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# MOTHER INDIA

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OCTOBER 2022

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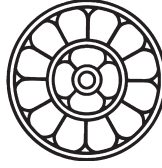
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# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

OCTOBER 2022

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM  
PONDICHERRY  
INDIA



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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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXV

No. 10

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## ‘FOR MAN THOU SEEKST, NOT FOR THYSELF ALONE’

At first out of the busy hum of mind  
As if from a loud thronged market into a cave  
By an inward moment’s magic she had come.  
A stark hushed emptiness became her self:  
Her mind unvisited by the voice of thought  
Stared at a void deep’s dumb infinity.  
Her heights receded, her depths behind her closed;  
All fled away from her and left her blank.  
But when she came back to her self of thought,  
Once more she was a human thing on earth,  
A lump of Matter, a house of closed sight,  
A mind compelled to think out ignorance,  
A life-force pressed into a camp of works  
And the material world her limiting field.  
Amazed like one unknowing she sought her way  
Out of the tangle of man’s ignorant past  
That took the surface person for the soul.  
Then a Voice spoke that dwelt on secret heights:  
“For man thou seekst, not for thyself alone.  
Only if God assumes the human mind  
And puts on mortal ignorance for his cloak  
And makes himself the Dwarf with triple stride,  
Can he help man to grow into the God.  
As man disguised the cosmic Greatness works  
And finds the mystic inaccessible gate  
And opens the Immortal’s golden door.  
Man, human, follows in God’s human steps.  
Accepting his darkness thou must bring to him light,  
Accepting his sorrow thou must bring to him bliss.  
In Matter’s body find thy heaven-born soul.”  
Then Savitri surged out of her body’s wall  
And stood a little span outside herself  
And looked into her subtle being’s depths  
And in its heart as in a lotus-bud  
Divined her secret and mysterious soul.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, pp. 488-89)



## ‘THRICE VISHNU PACED . . . ’

Thrice Vishnu paced and set his step uplifted out of the primal dust; three steps he has paced, the Guardian, the Invincible, and from beyond he upholds their laws. Scan the workings of Vishnu and see from whence he has manifested their laws. That is his highest pace which is seen ever by the seers like an eye extended in heaven; that the illumined, the awakened kindle into a blaze, even Vishnu’s step supreme. . . .<sup>1</sup>

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 210)

1. Sri Aurobindo’s translation of the verses from the *Rig Veda* I. 22. 17-21, used as epigraph in *The Life Divine*, Chapter XXI — ‘The Ascent of Life’.





## THE BUSINESS OF POETICAL TRANSLATION

. . . Kalidasa for instance compares a huge dark cloud striding northwards from Crouncharundhra to “the dark foot of Vishnu lifted in impetuous act to quell Bali”, *śyāmaḥ pādo baliniyamanābhyudyatasyeva viṣṇoḥ*. This I have translated

“Dark like the cloudy foot of highest God  
When starting from the dwarfshape world-immense  
With Titan-quelling step through heaven he strode.”

It will be at once objected that this is not translation, but the most licentious paraphrase. This is not so if my original contention be granted that the business of poetical translation is to reproduce not the exact words but the exact image, associations & poetical beauty & flavour of the original. There is not a single word in the translation I have instanced which does not represent something at once suggested to the Indian reader by the words of the text. Vishnu is nothing to the English reader but some monstrous & bizarre Hindu idol; to the Hindu He is God Himself; the word is therefore more correctly represented in English by “highest God” than by Vishnu; *śyāmaḥ pādaḥ* is closely represented by “dark like the cloudy foot”, the word cloudy being necessary both to point the simile which is not so apparent & natural to the English reader as to the Indian and to define the precise sort of darkness indicated by the term *śyāmaḥ*; Bali has no meaning or association in English, but in the Sanscrit it represents the same idea as “Titan”; only the particular name recalls a certain theosophic legend which is a household word to the Hindu, that of the dwarf-Vishnu who obtained from the Titan Bali as much land as he could cover with three steps, then filling the whole world with himself with one stride measured the earth, with another the heavens and with the third placing his foot on the head of Bali thrust him down into bottomless Hell. All this immediately arises before the mental eye of the Hindu as he reads Kalidasa’s finely chosen words. The impetuous & vigorous term *abhyudyatasya* both in sound & sense suggests the sudden starting up of the world-pervading deity from the dwarf shape he had assumed while the comparison to the cloud reminds him that the second step of the three is referred to, that of Vishnu striding “through heaven.” But to the English reader the words of Kalidasa literally transliterated would be a mere artificial conceit devoid of the original sublimity. It is the inability to seize the associations & precise poetical force of Sanscrit words that has led so many European Sanscritists to describe the poetry of Kalidasa which is hardly surpassed for truth, bold directness & native beauty & grandeur as the artificial poetry of an artificial period. A literal translation would only spread this erroneous impression to the general reader. It must be admitted that in the opposite

method one of Kalidasa's finest characteristics is, it is true, entirely lost, his power of expressing by a single simple direct & sufficient word ideas & pictures of the utmost grandeur or shaded complexity; but this is a characteristic which could in no case be possible in any language but the classical Sanscrit which Kalidasa did more than any man to create or at least to perfect. Even the utmost literalness could not transfer this characteristic into English. This method of eliciting all the idea-values of the original of which I have given a rather extreme instance, . . .

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Early Cultural Writings, CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 253-55)*



## THREE GREAT GODS

Three great Gods, origin of the Puranic Trinity, largest puissances of the supreme Godhead, make possible this development and upward evolution; they support in its grand lines and fundamental energies all these complexities of the cosmos. Brahmanaspati is the Creator; by the word, by his cry he creates, — that is to say, he expresses, he brings out all existence and conscious knowledge and movement of life and eventual forms from the darkness of the Inconscient. Rudra, the Violent and Merciful, the Mighty One, presides over the struggle of life to affirm itself; he is the armed, wrathful and beneficent Power of God who lifts forcibly the creation upward, smites all that opposes, scourges all that errs and resists, heals all that is wounded and suffers and complains and submits. Vishnu of the vast pervading motion holds in his triple stride all these worlds; it is he that makes a wide room for the action of Indra in our limited mortality; it is by him and with him that we rise into his highest seats where we find waiting for us the Friend, the Beloved, the Beatific Godhead.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(The Secret of the Veda, CWSA, Vol. 15, pp. 382-83)*



# VISHNU, THE ALL-PERVADING GODHEAD

## Rig Veda I.154

1. Of Vishnu now I declare the mighty works, who has measured out the earthly worlds and that higher seat of our self-accomplishing he supports, he the wide-moving, in the threefold steps of his universal movement.

2. That Vishnu affirms on high by his mightiness and he is like a terrible lion that ranges in the difficult places, yea, his lair is on the mountain-tops, he in whose three wide movements all the worlds find their dwelling-place.

3. Let our strength and our thought go forward to Vishnu the all-pervading, the wide-moving Bull whose dwelling-place is on the mountain, he who being One has measured all this long and far-extending seat of our self-accomplishing by only three of his strides.

4. He whose three steps are full of the honey-wine and they perish not but have ecstasy by the self-harmony of their nature; yea, he being One holds the triple principle and earth and heaven also, even all the worlds.

5. May I attain to and enjoy that goal of his movement, the Delight, where souls that seek the godhead have the rapture; for there in that highest step of the wide-moving Vishnu is that Friend of men who is the fount of the sweetness.

6. Those are the dwelling-places of ye twain which we desire as the goal of our journey where the many-horned herds of Light go travelling; the highest step of wide-moving Vishnu shines down on us here in its manifold vastness.

## COMMENTARY

The deity of this hymn is Vishnu the all-pervading, who in the Rig Veda has a close but covert connection and almost an identity with the other deity exalted in the later religion, Rudra. Rudra is a fierce and violent godhead with a beneficent aspect which approaches the supreme blissful reality of Vishnu; Vishnu's constant friendliness to man and his helping gods is shadowed by an aspect of formidable violence, — “like a terrible lion ranging in evil and difficult places”, — which is spoken of in terms more ordinarily appropriate to Rudra. Rudra is the father of the vehemently-battling Maruts; Vishnu is hymned in the last Sukta of the fifth Mandala under the name of Evaya Marut as the source from which they sprang, that which they become and himself identical with the unity and totality of their embattled forces. Rudra is the Deva or Deity ascending in the cosmos, Vishnu the same Deva or Deity helping and evoking the powers of the ascent.

It was a view long popularised by European scholars that the greatness of Vishnu and Shiva in the Puranic theogonies was a later development and that in the Veda these gods have a quite minor position and are inferior to Indra and Agni. It has even become a current opinion among many scholars that Shiva was a later conception borrowed from the Dravidians and represents a partial conquest of the Vedic religion by the indigenous culture it had invaded. These errors arise inevitably as part of the total misunderstanding of Vedic thought for which the old Brahmanic ritualism is responsible and to which European scholarship by the exaggeration of a minor and external element in the Vedic mythology has only given a new and yet more misleading form.

The importance of the Vedic gods has not to be measured by the number of hymns devoted to them or by the extent to which they are invoked in the thoughts of the Rishis, but by the functions which they perform. Agni and Indra to whom the majority of the Vedic hymns are addressed, are not greater than Vishnu and Rudra, but the functions which they fulfil in the internal and external world were the most active, dominant and directly effective for the psychological discipline of the ancient Mystics; this alone is the reason of their predominance. The Maruts, children of Rudra, are not divinities superior to their fierce and mighty Father; but they have many hymns addressed to them and are far more constantly mentioned in connection with other gods, because the function they fulfilled was of a constant and immediate importance in the Vedic discipline. On the other hand, Vishnu, Rudra, Brahmanaspati, the Vedic originals of the later Puranic Triad, Vishnu-Shiva-Brahma, provide the conditions of the Vedic work and assist it from behind the more present and active gods, but are less close to it and in appearance less continually concerned in its daily movements.

Brahmanaspati is the creator by the Word; he calls light and visible cosmos out of the darkness of the unconscious ocean and speeds the formations of conscious being upward to their supreme goal. It is from this creative aspect of Brahmanaspati that the later conception of Brahma the Creator arose.

For the upward movement of Brahmanaspati's formations Rudra supplies the force. He is named in the Veda the Mighty One of Heaven, but he begins his work upon the earth and gives effect to the sacrifice on the five planes of our ascent. He is the Violent One who leads the upward evolution of the conscious being; his force battles against all evil, smites the sinner and the enemy; intolerant of defect and stumbling he is the most terrible of the gods, the one of whom alone the Vedic Rishis have any real fear. Agni, the Kumara, prototype of the Puranic Skanda, is on earth the child of this force of Rudra. The Maruts, vital powers which make light for themselves by violence, are Rudra's children. Agni and the Maruts are the leaders of the fierce struggle upward from Rudra's first earthly, obscure creation to the heavens of thought, the luminous worlds. But this violent and mighty Rudra who breaks down all defective formations and groupings of outward and inward life, has

also a benigner aspect. He is the supreme healer. Opposed, he destroys; called on for aid and propitiated he heals all wounds and all evil and all sufferings. The force that battles is his gift, but also the final peace and joy. In these aspects of the Vedic god are all the primitive materials necessary for the evolution of the Puranic Shiva-Rudra, the destroyer and healer, the auspicious and terrible, the Master of the force that acts in the worlds and the Yogin who enjoys the supreme liberty and peace.

For the formations of Brahmanaspati's word, for the actions of Rudra's force Vishnu supplies the necessary static elements, — Space, the ordered movements of the worlds, the ascending levels, the highest goal. He has taken three strides and in the space created by the three strides has established all the worlds. In these worlds he the all-pervading dwells and gives less or greater room to the action and movements of the gods. When Indra would slay Vritra, he first prays to Vishnu, his friend and comrade in the great struggle, "O Vishnu, pace out in thy movement with an utter wideness," and in that wideness he destroys Vritra who limits, Vritra who covers. The supreme step of Vishnu, his highest seat, is the triple world of bliss and light, *priyam padam*, which the wise ones see extended in heaven like a shining eye of vision; it is this highest seat of Vishnu that is the goal of the Vedic journey. Here again the Vedic Vishnu is the natural precursor and sufficient origin of the Puranic Narayana, Preserver and Lord of Love.

In the Veda indeed its fundamental conception forbids the Puranic arrangement of the supreme Trinity and the lesser gods. To the Vedic Rishis there was only one universal Deva of whom Vishnu, Rudra, Brahmanaspati, Agni, Indra, Vayu, Mitra, Varuna are all alike forms and cosmic aspects. Each of them is in himself the whole Deva and contains all the other gods. It was the full emergence in the Upanishads of the idea of this supreme and only Deva, left in the Riks vague and undefined and sometimes even spoken of in the neuter as That or the one sole existence, the ritualistic limitation of the other gods and the progressive precision of their human or personal aspects under the stress of a growing mythology that led to their degradation and the enthronement of the less used and more general names and forms, Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra, in the final Puranic formulation of the Hindu theology.

In this hymn of Dirghatamas Auchathya to the all-pervading Vishnu it is his significant activity, it is the greatness of Vishnu's three strides that is celebrated. We must dismiss from our minds the ideas proper to the later mythology. We have nothing to do here with the dwarf Vishnu, the Titan Bali and the three divine strides which took possession of Earth, Heaven and the sunless subterrestrial worlds of Patala. The three strides of Vishnu in the Veda are clearly defined by Dirghatamas as earth, heaven and the triple principle, *tridhātu*. It is this triple principle beyond Heaven or superimposed upon it as its highest level, *nākasya pṛṣṭhe*, which is the supreme stride or supreme seat of the all-pervading deity.

Vishnu is the wide-moving one. He is that which has gone abroad — as it is put in the language of the Isha Upanishad, *sa paryagāt*, — triply extending himself

as Seer, Thinker and Former, in the superconscient Bliss, in the heaven of mind, in the earth of the physical consciousness, *tredhā vicakramāṇaḥ*. In those three strides he has measured out, he has formed in all their extension the earthly worlds; for in the Vedic idea the material world which we inhabit is only one of several steps leading to and supporting the vital and mental worlds beyond. In those strides he supports upon the earth and mid-world, — the earth the material, the mid-world the vital realms of Vayu, Lord of the dynamic Life-principle, — the triple heaven and its three luminous summits, *trīṇi rocanā*. These heavens the Rishi describes as the higher seat of the fulfilling. Earth, the midworld and heaven are the triple place of the conscious being's progressive self-fulfilling, *triṣadhasṭha*, earth the lower seat, the vital world the middle, heaven the higher. All these are contained in the threefold movement of Vishnu.<sup>1</sup>

But there is more; there is also the world where the self-fulfilment is accomplished, Vishnu's highest stride. In the second verse the seer speaks of it simply as "that"; "that" Vishnu, moving yet forward in his third pace affirms or firmly establishes, *pra stavate*, by his divine might. Vishnu is then described in language which hints at his essential identity with the terrible Rudra, the fierce and dangerous Lion of the worlds who begins in the evolution as the Master of the animal, Pashupati, and moves upward on the mountain of being on which he dwells, ranging through more and more difficult and inaccessible places, till he stands upon the summits. Thus in these three wide movements of Vishnu all the five worlds and their creatures have their habitation. Earth, heaven and "that" world of bliss are the three strides. Between earth and heaven is the Antariksha, the vital worlds, literally "the intervening habitation". Between heaven and the world of bliss is another vast Antariksha or intervening habitation, Maharloka, the world of the superconscient Truth of things.<sup>2</sup>

The force and the thought of man, the force that proceeds from Rudra the Mighty and the thought that proceeds from Brahmanaspati, the creative Master of the Word, have to go forward in the great journey for or towards this Vishnu who stands at the goal, on the summit, on the peak of the mountain. His is this wide universal movement; he is the Bull of the world who enjoys and fertilises all the energies of force and all the trooping herds of the thought. This far-flung extended space which appears to us as the world of our self-fulfilment, as the triple altar of the great sacrifice has been so measured out, so formed by only three strides of that almighty Infinite.<sup>3</sup>

All the three are full of the honey-wine of the delight of existence. All of them this Vishnu fills with his divine joy of being. By that they are eternally maintained and

1. *Viṣṇor nu kaṁ vīryāṇi pra vocaṁ, yaḥ pārthivāni vimame rajāṁsi; yo askabhāyad uttarāṁ sadhasṭhaṁ, vicakramāṇas tredhorugāyaḥ.*

2. *Pra tad viṣṇuḥ stavate vīryeṇa, mṛgo na bhūmaḥ kucaro giriṣṭhāḥ; yasyoruṣu triṣu vikramaṇeṣu, adhikṣiyanti bhuvanāni viśvā.*

3. *Pra viṣṇave śūṣam etu manma, girikṣita urugāyāya vṛṣṇe; ya idaṁ dīrghaṁ prayataṁ sadhasṭhaṁ, eko vimame tribhir it padebhiḥ.*



they do not waste or perish, but in the self-harmony of their natural movement have always the unfailing ecstasy, the imperishable intoxication of their wide and limitless existence. Vishnu maintains them unfailingly, preserves them imperishably. He is the One, he alone is, the sole-existing Godhead, and he holds in his being the triple divine principle to which we attain in the world of bliss, earth where we have our foundation and heaven also which we touch by the mental person within us. All the five worlds he upholds.<sup>4</sup> The *tridhātu*, the triple principle or triple material of existence, is the Sachchidananda of the Vedanta; in the ordinary language of the Veda it is *vasu*, substance, *ūrj*, abounding force of our being, *priyam* or *mayas*, delight and love in the very essence of our existence. Of these three things all that exists is constituted and we attain to their fullness when we arrive at the goal of our journey.

