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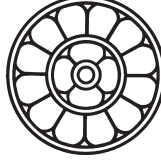
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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No. 7

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

CONTENTS

Sri Aurobindo

PARABRAHMAN	...	7
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF YOGA	...	9
A LETTER OF FEBRUARY 19, 1937	...	19

The Mother

‘JUST AS THOU WILT, JUST AS THOU WILT. . . .’	...	21
A FANTASTIC DISCOVERY	...	22
SOME EXPLANATIONS ON THE CONVERSATION OF 14 APRIL 1929	...	28

Amal Kiran (K. D. Sethna)

“WHITENESSES” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO	...	40
---	-----	----

Bulu (Asit Kumar Mitra)

INTRODUCTION TO <i>KARMAYOGIN</i>	...	42
-----------------------------------	-----	----

Biren Palit

TINY BOAT	...	49
-----------	-----	----

Prabhakar (Batti)

BIRENDRA KUMAR PALIT — BINDER OF BOOKS	...	50
--	-----	----

Ramakant Navelkar

BIREN-DA — A TALK AT SAICE	...	52
----------------------------	-----	----

Kanupriyo Chattopadhyay

SO MANY WISHES	...	59
----------------	-----	----

Gautam Malaker

“LIFE OF PREPARATION AT BARODA” — SRI AUROBINDO, THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN (Part 18) Section 2. Simplicity and Austerity	...	60
--	-----	----

PARABRAHMAN

These wanderings of the suns, these stars at play
In the due measure that they chose of old,
Nor only these, but all the immense array
Of objects that long Time, far Space can hold,

Are divine moments. They are thoughts that form,
They are vision in the Self of things august
And therefore grandly real. Rule and norm
Are processes that they themselves adjust.

The Self of things is not their outward view,
A Force within decides. That Force is He;
His movement is the shape of things we knew,
Movement of Thought is Space and Time. A free

And sovereign master of His world within,
He is not bound by what He does or makes,
He is not bound by virtue or by sin,
Awake who sleeps and when He sleeps awakes.

He is not bound by waking or by sleep;
He is not bound by anything at all.
Laws are that He may conquer them. To creep
Or soar is at His will, to rise or fall.

One from of old possessed Himself above
Who was not anyone nor had a form,
Nor yet was formless. Neither hate nor love
Could limit His perfection, peace nor storm.

He is, we cannot say; for Nothing too
Is His conception of Himself unguessed.
He dawns upon us and we would pursue,
But who has found Him or what arms possessed?

He is not anything, yet all is He;
He is not all but far exceeds that scope.

Both Time and Timelessness sink in that sea:
 Time is a wave and Space a wandering drop.

Within Himself He shadowed Being forth,
 Which is a younger birth, a veil He chose
 To half-conceal Him, Knowledge, nothing worth
 Save to have glimpses of its mighty cause,

And high Delight, a spirit infinite,
 That is the fountain of this glorious world,
 Delight that labours in its opposite,
 Faints in the rose and on the rack is curled.

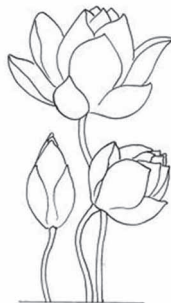
This was the triune playground that He made
 And One there sports awhile. He plucks His flowers
 And by His bees is stung; He is dismayed,
 Flees from Himself or has His sullen hours.

The Almighty One knew labour, failure, strife;
 Knowledge forgot divined itself again:
 He made an eager death and called it life,
 He stung Himself with bliss and called it pain.

Circa 1900-1906.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 216-18)



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF YOGA

Initial Definitions and Descriptions

Yoga has four powers and objects, purity, liberty, beatitude and perfection. Whosoever has consummated these four mightinesses in the being of the transcendental, universal, lilamaya and individual God is the complete and absolute Yogin.

All manifestations of God are manifestations of the absolute Parabrahman.

The Absolute Parabrahman is unknowable to us, not because It is the nothingness of all that we are, for rather whatever we are in truth or in seeming is nothing but Parabrahman, but because It is pre-existent & supra-existent to even the highest & purest methods and the most potent & illimitable instruments of which soul in the body is capable.

In Parabrahman knowledge ceases to be knowledge and becomes an inexpressible identity. Become Parabrahman, if thou wilt and if That will suffer thee, but strive not to know It; for thou shalt not succeed with these instruments and in this body.

In reality thou art Parabrahman already and ever wast and ever will be. To become Parabrahman in any other sense, thou must depart utterly out of world manifestation and out even of world transcendence.

Why shouldst thou hunger after departure from manifestation as if the world were an evil? Has not That manifested itself in thee & in the world and art thou wiser & purer & better than the Absolute, O mind-deceived soul in the mortal? When That withdraws thee, then thy going hence is inevitable; until Its force is laid on thee, thy going is impossible, cry thy mind never so fiercely & wailingly for departure. Therefore neither desire nor shun the world, but seek the bliss & purity & freedom & greatness of God in whatsoever state or experience or environment.

So long as thou hast any desire, be it the desire of non-birth or the desire of liberation, thou canst not attain to Parabrahman. For That has no desires, neither of birth nor of non-birth, nor of world, nor of departure from world. The Absolute is unlimited by thy desire as It is inaccessible to thy knowledge.

If thou wouldst know Paratpara brahman, then know It as It chooses to manifest Itself in world and transcending it — for transcendence also is a relation to world & not the sheer Absolute, — since otherwise It is unknowable. This is the simultaneous knowing & not knowing spoken of in the Vedanta.

Of Parabrahman we should not say that “It” is world-transcendent or world-immanent or related or non-related to the world; for all these ideas of world and not-world, of transcendence and immanence and relation are expressions of thought by which mind puts its own values on the self-manifestation of Parabrahman to Its own

principle of knowledge and we cannot assert any, even the highest of them to be the real reality of that which is at once all and beyond all, nothing and beyond nothing. A profound and unthinking silence is the only attitude which the soul manifested in world should adopt towards the Absolute.

We know of Parabrahman that It Is, in a way in which no object is and no state in the world, because whenever & in whatever direction we go to the farthest limits of soul-experience or thought-experience or body-experience or any essential experience whatsoever, we come to the brink of That and perceive It to be, unknowably, without any capacity of experiencing about it any farther truth whatsoever.

When thy soul retiring within from depth to depth & widening without from vastness to vastness stands in the silence of its being before an unknown & unknowable from which & towards which world is seen to exist as a thing neither materially real nor mentally real and yet not to be described as a dream or a falsehood, then know that thou art standing in the Holy of Holies, before the Veil that shall not be rent. In this mortal body thou canst not rend it, nor in any other body; nor in the state of self in body nor in the state of pure self, nor in waking nor in sleep nor in trance, nor in any state or circumstances whatsoever for thou must be beyond state before thou canst enter into the Paratpara brahman.

That is the unknown God to whom no altar can be raised and no worship offered; universe is His only altar, existence is His only worship. That we are, feel, think, act or are but do not feel, do not think, do not act is for That enough. To That, the saint is equal with the sinner, activity with inactivity, man with the mollusc, since all are equally Its manifestations. These things at least are true of the Parabrahman & Para Purusha, which is the Highest that we know & the nearest to the Absolute. But what That is behind the veil or how behind the veil It regards Itself and its manifestations is a thing no mind can assume to tell or know; and he is equally ignorant and presumptuous who raises & inscribes to It an altar or who pretends to declare the Unknown to those who know that they can know It not. Confuse not thought, bewilder not the soul of man in its forward march, but turn to the Universe & know That in this, Tad va etat, for so only & in these terms It has set itself out to be known to those who are in the universe. Be not deceived by Ignorance, be not deceived by knowledge; there is none bound & none free & none seeking freedom but only God playing at these things in the extended might of His self-conscious being, para maya, mahimanam asya, which we call the universe.

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 93-95)

The Object of Our Yoga

The object of our Yoga is self-perfection, not self-annulment.

There are two paths set for the feet of the Yogin, withdrawal from the universe and perfection in the Universe; the first comes by asceticism, the second is effected by tapasya; the first receives us when we lose God in Existence, the second is attained when we fulfil existence in God. Let ours be the path of perfection, not of abandonment; let our aim be victory in the battle, not the escape from all conflict.

Buddha and Shankara supposed the world to be radically false and miserable; therefore escape from the world was to them the only wisdom. But this world is Brahman, the world is God, the world is Satyam, the world is Ananda; it is our misreading of the world through mental egoism that is a falsehood and our wrong relation with God in the world that is a misery. There is no other falsity and no other cause of sorrow.

God created the world in Himself through Maya; but the Vedic meaning of Maya is not illusion, it is wisdom, knowledge, capacity, wide extension in consciousness. Prajna prasrita purani. Omnipotent Wisdom created the world, it is not the organised blunder of some Infinite Dreamer; omniscient Power manifests or conceals it in Itself or Its own delight, it is not a bondage imposed by His own ignorance on the free and absolute Brahman.

If the world were Brahman's self-imposed nightmare, to awake from it would be the natural and only goal of our supreme endeavour; or if life in the world were irrevocably bound to misery, a means of escape from this bondage would be the sole secret worth discovering. But perfect truth in world-existence is possible, for God here sees all things with the eye of truth; and perfect bliss in the world is possible, for God enjoys all things with the sense of unalloyed freedom. We also can enjoy this truth and bliss, called by the Veda amritam, Immortality, if by casting away our egoistic existence into perfect unity with His being we consent to receive the divine perception and the divine freedom.

The world is a movement of God in His own being; we are the centres and knots of divine consciousness which sum up and support the processes of His movement. The world is His play with His own self-conscious delight, He who alone exists, infinite, free and perfect; we are the self-multiplications of that conscious delight, thrown out into being to be His playmates. The world is a formula, a rhythm, a symbol-system expressing God to Himself in His own consciousness, — it has no material existence but exists only in His consciousness and self-expression; we, like God, are in our inward being That which is expressed, but in our outward being terms of that formula, notes of that rhythm, symbols of that system. Let us lead forward God's movement, play out His play, work out His formula, execute His harmony, express Him through ourselves in His system. This is our joy and our self-fulfilment; to this end we who transcend & exceed the universe, have entered

into universe-existence.

Perfection has to be worked out, harmony has to be accomplished. Imperfection, limitation, death, grief, ignorance, matter, are only the first terms of the formula — unintelligible till we have worked out the wider terms and reinterpreted the formulary; they are the initial discords of the musician's tuning. Out of imperfection we have to construct perfection, out of limitation to discover infinity, out of death to find immortality, out of grief to recover divine bliss, out of ignorance to rescue divine self-knowledge, out of matter to reveal Spirit. To work out this end for ourselves and for humanity is the object of our Yogic practice.

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 96-97)

PURNA YOGA

I

The Entire Purpose of Yoga

By Yoga we can rise out of falsehood into truth, out of weakness into force, out of pain and grief into bliss, out of bondage into freedom, out of death into immortality, out of darkness into light, out of confusion into purity, out of imperfection into perfection, out of self-division into unity, out of Maya into God. All other utilisation of Yoga is for special and fragmentary advantages not always worth pursuing. Only that which aims at possessing the fullness of God is purna Yoga; the sadhaka of the Divine Perfection is the purna Yogin.

Our aim must be to be perfect as God in His being and bliss is perfect, pure as He is pure, blissful as He is blissful, and, when we are ourselves siddha in the purna Yoga, to bring all mankind to the same divine perfection. It does not matter if for the present we fall short of our aim, so long as we give ourselves whole-heartedly to the attempt and by living constantly in it and for it move forward even two inches upon the road; even that will help to lead humanity out of the struggle and twilight in which it now dwells into the luminous joy which God intends for us. But whatever our immediate success, our unvarying aim must be to perform the whole journey and not lie down content in any wayside stage or imperfect resting place.

All Yoga which takes you entirely away from the world, is a high but narrow specialisation of divine tapasya. God in His perfection embraces everything; you also must become all-embracing.

God in His ultimate existence beyond all manifestation and all knowledge, is the Absolute Parabrahman; in relation to the world He is that which transcends all universal existence while regarding it or in turning away from it; He is that which

contains and upholds the universe, He is that which becomes the universe and He is the universe & everything which it contains.

He is also Absolute and Supreme Personality playing in the universe and as the universe; in the universe He appears to be its Soul & Lord, as the universe He appears to be the motion or process of the Will of the Lord and to become all the subjective and objective results of the motion. All the states of the Brahman, the transcendent, the continent, the universal, the individual are informed & sustained by the divine Personality. He is both the Existent & the state of existence. We call the state of existence the Impersonal Brahman, the Existent the Personal Brahman. There is no difference between them except to the play of our consciousness; for every impersonal state depends upon a manifest or secret Personality and can reveal the Personality which it holds and veils and every Personality attaches to itself and can plunge itself into an impersonal existence. This they can do because Personality & Impersonality are merely different states of self-consciousness in one Absolute Being.

Philosophies & religions dispute about the priority of different aspects of God & different Yogins, Rishis & Saints have preferred this or that philosophy or religion. Our business is not to dispute about any of them, but to realise & become all of them, not to follow after any aspect to the exclusion of the rest, but to embrace God in all His aspects and beyond aspect.

God descending into world in various forms has consummated on this earth the mental and bodily form which we call humanity.

He has manifested in the world through the play of all-governing Soul with its own formative Will or Shakti a rhythm of existence of which Matter is the lowest term and pure being the highest. Mind & Life stand upon Matter (Manas & Prana on Annam) and make the lower half of world-existence (aparardha); pure consciousness and pure bliss proceed out of pure Being (Chit and Ananda out of Sat) and make the upper half of world-existence. Pure idea (vijñana) stands as the link between the two. These seven principles or terms of existence are the basis of the sevenfold world of the Puranas (Satyaloka, Tapas, Jana, Mahar, Swar, Bhuvan & Bhur).

The lower hemisphere in this arrangement of consciousness consists of the three vyahritis of the Veda, "Bhur, Bhuvah, Swar"; they are states of consciousness in which the principles of the upper world are expressed or try to express themselves under different conditions. Pure in their own homes, they are in this foreign country subject to perverse, impure & disturbing combinations & workings. The ultimate object of life is to get rid of the perversity, impurity & disturbance & express them perfectly in these other conditions. Your life on this earth is a divine poem that you are translating into earthly language or a strain of music which you are rendering into words.

Being in Sat is one in multiplicity, one that regards its multiplicity without being lost or confused in it and multiplicity that knows itself as one without losing

the power of multiple play in the universe. Under the conditions of mind, life & body, ahankara is born, the subjective or objective form of consciousness is falsely taken for self-existent being, the body for an independent reality & the ego for an independent personality; the one loses itself in us in its multiplicity & when it recovers its unity, finds it difficult, owing to the nature of mind, to preserve its play of multiplicity. Therefore when we are absorbed in world, we miss God in Himself; when we seek God, we miss Him in the world. Our business is to break down & dissolve the mental ego & get back to our divine unity without losing our power of individual & multiple existence in the universe.

Consciousness in Chit is luminous, free, illimitable & effective; that which it is aware of as Chit (Jnanashakti) it fulfils infallibly as Tapas (Kriyashakti); for Jnanashakti is only the stable & comprehensive, Kriyashakti only the motional and intensive form of one self-luminous Conscious Being. They are one power of conscious force of God (Chit-Shakti of Sat-Purusha). But in the lower hemisphere, under the conditions of mind, life & body, the luminousness becomes divided & broken up into uneven rays, the freedom trammelled by egoism and unequal forms, the effectiveness veiled by the uneven play of forces. We have, therefore, states of consciousness, non-consciousness & false consciousness, knowledge & ignorance & false knowledge, effective force & inertia and ineffective force. Our business is by renouncing our divided & unequal individual force of action & thought into the one, undivided universal Chitshakti of Kali to replace our egoistic activities by the play in our body of the universal Kali and thus exchange blindness & ignorance for knowledge and ineffective human strength for the divine effective Force.

Delight in Ananda is pure, unmixed, one & yet multitudinous. Under the conditions of mind, life & body it becomes divided, limited, confused & misdirected and owing to shocks of unequal forces & uneven distribution of Ananda subject to the duality of positive & negative movements, grief & joy, pain & pleasure. Our business is to dissolve these dualities by breaking down their cause & plunge ourselves into the ocean of divine bliss, one, multitudinous, evenly distributed (sama), which takes delight from all things & recoils painfully from none.

In brief, we have to replace dualities by unity, egoism by divine consciousness, ignorance by divine wisdom, thought by divine knowledge, weakness, struggle & effort by self-contented divine force, pain & false pleasure by divine bliss. This is called in the language of Christ bringing down the kingdom of heaven on earth, or in modern language, realising & effectuating God in the world.

Humanity is, upon earth, the form of life chosen for this human aspiration & divine accomplishment; all other forms of life either do not need it or are ordinarily incapable of it unless they change into humanity. The divine fullness is therefore the sole real aim of humanity. It has to be effected in the individual in order that it may be effected in the race.

Humanity is a mental existence in a living body; its basis is matter, its centre

& instrument mind & its medium life. This is the condition of average or natural humanity.

In every human being there is concealed (avyakta) the four higher principles. Mahas, pure ideality in vijnana, is not a vyahriti but the source of the vyahritis, the bank upon which mental, vital and bodily action draw & turn its large & infinite wealth into small coin of the lower existence. Vijnana being the link between the divine state & the human animal is the door of escape for man into the supernatural or divine humanity.

Inferior mankind gravitates downward from mind towards life & body; average mankind dwells constant in mind limited by & looking towards life & body; superior mankind levitates upward either to idealised mentality or to pure idea, direct truth of knowledge & spontaneous truth of existence; supreme mankind rises to divine beatitude & from that level either goes upward to pure Sat & Parabrahman or remains to beatify its lower members & raise to divinity in itself & others this human existence.

The man who dwells in the higher or divine & now hidden hemisphere of his consciousness, having rent the veil, is the true superman and the last product of that progressive self-manifestation of God in world, Spirit out of matter, which is now called the principle of evolution.

To rise into divine existence, force, light & bliss and recast in that mould all mundane existence is the supreme aspiration of religion & the complete practical aim of Yoga. The aim is to realise God in the universe, but it cannot be done without realising God transcendent of the Universe.

II

Parabrahman, Mukti & Human Thought-Systems

Parabrahman is the Absolute, & because It is the Absolute, it cannot be reduced into terms of knowledge. You can know the Infinite in a way, but you cannot know the Absolute.

All things in existence or non-existence are symbols of the Absolute created in self-consciousness (Chid-Atman); by Its symbols the Absolute can be known so far as the symbols reveal or hint at it, but even the knowledge of the whole sum of symbols does not amount to real knowledge of the Absolute. You can become Parabrahman; you cannot know Parabrahman. Becoming Parabrahman means going back through self-consciousness into Parabrahman, for you already are That, only you have projected yourself forward in self-consciousness into its terms or symbols, Purusha & Prakriti through which you uphold the universe. Therefore, to become Parabrahman void of terms or symbols you must cease out of the universe.

By becoming Parabrahman void of Its self-symbols you do not become anything

you are not already, nor does the universe cease to operate. It only means that God throws back out of the ocean of manifest consciousness one stream or movement of Himself into that from which all consciousness proceeded.

