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# MOTHER INDIA

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DECEMBER 2022

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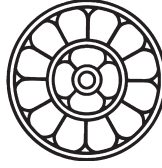
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# MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

DECEMBER 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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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXXV

No. 12

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## **‘SHE WISHED TO MAKE ALL ONE IMMENSE EMBRACE’**

. . . These things she took in as her nature’s food,  
But these alone could fill not her wide Self:  
A human seeking limited by its gains,  
To her they seemed the great and early steps  
Hazardous of a young discovering spirit  
Which saw not yet by its own native light;  
It tapped the universe with testing knocks  
Or stretched to find truth mind’s divining rod;  
There was a growing out to numberless sides,  
But not the widest seeing of the soul,  
Not yet the vast direct immediate touch,  
Nor yet the art and wisdom of the Gods.  
A boundless knowledge greater than man’s thought,  
A happiness too high for heart and sense  
Locked in the world and yearning for release  
She felt in her; waiting as yet for form,  
It asked for objects around which to grow  
And natures strong to bear without recoil  
The splendour of her native royalty,  
Her greatness and her sweetness and her bliss,  
Her might to possess and her vast power to love:  
Earth made a stepping-stone to conquer heaven,  
The soul saw beyond heaven’s limiting boundaries,  
Met a great light from the Unknowable  
And dreamed of a transcendent action’s sphere.  
Aware of the universal Self in all  
She turned to living hearts and human forms,  
Her soul’s reflections, complements, counterparts,  
The close outlying portions of her being  
Divided from her by walls of body and mind  
Yet to her spirit bound by ties divine.  
Overcoming invisible hedge and masked defence  
And the loneliness that separates soul from soul,  
She wished to make all one immense embrace  
That she might house in it all living things  
Raised into a splendid point of seeing light  
Out of division’s dense inconscient cleft,



And make them one with God and world and her.  
 Only a few responded to her call:  
 Still fewer felt the screened divinity  
 And strove to mate its godhead with their own,  
 Approaching with some kinship to her heights.  
 Uplifted towards luminous secrecies  
 Or conscious of some splendour hidden above  
 They leaped to find her in a moment's flash,  
 Glimpsing a light in a celestial vast,  
 But could not keep the vision and the power  
 And fell back to life's dull ordinary tone.  
 A mind daring heavenly experiment,  
 Growing towards some largeness they felt near,  
 Testing the unknown's bound with eager touch  
 They still were prisoned by their human grain:  
 They could not keep up with her tireless step;  
 Too small and eager for her large-paced will,  
 Too narrow to look with the unborn Infinite's gaze  
 Their nature weary grew of things too great.  
 For even the close partners of her thoughts  
 Who could have walked the nearest to her ray,  
 Worshipped the power and light they felt in her  
 But could not match the measure of her soul.  
 A friend and yet too great wholly to know,  
 She walked in their front towards a greater light,  
 Their leader and queen over their hearts and souls,  
 One close to their bosoms, yet divine and far.  
 Admiring and amazed they saw her stride  
 Attempting with a godlike rush and leap  
 Heights for their human stature too remote  
 Or with a slow great many-sided toil  
 Pushing towards aims they hardly could conceive;  
 Yet forced to be the satellites of her sun  
 They moved unable to forego her light,  
 Desiring they clutched at her with outstretched hands  
 Or followed stumbling in the paths she made.  
 Or longing with their self of life and flesh  
 They clung to her for heart's nourishment and support:  
 The rest they could not see in visible light;  
 Vaguely they bore her inner mightiness.  
 Or bound by the senses and the longing heart,



Adoring with a turbid human love,  
They could not grasp the mighty spirit she was  
Or change by closeness to be even as she.  
Some felt her with their souls and thrilled with her,  
A greatness felt near yet beyond mind's grasp;  
To see her was a summons to adore,  
To be near her drew a high communion's force.  
So men worship a god too great to know,  
Too high, too vast to wear a limiting shape;  
They feel a Presence and obey a might,  
Adore a love whose rapture invades their breasts;  
To a divine ardour quickening the heart-beats,  
A law they follow greatening heart and life.  
Opened to the breath is a new diviner air,  
Opened to man is a freer, happier world:  
He sees high steps climbing to Self and Light.  
Her divine parts the soul's allegiance called:  
It saw, it felt, it knew the deity.  
Her will was puissant on their nature's acts,  
Her heart's inexhaustible sweetness lured their hearts,  
A being they loved whose bounds exceeded theirs;  
Her measure they could not reach but bore her touch,  
Answering with the flower's answer to the sun  
They gave themselves to her and asked no more.  
One greater than themselves, too wide for their ken,  
Their minds could not understand nor wholly know,  
Their lives replied to hers, moved at her words:  
They felt a godhead and obeyed a call,  
Answered to her lead and did her work in the world;  
Their lives, their natures moved compelled by hers  
As if the truth of their own larger selves  
Put on an aspect of divinity  
To exalt them to a pitch beyond their earth's.  
They felt a larger future meet their walk;  
She held their hands, she chose for them their paths:  
They were moved by her towards great unknown things,  
Faith drew them and the joy to feel themselves hers;  
They lived in her, they saw the world with her eyes.  
Some turned to her against their nature's bent;  
Divided between wonder and revolt,  
Drawn by her charm and mastered by her will,

Possessed by her, her striving to possess,  
 Impatient subjects, their tied longing hearts  
 Hugging the bonds close of which they most complained,  
 Murmured at a yoke they would have wept to lose,  
 The splendid yoke of her beauty and her love:  
 Others pursued her with life's blind desires  
 And claiming all of her as their lonely own,  
 Hastened to engross her sweetness meant for all.  
 As earth claims light for its lone separate need  
 Demanding her for their sole jealous clasp,  
 They asked from her movements bounded like their own  
 And to their smallness craved a like response.  
 Or they repined that she surpassed their grip,  
 And hoped to bind her close with longing's cords.  
 Or finding her touch desired too strong to bear  
 They blamed her for a tyranny they loved,  
 Shrank into themselves as from too bright a sun,  
 Yet hankered for the splendour they refused.  
 Angrily enamoured of her sweet passionate ray  
 The weakness of their earth could hardly bear,  
 They longed but cried out at the touch desired  
 Inapt to meet divinity so close,  
 Intolerant of a Force they could not house.  
 Some drawn unwillingly by her divine sway  
 Endured it like a sweet but alien spell;  
 Unable to mount to levels too sublime,  
 They yearned to draw her down to their own earth.  
 Or forced to centre round her their passionate lives,  
 They hoped to bind to their heart's human needs  
 Her glory and grace that had enslaved their souls.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 34, pp. 361-65)

## **‘ALL IS IN EACH AND EACH IS IN ALL AND ALL IS IN GOD AND GOD IN ALL’**

. . . But we see farther that it is not solely and ultimately the cosmic being into which our individual being enters but something in which both are unified. As our individualisation in the world is a becoming of that Self, so is the world too a becoming of that Self. The world-being includes always the individual being; therefore these two becomings, the cosmic and the individual, are always related to each other and in their practical relation mutually dependent. But we find that the individual being also comes in the end to include the world in its consciousness, and since this is not by an abolition of the spiritual individual, but by his coming to his full, large and perfect self-consciousness, we must suppose that the individual always included the cosmos, and it is only the surface consciousness which by ignorance failed to possess that inclusion because of its self-limitation in ego. But when we speak of the mutual inclusion of the cosmic and the individual, the world in me, I in the world, all in me, I in all, — for that is the liberated self-experience, — we are evidently travelling beyond the language of the normal reason. That is because the words we have to use were minted by mind and given their values by an intellect bound to the conceptions of physical Space and circumstance and using for the language of a higher psychological experience figures drawn from the physical life and the experience of the senses. But the plane of consciousness to which the liberated human being arises is not dependent upon the physical world, and the cosmos which we thus include and are included in is not the physical cosmos, but the harmonically manifest being of God in certain great rhythms of His conscious-force and self-delight. Therefore this mutual inclusion is spiritual and psychological; it is a translation of the two forms of the Many, all and individual, into a unifying spiritual experience, — a translation of the eternal unity of the One and the Many; for the One is the eternal unity of the Many differentiating and undifferentiating itself in the cosmos. This means that cosmos and individual are manifestations of a transcendent Self who is indivisible being although he seems to be divided or distributed; but he is not really divided or distributed but indivisibly present everywhere. Therefore all is in each and each is in all and all is in God and God in all; and when the liberated soul comes into union with this Transcendent, it has this self-experience of itself and cosmos which is translated psychologically into a mutual inclusion and a persistent existence of both in a divine union which is at once a oneness and a fusion and an embrace.