That goal is Delight, the last of Vishnu's three strides. The Rishi takes up the indefinite word "*tat*" by which he first vaguely indicated it; it signified the delight that is the goal of Vishnu's movement. It is the Ananda which for man in his ascent is a world in which he tastes divine delight, possesses the full energy of infinite consciousness, realises his infinite existence. There is that high-placed source of the honey-wine of existence of which the three strides of Vishnu are full. There the souls that seek the godhead live in the utter ecstasy of that wine of sweetness. There in the supreme stride, in the highest seat of wide-moving Vishnu is the fountain of the honey-wine, the source of the divine sweetness, — for that which dwells there is the Godhead, the Deva, the perfect Friend and Lover of the souls that aspire to him, the unmoving and utter reality of Vishnu to which the wide-moving God in the cosmos ascends.<sup>5</sup>

These are the two, Vishnu of the movement here, the eternally stable, bliss-enjoying Deva there, and it is those supreme dwelling-places of the Twain, it is the triple world of Sachchidananda which we desire as the goal of this long journey, this great upward movement. It is thither that the many-horned herds of the conscious Thought, the conscious Force are moving — that is the goal, that is their resting-place. There in those worlds, gleaming down on us here, is the vast, full, illimitable shining of the supreme stride, the highest seat of the wide-moving Bull, master and leader of all those many-horned herds, — Vishnu the all-pervading, the cosmic Deity, the Lover and Friend of our souls, the Lord of the transcendent existence and the transcendent delight.<sup>6</sup>

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Secret of the Veda*, CWSA, Vol. 15, pp. 343-50)

4. *Yasya trī pūrṇā madhunā padāni, akṣyamāṇā svadhayā madanti; ya u tridhātu pṛthivīm uta dyām, eko dādharma bhuvanāni viśvā.*

5. *Tad asya priyam abhi pātho aśyām, naro yatra devayavo madanti; urukramasya sa hi bandhur itthā, viṣṇoḥ pade parama madhva utsaḥ.*

6. *Tā vām vāstūni uśmasi gamadhyai, yatra gāvo bhūriṣṛṅgā ayāsaḥ; atrāha tad urugāyasya vṛṣṇaḥ, paramaṁ padam ava bhāti bhūri.*

## ‘NA KARMA LIPYATE NARE’

... But in that case we are eternally bound by the chain of our works, nailed helplessly to the wheel of karma? Not so; for the wheel of karma is an error and the chain of our works is a grand illusion. “Action clingeth not to a man.” Bondage is not the result of works, & liberation is not the result of cessation of works. Bondage is a state of the mind; liberation is another state of the mind. When through the principle of desire in the mind the soul, the Ish, the lord, mixes himself up in the whirl of Prakriti, he sees himself in mental consciousness as if carried forward in the stream of causality; he seems to the mind in him to be bound by the effects of his works; when he relinquishes desire, then he recovers his lordship — which in his higher being he has never lost — and appears to himself what he has always been in reality, free in his being, swarat, samrat. It follows then that the way to liberate oneself is not to renounce works but to rise from mind to Supra-mind, from the consciousness of mental being, sambhava, to the consciousness of self-being, swayambhava or asambhuti. It is necessary to remember oneself, but it is not necessary to forget phenomena. For action is the movement of Prakriti and the chain of action is nothing more terrible or mystic than the relation of cause & effect. That chain does not bind the Master; action leaves no stain on the soul. The works of the liberated man produce an effect indeed, but on the stream of Prakriti, not on the soul which is above its action and not under it, uses action & is not victimised by it, determines action & is not determined by it. But if action in its nature bound the soul, then freedom here would be impossible. It does not & cannot; the soul allows mind to mix itself up with its works, buddhir lipyate, but the action does not adhere to the soul, na karma lipyate nare. The fear of action is Maya; the impossibility of combining action with calm & renunciation is a false sanskara. Nivritti or calm is the eternal state & very nature of the soul, pravritti is in manifestation the eternal state and very nature of Prakriti. Their coexistence & harmony is not only possible, but it is the secret of the world obscured only by ignorance in the mind. The enemy therefore is not action, but ignorance; not works bind us, but works done in the state of ignorance give us the illusion of bondage. The idea of separateness, of limitation with its fruit of desire, internal struggle, disappointment, grief, pain, — this alone is our stumbling block. Abolish it, see God alone everywhere & all difficulty disappears. Nivritti & Pravritti, tyaga & bhoga move harmoniously to the perfect fulfilment of the divine purpose.

Those important enunciations completed, the Sage proceeds to a minor, but not inessential effect of the knowledge he is developing — the life after this one which we have to use here, our progress into worlds beyond. The gati, trans-mortal journey or destination of the soul, occupied profoundly the Vedantic mind as it has occupied humanity in all except in its brief periods of entire materialistic this-worldliness. As

yet the Sage does not proceed to any positive statement; but by a negative movement he indicates the importance of the question. Our life here is only one circumstance in our progress — the fundamental circumstance, indeed, since earth is the pratistha or pedestal of our consciousness in manifest being, — but still the fundamental is not the final, the pratistha is not the consummation but only the means to the consummation. It is the first step in our journey, the initial movement in the triple stride of Vishnu. There is beyond it a second step, from which we constantly return till we are ready here for the third, for the consummation. Our future state depends on our fullness at the time of our passage, on our harmonious progress towards divine being. That is the hidden thing in us which we have to develop. We are to become atmavan, to possess our divine being, to disengage & fulfil our real self. Those who fall from this development, who turn aside from it are self-hurters or, to take the full vigorous sense of the word used, self-slayers. Not that God in us can be slain, for death of the soul is impossible, — but there may be temporary perdition of the apparent divinity by the murder of its self-expression. And to this we may arrive either by wilfulness of passion or by intellectual wilfulness. Instead of becoming gods, Suras, images of the Most High, the Paratpara Purusha in His effulgent glory, we may become misrepresentations of Him, false because distorted images, distorted by imperfection, distorted by one-sidedness, Titans, Asuras or else souls unilluminated by the sun of Knowledge & if illumined at all then only by false lights which eventually become eclipsed in darkness. Our after state will be Asurya, sunless, unilluminated.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Isha Upanishad*, CWSA, Vol. 17, pp. 384-86)



## **THREE STEPS IN THE SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE OF SELF**

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

by bridging the remoteness of our individuality in Nature from the Divine Being who is the omnipresent Reality in Nature and above Nature.

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

SRI AUROBINDO

*(The Life Divine, CWSA, Vol. 22, pp. 653-55)*



**‘ . . . ALL THIS ENORMOUS UNIVERSE  
IS ONLY AN ATOM OF THY ETERNAL WILL ’**

**August 2, 1914**

What are these powerful gods whose hour of manifestation upon earth has come, if not the varied and perfected modes of Thy infinite activity, O Thou Master of all things, Being and Non-Being and What is beyond, Marvellous Unknowable One, our sovereign Lord? . . .

What are these manifold brilliant intellectual activities, these countless sunbeams illumining, conceiving and fashioning all forms, if not one of the modes of being of Thy infinite Will, one of the means of Thy manifestation, O Thou Master of our destinies, sole unthinkable Reality, sovereign Lord of all that is and all that is not yet. . . .

And all these mental powers, all these vital energies, and all these material elements, what are they if not Thyself in Thy outermost form, Thy ultimate modes of expression, of realisation, O Thou whom we adore devotedly and who escapest us on every side even while penetrating, animating and guiding us, Thou whom we cannot understand or define or name, Thou whom we cannot seize or embrace or conceive, and who art yet realised in our smallest acts. . . .

And all this enormous universe is only an atom of Thy eternal Will.

In the immensity of Thy effective Presence all things blossom!

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 214)*



## A CONVERSATION OF 1 AUGUST 1956

*Sweet Mother, does the worship offered to the goddess Durga and to Kali have any spiritual value?*

That depends on who offers the worship.

It is not that which is of importance for the spiritual value. For the integrality and the complete truth of the Yoga it is important not to limit one's aspiration to one form or another. But from the spiritual point of view, whatever the object of worship, if the movement is perfectly sincere, if the self-giving is integral and absolute, the spiritual result can be the same; for, whatever object you take, through it — sometimes in spite of it, despite it — you always reach the supreme Reality, in the measure and proportion of the sincerity of your consecration.

That is why it is always said that, no matter what aspect of the Divine you adore or even what guide you choose, if you are perfect in your self-giving and absolutely sincere, you are *sure* to attain the spiritual goal.

But the result is no longer the same when you want to realise the integral yoga. Then you must not limit yourself in any way, even in the path of your consecration. . . . Only, these are two very different things.

Spiritual realisation — as it was formerly understood, as it is still commonly understood — is union with the Supreme in some way or other, either within you or through some form or other; it is the fusion of your being with the Supreme, with the Absolute, almost the disappearance of your individuality in this fusion.<sup>1</sup> And that depends absolutely on the sincerity and the integrality of your self-giving, rather than on the choice you make of that to which you want to give yourself. For . . . the very sincerity of your aspiration will make you cross all limitations and find the Supreme, for you carry Him within yourself.

Whether you seek Him outside, whether you seek Him within, whether you seek Him in a form or without form, if your aspiration is sincere enough and your resolution sincere enough, you are sure to reach the goal.

But if you want to make the complementary movement of which Sri Aurobindo speaks, that is to say, to return to the outer consciousness and world after having realised this union in yourself, and transform this outer consciousness and world, then in this case you cannot limit yourself in any way, for otherwise you will not be

1. Later a disciple asked Mother: "Why did you say 'almost'? Isn't then the disappearance complete?" To which Mother answered: "Somewhere, I believe it is in 'The Yoga of Self-Perfection' [*The Synthesis of Yoga*], regarding those who wish to merge in the Supreme, Sri Aurobindo says or rather hints that this cannot be done, for the Supreme wants it otherwise. But Sri Aurobindo says it without saying it, it is just an allusion in passing. The idea is that beyond Being and Non-Being, the total Summit necessarily includes a form — what might be called an essential form — of the individuality, which no longer contradicts or is even distinct from the One, but is included in the One without any separation. But the words at our disposal mean nothing! And one is reduced to giving a childish explanation. That is why I said 'almost'."



able to accomplish your work.

Essentially, you must be able to find this oneness with the Divine in all forms, all aspects, in every way that has been used to reach Him. And you must go beyond that and find a new way.

So, the first point to clear up in your thought — and it is a point of capital importance: you must not confuse the integral yoga with other spiritual realisations, which may be very high but cover a very limited field, for theirs is a movement only in depth.

You may pierce a hole, you see, with your aspiration and make a movement in depth through anything at all. All depends on the intensity and sincerity of your aspiration — on the sincerity, that is to say, on how far your self-giving is complete, integral, absolute. But it does not depend on the form you have chosen: necessarily, you will have to pass through in order to find what is behind.

But if you want to transform your nature and your being, and if you want to participate in the creation of a new world, then this aspiration, this sharp and linear point is no longer enough. One must include everything and contain everything in one's consciousness.

Naturally, that is much more difficult.

*Mother, what is this “divine element in human nature” which always demands symbols for the completeness of its spiritual satisfaction?*

What?

*Which demands a form, an expression in form.*

Oh! what I have just read to you today?<sup>2</sup>

2. “In any cult the symbol, the significant rite or expressive figure is not only a moving and enriching aesthetic element, but a physical means by which the human being begins to make outwardly definite the emotion and aspiration of his heart, to confirm it and to dynamise it. For if without a spiritual aspiration worship is meaningless and vain, yet the aspiration also without the act and the form is a disembodied and, for life, an incompletely effective power. It is unhappily the fate of all forms in human life to become crystallised, purely formal and therefore effete, and although form and cult preserve always their power for the man who can still enter into their meaning, the majority come to use the ceremony as a mechanical rite and the symbol as a lifeless sign, and because that kills the soul of religion, cult and form have in the end to be changed or thrown aside altogether. There are those even to whom all cult and form are for this reason suspect and offensive; but few can dispense with the support of outward symbols and, even, a certain divine element in human nature demands them always for the completeness of its spiritual satisfaction. Always the symbol is legitimate in so far as it is true, sincere, beautiful and delightful, and even one may say that a spiritual consciousness without any aesthetic or emotional content is not entirely or at any rate not integrally spiritual. In the spiritual life the basis of the act is a spiritual consciousness perennial and renovating, moved to express itself always in new forms or able to renew the truth of a form always by the flow of the spirit, and to so express itself and make every action a living symbol of some truth of the soul is the very nature of its creative vision and impulse. It is so that the spiritual seeker must deal with life and transmute its form and glorify it in its essence.” — Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 163-64

It is precisely that part of the being which is not satisfied with abstractions and with escaping from life and evading it and leaving it as it is. It is that part of the being which wants to be integral, wants to be integrally transformed or at any rate to participate integrally in the inner adoration.

In every normal being there is the necessity, the need — an absolute need to translate into a physical form what he feels and wants internally. I consider those who always want to evade life in order to have self-realisation as abnormal and incomplete. And in fact, these are usually weak natures. But those who have strength, force and a kind of healthy equilibrium in themselves, feel an absolute need to realise materially their spiritual realisation; they are not satisfied with going away into the clouds or into worlds where forms no longer exist. They must have their physical consciousness and even their body participate in their inner experience.

Now, it may be said that the need to adopt or follow or participate in a religion as it is found all ready-made, arises rather from the “herd instinct” in human beings. The true thing would be for each one to find that form of adoration or cult which is his own and expresses spontaneously and individually his own special relation with the Divine; that would be the ideal condition.

To adopt a religion because one is born in that religion or because the people one loves and trusts practise that religion or because when one goes to a particular place where others pray and worship, one feels helped in one’s own prayer and worship, is not the sign of a very strong nature; I should say it is rather the sign of a weakness or at any rate of a lack of originality.

But to want to translate into the forms of one’s physical life the inner aspiration and adoration is quite legitimate, and it is much more sincere than what is done by a man who splits himself into two, leads a physical life quite mechanically and ordinarily and, when he can do it, when he has the time or when it suits him, withdraws within himself, escapes from physical life and the physical consciousness and goes to far-off heights to find his spiritual joys.

Someone who tries to make his material life the expression of his highest aspiration is certainly more noble, more upright and sincere in character than a man who splits himself into two saying that the outer life is of no importance and will never change and must be accepted as it is, and that, in reality only the inner attitude counts.

*(Silence)*

My file of questions is increasing! And I must say they are not all equally interesting; but still, I could perhaps take one or two of them for the satisfaction of those who have asked them.

First, some of you have got into the habit of sending me questions without signing them, for fear that I may reveal the identity of the one who has asked

the question! I shall never reveal it, you may rest assured; and even if I make an unpleasant remark, nobody will know who it is for! (*Laughter*)

There is another thing. Some of you don't take the trouble of asking your questions in French. As I did not give you notice openly that I would reply only to questions in French, I have translated one or two of them for the moment; but in future, if you want me to consider your questions, they must be expressed in French. Even if there are many mistakes, it does not matter, I shall correct them!

Here is one which has been asked in English, to which the answer is very short. I am asked:

*“What is the fundamental virtue to be cultivated in order to prepare for the spiritual life?”*

I have said this many times, but this is an opportunity to repeat it: it is *sincerity*.

A sincerity which must become total and absolute, for sincerity *alone* is your protection on the spiritual path. If you are not sincere, at the very next step you are sure to fall and break your head. All kinds of forces, wills, influences, entities are there, on the look-out for the least little rift in this sincerity and they immediately rush in through that rift and begin to throw you into confusion.

Therefore, before doing anything, beginning anything, trying anything, be sure *first of all* that you are not only as sincere as you can be, but have the intention of becoming still more so.

For that is your only protection.

*Can this effort to cultivate this initial virtue be a collective one?*

Certainly it can. And this is what used to be attempted long ago in the schools of initiation. Even now, in more or less secret societies or very small groups, the collectivity seeks to be sufficiently united and to make a collective effort sufficiently complete for the result to be a group result instead of an individual one.

But naturally, that complicates the problem terribly. . . . Each time they meet, they try to create a collective entity; but for a virtue to be collectively realised, a tremendous effort is required. However, it is not impossible.

*(Silence)*

I have been asked another question which is a little more subtle, but it seems to me it has quite a special interest. . . . Somebody asks what is the true intensity for wanting the Divine, in the will to unite with the Divine. And then this person says that he has found within himself two different modes of aspiration, especially in the intensity of aspiration for the Divine: in one of these movements there is a sort of anguish, like

a poignant pain, in the other, there is an anxiety, but at the same time a great joy.

This observation is quite correct.

And the question is this:

*“When do we feel this intensity mixed with anguish, and when the intensity containing joy?”*

I don't know if several or many of you have a similar experience, but it is very real, this experience, very spontaneous. And the answer is very simple.

As soon as the presence of the psychic consciousness is united with the aspiration, the intensity takes on quite a different character, as if it were filled with the very essence of an inexpressible joy. This joy is something that seems contained in everything else. Whatever may be the outer form of the aspiration, whatever difficulties and obstacles it may meet, this joy is there as though it filled up everything, and it carries you in spite of everything.

That is the sure sign of the psychic presence. That is to say, you have established a contact with your psychic consciousness, a more or less complete, more or less constant contact, but at that moment it is the psychic being, the psychic consciousness which fills your aspiration, gives it its true contents. And that's what is translated into joy.

When that is not there, the aspiration may come from different parts of the being; it may come mainly from the mind or mainly from the vital or even from the physical, or it may come from all the three together — it may come from all kinds of combinations. But in general, for the intensity to be there, the vital must be present. It is the vital which gives the intensity; and as the vital is at the same time the seat of most of the difficulties, obstacles, contradictions, it is the friction between the intensity of the aspiration and the intensity of the difficulty which creates this anguish.