All who go out of universe-consciousness, do not necessarily go into Parabrahman. Some go into undifferentiated Nature (Avyakrita Prakriti), some lose themselves in God, some pass into a dark state of non-recognition of universe, (Asat, Shunya), some into a luminous state of non-recognition of universe — Pure Undifferentiated Atman, Pure Sat or Existence-Basis of Universe, — some into a temporary state of deep sleep (sushupti) in the impersonal principles of Ananda, Chit or Sat. All these are forms of release & the ego gets from God by His Maya or Prakriti the impulse towards any one of them to which the supreme Purusha chooses to direct him. Those whom He wishes to liberate, yet keep in the world, He makes jivanmuktas or sends them out again as His vibhutis, they consenting to wear for the divine purposes a temporary veil of Avidya, which does not at all bind them and which they can rend or throw off very easily. Therefore to lust after becoming Parabrahman is a sort of luminous illusion or sattwic play of Maya; for in reality there is none bound & none free & none needing to be freed and all is only God's Lila, Parabrahman's play of manifestation. God uses this sattwic Maya in certain egos in order to draw them upwards in the line of His special purpose & for these egos it is the only right and possible path.

But the aim of our Yoga is Jivanmukti in the universe; not because we need to be freed or for any other reason, but because that is God's will in us, we have to live released in the world, not released out of the world.

The Jivanmukta has, for perfect knowledge & self-fulfilment to stand on the threshold of Parabrahman, but not to cross the threshold.

The statement he brings back from the threshold is that That is & we are That, but what That is or is not, words cannot describe, nor mind discriminate.

Parabrahman being the Absolute is indescribable by any name or definite conception. It is not Being or Non-Being, but something of which Being & Non-Being are primary symbols; not Atman or unAtman or Maya; not Personality or Impersonality; not Quality or Non-Quality; not Consciousness or Non-Consciousness; not Bliss or Non-Bliss; not Purusha or Prakriti; not god nor man nor animal; not release nor bondage; but something of which all these are primary or derivative, general or particular symbols. Still, when we say Parabrahman is not this or that, we mean that It cannot in its essentiality be limited to this or that symbol or any sum of symbols; in a sense Parabrahman is all this & all this is Parabrahman. There is nothing else which all this can be.

Parabrahman being Absolute is not subject to logic, for logic applies only to the determinate. We talk confusion if we say that the Absolute cannot manifest the determinate & therefore the universe is false or non-existent. The very nature of the Absolute is that we do not know what it is or is not, what it can do or cannot do; we

have no reason to suppose that there is anything it cannot do or that its Absoluteness is limited by any kind of impotency. We experience spiritually that when we go beyond everything else we come to something Absolute; we experience spiritually that the universe is in the nature of a manifestation proceeding, as it were, from the Absolute; but all these words & phrases are merely intellectual terms trying to express the inexpressible. We must state what we see as best we can, but need not dispute what others see or state; rather we must accept & in our own system locate & account for what they have seen & stated. Our only dispute is with those who deny credit to the vision or freedom & value to the statements of others; not with those who are content with stating their own vision. A philosophical or religious system is only a statement of that arrangement of existence in universe which God has revealed to us as our status of being. It is given in order that the mind may have something to stand upon while we act in Prakriti. But our vision need not be precisely the same in arrangement as the vision of others, nor is the form of thought that suits our mentality bound to suit a mentality differently constituted. Firmness, without dogmatism, in our own system, toleration, without weakness, of all other systems should therefore be our intellectual outlook.

You will find disputants questioning your system on the ground that it is not consistent with this or that Shastra or this or that great authority, whether philosopher, saint or Avatar. Remember then that realisation & experience are alone of essential importance. What Shankara argued or Vivekananda conceived intellectually about existence or even what Ramakrishna stated from his multitudinous and varied realisation, is only of value to you so far as you [are] moved by God to accept and renew it in your own experience. The opinions of thinkers & saints & Avatars should be accepted as hints but not as fetters. What matters to you is what you have seen or what God in His universal personality or impersonally or again personally in some teacher, guru or pathfinder undertakes to show to you in the path of Yoga.

III

Parabrahman and Parapurusha

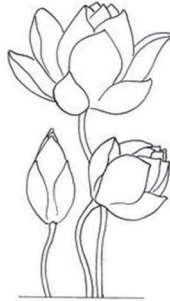
God or Para Purusha is Parabrahman unmanifest & inexpressible turned towards a certain kind of manifestation or expression, of which the two eternal terms are Atman and Jagati, Self and Universe. Atman becomes in self-symbol all existences in the universe; so too, the universe when known, resolves all its symbols into Atman. God being Parabrahman is Himself Absolute, neither Atman nor Maya nor unAtman; neither Being nor Not-Being (Sat, Asat); neither Becoming nor non-Becoming (Sambhuti, Asambhuti); neither Quality nor non-Quality (Saguna, Nirguna); neither Consciousness nor non-consciousness, (Chaitanya, Jada); neither Soul nor Nature

(Purusha, Prakriti); neither Bliss nor non-Bliss; neither man nor god nor animal; He is beyond all these things, He maintains & contains all these things; in Himself as world He is & becomes all these things.

The only difference between Parabrahman & Parapurusha is that we think of the first as something beyond our universe-existence, expressed here indeed, but still inexpressible, and of the second as something approaching our universe-existence, inexpressible indeed, but still here expressed. It is as if, in reading a translation of the Ramayan or Homer's Iliad, we were to look at the unapproachable something no translator can seize and say "This is not the Ramayan", "This is not the Iliad" and yet, looking at the comparative adequacy of the expressions which do succeed in catching something of the original spirit and intention, were at the same time to say "This is Homer", "This is Valmekie." There is no other difference except this of standpoint. The Upanishads speak of the Absolute Parabrahman as Tat; they say Sa when they speak of the Absolute Parapurusha.

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 98-107)

SRI AUROBINDO



A LETTER OF FEBRUARY 19, 1937

I am afraid you did not quite understand the spirit or the letter of what the Mother told you on Monday. Her point was not that the Pranam was useless except to a very few, but that only some made full use of it while the others got either nothing from it or an inferior gain and that the change to Meditation had shown that many got something from this new method while from Pranam they had drawn much less advantage. (It is a fact that many have said so — others of course have lamented the stopping of the Pranam on the ground that they felt empty and could not draw anything from the Meditation.) Under these circumstances the idea has arisen of varying the method maintained up till now and alternating between Pranam and Meditation. That was what she was trying to explain to you.

On the other point of the wrong attitude of many of the sadhaks — about her smile; in the first place *agacé* does *not* mean irritated; it is the mildest possible word to express a certain contrariety, a slight and very mild feeling of impatience at something unreasonable. Secondly, she did not say that it was people missing her smile when she did not smile that *agaced* her, but that it was wrong complaints, their missing or rather refusing to acknowledge her smile when she did smile and attack her therefore — for it was not usually sorrow their letters expressed but anger, revolt or displeasure. Hundreds of times it has happened like that — even when she saw that the sadhak was morally out of sorts and did her best to cheer him by kindness, sympathy, her sweetest smile, he or she would write that Mother had refused him or her a smile, had been hard and angry, had shown a frowning displeasure. Very often she was accused of giving the wrong kind of smile, of giving satiric or ironic smile — an intention of which she had been utterly unconscious and had not entertained a moment — or somehow or other not the smile the sadhak had wanted. Moreover it was often added that she had smiled on *everybody* else, but reserved her harshness only for one alone — and sometimes several people would write that on the same day! Moreover these things were discussed, the Mother's attitude to sadhaks watched, estimated, slight variations made big things of, a table of intentional rewards and punishments, of Mother's approval or displeasure built upon that — though such an idea was as far as possible from the Mother's mind. Now are not these things, especially when carried to excess and constantly expressed, *agaçant* and is it so unreasonable for Mother to feel *agaced* by them — to feel some contrariety or a slight impatience? Would not anybody if he got day after day a correspondence full of such confounded complaints, reproaches, expressions of anger, sometimes something like an abuse, be drawn to feel some ripple of *agacement*? Is all that really in all cases — as in your own which is not in question — the outcome of a feeling of the heart's dependence on the

Mother? Is it altogether (apart from any idea of self-giving) the right attitude for a sadhak in a Pranam? I thought not and that was why I sometimes said to the Mother that if that was all the use so many made of the Pranam, it might be better to stop it rather than that it should be an occasion of such self-torment and revolts as were expressed in these letters. I did not stop it, however — I only wrote to many pointing out the unreasonableness of this attitude and that has had a certain effect. My suggestion of stopping was merely an expression of *agacement*, a momentary grumble sometimes may be permitted even to us — it was worth nothing more.

I may add that Mother had not spoken of self-giving and not demanding — what she said was that people should be more concerned to receive what she could give them than occupied wholly with such external things. Nor was she thinking at all of you as a complainant — for you have not given her this kind of trouble.

Finally, when the Mother was explaining the thing to you, she did it smilingly, not in any spirit of irritation or displeasure. So I think you will see that you need not have taken it so much to heart, still less taken it for yourself. It was not aimed at you in the least degree.

All that was said had regard to the proposed change which would vary Pranam with Meditation — not stop Pranam altogether. It had nothing to do with the temporary rest taken by the Mother — that was absolutely indispensable. I had often asked her to take some rest before but she had refused because it might disturb the sadhaks too much — what happened made the break physically indispensable. The sadhaks ought to concede that much to her after she has labored night and day for so many years without giving herself any rest even at night. You yourself wrote asking her to take the rest she needed. Even so she did not fail to begin going down morning and evening and renewing interviews as soon as it was physically possible.

Your description of the Avatars is magnificent in colour — I wish it were a sober fact that the Divine refuses us nothing — if He would start doing that, it would be glorious and I should not at all insist on constant beauty. But from his representatives, Vibhutis and Avatars he rather exacts a good deal and expects them to overcome under rather difficult conditions. No doubt they do not call for compassion — but, well, surely you can permit them an occasional divine right to a grumble? Most of them have grumbled — at least once or twice — and ours, like Mother's about *agacement* or mine about the tons of correspondence is a semi-humorous *plainte*.

P.S. I don't know why you should fear the Mother will refuse you her smile at the Darshan time — she has never done so and has no intention of doing so. All these fears should be dismissed — it is only they that spoil things which would otherwise go all right.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Sri Aurobindo to Dilip*, Vol. 3, pp. 261-64)

‘JUST AS THOU WILT, JUST AS THOU WILT. . . .’

July 15, 1914

What, O Lord? . . .

Just as Thou wilt, just as Thou wilt. . . .

This instrument is weak, mediocre; Thou hast taught it that all activities are possible to it, that nothing was radically strange to it in all human activities; but it is in intensity, in perfection only that the Divine begins, and until now Thou hast not granted to it any extraordinary intensity, any real perfection. . . . Everything is in a state of promise, a promise not individual but collective; nothing is completely realised.

Why, O Lord?

Thou hast placed in my heart a peace so total that it seems to be almost indifference and in an immensity of calm serenity it says:

Just as Thou wilt, just as Thou wilt. . . .

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 202)



A FANTASTIC DISCOVERY

I had an experience some time ago (about something unimportant, but anyway). I took some notes, I don't remember where they are (they were in English, in the form of an answer to a letter).

I saw, almost simultaneously, love as people "practise" it, if we may say so, and feel it, and divine Love in its origin. Both were as if shown to me side by side, and not only were they side by side, but I saw also the difference (it was almost simultaneous) between the two actions: how human action is generated and how divine action is produced or manifests. It came through a series of examples or absolutely concrete experiences, lived one after the other, as if a superior Wisdom had organised a whole set of circumstances (circumstances which in themselves were minor, "unimportant") in order to give me the living example of those two things. It was such a concrete and living whole that I took some notes, very succinct and reduced to the minimum as always, and in English. All that is somewhere around, mixed up with other papers.

(the first note, found again later:)

Unlike human love which is for some and not for the others, my love is for the Supreme Lord alone, but as the Supreme Lord is all, my love is for all equally.

The Lord's love is equal, constant, all-embracing, immutable, eternal.

(the second note:)

Unlike in human beings, the action is not governed by feelings or principles, but by the "dharma" of each being or thing, known through identity.

I will tell you the second experience first, because it's a phenomenon of daily experience, a daily observation. And it's one of the chief reasons why it's impossible for ordinary human beings to understand a being who acts from what we could call "divine impulse." Because all human activity is based on reactions, which are themselves the result of feelings and sensations, and, for people who are considered "superior" and who act according to reason, is based on principles of action — everyone has his range of principles on which he bases his action (this is so well known that there's not much point in talking about it). But the other fact is interesting: for instance, when a human being loves someone (what he calls "love") or doesn't love someone, his reactions to the *same* phenomenon — the *same* phenomenon — are, not always opposite, but extremely different, to such an extent that ordinary human judgment is

based on those reactions. It would be better to take a very precise example: that of disciples and Master. The disciples almost never understand the Master, but they have opinions of him and of his ways of acting; they see and they say, “The Master did such and such a thing, he acts with this person in such and such a way and with that other person in such and such other way, therefore he loves this person and doesn’t love that one.” I am putting it very bluntly, but that’s the way it is.

All this is based on experiences of every minute, here.

All human action is based on that — for them, that’s the way it is; they won’t act with this person in the same way as with that one, even in similar circumstances, because, as they say, they “love” this one, but not that one. Therefore, in one case, the Master loves, and in another case, he doesn’t — (*laughing*) simple!

So I said that human action is based on reactions. Divine action, on the other hand, *spontaneously* stems from the vision through identity of the necessity of the “dharma” of each thing and each being. It is a constant perception, spontaneous, effortless, through identity, of the dharma of each being (I use the word “dharma” because it’s neither “law” nor “truth”, but both together). In order for this being to go by the shortest way to his goal, here is the curve of the most favourable circumstances; consequently the action will always be modelled on that curve. The result is that in seemingly similar circumstances, the action of the divine Wisdom will sometimes be completely different, at times even opposite. But then, how do you explain this to the ordinary consciousness? . . . In one case, the Master “loves” this person, while in the other he doesn’t “love” him — it’s easy!

It was so clear! And such a constant, constantly repeated experience that it’s really very interesting. It’s very clear that it’s impossible for the disciples to understand; even if they are told, “What is done is done because of each being’s dharma,” for them it’s just words; it doesn’t correspond to a living experience, they can’t feel it.

So once and for all, I’ve given up all hope of anyone at all understanding why and how I act. Because it’s true, now I can say (it has come about progressively), I can say in an absolute way, after looking at it for several months, that my actions are not the result of a reaction — neither an intellectual reaction nor a mental reaction, nor a vital reaction, nor, of course, an emotional reaction, nor even a physical reaction. Now, even the body instantly refers all that comes to it to the Supreme, automatically.

This experience came regarding a simply personal question, to make me understand how things happen and how useless it is to hope that people will ever understand; it was on the occasion of a host of silly little events that occur constantly and make people repeat, “Mother said, Mother felt, Mother did, Mother . . .” and so on — and all the squabbles. And I was put forcibly into that whole muddle. For a time, I used to worry, I wondered, “Can’t I make them understand?” Well, I have seen that it’s impossible, so I don’t bother about it anymore. I simply said to those who have goodwill, “Don’t listen to what people tell you; when they come and tell

you, ‘Mother said, Mother wanted. . . ,’ don’t believe a word of it, that’s all; let them say what they like, it doesn’t matter.”

But the other experience, which came first and is now continuous (it hasn’t left me, which is quite rare: usually, experiences come, assert themselves, impose themselves, then they fade away to be replaced by others; but in this case, it didn’t go, it’s continuous), this other experience is of a more general order. . . .

Human love, what people call “love”, even at its best, even taking it in its purest essence, is something that goes to one person, but not to another: you love *some* people (sometimes even you love only certain qualities in some people); you love *some* people, and that means it’s partial and limited. And even for those who are incapable of hatred there is a number of people and things that they are indifferent to: there is no love (in most cases). That love is limited, partial and defined. It’s unstable, moreover: man (I mean the human being) is unable to feel love in a continuous way, always with the same intensity — at certain times, for a moment, it becomes very intense and powerful, and at other times it grows dim; sometimes, it falls completely asleep. And that’s under the best conditions — I am not speaking of all the degradations, I am speaking of the feeling people call “love”, which is the feeling closest to true love; that’s how it is: partial, limited, unstable and fluctuating.

Then, immediately, without transition, it was as if I was plunged in a bath of the Supreme’s Love . . . with the sensation of something limitless; in other words, when you have the perception of space, that something is everywhere (it’s beyond the perception of space, but if you have the perception of space, it’s everywhere). And it’s a kind of homogenous vibratory mass, *immobile*, yet with an unparalleled intensity of vibration, which can be described as a warm, golden light (but it’s not that, it’s much more marvelous than that!). And then, it’s everywhere at once, everywhere always the same, without alternations of high and low, unchanging, in an unvarying intensity of sensation. And that “something” which is characteristic of divine nature (and is hard to express with words) is at the same time absolute immobility and absolute intensity of vibration. And That . . . loves. There is no “Lord”, there are no “things”; there is no subject, no object. And That loves. But how can you say what That is? . . . It’s impossible. And That loves everywhere and everything, all the time, all at the same time.

All those stories those so-called saints and sages told about God’s Love “coming and going”, oh, it’s unspeakably stupid! — It’s *there*, eternally; It has always been there, eternally; It will always be there, eternally, always the same and at the highest of its possibility. It hasn’t left, and now it won’t be able to leave. And once you’ve lived That . . . you become so irrevocably conscious that everything depends on the individual perception, entirely; and naturally, that individual perception [of divine Love] depends on the inadequacy, the inertia, the incomprehension, the incapacity, the cells’ inability to hold and keep the Vibration, anyway all that man calls his “character” and which comes from his animal evolution.

(silence)

It is said that divine Love doesn't manifest because, in the world's present state of imperfection, the result would be a catastrophe — that's a human vision. Divine Love manifests, has manifested eternally, will manifest eternally, and it's the incapacity of the material world . . . not only of the material world, but of the vital world and the mental world, and of many other worlds that aren't ready, that are incapable — but He is there, He is there, right there! He is there permanently: it's *the Permanence*. The Permanence Buddha sought is there. He claims he found it in Nirvana — it is there, in Love.

Since that experience came, there has no longer even been in the consciousness that sort of care I took for years not to concentrate too much Force or Power, or Light or Love, on beings and things for fear of upsetting their natural growth — that seems so childish! It's there, it's there, it's there — it is there. And it's for things themselves that it's impossible to feel more of it than they can bear.

(silence)

As soon as I have one minute to meditate, that is to say, as soon as I am not assailed from every side by people, things, events, as soon as I can simply do this (*gesture of drawing within*) and look, well, I see that the cells themselves are beginning to learn the Vibration. It is obviously the agent of the creation. And I said that that sort of "rain of Truth-Light" which came a few months ago announced something — it has obviously prepared, started this kind of permeation of a superior Harmony into the material vibrations. It has prepared not a "new descent", but the possibility of a new perception, a perception that allows an outward and physical action.

(silence)

We should use another word; what men call "love" is so many different things, with such different mixtures and such different vibrations that it can't be called "love", it can't be given a single name. So it's better simply to say, "No, this isn't Love", that's all. And keep the word for the True Thing. . . . The word *amour* [love] in French has a certain evocative power because, whenever I pronounce it, it makes contact; that's why I'd rather keep it. As for all the rest: no, don't talk of love, it isn't love.

I said and wrote somewhere, "Love is not sexual intercourse. Love is not attraction Love is not . . ." and so on, and in the end I said, "Love is an almighty vibration coming straight from the One. . . ." It was a first perception of That.