The normal experience of the reason therefore is not applicable to these higher truths. In the first place the ego is the individual only in the ignorance; there is a true individual who is not the ego and still has an eternal relation with all other individuals which is not egoistic or self-separative, but of which the essential character is prac-

tical mutuality founded in essential unity. This mutuality founded in unity is the whole secret of the divine existence in its perfect manifestation; it must be the basis of anything to which we can give the name of a divine life. But, secondly, we see that the whole difficulty and confusion into which the normal reason falls is that we are speaking of a higher and illimitable self-experience founded on divine infinities and yet are applying to it a language formed by this lower and limited experience which founds itself on finite appearances and the separative definitions by which we try to distinguish and classify the phenomena of the material universe. Thus we have to use the word individual and speak of the ego and the true individual, just as we speak sometimes of the apparent and the real Man. Evidently, all these words, man, apparent, real, individual, true, have to be taken in a very relative sense and with a full awareness of their imperfection and inability to express the things that we mean. By individual we mean normally something that separates itself from everything else and stands apart, though in reality there is no such thing anywhere in existence; it is a figment of our mental conceptions useful and necessary to express a partial and practical truth. But the difficulty is that the mind gets dominated by its words and forgets that the partial and practical truth becomes true truth only by its relation to others which seem to the reason to contradict it, and that taken by itself it contains a constant element of falsity. Thus when we speak of an individual we mean ordinarily an individualisation of mental, vital, physical being separate from all other beings, incapable of unity with them by its very individuality. If we go beyond these three terms of mind, life and body, and speak of the soul or individual self, we still think of an individualised being separate from all others, incapable of unity and inclusive mutuality, capable at most of a spiritual contact and soul-sympathy. It is therefore necessary to insist that by the true individual we mean nothing of the kind, but a conscious power of being of the Eternal, always existing by unity, always capable of mutuality. It is that being which by self-knowledge enjoys liberation and immortality.

But we have to carry still farther the conflict between the normal and the higher reason. When we speak of the true individual as a conscious power of being of the Eternal, we are still using intellectual terms, — we cannot help it, unless we plunge into a language of pure symbols and mystic values of speech, — but, what is worse, we are, in the attempt to get away from the idea of the ego, using a too abstract language. Let us say, then, a conscious being who is for our valuations of existence a being of the Eternal in his power of individualising self-experience; for it must be a concrete being — and not an abstract power — who enjoys immortality. And then we get to this that not only am I in the world and the world in me, but God is in me and I am in God; by which yet it is not meant that God depends for His existence on man, but that He manifests Himself in that which He manifests within Himself; the individual exists in the Transcendent, but all the Transcendent is there concealed in the individual. Further I am one with God in my being and yet I can have relations with Him in my experience. I, the liberated individual, can enjoy

the Divine in His transcendence, unified with Him, and enjoy at the same time the Divine in other individuals and in His cosmic being. Evidently we have arrived at certain primary relations of the Absolute and they can only be intelligible to the mind if we see that the Transcendent, the individual, the cosmic being are the eternal powers of consciousness — we fall again, this time without remedy, into a wholly abstract language, — of an absolute existence, a unity yet more than a unity, which so expresses itself to its own consciousness in us, but which we cannot adequately speak of in human language and must not hope to describe either by negative or positive terms to our reason, but can only hope to indicate it to the utmost power of our language.

But the normal mind, which has no experience of these things that are so powerfully real to the liberated consciousness, may well revolt against what may seem to it nothing more than a mass of intellectual contradictions. It may say, “I know very well what the Absolute is; it is that in which there are no relations. The Absolute and the relative are irreconcilable opposites; in the relative there is nowhere anything absolute, in the Absolute there can be nothing relative. Anything which contradicts these first data of my thought, is intellectually false and practically impossible. These other statements also contradict my law of contradictions which is that two opposing and conflicting affirmations cannot both be true. It is impossible that there should be oneness with God and yet a relation with Him such as this of the enjoyment of the Divine. In oneness there is no one to enjoy except the One and nothing to be enjoyed except the One. God, the individual and the cosmos must be three different actualities, otherwise there could be no relations between them. Either they are eternally different or they are different in present time, although they may have originally been one undifferentiated existence and may eventually re-become one undifferentiated existence. Unity was perhaps and will be perhaps, but it is not now and cannot be so long as cosmos and the individual endure. The cosmic being can only know and possess the transcendent unity by ceasing to be cosmic; the individual can only know and possess the cosmic or the transcendental unity by ceasing from all individuality and individualisation. Or if unity is the one eternal fact, then cosmos and individual are non-existent; they are illusions imposed on itself by the Eternal. That may well involve a contradiction or an unreconciled paradox; but I am willing to admit a contradiction in the Eternal which I am not compelled to think out, rather than a contradiction here of my primary conceptions which I am compelled to think out logically and to practical ends. I am on this supposition able either to take the world as practically real and think and act in it or to reject it as an unreality and cease to think and act; I am not compelled to reconcile contradictions, not called on to be conscious of and conscious in something beyond myself and world and yet deal from that basis, as God does, with a world of contradictions. The attempt to be as God while I am still an individual or to be three things at a time seems to me to involve a logical confusion and a practical impossibility.” Such

might well be the attitude of the normal reason, and it is clear, lucid, positive in its distinctions; it involves no extraordinary gymnastics of the reason trying to exceed itself and losing itself in shadows and half-lights or any kind of mysticism, or at least there is only one original and comparatively simple mysticism free from all other difficult complexities. Therefore it is the reasoning which is the most satisfactory to the simply rational mind. Yet is there here a triple error, the error of making an unbridgeable gulf between the Absolute and the relative, the error of making too simple and rigid and extending too far the law of contradictions and the error of conceiving in terms of Time the genesis of things which have their origin and first habitat in the Eternal.

We mean by the Absolute something greater than ourselves, greater than the cosmos which we live in, the supreme reality of that transcendent Being which we call God, something without which all that we see or are conscious of as existing, could not have been, could not for a moment remain in existence. Indian thought calls it Brahman, European thought the Absolute because it is a self-existent which is absolved of all bondage to relativities. For all relatives can only exist by something which is the truth of them all and the source and continent of their powers and properties and yet exceeds them all; it is something of which not only each relativity itself, but also any sum we can make of all relatives that we know, can only be — in all that we know of them — a partial, inferior or practical expression. We see by reason that such an Absolute must exist; we become by spiritual experience aware of its existence: but even when we are most aware of it, we cannot describe it because our language and thought can deal only with the relative. The Absolute is for us the Ineffable.

So far there need be no real difficulty nor confusion. But we readily go on, led by the mind's habit of oppositions, of thinking by distinctions and pairs of contraries, to speak of it as not only not bound by the limitations of the relative, but as if it were bound by its freedom from limitations, inexorably empty of all power for relations and in its nature incapable of them, something hostile in its whole being to relativity and its eternal contrary. By this false step of our logic we get into an impasse. Our own existence and the existence of the universe become not only a mystery, but logically inconceivable. For we get by that to an Absolute which is incapable of relativity and exclusive of all relatives and yet the cause or at least the support of relativity and the container, truth and substance of all relatives. We have then only one logical-illogical way of escape out of the impasse; we have to suppose the imposition of the world as a self-effective illusion or an unreal temporal reality, on the eternity of the formless relationless Absolute. This imposition is made by our misleading individual consciousness which falsely sees Brahman in the figure of the cosmos — as a man mistakes a rope for a serpent; but since either our individual consciousness is itself a relative supported by the Brahman and only existent by it, not a real reality, or since in its reality it is itself the Brahman, it is the Brahman

after all which imposes on itself in us this delusion and mistakes in some figure of its own consciousness an existent rope for a non-existent snake, imposes on its own indeterminable pure Reality the semblance of a universe, or if it does not impose it on its own consciousness, it is on a consciousness derived from it and dependent on it, a projection of itself into Maya. By this explanation nothing is explained; the original contradiction stands where it was, unreconciled, and we have only stated it over again in other terms. It looks as if, by attempting to arrive at an explanation by means of intellectual reasoning, we have only befogged ourselves by the delusion of our own uncompromising logic: we have imposed on the Absolute the imposition which our too presumptuous reasoning has practised on our own intelligence; we have transformed our mental difficulty in understanding the world-manifestation into an original impossibility for the Absolute to manifest itself in world at all. But the Absolute, obviously, finds no difficulty in world-manifestation and no difficulty either in a simultaneous transcendence of world-manifestation; the difficulty exists only for our mental limitations which prevent us from grasping the supramental rationality of the coexistence of the infinite and the finite or seizing the nodus of the unconditioned with the conditioned. For our intellectual rationality these are opposites; for the absolute reason they are interrelated and not essentially conflicting expressions of one and the same reality. The consciousness of infinite Existence is other than our mind-consciousness and sense-consciousness, greater and more capacious, for it includes them as minor terms of its workings, and the logic of infinite Existence is other than our intellectual logic. It reconciles in its great primal facts of being what to our mental view, concerned as it is with words and ideas derived from secondary facts, are irreconcilable contraries.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 386-93)