This is no reason to stop one's aspiration.

You must know, you must understand the reason for this anguish. And then, if you can introduce just one more element in your aspiration, that is, your trust in the divine Grace, trust in the divine Response, it counterbalances all possible anguish and you can aspire without any disturbance or fear.

This brings us to something else, which is not positively a question, but a request for an explanation, a comment or a development of the subject. It is about Grace.

I have said somewhere, or maybe written, that no matter how great your faith and trust in the divine Grace, no matter how great your capacity to see it at work in all circumstances, at every moment, at every point in life, you will never succeed in understanding the marvellous immensity of Its Action, and the precision, the exactitude with which this Action is accomplished; you will never be able to grasp to what extent the Grace does everything, is behind everything, organises

everything, conducts everything, so that the march forward to the divine realisation may be as swift, as complete, as total and harmonious as possible, considering the circumstances of the world.

As soon as you are in contact with It, there is not a second in time, not a point in space, which does not show you *dazzlingly* this perpetual work of the Grace, this constant intervention of the Grace.

And once you have seen this, you feel you are never equal to it, for you should never forget it, never have any fears, any anguish, any regrets, any recoils . . . or even suffering. If one were in union with this Grace, if one saw It everywhere, one would begin living a life of exultation, of all-power, of infinite happiness.

And that would be the best possible collaboration in the divine Work.

THE MOTHER

(*Questions and Answers 1956*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 8, pp. 243-50)



## SRI AUROBINDO — HIS ACTION

### The power of Sri Aurobindo's thought

... Yes. In fifty years the whole world, all the receptive section of humanity (I am not saying intellectual, I am saying receptive), all the receptive section of the world will be embraced — not “embraced”: absorbed in the power of Sri Aurobindo's thought.

Those who already are have the good fortune of being the first ones, that's all.

(From a conversation with a disciple on 16 February 1972)

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### Sri Aurobindo's Force on his centenary

*(Mother listens to a reading of a letter from a disciple who had felt a specially strong descent of force and was asking if it was related to the new year.)*

It is related to the year of Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo's Force will exert a pressure this year. I felt it immediately, on the very first of January. A strong pressure from his force, his consciousness, like this (*Mother lowers both arms*).

(From a conversation with a disciple on 5 January 1972)

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### New Year message on Sri Aurobindo's centenary

Without the Divine we are limited, incompetent and helpless beings; with the Divine, if we give ourselves entirely to Him, all is possible and our progress is limitless.

A special help has come upon the earth for Sri Aurobindo's centenary year; let us take advantage of it to overcome the ego and emerge into the light.

BONNE ANNÉE

1 January 1972  
(CWM, Vol. 13, p. 16)

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### **When Sri Aurobindo left his body he said that he would not abandon us**

When Sri Aurobindo left his body he said that he would not abandon us. And in truth, during these twenty-one years, he has always been with us, guiding and helping all those who are receptive and open to his influence.

In this year of his centenary, his help will be stronger still. It is up to us to be more open and to know how to take advantage of it. The future is for those who have the soul of a hero. The stronger and more sincere our faith, the more powerful and effective will be the help received.

(From a conversation with a disciple on 2 January 1972)

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### **Sri Aurobindo possesses more power for action now than when he was in his body**

You have nothing to ask?

*I asked myself a question about Sri Aurobindo. I wanted to know at what point he had arrived when he passed away — at what point of transformation. What difference in the work, for example, is there between what you are doing now and what he was doing at that time?*

He had gathered in his body a great amount of supramental force and as soon as he left . . . You see, he was lying on his bed, I stood by his side, and in a way altogether concrete — concrete with such a strong sensation as to make one think that it could be seen — all this supramental force which was in him passed from his body into mine. And I felt the friction of the passage. It was extraordinary — extraordinary. It was an extraordinary experience. For a long time, a long time like that (*Mother indicates the passing of the Force into her body*). I was standing beside his bed, and that continued.

Almost a sensation — it was a material sensation.

For a long time.

That is all I know.

*But what I wanted to understand is at what point of the inner work was, for example, the cleaning of the subconscious and all that? What difference is there, say, between the work he had done at that time and the work to which you have come now? I mean to say, is the subconscious less subconscious or . . .*



Oh! Yes, that, surely. Surely.

Well, this is the mental way of looking at things — I do not have it any more.

*Yes, Mother.*

(*Silence*)

*The difference is perhaps a difference in the general or collective intensity of this Power, of this Force, is it not so?*

There is a difference in the *power* for action. He himself possesses more action, more power for action, now than when in his body. Besides, it is for that that he left, because it was necessary to act in that way.

It is very concrete. His action has become very concrete. Evidently it is something which is not at all mental. It is from another region. But it is not ethereal nor . . . it is concrete. One could almost say that it is material.

*But this other region, I have often asked myself what is the true movement one must make to get there. There are two possible movements: the movement inward towards the soul, and another in which the individuality is annulled and one is rather in a wideness without the individual. . . .*

Both must be there.

*Both must be there?*

Yes.

(CWM, Vol. 11, pp. 328-29)



## “VIOLET WISDOM” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

Some more blank verses, suggested by a line put aside from a recent poem of mine. What do you think of their quality and atmosphere?

### VIOLET WISDOM

| A violet wisdom gathers in cool eve  
| { Calming  
| To hush<sup>1</sup> the loud day's many-coloured thought.  
| Hushing  
| Now<sup>2</sup> the whole wandering universe sleeps one:  
| Purple the tree and purple every bird  
| And even flight is but vague flower thrown  
| From boughs of vaguenesses. | The gloamy hour  
| Brings all far beauty close by some mauve throb  
| Of inner vigil echoed everywhere.  
| Desire lies numb, for distances are nought:  
| flame  
| The walls of varied fires<sup>3</sup> drop down awhile,  
| { Swept by  
| Sunk<sup>4</sup> to one single love's immensity.  
| Submerged by a

[*Amal's questions written in the margins:*]

1. Of course, if a present participle is used, there will be a comma after “eve”. What about “To calm” in place of “To hush”?
2. I don't suppose it's necessary to write “Then” instead of “Now”?
3. Should the word chosen here be in the singular or the plural?
4. Please cancel what you reject.

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

1. Yes.
2. No.

[*Line 5:*] It should surely be “a vague flower”.

3. Singular certainly. [*fires crossed out*]
4. [*“Swept by” and “Submerged by a” crossed out*]

Very fine. I think you have mastered the blank verse movement; the movement here is faultless and very skilful. A fine poem. I mark the outstanding lines [1, 4-6, 7-8, *last*], but all have their quality.

2 April 1937

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(Version from *The Secret Splendour — Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna [Amal Kiran]*, 1993 Ed., p. 50)

### VIOLET WISDOM

A violet wisdom gathers in cool eve  
 To calm the loud day's many-coloured thought.  
 Now the whole wandering universe sleeps — one:  
 Purple the tree and purple every bird  
 And even flight is a vague flower thrown  
 From boughs of vaguenesses. The gloamy hour  
 Brings all far beauty close by some mauve throb  
 Of inner vigil echoed everywhere.  
 Desire lies numb, for distances are nought:  
 The walls of varied flame drop down awhile,  
 Sunk to one single Love's immensity.

AMAL KIRAN  
 (K. D. SETHNA)

*Poetry, or at any rate a truly poetic poetry, comes always from some subtle plane through the creative vital and uses the outer mind and other external instruments for transmission only.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Letters on Poetry and Art*, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 5)

## SAHANA'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO — II

(Continued from the issue of September 2022)

*There was a proposal to translate into Bengali Sri Aurobindo's small book, Six Poems . . . The one I was to translate was "In Horis Aeternum" — a very difficult poem. I had much doubt if I could cope with it. . . .*

*Sri Aurobindo gave his consent and I started with great zeal. Often I had to seek his help regarding many points. I quote here a few instances of the exchanges.*

*"Your 'In Horis Aeternum', " I wrote, "has put me to a lot of trouble. . . . Many people are discouraging me saying that this poem is very difficult, almost impossible to translate. . . . Please tell me frankly — so that I may not stick on to something which is impossible."*

*Sri Aurobindo's reply:*

The poem is not at all easy to translate, but one cannot say that it is impossible, one can always try provided one is prepared not to mind if it is a failure or half-success. To try sometimes even impossible things can be a very good training for the capacity.

*Translation of Mother's writing and of yours can never be equivalent to the original, nobody expects it. But whatever approximation is possible, whatever inspiration can be received should be enough so long as the thought and movement are preserved.*

Yes. A complete equivalent is not likely — but something approximative can be done.

*One thing: I am doing my translation in blank verse. Dilip objects strongly to it. He says that without rhyme it won't do. Do you have the same view?*

If it can be done in rhyme so much the better — as the original is in rhyme. But if not, it can be tried in blank verse. The form will not be the same, but to keep something of the movement may not be impossible.

*I am rewriting it, in rhyme. It appears very difficult, but very attractive too. A great urge is pressing me and I am trying hard. . . . Please give me light,*

*inspiration. Whether I can do it or not, the very attempt to do your things gives me great joy. I feel as if I am always in contact with you. The consciousness remains turned upward, and there is a strange feeling of some inner change. That is why I want to continue and can't give up though I can't do it well. And I am troubling you for nothing. Again, I want to know more clearly if in these two lines*

*Over its head like a gold ball the sun tossed by the gods in their play  
Follows its curve,*

*the second 'its' refers to the sun.*

It is the sun's own curve.

*I have done some parts. May I send them to you as samples so that you may decide if it will do?*

Yes, you can send.

*I sent the samples. On seeing them, Sri Aurobindo wrote:*

You have made an excellent start.

*Please explain to me this line I have marked. I can't get the full sense of it:*

*Something that waits, something that wanders and settles not, a Nothing that was all and is found.*

*Sri Aurobindo replied in Bengali, which may be translated thus:*

The sense is: something ineffable — as if it is nothing *asat*, yet it is everything, contains everything — it was not, yet it can be obtained, and once obtained, everything is obtained. I don't know if I have made it clear.

*The last line as I have translated it doesn't satisfy me at all. Something is missing. I have made changes; Dilip wants further changes and is helping me too. He has changed the last three words, I am sending them. If you think that Dilip's version is better, that will be kept.*

I cannot say that I approve of either of Dilip's last words or any of the other alterations suggested by you or Nolini. All seem to miss the mark.

*However, finally after many changes the poem took shape. Dilip worked hard at it. Nolini and Dilip encouraged and helped to make possible what was really impossible. Dilip himself wrote a letter to Sri Aurobindo after the completion. It will be seen from Sri Aurobindo's reply how patiently he saw our work and taught and helped us.*

*Dilip wrote:*

*"I feel the last verse makes very clear meaning anyway, but since Sahana is not pleased with it and she has been labouring at it for days, I think I may have mistaken your meaning. Doubtless, the 'Something' I could not keep as I took it to mean that the passing moment reflects the Eternal when 'Caught by the spirit in sense'. Tell me therefore — O Lord, I must stop."*

*Sri Aurobindo's reply:*

Dilip,

I think it is a very fine rendering.

In line 4 however I would note that there is no reference to day as a movement of time but one to the noon, the day as sunlit space rather than time, it is the fixed moment, as it were, the motionless scene of noon. The eye is of course the sun itself. I mark by the dash that I have finished with my first symbol of the gold ball and go off to a second, quite different one.

In the last line your translation is indeed very clear and precise in meaning, but it is perhaps too precise — the "something" twice repeated is meant to give a sense of just the opposite, an imprecise unseizable something which is at once nothing and all things at a time. It is found no doubt in the momentary things and all is there but the finding is less definite than your translation suggests. But the expression নাস্তিরূপে ছিল যে সর্বাস্তি is very good.

One point more. "Caught by the spirit in sense" means "there is a spirit in sense (sense not being sense alone) that catches the eternal out of the perishable hours in these things."

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*We . . . used to write daily at a fixed hour and invoke Sri Aurobindo's inspiration before doing it. It was done as a part of our Sadhana. What we wanted was that our poetry should be cast and shaped from its very roots by his inspiration. A new zeal and taste carried us forward. When a poem was finished, how eagerly we sent it to Sri Aurobindo and how expectantly we waited for his reply which*

*Nolini used to bring the next morning! It was his duty to deliver letters at every house by 7 a.m. With Sri Aurobindo's touch and his remarks the poems would come back filling our beings with an uncommon exhilaration. Sometimes he would say "Good", "Fine" or even "Very beautiful" about my poems. As his appreciation increased, so did my joy. . . .*

*One can almost say he led us onward, holding us by the hand. We were making various experiments with poetry, not regarding the poetic beauty alone, but regarding the rhythm too. The more we entered into the rhythmic varieties the more was the enjoyment. . . . We realised that the knowledge of rhythm intensifies this delight.*

*Feeling and beauty of words apart, the swing of chhanda, which was something unknown before, gave a new taste, an increased pleasure in poetry. I had loved poetry always but I did not know it had so many aspects to delight us. As I proceeded onward, a door suddenly opened, as it were, of an unknown house and lines of English poetry began to come. Most incredible! I was astonished. I knew very little English, yet the lines were coming in that tongue. I set them down in this form:*

*Mother, in my deep heart I find  
A jewel shines amidst the night,  
When all the mortal senses are blind  
It speaks to the stars of unknown height.*

*Mother, a flame of love so sweet  
Sways along the path of gold  
And rises to touch your heavenly feet  
Where sun and moon and stars you mould.*

*Mother, a flower of eternity  
Unfolds its petals within my soul.  
I sing to the light that unveils to me  
The Crystal tower, your shining goal.*

*Mother, in my precious secret spot,  
I am nestled on your breast alone  
Where all my parts are gathered and brought  
Before the dream of your opening-dawn.*

*Nirod took my poem to Sri Aurobindo, since by then all correspondence had come to a stop. Sri Aurobindo corrected it like this:*

Mother! deep in my heart I find  
 A jewel glimmering in the night,  
 When every mortal sense is blind  
 It speaks to stars of unknown height.

Mother! a love-flame swift and sweet  
 Swaying along the path of gold,  
 It rises to your heavenly feet  
 Where sun and moon and stars you mould.

Mother! the flower of eternity  
 Unfolds its petals in my soul,  
 I sing to its light that unveils to me  
 A crystal tower, your shining goal.

Mother! in a lonely secret spot  
 I am cradled on your breast alone  
 Where all of me is gathered, brought  
 Into your dream of opening-Dawn.

\*

*Another incident to note. I was working in the Building Department, supervising the repair and construction of houses, and dealing with workers. One day when I was inspecting the repair of a house called Nanteuil House, one line in English began to hover around me:*

*Travels from height to height unseen.*

*Well, I was puzzled; neither could I drive it away, it would insist on coming back. So I started jotting down lines just as they flowed in. Here they are after Sri Aurobindo's correction:*

An emerald-soul of peaks within  
 Travels from height to height unseen;  
 The shadow of the Infinite falls on earth's pain  
 A golden desire, a heavenly rain.  
 Transcendent of Time's moments, power  
 Comes encircling the eternal hour.  
 The sun above, the moon below,  
 Unheard foot-falls come soft and slow,



A bell rings from Eternity:  
Whirling the Almighty's power, She  
Creates a land of blue and white  
Within the smoke and doze of night:  
She comes in her golden robe of fire  
To release God-music from earth's lyre.

\*

*After a few days, as I sat down to write, I found that like the English poem some lines in Bengali were coming whose meaning was unintelligible to me. It seemed very strange and intricate since Bengali was my own native tongue. However, I went on writing and tearing up as things seemed to have no head or tail. For six days I continued in this way till I met Nirod and said to him, "What is all this happening to me? Can you tell me?" He said, "Can you recite some lines?" I did that quite easily, for they had become so natural after so many days of repetition. He heard them and said, "They are oceans of mystic lines. Don't throw away. Finish them as they come and give them to me. I shall show them to Sri Aurobindo."*

*With a wild fervour, I finished the poem. Though it was all Greek, it read well and I felt something, as if there was some stuff in it. Nirod showed it to Sri Aurobindo and, before I had time to ask him, he said: "Sri Aurobindo read your poem and said, 'If Sahana throws away such inspiration, then what's the use of giving her inspiration?'" And when Nirod reported the meaning of the poem as explained by Sri Aurobindo I was not only astonished, I became speechless and wondered how the mysteries of the unseen world could pass through my pen.*

\*

*Here I shall quote in translation a small letter of Sri Aurobindo written in Bengali in the margin of a letter by me:*

Ego doesn't go all at once, but it can be gradually diminished and made weaker — especially as more and more the inner feeling increases, thinner and thinner becomes the small self.

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*. . . one day I began to sing some of my compositions to see how they had fared. I was astonished to find that these songs appeared very unfamiliar to me, as if they had been composed by another person. . . . I wondered how a known thing*

*could become so strangely unknown. So I wrote about it to Sri Aurobindo and he replied:*

. . . As you have opened yourself to the Force and made yourself a channel for the energy of work, it is quite natural that when you wanted to do this musical work the Force should flow and act in the way that is wanted or the way that is needed and for the effect that is needed. When one has made oneself a channel, the Force is not necessarily bound by the limitations or disabilities of the instrument; it can disregard them and act in its own power. In doing so it may use the instrument simply as a medium and leave him as soon as the work is finished just what he was before, incapable in his own ordinary moments of doing such good work; but also it may by its action set the instrument right, accustom it to the necessary intuitive knowledge and movements so that it can at will command the action of the Force. As for the technique, there are two different things, the intellectual knowledge which one applies, the intuitive cognition which acts in its own right, even if it is not actually possessed by the worker. Many poets for instance have little knowledge of metrical or linguistic technique and cannot explain how they write or what are the qualities and elements of their success, but they write all the same things that are perfect in rhythm and language. Intellectual knowledge helps of course, provided one does not make of it a mere device or a rigid fetter. There are some arts that cannot be done well without some technical knowledge, e.g., painting and sculpture.