But it's a fantastic discovery, in the sense that once you have discovered it, it won't leave you no matter what happens. You may have your attention turned

elsewhere while you are at work, as for instance last night when I had a quite symbolic activity: for an hour I went around all the Ashram rooms, and I wanted to find an armchair in a corner where I could sit down and do a certain inner work — it was impossible! I went from room to room, and in every room there was a group of people, one or two people, or several groups of several people, each with a “marvellous” discovery, a “marvellous” invention, a “marvellous” project — each one had brought the most marvellous thing he had! And each one wanted to show it to me and demonstrate it. So I was looking and looking (they were people I know; it must be the expression of their best thoughts: it was really full of a great goodwill (*Mother laughs*)), but there were scores and scores of them! I would simply look, say a word or two, then I would take a few steps in the hope of finding a solitary corner and an armchair in which I could do my work; and I was going from room to room, from room to room. . . . It lasted an hour. One hour of invisible life is extremely long. I woke up, in other words, I emerged from that state . . . without having been able to find an armchair! I woke up just as I said to myself, “It’s no use trying” (there were corners with armchairs, but with so many people that it was impossible to go there), “No use trying, it’ll be the same everywhere, it’s useless, I’ll go back into myself”, and as soon as I decided to go back into myself, it was over. Obviously, in those activities, I don’t have recourse to divine Love to find the solution of the problem — I am not allowed to do so. So I understand that this is what was translated in people’s thought by the idea that divine Love cannot manifest entirely, otherwise there would be catastrophes — it’s not that at all, that’s not at all the way it is. But it’s clear that in my consciousness the [supreme] contact has been made (with some degree of limitation, but still it has been made), and nothing takes place — nothing, absolutely nothing, not even the most totally insignificant things — without, I can’t even say the “thought” or the “sensation” (in English they say *awareness*, but it’s much fuller than that), the feeling (another impossible word), without the feeling of the Lord’s Presence, the supreme Presence, being there twenty-four hours a day. Throughout that activity of the night I’ve just told you about, He was there, the Lord’s Presence was there all the time, every second, directing everything, organising everything — *but That wasn’t there*. And That, which I call Love, that Manifestation, is so formidably powerful that, as I once said, it is intolerant of anything else — That alone exists. . . . That exists, That is — and it’s finished. Whereas the Lord (the “Lord”, what I call the Lord) is something else altogether; the Lord is all that has manifested, all that hasn’t manifested, all that is, all that will be, and all, all is the Lord — it’s the Lord. But the Lord (*laughing*) is necessarily tolerant of Himself! . . . All is the Lord, but all is perceived by the Lord through the limitations of human perception!¹ But everything, everything is there — everything is there; everything, as it is every second; and with the perception of time, every second is different, in a

1. Mother later repeated: “It is the Lord perceiving Himself through human limitations.”

perpetual becoming. This is supreme Tolerance: there is no more struggle, no more battle, no more destruction — there is only He. Those who have had this experience have generally stopped there. And if they wanted to get out of the world, they chose the Lords “aspect of annihilation”; they took refuge there and stayed there — all the rest no longer existed. But the other aspect . . . the other aspect is the world of tomorrow, or of the day after tomorrow. The other aspect is an inexpressible glory. So all-powerful a glory that it alone exists.

Its *one* way of being of the Lord.

(*silence*)

This experience is a milestone on the road. [. . .]

And That is . . . I don’t know if this world (I am not talking of the earth alone, but of the present universe), if this world will be followed by others or if it will itself go on, or if . . . but That, which I am talking about and calling “Love”, is the Master of this world. The day when the earth (because we were promised it, and they aren’t vain promises), the day the earth manifests That, it will be a glory. I’ve had very faint and momentary perceptions of what it could be — it was beautiful. It was magnificent.

And the physical world is made to express Beauty; if it became harmonious instead of being the ignoble thing it is, if it became harmonious, it would have an exceptional vibratory quality! . . . It’s rather curious: the vital world is magnificent, the mental world has its splendors, the overmental world with all its gods (who are existing beings, I know them well) is truly very beautiful; but I tell you, since I had that Contact, I have found all that hollow — hollow and . . . lacking the essential.

And that essential thing, in its principle, is here, on earth.

THE MOTHER

(*From a conversation with a disciple on July 22, 1964*)

Love is not sexual intercourse.

Love is not vital attraction and interchange.

Love is not the heart’s hunger for affection.

Love is a mighty vibration coming straight from the One,
and only the very pure and very strong are capable of receiving and manifesting it.

To be pure is to be open only to the Supreme’s influence and to no other.

THE MOTHER

(*Words of the Mother – II, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 14, p. 125*)

SOME EXPLANATIONS ON THE CONVERSATION OF 14 APRIL 1929

[In the June issue of the journal, we carried the Mother's conversation of 14 April 1929 and some explanations. In this issue we continue with some more of the Mother's explanations.]

“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.”

(Conversation of 14 April 1929)

I would like someone to tell me what he understands by “be absolutely free”, for it is a very important question. I shall tell you why.

Most people confuse liberty with licence. For the ordinary mind, to be free is to have the chance of committing every stupidity that one likes, without anybody intervening. I say one must be “absolutely free”, but it is a very dangerous advice unless one understands the meaning of the words. Free from what? — free from attachments, evidently. It is exactly that. It is the story of the Buddha¹ who answers the young man expert in all the arts, “I am an expert in the art of self-control. If men congratulate me or praise me, it leaves me tranquil and indifferent. If they blame me, that leaves me equally tranquil and indifferent.”

1. A young Brahmacharin was clever and knew it. He wished to add to his talents more and more so that everyone would admire him. So he travelled from land to land.

With an arrow-maker he learned to make arrows.

Further on he learnt how to build and sail ships.

In another place he learnt how to build houses.

And in other places he acquired various other skills.

In this way he visited sixteen different countries. Then he returned home and proudly declared, “What man on earth is as skilful as I?” The Lord Buddha saw him and wanted to teach him a nobler art than any he had learnt before. Assuming the appearance of an old Shramana he presented himself before the young man with a begging bowl in his hand.

“Who are you?” asked the Brahmacharin.

“I am a man who is able to control his own body.”

“What do you mean?”

“The archer can aim his arrows,” the Buddha replied. “The pilot guides the ship, the architect supervises the construction of buildings, but the wise man controls himself.”

“In what way?”

“If he is praised his mind remains unmoved, if he is blamed his mind remains equally unmoved. He loves to follow the Right Law and he lives in peace.” (CWM 2nd Ed. Vol. 2, pp. 177-78)

Try then to question yourself to see to what extent you are above all blame and praise. Not that you must feel so superior to others that what they say seems to you of no importance, it is not that. It is that you have become aware of the general state of ignorance, including yours, and when others believe that something is good, you know “It is not so good as that”, and when they believe it is bad you can say, “It is not so bad as that.” Everything is completely mixed up and finally nobody can judge anybody. Therefore you are completely indifferent to all praise and all blame. And the conclusion would be: so long as the divine consciousness in me or in one whom I have chosen as my Guru does not tell me “This is to be done”, “This is not to be done”, I am indifferent to what others may tell me. For I think that the divine presence in the one in whom I have put my trust is capable of knowing what is good and what is bad, what is to be done and what is not to be done.

And that is the best way of being free. Let your surrender to the Divine be entire and you will become completely free.

The only way of being truly free is to make your surrender to the Divine entire, without reservation, because then all that binds you, ties you down, chains you, falls away naturally from you and has no longer any importance. If someone comes and blames you, you may say, “On what authority does he blame me, does he know the supreme will?” And the same thing when you are congratulated. This is not to advise you not to profit by what comes to you from others — I have learnt throughout my life that even a little child can give you a lesson. Not that he is less ignorant than you but he is like a mirror which reflects the image of what you are; he may tell you something which is not true but also may show you something that you did not know. You can hence profit a great deal by it if you receive the lesson without any undesirable reaction.

Every hour of my life I have learnt that one can learn something; but I have never felt bound by the opinion of others, for I consider that there is only one truth in the world which can know something, and this is the Supreme Truth. Then one is quite free. And it is this freedom that I want of you — free from all attachment, all ignorance, all reaction; free from everything except a total surrender to the Divine. This is the way out from all responsibility towards the world. The Divine alone is responsible.

It is not possible, is it, for the surrender to be total from the very beginning?

Generally, no. It needs time. But there are instantaneous conversions; to explain all that to you in detail would take too much time. You know perhaps that in all schools of initiation it used to be said that it takes thirty-five years to change one’s character! So you must not expect the thing to be done in a minute.

If one is to be indifferent to everything, why are prizes given to the children?

You do not expect a schoolboy to be a yogi, do you? I have just said that it takes thirty-five years to attain that and to change one's character.

You see, individual, human authority, like the authority of a father of the family, of a teacher, of the head of a state, is a symbolic thing. They have no real authority but authority is given to them to enable them to fulfil a role in social life as it now is, that is to say, a social life founded upon falsehood and not at all on truth, for truth means unity and society is founded on division. There are people who work out their role, their function, their symbol more or less well — nobody is faultless, all is mixed in this world. But he who takes his role seriously, tries to fill it as honestly as possible, may receive inspirations which enable him to play his part a little more truly than an ordinary man. If the teacher who gives marks kept in mind that he was the representative of the divine truth, if he constantly took sufficient trouble to be in tune with the divine Will as much as this is possible for him, well, that could be very useful; for the ordinary teacher acts according to his personal preferences — what he does not like, what he likes, etc. — and he belongs to the general falsehood, but if at the time of giving marks, the teacher tries sincerely to put himself in harmony with a truth deeper than his small narrow consciousness, he may serve as an intermediary of this truth and, as such, help his students to become conscious of this truth within themselves.

This is precisely one of the things that I wanted to tell you. Education is a sacerdotaly, teaching is a sacerdotaly, and to be at the head of a State is a sacerdotaly. Then, if the person who fulfils this role aspires to fulfil it in the highest and the most true way, the general condition of the world can become much better. Unfortunately, most people never think about this at all, they fill their role somehow — not to speak of the innumerable people who work only to earn money, but in this case their activity is altogether rotten, naturally. That was my very first basis in forming the Ashram: that the work done here be an offering to the Divine.

Instead of letting oneself go in the stream of one's nature, of one's mood, one must constantly keep in mind this kind of feeling that one is a representative of the Supreme Knowledge, the Supreme Truth, the Supreme Law, and that one must apply it in the most honest, the most sincere way one can; then one makes great progress oneself and can make others also progress. And besides, one will be respected, there will be no more indiscipline in the class, for there is in every human being something that recognises and bows down before true greatness; even the worst criminals are capable of admiring a noble and disinterested act. Therefore when children feel in a teacher, in a school master, this deep aspiration to act according to the truth, they listen to you with an obedience which you would not get if one day you were in a good mood and the next day you were not, which is disastrous for everybody.

If one needs thirty-five years to change one's character, how can one make, from now, a total surrender to the Divine?

It may go quicker, you know! All depends on the way that one follows.

You remember, we spoke once of the attitude of the baby cat and that of the baby monkey. If you agree to be like a docile baby cat (there are also baby cats which are very undisciplined, I have seen them), like a docile little child, this may go very fast. Note that it is very easy to say, "Choose the attitude of the baby cat", but it is not so easy to do. You must not believe that adopting the attitude of the baby cat lets you off from all personal effort. Because you are not a baby cat, human beings are not baby cats! There are in you innumerable elements which are accustomed to trusting only themselves, which want to do their own work, and it is much more difficult to control all these elements than to let oneself go in all circumstances. It is very difficult. First of all, there is always that wonderful work of the mind which likes so very much to observe, criticise, analyse, doubt, try to solve the problem, say, "Is it good thus?", "Would it not be better like that?", and so on. So that goes on and on, and where is the baby cat? . . . For the baby cat does not think! It is free from all this and hence it is much easier for it!

Whatever be the way you follow, personal effort is always necessary till the moment of identification. At that moment all effort drops from you like a worn-out robe, you are another person: what was impossible for you becomes not only possible but indispensable, you cannot do otherwise.

You must be attentive, silent, must await the inner inspiration, not do anything from external reactions, you must be moved by the light that comes from above, constantly, regularly, must act only under the inspiration of that light and nothing else. Never to think, never to question, never to ask "Should I do this or that?", but to know, to see, to hear. To act with an inner certitude without questioning and without doubting, because the decision does not come from you, it comes from above. Well, this may come very soon or one may have to wait perhaps a long time — that depends upon one's previous preparation, upon many things. Till then you must will and will with persistence, and above all never lose patience or courage. If necessary, repeat the same thing a thousand times, knowing that perhaps the thousandth time you will realise the result.

You are not all of a single piece. Your present body is often an accident. If you have within you a conscious soul which has influenced the formation of your body, you are infinitely better prepared than someone, a soul, which falls headfirst into a body without knowing where it is going; in this latter case much hard work is needed to lift up the consciousness which has thus fallen into obscurity. The inner preparation may come from previous lives or from the present life; or you have reached a turning-point in your integral growth and are in just the right relation with the circumstances necessary for the last step to be taken. But this does not mean that

you have not lived a thousand times before reaching this turning-point.

10 February 1951

(*Questions and Answers 1950-1951*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 4, pp. 90-95)

* * *

“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.”

(*Conversation of 14 April 1929*)

Why does the divine force upset people?

Because it is too strong for them. It is as though you were in the midst of a big cyclone. It happens at times that the wind is so violent that you are not able to stand — you have to lie down and wait till it blows over. Now, the divine forces are a thousand times stronger than a cyclonic wind. If you do not have in you a very wide receptivity, an extremely solid basis of calmness, of equality of soul and inner peace, they come and carry you away like a hurricane and you cannot resist them. It is the same thing with light; some people get a pain in the eyes when they look at the sun and are obliged to put on dark glasses because sunlight is too strong for them. But this is merely sunlight. When you are able to look at the supramental light, it appears to you so brilliant that sunlight seems like a black stain in comparison. One must have strong eyes and a solid brain to bear that, one must be well prepared, established in something extremely calm and vast — it is as though one had such a strong basis of tranquillity that when the storm passes, when the light comes with a great intensity, one is able to remain immobile and receive what one can without being knocked over. But there is not one being in a million who can do it. Only those who have had a foretaste of inner experience can know what this means. But even if you enter consciously into the psychic, it is dazzling; and it is within your reach because it is your own psychic being, and yet it is so different from your external consciousness that the first time you enter it consciously, it seems to you truly dazzling, something infinitely more brilliant than the most brilliant sunlight.

The psychic is what may be called “the Divine within the reach of man”.

Are there any signs which indicate that one is ready for the path, especially if one has no spiritual teacher?

Yes, the most important indication is a perfect equality of soul in all circumstances. It is an absolutely indispensable basis; something very quiet, calm, peaceful, the feeling of a great force. Not the quietness that comes from inertia but the sensation of a concentrated power which keeps you always steady, whatever happens, even in circumstances which may appear to you the most terrible in your life. That is the first sign.

A second sign: you feel completely imprisoned in your ordinary normal consciousness, as in something extremely hard, something suffocating and intolerable, as though you had to pierce a hole in a brass wall. And the torture becomes almost unbearable, it is stifling; there is an inner effort to break through and you cannot manage to break through. This also is one of the first signs. It means that your inner consciousness has reached a point where its outer mould is much too small for it — the mould of ordinary life, of ordinary activities, ordinary relations, all that becomes so small, so petty; you feel within you a force to break all that.

There is yet another sign: when you concentrate and have an aspiration, you feel something coming down into you, you receive an answer; you feel a light, a peace, a force coming down; and almost immediately — you need not wait or spend a very long time — nothing but an inner aspiration, a call, and the answer comes. This also means that the relation has been well established.

If there is an upsetting when the force descends, does it not mean that the vital is not ready and should it not be forced to be ready?

How can you force it? It escapes through your fingers, so to say. Your will thinks it has caught it, and it eludes you. It is difficult to control. And force it to what? To be ready? . . . All that you will be able to get from it is that it will become inert, that is, it will hide in a corner, not stir any longer, and let the storm pass! Because for it the contact with the divine forces is like a storm. And when it sees that the crisis is over, it will react: “Here we are! Now, it is my turn!”

If you are upset, it means that you have still much work to do upon your vital before it can be ready, it means there is a weakness somewhere. For some, the weakness is in the mind. I knew a boy in France who was a fine musician, he used to play the violin admirably. But his brain was not very big, it was just big enough to help him in his music, nothing more. He used to come to our spiritual meetings and, all of a sudden, he had the experience of the infinite in the finite; it was an absolutely true experience; in the finite individual came the experience of the infinite.

But this upset the boy so much that he could make nothing at all of it! He could not even play his music any longer. The experience had to be stopped because it was too powerful for him. This is an instance where the mind was too weak.

He had the experience, truly, not the idea (ideas are generally something foreign to all men). One must have the experience before the idea; for most men think only with words — if you put two contradictory ideas together, they no longer understand, while the experience is quite possible. So the mind must be a little wide, a little supple and quiet, and instead of feeling immediately that everything you were thinking of is now escaping you, you wait very quietly for something in your head to begin to understand the content of the experience.

There are people — many — who are weak in their vital being. When they have this sensation of infinity, eternity, in their very small person, in their very little strength, it is so different from the impression they have constantly, that they understand nothing whatever. Then they fall sick or they begin to talk deliriously or to shout and dance.

But if you are absolutely sincere and look at yourself clear-sightedly, this cannot happen to you, for an experience which comes inopportunately like that is always the result of some pride or ambition or some lack of balance within, due to having neglected one part of the being for the benefit of another.

Those who think they can advance in yoga by leaving their body completely inert, their vital asleep and their mind in a kind of stupefaction (for often, what they call “silence” is just stupefaction), get completely upset, you may be sure, when an experience comes to them. They lose their head, they do extravagant things or otherwise something very unfortunate happens to them. . . . One must have a solid well-balanced body, a well-controlled vital and a mind organised, supple, logical; then, if you are in a state of aspiration and you receive an answer, all your being will feel enriched, enlarged, splendid, and you will be perfectly happy and you will not spill your cup because it is too full, like a clumsy fellow who does not know how to hold a full tumbler. It is like that, you see, it is as if you had a small vase there, quite small, which will remain small if you do not take care to make it bigger; then if all of a sudden it is filled up with something which is too strong, everything overflows!

When the consciousness feels imprisoned within its too narrow external mould, what should be done?

You must particularly not be violent, for if you are violent, you will come out of it tired, exhausted, without any result. You must concentrate all the forces of aspiration. If you are conscious of the inner flame, you should put into this flame all that you find strongest in you by way of aspiration, of a call, and hold yourself as quiet as you can, calling, with a deep reliance that the answer will come; and when you are in this state, with your aspiration and concentrated force, with your inner flame,

press gently upon this kind of outer crust, without violence, but with insistence, as long as you can, without getting agitated, irritated or excited. You must be perfectly quiet, must call and push.

It will not succeed the first time. You must begin again as many times as is necessary, but suddenly, one day . . . you are on the other side! Then you emerge in an ocean of light.

If you fight, if you are restless, if you struggle, you will get nothing at all; and if you become irritable you will only get a headache, that is all.

Yes, it is that. To gather together all your power of aspiration, make of it something intensely concentrated, in an absolute tranquillity, to be conscious of your inner flame and throw into it all you can that it may burn ever higher and higher, and then call with your consciousness and, slowly, push. You are sure to succeed one day.

[Mother reads a comment made by someone during her talk in 1929:

“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.”]

We enter here into a big problem. . . . The notion of what is good for a being and what isn't is not the same to his evolved consciousness as to the divine consciousness. What appears to you good, favourable, is not always what's best for you from a spiritual point of view. It is this which must be learnt from the beginning, that the divine perception of what will lead you fastest to the goal is absolutely different from yours, and that you cannot understand it. That is why you must say to yourself from the beginning, “It is all right. I shall accept everything and I shall understand later on.”