## PALLI SAMITI<sup>1</sup>

The resolution on which I have been asked to speak is from one point of view the most important of all that this conference has passed. As one of the speakers has already said, the village Samiti is the seed of Swaraj. What is Swaraj but the organization of the independent life of the country into centres of strength which grow out of its conditions and answer to its needs, so as to make a single and organic whole? When a nation is in a natural condition, growing from within and existing from within and in its own strength, then it develops its own centres and correlates them according to its own needs. But as soon as for any reason this natural condition is interrupted and a foreign organism establishes itself in and dominates in the country, then that foreign body draws to itself all the sources of nourishment and the natural centres, deprived of their sustenance, fail and disappear. It is for this reason that foreign rule can never be for the good of a nation, never work for its true progress and life, but must always work towards its disintegration and death. This is no new discovery, no recently invented theory of ours, but an ascertained truth of political science as taught in Europe by Europeans to Europeans. It is there laid down that foreign rule is inorganic and therefore tends to disintegrate the subject body politic by destroying its proper organs and centres of life. If a subject nation is ever to recover and survive, it can only be by reversing the process and reestablishing its own organic centres of life and strength. We in India had our own instruments of life and growth; we had the self-dependent village; we had the Zamindar as the link between the village units and the central governing body and the central governing body itself was one in which the heart of the nation beat. All these have been either destroyed or crippled by the intrusion of the foreign organism. If we are to survive as a nation we must restore the centres of strength which are natural and necessary to our growth, and the first of these, the basis of all the rest, the old foundation of Indian life and secret of Indian vitality was the self-dependent and self-sufficient village organism. If we are to organize Swaraj we must base it on the village. But we must at the same time take care to avoid the mistake which did much in the past to retard our national growth. The village must not in our new national life be isolated as well as self-sufficient, but must feel itself bound up with the life of its neighbouring units, living with them in a common group for common purposes. Each group again must feel itself part of the life of the district, living in the district unity, so each district must not be engrossed in its own separate existence but feel itself a subordinate part of the single life of the province, and the province in its turn of the single life of the country. Such is the

*1. Speech delivered in Kishoregunj, East Bengal, on 20 April 1908. Text published in the weekly edition of the Bande Mataram on 26 April 1908.*

plan of reconstruction we have taken in hand, but to make it a healthy growth and not an artificial construction we must begin at the bottom and work up to the apex. The village is the cell of the national body and the cell-life must be healthy and developed for the national body to be healthy and developed. Swaraj begins from the village.

Take another point of view. Swaraj is the organization of national self-help, national self-dependence. As soon as the foreign organism begins to dominate the body politic, it compels the whole body to look to it as the centre of its activities and neglect its own organs of action till these become atrophied. We in India allowed this tendency of alien domination to affect us so powerfully that we have absolutely lost the habit and for some time had lost the desire of independent activity and became so dependent and inert that there can be found no example of such helplessness and subservience in history. The whole of our national life was swallowed up by this dependence. Swaraj will only be possible if this habit of subservience is removed and replaced by a habit of self-help. We must take back our life into our own hands and the change must be immediate, complete and drastic. It is no use employing half-measures, for the disease is radical and the cure must be radical also. Our aim must be to revolutionize our habits and leave absolutely no corner of our life and activities in which the habit of dependence is allowed to linger or find refuge for its insidious and destructive workings; education, commerce, industry, the administration of justice among ourselves, protection, sanitation, public works, one by one we must take them all back into our hands. Here again the village Samiti is an indispensable instrument, for as this resolution declares, the village Samiti is not to be a mere council for deliberation, but a strong organ of executive work. It is to set up village schools in which our children will grow up as good citizens and patriots to live for their country and not for themselves or for the privilege of a dependent life in a dependent nation. It is to take up the work of arbitration by which we shall recover control of the administration of justice, of self-protection, of village sanitation, of small local public works, so that the life of the village may again be self-reliant and self-sufficient, free from the habit of dependence rooted in the soil. Self-help and self-dependence, the first conditions of Swaraj, depend for their organisation on the village Samiti.

Another essential condition of Swaraj is that we should awaken the political sense of the masses. There may have been a time in history when it was enough that a few classes, the ruling classes, the learned classes, at most the trading classes should be awake. But the organisation of the modern nation depends on the awakening of the political sense in the mass. This is the age of the people, the million, the democracy. If any nation wishes to survive in the modern struggle, if it wishes to recover or maintain Swaraj, it must awaken the people and bring them into the conscious life of the nation, so that every man may feel that in the nation he lives, with the prosperity of the nation he prospers, in the freedom of the nation he is free. This work again depends on the village Samiti. Unless we organise the united life of the village we

cannot bridge over the gulf between the educated and the masses. It is here that their lives meet and that they can feel unity. The work of the village Samiti will be to make the masses feel Swaraj in the village, Swaraj in the group of villages, Swaraj in the district, Swaraj in the nation. They cannot immediately rise to the conception of Swaraj in the nation, they must be trained to it through the perception of Swaraj in the village. The political education of the masses is impossible unless you organise the village Samiti.

Swaraj, finally, is impossible without unity. But the unity we need for Swaraj is not a unity of opinion, a unity of speech, a unity of intellectual conviction. Unity is of the heart and springs from love. The foreign organism which has been living on us, lives by the absence of this love, by division, and it perpetuates the condition of its existence by making us look to it as the centre of our lives and away from our Mother and her children. It has set Hindu and Mahomedan at variance by means of this outward outlook; for by regarding it as the fountain of life, however, we are led to look away from our brothers and yearn for what the alien strength can give us. The Hindu first fell a prey to this lure and it was the Mahomedan who was then feared and held down. Now that the Hindu is estranged, the same lure is held out to the Mahomedan and the brother communities kept estranged because they look to the foreigner for the source of prosperity and honours and not to their own Mother. Again, in the old days we did not hear of this distress of the scarcity of water from which the country is suffering now so acutely. It did not exist and could not exist because there was love and the habit of mutual assistance which springs from love. The Zamindar felt that he was one with his tenants and could not justify his existence if they were suffering, so his first thought was to meet their wants and remove their disabilities. But now that we look to a foreign source for everything, this love for our countrymen, this habit of mutual assistance, this sense of mutual duty has disappeared. Each man is for himself and if anything is to be done for our brothers, there is the Government to do it and it is no concern of ours. This drying up of the springs of mutual affection is the cause which needs most to be removed and the village Samiti is again the first condition of a better state of things. It will destroy the aloofness, the separateness of our lives and bring us back the sense of community, the habit of mutual assistance and mutual beneficence. It will take up the want of water and remove it. It will introduce arbitration courts and, by healing our family feuds and individual discords, restore the lost sense of brotherhood. It will seek out the sick and give them medical relief. It will meet the want of an organization for famine relief. It will give justice, it will give protection and when all are thus working for the good of all, the old unity of our lives will be restored, the basis of Swaraj will have been laid in the tie which binds together the hearts of our people.

This is therefore no empty resolution, it is the practice of Swaraj to which you are vowing yourselves. Bengal is the leader of Indian regeneration, in Bengal its

problems must be worked out and all Bengal is agreed in this — whatever division there may be among us — that the recovery of our self-dependent national life is the aim and end of our national movement. If you are really lovers of Swaraj, if you are not merely swayed by a blind feeling, a cry, but are prepared to work out Swaraj, then the measure of your sincerity shall be judged by the extent to which you carry out this resolution. Before the necessity of these village Samitis was realised there was some excuse for negligence, but now that the whole of Bengal is awakened to the necessity, there is none. You have assembled here from Kishoregunj, from all quarters of the Mymensingh District and on behalf of the people of Mymensingh are about to pass this resolution. If by this time next year you have not practically given effect to it, we shall understand that your desire for Swaraj is a thing not of the heart but of the lips or of the intellect at most. But if by that time Mymensingh is covered with village Samitis in full action, then we shall know that one district at least in Bengal has realised the conditions of Swaraj and when one district has solved the problem, it is only a question of time when over all Bengal and over all India, Swaraj will be realised.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Bande Mataram*, CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 1047-51)



## ‘A HOLOCAUST CONSCIOUS AND COMPLETE’

**August 4, 1914**

O Lord, O eternal Master!

