo stayed for six weeks in Chandernagore. Since he was staying there incognito, no home-cooked food could be offered to him as it could raise suspicions in the household where he was staying. His host Motilal Roy writes: “He was given some sweetmeats bought from a stall, with which he filled his belly. I still remember how indifferently he munched the bazaar sweets, cooked with impure ghee!”⁵³ Motilal Roy also writes:

. . . a completely surrendered individual — one felt when he spoke as if somebody else was speaking through him. . . . I placed the plate of food before him — he simply gazed at me and then ate a little — just mechanically! Sri Aurobindo appeared to be absorbed even when he was eating.⁵⁴

Sri Aurobindo once told a disciple:

Your mind is too full of demands and desires. If you want to be able to practise the Yoga here, you must throw them from you and learn quietude, desirelessness, simplicity and surrender. It is these you must get first; other things can come afterwards — for this is the only true foundation of the sadhana.⁵⁵

On matters of palatableness, Sri Aurobindo has said:

When there is Samata then there comes *Samarasatva* — equal enjoyment — from everything one gets the *rasa*, essential delight, from every kind of food. Even the food that we call badly cooked has a *rasa* of its own.⁵⁶

51. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, January 2016, p. 38.

52. Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 1989, p. 104.

53. See Motilal Roy, *My Life’s Partner*, pp. 171-91 (translated from Bengali by D. S. Mahalanobis).

54. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 132.

55. CWSA, Vol. 29, p. 139.

56. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 307.

And in a letter he writes:

As to the question of practising to take all kinds of food with equal *rasa*, it is not necessary to practise nor does it really come by practice. One has to acquire equality within in the consciousness and as this equality grows one can extend it or apply it to the various fields of the activity of the consciousness.⁵⁷

However, on matters of taste Sri Aurobindo clarified to a disciple:

Distinction is never lost, bread cannot be as tasty as *luchi*, but a yogi can enjoy bread with as much *rasa* as *luchi* — which is quite a different thing.⁵⁸

Incidentally in 1926, Sri Aurobindo, in reply to a disciple’s question, said:

The vital also has strong likes and dislikes like that. I have removed it down to the physico-vital and I can now take any food whether it is bland or spicy, good or bad; I can now take the essential *rasa* out of any and every kind of food. In my case this desire for certain foods and antipathy for others is still there in the atoms of my physical being. If that can be removed, then what you say may be possible; that is even a cup of poison will not affect me.⁵⁹

Despite Sri Aurobindo’s detachment and self-discipline in dietary matters, he was gracious to accept what was offered to him. Charu Chandra Dutt recalls that Sri Aurobindo was pampered during his stay as a guest in 1905 at Thane and later in 1906-07 at Calcutta when he stayed with Dutt’s brother-in-law, Subodh Chandra Mullick: “The ladies of the house cooking little things for him was a daily occurrence, both in Thana and in Calcutta. He never objected to that, as he was a connoisseur of good food. But be it remembered that he was always a small eater.”⁶⁰

Dinendra Kumar Roy also observed that Sri Aurobindo was a small eater. About Sri Aurobindo’s food and health habits, he writes:

Aurobindo ate very little. Because he ate little and led a well-regulated life, he was able to maintain his health even though he did heavy intellectual work. He was very health-conscious. . . . Though not fond of physical exercise, every day before nightfall he used to walk briskly up and down the verandah for an hour.⁶¹

57. CWSA, Vol. 31, p. 433.

58. Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2005, pp. 50-51.

59. *Sri Aurobindo’s Talks of 1926*, recorded by Anilbaran Roy, 1st Ed., 2020, p. 6.

60. Charu Chandra Dutt, ‘My Friend and My Master’, *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, Eighth Number, p. 134.

61. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st Ed., 2006, pp. 24-25.

During his stay at Pondicherry in the 1920s, T. Kodandarama Rao noticed Sri Aurobindo’s simple tastes:

With regard to food, he was never punctilious about taste or richness or delicacies of food. Whatever was given he tasted with equal *rasa* and often the cooks employed gave unwholesome and tasteless dishes, but the Master enjoyed all kinds of food without murmur.⁶²

Later, Tara and Suman, who both worked in the Mother’s kitchen, said:

Not that we were great cooks or anything . . . We used to make the same food for both and send it to them. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo never ever said that they wanted to eat this or that. Whatever we prepared, they ate.⁶³

During his incarceration in Alipore jail Sri Aurobindo experimented in sustaining himself without food. “I drew sufficient vital force from the universal energy to keep my strength intact, but the physical tissues shrank and this loss of physical substance I could not make up — hence the necessity of taking up material food,” he said.⁶⁴ Sri Aurobindo was asked: “Is it not more difficult to take vital force directly from the universal energy than to take it through food?” He replied:

For me the former is easier. I can draw as much vital force from the universe as I require. In jail I fasted for ten days. I slept on every third night. At the end of the tenth day I felt much stronger. I could lift a weight which I could not lift before. But I lost eleven pounds. This loss of the material substance of the body could not be prevented. When I fasted for twenty-three days while living at Chetty’s house, I felt no weakness. I did eight hours’ work, walked in my room, slept normally . . . I had not lost my balance in the least. . . .