So often you come across persons who, before they began yoga, had a relatively easy life, and as soon as they come to yoga, all the circumstances to which they were particularly attached break away from them more or less brutally. Then they are troubled; they do not perhaps have the frankness to admit it to themselves, they perhaps take recourse to other thoughts and other words, but it comes to this: “How is it? I am good and I am not treated kindly!”

The entire human notion of justice is there. “You try to become good and what cataclysms befall you! All the things you loved are taken away from you, all the pleasures you have had are taken away from you, all the people whom you loved leave you; it is indeed not worth the trouble to be good and to have made an effort.” And if you follow your reasoning far enough, all of a sudden you come upon the canker — so, you wanted to do yoga out of self-interest, you wanted to be good out of self-interest, you thought your situation would be better and you would be given

a bonbon for your wisdom! And that does not happen! . . . Well, this refusal is the best lesson that could ever be given to you. For as long as your aspiration hides a desire and as long as in your heart there is the spirit of bargaining with the Divine, things will come and give you blows till you wake up to the true consciousness within you which makes no conditions, no bargains. That's all.

Since the time I have been doing yoga I find that all my affairs are going better than before. So I conclude . . .

Perhaps your aspiration was truly sincere and disinterested. In such a case, things must happen like that.

If someone who has been bad and wicked, suddenly decides to change, does he immediately hear the small inner voice which warns every time one does something bad?

Everything depends upon the form the reversal, the inner conversion has taken. If the change is sudden, yes, one can immediately become conscious of the small voice, but if it is gradual, the best effects will also be gradual. It depends absolutely on each case, one cannot tell. If a kind of tearing, an illumination takes place, then yes, one has immediately the inner indication. It can even be retrospective. That is, while thinking of certain past acts, one may get a clear vision of what one was compared with what one now is. Besides, each time there is a true change in the being, each time one overcomes a fault, one has the clear vision of a whole set of things which seemed quite natural and which now pass across the screen like a dark spot; you see the origin, the causes and the effects. If you have a precise, exact memory and have for a certain length of time, say a period of ten years, made sincere efforts to transform yourself, to consecrate yourself more and more, and if you could recollect what you were before, you would say, "It is not possible, I was not like that!" And yet you were indeed like that. There is such a distance between what one was before, what seemed quite natural to you before and what seems to you natural now, that you cannot believe you are the same person. This is the surest indication that you have truly progressed.

When can one say that one has truly entered the spiritual path?

The first sign (it is not the same for everybody) but in a chronological order, I believe, is that everything else appears to you absolutely without importance. Your entire life, all your activities, all your movements continue, if circumstances so arrange things, but they all seem to you utterly unimportant, this is no longer the meaning of your existence. I believe this is the first sign.

There may be another; for example, the feeling that everything is different, of living differently, of a light in the mind which was not there before, of a peace in the heart which was not there before. That does make a change; but the positive change usually comes later, very rarely does it come at first except in a flash at the time of conversion when one has decided to take up the spiritual life. Sometimes, it begins like a great illumination, a deep joy enters into you; but generally, afterwards this goes into the background, for there are too many imperfections still persisting in you. . . . It is not disgust, it is not contempt, but everything appears to you so uninteresting that it is truly not worth the trouble of attending to it. For instance, when you are in the midst of certain physical conditions, pleasant or unpleasant (the two extremes meet), you say to yourself, "It was so important to me, all that? But it has no importance at all!" You have the impression that you have truly turned over to the other side.

Some imagine that the sign of spiritual life is the capacity to sit in a corner and meditate! That is a very, very common idea. I do not want to be severe, but most people who make much of their capacity for meditation — I do not think they meditate even for one minute out of one hour. Those who meditate truly never speak about it; for them it is quite a natural thing. When it has become a natural thing, without any glory about it, you may begin to tell yourself that you are making progress. Those who talk about it and think that this gives them a superiority over other human beings, you may be sure, are most of the time in a state of complete inertia.

It is very difficult to meditate. There are all kinds of meditations. . . . You may take an idea and follow it to arrive at a given result — this is an active meditation; people who want to solve a problem or to write, meditate in this way without knowing that they are meditating. Others sit down and try to concentrate on something without following an idea — simply to concentrate on a point in order to intensify one's power of concentration; and this brings about what usually happens when you concentrate upon a point: if you succeed in gathering your capacity for concentration sufficiently upon a point whether mental, vital or physical, at a given moment you pass through and enter into another consciousness. Others still try to drive out from their head all movements, ideas, reflexes, reactions and to arrive at a truly silent tranquillity. This is extremely difficult; there are people who have tried for twenty-five years and not succeeded, for it is somewhat like taking a bull by the horns.

There is another kind of meditation which consists in being as quiet as one can be but without trying to stop all thoughts, for there are thoughts which are purely mechanical and if you try to stop these you will need years, and moreover you will not be sure of the result; instead of that you gather together all your consciousness and remain as quiet and peaceful as possible, you detach yourself from external things as though they do not interest you at all, and all of a sudden, you brighten the flame of aspiration and throw into it everything that comes to you so that the flame

may rise higher and higher, higher and higher; you identify yourself with it and you go up to the extreme point of your consciousness and aspiration, thinking of nothing else — simply, an aspiration which mounts, mounts, mounts, without thinking a minute of the result, of what may happen and especially of what may not, and above all without desiring that something may come — simply, the joy of an aspiration which mounts and mounts and mounts, intensifying itself more and more in a constant concentration. And there I may assure you that what happens is the best that can happen. That is, it is the maximum of your possibilities which is realised when you do this. These possibilities may be very different according to individuals. But then all these worries about trying to be silent, going behind appearances, calling a force which answers, waiting for an answer to your questions, all that vanishes like an unreal vapour. And if you succeed in living consciously in this flame, in this column of mounting aspiration, you will see that even if you do not have an immediate result, after a time something will happen.

During the concentration that we have here together, on what should we concentrate?

Can anyone tell me what this concentration is and why we have it? It is a very interesting question, it concerns everybody. Can anyone tell me the difference between this concentration and a so-called “ordinary” meditation? Why do we do it and what happens there?

We make an offering of all our daily actions.

Yes, this is the individual side. And collectively, what is this concentration for? (He is on the way, note, he has taken half the first step.)

We concentrate on our weak points and aspire for their disappearance.

That is also an individual aspect.

In the meditations we formerly used to have there [*at the Ashram*], when we had a morning or evening meditation, my work was to unify the consciousness of everyone and lift it as high as I could towards the Divine. Those who were able to feel the movement followed it. This was ordinary meditation with an aspiration and ascent towards the Divine. Here, at the Playground, the work is to unify all who are here, make them open and *bring down* the divine force into them. It is the opposite movement and that is why this concentration cannot replace the other, even as the other cannot replace this one. What happens here is exceptional — in the other meditation [*at the Ashram*] I gathered together the consciousness of all who were present and, with the power of aspiration, lifted it towards the Divine, that is, made

each one of you progress a little. Here, on the other hand, I take you as you are; each one of you comes saying, “Here we are with our whole day’s activities, we were busy with our body, here it is, we offer to you all our movements, just as they were, just as we are.” And my work is to unify all that, make of it a homogeneous mass and, in answer to this offering (which each one can make in his own way), to open every consciousness, widen the receptivity, make a unity of this receptivity and bring down the Force. So at that moment each one of you, if you are very quiet and attentive, will surely receive something. You will not always be aware of it, but you will receive something.

12 February 1951

* * *

[In March 1964, the following question was put to the Mother:]

And now that you are no longer physically present at the Playground concentrations, what happens?

I hope people have made some progress and do not need the physical presence to feel the Help and the Force.

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1950-1951, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 4, pp. 96-106)



**“WHITENESSES” —
CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO**

Sri Aurobindo —

I have written a sonnet, using in the octave some lines from a rejected poem you may remember.

WHITENESSES

known
I have viewed many miracled whitenesses —
The passionless pure anger of thick snow
Falling from heaven; a crest of icy glow
Like the eternal laughter of a god;
The
And Taj Mahal’s imperishable peace,
An emperor’s flawless dream ecstatic-hewn
By wizard hands out of a plenilune
Of love untarnished by the mouldering sod.

But once I knew a whiteness stranger still:
Limb-mystery kindled to dancing gesture —
A rhythm of adoration its sole vesture,
And every line a call from paradise
Singing to earth the rapture¹ of shut eyes
Impregnate with some vast Invisible.

(Amal’s explanation in the left margin:)

1. I had written “dazzle” instead of “rapture” — making “Invisible” in the next line mean “invisible to outer sight”.

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

It is a very good sonnet.

17 June 1935

(Version from *The Secret Splendour* —
Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna [Amal Kiran], 1993, p. 484)

WHITENESSES

I have viewed many miracled whitenesses —
The passionless pure anger of thick snow
Falling from heaven; a crest of icy glow
Like the eternal laughter of a god;
And Taj Mahal’s imperishable peace,
An emperor’s flawless dream ecstatic-hewn
By wizard hands out of a plenilune
Of love untarnished by the mouldering sod.

But once I knew a whiteness stranger still:
Limb-mystery kindled to dancing gesture —
A rhythm of adoration its sole vesture,
And every line a call from paradise
Singing to earth the rapture of shut eyes
Impregnate with some vast Invisible!

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

*... if one allows the Divine White Light to manifest and pour through the being,
then one comes to know it and get all its results.*

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga – III, CWSA, Vol. 30, p. 138)

INTRODUCTION TO *KARMAYOGIN*

CWSA VOLUME 8

Karmayogin comprises political articles and speeches of Sri Aurobindo published in the Calcutta weekly journal of that name between June 1909 and February 1910. They are filled with the fervour of his love for India.

An early protagonist of the freedom movement in India, Sri Aurobindo was among the first to demand complete independence from Great Britain. Mobilisation of the people for this purpose was achieved primarily through *Bande Mataram*, an English-language daily newspaper he edited between 1906 and 1908. Popular with the young intelligentsia of Bengal and other provinces of India, it was considered “the most effective voice of what [was] then called nationalist extremism”.¹ Responding to his unequivocal demand for independence, the British government tried to repress his writings. Twice he was tried for sedition. Unable to muzzle him by legal means, the colonial administrators took means that were not always above reproach. On 5 May 1908, he was incarcerated in the famous Alipore Bomb Case. Acquitted on 6 May 1909, Sri Aurobindo emerged from jail to find that Bengal was politically paralysed; the life stream of the national movement was rapidly ebbing. A pall of gloom and a frightened hush had descended on the people. British repression, with its punitive arrests and trials, its unjust sentences and unwarranted deportations had dispirited the movement and sundered its leaders from the people.

We will never know how Sri Aurobindo truly felt in such a situation, but there was little in him that betrayed doubt or despondency. The light he had seen, the truth he had glimpsed, the understanding he had gleaned during his seclusion in prison had become a settled part of his nature, informing his thought and action. There was a calmness in his heart, an iron resolve in his soul. Within six weeks of his acquittal from prison he set up a newspaper office, a printing press and wrote most of the articles for the first issue of his English weekly *Karmayogin*. Between its inception and his departure from Calcutta six months later, he published thirty-eight issues of the journal. Compared to his acerbic style in *Bande Mataram*, we see evidence of an inner change that suggests itself in the tone and tenor of his writings.

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bande_Mataram_\(publication\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bande_Mataram_(publication)) S. K. Ratcliffe, a previous editor of *The Statesman*, in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* of 28 December 1950.

Though his later thoughts and views deepened even further, their seeds were unmistakably present in *Karmayogin*.²

The *Karmayogin* journal contained not only his political writings and speeches but essays on philosophy, yoga and education, as well as translations and poetry. The non-political writings appear in the other volumes of the Complete Works.³ The political writings appear in the volume under review. It includes political essays and critiques, comments on current events, and speeches given during this period.

Sri Aurobindo saw the *Karmayogin* as “more of a national review than a weekly newspaper”. In this review, he stated,

We shall notice current events only as they evidence, help, affect or resist the growth of national life and the development of the soul of the nation. Political and social problems we shall deal with from this standpoint, seeking first their spiritual roots and inner causes and then proceeding to measures and remedies. In a similar spirit we shall deal with all sources of national strength in the past and in the present, seeking to bring them home to all comprehensions and make them applicable to our life, . . .⁴

The task he set before himself was not moral but spiritual, and his aim was not a mere tinkering with forms of colonial government but an unconditional demand for Swaraj and the building up of a new nation. He saw that under British rule the national life was in disarray, with the various components of its being decaying under an unjust alien rule. But he saw too the inherent possibility of their revival, and the tendency of these elements “to unite again into one mighty invincible and grandiose flood. To assist that tendency, to give voice and definiteness to the deeper aspirations now forming obscurely within the national consciousness is the chosen work of the *Karmayogin*.”⁵

2. To a reviewer of the *The Ideal of the Karmayogin* comprising articles from *Karmayogin*, Sri Aurobindo wrote: “You even assert that I have “thoroughly” revised the book and these articles are an index of my latest views on the burning problems of the day and there has been no change in my views in 27 years (which would surely be proof of a rather unprogressive mind). How do you get all that? My spiritual consciousness and knowledge at that time was as nothing to what it is now – how would the change leave my view of politics and life unmodified altogether? There has been no such thorough revision; I have left the book as it was, because it would be useless to modify what was written so long ago. . . .” (CWSA Vol. 35, *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, pp. 76-77)

3. CWSA Vol. 1. *Early Cultural Writings: (The Brain of India, The National Value of Art, Conversations of the Dead, A System of National Education, Kalidasa’s Seasons and other essays)*; CWSA Vol. 2. *Collected Poems: (Invitation, Who?, Baji Prabhau and other poems)*; CWSA Vol. 5. *Translations: (Anandamath, Some Aphorisms of Bhartrihari)*; CWSA Vol. 13. *Essays In Philosophy And Yoga: (The Ideal of the Karmayogin, Man – Slave or Free?, Fate and Free Will and other essays)*; CWSA Vol. 17. *Isha Upanishad* and CWSA Vol. 18. *Kena and Other Upanishads: (The Kena Upanishad, The Katha Upanishad and The Moondac Upanishad of the Atharvaveda)*.

4. CWSA Vol. 8, p. 22.

5. CWSA Vol. 8, pp. 18-19.

The undercurrent of Sri Aurobindo's writing had one predominant theme which ran through all his articles: India must become a sovereign nation,⁶ empowered with the means to realise the deep potential concealed in her heart. To him, India was not merely the sum total of its inhabitants, geography, languages, culture and thought, much less its GDP and per capita income. These were undoubtedly important external elements but they did not represent her true essence. He saw that essence as an inmost something that informed and guided the nation and all its activities, a soul-tendency that gave it its true character. When this element came to the fore, then miracles became the common rule and extraordinary accomplishments were attained in a brief span of time. History is replete with evidence of such examples of soul-power,⁷ and Sri Aurobindo saw the movement for Swaraj in Bengal between 1905 and 1908 as one of them.

In India's case, Sri Aurobindo called this essential soul element the Sanatana Dharma, the "eternal religion", the mystic key for unlocking her inner and outer puissance. In his Uttarpara speech he affirms:

6. Disclosing the spiritual *raison d'être* behind his demand for a separate and sovereign nation, Sri Aurobindo wrote "We must live as a nation before we can live in humanity. It is for this reason that Nationalist thinkers have always urged the necessity of realising our separateness from other nations and living to ourselves for the present, not in order to shut out humanity, but that we may get that individual strength, unity and wholeness which will help us to live as a nation for humanity. A man must be strong and free in himself before he can live usefully for others, so must a nation. But that does not justify us in forgetting the ultimate aim of evolution. God in the nation becomes the realisation of the first moment to us because the nation is the chosen means or condition through which we rise to the higher synthesis, God in humanity, God in all creatures, God in Himself and ourself." (CWSA Vol. 8, p. 85) Warning us against too hasty a pursuit after globalisation, Sri Aurobindo writes, "but to sacrifice the interests of the nation to the larger interest of humanity is an act of which humanity in the mass is not yet capable. God prepares, but He does not hasten the ripening of the fruit before its season. A time will come when this also will be possible, but the time is not yet. Nor would it be well for humanity if it came before the other and lesser identifications were complete; for that would necessitate retrogression in order to secure the step which has been omitted. The advance of humanity is a steady progress and there is no great gain in rushing positions far ahead, while important points in the rear are uncaptured." (CWSA Vol. 8, pp. 138-39)

7. Suggested here are five events indicative of the soul-power: 1. The Spartan stand at Thermopylae against a vast numerically superior and better equipped Persian army. 2. Joan of Arc: Seventeen years old, born to a French peasant family, she broke the siege of Orleans with a small army and later led an inspired battle against the English that changed the course of The Hundred Years War. 3. Winston Churchill's spirited resistance against the Nazi juggernaut during the Second World War thwarting Hitler's ambition to conquer the world. 4. Twenty-one Sikh soldiers at the Battle of Saraghari who died to the last man holding a small post for six hours against ten thousand armed Pashtun tribesmen who eventually lost and had to retreat. 5. One hundred twenty Indian soldiers impeded the capture of a small border post by two to three thousand Pakistani soldiers accompanied by thirty to forty tanks leading to a humiliating Pakistani defeat. The one common thread that runs through these events is the overt expression of an inner force. It is worth mentioning that all these examples denote exceptional situations of war and death when the inner element surges to the fore more decisively. But the soul-power can also express itself in other circumstances. One sees it manifest, though less intensely, during periods such as the Elizabethan age or the period in Bengal from Ram Mohan Roy to the early part of the Naxalbari movement. During such times, individuals and whole peoples are uplifted; these periods are marked by an exuberance and a creative upsurge in all walks of life.

Other religions are preponderatingly religions of faith and profession, but the Sanatana Dharma is life itself; it is a thing that has not so much to be believed as lived. . . . It is to give this religion that India is rising. She does not rise as other countries do, for self or when she is strong, to trample on the weak. She is rising to shed the eternal light entrusted to her over the world. India has always existed for humanity and not for herself and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must be great.⁸

When therefore it is said that India shall rise, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall rise. When it is said that India shall be great, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall be great. When it is said that India shall expand and extend herself, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall expand and extend itself over the world. It is for the *dharma* and by the *dharma* that India exists. To magnify the religion means to magnify the country.⁹

But what is the Sanatana Dharma or eternal religion? Most religions are narrow, sectarian, exclusive and can live for a limited time and a limited purpose but the Dharma spoken of by Sri Aurobindo is not a dogma or combination of dogmas but a law of life. He saw it as universal and eternal: it had in its power the ability to triumph over materialism by absorbing and assimilating the discoveries of science and the speculations of philosophy. This Dharma is at once “. . . the most sceptical and the most believing of all, the most sceptical because it has questioned and experimented the most, the most believing because it has the deepest experience and the most varied and positive spiritual knowledge”.¹⁰ It does not divorce life, even in the smallest detail, from the Spirit. It is the one religion, he believed, that insists at every moment on the truth which all religions acknowledge and enables us not only to understand and believe this truth but to realize it in every part of our being.¹¹

8. CWSA Vol. 8, p. 6.

9. CWSA Vol. 8, p. 10.

10. CWSA Vol. 8, p. 26.

11. Sri Aurobindo used the word religion in this context to mean spirituality. Elsewhere he spells out the difference between religion and spirituality, such as in CWSA Vol. 8, p. 21, where he writes: “We have said that Brahmatej is the thing we need most of all and first of all. In one sense, that means the pre-eminence of religion; but after all, what the Europeans mean by religion is not Brahmatej; which is rather spirituality, the force and energy of thought and action arising from communion with or self-surrender to that within us which rules the world. In that sense we shall use it. This force and energy can be directed to any purpose God desires for us; it is sufficient to knowledge, love or service; it is good for the liberation of an individual soul, the building of a nation or the turning of a tool. It works from within, it works in the power of God, it works with superhuman energy. The re-awakening of that force in three hundred millions of men by the means which our past has placed in our hands, that is our object.”