Men, driven by the conflict of forces, are performing a sublime sacrifice, they are offering their lives in a bloodstained holocaust. . . .

O Lord, O eternal Master, grant that all this may not be in vain, grant that the inexhaustible torrents of Thy divine Force may spread over the earth and penetrate its troubled atmosphere, the struggling energies, the violent chaos of battling elements; grant that the pure light of Thy Knowledge and the inexhaustible love of Thy Benediction may fill men’s hearts, penetrate their souls, illumine their consciousness and, out of this obscurity, out of this sombre, terrible and potent darkness, bring forth the splendour of Thy majestic Presence!

My being is laid before Thee in a holocaust conscious and complete, that their unconscious holocaust may by it be made effective.

Accept the offering, answer our call: *Come!*

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 216)*



## A CONVERSATION OF 16 AUGUST 1969

*Is it an error to make a clean sweep of everything, to make it all empty?*

Oh no! Oh no!

*I have often asked myself whether I was wrong in my way of proceeding. My spontaneous way of proceeding is to sweep away everything, to make it all completely empty and then to turn towards something up above and to keep absolutely silent and immobile.*

Yes, that is the *best* means, nothing can be better.

That is what I am doing all the time.

If one could only do that! . . . From all sides it comes like that (*gesture as of waves attacking*).

*(A little later. About the world situation.)*

Finally, I am fully convinced that the confusion is there to teach us how to live from day to day, that is to say, not to be preoccupied with what may happen, what will happen, just to occupy oneself day by day with doing what one has to do. All thinkings, pre-plannings, arrangements and all that, are very favourable to much disorder.

To live almost minute by minute, to be like that (*gesture upward*), attentive only to the thing that is to be done at the moment, and then to let the All-Consciousness decide. . . . We can never know things even with the widest vision: we can know things only *very* partially — very partially. So our attention is drawn this way and that, and still other things are there. By giving great importance to things dangerous and harmful, you only add strength to them.

*(Mother goes into contemplation.)*

When you are assailed by the vision of such disorder and confusion, you have to do only one thing, to enter into the consciousness where you see only *one* Being, *one* Consciousness, *one* Power — there is only a single Unity — and all this is taking place within this Unity. And all our insignificant visions and knowings and judgments and . . . all that is mere nothing, it is microscopic in comparison with the Consciousness presiding over All. Therefore, if one had the least sense of the reason why separate individualities existed, one would see that it was only for allowing

aspiration, the existence of aspiration, of this movement of self-giving and surrender, trust and *faith*. And it is this that is the very reason why individuals were built up; and then, for you to become that in all sincerity and intensity . . . it is all that is needed.

It is all that is needed, it is the *only thing*, the only thing that stays; all the rest . . . phantasmagoria.

And it is the only thing valid in every case: when you want to do a thing, when you cannot do a thing, when you move, when the body is no more able to move . . . in *every*, every case, that only, only that: to come in conscious contact with the Supreme Consciousness, to be united with it; and . . . to wait. There!

It is then that you receive the exact indication of what you ought to do at each minute — to do or not to do, to act or to be stone still. That is all. And even to be or not to be. That is the only solution. More and more, more and more, the certitude is there: this is the *only* solution. All the rest is mere childishness.

And all activities, all possibilities can be made use of in a natural way — it eliminates all arbitrary personal choice. All possibilities are there, all, all, all are there. All perceptions are there and all knowledge — only the personal arbitrariness has been eliminated. And this personal arbitrariness is *so* childish, so childish . . . a stupidity, a stupidity full of ignorance.

And I feel, I feel like that (*Mother feels the air*) this agitation, oh! this whirl in the atmosphere!

Poor humanity.

(*Long silence*)

All that is for teaching the world to turn back to the Lord in its consciousness. . . . Why? It is for this that there has been a creation?

(*Silence*)

*But I have a practical problem. Each time I form this emptiness, in order precisely to join myself up there . . . with this something, I feel that I have never had an accurate answer. It is such a massive Power that is there, so solid and then . . .*

Ah! You never had an answer?

*It is always the same thing, this Power which is there, impassive.*

Well!



*Yesterday, for example, during the meditation, it was the same thing — it is always the same thing — this Thing, massive, powerful, which is there but which does not want to say anything.*

But don't you have the sense of a . . . I do not know how to explain, because it is not ease nor . . . I do not know how to explain, it is something which . . . no words can tell it, but it leaves you absolutely satisfied.

*One is well.*

Ah!

*Yes, one is well, that is certain.*

Ah! So it's all right, it is that. Everything, everything else is useless.

*Yes, but how to get the true, the correct impulse?*

But it lies underneath that state.

*It is underneath?*

It is underneath.

That state . . . I know, by experience, that it is the state in which *one can change the world*. One becomes a sort of instrument — that is even unconscious of being an instrument — but which serves (*gesture showing the flow of forces through the instrument*) to project the forces (*gesture in all directions radiating from the instrument as the centre*). The brain is altogether, altogether too small, is it not? Even when it is very big, it is too small to be capable of understanding; that is why there is this blank in the mind and the thing happens.

And then you perceive that with regard to the needs of the little life you represent, it automatically comes to pass and you automatically do at every minute just what you have to do without . . . without calculating, without speculating, without deciding, nothing; it is like this (*same gesture of flow through the instrument*).

I had the personal experience then, that if something is upset in the body (a pain, a discomfort or something that does not function properly), when you have gone through that state, it leaves you — it goes away, disappears. Acute pains even disappeared completely, one does not know how! Ah! Gone — like that.

And then, in the contact with people and in the contact with the things of life, a childlike simplicity. That is to say, one does things without . . . particularly without speculating.

Well, it is like that. I try to be always in the state which you are describing, like that, *whatever happens*; and always — always, without exception — if there is anything to be done, I am made to do it.

I cannot say anything else. It is so.

I noticed that I am made to act differently at different moments with different people, and even the experience is very different — all that, the same thing, the same way, like that (*gesture turned upward, without movement*).

Only, one must arrive at a state where there is naturally no more preference nor desire nor repulsion nor attraction, nothing — all that is gone.

And above all, above all, no fear — particularly. That is the most essential of all things.

THE MOTHER

(*Notes on the Way*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 11, pp. 184-88)



## A CONVERSATION OF 24 JUNE 1967

Many things to say, but . . . it is better to come to the end. It is a curve. Better to reach the end. It is too early to speak.

*(After a silence)* The movements of the body almost in their totality are habitual movements. Behind, there is the consciousness of the physical mind (what I call the “cellular mind”), which is itself constantly conscious of the divine Presence and is keen on accepting nothing but That; so a whole work is going on for changing, shifting the origin of the movements. I mean to say that instead of it just being automatically the habit, it should be automatically the divine Presence and Consciousness that causes the movement (*Mother makes a gesture of pushing the Consciousness into the body*).

But it is quite, quite inexpressible; that is to say, as soon as you try to express it, it is mentalised, it is no longer itself. That is why it is very difficult to express it. I cannot speak of it.

However, I seem to have told you not long ago of my observation of the habit and the taste for drama in the most material consciousness. That was the starting-point. As soon as it became conscious, that habit became, as it were, foreign, foreign to the true consciousness, and from then on the transfer has been going on.

It is a very delicate and difficult work.

It means fighting against a habit thousands of years old. It is the automatism of the material consciousness which is, yes, dramatic, almost catastrophic; sometimes dramatic, and dramatic with an imaginative conclusion which undoes the drama. But all that becomes much too concrete as soon as one expresses it. Better not to speak of it.

As soon as it is said, it becomes artificial.

And it is as though in order to replace this habit there was a kind of effort to create another (!) which is only an approximation. Does this state of consciousness, this way of being, this way of existing, of reacting, of expressing, point to or tend towards the Divine Manifestation? Is it in conformity with the urge towards the Divine Manifestation? . . . And the thought is silent, immobile, then the imagination does not work (all that, willingly), and the movement tries to be as sincere and as spontaneous as possible, under the influence of the divine Presence. . . . Words deform everything.