What you write is your own in the sense that you have been the instrument of its manifestation — that is so with every artist or worker. You need have no scruple about putting your name, though of course for sadhana it is necessary to recognise that the real power was not yourself and you were simply the instrument on which it played its tune.

The Ananda of creation is not the pleasure of the ego in having personally done well and being somebody; that is something extraneous which attaches itself to the joy of work and creation. The Ananda comes from the inrush of a greater Power, or the perfection that is being created. How far one feels it depends on the condition of the consciousness at that time, the thrill of being possessed and used by it, the *āvesh*, the exultation of the uplifting of the consciousness, its illumination and its heightened action and also the joy of the beauty, power or perfection that is being created.

How far one feels it depends on the condition of the consciousness at that time, the temperature, the activity of the vital. The yogi of course (even certain strong and calm minds) is not carried away by the Ananda he holds and watches it and there is no more excitement mixed with the flow of it through the mind, vital or body. Naturally the Ananda of *samarpan* or spiritual realisation or divine love is something far greater, but the Ananda of creation has its place.

\*

*As the consciousness gets gradually awakened because of our stay here, all of us can to a certain extent understand, if we are sincere, why we can do some things, why we cannot do other things and why, where and when we fail, though the help and force given by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are always standing behind all our effort and work like wakeful sentinels.*

*When one can throw oneself in the stream which the force of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo has set going in order to take us in a certain direction and is constantly striving to do so, strange things are found to take place. Firstly, life moves in another rhythm, it has another taste and one enters into another kind of existence. . . . One perceives clearly the truth that when the trial comes the mind cannot keep to the right attitude, and the result is failure and confusion. We realise that we have in fact lost our inner connection with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. . .*

*Regarding this condition, Sri Aurobindo wrote to me the following letter:*

The automatic tendency is a good sign as it shows that it is the inner being opening to the Truth which is pressing forward the necessary changes.

The attitude you describe (in regard to your going to X's) is quite the right one, — also in regard to Y's affair.

As you say, it is the failure of the right attitude that comes in the way of passing through ordeals to a change of nature. The pressure is becoming greater now for this change of character even more than for decisive Yoga experience — for if the experience comes it fails to be decisive because of the want of the requisite change of nature. The mind for instance gets the experience of the one in all, but the vital cannot follow because it is dominated by ego-reaction and ego-nature or the habits of the outer nature keep up a way of thinking, feeling, acting, living which is quite out of harmony with the experience. For the psychic and part of the mind and emotional being feel frequently the closeness of the Mother, but the rest of the nature is unoffered and goes its own way prolonging division from her nearness, creating distance. It is because the sadhaks have never even tried to have the Yogic attitude in all things — they have been contented with the common ideas, common view of things, common motives of life, only varied by inner experiences and transferred to the framework of the Ashram instead of that of the world outside. It is not enough and there is great need that it should change.

No, what I have written should not be sent to Z; for it was not meant for her. I am not her Guru and she has a right to her ignorance. I objected only to her trying to force it on one who has taken up the spiritual life. (9.9.36)

\*

*From all these letters and their answers one can have some idea of our mode of life; some aspects of it may also be grasped. What we usually write about are the events of the outer existence which may not give any true picture of the basic character of our life. Still, many hints regarding the inner life can be seen in the incidents of the outer existence. However, to write about sadhana is not my object. What I want to do is to write about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. So let me present them through their own letters which will give a better knowledge of our sadhana. Our hearts get filled up when we write about those blessed events — in them we feel their touch, their presence; we get an opportunity, while writing about their measureless grace, to recognise our gratitude to them and feel a new taste in it.*

*(To be continued)*

SAHANA

*(At the Feet of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo by Sahana; translated by Nirodbaran.)*

*... it is likely that such is the next higher state of consciousness of which Mind is only a form and veil, and through the splendours of that light may lie the path of our progressive self-enlargement into whatever highest state is humanity's ultimate resting-place.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Life Divine, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 7)*

## EARTH

I think of earth as the floor of a cathedral where altar and Presence are everywhere. This reverence came to me as a boy listening to the voice of birds one coloured evening in summer, when suddenly birds and trees and grass and tinted air and myself seemed but one mood or companionship, and I felt a certitude that the same spirit was in all. A little breaking of the barriers and being would mingle with being. Whitman writes of the earth that it is rude and incomprehensible at first. "But I swear to you," he cries, "that there are divine things well hidden."<sup>1</sup> Yet they are not so concealed that the lover may not discover them, and to the lover nature reveals herself like a shy maiden who is slowly drawn to one who adores her at a distance, and who is first acknowledged by a lifting of the veil, a long-remembered glance, a glimmering smile, and at last comes speech and the mingling of life with life. So the lover of Earth obtains his reward, and little by little the veil is lifted of an inexhaustible beauty and majesty. It may be he will be tranced in some spiritual communion, or will find his being overflowing into the being of the elements, or become aware that they are breathing their life into his own. Or Earth may become on an instant all faery to him, and earth and air resound with the music of its invisible people. Or the trees and rocks may waver before his eyes and become transparent, revealing what creatures were hidden from him by the curtain, and he will know as the ancients did of dryad and hamadryad, of genii of wood and mountain. Or earth may suddenly blaze about him with supernatural light in some lonely spot amid the hills, and he will find he stands as the prophet in a place that is holy ground, and he may breathe the intoxicating exhalations as did the sibyls of old. Or his love may hurry him away in dream to share in deeper mysteries, and he may see the palace chambers of nature where the wise ones dwell in secret, looking out over the nations, breathing power into this man's heart or that man's brain, on any who appear to their vision to wear the colour of truth. So gradually the earth lover realises the

1. Allons! whoever you are come travel with me!

Travelling with me you find what never tires.

The earth never tires,

The earth is rude, silent, incomprehensible at first, Nature is rude and incomprehensible at first,

Be not discouraged, keep on, there are divine things well envelop'd,

I swear to you there are divine things more beautiful than words can tell.

Allons! we must not stop here,

However sweet these laid-up stores, however convenient this dwelling we cannot remain here,

However shelter'd this port and however calm these waters we must not anchor here,

However welcome the hospitality that surrounds us we are permitted to receive it but a little while.

Walt Whitman: *Song of the Open Road*, Section 9

golden world is all about him in imperishable beauty, and he may pass from the vision to the profounder beauty of being, and know an eternal love is within and around him, pressing upon him and sustaining with infinite tenderness his body, his soul and his spirit. I have obscured the vision of that being by dilating too much on what was curious, but I desired to draw others to this meditation, if by reasoning it were possible to free the intellect from its own fetters, so that the imagination might go forth, as Blake says, "in uncurbed glory."<sup>2</sup> So I stayed the vision which might have been art, or the ecstasy which might have been poetry, and asked of them rather to lead me back to the ancestral fountain from which they issued. I think by this meditation we can renew for ourselves the magic and beauty of Earth, and understand the meaning of things in the sacred books which had grown dim. We have so passed away from vital contact with divine powers that they have become for most names for the veriest abstractions, and those who read do not know that the Mighty Mother is that Earth on which they tread and whose holy substance they call common clay; or that the Paraclete is the strength of our being, the power which binds atom to atom and Earth to Heaven: or that the Christos is the Magician of the Beautiful and that it is not only the Architect of the God-world but is that in us which sees beauty, creates beauty, and it is verily wisdom in us and is our deepest self; or that the Father is the fountain of substance and power and wisdom, and that we could not lift an eyelash but that we have our being in Him. When we turn from books to living nature we begin to understand the ancient wisdom, and it is no longer an abstraction, for the Great Spirit whose home is in the vast becomes for us a moving glamour in the heavens, a dropping tenderness at twilight, a visionary light in the hills, a voice in the heart, the Earth underfoot becomes sacred, and the air we breathe is like wine poured out for us by some heavenly cupbearer. As we grow intimate with earth we realise what sweet and august things await humanity when it goes back to that forgotten mother. Who would be ambitious, who would wish to fling a name like Caesar's in the air, if he saw what thrones and majesties awaited the heavenly adventurer? Who would hate if he could see beneath the husk of the body the spirit which is obscured and imprisoned there, and how it was brother to his own spirit and all were children of the King? Who would weary of nature or think it a solitude once the veil had been lifted for him, once he had seen that great glory? Would they not long all of them for the coming of that divine hour in the twilights of time, when out of rock, mountain, water, tree, bird, beast or man the seraph spirits of all that live shall emerge realising their kinship, and all together, fierce things made gentle, and timid things made bold, and small made great, shall return to the Father Being and

2. "Men are admitted into heaven not because they have curbed and governed their passions or have no passions, but because they have cultivated their understandings. The treasures of heaven are not negations of passion, but realities of intellect, from which all the passions emanate uncurbed in their eternal glory."

William Blake: *A Vision of the Last Judgement*

be made one in Its infinitudes. When we attain this vision nature will melt magically before our eyes, and powers that seem dreadful, things that seemed abhorrent in her, will reveal themselves as brothers and allies. Until then she is unmoved by our conflicts and will carry on her ceaseless labours. No sign is made while empires pass.

The flowers and stars are still His care,  
 The constellations hid in grass,  
 The golden miracles in air.  
 Life in an instant will be rent  
 When death is glittering, blind and wild,  
 The Heavenly Brooding is intent  
 To that last instant on Its child.  
 It breathes the glow in brain and heart.  
 Life is made magical.  
 Until Body and spirit are apart  
 The Everlasting works Its will.  
 In that wild orchid that your feet  
 In their next falling shall destroy,  
 Minute and passionate and sweet,  
 The Mighty Master holds His joy.  
 Though the crushed jewels droop and fade  
 The Artist's labours will not cease,  
 And from the ruins shall be made  
 Some yet more lovely masterpiece.

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(GEORGE WILLIAM RUSSELL)

(*The Candle of Vision*, Macmillan, London, 1920)

*Footnotes in this article are editorial additions. — Ed.*

*It is the individual being that is a portion of the Divine. The universal self or Atman which is the same in all, is not a portion but an aspect of the Divine.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Letters on Yoga – I*, CWSA, Vol. 28, p. 12)



# THE MAHABHARATA WAR AND SRI AUROBINDO: AN INNER CONVERSATION

## A TALK TO THE STUDENTS OF THE ASHRAM SCHOOL

I'd like to share with you a very interesting and illuminating "conversation" I had with Sri Aurobindo on the subject of the film, *Veer Bhimsen*, that we saw the other day. Since you were there in defiance of the heavy rain drenching you through and through, I was very happy to see that you still took great interest in our Puranic stories; you'd not become so modernised as to lose the taste of the glory that was India once and still is, though covered up with all that poverty and squalor.

At the beginning, as I was entering the Playground, there was a little bit of drizzling. I met Pranab at the gate and said, "Look!" He replied, "This drizzling doesn't matter. If it rains today, I'll put up the film tomorrow." His tone meant that if it rained tomorrow, he'd put it up the next day. You must have it. I don't know what exactly he liked most there. (*Laughter*) But probably, knowing him as I do, and being the great hero that he is, he must have taken an extraordinary delight in the audacious exploits of Gadadhar Bhim. You also have enjoyed the picture, I am sure, though what you liked most I can't tell, whether Bhim's 'gada' (mace), or Krishna's 'chakra' (discus) at the back of his head, or Draupadi's sad plight or else the dancing of the dwarf. Maybe if you ask me I'd tell you what I liked most. I liked all that you did, and the glimpse, as I first said, which I got of our former glory. Different people like different things for different reasons.

That reminds me of a story told by nobody else than Sri Ramakrishna. You know he was a very witty Avatar — all Avatars are witty — I being a disciple of a great Avatar must be expected to be at least half-witty. (*Laughter*) Now the story goes thus. There was once in some holy place a samkirtan path, kirtan, bhajan, devotional songs woven around Sri Krishna and Radha and the gopis, etc. So the passers-by were attracted by the kirtans. One of these passers-by, a very ordinary man of the village, came and sat there. He began to listen with rapt attention to the music. You know the various devotional attitudes and actions, tears particularly, and so this ordinary man began to shed tears profusely. Well, at the end of it all when he was asked what made him weep so much, he replied: "Babu, I liked it very much. You've seen by the shedding of my tears, it was wonderful!" "But what made you like it?" "When the singer was crying 'Bandhu he, bandhu he!' it reminded me of my beloved, so I began to shed tears out of joy."

So, ladies and gentlemen, the film must have gone home to people for various episodes. I for one divided my delight between Bhim's 'gada' and Krishna's 'chakra'. But somehow Sri Krishna was uppermost in my mind. I don't know if it has ever



occurred to you — to some it must have — that Sri Krishna whom you saw was no other than Sri Aurobindo. But that was what touched me most and I was constantly thinking: “Ah, so Sri Aurobindo came as Sri Krishna and did all this!” It gave me an immense pleasure to think, to see Him in the film so vividly. Although the film was somewhat crude, somewhat ludicrous, it came as a sort of a revelation. And I felt somehow, when I saw the battle of Kurukshetra, that all of us here must have taken part in that battle in which Krishna was Arjuna’s charioteer. We must have fought, we must have killed, we must have died, we must have lived. . . . That was the impression I had of that great holocaust as it passed before me on the screen.

My association with Sri Aurobindo (and prolonged service to Him) somehow corroborates and confirms this belief, this faith of mine that perhaps as a rat or a cat or at best a common soldier I might have been there, taking some part in it. So also all of you: either fighters or wives of fighters or sons or daughters of fighters. Some such connection must have been there either at Kurukshetra or somewhere else, which has brought all of us here. I think the Mother said once that we had all met before. Otherwise we would not have met today, in this field of yoga for transformation. That is my personal view.

Anyway, when I saw the film there were some questions that troubled me. Since I identified Sri Krishna with Sri Aurobindo, seeing Sri Krishna’s personality at that time and Sri Aurobindo’s personality as I knew it, I couldn’t reconcile the two. I had seen Sri Aurobindo as very gentle, nay tender, almost child-like, sometimes a ‘bholanath’, and here was a different person: a charioteer, a shrewd statesman, a man of action, an encourager of violence. As I was pondering all these points, turning them over in my mind, Sri Aurobindo appeared before me and I had a long conversation with Him, while I was seeing the film. The talk is somewhat long, so I’ll tell parts of it here and there because you don’t expect me to remember everything that I heard and talked about. Even as I was seeing the film I was asking questions. He was answering me, just as he uttered the Gita in the field of battle; so it was now, in a less exciting, less dangerous context.

“Well, Sir,” I asked Him, “all this carnage, all this massacre that I see perpetrated here, you are the author of all this. I will, however, come to it later on. Please tell me first why do you make the Pandavas suffer so much? — these Pandavas who were your devotees, who were your bhaktas, who were your friends, who have taken shelter for their life and death at your feet, for what capricious reason have you made them suffer so much?” Then, well, as I provoked Him, He also in provoking tones answered: “You should have known by now that those who love me, and those whom I love, suffer most.” I muttered, “Strange idea of love!” (*Laughter*) Then He said: “Otherwise what is the use of love? What is love for? Is it only for a pot of honey? Only to tread on the rosy path? Love has to be tested in the burning fire in order to see how far it is genuine. Remember the line in *Savitri*: ‘And must fire always test the great of soul?’ So here you are. These Pandavas were great of soul . . . and love

is a thing which is divine. If it is genuine it has got to pass through fire.” So that was the answer He gave me. Further He said: “These are my chosen instruments. They have come here for a special purpose of mine. I’ve got to do some work through them. So they have to be prepared through all trials and difficulties and hardships. Pain is necessary, knocks and shocks are good for the soul. See on the other hand the Kauravas. They have enjoyed a happy life, a life of ease, a life of comfort. To what end? It is all because of their *māmā* (uncle) who brought ruin to them, their multifarious hardships.” As soon as He uttered the word *māmā*, my thoughts went to my own nieces whose presence in the Ashram has *māmā*-fied me for many people! (*Laughter*) To continue with Sri Aurobindo’s reply: “Also don’t forget that though I am inflicting punishment as you call it, or suffering, I am always with the Pandavas. I have never deserted them, wherever they are, I am with them, I guard them, I protect them, I guide them. My love is always with them. Is that not enough? You see only the dark side of things because the Man of Sorrows in you pleases to show you that. Please see a little widely, a little deeply, a little more intuitively and perceptively.”

“All right, Sir, I accept. Still, a greater puzzle haunts me: How could you have allowed Draupadi to be dragged, to be insulted publicly before so many — such a vast audience? Why did you allow that? For what reason? Can you explain that?” I said with burning indignation. He answered: “Peace! You are evidently moved too much by ladies. (*Laughter*) So am I. But first of all kindly remember that I was not there when she was being dragged. Secondly, what were her five fine husbands doing when this poor woman was being insulted before all that noble audience? They didn’t dare lift a small finger. They were all kshatriyas, they were all heroes, they were all nobles. Why didn’t they protest?” I said, “That is another question. My question is why didn’t *you*? You certainly knew what was going to happen. Why did you allow it to happen; and this ignominy for a woman is unbearable. You know that very well, and you came when at the extremity of her pain and suffering she cried out, “*Trāhi mām, trāhi mām!*” He said, “Yes, I did come.” “But you came rather late.” “Yes, I came rather late, but why? Because she called me rather late. She was waiting and looking to her husbands to come and protect her. They didn’t oblige. Then she looked around at the audience, they didn’t care a rap. Utterly helpless, she began to cry for me, and I came at once. That heart-piercing cry, that cry of lamentation and agony! When you have found that everything is lost, it is at this moment when you call the Divine that He comes to rescue you. But there is a deeper mystery behind it. Shocking indeed! With your rational pate you do not see, do not understand.”