To reclaim this Dharma¹² and to infuse Indian life with its spirit, Swaraj, complete freedom from the foreign rule, became the first necessary step;¹³ for how can something so subtle and quintessentially Indian as this Dharma flower under the rude barrenness of an alien rule? It is not out of rancour or hatred that Sri Aurobindo wanted the British out of India. “The basis of our claim to Swaraj is not that the English bureaucracy is a bad or tyrannical Government,” he wrote. “even if we were ruled by a bureaucracy of angels, we should still lay claim to Swaraj and move towards national self-sufficiency and independence.”¹⁴

It is imperative that India refuses to abandon her true Dharma by blindly copying the West. She must find that unique element, that secret genius which makes her stand apart from the rest of the world. Instead of depending on the strength of her native intelligence and creativity, today she stands betrayed by an impotent genu-flecting intelligentsia, and by a political life which is weak, petty, unscrupulous, full of insincerity and concealment, circling forever around small, selfish material interests. Her politicians and intellectuals too often seek success by imposing borrowed institutions from the West on the country.¹⁵ Nothing could be more fallacious, more dangerous. For if it succeeds we will have lost for ever, in Sri Aurobindo’s words, “. . . our spiritual capacity, our intellectual force, our national elasticity and power of self-renovation. That tragedy has been enacted more than once in history . . .”¹⁶

As there are no two men alike, so there are no two nations alike and each nation must follow its own Dharma. Regarding the national movement in India, Sri Aurobindo pointed out:

12. It is worth noting here that Sanatana Dharma as conceived by Sri Aurobindo is a Law of Being that is universal, “not a mass of fugitive and temporary customs”. (CWSA Vol. 1, p. 493) Being a preexistent law that is universal, the Sanatana Dhama cannot be the possession of a particular nation, race, culture or religion. It is the genius of India that discovered this law, as the genius of Newton discovered the Law of Gravity. The Sanatana Dharma is no more Indian or Hindu than Law of Gravity is English or British. Any attempt to appropriate it for a narrow end is to limit and shackle, even distort its truth and purpose.

13. To gain independence from the British could only be a first incipient step towards the resurrection of India as a nation; much work needs to be done before India can be rightly placed at the “head and forefront of the new world whose birth-throes are now beginning to convulse the Earth.” (CWSA Vol. 8, p. 188) Freedom would mean little if it were not followed by a diligent pursuit to reinvent her thought and life, her art and sciences, her statecraft, jurisprudence, economics and other external forms in the template of her true spirit; till such time the task of nation building is far from over. She has to delve deep into her spirit and remold her national character and all her constituents in the light of her peculiar genius. This will require much labour and persistence. To seek a quick-fix solution borrowed from the West or elsewhere would leave India maimed and her destiny compromised, terminating in an unmitigated loss for herself and the world.

14. CWSA Vol. 8, p. 408.

15. In this context, Sri Aurobindo points out the challenge before the emerging Asiatic nations: “The problem for all Asiatic peoples is the preservation of their national individuality and existence while equipping themselves with the weapons of the modern struggle for survival. A deep study of European politics, a strong feeling for Asiatic institutions and ideals, a selfless patriotism and immense faith, courage and self-restraint are the qualities essential to their leaders in these critical times.” (CWSA Vol. 8, p. 144)

16. CWSA Vol. 8, p. 62.

If it is imitative, imported, artificial, then, whatever temporary success it may have, the nation is moving towards self-sterilisation and death; . . . If, on the other hand, the peculiar individuality of a race stamps itself on the movement in its every part and seizes on every new development as a means of self-expression, then the nation wakes, lives and grows and whatever the revolutions and changes of political, social or intellectual forms and institutions, it is assured of its survival and aggrandisement.¹⁷

Our mission and our contribution to the world lies in recovering Indian thought, character, perception, energy, greatness; then the Indian spirit can help in solving the problems that perplex the world. This India cannot do merely by being an obedient pupil of the West but by recovering the eternal Dharma.¹⁸

Sri Aurobindo insisted that it would be perilous for India to stick with a tamasic stubbornness to the forms of her past¹⁹ rather than recast and reinvent herself in keeping with demands of the Time-Spirit.²⁰ A vulgar resurrection of a pop-Hinduism would be far from a true revival of the Sanatana Dharma; therefore India must be ever observant and watchful “. . . against any tendency to cling to every detail that has been Indian. That has not been the spirit of Hinduism in the past, there is no reason why it should be so in the future.”²¹ Yet, he added, “We have to treasure jealously everything in our social structure, manners, institutions, which is of permanent value, essential to our spirit or helpful to the future; but we must not

17. CWSA Vol. 8, p. 61.

18. And Sri Aurobindo writes, “But in Europe and India alike we seem to stand on the threshold of a vast revolution, political, social and religious. Whatever nation now is the first to solve the problems which are threatening to hammer Governments, creeds, societies into pieces all the world over, will lead the world in the age that is coming. It is our ambition that India should be that nation. But in order that she should be what we wish, it is necessary that she should be capable of unsparing revolution. She must have the courage of her past knowledge and the immensity of soul that will measure itself with her future. This is impossible to England, it is not impossible to India. She has in her something daemonic, volcanic, elemental – she can rise above conventions, she can break through formalities and prejudices. But she will not do so unless she is sure that she has God’s command to do it. . . .” (CWSA Vol. 8, pp. 457-58)

19. However Sri Aurobindo makes an interesting observation, “The resistance of the conservative element in Hinduism, tamasic, inert, ignorant, uncreative though it was, saved the country by preventing an even more rapid and thorough disintegration than actually took place and by giving respite and time for the persistent national self to emerge and find itself.” (CWSA Vol. 8, p. 62)

20. Sri Aurobindo reiterates this point and writes, “The spirit and ideals of India had come to be confined in a mould which, however beautiful, was too narrow and slender to bear the mighty burden of our future. When that happens, the mould has to be broken and even the ideal lost for a while, in order to be recovered free of constraint and limitation. We have to recover the Aryan spirit and ideal and keep it intact but enshrined in new forms and more expansive institutions.” (CWSA Vol. 8, p. 247)

21. CWSA Vol. 8, p. 66. Sri Aurobindo expatiates further, “Hinduism has always been pliable and aggressive; it has thrown itself on the attacking force, carried its positions, plundered its treasures, made its own everything of value it had and ended either in wholly annexing it or driving it out by rendering its further continuation in the country purposeless and therefore impossible. Whenever it has stood on the defensive, it has contracted within narrower limits and shown temporary signs of decay.” (CWSA Vol. 8, p. 63)

cabin the expanding and aggressive spirit of India in temporary forms . . . That would be a vain and disastrous endeavour.”²²

To some, the task of such a nation building may appear too overwhelming given the present scenario. Who has the vision, the ability, the energy to execute such a stupendous endeavour? Do we see a political and social resolve that is willing to pursue such a task? Perhaps not. But has not the past shown us that the much which has been achieved, has been done by ordinary individuals endowed with extraordinary faith and imagination?²³ All they did was to take the first courageous step — the rest is history. In Sri Aurobindo’s words, “So long as in this country there were a few who had the courage of their faith, so long as there were even a few who were ready to proclaim their faith and live it, there was no fear for the ultimate triumph of the faithful.”²⁴ Everything need not be based solely on individual courage and faith, for the force of the Spirit is behind such a pursuit. “The spiritual force within not only creates the future but creates the materials for the future. It is not limited to the existing materials either in their nature or in their quantity. It can transform bad material into good material, insufficient means into abundant means.”²⁵

Others, astounded by the counsel given in these writings, may find it too idealistic and largely impractical. Is it not more important to deal with and work out our diurnal issues first? Is it really worth our time and energy to run after such vague things as the soul of a nation on whose basis we seek to resolve the problems we face? Maybe. But if we pay heed to the collective wisdom of mankind through many thousands of years, we see time and again that unless we venture to deal with the long-term issues first, the tyranny of the day-to-day problems besetting us cannot be fully resolved. “To follow after the highest in us may seem to be to live dangerously, . . .” said Sri Aurobindo, “. . . but by that danger comes victory and security. To rest in or follow after an inferior potentiality may seem safe, rational, comfortable, easy, but it ends badly, in some futility or in a mere circling, down the abyss or in a stagnant morass. Our right and natural road is towards the summits.”²⁶

We must ponder and choose.

BULU (ASIT KUMAR MITRA)

22. CWSA Vol. 8, p. 247.

23. Even if there are difficulties, delays and temporary setbacks, these are, points out Sri Aurobindo, “. . . but the hammer of God that is beating us into shape, so that we may be moulded into a mighty nation and an instrument for His work in the world. We are iron upon His anvil and the blows are showering upon us not to destroy but to re-create. Without suffering there can be no strength, – without sacrifice there can be no growth.” (CWSA Vol. 8, p. 38)

24. CWSA Vol. 8, p. 106. Sri Aurobindo suggests how this triumph is to be achieved: “Our means must be as great as our ends and the strength to discover and use the means so as to attain the end can only be found by seeking the eternal source of strength in ourselves.” (CWSA Vol. 8, p. 25)

25. CWSA Vol. 8, p. 184.

26. CWSA Vol. 25, p. 239.

TINY BOAT

Very tiny indeed is my boat!
It can hold no more
than me and my Boatman.
Tiny indeed is my boat!

If by chance a passenger I take
At once my boat ships water
and sinks in the sea.
If just one passenger I take!

Whenever a curtain drops between me and my Boatman
The oar snaps, the rudder breaks,
the boat goes out of control in a trice.
Whenever a curtain drops between us!

But when I sit with my Helmsman, face to face,
The boat spreads its wings
and joyfully sails undeterred by the waves.
When my Helmsman I face!

I am the sole traveller here.
Handling the oar, the rudder and the sail,
Alone He guides the boat —
He, the Lord of life's ocean.

If I glance at Him whole-heartedly,
Happily my Helmsman takes me across.
He does not ask for a fee.
If only my heart glances at Him!

BIREN PALIT

*(Translation by Aniruddha Sirkar from the original Bengali,
published in Mother India, November 1987, p. 734)*

BIRENDRA KUMAR PALIT

Binder of Books

Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves.

— Thomas Carlyle

Biren Palit was from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) — Chittagong (many would prefer Chottogram). Diwanpur was his birthplace, may have been a small town or village.

Biren-da was an ordinary-looking man in build and appearance — like many other Bengalees, *i.e.* of medium height, rather of the leaner category. He sported a thick black moustache, also common enough. What stood him apart were big black eyes that seemed unblinking, gazing at the world around and the unusually long hair, also thick and black, that hung below his waist (could be the envy of many a girl). I have no recollection of his hair turning grey (I have noticed this phenomenon in some others from Chittagong — not the length but the non-greying). Biren-da was born on the 27th of February, 1906. He arrived here — the Ashram — on 25.7.30 at the age of 24.

Biren-da was a man after my heart. What in him makes me say so is the Slowness with which he went through all his doings — talking, walking. Also I have never heard him raise his voice in anger or of necessity! I wonder to this day if he could at all shout! I almost forget one “hallmark” of Biren-da’s. He had, at most times, when outdoors or maybe even indoors a beret of cloth perched on his head — maybe to keep the hair out of any breeze’s way (a positive point of relief for the young girls!).

Biren-da worked in the Binding Department when it was a modest affair, situated in our Guest House (now a table-tennis room). This Department was absorbed into our *Imprimerie* (Printing Press). Biren-da too shifted to the *Imprimerie*. Why? I wondered at times — I thought that would be the natural sequence of events. Now I learn that the Mother, with Her all-encompassing mind, had sent Biren-da to Calcutta to learn Book Binding! It was from Biren-da that Soma-di, Niharika-di, Kusumben, and others learnt the art and worked in the *Imprimerie*!

Biren-da was at first (or long ago) lodged on the 1st floor of our Guest House. The window in his room had glass panes which allowed light into the room. He thought it would be good if he could paint the panes to prevent the glare. He wrote to the Mother (I think) seeking Her permission. The reply came from Sri Aurobindo: “What luxury!” There ended the episode.

Biren-da and several others were shifted to various other houses (from Guest House) when the Mother decided to turn it into Dortoir Annexe. Biren-da was given

a room in a new complex called Ambika House. He was allotted a room on the 2nd floor. He was well satisfied as was his wont. But someone had kept his “comfort” and welfare in his/her mind. So, when a room was available just behind the Ashram, across the street, he (Biren-da) was offered the place. He thought he should not have such ‘ease’ or ‘desire’. He declined the offer. He did not know, neither do I, to this day, who the benefactor was! What I do know is that Nolini-da told him: “*Chupchap cholé ésho!*” (Come quietly or without protest.) Biren-da could not protest nor ignore! One may think, “Why all this fuss over him?” That is because Biren-da was a gentle slow tortoise not racing the hares of the place! And what of the fact that it was the Mother who chose this tortoise to go to Calcutta on a mission? Biren-da was of the old, old stock of people. He never did learn to cycle. The speed would probably have upset his ways of thinking and maybe more. He moved at a slow, very slow pace. The pace was good enough for going to work, on long walks to Lake or the countryside. He would at times even read a newspaper when walking (the traffic was neither so fast nor chaotic as today). Two young ladies Ajanta and Ellora often accompanied him.

Age might have just slowed him down a bit more. He shed his mortal shackles in June of 1987 aged 81, having lived here a mere 57 years.

I hope by now it is clear as to who is the tortoise and who the hare — and what or to which End is the Race?

The Mother has said that “The Tortoise is the Symbol of Immortality.”

PRABHAKAR (BATTI)

(Among the Not So Great by Prabhakar,
Published by New House, Kolkata, 2018, pp. 280-82)

As a tortoise gathereth in its limbs from all sides, so when this understanding Spirit gathereth in the senses away from the things in which the senses work, then is the Reason in a man safely seated.

Sri Aurobindo

(Translations, CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 83)

BIREN-DA

A Talk at SAICE

By the Grace of Sri Aurobindo and our Mother, many people who came to Their Feet, developed very much and went far in their Sadhana. Although they have remained almost unknown like gems in the dark ocean, they are very precious for us. I had the opportunity to know one of these good men, our Biren-da, for the last eleven years and I shall be happy to share my memories of him with you all. I shall begin with his last days.

On Friday, 12th June [1987], at 5.00 in the evening, I accompanied Biren-da to the Trésor Nursing Home. He had had fever since morning. I used to take him in this way to the Trésor Nursing Home whenever he suffered acutely from asthma. He used to stay there for a few days, recover and come home. This time, it was not an asthma attack. He had a serious infection in the chest. He remained there only for three and a half days. He spent the last night very restlessly. I had requested Batti to make available two students to help me at night. Nagashankar, Khusru, sister Rukmini and myself remained at his bedside the whole night. He was in a state of delirium, although from time to time he was becoming conscious and talking. Early morning of the day he passed away, *i.e.*, Tuesday, 16th June, he told me in English, “Ramakant-bhai, I want to go now to sleep.” And I knew what he meant by that sleep, for I had already received two hints earlier, that this time he might not recover. He passed away at 12.05 afternoon in the presence of Dr. Satyabrata and his staff. I was near the Samadhi at that moment.

One hint that he might leave his body I got barely 24 hours before his final departure. Biren-da’s condition had unnerved me. To get some solace and strength, I opened *Savitri*. It was Book 2, Canto 14: ‘The World-Soul.’ My eyes fell on the lines:

There they remould their purpose and their drift,
Recast their nature and re-form their shape.
Ever they change and changing ever grow,
And passing through a fruitful stage of death
And after long reconstituting sleep
Resume their place in the process of the Gods
Until their work in cosmic Time is done.

My eyes got riveted to the line, “And passing through a fruitful stage of death”. I closed the book and got up to face the unavoidable. He had lived his whole life

offering every moment of it to the Will of the Divine Mother. Now I had to turn to the Mother and say, “Mother, let Thy Will be done.”

Then suddenly I remembered an incident that had happened a few weeks before, in which Biren-da himself had given me a hint about his next step. One day when I was in his room, waiting for the tea that he was preparing, a thought had just crossed my mind, “How long will he be able to continue in this body?” I quickly brushed aside the thought and tried to forget it. But Biren-da suddenly turned towards me and asked, “Ramakant-bhai, do you think that Biren-da is living in this body?” He had caught my thought and he had revealed something inexplicable. I pondered over his statement for a few days, and thought, “Perhaps his bodily existence is only an insignificant portion of his vast inner life, and he must be meaning that.”

One apparent cause that weakened his body considerably in this period was the 8 ½-hour-long walk he undertook alone, on 17th May. He wanted to visit a Buddha-temple near the Arikamedu Archaeological site. He started at 8 in the morning, without carrying even a drop of water. He had totally misjudged his speed of walking, thus instead of returning for lunch he reached home at 4.30 in the afternoon, totally exhausted and dehydrated. He told us about this only the next day.

Now let us go back to his early life.

Biren-da, *i.e.* Biren Palit, was born on 27th February 1906 at Chittagong, East Bengal. He came from a lower-middle-class family. Much is not known to me about his family background. His mother was of a religious temperament and every night before going to sleep she used to narrate to her children stories from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, etc. This had awakened in young Biren a thirst for God-realisation. Already in the nearby town Chandannagore, there was a Sri Aurobindo Centre. Young Biren had come in contact with it. At the age of 14, he left his house, and went to stay at this Centre. Conditions were so bad that to procure even one meal a day was difficult. Our late Jyotin-da, Manodhar-da, Suren-da, they all belonged to this Centre. All of them got Sri Aurobindo’s permission to come to Pondicherry and came here almost together. Lack of proper nourishment, neglect of the body in the pursuit of Sadhana at Chandannagore for ten years had weakened Biren-da and he contracted asthma, which remained like his shadow till the end. Thus the Sadhana which began at the age of 14 continued up to the age of 81.

At the age of 24, he arrived at Pondicherry railway-station in the early morning of 25th July 1930. Under the Mother’s instructions, Nolini-da had sent Premanand to receive him. From that day, he stayed in the Ashram for 57 years. He did not go back to see his family even once.

He was given accommodation in the Playground Guest House, where he stayed for 25 years. He shared with Pujalal-ji the large hall divided by a wooden partition.

In the same house, on the ground-floor was Biren-da’s Binding Section. Bula-da once told me, “Biren-da is a fine fellow.” When he was given permission to join

the Ashram, the Mother advised that he could learn book-binding work before coming here. So he learned this art. When he came here, he brought with him some simple tools needed for binding work, so that he might serve the Divine Mother through this art. For him, binding work was a delicate art. It was not mere handling of paper and gum. Tehmi-ben talked to me about Biren-da's way of teaching binding work to school-children. He made them first sit quietly, observe how his long fingers were touching the papers, as if the paper was made of some sacred material. Harikant-bhai told me how he enjoyed working with Biren-da in the Binding Department, and how they both went together for long walks.

Some of the senior teachers here and others will remember their childhood days in the Playground and how they loved Biren-da. He used to be clad in a dhoti, his long jet-black hair reaching up to his knees, his eyes misty — partly fixed on the outward scene and partly fixed within. I shall narrate to you later how one of the boys of those days did his last service to Biren-da.