From time to time — from time to time, all of a sudden: the concrete experience, like a lightning flash — the experience of the Presence, the identification. But that lasts a few seconds and then it begins again as it was before.

It cannot be expressed.

[Then Mother turns to the translation of two texts of Sri Aurobindo.]

*“That is a great secret of sadhana, to know how to get things done by the Power behind or above instead of doing all by the mind’s effort.”<sup>1</sup>*

It is exactly so.

*“The importance of the body is obvious; it is because he has developed or been given a body and brain capable of receiving and serving a progressing mental illumination that man has risen above the animal. Equally, it can only be by developing a body or at least a functioning of the physical instrument capable of receiving and serving a still higher illumination that he will rise above himself and realise, not merely in thought and in his internal being but in life, a perfectly divine manhood. Otherwise either the promise of Life is cancelled, its meaning annulled and earthly being can only realise Sachchidananda by abolishing itself, by shedding from it mind, life and body and returning to the pure Infinite, or else man is not the divine instrument, there is a destined limit to the consciously progressive power which distinguishes him from all other terrestrial existences and, as he has replaced them in the front of things, so another must eventually replace him and assume his heritage.”<sup>2</sup>*

I understand! I was busy with it all the while.

(Silence)

But Sri Aurobindo’s conclusion is that it is not this (*the body*) which can change; it will be a new being.

*No, he says if it is not able, it will be a new being.*

No, I do not mean here in this text; I mean in the things he wrote subsequently.

? . . .

Besides, it is the same thing, because . . . can a body change? . . . And even so, it seems to be very difficult. It is not impossible. It is not impossible, but . . . it is such a tremendous labour that life is too short; and even there, there is something to change, yes — this habit of wearing out is a terrible thing.

*Yes, but a “new being”, from where would it come? Will it drop from the sky?*

1. *Letters on Yoga – II*, CWSA, Vol. 29, p. 215.

2. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 245-46.

Of course not, just so! The more one looks . . . It won't come like that (*Mother laughs*), it will come evidently in the same way as man has come out of the animal. But the stages between the animal and man are missing. We think of it, we imagine it, we have rediscovered things, but to say the truth we were not present! We do not know how that happened. But that does not matter. . . . According to some, we can consciously begin to work out within us the transformation, in forming the child. It is possible; I do not say No. It is possible. And then this one must prepare a more transformed one and so on, several stages like that which will disappear even as the stages between the ape and man have disappeared?

*Well, yes, it is the whole story of the process of human perfection.*

You can call it as you like, yes. But a *new being* . . . as for us, we conceive, as you say, a new being as descending ready-made, prefabricated! . . . That is pure romance.

*It is exactly what Sri Aurobindo also says. It must be built.*

It would be after two or three — or four or ten or twenty, I do not know — intermediary beings that the new manner, the supramental manner of creating, will come. . . . But will it be necessary to have children? Will it not do away with the necessity of children to replace those who will be no longer there? For they will continue to exist indefinitely. They will transform themselves sufficiently to adapt to the new needs.

*All that is very conceivable at a long distance of time.*

Yes, a long distance.

*But precisely you are there so that it may be at a short distance!*

No, Sri Aurobindo did not view it at a short distance.

*Well, it must be yourself. At a short or at a long distance, it must be you who does it, in this life and in this body.*

But, I see . . .

I am trying to do it — not by an arbitrary will, nothing of the kind; simply there is “Something” or Someone or a Consciousness or anything (I do not want to speak of it) which is using this (*Mother's body*) and trying to make something of it. That is to say, at the same time I am doing and I am witnessing, and the “I”, I do not know where it is: it is not within there, it is not up there, it is not . . . I do not know where it is; it is for the necessity of language. There is “something” that is doing and it is

witnessing at the same time, and at the same time it is the action that does it: the three.

Because the body itself now truly collaborates as much as it can — as much as it can — with a goodwill and an increasing power of endurance, and, in fact, the backward turn on oneself is reduced to a minimum (it is there, but like something that just touches from time to time, but it does not stay even for a few seconds). That, this backward turn on oneself, is altogether the atmosphere that is disgusting, repulsive, catastrophic. And it is like that, it is *felt* like that. And it is becoming more and more impossible, I see it, it is visible. . . . But there is still the weight of thousands of years of bad habits which may be called pessimistic, that is to say, expecting decline, expecting catastrophe, expecting . . . in fact, all these things, and it is that which is most difficult, ouf! to purify, to clarify, to throw out of the atmosphere. It is so much *inside* that it is altogether spontaneous. It is this which is the great, great obstacle, this kind of feeling of the inevitable decline.

Naturally, from the mental point of view, the whole earthly atmosphere is like that, but in the mind it has very little importance: a ray of light and it is swept away. But it is there *within* (*Mother points to her body*), it is this habit — this catastrophic habit — which is formidable, formidable to counteract. And it is *indispensable* that it should disappear so that the other may instal itself.

So it is a battle of every minute, every minute, all the while, all the while.

And then, you know, the being is not isolated, the body is not isolated; it is more or less a multitude, with degrees of proximity; but quite near, there are all those who are here, and it is the same problem — the same problem. Because what is acquired in the consciousness of this body is not acquired at all in the consciousness of others. That increases the labour.

The problem of mental and even vital contagion is, so to say, resolved, but the problem of material contagion still remains there.

And in this material consciousness, there is the material mind that has so marvellously responded here<sup>3</sup>, but it has not yet the power to assert itself spontaneously against what comes from outside, this perpetual contagion, constant, constant, of every minute.

(*Long silence*)

When all of a sudden the Contact becomes conscious and the sense of Identity comes, as I say, for a few seconds, but when it comes . . . it is like a hosanna of all the cells which say: “Oh! Yes, yes, it is true! So it is true. . . .”

This comes perhaps a hundred times a day, but it does not stay.

THE MOTHER

(*Notes on the Way*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 11, pp. 69-74)

3. Mother means within herself.

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

Sri Aurobindo —

What do you think of this poem, trying to express a spiritual paradox?

**FRAILTY**

No delicate flower finds her perfume-poise  
More chilled than now this timid flame of prayer:  
A rough wind blowing from the world's commotion  
Leaves my heart-incense broken on the air!  
But, O miraculous Calm, out of my weakness  
Build thou a sudden towering vehemence:  
Make so death-frail the sprout of life's endeavour,  
So void of help without thy tranquil beauty  
          would     to thee for ever and ever  
That I must cling and cling to thee for ever —  
Ivied with love round thy omnipotence!

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

Very fine.

15 February 1936

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(Version from *The Secret Splendour —  
Collected Poems of K. D Sethna [Amal Kiran], 1993 Ed., p. 47)*

**FRAILTY**

No delicate flower finds its perfume-poise  
More chilled than now this timid flame of prayer;  
A rough wind blowing from the world's commotion  
Leaves my heart-incense broken on the air!  
But, O miraculous Calm, out of my weakness  
Build up a sudden towering vehemence:  
Make so death-frail the sprout of life's endeavour,  
So void of help without Your tranquil beauty  
That I must cling and cling to You for ever —  
Ivied with love round Your omnipotence!

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)



## SAHANA'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO — IV

(Continued from the issue of November 2022)

*Mother, today I took my lunch at A's place. Was it a wrong step?*

If you keep the intensity it is all right — but you must see that the intensity continues and is not replaced by some other condition in which you only feel at ease and do not notice that the intense condition has gone — for if that happens, then small things may again begin to matter. (13.7.32)

\*

*Tell me frankly — is there anything objectionable if I go and read your Prayers and Meditations with D? He says he can explain it to me (there will be two or three other persons). If anyone else could explain Prayers I would equally be willing to take the help. Anyhow, I will do what you want me to do.*

We don't think that much depends upon that — your going or not going. It is the inner attitude and state that matters, the resolution to conquer, that is the thing important. (22.7.32)

\*

*What shall I do if I can't make the rejection completely? Everything comes to the same point.*

It would be easier when you bring down a settled peace and equanimity into that part of the being. There will then be more of an automatic rejection of such movements and less need of Tapasya. (27.8.32)

\*

*You have spoken of bringing down "settled peace" and "equanimity". But what is the way? Will you please tell me?*

The Mother's peace is above you — by aspiration and quiet self-opening it descends. When it takes hold of the vital and the body, then equanimity becomes easy and in the end automatic. (28.8.32)

\*

*Sweet Mother, this new place is very quiet, but I don't feel the atmosphere, the intensity that I was always feeling in the former house. I know all this depends on my inner condition. I am feeling calm and quiet but don't have the former joy and energy in every movement, the same heart-filling and soothing feeling which was constantly there. Guard me, Mother, from all that pushes me back towards the surface.*