I was all agog. Let’s see, let’s hear what deeper mystery He is going to reveal. Then He said: “It was or it is such atrocious behaviour that strikes against the Divine Seat and tilts the balance of the God of Justice. The atrocious manner in which the Kauravas acted towards a helpless God-loving woman sealed their doom and the Pandavas woke to the idea of grave revenge then. Mahakali’s wrath fell upon them because they insulted Her own Shaktis, Her powers. Beware!”

I said: "I fear Pranab's wrath more than Mahakali's!" (*Laughter*) "Then . . . have you finished your questions? I've elsewhere to go, so many are calling me." I said: "One other question. Now I accept poor Draupadi's humiliation, but what about Abhimanyu, that poor boy? Why was he sacrificed at the altar? Was this not a very terrible sacrifice?" He replied: "Yes, and it is for the same reason. It was necessary to awake fully the wrath of the slothful and sentimental Pandavas. Even the revelation of my 'vishwarupa' could not utterly convince Arjuna to take up arms and fight the Kauravas. He was still hesitating. So when Abhimanyu died at the hands of so many heroes in an unfair manner, that did the trick. You have read Homer, I suppose. You know the story of Achilles. He was sulking in his tent because of a wrangle between himself and Agamemnon for nothing more than — a Woman. But when he heard that his great friend Patroclus was killed by Hector, then all his wrath flared up and he went out in a mad fury to fight. So his friend had to be sacrificed. Here too Abhimanyu had to be sacrificed in order that the others might join the fight; and you saw Bhim's 'gada' break the proud thighs and his hands open the hard bosom."

I shuddered and said: "That, I think, is too much. Particularly Draupadi soaking her hair in Dusshasan's blood!" "Ah, since when have you become so humane? Three cheers for St. Nirod! Is it your Buddhist blood, or Gandhi's non-violence at work? You must remember, my friend, that it was the heroic age when men and women were heroes and heroines. I suppose you won't approve of Kurukshetra either, and advocate the gospel of love and compassion. Gandhi said that all that battle was symbolic. Well, that is what India has come to today. See the condition of the world: Russia, America, Israel, Nasser and Mao Tse-tung. Well, really, our Indira Gandhi is hard put to it to manage her house. She looks with one eye at Russia, with another eye at America and perhaps with both eyes at China. (*Laughter*) And this is our position today. So where is our gospel of non-violence leading? No, you can't have non-violence till . . ." He did not complete the sentence. He went on: "Have you read my *Essays on the Gita*?" "Yes, I have read it." "Read it again and look with a fresh eye at the passage where I have dealt with this question." Then He left me.

I came home and read the passage. Let me read it out to you:

No real peace can be till the heart of man deserves peace; the law of Vishnu cannot prevail till the debt to Rudra is paid. To turn aside then and preach to a still unevolved mankind the law of love and oneness? Teachers of the law of love and oneness there must be, for by that way must come the ultimate salvation. But not till the Time-Spirit in man is ready can the inner and ultimate prevail over the outer and immediate reality. Christ and Buddha have come and gone but it is Rudra who still holds the world in the hollow of his hand. And meanwhile the fierce forward labour of mankind tormented and oppressed by the Powers that are profiteers of egoistic force and their servants cries out for the sword of the hero of the struggle and the word of its prophet.

So this is the message interpreted by Sri Aurobindo. Perhaps you know that Sri Aurobindo said that when He was in jail the Gita was put into His hand. Not literally, mind you, but in a subtle manner as things are given to you in your dreams, in your visions. So He told us that this Gita was given to Him by Sri Krishna; and if you read *Essays on the Gita*, which I recommend very strongly to all of you, those particularly who are grown up, you will have no doubt that it was Sri Aurobindo Himself who was Sri Krishna. Who else could be the author of the luminous and revealing interpretation that He gives, the intimate and understanding tone in which He expresses Himself, and the deeper secret undiscovered by anybody yet that He lays bare? There have been so many interpretations of the Gita, partial all of them, but none has that *uttamam rahasyam*, the supreme secret, which is His alone — because He is dealing with His own ancient message. For that matter, you will see that any other book He has written is all out of personal experience. Take the narrative poem, *Baji Prabhou*. In the description of the battle, the see-saw of fortune, the flight of the soldiers, the forward movement of them, the description is given in the minutest detail. It would have been impossible for any imaginative writer to provide such intricate movements of the battle. So also about all other books. In His past lives He has played so many roles and He has now relived them, brought them out. *Essays on the Gita* particularly is one of the most fascinating books that I've ever read. We have no doubt that Sri Krishna was born as Sri Aurobindo and carried on the same struggle even in our day, inwardly and outwardly — from the higher inner chamber in which He lived for so many years, all along not as a fighter, not as a charioteer, but as a commander of a great spiritual power which knows no time and space, and by the marshalling of that power He has moved, He has guided the world chariot. When Hitler was in the ascendant, all of you know that it was the Mother and Sri Aurobindo who championed the cause of the Allies, and the Mother declared it was Her war. She even said in one of Her most firm notices: "Those who speak against the Allies are traitors." At that time Churchill and De Gaulle stood as champions — the Pandavas — against the Hitlerite Kauravas. And after so many ignominious defeats ultimately you know what happened: the Allies were triumphant, the Fascists were crushed, the Japanese were routed.

Perhaps you do not know that during the visit of the Cripps Mission Sri Aurobindo sent His emissary from here to Delhi to persuade the Congress to accept the British proposals. Such a thing Sri Aurobindo had never done before. But he saw that Cripps had come on the wave of a great inspiration. Had Sri Aurobindo's suggestion been accepted, as all clear thinkers say today, India's state would have been different. There is such a thing as fate. When this Mission failed we told Him, "You see, your mission has failed." He said: "I knew it would!" And we pounced on this pronouncement: "If you knew, why did you send your emissary?" He smiled in his usual enigmatic way, and looking up said: "Well, I have done a bit of nishkama karma," — disinterested work.

Again that reminds me of Sri Krishna. You know he went on a peace mission. He knew very well that it would not be accepted, but he wanted to give a chance to Duryodhana. “Do accept peace. Let’s live amicably,” he said. The result — you know: Duryodhana tried to arrest him. Here, fortunately, Sri Aurobindo was far away, safe and, after all, the Congress are our own people . . .

You see then that there are so many parallelisms between Sri Aurobindo’s life and Sri Krishna’s and you know very well what happened on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1926: the great descent. He said to us that on that day, ‘siddhi day’, Sri Krishna’s consciousness descended into Him.

Now, I have finished my tale.

NIRODBARAN

(*Mother India*, December 5, 1969, pp. 687-92)

### *Spirit and Life*

*In the sphere of the Spirit are only the eternal truths — all is eternally itself there, there is no development, nothing unrealised or striving to be fulfilled. There are no such things as possibilities therefore.*

*In life on the other hand all is a play of possibilities — nothing is realised, all is seeking to be realised — or if not yet seeking, then waiting behind the veil for that. Nothing is realised in its highest form, in its truth or completeness, but all is possible. All these possibilities are derived from the truths above — e.g., the possibility of knowledge, the possibility of love, the possibility of joy etc.*

*Intellect, will etc. are intermediaries which try to catch something of the hidden higher truths and bring them into life or else raise life to them — so that the possibilities of life here may become the complete realities that are already there above.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

(*Letters on Yoga – I*, CWSA, Vol. 28, p. 29)

# SRI AUROBINDO'S SAMADHI THAT SPEAKS

## Celebration of Sri Aurobindo's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

### Simple Faith

Arun Ganguli's mother was very ill. At night her condition became serious, so about 2.30 a.m. Ganguli knocked on Bula's window and pleaded with him to inform the Mother. Bula was in a quandary. But Ganguli pleaded so much that he said, "I'll do whatever is possible."

Now Bula used to go to sleep only after he had seen the lights in the Mother's room switched off. On this night he had seen the lights go out a little while before, so he did not want to disturb the Mother. He had a simple faith that if he conveyed that news to the Samadhi, the Mother would know of it. So he went and prayed at the Samadhi and told everything. Then he told the waiting Ganguli that he had informed the Mother.

At about 4 a.m., as soon as the Ashram main gate was opened, someone from the family rushed up to the Mother's room and informed the Mother through her attendant. The Mother replied, "Yes, I know. Bula told me."<sup>1</sup>

### Vision of Mother Kali

Sometime ago I had a few striking visions during my pranam at the Samadhi. Quite a number of my experiences happened then. So, the Samadhi is very living for me and I have been asked not to miss my pranam there. It is as if the Guru is waiting for me and our talks go on. I come back full of joy and peace.

One day I saw the entire Samadhi all aglow with bright light and Sri Aurobindo was lying on a bed of Light, in a trance as it were. His body was luminous, and Kali was standing by his side. She was rather of a short stature and dark, but sparkling, as if her black figure was dazzling. It was really wonderful. This was the first time that I had seen her. As soon as I saw Sri Aurobindo I rushed towards him. But before I could touch him Kali stretched out her hand and said in a stern voice, "Don't touch!" I stopped.

After a few months the same experience repeated itself, but this time Kali was of a bigger size and was full of power. She was like a dazzling dark statue of light, and her pose was majestic. She was the Mother herself in her form of Kali. As I approached her, she said in a strident voice, "Without my Grace you cannot meet

1. Shyam Kumari. *Vignettes of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 1989, p. 165.



your Guru.” I was struck dumb.

I began thinking, why did the Mother say that? Have I not received her Grace? If I think more often of Sri Aurobindo it is because from my childhood he has been with me and it is natural that my thoughts and feelings should be occupied with him. Then the question that troubled me was, “How to receive the Mother’s Grace? See and meet Sri Aurobindo I must. I began to pray to her. Some friends suggested that I should do some work for her. Besides Sri Aurobindo had also said that doing the Mother’s work keeps the body healthy. So I took up making garlands for the Samadhi, for that work was the most suitable for me.

I began the work, doing it as an offering, with full concentration. After a few days something very startling happened. As I bowed down at the Samadhi, I saw the Mother’s face with three eyes, two wide extended and one in the middle of the forehead. And they were gazing into my eyes. Beams of light issued forth from them and penetrated my sight and kept me transfixed with their gaze. Such wondrous eyes I had never seen before.

When I returned home I told Sri Aurobindo of my experience. He seemed to be happy and said, “It is true that without Her grace none can see me, just as without Radha’s grace none could come to Krishna.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Collective Meditation at the Samadhi is very important**

On one darshan day I did not feel like attending the meditation at 10 a.m. Sri Aurobindo told me distinctly, “No, you must attend the meditation. It is very important.”

On another day I asked him, “How can I be sure that it is your voice that is speaking?”

He replied, “Be quiet, make your mind free from all desires. Then you will hear the true voice. It applies to all who can observe this condition. Desire distorts the true answer.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Shame! Sitting at the Samadhi you are thinking like this?**

One day I was thinking of all that I had told Nirod-da. Sahana auntie says there is something like an Intermediate Zone and people going there hear lots of things and take them to be genuine. Since the Guru isn’t now in his body one cannot verify the truth directly from him. Who knows if I am not hearing the same kind of things?

Then I heard the Guru’s voice, “Shame! Sitting at the Samadhi you are thinking like that? And you believe it?”

“Lord if you were in your body, the question would not arise. Others too would believe it.”

2. Nirodbaran, *An Extraordinary Girl*, pp. 170-71.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

“It does not matter in the least. The effect would be just the same whether I were in the body or not.”

“But people won't believe — ”

“It is not with their belief, but with your own that I am concerned.”

“I understand, Lord. But I am so insignificant — where is the power in me by which I can write or speak about you?”

“Oh, you are taking pride in your humility? Beware! The consciousness in which you find yourself at present may not remain at all times. So do sadhana from now on.”

“I don't tell everything to Nirod-da lest he should disbelieve it. That is why I did not speak of the incident regarding Sri Ramakrishna.”

“No, you must be candid. Whether he believes you or not, you have to tell him.”<sup>4</sup>

\*

The heroes and the demigods are few  
To whom the close immortal voices speak  
And to their acts the heavenly clan are near.<sup>5</sup>

\*

### **All is happening well with him**

Here is an experience of Esha-di:

Esha-di used to cook her own food. On an evening (1999), a thief entered her kitchen and took away some essential kitchenware, e.g. pressure cooker, pan, spoons etc.

In the late evening when I went to her room, I found her totally upset. By habit she gets upset even for a very minor thing. In great tension, she told me, “Nirmal Bhai, the thief has taken away all my cooking vessels. How am I to survive?”

In an attempt to make her calm, I promised her that all food etc. would come to her till necessary materials were arranged. The promise did not work at all . . .

Next morning, my son went to the market and brought all necessary equipment. Immediately, I went to Esha-di's room and handed over the things. Peace seemed to have prevailed.

Two or three days after this event, Esha-di had been to the Ashram for pranam to the Samadhi. She had just returned when I happened to be in her house. Happily

4. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

5. CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 689.



she said, "Nirmal Bhai! There is good news for you. During my Samadhi pranam I told Guru, "Lord! Nirmal Bhai is doing so much for me. I am not at all able to do anything for him. On my behalf, "*Tumi tar mangal karo.*" ("You please do all good for him.")

Guru replied from the Samadhi, "*Tar to mangal hochheyee*" (in Bengali) rendered to English as "All is happening well with him".

My joy knew no bounds.

### **Moving Golden Letters: An experience**

During our '*Bhagbat Alap*' (Godly conversation) sometime in 1999, Esha-di spoke something what she had heard from Guru: "*Kamo* (desire), *Artha* (money), *Dharma* (True religion) and *Mukti* (Freedom) are granted by Mahashiva, to His devotees."

"Who is this Mahashiva?

"Do you have any idea Nirmal Bhai about this?"

"No," was my answer.

After a few days I saw a Bengali movie in the Playground which was directed by Sandeep Ray. On my way back home, I went for Samadhi Pranam. Standing near the east side beam during my meditation I had an inner vision for a second or two of moving golden letters: Mahashiva written on the wall of the Samadhi.

Many have seen Sri Aurobindo as Mahashiva in their Darshan. Mahashiva is an aspect of Sri Aurobindo. Shiva is the Devata (Godhead) of transformation. In his dynamic form He is Mahashiva.

Esha-di was very happy to hear this experience of mine. Many are the experiences the sadhaks have. Two very common ones are explained in Sri Aurobindo's letters:

1. The eye indicates the vision of higher spiritual consciousness and the blue expanse indicates that consciousness. (*Letters on Yoga*, p. 392)
2. If the psychic is active and open, the presence may be felt. (*Ibid.*, p. 1124)

### **A Beautiful Experience of Little 'M'**

The Mother to a disciple: I can't say I was surprised, but I admired the mighty power by which the simple fact of having been here and died here was sufficient to help you to the utmost in that transition.

But there are all sorts of cases. Take N.D. for example, a man who died clasping my photo to his breast. This was a consecrated man, very conscious, with an unflinching dedication, and all the parts of his being well organised around the psychic. The day he was going to leave his body little M. was meditating next to the Samadhi when suddenly she had a vision: she saw all the flowers of the tree next to the Samadhi (those yellow flowers I have called 'Service') gathering themselves together to form

a big bouquet, and rising, rising straight up. And in her vision these flowers were linked with the image of N.D. She ran quickly to their house and — he was dead.

I only knew about this vision later, but on my side, when he left, I saw his whole being gathered together, well united, thoroughly homogenous, in a great aspiration, and rising, rising without dispersing, without deviating, straight up to the frontier of what Sri Aurobindo has called 'the higher hemisphere', there where Sri Aurobindo in his supramental action presides over earth. And he melted into that light. Some time before his heart attack he said to his children: the gown is old, it must be thrown away.<sup>6</sup>

### **'Man can only express his gratitude': an experience by Nirod-da**

The Mother: Thanks to Nirod, we have the revelation of an altogether unknown side of what Sri Aurobindo was.

Nirod-da: What she had written was beyond my wildest imagination. I felt so grateful to Her and Him for having inspired me all through and enabled me to finish the work just in time for Sri Aurobindo's Birth Centenary. My worshipful gratitude to them had behind it the feeling of the endless trouble they had taken to fashion my raw material into a writer and to mould it into a spiritual stability full of trust in their Grace. Talking about gratitude reminds me of a significant dream I had some years ago. One evening I was in a reminiscent mood (sitting near the Samadhi) asking myself why Sri Aurobindo had showered on me so much kindness of which I was not in the least worthy. I regretted that I could not make any return, even in a small degree, for his unaccountable magnanimity.

[In dream] At about 2.45 a.m. as I had sat to meditate, I heard a voice (from the Samadhi) speaking in Bengali. Rendered into English, it would mean: "Man can only express his gratitude, he can do nothing more."

This seemed to be in answer to my evening musing.<sup>7</sup>

Note: Nirod-da delivered, on the whole, around 150 talks, all of which were patiently recorded and transcribed by Sudha and Kokila. Nirod-da's well-known book, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* was written from the notes taken during these talks. Even before the writing of the book was completed, Nirod-da started reading it out to the Mother, who would listen to it with great interest about four times a week. She herself wrote a small note for the book, which said, "Thanks to Nirod, we have the revelation of an altogether unknown side of what Sri Aurobindo was. It is extremely interesting and very instructive."<sup>8</sup>

6. Conversation with a disciple, 24 June 1961.

7. Nirodbaran, *Memorable Contacts with the Mother*, pp. 136-37.

8. *Talks by Nirodbaran at SAICE*, 2012, pp. v-vi.