I slept normally during my second fast. But during the previous fast in jail I had to bear a great pressure of *sadhana* — so I had to do without much sleep.⁶⁵

Another facet of Sri Aurobindo’s simplicity was his shy and self-effacing nature. After his return to India in February 1893, at his first opportunity, during his vacations in January 1894, Sri Aurobindo visited Bengal to meet his family. En route he

62. *Breath of Grace*, edited by M. P. Pandit, 2011, p. 46.

63. Chitra Sen, ““Their Earthly Food” – The Mother’s Kitchen’, *Mother India*, September, 2020, p. 59.

64. *Sri Aurobindo’s Talks of 1926*, recorded by Anilbaran Roy, 1st Ed., 2020, p. 10.

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

stopped at Ajmer to meet Benoybhusan. His sister, Sarojini, almost five decades later, recounted the meeting between Sri Aurobindo and his grandfather at Deoghar:

First came a telegram, then Sejda [*third brother*] arrived. A very young and delicate face, shoulder-length hair cut in English fashion, Sejda was a very shy person. When womenfolk surrounded him he shrank bashfully. Dadababu [grandfather] put his arms around him and embraced him in a warm welcome.⁶⁶

Barin has spoken of Sri Aurobindo as:

The shy retiring poet-brother that I used to see every Puja vacation in Deoghur became intimately known to me only after I visited Baroda in 1902.⁶⁷

R. S. Dalal and P. B. Chandwani, students of Sri Aurobindo at Baroda College, have also remarked about his shy nature.⁶⁸ And during the early days of Pondicherry, Va. Ra. (V. Ramaswami Iyengar), a noted scholar, novelist and biographer of Subramania Bharati who used to visit Sri Aurobindo, said: “Bharati was shy and so too was Aurobindo.”⁶⁹

About Sri Aurobindo’s stay in England, A. B. Purani writes in *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*:

Being brought up in a foreign country without a background of home life in India or, once they had left the Drewetts in Manchester, of family life in England, must have been a great trial for the three brothers.

Benoybhusan who was generous by temperament seems to have felt his responsibility keenly, particularly in the beginning when remittances from India became irregular. It is evident that Aurobindo had the same sense of responsibility. Manmohan, romantic and poetic, enamoured of England and English life, a little prone to luxury, felt very strongly the want of a family and parental love. In his correspondence one can clearly see that he was trying hard to stretch out his hands to someone so as to make good this loss. Aurobindo, shy and reserved temperamentally but firm in his will and hard-working, does not express himself with the same emotional exuberance. It seems to me that the difficult circumstances steeled his will to face life with an inflexible resolution. . . .

66. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 56.

67. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, May 2012, p. 348.

68. See P. B. Chandwani, ‘Reminiscences of Sri Aurobindo and Impressions of His Ashram’, *Mother India*, August 1971, p. 469; see Sri Aurobindo Society, *Sri Aurobindo at Gujarat*, Appendix p. 15.

69. M. Srinivasan, ‘Bharati and Aurobindo’, *Srinwantu*, February 1981, p. 55.

But what Manmohan describes as his great loss in his own childhood must have been felt as a loss by all the three brothers. This becomes clear in one of Manmohan’s letters [dated 18th February, 1888] to his poet friend Laurence Binyon:

All childhood and boyhood is expansive. This human ivy stretches passionately forth its young tendrils, and the warm feelings are at the forefront, yearning to bestow and to be reciprocated: it is all heart; its brain lies undeveloped. It is the wise forethought of Nature that this should be so; but, in my case, Fate came between and cancelled her decrees; and, what to others is the bright portion of their life, its heaven and refuge, was for me bitterly and hopelessly blighted. You will not understand me, unless I tell a circumstance of my life which is unhappily both painful for me to reveal, and for you to hear. I had no mother. . . . Crying for bread I was given a stone. My father was kind but stern, and I never saw much of him. . . .

The quotation makes sad reading but it serves to bring into relief a part of the psychological background of the three brothers.⁷⁰

Although Sri Aurobindo was a multifaceted personality, Nirodbaran has referred to his “shy and reserved nature”:

Lastly, those who have read *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* and his *Correspondence* with me cannot but notice a striking difference between the two in their tone and manner. Though both of them have an air of intimacy and informality, still the correspondence is certainly more free. There he has let himself go, to quote his phrase, whereas in the talks there is a sense of restraint. Is it because of a different set of circumstances and a different milieu? I believe there is something more. Even if I had met him all alone, I don’t think he would have been as free in his speech as with his pen. For, his shy and reserved nature would have put some curb on total abandon. Of course, the correspondence was restricted to one person with his own particular interests; the talks covered a larger and more diverse sphere, and there they have an advantage of their own.⁷¹

Nirodbaran also writes that Dilip Kumar Roy once complained to Sri Aurobindo on why he would not laugh or even smile. Sri Aurobindo replied that “since his childhood, he had been estranged from his family and accustomed to live a solitary

70. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, pp. 24-25.

71. Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2005, p. 236.

life. His nature had therefore become reserved, somewhat remote and he felt shy of too much personal emotion.”⁷²

Nirodbaran continues:

Moreover, the Yoga he had practised, beginning with the transcendental nirvanic experience, must have crowned the natural disposition. Buddha, I believe, for all his compassion, could not but have been impersonal in his daily communication. This vast impersonality even in personal relations, is it not the basis of his Yoga?⁷³

Sri Aurobindo once told a disciple:

The Guru should be accepted in all ways — transcendent, impersonal, personal.⁷⁴

Sri Aurobindo was a mystical blend of impersonality and intimacy. Dilip Kumar Roy writes of Sri Aurobindo:

. . . whom I accused bitterly of being aloof although even his remoteness gave me boons of intimacy and vision which no physical nearness with my dearest friends and comrades had ever been able to rival.⁷⁵

On the significance of having a certain reserve, Sri Aurobindo explained:

As for shyness, there are two kinds: one is egoistic, being ashamed of expressing the Truth or showing allegiance to it in ways which would not be understood by others, the other is a certain reserve, an unwillingness to expose one’s deeper feelings to the gaze of others, the wish to keep sacred and secret the relations of love with the Divine — that is a psychic feeling.⁷⁶

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

72. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

73. *Ibid.*, pp. 232-33.

74. CWSA, Vol. 29, p. 190.

75. Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, p. 2.

76. CWSA, Vol. 31, p. 213.

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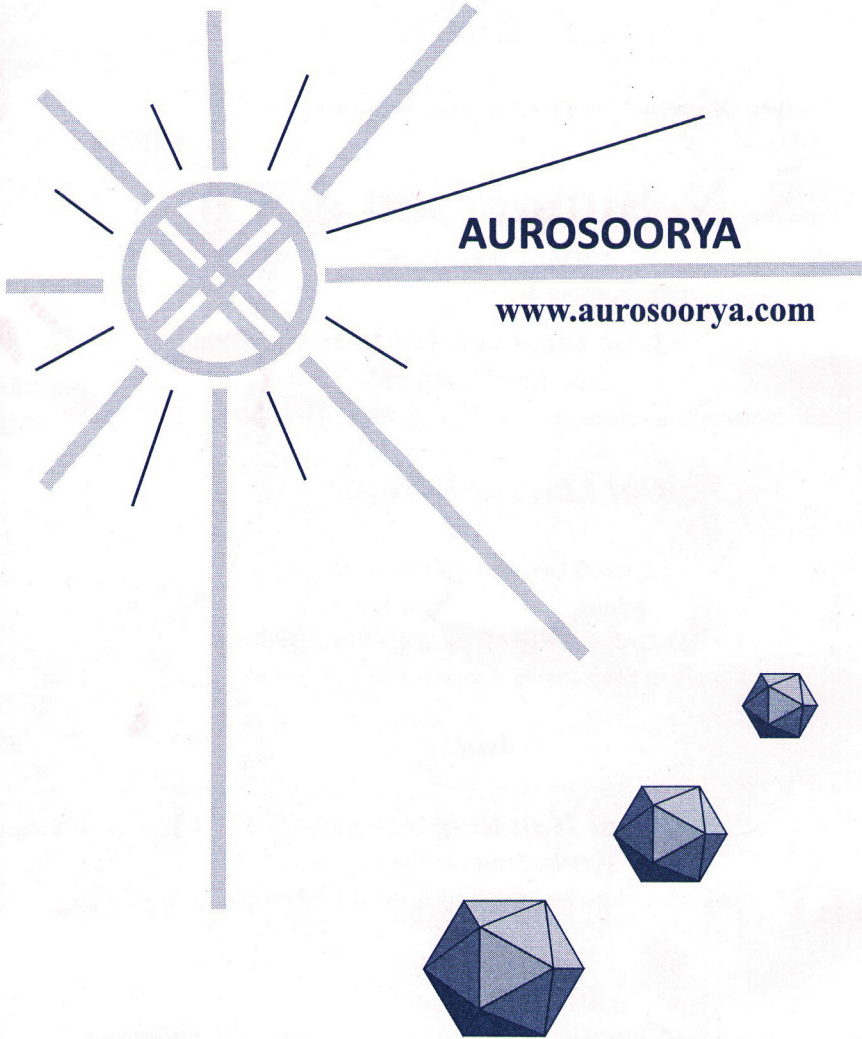
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