After 25 years of stay in the Playground Guest House, Biren-da was given accommodation in Ambika House, No. 13, Balcony Street beyond the canal. There he stayed for 26 years. As his Sadhana was not affected by outward circumstances, he never had complaints or preferences. A room became vacant beside Biren-da's room in 1976 and I was given that room. And I met Biren-da for the first time. I felt an instant affinity to him. I liked the old man, everything was so pure about him. He remained my neighbour only for six years and then he was shifted to House No. 10, Balcony Street. It was done on the advice of Nolini-da. Nolini-da was trying for quite some time to find accommodation for Biren-da in some ground-floor room nearer to the Ashram. Although Biren-da shifted to that house, we maintained contact with each other. In this house, Lallubhai was his neighbour. And they had happy relations.

Now I shall narrate to you how Norman Junior happened to perform the last service to Biren-da.

Biren-da's body was cremated on Wednesday, 17th June. On Thursday, 18th June at 6.00 a.m., Behram took Sachin-da and myself to the cremation ground and we brought with us Biren-da's last remains for immersion in the Bay of Bengal. An expert swimmer whom Behram had called had not arrived. Instead, Norman was standing there in his swimming-costume, ready to enter the sea. Behram called him. I carried the last remains to a certain distance in the sea and then handed them over to Norman for immersion in deep waters. Norman, when he was a child, had been very friendly with Biren-da in the Playground Guest House, and happened to be present at this moment. He normally lives in Australia.

While returning from the Tennis Ground, Sachin-da narrated an incident to Norman, about him and Biren-da. Sachin-da said he had heard it from Biren-da himself. Norman at that time was perhaps 7 or 8 years old. One morning at about 10 o'clock, he and three other boys entered Biren-da's room. Norman asked for a

knife and some salt. They had brought in their hands some raw mangoes. Biren-da inquired how they had come at that hour when classes were going on. The boys gave some vague answer. Then Biren-da asked them, "Will you not suffer from a sore throat if you eat these raw mangoes?" Norman promptly replied, "No, Biren-da, we won't have sore throats; on the contrary, if one eats raw mangoes one gets sound sleep at night." Biren-da smiled at Norman's clever answer and gave the boys a knife and some salt.

Nolini-da was very fond of Biren-da, while Biren-da held him in high respect. In those days the number of Sadhaks was limited. All notices on the notice-board were handwritten. It was Biren-da's work to write these notices. His handwriting, Bengali and Roman script, was the envy of expert calligraphers.

Nolini-da also used to ask Biren-da to go through every article written in Bengali by him before he published it. Biren-da told me that Nolini-da did this out of affection, so that Biren-da might be the first reader of the article. Nolini-da often invited Biren-da to discuss Tagore's and Nishikanto's poems.

A year or two before Nolini-da left his body, Biren-da had gone to greet Nolini-da on his birthday. Nolini-da said, "Biren is my best friend of the old days."

Besides working in the Binding Section, Biren-da worked in the Dining Room. Dyuman-bhai and Biren-da did the work of sorting out bananas. Dyuman-bhai recollects Biren-da's sincerity in work. Biren-da once said to me, "Dyuman-bhai's concern for the welfare of the Ashram is unique."

When the Binding Section in the Playground Guest House was closed and the New Bindery was started, Biren-da was given work in the Ashram Press, in the binding section. There he worked till the last four days of his life. He used to go walking to the Press and return walking, twice a day. I asked him why he did not go by the Press rickshaw. He said that he preferred walking. Once he had told me that while walking he did many things. I guess he must be doing Japa, or meditation, or receiving poetic inspiration. He had on an earlier occasion mentioned to me that he used to see visions with open eyes while walking in the streets.

In spite of the various ailments that he had, if somebody would ask, "*Biren-da, kèmon achho?*" (How are you, Biren-da?) he would smile and say, "*Chomotkaar*" ("Very fine"). He did not want others to be unhappy by knowing about his suffering.

When ill, he always preferred to go to the Trésor Nursing Home. This was because of his intimate relation with Dr. Satyabrata. The entire staff of the Trésor Nursing Home treated Biren-da as a person close to their hearts. They served him happily.

He told me an incident regarding an illness he had undergone in his very early days here. He was admitted to the Government Hospital near the Park. The French Medical Officer suggested that Biren-da's long hair be cut, so that it might be easy to take care of him. As mentioned earlier, he had long hair reaching up to his knees.

In those days, every minute detail concerning a Sadhak was brought before

the Mother and Her advice taken. The Mother referred the matter to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo did not agree to allow Biren-da's long hair to be cut. He said, "How fine Biren looks with his long hair!"

Biren-da avoided publicity; he did not let me tell people even about the number of years he had been in the Ashram.

He told me to be cautious in praising others. Flattery and praise strengthen the ego and retard inner progress, he said. Self-praise was out of the question. He never even once mentioned his achievements in Sadhana.

But some outer results of his Sadhana could not pass unnoticed. Like me, many persons had the experience of receiving peace from him. People came to him to remain in his proximity, for his atmosphere was made of peace and the Mother's Presence. We all felt some difference in our own atmosphere, before and after meeting Biren-da. A Sadhika told me last week that she did not have personal contact with Biren-da. She never went to his house or spoke with him. But it was her experience that whenever she was besieged by inner difficulties, if she happened to see Biren-da walking across the street, a mere glance at him would give her relief from her problems.

To receive Biren-da's good wishes on our birthdays was a joy. He used to give a small bunch of flowers and it always contained a type of grass named 'Humility' by the Mother. He considered humility indispensable for inner growth.

He never contradicted anybody or entered into argumentative discussions. He saw to it that nobody's faith was disturbed. He helped them to increase their faith, so that they might reach the Divine through whatever Godhead they adored. I shall give an example of it. The evening he was admitted to the Trésor Nursing Home this time, the senior Nurse, after making him comfortable, told him that she was proceeding on four days' leave on a pilgrimage to Tirupati. She wished that he would be all right in this period and that she would be at his service after four days. In spite of his fever, Biren-da smiled and told her that it was God's Grace that she was able to go to Tirupati. He further told her that Lord Krishna Himself resides at Tirupati, and she would come back carrying the Lord's Blessings.

His whole life was a quiet Sadhana; violent revolts and crippling depressions had no place in it. He always maintained full faith that the Mother's Force was working in him and therefore he did not have much correspondence with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Biren-da felt a great attraction towards the growing Presence of the Divine Mother at Matrimandir. In the last seven years, he went at least fifteen times to Auroville, twice on foot and at other times by car. Whichever quarter of Auroville he visited, he was warmly welcomed there. Biren-da's last visit to Matrimandir was on 6th June this year. We went in a car at about 9.00 at night and returned by midnight. Biren-da enjoyed the spiritual atmosphere there and the view of Matrimandir in moonlight. On an earlier visit, Lorenzo — a Matrimandir worker —

had helped Biren-da to climb the ladders up to the Meditation Chamber.

Many knew Biren-da for his poems in Bengali. A few of them have been published in *Purodha*.

The other day Harikant-bhai mentioned to me that Biren-da's was a rare case, he never asked for anything extra from the Mother. Do you know what made Biren-da take such an attitude? When he went to stay at the Guest House, he found that strong sunlight was streaming into the room through the window. He wrote a note to the Mother asking if the window glasses could be painted to prevent the sunlight. As the Mother happened to be indisposed that day, the note was sent to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo sent a reply to Biren-da saying, "One must learn how to bear with such small difficulties, if one is to succeed in Yoga." This reply became for Biren-da a life-time guidance.

Biren-da spoke to me of another incident that occurred when he was staying in the Guest House.

A friend of his arrived from Burma. He had brought with him an easy-chair, made of Burma-teak, to present to Biren-da. Biren-da wrote about it to Sri Aurobindo and asked whether the easy-chair could be accepted. Sri Aurobindo replied, "You can accept the chair, as if given to you by the Mother. You should have no feeling of obligation." With this attitude, he in his later life accepted things presented to him with love.

Whenever we sought his guidance regarding our problems, he replied only when he received some signal from above. Once I asked him, "Biren-da, I lack cheerfulness very much. How to be cheerful?" He replied, "There is no need to be cheerful, it is enough if you can be peaceful." He then further explained that it would be dangerous to be cheerful if peace and equality were not deeply established. Such superficial cheerfulness sometime swings to the other extreme.

Once very pessimistic thoughts passed through my mind regarding the future of our Ashram; these thoughts were draining away my energy. So I went to Biren-da and asked what he thought about our future. He said, "The future of our Ashram is brilliant." But I protested, I narrated to him a number of incidents which indicated that things were not going on as they should.

He told me not to take these outward presentations seriously. He said that his remark was based on a vision he had recently seen.

In this vision, Biren-da found himself once again at his usual familiar place, a place he said where our Ashram exists on some subtle plane. It was a landscape similar to the Lake Estate, but full of well-grown trees. While he was walking there, he saw above him a baby-eagle struggling to return to its nest because it had lost its direction. It was harassed on all sides by vultures. Then Biren-da saw that from far-off skies a huge mother-eagle descended towards the baby-eagle, took it under its protecting wings and brought it down slowly to the nest, which was in the Ashram area.

Biren-da explained to me that the baby-eagle represented ‘the Spirit of Sadhana’ in the Ashram and the mother-eagle represented the Divine Mother. Due to Her action the outer life in the Ashram will take a radical turn and we shall have a brilliant future before us.

RAMAKANT NAVELKAR

(This talk of 26.6.1987 was published
in *Mother India*, September 1987, pp. 575-81)

For us here there is only one thing that counts. We aspire for the Divine, live for the Divine, act for the Divine.

The Mother

(*Words of the Mother – I*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 108)

SO MANY WISHES

(To Birendra Palit, who passed away on 16.6.1987)

So many wishes in life remain unfulfilled!
I had a great desire to walk with you
Along some unknown pathway
And get lost . . .

Whenever I decide to go anywhere —
Before setting out I make plans, detailed plans:
A bottle of water I must carry
To quench my thirst. Some tasty food too . . .
The pure dedication
With which you loved the dust of the road
Has never been mine.
You used to tell us not to carry money
Lest on the way back
The lure of a bus-ride
Became too tempting for the tired legs.
And food? — why burden oneself needlessly?

One desire I'd cherished long:
To tread with you
The far road to the Matrimandir.
But I lacked the courage to be your companion.
So I just came to you again and again
To hear from your own lips
The tales of the wayfarer . . .

To go with you I did not dare!
And then, one day, as soon as the call came
You went away — all alone . . .

KANUPRIYO CHATTOPADHYAY

(Translated by Aniruddha Sircar from the original Bengali)

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

(Part 18)

(Continued from the issue of June 2021)

SECTION 2. SIMPLICITY AND AUSTERITY

Another facet of Sri Aurobindo’s simplicity was his apathy to the materialistic lifestyle and the extravagance of the West. Dinendra Kumar Roy writes:

But what struck me as most amazing was that his noble heart had suffered not the least contamination from the luxury and dissipation, the glitter and glamour, the diverse impressions and influences, and the strange spell of Western society.¹

Regarding materialism, Sri Aurobindo writes in *The Life Divine*:

... That is why the gospel of materialism, in spite of the dazzling triumphs of physical Science, proves itself always in the end a vain and helpless creed, and that too is why physical Science itself with all its achievements, though it may accomplish comfort, can never achieve happiness and fullness of being for the human race.²

Sri Aurobindo spent the most impressionable part of his life — from seven to twenty-one years — in England and during this time “He knew nothing about India or her culture etc.”³ Nonetheless, Sri Aurobindo had a wide outlook on life and assimilated the finer aspects of other cultures. He commented that his return to India was

... a transition from one culture to another. There was an attachment to English and European thought and literature, but not to England as a country; he had no ties there and did not make England his adopted country, as Manmohan did for a time. If there was attachment to a European land as a second country, it

1. Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., p. 56 (Translated from Dinendra Kumar Roy’s Bengali book, *Aurobindo Prasanga*).

2. *CWSA*, Vol. 22, pp. 757-58.

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 29.

was intellectually and emotionally to one not seen or lived in in this life, not England, but France.⁴

Elsewhere Sri Aurobindo writes: “It may be observed that Sri Aurobindo’s education in England gave him a wide introduction to the culture of ancient, of mediaeval and of modern Europe.”⁵ However, Sri Aurobindo has also said:

My education in England was badly neglected — though people say to the contrary. I filled in most of the *lacunae* afterwards . . .⁶

Due to his father’s directions Sri Aurobindo “grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, her religion and her culture.”⁷ Yet at Baroda, Sri Aurobindo made unrelenting efforts to get into the heart and soul of Indian culture, immersing himself in its classics and its scriptures. He notes:

In England he had received, according to his father’s express instructions, an entirely occidental education without any contact with the culture of India and the East. At Baroda he made up the deficiency, learned Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages, assimilated the spirit of Indian civilisation and its forms past and present.⁸

When he was asked about the process of renationalisation, Sri Aurobindo noted that it

. . . came, after reaching India, by natural attraction to Indian culture and ways of life and a temperamental feeling and preference for all that was Indian.⁹

Rajaram N. Patkar, who had assisted Sri Aurobindo at Baroda, writes that having stayed almost his entire conscious life in England,

. . . one would have naturally supposed that he must have been entirely anglicised, but such was not the case with him. Within a short time of arrival in India, he adapted himself to Indian life and became Indian to the core.¹⁰

4. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

6. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 10.

7. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 15.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

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

Many Indian students returning from abroad adopted the European way of life, becoming anglicised and materialistic. Once, an England-returned young Bengali sought Sri Aurobindo’s help to secure a job with the government of Baroda. A taken-aback Dinendra Kumar Roy writes:

Two or three years in England had made him an absolute sahib. Seeing the vast difference between the behaviour of Aurobindo and of this man, I once spoke to Aurobindo about the strange westernisation among the class of foreign-returned imitation Europeans.¹¹

Roy asked Sri Aurobindo: “But how is it that you who spent so much time in England from your very childhood seem like such a thorough Bengali?” Roy then narrates:

Laughing, Aurobindo replied that when one goes to England one certainly is blinded at first by the country’s outward glamour. But if one stays longer then that blindness goes away. One develops the ability to distinguish the good from the bad. There are many who go to Europe and after just two or three years come back as fully fledged sahebs . . . practically forget their mother-tongue . . .¹²

Roy adds:

How could such people believe without seeing it that even after eighteen or twenty years’ stay in England one could return, not a grotesque *firinghee* [foreigner], but a son of the Motherland who offered her the devotion and respect due “to the mistress of the heart of the world, the Mother, clad resplendently in sun-beams, Bharat-lakshmi”?¹³

Later, sometime in 1906-07, Brahmabandhav Upadhyay, a proud patriot of whom Sri Aurobindo spoke highly, wrote:

True, he has had his education in England, but he has not succumbed to its bewitching spell. An efflorescence of the glory of his country’s swadharma and culture, Aurobindo is now at the feet of the Motherland, as a fresh-bloomed lotus of autumn, aglow with the devotion of his self-offering. Oh, was there

11. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st Ed., 2006, p. 7. (Dinendra Kumar Roy, *Aurobindo Prasanga* – Translated from Bengali by Maurice Shukla).

12. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

13. *Ibid.*

ever its like? Aurobindo is no fop sprung from the vulgarities of English life. That is why, a true son of the Mother, he has set up the Bhawani Temple. There, bow down to the Mother, with the mantra of “Bande Mataram”. Swaraj is now no far-off event.¹⁴

Incidentally, it is said that the spirit of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya, who had died during captivity in the Campbell Hospital, appeared in a dream to C. R. Das and told him that he should take up the defence of Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Bomb Case. Das’ mother too seems to have asked him not to hesitate, for his duty lay in taking up the case.¹⁵

Alluding to the Baroda period, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

. . . he had long tried to apprehend the true inwardness and glory of the Indian religious and spiritual tradition, Sanatana Dharma, and to accept it in its entirety.¹⁶

Sri Aurobindo was disappointed to learn that the so-called “educated classes” were trying to mimic the Westerner in every manner. Subsequently he expressed this sentiment in the *Karmayogin*:

The nineteenth century in India was imitative, self-forgetful, artificial. It aimed at a successful reproduction of Europe in India, forgetting the deep saying of the Gita — “Better the law of one’s own being though it be badly done than an alien *dharma* well-followed; death in one’s *dharma* is better, it is a dangerous thing to follow the law of another’s nature.” For death in one’s own *dharma* brings new birth, success in an alien path means only successful suicide. If we had succeeded in Europeanising ourselves we would have lost for ever our spiritual capacity, our intellectual force, our national elasticity and power of self-renovation.¹⁷

Charu Chandra Dutt was mystified how easily Sri Aurobindo imbibed Indian culture:

When in 1890 I came to Calcutta for my studies, I used to hear a great deal about Aurobindo Ghose. Whatever we heard astonished us greatly. The son of a rabidly Europeanised man like Dr. K. D. Ghose, a boy brought up in England

14. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., pp. 2-3.

15. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 326.

16. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 111.

17. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, pp. 61-62.

from early boyhood, has so thoroughly Indianised himself in his dress and food and habits that people can never cease talking of it. And when he married, he chose a very young Bengali bride and went through the whole of the old-fashioned Hindu rites! People told us that he was a man vastly learned in Western lore and was now engaged diligently in learning Sanskrit and various modern Indian languages. Young as we were, we could not quite tally things. . . . I had always been very anxious to have a glimpse of this prodigy, but had no luck. In 1896, I went away to Europe for a few years, and it was not till my return home that I met him casually on the Baroda station platform . . .¹⁸

Sri Aurobindo’s assimilation of Indian culture was so profound and integral that he became a beacon to others. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes:

Within a few years of his return, then, Sri Aurobindo saw very clearly that salvation could come to India, then fallen upon evil days, not through dialectical skill and intellectual subtlety, but through renewed faith and stern spiritual discipline; not by a brazen mimicry of Western models and Western mores, but rather by recapturing, amplifying and re-living the eternal truths of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita . . .

In his own life and in the life of the nation, what Sri Aurobindo wanted, what he set out to achieve, was a veritable transformation — not a retreat to the past, not a return to obsolete forms, but a rediscovery of the soul and rebuilding around it of a life full of vigour and vitality, and in consonance with the imperatives of the present and also ready to meet the challenges of the future. In short, individual and nation alike had deliberately to will and achieve the difficult feat of re-nationalisation. For him, it did not simply mean acquiring a knowledge of Bengali, Gujarati or Marathi; or delving into the treasures of Sanskrit literature; or showing a preference for Indian dress or Indian dishes. For the nation too, the change required was something far deeper . . .¹⁹

Indeed, Sri Aurobindo had the lucidity to discern that imitating European institutions in India would not work. He wrote, with a touch of humour, in the *Karmayogin*:

The Europeans and especially our gurus, the English, attach an exaggerated importance to machinery, because their own machinery has been so successful, their organisation so strong and triumphant. In the conceit of this success they imagine that their machinery is the only machinery and that the adoption of

18. Charu Chandra Dutt, ‘My Friend and my Master’, *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, p. 124.

19. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 61.

their organisation by foreign peoples is all that is needed for perfect social and political felicity. In Europe this blind attachment to machinery does not do fatal harm, because the life of a free nation has developed the existing institutions and modifies them by its own irresistible law of life and development. But to take over those institutions and think that they will magically develop European virtues, force and robustness, or the vivid and vigorous life of Europe, is as if a man were to steal another's coat and think to take over with it his character. Have not indeed many of us thought by masquerading in the amazing garb which nineteenth century Europe developed, to become so many brown Englishmen? This curious conjuring trick did not work; hatted, coated and pantalooned, we still kept the chaddar and the dhooty in our characters. The fond attempt to become great, enlightened and civilised by borrowing European institutions will be an equally disastrous failure.²⁰

In a conversation in 1926, Sri Aurobindo told his disciples:

Modern Europe is now in the grip of vital forces; if you look at the society there, you will find how corrupted and rotten it is. The mad rush for power, wealth, possession, the huge conflicts — all these are indications of the play of the vital forces.²¹

Later, on the subject of materialism in Europe, Sri Aurobindo explained to a disciple:

From the spiritual point of view such temporary phenomena as the turn of educated Hindus towards materialism are of little importance. There have always been periods when the mind of nations, continents, cultures turned towards materialism and away from all spiritual belief. Such periods came in ancient Europe in the first century A.D., in western Europe in the nineteenth century, but they are usually of short duration. Western Europe has already lost its faith in materialism and is seeking for something else, either turning back to old religion or groping for something new. Russia and Asia are now going through the same materialistic wave. These waves come because of a certain necessity in human development — to destroy the bondage of old forms and leave a free field for new truth and new forms of truth and action in life as well as of what is behind life.²²

20. CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 455-56.

21. *Sri Aurobindo's Talks of 1926*, recorded by Anilbaran Roy, 1st Ed., 2020, p. 22.