### **He will hear you and He will give you your answer**

The Mother: You should tell Him (Sri Aurobindo); like this, you should keep your head on the Samadhi (the Mother bows Her head) and you tell Him to get rid of your difficulties. Or you send a prayer like this (the Mother makes a movement with the hand from the region of the heart upwards) but very sincerely, and you bring the concentration at the very depth of your being. I am sure He will hear you and He will give you your answer. Without doubt, you can now communicate easily with Him. There are many who put themselves in contact with Him and find their answers. He has become more accessible to us and He is much more active. You see then, in this way you don't have to wait . . .

But this method is convenient and more direct and more accessible. At any time you can ask. You just come to the Samadhi to have your answer.<sup>9</sup>

### **Nothing has happened — you need not go**

Esha-di had a fine experience in 1972. She told me this experience, in one of her evening meetings in her Auroma flat, in 1999.

I reached Pondicherry well in advance for the Birth Centenary celebration of Sri Aurobindo, in August 1972, and stayed with Sahana mashi.

All Ashramites and devotees were busy for their performance — rehearsing songs, music, dance etc. Everybody was cheerful, charged with the spiritual force in the Ashram atmosphere.

Then came a sudden blow — a telegram from my mother in Calcutta: “Come soon, I am suffering from gangrene.”

I became very sad — didn't know what to do. I showed the telegram to mashi who advised me to write the matter to the Mother, for guidance, to be sent through Nirod-da.

I wrote the letter. Before going to Nirod-da I sat down near the Samadhi for meditation and told everything to the Guru for His guidance. From the Samadhi I had the Guru's voice answering me.

When translated in English it is: “Nothing has happened, you need not go.” The idea of sending the letter to Mother was dropped naturally.

It was a great relief for me since I wanted to be here in the Ashram, for the great occasion.

After the celebration I went back to Calcutta. My son was there on the platform of Howrah railway station, to receive me. As soon as I saw my son, I enquired about the telegram. He replied: “Nothing has happened to grandmother. It was a false telegram sent by her without my knowledge.”

NIRMAL CHANDRA SAHU

9. Mona Sarkar, *Blessings of the Grace*, pp. 120-21.

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

(Part 29)

(Continued from the issue of September 2022)

## Section 3: A QUIET AND HUMBLE DISPOSITION

Sri Aurobindo’s quiet and soft-spoken nature was also a reflection of his humility; perhaps the two qualities were intertwined. He came from two illustrious Bengali families, both from his paternal and maternal side. His maternal grandfather, Rishi Rajnarayan Bose (1826-1899), and his father, Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose (1844-1892) — both of whom deeply loved Sri Aurobindo — were not only distinguished personalities but also great men. People who come from a great lineage are usually conscious and proud of their ancestry but Sri Aurobindo was quite unconcerned and never spoke about it.

The Nationalist leader, Bipin Chandra Pal said that Sri Aurobindo had inherited sterling qualities from both Rajnarayan Bose and Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose so let us briefly touch on Sri Aurobindo’s family heritage. Dr. K. D. Ghose’s marriage to Rajnarayan’s daughter, Swarnalata Devi, was termed by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar as “the alliance of two authentic and forceful currents in the inner life of Bengal.”<sup>1</sup> Rajnarayan Bose was called the “Grandfather of Indian Nationalism”. After retirement he was given the honorific of *Rishi*. Bipin Chandra Pal gives us a glimpse of this grand personality:

Two strong currents of thoughts, ideals and aspirations met together and strove for supremacy in Bengal, among the generation to which Aravinda’s parents belonged. One was the current of Hindu Nationalism — of the revived life, culture and ideals of the nation that had lain dormant for centuries. . . . The other was the current of Indo-Anglicism . . . threatened to swamp and drown the original culture and character of the people. The two stocks from which Aravinda sprang represented these two conflicting forces in the country. His maternal grandfather, Rajnarayan Bose was one of the makers of modern Bengal. . . . Rajnarayan Bose started life as a social and religious reformer. . . . He joined the Brahmo-Samaj under Maharishi Debendranath Tagore, but felt repelled by the denational spirit of the later developments of the movement under Keshab Chandra Sen. In fact,

1. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 25.

it is difficult to say, to which of its two leaders, Debendranath or Rajnarayan, the Adi or the older Brahma Samaj — as it came to be called after Keshab Chandra Sen seceded from it and established the Brahma Samaj of India — was more indebted for its intense and conservative nationalism. But it may be safely asserted that while Debendranath’s nationalism had a dominating theological note, Rajnarayan’s had both a theological and social, as well as a political emphasis. In him, it was not merely the spirit of Hinduism that rose up in arms against the onslaught of European Christianity but, the whole spirit of Indian culture and manhood stood up to defend and assert itself against every form of undue foreign influence and alien domination. While Keshab Chandra Sen pleaded for the recognition of the truths of the Hindu scriptures side by side with those in the Bible, Rajnarayan Bose proclaimed the superiority of Hinduism to Christianity. . . . He saw the onrush of European goods into Indian markets, and tried to stem the tide by quickening what we would now call the Swadeshi spirit, long before anybody else had thought of it. . . . Rajnarayan Bose did not openly take any part in politics, but his writings and speeches did a good deal to create that spirit of self-respect and self-assertion in the educated classes that have since found such strong expression in our recent political activities.

A strong conservatism, based upon a reasoned appreciation of the lofty spirituality of the ancient culture and civilisation of the country; a sensitive patriotism, born of healthy and dignified pride of race; and a deep piety expressing itself through all the varied practical relations of life — these were the characteristics of the life and thought of Rajnarayan Bose. . . . Rajnarayan Bose was also an acknowledged leader in Bengalee literature. A writer in the *Modern Review* (Calcutta) calls Rajnarayan Bose the “Grandfather of Indian Nationalism.” He was Aravinda’s maternal grandfather; and Aravinda owes not only his rich spiritual nature, but even his very superior literary capacity to his inherited endowments from his mother’s line.<sup>2</sup>

The nobel-laureate Rabindranath Tagore, son of Brahma founder Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), was also impressed by Rajnarayan’s simple and multi-faceted personality:

When I first knew Rajnarayan Babu, I was not old enough to appreciate his many-sidedness. In him were combined many opposites. In spite of his hoary hair and beard he was as young as the youngest of us, his venerable exterior serving only as a white mantle for keeping his youth perpetually fresh. Even

2. *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, pp. 411-12 (Written by Bipin Chandra Pal and published in his journal *Svaraj* which he was editing in London in 1909-10).

his extensive learning had not been able to do him any damage, for it left him absolutely simple. To the end of his life the incessant flow of his hearty laughter suffered no check, neither from the gravity of age nor ill-health, nor domestic affliction, nor profundity of thought, nor variety of knowledge all of which had been his in ample measure. . . . The memory of this smile-sweetened, fervour-illuminated, lifelong-youthful saint is one that is worth cherishing by our countrymen.<sup>3</sup>

Rabindranath’s eldest brother Dwijendranath Tagore (1840-1926) and Rajnarayan were close friends. Both were pioneers in the Brahma movement and for many years Rajnarayan was the honoured president of the Adi or true Brahma Samaj. Rajnarayan’s father Nanda Kishore Bose was a disciple, and later secretary, of Raja Ram Mohan Roy who was the founder of Brahma Samaj in 1828. Sri Aurobindo once remarked: “My grandfather started by being a Brahma and ended by writing a book on Hinduism and proclaiming it as the best religion in the world.”<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Dwijendranath, a philosopher and a poet, became a great admirer of Sri Aurobindo. He became a regular reader of Sri Aurobindo’s writings in the *Arya*, a monthly journal, which Sri Aurobindo edited at Pondicherry from August 1914 to January 1921, and opined that never, since the days of the Vedic Rishis, had such a spiritual message been delivered to mankind.<sup>5</sup> Sri Aurobindo once commented that Dwijendranath had some spiritual realisation in him.<sup>6</sup> Sri Aurobindo was close to Rajnarayan and has said, “I admired my grandfather”.<sup>7</sup>

On Rajnarayan’s accomplishments, the eminent professor of English, Jitendralal Bandopadhyay, wrote in 1909:

But Rajnarayan Bose was something more than the passionate and impulsive lover of his country; and certainly he was no man to cling blindly to the old, worn-out rags of the past . . . there was realised in his character that rare and curious combination — the ardent, almost militant defender of his country, dwelling side by side with the aggressive social reformer who shocked the effete orthodoxy of his time by the plainness of his speech and the directness of his action.

There was, however, little in common between this forceful and dominant old man and Aravinda’s father, Babu Krishnadhan Ghose. Sweetness, tenderness, geniality and a perpetual sunshine in the heart which warmed and com-

3. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, September 2011, p. 780 (Rabindranath Tagore: *Reminiscences*, Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1928).

4. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 691.

5. Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 1981, p. 199 (footnote).

6. See A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 537.

7. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 45.

forted whoever might come in contact with them — these were the common characteristics of both; but beyond this their path widely diverged.<sup>8</sup>

Ideologically, Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose differed from his father-in-law but he too was an exceptional man. Bipin Chandra Pal also glowingly writes about Sri Aurobindo’s father:

If the maternal grandfather represented the ancient spiritual forces of his nation, Aravinda’s father, Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose, represented to a very large extent the spirit of the new illumination in his country. Dr. Ghose was essentially a product of English education and European culture. A man of exceptional parts, he finished his education in England, and taking his degree in medicine, entered the medical service of the Indian Government. He was one of the most successful Civil Surgeons of his day, and had his life been spared, he would have assuredly risen to the highest position in his service open to any native of India. Like the general body of Indian young men who came to finish their education in England in his time, Krishnadhan Ghose was steeped in the prevailing spirit of Anglicism. . . . But unlike many of them, underneath his foreign clothing and ways, he had a genuine Hindu heart and soul. Anglicism distorts Hindu character — cripples, where it cannot kill, the inherited altruism of the man, and makes him more or less neglectful of the numerous family and social obligations under which every Hindu is born. Like the original Anglo-Saxon, his Indian imitation also lives first and foremost for himself, his wife and children; and though he may recognise the claims of his relations to his charity, he scarcely places his purse at their service as an obligation. But Krishnadhan Ghose was an exception. Though he affected the European way of living, he never neglected the social obligations of the Hindu. His purse was always open for his needy relations. The poor of the town, where he served and lived, had in him a true friend and a ready help. In fact, his regard for the poor frequently led him to sacrifice to their present needs the future prospects of his own family and children. . . . But his charities made such constant heavy inroad into his tolerably large income, that he could not always keep his own children, living in England, provided with sufficient funds for their board and schooling. Sons of comparatively rich parents, they were brought up almost in abject poverty in a friendless country where wealth counts so much, not only physically, but also intellectually and morally. Keen of intellect, tender of heart, impulsive and generous almost to recklessness, regardless of his own wants, but sensitive to the sufferings of others — this was the inventory of the character of

8. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, June 2016, pp. 447-48 (Sri Aurobindo Archives).



Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose. The rich blamed him for his recklessness, the man of the world condemned him for his absolute lack of prudence, the highest virtue in his estimation. But the poor, the widow and the orphan loved him for his selfless pity, and his soulful benevolence.

When death overtook him, in the very prime of life, there was desolation in many a poor home in his district. It . . . destroyed the source of ready relief to many helpless families among his relations and neighbours. His quick intellectual perceptions, his large sympathies, his selflessness, characterised by an almost absolute lack of what the man of the world, always working with an eye to the main chance, calls prudence, as a matter of personal calculation — these are Aravinda’s inheritance in his father’s line.<sup>9</sup>

Rajnarayan Bose was very fond of Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose. When the latter went to England in January 1870 for higher medical studies the former wrote four poems for his son-in-law. But on Dr. K. D. Ghose’s homecoming in 1871, Rajnarayan was disappointed to learn that his Europe-returned son-in-law had become anglicised. Yet, he was relieved that Dr. Ghose still retained his unselfish, sweet and helpful nature. Bipin Pal observed that the Anglo-Saxon and his Indian imitation live “first and foremost for himself, his wife and children” but noted that an anglicised K. D. Ghose was an exception in this regard. Basanti Mitra mentions that her uncle Dr. K. D. Ghose “was westernised but very gentle at heart. He treated the poor without charge.”<sup>10</sup> Despite Dr. K. D. Ghose’s anglicisation during his stay in Britain and his ideological differences with his father-in-law, Basanti Mitra writes that Dr. K. D. Ghose “respected and revered my grandfather, Rajnarayan Bose, and loved him like a father.”<sup>11</sup> Incidentally, when Dr. K. D. Ghose, who came from an orthodox Hindu family, married he had not told his mother that he was taking a Brahmo bride. “I went to the length of offending a dear mother by marrying as I did,” he later wrote, “to get such a father as Rajnarayan Bose.”<sup>12</sup>

After returning from Britain, Dr. Ghose joined the civil medical service as a sub-assistant surgeon in Calcutta following which, in October 1871, Dr. Ghose was given a new post as assistant surgeon in charge of the civil station of Rangpur. In December 1872, Dr. Ghose was appointed as a Medical Officer at Rangpur in place of Dr. H. C. Browser. In February 1873 Dr. Ghose was named the district’s (population 2 million) civil surgeon. Rangpur suffered from the endemic diseases, cholera and malaria. Dr. Ghose spent much of his professional life fighting against them in an age where no one knew what caused malaria. While working with patients

9. *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, pp. 412-13 (Written by Bipin Chandra Pal and published in his journal *Svaraj* which he was editing in London in 1909-10).

10. Basanti Chakravarty (*née* Mitra), ‘Our Aurodada’, *Srinwantu*, April & August 1984, p. 83.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Website: [http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item\\_00952\\_e.htm/8](http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item_00952_e.htm/8) June 2022



in different parts of the district, he noted that malaria was most prevalent in areas with “undrained, waterlogged soils.” Accordingly he recommended draining the swamps around Rangpur. But it is only after five years, in December 1877, that Dr. Ghose had the pleasure of driving in the first stake in the town’s drainage works. The result, completed several years later, became known as Ghose’s canal. Dr. Ghose was very close to Edward George Glazier who served as a Magistrate and later as District Collector at Rangpur. Mr. Glazier did nothing without consulting Dr. Ghose. It is with Mr. Glazier’s cousin — Mr. Drewett — that the Ghose boys stayed during their first few years in England. Between 1872 and 1877 Sri Aurobindo stayed at Rangpur, where his father was serving. Occasionally, the family used to go to Deoghar to stay with Rajnarayan Bose. Dr. Ghose spent a good deal of his time touring the district and his sons “never saw much of him.”<sup>13</sup>

Prior to his higher studies in Britain, Dr. K. D. Ghose had served at Bhagalpur. Benoybhusan and Manmohan were born at Bhagalpur while Sarojini was born at Rangpur.<sup>14</sup> Dr. K. D. Ghose had a brother, Bama Charan Ghose, who served as head-clerk in the Bhagalpur Commissioner’s office. He also had two sisters, Biraj Mohini and Tinkoti. The two brothers did not agree with each other. While serving at Baroda Sri Aurobindo had gone to Bhagalpur to meet his uncle and was invited to dine at his place.<sup>15</sup>

In the summer of 1872 there was an outbreak of malaria followed by a cholera epidemic in Rangpur, so Dr. Ghose sent his wife to Calcutta to stay at the mansion of his great friend Barrister-at-Law Manmohan Ghose, where, on August 15, Sri Aurobindo was born.<sup>16</sup> In late 1872 Miss Annette Akroyd (1842-1929), a friend of Dr. K. D. Ghose from the days he studied in Scotland, arrived in Calcutta and also stayed in this mansion. She was present at the naming ceremony of Sri Aurobindo where Dr. Ghose, who thought highly of English culture, named the child “Aravinda Akroyd Ghose” thus using Miss Akroyd’s family name as Sri Aurobindo’s middle name.<sup>17</sup> Miss Akroyd also met Rajnarayan Bose who was very fond of his son-in-law despite his anglicisation after his return from Britain.

Annette Akroyd later married Henry Beveridge in 1875. Henry Beveridge was the district judge at Rangpur and a close friend of Dr. Ghose so possibly Dr. Ghose was the link through which Ms. Akroyd met Mr. Beveridge. The Beveridges often invited the Ghoses for dinner at Rangpur.<sup>18</sup>

13. *Ibid.*

14. See Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, October 2011, p. 849.

15. See A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 2; See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, p. 12 (Dinendra Kumar Roy, *Aurobindo Prasanga* –Translated from Bengali by Maurice Shukla); Website: [http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item\\_00952\\_e.htm/8](http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item_00952_e.htm/8) June 2022.

16. Website: [http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item\\_00952\\_e.htm/8](http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item_00952_e.htm/8) June 2022.

17. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 28; See Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, September 2011, p. 779.