It must be something in the vital that has come up and got in the way. You should find out what it is and reject it. (7.9.32)

\*

*Mother, I fail to know the reason. I am trying to keep the right attitude by remaining calm and quiet. Some days ago, I had an experience about the right attitude and I wanted to live in the consciousness of that attitude so that no excitement might come in. Yet it is true that still there was excitement at times. Now, please tell me what went wrong.*

It is the effect of a wrong movement — a mixture of seeking after comfort and convenience and a certain vanity or self-esteem (it is difficult to get an exact word for the feeling) which you did not seem to have recognised sufficiently in your vital. It was an eager excited movement with the vital push behind — not the right thing. As it was connected with the house the effect came up when you removed to that house. We say this because you ask what it was, — but as it is now over, the best thing is to forget all about it and get back to your true condition. (7.9.32)

\*

*Mother Divine, Sri Aurobindo has mentioned my wrong movement. May I know when it came about? I am asking because I want to be clear about it. I remember that just before my shifting here I had the wrong movement and recognised it there, and I remember writing to you all about it. I also realised afterwards the wrong movement of all my ambitions etc. (what Sri Aurobindo has mentioned) and experienced what should be the right attitude and offered myself to be put anywhere in any way you decided. After this experience I was trying to remain in that consciousness, and about this also I wrote to you. After that I don't remember having any craving or eagerness for such things; on the contrary I was ashamed that I had written so many letters about them. That is why I am writing to you to know when the wrong movement stepped in. I mentioned in my letter of yesterday a rising of excitement sometimes, but that was of this character — to do what has to be done hurriedly — and I was always*

*drawing myself back and trying to remain in that experience-consciousness. So is it the effect of that wrong movement that is still going on? Or did it appear again without my sufficient knowledge and recognition when I was moving to the new place?*

It was before when you were still in the other house, but something of it continued afterwards also — your excitement was the result of that feeling suppressed but still there, at least in the subconscious vital, and the desire to finish quickly is the result of a desire to get rid of the occasion of this want of the entire inner clearness and quietude. You are not yet entirely conscious of what is there in your physical and vital physical consciousness when it is not formulated to the mind and higher vital consciousness. (8.9.32)

\*

*Sweet Mother, in my waking consciousness I feel that I flow always in the stream of sadhana, but in my sleep I am quite a different person. I want to be changed in my sleep also. How to improve it? During sleep too I want to keep the constant contact with you. Will my sleep begin to change in due time? What must I do to make it change? Is there any process or has any personal effort to be made or should I simply call your help before I retire to bed?*

Aspire and want it always — that is the first thing. As for the methods perhaps the best is not to go to sleep straight in the ordinary way, but to meditate and through meditation pass into sleep.

At least before going to bed have a meditation. (13.9.32)

\*

*Let me know if I have done anything wrong in telling you what I suspect in the matter that has been going on for some days.*

Nothing wrong in telling, but the less these things are thought about, the better. By dwelling on them with the thought or speech, vibrations are set up which increase the chance of their developing. (27.9.32)

\*

*Mother, whenever I look at you, if I stare a little, I begin to feel the descent of your Force. Simply by looking at you, can we really receive anything?*

Of course, you can. (1.10.32)

\*

*Mother, my Sweet Mother, tomorrow we shall have the opportunity to rest our heads on Your Feet. The eagerness, the joy, the inner push that I feel nowadays to go and see you — is it vital in character? I feel the movement starts from deep within myself and the whole of it remains and goes on deep behind my chest, nearly at the back. Is it merely a vital craving or desire? Or something deeper than that? I am unable to express exactly what I feel; it is some very strong and joyous movement.*

The original is not vital, it is psychic, it is only if disappointment comes in that there is evidence of the vital mixing in it some unruléd movement. The vital has to share, but in the psychic way. (4.10.32)

\*

*Mother, see what has happened! So long I was going on well, but today the memory of the past has been coming and going like pictures before my mind. I was almost pressed down by them. I got up to meditate, but failed. Then I tried to reject — no success. I couldn't separate myself at all. These things stop the progress and I feel heavy and exhausted.*

So long as you have not learned the lesson the past had to give you, it comes back on you. Notice carefully what kind of remembrances come, you will see that they are connected with some psychological movements in you that have to be got rid of. So you must be prepared to recognise all that was not right in you and is still not corrected, not allow any vanity or self-righteousness to cloud your vision. (24.10.32)

\*

*Sweet Mother, shake me up again and again until I am able to succeed in this matter. I have experienced many times that for the first few days after a new experience I always happen to be very wakeful about what I experience, but slowly, if I am not sufficiently earnest about keeping what I gain, it gets lost behind the veil of inferior, ordinary or clouded movements of vision. So I pray shake me up each time (whatever way you like) so that I may be able to keep these things present in my consciousness until they are removed.*

*Now kindly tell me afresh about my tea or food with others. I have found out that I am quite fond of tea; only, I was not admitting it. May I know what I should do if anybody offers tea or asks me to take food?*

As to taking tea or food with others, you must always remember that to be governed by these ideas is not at all an ideal condition, but if you have the impulse and are not able easily and naturally to reject it, you can take on condition you scrupulously inform the Mother both of the act and of the movement and state of mind accompanying it. Also often the desire may not be yours, but may come on you from outside, imposed on you silently with conscious suggestions by others; you must learn to see when it is like that and then you must reject it. Your aspiration must be for an inner change so that there will be no longer any need to indulge in the desires, because they will no longer have a hold on you. You must learn to watch yourself and know what is the true nature and source of the movement in you and report them carefully — as in fact you had begun to do when you first had the psychic opening and could see the movements in you or many of them at least very clearly. (26.10.32)

\*

*Mother Divine, I really did not know that I still had such craving for sarees, I never felt this sort of thing before, I was wondering how it could be so absolutely strong that I could ask you to give me more than one saree. I am feeling so bad, so miserable! I can very well see now that it was you who made me see that the movement was from the vital craving and also pointed out so clearly that I have taken a wrong direction.*

*Mother, I dare not ask, but I am feeling like offering the sarees to you with the craving that made me press you for them. If you graciously allow I shall be very much relieved to offer them. May I do so?*

These things had been pressed down in you, but not got rid of. They were still lying there in the subconscious vital. That is why they now rise up with force to be got rid of more radically. It is better to keep them and get relieved. (1.11.32)

\*

*Mother mine, what to write? My movement of the day is an absolute failure. This morning my attitude was good. I was quite reserved and kept quiet, at least I was very careful not to let myself go; but afterwards I found myself making foolish mistakes one after another. Each night, when I write to you, pray and take the resolution that from the next day I should carry out what I have been asked, I feel also an assurance within me that, yes, I shall be able to do so. But alas, the next day I see I can do nothing but fail! Only in the morning, after coming back from Pranam, for some time I feel strengthened, energetic and enthusiastic, I am happy and light and find all my being praying for your help.*

*Is it still that a part of my vital resists — or what is it, I wonder. Mother, save me from the influences that are carrying me here and there.*

It is simply the habit of the physical consciousness that is showing itself insisently — the want of control of the tongue especially, — don't get upset, — observe yourself and keep the will steady — it is not merely the vital but the habit of the physical mind and the body. (2.11.32)

\*

*Mother, my morning-letter was full of self-defence, wasn't it? I am making the same mistake again and again; I am really very sorry for it.*

It is very good that you see clearly in yourself, it is the first necessary step for the entire change.