22. CWSA, Vol. 28, p. 382.

Prior to the publication of Dinendra Kumar Roy’s *Aurobindo Prasanga*, Professor Jitendralal Bandopadhyay, who passed his Masters, first class, in English Literature from Presidency College, wrote about Sri Aurobindo in 1909:

Western civilisation had lost its gloss and glamour for him. He had penetrated behind its glittering outer shell of painted brilliance and had sounded to the depth all its baldness, coarseness, barrenness . . . the soulless splendour of the material civilisation of Europe . . . and his heart had long been wistfully yearning for that deep peace and harmony, that large synthesis of conflicting claims and jarring susceptibilities which is of the essence of the ancient civilisation of the East. And, now, at last the time had come when he could steep himself in the culture and civilisation of the land of his fathers . . . which had been snapped by his too early transference to England . . . Indeed the twelve years of his residence in Baroda form a very important portion in his life. They were the seed-time of his soul in the strict literal sense of the word; and more than that, they were absolutely necessary in order that he might identify himself with the life, thought and culture of contemporary India.²³

When the great art critic, historian and philosopher of Indian art, Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy, wrote an article, ‘The Message of the East’, Sri Aurobindo, in the *Karmayogin*, concurred with the author that the unsavoury commercialisation of the West has degenerated the aesthetic sense of the Indians who once were renowned for their sense of beauty:

Dr. Coomaraswamy is above all a lover of art and beauty and the ancient thought and greatness of India, but he is also, and as a result of this deep love and appreciation, an ardent Nationalist. Writing as an artist, he calls attention to the debased aesthetic ideas and tastes which the ugly and sordid commercialism of the West has introduced into the mind of a nation once distinguished for its superior beauty and grandeur of conception and for the extent to which it suffused the whole of life with the forces of the intellect and the spirit. He laments the persistence of a servile imitation of English ideas, English methods, English machinery and production even in the new Nationalism. And he reminds his readers that nations cannot be made by politics and economics alone, but that art also has a great and still unrecognised claim. . . . Our mission is to outdistance, lead and instruct Europe, not merely to imitate and learn from her. Dr. Coomaraswamy speaks of art, but it is certain that a man of his wide culture would not exclude, and we know he does not exclude, thought,

23. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, June 2016, pp. 448-49.

literature and religion from the forces that must uplift our nation and are necessary to its future. To recover Indian thought, Indian character, Indian perceptions, Indian energy, Indian greatness, and to solve the problems that perplex the world in an Indian spirit and from the Indian standpoint, this, in our view, is the mission of Nationalism. . . .

The debasement of our mind, character and tastes by a grossly commercial, materialistic and insufficient European education is a fact on which the young Nationalism has always insisted. The practical destruction of our artistic perceptions and the plastic skill and fineness of eye and hand which once gave our productions pre-eminence, distinction and mastery of the European markets, is also a thing accomplished. Most vital of all, the spiritual and intellectual divorce from the past which the present schools and universities have effected, has beggared the nation of the originality, high aspiration and forceful energy which can alone make a nation free and great. To reverse the process and recover what we have lost, is undoubtedly the first object to which we ought to devote ourselves. . . .²⁴

And when a European scholar and historian found little to praise in Vedantic Art except a few masterpieces, Sri Aurobindo considered him superficial and wrote a critique in the *Karmayogin* from which we quote an excerpt:

Vedantic Art reveals spirit, essential truth, the soul in the body, the lasting type or idea in the mutable form with a power and masterly revelation of which European art is incapable. It is therefore sure to conquer Europe as steadily as Indian thought and knowledge are conquering the hard and narrow materialism of the nineteenth century.²⁵

At Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo was asked, “How do we know that the ancient Indians were a very aesthetic people?” He replied:

That we can know from the descriptions contained in ancient Indian literature. Then too, many things have survived, and also many customs, which show the high aesthetic sense of the Indian people.²⁶

Sri Aurobindo also told his disciples:

24. CWSA, Vol. 8, pp. 244-45.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 449.

26. *Sri Aurobindo's Talks of 1926*, recorded by Anilbaran Roy, 1st Ed., 2020, p. 205.

. . . all good artists break through conventions. They are not guided by conventions; they adopt lines and forms as conditions, but these conditions are very elastic. Thus different poets using different metres make them produce different kinds of beauty — the beauty is not confined to line and form, it is always something more. This is what makes it difficult for Europeans to appreciate Indian art. Their ideal is the Hellenic ideal — perfection of form.²⁷

Sri Aurobindo profoundly understood and wholly assimilated Indian culture, so much so that he realised the criticality of preserving it. An excerpt of his 1948 message to Andhra University reads:

It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light. This must not and will surely not happen; but it cannot be said that the danger is not there.²⁸

Earlier in his Independence Day message on 15th August, 1947, Sri Aurobindo mentions that

. . . the spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India’s spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.²⁹

And later in 1950, in a letter from the Ashram to K. M. Munshi we have:

And as far as Sri Aurobindo can see at present Indian Spiritual Culture has a great and bright future before it. It is the future power that might dominate the world.³⁰

In a 1926 conversation, Sri Aurobindo affirmed that the atmosphere in India is more congenial to spiritual life than that in any other country. When asked for the reason, he replied:

27. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

28. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 504.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 480.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 513.

The reason is the spiritual sadhana carried on in India for the last four thousand years.

Other countries also had a spiritual past but they lost it, though they are again coming back to it. But in India the sadhana has gone on continuously. This does not mean that all men in India are spiritual or that there are no spiritual men in other countries. It only means that in India one can more easily take up the spiritual life.³¹

In January 1908, Sri Aurobindo, on the invitation of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, toured the Bombay Presidency for almost a month and “was received with acclamation wherever he went”.³² It seems Tilak’s request to Sri Aurobindo was made late, during the Surat Congress Conference in end December 1907, for in a letter dated 6th December, 1907, to Mrinalini Devi, Sri Aurobindo tells her that he will be proceeding to Surat in mid December and will be back in Calcutta on the 2nd of January.³³ After this tour seven of his speeches were printed in a book. An extract from the book’s preface reads:

Babu Arbind Ghosh being brought up in the Western Education, he almost forgot to speak Bengalee. Till the last year he could not speak it. Here, it is a remarkable thing which needs careful attention of all, that although the Babu was brought up in Western Education, and although in the atmosphere of which he remained so long a time, his devotion to his country is extraordinary. Let half-educated people that go to England take a lesson of it.³⁴

About his early childhood spent in India, Sri Aurobindo mentions:

. . . Sri Aurobindo in his father’s house already spoke only English and Hindustani, he thought in English from his childhood and did not even know his native language, Bengali.³⁵

Nevertheless, Sri Aurobindo “learned his mother tongue only after his return from England.”³⁶ Dinendra Kumar Roy writes:

. . . but he was very eager to learn Bengali since from his childhood he felt strongly attracted to it. The master of so many European languages could not

31. *Sri Aurobindo’s Talks of 1926*, recorded by Anilbaran Roy, 1st Ed., 2020, p. 16.

32. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., p. 70.

33. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1st Ed., p. 70.

34. *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, p. 181.

35. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 25.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

write a letter in his own mother tongue! What is more, he could not even speak the language like a Bengali! I believe he considered this an unpardonable defect. And that is why Aurobindo’s maternal uncle, the late Jogindranath Bose, eldest son of the late lamented Rishi Rajnarayan Bose, selected me as the right person to groom Aurobindo in the use of Bengali, and Rajnarayanbabu approved the proposal. And so accordingly I left Calcutta for Deoghar with Aurobindo himself.³⁷

Nonetheless, Sri Aurobindo has noted: “Sri Aurobindo for the most part learnt Bengali for himself afterwards in Baroda,”³⁸ and that he “was not a pupil of Dinendra Kumar; he had learnt Bengali already by himself and only called in Dinendra to help him in his studies.”³⁹

Sri Aurobindo read by himself a vast collection of Bengali literature. He appreciated the writings of Bankim and the poetry of Madhusudan besides other classics. In January 1940, Sri Aurobindo was informed that some of his articles on Bankim were discovered at Bombay from the old files of *Indu Prakash*. He was asked if the articles were indeed written by him and the following conversation ensued:

SRI AUROBINDO: I may have, I don’t remember. I wrote some articles on Madhusudan, I remember. In which year was it?

PURANI: In 1894, the second year of your stay in Baroda.

SRI AUROBINDO: My knowledge of Bengali was very little at that time. I couldn’t have finished reading all the writings of Bankim or perhaps I wrote the articles during the first enthusiasm of my learning the language. Of course we started learning it [at] Cambridge — the judge, Beachcroft, was one of us — under an Anglo-Indian pundit. He used to teach us Vidyasagar. One day we hit upon a sentence of Bankim’s and showed it to him. He began to shake his head and said, “This can’t be Bengali!” (*Laughter*)

PURANI: Nolini is very happy that he will get materials for another book.

SRI AUROBINDO (*smiling*): Can’t allow publication of that. It must have been very immature.⁴⁰

The articles referred to were written on the passing of Bankim and featured in the *Indu Prakash* as a series of seven articles that ran from 16th July to 27th August 1894. These were later printed by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press in 1954. These

37. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st Ed., 2006, p. 3.

38. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 43.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

40. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2013, p. 1016.

articles contained literary criticism and an estimate of Bankim’s work. Sri Aurobindo’s comprehension of Bengali literature can be assessed by an excerpt from his critique:

Bankim, the greatest of novelists, had the versatility developed to its highest expression. Scholar, poet, essayist, novelist, philosopher, lawyer, critic, official, philologist and religious innovator, — the whole world seemed to be shut up in his single brain.⁴¹

The last phrase is perhaps more apt for Sri Aurobindo himself. Sri Aurobindo was also a Bengali scholar, for in another essay published between 1907 and 1920 he wrote, “The earlier Bankim was only a poet and stylist — the later Bankim was a seer and nation-builder.”⁴²

Covering the period 1898 to 1900, Dinendra Kumar Roy writes:

Once Aurobindo had learnt Bengali reasonably well, he applied himself to reading books like *Swarnalata*, Bharatchandra’s *Annadamangal*, Dinabandhu’s *Sadhabar Ekadashi*. Since he did not understand the colloquial language well, I had to explain several portions to him in English. I too benefited from this and whatever skill in translation I may have developed was due to this. But I was not so intelligent that I could fully answer all his questions and satisfy him. Where my own intelligence was insufficient, I tried to explain in all sorts of ways. With his brilliance, Aurobindo would somehow get the hang of it, then he would explain it elaborately in English and ask me if his explanation was correct. From his explanation I could see that he had understood quite well. . . .

Aurobindo read Bankimchandra’s novels himself and he followed them quite well. He had extraordinary respect for Bankim. He said that Bankim was a golden bridge between our past and our present. He wrote a beautiful sonnet in English in his honour in order to express his regard for him. He derived great joy from Swami Vivekananda’s Bengali essays. He would tell me that in Swamiji’s language the breath of the spirit can be felt and that such force, music and flow in the language are very hard to find. Aurobindo also bought and studied Rabindranath’s poetical works. He was quite respectful towards our singer-poet, although he did not think that all his poetry was worth publishing.⁴³

As regards *Swarnalata* — a book that depicted Bengali domesticity — Sri Aurobindo was very impressed. But Roy adds:

41. CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 103.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 638.

43. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st Ed., 2006, pp. 37-38.

But I found him a little confused while reading the concluding part of the novel. When he came to the point in *Swarnalata* where Shashankshekhar’s house catches fire, he shut the book. He said the novelist had spoilt the artistry of the story at that point. It is for readers interested in literature to judge the truth of this statement.⁴⁴

Dinendra Kumar Roy used to get many Bengali books for Sri Aurobindo from Gurudas Babu’s Library in Calcutta. Roy observed: “Sometimes he read Bengali once or twice a week; at other times he did not open a Bengali book for a fortnight.”⁴⁵ Sri Aurobindo also read the weekly *Basumati* for he liked its language and style. Panchkadi Bannerjee was its editor and Sri Aurobindo enjoyed reading his simple criticism. Roy writes: “I never imagined that very soon Panchkadi-babu would quit the *Basumati*, that I would be closely associated with it, and that eventually the whole editorial responsibility would fall on my weak shoulders! In the turn of destiny’s wheel, I had to assume the editorship of *Basumati* prior to Aurobindo’s coming to Calcutta to launch *Bande Mataram*.”⁴⁶

Dinendra Kumar Roy also writes: “Aurobindo could not speak Bengali then but how eager he was to talk in his mother-tongue.”⁴⁷ However, elsewhere Roy acknowledges that Sri Aurobindo could speak some Bengali; he writes: “Aurobindo could understand Marathi quite well, though he could not speak it well. But he could speak it better than Bengali.”⁴⁸ And despite Sri Aurobindo’s assimilation of diverse cultures, Roy remarked that he seemed “like such a thorough Bengali”.⁴⁹

A few years later at Bengal, Sri Aurobindo’s political associates observed that he was not fluent in speaking Bengali but he was very well read. Hemendra Prasad Ghose writes: “I found that he was vastly read in Bengalee literature though he was halting in speaking Bengalee.”⁵⁰ On Sri Aurobindo’s spoken Bengali, Upendranath Banerjee lightly said, “We all made fun of him as his Bengali had an English accent; he had not much command on the colloquial language, but [was] well-versed in the broken language.”⁵¹ Upendranath also remarked: “Though westernised by his talking and temperament, Sri Aurobindo was a pure Bengali in his dressing and behaviour.”⁵²

44. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

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

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

52. *Ibid.*

Sudhir Kumar Sarkar writes of Sri Aurobindo’s “faltering Bengali which sounded so sweet in his English-accented tongue,”⁵³ while Suresh Chandra Deb writes: “He generally spoke in English, but when he used his mother tongue, Bengali, the foreign accent and a lisping sound made it pleasant to the ear.”⁵⁴ Sometime in 1906-07, Nolini Kanta Gupta was to bring Sri Aurobindo from Raja Subodh Mullick’s mansion in South Calcutta to Manicktolla Gardens at the far end of North Calcutta. Nolini Kanta Gupta narrates:

Let me end this story today with something nice and sweet. It was during my stay at the Gardens that I had my first meeting and interview with Sri Aurobindo. Barin had asked me to go and see him, saying that Sri Aurobindo would be coming to see the Gardens and that I should fetch him. . . . I asked the doorman at the gate to send word to Mr. Ghose — this was how he used to be called in those days at the place — saying that I had come from Barin of the Manicktolla Gardens. As I sat waiting in one of the rooms downstairs, Sri Aurobindo came down, stood near me and gave me an inquiring look. I said, in Bengali, “Barin has sent me. Would it be possible for you to come to the Gardens with me now?” He answered very slowly, pausing on each syllable separately — it seemed he had not yet got used to speaking Bengali — and said, “Go and tell Barin, I have not yet had my lunch. It would not be possible to go today.” So, that was that. I did not say a word, did my *namaskāra* and came away. This was my first happy meeting with him, my first darshan and interview.⁵⁵

Henry Nevinson, the journalist who met Sri Aurobindo a few times, wrote, “Arabinda had been brought up in England, and complained he could not speak Bengali well enough to get to the hearts of his own people.”⁵⁶ For instance on 11th July, 1909, Sri Aurobindo attended a meeting held at Kumartuli Park. When he “rose amidst loud cheers” he expressed his reluctance to make a speech because “he had already made a good many speeches”. He added, “Another reason was that unfortunately he was unable to address them in their mother language and therefore he always felt averse to inflict an English speech on a Bengali audience.”⁵⁷

Sri Aurobindo’s ability to comprehend Bengali literature and even write in Bengali far surpassed his verbal skills. He notes:

About the learning of Bengali, it may be said that before engaging the teacher, Sri Aurobindo already knew enough of the language to appreciate the novels

53. Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 1989, p. 91.

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

55. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol. 7, 1st Ed., 1978, p. 347.

56. ‘Henry Nevinson on Sri Aurobindo in the Swadeshi Days’, *Mother India*, August 1980, p. 483.

57. *CWSA*, Vol. 8, p. 100.

of Bankim and the poetry of Madhusudan. He learned enough afterwards to write himself and to conduct a weekly in Bengali, writing most of the articles himself, but his mastery over the language was not at all the same as over English and he did not venture to make speeches in his mother tongue.⁵⁸

In mid 1909 Sri Aurobindo was offered the editorship of the *Bengalee* but instead on 23rd August he started the Bengali weekly, *Dharma*, where most of the pieces were written by him. The weekly had a fairly large circulation and was easily self-supporting. The premises, for both *Dharma* and *Karmayogin*, was at 4, Shyampukur Lane; the press and the office in front and living rooms for the staff at the back. While staying on at his uncle's place (the *Sanjivani* office), Sri Aurobindo came to Shyampukur every afternoon and remained there till late at night. Besides Bejoy Nag and Nolini Kanta Gupta, who were permanent residents there, others too regularly joined them.⁵⁹

Besides his Bengali articles in *Dharma*, Sri Aurobindo also wrote many letters in Bengali to his family members. Most of the letters that Sri Aurobindo wrote to Mrinalini Devi were in Bengali. About these letters she told her cousin:

I receive now and then a few letters from him. One or two happen to be in English. His letters written in Bengali are so accomplished that they put our own usage to abject shame.⁶⁰

Basanti Mitra was fascinated by Sri Aurobindo's brilliance for learning new languages. She writes:

While he was working in Baroda, Aurobindo learned Bengali from the late Dinendra Kumar Roy, the famous writer. He also learned Sanskrit. He wrote his first Bengali letter to me. In it he wrote: “I have learned to write Bengali and it is to you that I write my first letter.” I still remember how happy I was to get that letter. What is more, he even went on later to write poetry in Bengali. He had mastered two new languages in a short time. One cannot but be astonished by his ability to learn different languages.⁶¹

Basanti Mitra later bitterly regretted the loss of this letter during the Hindu-Muslim riots in Bengal after Pakistan came into being.⁶²

58. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 44.

59. See *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 61; see K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, pp. 335-36.