18. See Website: [http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item\\_00952\\_e.htm/8](http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item_00952_e.htm/8) June 2022

Dr. K. D. Ghose was determined to give his three eldest children a thoroughly English education for he believed in English culture. In 1877, Dr. Ghose sent his three sons to Loreto Convent School at Darjeeling, a school run by Irish nuns intended mainly for children of European officials in India. It was considered to be one of the best schools in the country. In early 1879, Dr. K. D. Ghose took his entire family, his wife and four children, to England. It was then almost unheard of for Indian women to sail across the ocean. To further their education, Benoybhusan, Manmohan and Sri Aurobindo were left in Manchester in the good care of a childless couple, Mr. and Mrs. Drewett. About this trip Barin writes: “Father proceeded to England for the second time with his three sons, one daughter and my mother, for educating his three sons. Carrying me in her womb this was my mother’s first and last voyage across the blue ocean. On our arrival in England I was born in the suburbs of London, at Norwood, in front of the Marble Palace. Because I was born almost on the sea I was to be called Barindrakumar.”<sup>19</sup> Barin adds that his father “returned alone in August 1879.” Dr. Ghose had left his wife in the care of a London physician, Dr. Mathew. Barin continues: “Mother returned home three months after my birth, in March 1880, along with me and my sister. There is nobody alive now who could remember how long my parents lived together after we were back home and when exactly my mother went away to Rohini along with me and Didi.”<sup>20</sup> From a letter that Miss Akroyd wrote to her sister in January 1873 we learn that Dr. K. D. Ghose had to shoulder an immense responsibility dating as far back as the year of Sri Aurobindo’s birth. She wrote:

Tell K. G. G. (K. G. Gupta) to write to Dr. Ghose, if he has not done so lately, and not to expect an answer. The poor fellow has been in worlds of trouble — his wife ill with a most alarming illness . . . his works in arrear owing to his own illness, and he himself has had fever. Write him a letter yourself, won’t you and tell him some English gossip. I am grieved for him, he has had such shameful treatment at the hands of the missionaries — one of whom published most scandalous libels of him. He feels himself also very much alone and I am so afraid of his fretting himself into real illness, with all his present worry.<sup>21</sup>

By “missionaries” Miss Akroyd meant the Brahmos and the cause of the trouble could be seen in the light of what Rajnarayan Bose had noted: “In 1871, my eldest son-in-law returned from abroad. . . . But it is a matter of sorrow that he returned from abroad completely anglicised. Before going there, he had been a dedicated, enthusiastic Brahmo, but upon his return I discovered the change in him.”<sup>22</sup>

19. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, October 2011, p. 848.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 849.

21. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, September 2011, p. 779.

22. Papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

The last twenty years of Dr. Ghose’s life tragically got clouded due to a malady of his wife, Swarnalata Devi. She was known as the “Rose of Rungpur” and prior to the illness she was an epitome of charm, dignity and affection towards all.<sup>23</sup> Dr. Ghose tried his best to get his wife cured, even having taken her to England for the purpose. Soon after their return from England they stayed separately. She resided for a while at her father’s home at Deoghar till Dr. Ghose provided her with a bungalow at Rohini, about 5 kilometres away from Deoghar. The two youngest children, Sarojini and Barin, stayed with her and visited their grandfather’s home from time to time. At Rohini they were isolated, not allowed to play with friends, and often unfairly punished. Anxious about the education and welfare of his children, Dr. Ghose visited Rohini and persuaded his wife and offered her sufficient money to part with Sarojini. This, however, resulted in Barin being left alone with a moody mother. Dr. Ghose then sent an emissary to negotiate with Swarnalata Devi. He offered her ample money so that Barin could be taken to Kolkata to live with his father. Unlike in Sarojini’s case, the strategy failed here. This led to no other alternative than to whisk Barin to Calcutta, without Swarnalata Devi’s consent — Barin was only too pleased to be taken away from Rohini — and put him under the care of Dr. Ghose’s acquaintance, Ranga-Ma, a charming, youthful, cultured and affectionate lady. Sarojini was already there and Barin found in her a cocoon of love and security. Ranga-Ma was a child widow, “wonderfully beautiful” and was extremely devoted to Dr. Ghose. She took great care of his two youngest children. Dr. Ghose frequently went to Calcutta to see his children. After Dr. Ghose’s death in 1893 the children had to leave for Deoghar, to live at their maternal grandfather’s house. Barin considered Ranga-Ma to be his mother and in his autobiography he always refers to her as “mother”. After his release from the infamous Andamans Cellular Jail, after eleven years of rigorous imprisonment, one of the first things he did was to seek her out.<sup>24</sup>

Dr. Ghose was keen that Sarojini and Barin, too, should get educated in England. Manmohan, a brilliant classics scholar, earned a scholarship to Oxford by passing a gruelling entrance examination. At Oxford, sometime in 1887, he received a letter from his father stating:

I am ready that you should take your chance and depend on your own enterprise in the literary world. There is not much danger in none of these appointments of your starving, if you do not marry. But you must not give up the scholarship in the prospect of getting an appointment.

You have to pass in Sanscrit and you must learn that. So I will try my best to give you a year or two at the University where you can learn Sanscrit, and improve your classics, get facility in writing and speaking and make interests

23. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 27.

24. See Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, May 2012, pp. 345-47.

and form friendships. When you have done that it will be easier for you not only to get an appointment in the Museum but to ensure a rapidity to your promotion to a high appointment. So you see I have no objection to this, provided *you can be sure of getting speedy promotion*. Perhaps if you can do that and have a home for your brother and sister in London they will have excellent facilities for education.<sup>25</sup>

Due to adverse economic conditions since his childhood and responsibilities as a doctor and a family man, Krishnadhan Ghose had developed a strong character and an iron will. Krishnadhan was only twelve years old when his father, Kali Prasad, passed away. Kali Prasad left his widow and children no more than a month's salary. As per custom Krishnadhan's mother went to Benares as a Hindu widow. During the boy's youth the family was "very poor, living almost entirely by the charity of friends." In 1858 Krishnadhan passed the Entrance Examination of the Calcutta University and then proceeded to the Calcutta Medical College. It was not an easy decision, because dissecting a cadaver meant losing caste. In June 1865 Krishnadhan became a licentiate in medicine and surgery and began his internship in the Medical College Hospital. In 1866 the young doctor was sent to Bhagalpur and given charge of the government dispensary. His salary, a hundred rupees a month, allowed him and his wife to live in reasonable comfort. Dr. K. D. Ghose then took leave from his work to pursue an advanced course of medical studies in Britain and in January 1870 he and a group of young Brahmos, among them Keshab Chandra Sen, embarked from Calcutta for Great Britain. In 1871 Dr. Ghose returned to India after having received a degree of M. D. with honours from Aberdeen University.<sup>26</sup>

Dr. K. D. Ghose's emphasis on education was not only for himself but also for his children. Basanti Mitra writes that Dr. K. D. Ghose's "heart's deepest aspiration was by proper education to make of his sons 'beacons of the world'."<sup>27</sup> Once referring to himself and his brothers Manmohan and Barin, Sri Aurobindo remarked:

But look at the irony of human decisions and human hopes. My father who wanted all his sons to be great men — and succeeded in a small way with three of them — in a sudden inspiration gave me the name Aurobindo, till then not borne by anyone in India or the wide world, that I might stand out unique among the great by the unique glory of my name. And now look at the swarm of Aurobindos with their mighty deeds in England, Germany and elsewhere! Don't tell me it is my fault because of my indiscretion in becoming famous. When I went to the National College in the Swadeshi days which was my first public step towards the ignominies of fame, there was already an Aurobindo

25. Manmohan Ghose, *Collected Poems*, Vol. 1, University of Calcutta 1970, p. 116.

26. See Website: [http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item\\_00952\\_e.htm/8](http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item_00952_e.htm/8) June 2022.

27. Basanti Chakravarty (*née* Mitra), 'Our Aurodada', *Srinwantu*, April & August 1984, p. 83.

Prakash waiting for me there with the sardonic comment of the gods printed on his learned forehead. Aurobindo Prakash, indeed!<sup>28</sup>

Sometime around 1887, Manmohan writes to his poet-friend, Laurence Binyon, of his father’s steely determination:

All the Ghoses come originally from the Punjab in the Afghan border. The word means “fame” and they were a tribe of proud warrior caste. But our family has suddenly come down: the family house or palace, a very noble building, I believe, not far from Calcutta, is quite in ruins. My father when a boy, was very poor, living almost entirely by the charity of friends; and it is only thro’ his almost superhuman perseverance that we have to some degree retrieved ourselves. You may be sure I shall try all I can to get to Oxford. But I am in a rather strange position. . . . He is just now in difficulties and if he finds that he cannot help me at the University he may consent to my staying in England, and trying for some Civil Service appointment (like those in the British Museum), just to earn some money.<sup>29</sup>

That Manmohan admired and deeply respected his father becomes more apparent in another letter of 1887 he wrote to Binyon:

I have just had a letter from my father, and I wanted to tell you the joyful news that he has willingly consented to my staying in England, and working at literature since it is so in my line. He also says he would like me to go to Oxford, but his means are not sufficient to keep me there long. But he may be able (he will write soon and tell me his decision) to keep me there a little while in order (as he phrases it) “to have still greater chances of acquiring literary tastes, make friends among those who are aspirants in the same field.” So he is going to try his best to give me a year or two at Oxford. As to the British Museum appointment, he would not mind my taking it at all, tho’ he does think there are objections to it — the slowness of promotion, and the smallness of the salary. . . .

I have given this in my father’s own words, as you will be able to understand the position better. Perhaps you did not know I have a little sister (she is about eleven years old now) and a brother eight years old in India at present. My father’s character may well be called “thorough”. He is determined to give them a good education, tho’ he is toiling under difficulties. He must be a man of iron nerves. I could not tell you half the things he has suffered, but he is bent

28. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 8.

29. Manmohan Ghose, *Collected Poems*, Vol. 1, University of Calcutta 1970, p. 123.

to go on. Indeed he says, “My body is as stern as my mind to have survived all the trouble which I have endured.” I cannot but be proud with admiration at the sight of such dauntless self-sacrifice and heroic perseverance.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, even in his youth Dr. Ghose’s personality stands out, enduring financial hardship and then daringly choosing to pursue his higher studies in distant England, where Indians were considered to be inferior and of a lower status. It was an era when most Indians would not even dream to undertake such an adventure. Sri Aurobindo had noted that his father was “among the first to go to England for his education.”<sup>31</sup> About his father’s character Sri Aurobindo has stated that his father was “a man of great ability and strong personality”.<sup>32</sup> Dr. K. D. Ghose was not only a solid and dogged personality but was also known for his extraordinary generosity and an unparalleled service for the common people. Although he was an atheist, in a letter dated December 1890 to J. Bose he wrote that the “real God” was the universe with its creatures, “and when I worship that by action I worship Him.”<sup>33</sup>

Amongst all the family members it was Sri Aurobindo who shared most with his father the attributes of compassion and resoluteness. Although both were dynamic, Sri Aurobindo’s approach greatly differed from his father’s. About his father’s dynamism, Sri Aurobindo once casually told his disciples:

My own father can be called the dictator of Rangpur or Khulna! The dictators come in answer to the necessity of the hour. When men and nations are in conflict with their surrounding conditions, when there is confusion all about, the dictators come, set things right and pull the race out of its difficulties.<sup>34</sup>

Sri Aurobindo has also remarked: “My father was very popular at Khulna; wherever he went he became all powerful.”<sup>35</sup> Barin, who sometimes stayed with his father at Khulna, wrote in his autobiography: “Olive complexioned, with large dreamy eyes and gentle dignified appearance, my father soon became the life and soul of Khulna. The police, the Magistrate, the civil servants, the school and municipal authorities all came to consult him. He made Khulna malaria free and introduced radical improvements in the hospital, the school, the jail and the municipality.”<sup>36</sup>

Dr. K. D. Ghose’s special medical training coupled with his commitment to work for the people made him one of the finest civil surgeons of his day. He treated the poor without charge. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes:

30. Manmohan Ghose, *Collected Poems*, Vol. 1, University of Calcutta 1970, pp. 115-16.

31. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 15.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Website: [http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item\\_00952\\_e.htm/8](http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item_00952_e.htm/8) June 2022.

34. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 168.

35. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 623.

36. Website: [http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item\\_00952\\_e.htm/8](http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item_00952_e.htm/8) June 2022.



Not only was Dr. Krishnadhan a capable Civil Surgeon and a true friend of the people, but he was also agreeably and alertly responsive to the social and literary cross-currents of his day. He took keen interest in the general welfare of the people around him and he evinced — despite the fact that he was “essentially a product of English education and European culture” — a genuine enthusiasm for the works of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Being a *persona grata* with European as well as Bengalee society, Dr. Krishnadhan was able to act as a link, a bridge, between the two; and, indeed, he came to be called the “Suez Canal”, for his house served as a common meeting place, day after day, for both Europeans and Bengalees.<sup>37</sup>

Dr. K. D. Ghose was an amazing blend of capability and empathy. A. B. Purani writes that Dr. K. D. Ghose “was always kind to the poor and extremely generous, so much so that he could never save anything from his pay.”<sup>38</sup> Sri Aurobindo gave his father the ultimate compliment: “He was extremely generous. Hardly anyone who went to him for help came back empty-handed.”<sup>39</sup> Nirodbaran states that whenever Sri Aurobindo spoke of his father “it was always with affection and tenderness.”<sup>40</sup>

Dr. K. D. Ghose’s extreme generosity coupled with the several responsibilities he shouldered meant he had constant funding constraints. Sadly, this had its consequences as he was unable to send regular remittances to Sri Aurobindo and his brothers, resulting in poverty and hardship for a large part of their stay in England. Manmohan told Binyon that although his father would like him to go to Oxford, his means were not sufficient to keep him there long.<sup>41</sup> In another letter to Binyon, Manmohan writes: “My position, by the way, is very hazy just now: I do not know whether after all I shall be able to retain my Scholarship, because my father is in some financial straits, and if he cannot help me £80 will not be enough to keep me at Oxford — the most expensive place on the face of the earth. I am going to Oxford next week to find out if I cannot help myself in any way, or find help. I feel as if anything might happen just now. But whatever happens I shall try and persuade my father to let me stay in England for good; I am sure with the tastes I have I shall be of no use in India.”<sup>42</sup>

Dr. K. D. Ghose would have been appointed the Health Officer of Calcutta, then the British jewel in India, but alas, due to the dark colour of his skin, was discriminated against, despite his competence. In 1883 there was a reversal in K. D. Ghose’s good impression of the English when the new English magistrate unfairly

37. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 27.

38. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 1.

39. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., p. 624.

40. Nirodbaran, ‘Sri Aurobindo – Perfect Gentleman’, *Mother India*, August 1970, p. 408.

41. See Manmohan Ghose, *Collected Poems*, Vol. 1, University of Calcutta 1970, p. 115.

42. Manmohan Ghose, *Collected Poems*, Vol. 1, University of Calcutta 1970, p. 119.

got him transferred out from Rangpur. Sri Aurobindo remarked, “It was since that time that he became a politician. That is to say, he did not like the English domination. Before that everything Western was good!”<sup>43</sup> In his disillusionment Dr. K. D. Ghose used to write to his sons in England about the injustices meted out by the British Government in India. Manmohan used to mention these to his friend Laurence Binyon. Sri Aurobindo notes that from an early age in England he “began first to be interested in Indian politics of which previously he knew nothing. His father began sending the newspaper *The Bengalee* with passages marked relating cases of maltreatment of Indians by Englishmen and he wrote in his letters denouncing the British Government in India as a heartless Government.”<sup>44</sup>

In late June 1883 Dr. Ghose stopped working in Rangpur. In October 1883 he worked as C. M. O. (Chief Medical Officer) at Bankura District. In January 1884, Dr. Ghose was the Officiating C. M. O., Noakhali District. On 10 February he was posted at Khulna. Again from March 1884, and for one year, the Government of Bengal appointed him “Superintendent of Vaccinations, Metropolitan Circle,” at Calcutta. The Bengal Government made this appointment in spite of the many objections raised by the Government of India — which might have added to Dr. Ghose’s bitterness against the English. Then in July 1885 Dr. Ghose was reverted to Khulna. He was to remain there until his death at the end of 1892.<sup>45</sup> In the latter part of his life he took to drinking to forget the struggles, bitterness and tragedy in his life.<sup>46</sup>

When Dr. K. D. Ghose suddenly passed away in December 1892 the whole town of Khulna mourned and a long procession followed the mortal remains bedecked with heaps of garlands; afterwards they established a school in his name and hung an oil painting of him in the town-hall. Both the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and *Bengalee* paid rich tributes. “He was in many respects a distinguished man. Rangpur owes him a debt immense of endless gratitude,” read a phrase in the obituary of the latter newspaper.<sup>47</sup>

On the theme of education we observe that right through his academic career, from his studies in England until the time he was a professor in India, Sri Aurobindo’s demeanour, in spite of his accomplishments, was self-effacing. Sri Aurobindo’s focus as a young student at St Paul’s School, London was in widening and deepening his knowledge rather than making an impact on his teachers by mastering the school curriculum. He told his disciples:

Up to the age of fifteen I was known as a very promising scholar in St. Paul’s. After fifteen I lost that reputation. The teachers used to say that I had become

43. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 624.

44. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, pp. 31-32.