\*

*What is the use of only seeing in oneself if there is no sincere effort to rise above what one sees? The will, determination and mental strength by virtue of which all kinds of obstacles can be surmounted or what had to be done is done — are not these things needed? My efforts go no further than just giving you my word and resting contented there. What then is the remedy?*

There is nothing to be discouraged about. The fact is that after having lived so long on the mental and vital plane you have become aware of the physical consciousness, and the physical consciousness in everybody is like that. It is inert, conservative, does not want to move, to change — it clings to its habits (what people call their character) or its habits (habitual movements) cling to it and repeat themselves like a clock working in a persistent mechanical way. When you have cleared your vital somewhat, things go down and stick there. You see, if you have become self-conscious, you put pressure, perhaps, but the physical responds very slowly, hardly at first seems to move at all. The remedy? Aspiration steady and unchanging, patient work, coalescing the psychic in the physical, calling down the light and force into these obscure parts. The light brings the consciousness of what is there; the force has to follow and work on them till they change or disappear. (7.11.32)

\*

*There is still a strain of discontent. Of course I have to work, the force for it is there, a new ardour, but an inner discontent is flowing on like an undercurrent. Meditation also was not a success the last two or three days. I sit for it all right but float on the surface. Whenever I concentrate to go deep inside, I come out bounding like a spring. This is what is now going on. When I shut my eyes*

*to meditate, the physical mind becomes active and pushes me always to the surface and I feel a kind of heaviness near the forehead, as if some movement were going on there.*

*Before, I used to have good meditation; what has happened now? I feel very cheerful and enthusiastic when at work, the mind too is quiet. But all the trouble starts with meditation and brings a sort of discomfort. Is it true, Mother, that if one tries to meditate, the consciousness goes downward? Whatever the truth may be, you know where lies my defect.*

It is on the surface that the transformation is done. One comes up to the surface with what has one gained in the depths, to change it. It may be you need to go in again and find it difficult to make the movement back quickly. When the whole being becomes plastic you will be able to make whatever movement is needed more quickly. (8.11.32)

\*

*Mother mine, I have stated one side of the feeling I have with the nervousness or hesitation to confess about my errors etc.; there is another side which is always telling me — why should I be nervous if my errors, my defects or faults are found or pulled out, or why must I feel ashamed if my ordinary nature shows itself to you, when I know you are making me see my ordinary nature in this way for me to become conscious of these things? So then why do I feel sorry? [Here in the margin Sri Aurobindo wrote] —*

Exactly so, — why?

*On the contrary I should be glad and relieved to see that one by one the defects of my lower external nature are exposing themselves to you to be transformed.*

*Mother, I am not sure whether this sort of thing may be also a self-consolation for the mistake that is made. I don't know which is the true movement, because there are so many tendencies to deceive myself that I feel like knowing from you which is what.*

Of course, one must not make a mistake for the purpose of bringing it out or accept the mistake once made; but if it comes, one has to take advantage of it to change. (18.11.32)

\*



*Mother Divine, I want to understand a point clearly. Kindly make me understand it. Sri Aurobindo has written to me — “a too great stiffness in the effort of the will” — “a too great stiffness” means what exactly?*

I mean a strong mental coercion on a recalcitrant part of the being — an outer tussle and wrestle to make it obey — that makes it resist more and brings reaction. (21.11.32)

\*

*Mother mine, how can something be carried out without making an effort with a strong will behind it, and with only the quiet persistent aspiration, as Sri Aurobindo has written? That is to say I have only to go on aspiring — is this what Sri Aurobindo meant for me when a part resists?*

You have to look at it, reject, and bring a quiet pressure for it to change its will. That is the most important — to bring light and change into the resisting part. (22.11.32)

\*

*Mother, after informing you, I became conscious about one thing — I could see very well what was working behind the condition. I saw that that force came to test if I really wanted to be freed from the bondage. A friction with one's relatives is often succeeded by a soft and tender feeling which along with a sense of sympathy or emotional stress covers the consciousness completely; and taking advantage of the occasion and the weakness, the force tries to turn the mind and increase the tenderness towards the old tie. This, I saw, is also one of the tricks of the forces. Please show me if I am anywhere wrong in my perception.*

No, what you saw about the forces was perfectly correct. You are not exaggerating or deceiving yourself. (8.1.33)

\*

*Mother mine, I remember that, when we used to go for a drive with you, you told us once that after a meditation we should go behind this ordinary consciousness. I feel I go deep down, but I don't go behind this consciousness. You said it was very important, but then how to do it? I want my meditation to be improved. I feel a beautiful sense of going deep, a quiet, a vastness, a peace etc. I like to remain in that state also, but I don't feel clearly the change of consciousness*



— *going from one place to another — kindly let me know how to go beyond this physical consciousness.*

Beyond, behind, deep (within) are all the same thing.

\*

*I began to try also to go out of this body, and after practising sometimes I began to feel a giddiness. Sri Aurobindo had asked me to stop this practice. May I try it again now?*

No, very dangerous.

\*

*I want to make progress in my meditation, Mother Beloved. I am not satisfied with my meditation, I am eager to get an initiation from you if only I am now capable of it.*

There is no initiation to give. As you go on, all will open up of itself. It is not necessary to go into trance in order to have all the needed experiences. (21.1.33)

\*

*I feel such a relief now that I have found in myself the mistake of following the outer methods and cannot but be grateful to you for having made me conscious in time and saved me.*

Yes, that is right. Relying on outer methods mainly never succeeds very well. It is only when there is the inner poise that the outer movement is really effective and then comes of itself. (27.1.33)

\*

*Again the old things are pushing themselves up driving me to anger! And the anger brought the usual result!*

It is really simply the recurrence of an old habit of the nature. Look at it and see how trifling is the occasion of rising of this anger and its outburst — it becomes more and more causeless and the absurdity of such movements reveals itself. It will not really be difficult to get rid of it if when it comes you look at it calmly — for it is perfectly

possible to stand back, in one part of the being observing in a detached equanimity even while the anger rises on the surface, as if it were someone else in your being who had the anger. The difficulty is that you get alarmed, grieved and upset and that makes it easier for the thing to get hold of your mind which it should not do.

Help we are giving you — stand back so as to be able to feel it and not the obsession of these surface movements. (30.1.33)

\*

*I am doing your work all right but where is the joy of the service? Cheerfulness is gone, there is faith neither in my success nor in divine grace. All empty and void. I am lying listless in an empty house. The flame is out!*

You must throw all that away. Such depressions can only make you shut to what Mother is giving you. There is absolutely no good reason for such an attitude. The existence of difficulties is a known thing in the yoga. That is no reason for questioning the final victory or the effectuality of the Divine Grace. (4.2.33)

\*

*Dear Mother, this desire of mine to remain all alone — has it arisen from a fixed mental idea? To keep quiet, to go within, cutting off social contacts — does this stress come from a pre-formed notion of the sadhana and does it want me to follow it? Or am I being pushed towards it as a genuine call coming from you? Is it all imagination? If it had been a wrong path I was choosing, surely you would have pointed out the mistake. Or perhaps you didn't want to do so.*

It is not *kalpana* [imagination]. Mother herself stresses in these things wherever possible not from any mental preference but because it is seen that these habits keep the sadhaks here in a light externalised ordinary consciousness open to all kinds of doubts, self-indulgence, carelessness about the aim of yoga. If there is a stress in you it is her stress in you. Follow it quietly but keep it for yourself alone as each has to find it out for himself in his own time. (22.2.33)

\*

*Very often we refuse to admit our wrongs but try to seek self-justification and thus don't see the truth. We indulge these habits which really we should abandon. In arguments too, do we not want to prove "I am right"? Isn't the ego at the root of all this?*

Yes — self-justification keeps the thing going because it gives a mental support. Self-justification is always a sign of ego and ignorance. When one has a wider consciousness, one knows that each one has his own way of looking at things and finds in that way his own justification, so that both parties in a quarrel believe themselves to be in the right. It is only when one looks from above in a consciousness clear of ego that one sees all sides of a thing and also their real truth.

\*

*Sweet Mother, again depression! Not very strong, not swallowing me up. I have realised concretely the truth that each depression makes the resolution for the Divine more firm. I am sending my experience of this in the form of a sentence, expecting Sri Aurobindo to correct it. The last time he did it so well!*

*(This is how Sri Aurobindo put it now:)*

Each depression overcome kindles a new aspiration in the heart, consolidates the mind's resolution, opens up a new, a more elevated relation with the Mother.