60. Nirodbaran, *Mrinalini Devi*, 1988, p. 19.

61. Basanti Chakravarty (née Mitra), ‘Our Aurobindo’, *Srinivantu*, April/August 1984, p. 84.

62. See A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 48.

In order to absorb Indian culture Sri Aurobindo got into its roots by laboriously and rigorously learning the Sanskrit language by studying its literature and scriptures. He was aflame with his interest in India that had already commenced in England. About his time at Baroda, he has said,

I myself was not much interested in administration. My interest lay outside, in Sanskrit literature and in the national movement.⁶³

Sri Aurobindo notes about himself: “A teacher was engaged for Bengali, a young Bengali littérateur — none for Sanskrit,”⁶⁴ and that he “did not learn Sanskrit through Bengali, but direct in Sanskrit itself or through English.”⁶⁵ And on the Sanskrit language Sri Aurobindo has stated:

Sri Aurobindo did not learn Sanskrit from anyone at Baroda. He read the Mahabharata by himself and also read works of Kalidas and one drama of Bhavabhuti as well as Ramayana.⁶⁶

Incidentally, in all the earlier drafts and publications of the Baroda period, Sri Aurobindo spelt Indian proper names in their Bengali way of pronunciation: Yudhisthere, Arjoon, Cowshalya, Dussaruth etc.⁶⁷

A disciple once asked: “It seems most people read more than they assimilate. They read lots of French stories, novels and dramas very rapidly and as a result they hardly assimilate the idioms, phrases, grammatical peculiarities, etc. . . . I think one ought to read a book three to four times.” Sri Aurobindo replied:

I suppose most learn only to be able to read French books, not to know the language well. . . . I don’t think many people would consent to make a principle of reading each book 3 or 4 times in the way you advocate, for very few have the scholarly mind — but two or three books should be so read — I learnt Sanskrit by reading the Naladamayanti episode in the Mahabharat like that with minute care several times.⁶⁸

Sri Aurobindo’s depth of comprehension was such that he translated a large quantity of Bengali and Sanskrit poetry.⁶⁹ He also wrote that “his acquaintance with

63. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 568.

64. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 43.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

66. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 114.

67. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, footnote, p. 72; also see CWSA, Vol. 7.

68. CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 11-12.

69. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 69.

Sanskrit and other Indian languages made it easy for him to pick up Hindi without any regular study and to understand it when he read Hindi books or newspapers.”⁷⁰ Remarking on his verbal skills Rajaram Patkar writes, “He used to speak in no other tongue than English, as he knew no other language except a smattering of Hindi which he used while speaking to the menials.”⁷¹

Sri Aurobindo also familiarised himself with Gujarati and Marathi.⁷² Sri Aurobindo has stated, “I learned Gujarati not for the literature but because it was the language of Baroda where I had to live for 13 years.”⁷³ And Dinendra Kumar Roy writes: “Sometimes Aurobindo studied Marathi with the elder Phadke, whose full name I can’t recollect. Another pundit came to teach him the Modi language. Modi was a colloquial form of Marathi, a little like Prakrit to Sanskrit, and very difficult to understand. Its alphabet was not Devanagari but Aurobindo was eager to learn it anyway!”⁷⁴ Alluding to his Baroda days Sri Aurobindo has said, “I had a disgust for administrative life . . . My interest was in poetry and literature and study of languages and patriotic action.”⁷⁵

Incidentally, apropos the ancient language of Tamil, Sri Aurobindo notes:

He listened for a few days to a Nair from Malabar who read and explained to him articles in a Tamil newspaper; this was a short time before he left Bengal. At Pondicherry he took up the study of Tamil, but he did not go very far and his studies were finally interrupted by his complete retirement.⁷⁶

Interestingly, when Mother first came to Pondicherry in 1914 and stayed here she began taking lessons in Sanskrit and Bengali from Sri Aurobindo.⁷⁷

Sri Aurobindo’s scholarship of the Sanskrit language has been noted by Dinendra Kumar Roy in his *Aurobindo Prasanga [With Aurobindo in Baroda]*:

. . . the Sanskrit *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* he understood quite well indeed. He did not translate the whole text in order but parts of it. He wrote poems based on some episode of the *Mahabharata*. . . He would open the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and read out the original words to verify whether his rendering had been faithful. He preferred the great Valmiki to Vyasa; he believed

70. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 44.

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

72. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, pp. 49-51.

73. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 16.

74. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st Ed., 2006, pp. 32-33.

75. *Reminiscences and Anecdotes of Sri Aurobindo*, 1999, compiled by M. P. Pandit, p. 68.

76. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 96.

77. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 407.

that Valmiki had no peer in the world. He once wrote an English article to demonstrate Valmiki’s prominence as a poet. I don’t know if this article was ever published in an English monthly here or in England. He said that Dante fascinated him and he found Homer’s *Illiad* highly satisfying. In European literature these two were incomparable. But as a poet, Valmiki was the most outstanding. No epic on earth could equal Valmiki’s *Ramayana*.⁷⁸

Around 1902 Sri Aurobindo had written some essays and notes on the *Mahabharata*. We reproduce an excerpt where he makes a comparison between Vyasa and Valmiki:

The whole personality of Draupadie breaks out in that cry, her chastity, her pride, her passionate & unforgiving temper, but it flashes out not in an expression of pure feeling, but in a fiery and pregnant apophthegm. It is this temperament, this dynamic force of intellectualism blended with heroic fire and a strong personality that gives its peculiar stamp to Vyasa’s writing and distinguishes it from that of all other epic poets. The heroic & profoundly intellectual national type of the great Bharata races, the Kurus, Bhojas and Panchalas who created the Veda & the Vedanta, find in Vyasa their fitting poetical type and exponent, just as the mild and delicately moral temper of the more eastern Coshalas has realised itself in Valmekie and through the Ramayana so largely dominated Hindu character. Steeped in the heroic ideals of the Bharata, attuned to their profound and daring thought & temperament, Vyasa has made himself the poet of the highminded Kshatriya caste, voices their resonant speech, breathes their aspiring and unconquerable spirit, mirrors their rich and varied life with a loving detail and moves through his subject with a swift yet measured movement like the march of an army towards battle.

A comparison with Valmekie is instructive of the varying genius of these great masters. Both excel in epical rhetoric — if such a term as rhetoric can be applied to Vyasa’s direct & severe style, but Vyasa’s has the air of a more intellectual, reflective & experienced stage of poetical advance. The longer speeches in the Ramayan, those even which have most the appearance of set, argumentative oration, proceed straight from the heart; the thoughts, words, reasonings come welling up from the dominant emotion or conflicting feelings of the speaker; they palpitate and are alive with the vital force from which they have sprung. Though belonging to a more thoughtful, gentle and cultured civilisation than Homer’s they have, like his, the large utterance which is not of primitive times, but of the primal emotions. Vyasa’s have a powerful but

78. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st Ed., 2006, pp. 18-19.

austere force of intellectuality. In expressing character they firmly expose it rather than spring half-unconsciously from it; their bold and finely-planned consistency with the original conception reveals rather the conscientious painstaking of an inspired but reflective artist than the more primary and impetuous creative impulse. In their management of emotion itself a similar difference becomes prominent. Valmekie when giving utterance to a mood or passion simple or complex, surcharges every line, every phrase, turn of words or movement of verse with it; there are no lightning flashes but a great depth of emotion swelling steadily, inexhaustibly and increasingly in a wonder of sustained feeling, like a continually rising wave with low crests of foam. Vyasa has a high level of style with a subdued emotion behind it occasionally breaking into poignant outbursts. It is by sudden beauties that he rises above himself and not only exalts, stirs and delights as at his ordinary level, but memorably seizes the heart and imagination. This is the natural result of his peculiarly disinterested art which never seeks out anything striking for its own sake, but admits it only when it arises uncalled from the occasion.

From this difference in temper and mode of expression arises a difference in the mode also of portraying character. Vyasa's knowledge of character is not so intimate, emotional and sympathetic as Valmekie's; it has more of a heroic inspiration, less of a divine sympathy. He has reached it not like Valmekie immediately through the heart and imagination, but deliberately through intellect and experience, a deep criticism and reading of men; the spirit of shaping imagination has come afterwards like a sculptor using the materials labour has provided for him. It has not been a light leading him into the secret places of the heart. Nevertheless the characterisation, however reached, is admirable and firm. It is the fruit of a lifelong experience, the knowledge of a statesman who has had much to do with the ruling of men and has been himself a considerable part in some great revolution full of astonishing incidents and extraordinary characters. With that high experience his brain and his soul are full. It has cast his imagination into colossal proportions & provided him with majestic conceptions which can dispense with all but the simplest language for expression; for they are so great that the bare precise statement of what is said and done seems enough to make language epic. His character-drawing indeed is more epic, less psychological than Valmekie's. Truth of speech and action give us the truth of nature and it is done with strong purposeful strokes that have the power to move the heart & enlarge and ennoble the imagination which is what we mean by the epic in poetry. In Valmekie there are marvellous & revealing touches which show us the secret something in character usually beyond the expressive power either of speech or action; they are touches oftener found in the dramatic artist than the epic, and seldom fall within Vyasa's method. It is the difference between strong and purposeful artistic synthesis and the beautiful

subtle & involute symmetry of an organic existence evolved and inevitable rather than shaped or purposed.

Vyasa is therefore less broadly human than Valmekie, he is at the same time a wider & more original thinker. His supreme intellect rises everywhere out of the mass of insipid or turbulent redaction and interpolation with bare and grandiose outlines. A wide searching mind, historian, statesman, orator, a deep and keen looker into ethics and conduct, a subtle and high aiming politician, a theologian & philosopher, — it is not for nothing that Hindu imagination makes the name of Vyasa loom so large in the history of Aryan thought and attributes to him work so important and manifold. The wideness of the man’s intellectual empire is evident throughout his work; we feel the presence of the Rishi, the original thinker who has enlarged the boundaries of ethical & religious outlook. . . .

His deep preoccupation with the ethical issues of speech and action is very notable. His very subject is one of practical ethics, the establishment of a Dharmyarajya, an empire of the just, by which is meant no millennium of the saints but the practical ideal of a government with righteousness, purity and unselfish toil for the common good as its saving principles. It is true that Valmekie has a more humanely moral spirit than Vyasa, in as much as ordinary morality is most effective when steeped in emotion, proceeding from the heart & acting through the heart. Vyasa’s ethics like everything else in him takes a double stand on intellectual scrutiny and acceptance and on personal strength of character; his characters having once adopted by intellectual choice & in harmony with their temperaments a given line of conduct, throw the whole heroic force of their nature into its pursuit. He is therefore preeminently a poet of action. Krishna is his authority in all matters religious and ethical and it is noticeable that Krishna lays far more stress on action and far less on quiescence than any other Hindu philosopher. Quiescence in God is with him as with others the ultimate goal of existence; but he insists that this quiescence must be reached through action and so far as this life is concerned, must exist in action; quiescence of the soul from desires there must be but there should not be and there cannot be quiescence of the Prakriti from action.⁷⁹

Years later in a correspondence with a disciple Sri Aurobindo explained that Homer, Shakespeare, Valmiki and Vyasa are the top four poets in history followed by the second rung of poets of Dante, Kalidasa, Aeschylus, Virgil, Milton, and Sophocles followed by Goethe on the third rung.⁸⁰

79. CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 320-24.

80. See CWSA 27, pp. 368-69.

Elsewhere, in a Bengali article, ‘*Sekaler Smriti*’, Dinendra Kumar Roy writes how assiduously Sri Aurobindo pursued his studies in Sanskrit. He would return home early from college, sit at his desk and compose poems. He would pick up an episode from the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* and write a poem on that. He had a notebook for poems. He wrote fluently without doing the least thinking. Thereafter, he would get lost in studying. By nine or ten at night he would take a light dinner and yet again get absorbed in studies. He remained still in the same posture till 1 a.m., and occasionally even 2 a.m.⁸¹

Dr. Arthur R. S. Roy, at the *Bande Mataram* office, was astonished by Sri Aurobindo’s scholarship: “I was astounded to learn that in two years he had mastered Sanskrit and had actually translated *Bhagavat Gita*.”⁸²

In Alipore jail Abinash Bhattacharya asked Sri Aurobindo to explain a verse from the Upanishads which he did in a simple, lucid manner. When Abinash told a fellow prisoner, the highly respected scriptural scholar, Panchanan Tarkachudamani, about Sri Aurobindo’s interpretation, the great pundit exclaimed with immense joy: “Why Abinash, I could never have explained this as simply as Aurobindo-babu has.” After Tarkachudamani got more acquainted with Sri Aurobindo’s Sanskrit scholarship he was overwhelmed at such profound knowledge.⁸³

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes that there are specimen drafts to suggest that it is not unlikely that Sri Aurobindo at one time entertained the possibility of translating practically the whole of at least the “original” *Mahabharata* (about 25,000 slokas) and the whole of the *Ramayana*, and the “Notes” and the experiments in translation were his first soundings of the two epics. But other interests and activities may have preempted the whole project.⁸⁴

On the magnificence of the Sanskrit language, Sri Aurobindo has written:

The ancient and classical creations of the Sanskrit tongue both in quality and in body and abundance of excellence, in their potent originality and force and beauty, in their substance and art and structure, in grandeur and justice and charm of speech and in the height and width of the reach of their spirit stand very evidently in the front rank among the world’s great literatures. The language itself, as has been universally recognised by those competent to form a judgment, is one of the most magnificent, the most perfect and wonderfully sufficient literary instruments developed by the human mind, at once majestic

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

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

83. See Abinash Bhattacharya, ‘Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, July 2012, p. 537.

84. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 81.

and sweet and flexible, strong and clearly-formed and full and vibrant and subtle, and its quality and character would be of itself a sufficient evidence of the character and quality of the race whose mind it expressed and the culture of which it was the reflecting medium. The great and noble use made of it by poet and thinker did not fall below the splendour of its capacities. Nor is it in the Sanskrit tongue alone that the Indian mind has done high and beautiful and perfect things, though it couched in that language the larger part of its most prominent and formative and grandest creations.⁸⁵

Unlike Sri Aurobindo, the western scholars did not learn the Sanskrit language and depended on translations, thus they could not get into the true essence of its literature. Sri Aurobindo writes:

In literature I shall be at a loss, for I cannot remember that any Western writer of genius or high reputation as a critic has had any first-hand knowledge of Sanskrit literature or of the Prakritic tongues, and a judgment founded on translations can only deal with the substance, — and even that in most translations of Indian work is only the dead substance with the whole breath of life gone out of it.⁸⁶

Sri Aurobindo’s scholarship of the Sanskrit language enabled him to fully understand and imbibe the best of Indian culture. In ‘A Defence of Indian Culture’ he writes:

The dignity given to human existence by the Vedantic thought and by the thought of the classical ages of Indian culture exceeded anything conceived by the Western idea of humanity. Man in the West has always been only an ephemeral creature of Nature or a soul manufactured at birth by an arbitrary breath of the whimsical Creator and set under impossible conditions to get salvation, but far more likely to be thrown away into the burning refuse-heap of Hell as a hopeless failure. At best he is exalted by a reasoning mind and will and an effort to be better than God or Nature made him. Far more ennobling, inspiring, filled with the motive-force of a great idea is the conception placed before us by Indian culture. Man in the Indian idea is a spirit veiled in the works of energy, moving to self-discovery, capable of Godhead. He is a soul that is growing through Nature to conscious self-hood; he is a divinity and an eternal existence; he is an ever-flowing wave of the God-ocean, an inextinguish-

85. CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 314-15.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

able spark of the supreme Fire. Even, he is in his uttermost reality identical with the ineffable Transcendence from which he came and greater than the godheads whom he worships. The natural half-animal creature that for a while he seems to be is not at all his whole being and is not in any way his real being. His inmost reality is the divine Self or at least one dynamic eternal portion of it, and to find that and exceed his outward, apparent, natural self is the greatness of which he alone of terrestrial beings is capable. He has the spiritual capacity to pass to a supreme and extraordinary pitch of manhood and that is the first aim which is proposed to him by Indian culture. Living no more in the first crude type of an undeveloped humanity to which most men still belong, *na yathā prākṛto janaḥ*, he can even become a free perfected semi-divine man, *mukta, siddha*. But he can do more; released into the cosmic consciousness, his spirit can become one with God, one self with the Spirit of the universe or rise into a Light and Vastness that transcends the universe; his nature can become one dynamic power with universal Nature or one Light with a transcendental Gnosis. To be shut up for ever in his ego is not his ultimate perfection; he can become a universal soul, one with the supreme Unity, one with others, one with all beings. This is the high sense and power concealed in his humanity that he can aspire to this perfection and transcendence. And he can arrive at it through any or all of his natural powers if they will accept release, through his mind and reason and thought and their illuminations, through his heart and its unlimited power of love and sympathy, through his will and its dynamic drive towards mastery and right action, through his ethical nature and its hunger for the universal Good, through his aesthetic sense and its seekings after delight and beauty or through his inner soul and its power of absolute spiritual calm, wideness, joy and peace.

This is the sense of that spiritual liberation and perfection of which Indian thought and inner discipline have been full since the earliest Vedic times.⁸⁷

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

87. *Ibid.*, pp. 156-57.

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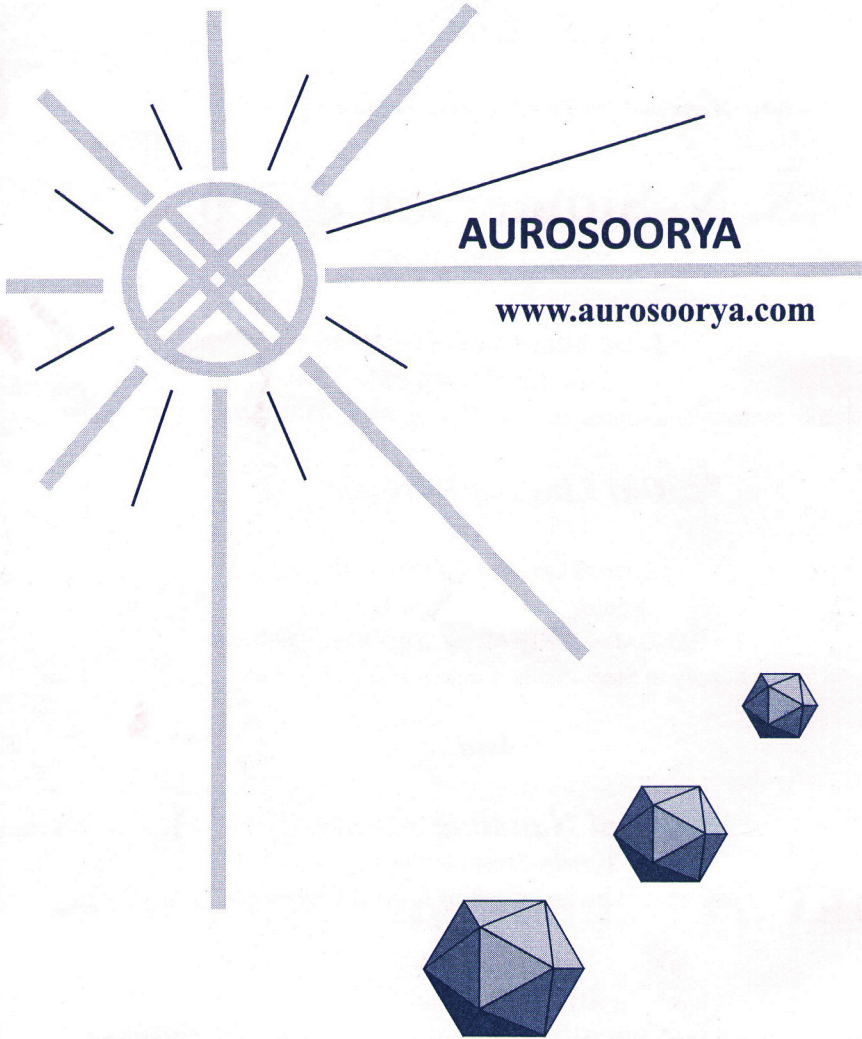
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