45. Website: [http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item\\_00952\\_e.htm/8](http://sri-aurobindo.in/images/other/item_00952_e.htm/8) June 2022

46. See A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 1.

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



lazy and was deteriorating — because I was reading novels and poetry only; at examination time I used to prepare a little. But now and then when I wrote Greek and Latin verse my teachers used to lament that I was not utilising my remarkable gifts because of my laziness.<sup>48</sup>

He also writes about himself:

... at St Paul's in the last three years he simply went through his school course and spent most of his spare time in general reading, especially English poetry, literature and fiction, French literature and the history of ancient, mediaeval and modern Europe. He spent some time also over learning Italian, some German and a little Spanish. He spent much time too in writing poetry.<sup>49</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's love for literature and poetry and his thirst for knowledge was more important than excelling in his examinations. However, Sri Aurobindo's brilliance, ingeniousness and industriousness later paid dividends. In the demanding Cambridge scholarship examinations, the celebrated Cambridge don, Oscar Browning observed that he had never seen such excellent papers as Sri Aurobindo's. Browning was enraptured with Sri Aurobindo's original style of writing, rich in antitheses and epigrams and where he indulged in his Oriental tastes. “I thought myself that it was the best thing I had ever done, but at school I would have been condemned as extraordinarily Asiatic & bombastic,” writes Sri Aurobindo to his father. He further writes: “The Great O. B. afterwards asked me where my rooms were & when I had answered he said “That wretched hole!” then turning to Mahaffy “How rude we are to our scholars! we get great minds to come down here and then shut them up in that box!” Although pride was foreign to Sri Aurobindo, Browning casually added, “I suppose it is to keep their pride down.”<sup>50</sup>

Interestingly, Oscar Browning, thanks to an invitation from Maharaja Gaekwad, visited Baroda in 1902. The Cambridge don got to meet his star pupil and even though twelve years had elapsed he fondly remembered Sri Aurobindo and still considered him to be “the most brilliant Greek scholar whom I ever examined for an entrance scholarship.” Also the relationship of an eminent Cambridge personality with his student had now transformed into a friendship. Oscar Browning in his *Impressions of Indian Travel* writes of Sri Aurobindo:

I was fortunate enough to have as my guide and companion an old Cambridge pupil, a Brahmin of high rank, the most brilliant Greek scholar whom I ever examined for an entrance scholarship. He obtained a place in the Indian Civil

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

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

50. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

Service, but was rejected for his riding, and the Gaekwar has wisely attached him to his service. He is now engaged in important literary work, and he may some day be Minister of Education. We established a kind of blood-brotherhood between us by riding together on an elephant, an experience which neither of us had undergone before. The beast seemed to tower aloft, higher than any elephant I had ever seen. He knelt down, and we crawled to our seats on either side of him. It was a terrible moment when the animal rose to his legs, and we had to contemplate the possibility of slowly sliding to the ground down that long, stretch of dark grey skin. . . . Neither my friend nor myself had any desire to mount an elephant a second time.

We saw some strange sights in the native town. . . .

At last, all too soon, came the time for departure. My friend accompanied me to the crowded train, where I had with some difficulty secured a lower berth. I was to wake up next morning in Bombay, the last stage of my travel.<sup>51</sup>

There is no record of Sri Aurobindo mentioning to anyone about his friendship at Baroda with this distinguished Cambridge don who was also the author of several books, once again indicating Sri Aurobindo's proclivity for a low profile.

Akin to his time in school Sri Aurobindo did not focus on his degree syllabus at King's College, Cambridge. He notes that he “was not engrossed in classical studies; he was more busy reading general literature and writing poetry.”<sup>52</sup>

Thereafter Sri Aurobindo fulfilled his promise as a brilliant classical scholar by not only passing the First Part of the Classical Tripos examination at Cambridge in first class but also completing it in two years instead of the norm of three years. Despite passing the exam a year ahead of schedule, Sri Aurobindo did not receive the B.A. degree as curiously “the First Part gives the degree only if it is taken in the third year.” Astonishingly, Sri Aurobindo was entirely indifferent to the coveted degree certificate from one of the oldest and prestigious universities in the world, a unique achievement in those days even for any Englishman. Sri Aurobindo notes: “He might have got the degree if he had made an application for it, but he did not care to do so. A degree in English is valuable only if one wants to take up an academical career.”<sup>53</sup> Sri Aurobindo was of the view that “If one has true knowledge, a job is always available.”<sup>54</sup>

To a biographer Sri Aurobindo had sent a short note about his education in England where a certain phrase read that he “passed the Tripos in Cambridge in the first division, obtained record marks in Greek and Latin in the examination for the

51. Oscar Browning, *Impressions of Indian Travel*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1903, pp. 195-97, 199-200.

52. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 30.

53. *Ibid.*

54. Nirodbaran, *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, 1994, p. 18.

Indian Civil Service.” However, in his note Sri Aurobindo added, “I have left the detail about the Tripos and the record marks, though I do not find these trifles in place here; the note would read much better with the omission . . .”<sup>55</sup>

Sri Aurobindo could have become a celebrated fellow in Cambridge but he never gave it any consideration. Percy Mead, a Cambridge graduate, who had referred to Sri Aurobindo as “a great classical scholar, who had well-nigh beaten all records in Latin and Greek”, told Charu Chandra Dutt: “It is a pity that the man is an Indian and has had to come to this country. He would have been a famous professor in Cambridge.”<sup>56</sup> And Professor Lepper who was an undergraduate at King’s College recalls not only Sri Aurobindo’s brilliance but also his humility: “I knew him in those days quite well, and have happy recollections of him as a brilliant young classical scholar . . . of marked literary and poetic taste, and as far as I saw a young man of high character and modest bearing . . .”<sup>57</sup>

While at Cambridge, Sri Aurobindo was pressed by his father to sit for the arduous I.C.S. examination although he was already undertaking a demanding Classical Tripos course. Yet, he easily passed the I.C.S., securing an extremely high position with record breaking marks in Latin and Greek. Earlier Indians could not sit as they were considered to not have the requisite education or grooming. The I.C.S. was so prestigious that about 70 percent of its officers were from Oxbridge (Oxford and Cambridge University), most of whom did their schooling from the exclusive British public schools, which only the aristocracy or the élite rich could afford. Even the less exalted Colonial Service, which administered the British Colonies in Africa and other parts of Asia, were largely staffed by Oxbridge graduates. Furthermore, Oxbridge graduates also joined other less prestigious governmental and private-sector agencies that operated in the Colonies. For an Indian the I.C.S. was the pinnacle of success, but Sri Aurobindo chose to forego it. Until 1870 only one Indian had been able to get into the I.C.S. and Sri Aurobindo was the seventh Indian to pass the examination. He was the first Indian to reject this prestigious service, an unthinkable proposition at that time.

Sri Aurobindo notes in third person: “He felt no call for the I.C.S. and was seeking some way to escape from that bondage. By certain manoeuvres he managed to get himself disqualified for riding without himself rejecting the Service, which his family would not have allowed him to do.”<sup>58</sup> The day Sri Aurobindo deliberately disqualified himself from the I.C.S. his elder brother Manmohan, on hearing about it, was very upset. About that day Sri Aurobindo writes: “I was wandering in the streets of London to pass away time . . . . At last when I went to the grounds I was too late. I came back home and told my elder brother, Benoybhusan, that I was chucked. He

55. See *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 13.

56. Charu Chandra Dutt, ‘My Friend and my Master’, *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, Eighth Number, p. 125.

57. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 33.

58. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 31.

with a philosophic attitude proposed playing cards and so we [sat] down playing cards. [Manmohan] came [later] and on hearing about my being chucked began to shout at our playing cards when such a calamity had befallen [us].”<sup>59</sup> Sri Aurobindo later remarked that he sat for the I.C.S. exam solely because his father wanted “all his sons to be great; at that time to join the I.C.S. was to become great.”<sup>60</sup>

Interestingly, Sri Aurobindo’s elder brother, Manmohan — a poet and an Oxford scholar — too was more interested in following his artistic tastes than being successful in the world. He writes to his poet-friend Laurence Binyon, “My father wants me to go out to India, and slave as a barrister, and become a great man of the world like himself — a thing which is quite distasteful to my nature.”<sup>61</sup>

As a superlative scholar and a fine litterateur, Sri Aurobindo was a man of vast knowledge. His friends and acquaintances would have been eager to hear him speak, yet he spoke very little. His Baroda State colleague G. S. Sardesai, a well-known Marathi historian who used to go for walks with Sri Aurobindo, mentioned that Sri Aurobindo was so quiet and mystical that to any question he would merely reply “yes” or “no” and stop at that.<sup>62</sup> Dinendra Kumar Roy explained: “Aurobindo felt that the less one said about oneself the better. Perhaps that is why he spoke so little.”<sup>63</sup> It is extraordinary for a man of such ability to speak so little about himself or of his knowledge. Sri Aurobindo’s reticence and humility can be explained by one of his statements: “A Yogi doesn’t say all that he knows. He says only what is necessary.”<sup>64</sup> And the Mother has cautioned us: “Never boast. By boasting you dissipate your capacity for realisation.”<sup>65</sup>

However, as a professor at Baroda College Sri Aurobindo was compelled to speak to his students. A student, Dimishe, recalls his encyclopaedic knowledge and memory: “He had no books or notes with him; everything was extempore. The procedure went on for one and a half hours.”<sup>66</sup> Another student R. S. Dalal was overwhelmed by Sri Aurobindo’s knowledge, “we were all stunned at his genius when he dictated extemporaneous notes in a very lucid style.”<sup>67</sup> Another student, M. H. Kantavala reminisces: “The speech he delivered at one of the annual social gatherings was a piece of chaste and polished English, the like of which I have never heard.”<sup>68</sup>

Sri Aurobindo was an exemplary teacher who could speak impromptu at length, giving his students profound insights into literature and history from his vast reserves

59. *Ibid.*

60. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 624.

61. Manmohan Ghose, *Collected Poems*, Vol. 1, University of Calcutta 1970, p. 123.

62. See A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 39.

63. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 13.

64. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 205.

65. *CWM*, Vol. 14, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 205.

66. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 215.

67. Sri Aurobindo Society, *Sri Aurobindo at Gujarat*, Appendix p. 15.

68. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., p. 83.

of learning. His elder brother the poet Manmohan was a professor of English at Presidency College, Calcutta and once in a conversation Sri Aurobindo pointed out the difference in their teaching styles, underplaying his own ability: “He was very painstaking; most of the professors don’t work hard. I saw that his books used to be interleaved and marked and full of notes. I was not so conscientious a professor.” “But people who heard you in College and those who heard you afterwards in politics differ from you. They speak very highly of your Lectures,” protested A. B. Purani.<sup>69</sup>

Another aspect of Sri Aurobindo’s humility was his indifference to career, wealth or acclaim. Akin to his student days in England Sri Aurobindo never sought success or fame at Baroda. His routine was more inward than outward, content to be immersed in his literary studies, writing poetry and assimilating Indian culture. Maharaja Sayaji Gaekwad had a high regard for Sri Aurobindo’s scholarship and his abilities. Indeed, the Maharaja wanted to make Sri Aurobindo his private secretary, a position of such proximity that it would be the envy of all; but Sri Aurobindo resisted as he did not want much intrusion on his personal time.

Sri Aurobindo was brilliant and swift in his official work but was not inclined to give up his leisure time. The Maharaja was keen to exploit Sri Aurobindo’s unique talents to the fullest. In August 1902, the Maharaja in an official note, gave Sri Aurobindo a promotion with a Rs. 90 salary raise and praised him highly for being extremely talented, valuable and capable but added that he could be even more useful if he gives a bit more time, for otherwise, the Maharaja added for good measure, this could damage his own self-interest.<sup>70</sup> Not only was Sri Aurobindo reluctant to give the Maharaja more of his personal time but even this mild censure, to the Maharaja’s disappointment, did not have its desired effect! Moreover, Sri Aurobindo was quite detached about the compliments the Maharaja had given him.<sup>71</sup>

Dinendra Kumar Roy remarked, “Career was of no importance to Aurobindo — he never made petitions for promotion.”<sup>72</sup> Indeed in those days the I.C.S. officers used to start on an initial salary of Rs. 450 and reached the Rs. 1000 mark within less than five years. Dinendra Kumar Roy also writes: “Had Aurobindo been permitted to enter the Indian Civil Service he would have been the judge or magistrate of a district by now,”<sup>73</sup> but Sri Aurobindo had no such inclination. Dinendra Kumar Roy further notes that “there was not the least force of worldly ambition or ordinary human selfishness in his heart . . .”<sup>74</sup>

About Sri Aurobindo’s career in Baroda, Nationalist leader Bipin Chandra Pal wrote: “Had Aravinda cared for earthly honours or wealth, he had a very splendid

69. See A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 209.

70. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

71. See *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 145.

72. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., 2006, p. 42.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

opening for both in Baroda. He was held in great respect by the Maharaja. . . . All these opened very large possibilities of preferment before him in the service of this premier Native State in India.”<sup>75</sup> And in a prominent monthly review, edited by the highly respected scholar-editor, Ramananda Chatterjee, Jitendralal Bandhopadhyay, an eminent professor of English, writes of Sri Aurobindo’s unambitious and unworldly nature: “Still in the prime vigour of his life, he might have ascended, if he had so liked, step by step, to the highest position of trust and dignity in the princely state of Baroda. But this life of rest and ease was not for him. The God of India had other and nobler work to do for the chosen son than to rust in disuse in the cloistered seclusion of Baroda.”<sup>76</sup>

Sri Aurobindo himself admitted to his disciples, “If I had followed the line of external success I would have been somewhere in Baroda! That life was easy.”<sup>77</sup> The Mother has said that “one must be very high to be able to bear success.”<sup>78</sup> The Mother has also stated:

One must already be very strong, very far along the way, to be able to face success and the little enjoyments it brings without giving way. Those who can do this, those who are strong, do not run after success; they do not seek it, and accept it with indifference. For they know and appreciate the value of the lashes given by unhappiness and misfortune.<sup>79</sup>

In *The Synthesis of Yoga* Sri Aurobindo writes:

. . . The Yogin’s distinction from other men is this that he lives in a higher and vaster spiritual consciousness; . . .

He is not attached, bound and limited by any nor has he any personal motive of fame, greatness or personal satisfaction in these works; he can leave or pursue them as the Divine in him wills, but he need not otherwise abandon them in his pursuit of the higher integral knowledge.<sup>80</sup>

Sri Aurobindo himself gave no importance to worldly success. He told his disciples:

Many times outer success is not beneficial to a man’s inner progress. Sometimes it may be better for a man’s progress that he should fail than succeed. . . .

75. *Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities*, compiled and edited by Anurag Banerjee, pp. 414 (Written by Bipin Chandra Pal and published in his journal *Svaraj* which he was editing in London in 1909-10).

76. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, June 2016, p. 449.

77. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 351.

78. *CWM*, Vol. 6, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., pp. 239-40.

79. *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., pp. 58-59.

80. *CWSA*, Vol. 23, p. 143.

Because success may mean being led away from the path; of course, it depends upon what you mean by success. If you mean success in external life then it is a different matter. But if you mean “following the upward line of his evolution” then the so-called outward success may be harmful.<sup>81</sup>

*(To be continued)*

GAUTAM MALAKER

81. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 351.

*All great movements of life in India have begun with a new spiritual thought and usually a new religious activity. What more striking and significant fact can there be than this that even the new European influence, which was an influence intellectual, rationalistic, so often antireligious and which drew so much of its idealism from the increasingly cosmopolitan, mundane and secularist thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, precipitated in India from the very first an attempt at religious reformation and led actually to the creation of new religions? The instinct of the Indian mind was that, if a reconstruction of ideas and of society was to be attempted, it must start from a spiritual basis and take from the first a religious motive and form.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(The Renaissance in India, CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 24)*



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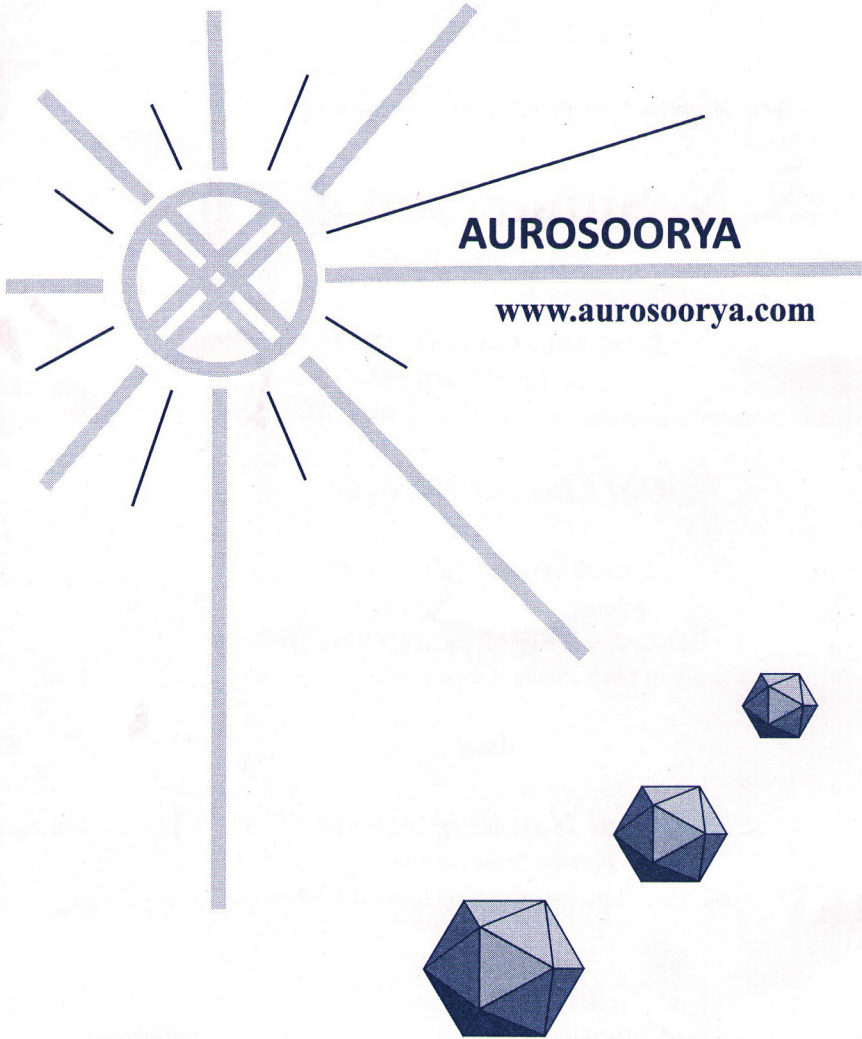
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