There may be something in a half subconscious form which causes the mechanical vital repetition of old thoughts, but can no longer take a strong mental or vital shape: so even if it is there, there is no necessity to trouble much about it — it can be left to fade out. The depression may have been largely atmospheric and of the mechanical physical kind — that can be more easily thrown away. (11.3.33)

\*

*Mother, I am feeling so happy that Sri Aurobindo has corrected my sentence. I also felt that the depression was atmospheric, since all the other inmates had slight depression. As regards the mental movement I spoke of, there too I felt that it would slowly vanish; so I didn't take much notice of it. When Sri Aurobindo wrote, "it can be left to fade out", I felt a great support within, understanding that it would one day leave me for good. (12.3.33)*

\*

*Mother, you know very well that I have the bad habit of letting out whatever I hear; I can't hold back anything. Now there has come a strength in me not to speak to anybody all that you write to me, for, as I cannot reproduce things correctly, much misunderstanding and confusion are created.*

It is better to keep what is written in the book for yourself. If people could be relied on to receive or interpret rightly, it might not be perilous to tell them to others, but they cannot. Besides things kept for oneself have a greater power than if one lets them out to others. (13.3.33)

\*

*What has hurt me much is certainly due to my sentimentality, but how to protect myself?*

It is only from the vital and sentimental point of view that it had any value — but that ought now to belong to the past — the standard now ought to be different. (22.3.33)

\*

*Mother, do give me a strong support; otherwise the downward pull makes me suffer intensely. Now it is the last tie; let it be rent asunder. So far the movement was downward; now it seems to be looking up towards the Light. I pray to Sri Aurobindo to keep his touch constant. Whenever I turn towards the Light, he stops writing. This touch along with your touch and smile enables me to fight. Otherwise I would have been finished long ago.*

My touch is always there; but you must learn to feel it not only with the outward contact as a medium — a touch of pen — but in its direct action on the mind and heart and vital and body, there would then be very much less difficulty — or no difficulty at all. (27.3.33)

\*

*I am ready to give up all contact with X. You know that. I am aware that I shall suffer for it, but still I hope that your grace will make me come out of this weakness. I have suffered no less for this weakness. But there is no other way.*

All that you write in this letter is quite correct. It is useless to go through the old kind of reconciliation — it will bring back the same futile circle — for he will act in the same way always (until he changes spiritually in the vital and that means a turning away from all vital relations) and you would be flung back into the same reactions. To cut away is the only thing — the best for him, the best for you. As for the feelings excited in him — more hurt self-esteem than anything else — they will fade out of themselves. The first necessity of both is to free yourselves from the old relations and that cannot, it is very clear, be done by going back to any remnant of

the old interchange.

For the rest keep to your resolution. Do not discuss him with anybody, do not interest yourself in what he does or does not do; let it be his own concern and the Divine's, not yours. Expect nothing personally from him — you may be sure that your expectations will be disappointed. His nature is not yours and his mental view of what should or should not be done is quite different — incompatible with yours. By retaining anything of the old feeling you will only invite pain and farther disillusionment — you gain nothing and pay a heavy price for that nothing. It is only by becoming one-minded in the sadhana that you can escape from this painful circle. . . . Let the physical consciousness as well as the rest of the nature turn wholly to the Light and the Divine and seek only the one true source of happiness and Ananda. (31.3.33)

*(To be continued)*

SAHANA

*(At the Feet of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo,  
translated by Nirodbaran from the original Bengali)*

*Obviously to seek the Divine only for what one can get out of Him is not the proper attitude; but if it were absolutely forbidden to seek Him for these things, most people in the world would not turn towards Him at all. I suppose therefore it is allowed so that they may make a beginning — if they have faith, they may get what they ask for and think it a good thing to go on and then one day they may suddenly stumble upon the idea that this is after all not quite the one thing to do and that there are better ways and a better spirit in which one can approach the Divine. If they do not get what they want and still come to the Divine and trust in Him, well, that shows they are getting ready. Let us look on it as a sort of infants' school for the unready. But of course that is not the spiritual life, it is only a sort of elementary religious approach. For the spiritual life to give and not to demand is the rule.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Letters on Yoga – II, CWSA, Vol. 29, pp. 8-9)*

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

(Part 31)

## Section 3: A QUIET AND HUMBLE DISPOSITION

*(Continued from the issue of November 2022)*

Sri Aurobindo’s distinctive versatility was reflected in his all-round brilliance in several fields. He was an unparalleled scholar, poet, linguist and littérateur, a visionary political-cum-revolutionary leader and an unsurpassable Yogi, yet he rarely spoke about himself or his achievements. He rarely spoke about his life, and only when he was asked about it, and would hold back his attainments. The Uttarpara speech on 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1909, was the only instance that he publicly spoke about his spiritual experiences. Decades after Sri Aurobindo retired from politics he noted: “Even my action in giving the movement in Bengal its militant turn or founding the revolutionary movement is very little known.”<sup>1</sup> He added:

History very seldom records the things that were decisive but took place behind the veil; it records the show in front of the curtain. Very few people know that it was I (without consulting Tilak) who gave the order that led to the breaking of the Congress and was responsible for the refusal to join the new-fangled Moderate Convention which were the two decisive happenings at Surat.<sup>2</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s reluctance to speak about himself once drove Nirodbaran to pointedly tell him, “Everybody’s opinion is that nothing can be got out of you unless you are ‘pricked’”.<sup>3</sup> Despite the Viceroy of India, Lord Minto having told the Secretary of State for India, Lord Morley that “it was well known that Arabindo was the most dangerous man with whom we had to deal,”<sup>4</sup> a sentiment or rather a conviction that was shared by the Lt. Governor of Bengal, Sir Andrew Fraser, and his successor Sir Edward Baker, several of his disciples in Pondicherry were not fully aware of the grave difficulties and extreme hazards he had to encounter as a nationalist and a revolutionary leader. Once, when Nirodbaran posed an extremely naive question, Sri Aurobindo replied in a casual manner. The informal exchange of

1. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 26.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Nirodbaran, *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2001, p. 101.

4. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 144.

correspondence between disciple and Guru is amusing, yet reflects Sri Aurobindo’s unassuming nature:

*You wrote [on the 5<sup>th</sup>] that you had lived dangerously. All that we know is that you did not have enough money in England, — also in Pondicherry in the beginning. In Baroda you had a handsome pay, and in Calcutta you were quite [above “quite” Sri Aurobindo put !!!!] well off.*

I was so astonished by this succinct, complete and impeccably accurate biography of myself that I let myself go in answer! But I afterwards thought that it was no use living more dangerously than I am obliged to, so I rubbed all out. My only answer now is !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I thank you for the safe, rich, comfortable and unadventurous career you have given me. I note also that the only danger man can run in this world is that of the lack of money. Karl Marx himself could not have made a more economic world of it!

*I am rather grieved to know that you rubbed off what you wrote, and that my attempts to draw you out have failed very narrowly! But what are we to do? Everybody’s opinion is that nothing can be got out of you unless you are “pricked” (not my term) and we want to know so much of your life of which we know so little!*

Why the devil should you know anything about it?

*. . . Kindly let us know by your examples, what you mean by living dangerously that we poor people may gather some courage and knowledge . . .*

I won’t. It is altogether unnecessary besides. If you don’t realise that starting and carrying on for ten years and more a revolutionary movement for independence without means and in a country wholly unprepared for it meant living dangerously, no amount of puncturing of your skull with words will give you that simple perception.

*I beg to submit my apologies. I committed this folly because of ignorance of facts. Believe me, I did not know that you were the brain behind the revolutionary movement and its real leader till I read the other day what Barinbabu has written about you (that does not minimise my guilt, I know) . . .*

Wait a sec. I have admitted nothing about “Barinbabu”— only to having inspired and started and maintained while I was in the field a movement for independence. That used at least to be a matter of public knowledge. I do not

commit myself to more than that. My dear fellow, I was acquitted of sedition twice and of conspiracy to wage war against the British Raj once and each time by an impeccably British magistrate, judges or judge. Does not that prove conclusively my entire harmlessness and that I was a true Ahimsuk?<sup>5</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s friend from his revolutionary days, Charu Chandra Dutt, writes about his undemonstrative ways:

The course of Sri Aurobindo’s life has undoubtedly been mysterious. He himself said in a letter that it has not been visible on the surface and therefore it has been beyond the ken of the ordinary man. Then again, he had always been, even in the days of his political activity, averse to pushing himself forward. He had been ever inclined to work from behind other people. He said once, by way of joke, that it was the British Government who dragged him out into publicity.<sup>6</sup>

Sri Aurobindo was shy of being projected as a hero. He once told a disciple:

I quite agree with you in not relishing the idea of another attack of this nature. I am myself, I suppose, more a hero by necessity than by choice — I do not love storms and battles — at least on the subtle plane. The sunlit way may be an illusion, though I do not think it is — for I have seen people treading it for years; but a way with only natural or even only moderate fits of rough weather, a way without typhoons surely is possible — there are so many examples.<sup>7</sup>

Then again to a disciple he wrote: “But all that is probably because I am constitutionally lazy (in spite of my present feats of correspondence) and prefer the easiest and most automatic method possible.”<sup>8</sup>

Manoj Das writes about Sri Aurobindo’s wise and unpretentious nature:

There are a number of testimonies of those who had come in contact with Sri Aurobindo in his pre-Pondicherry days telling us that he was indeed not only special but also unique, not akin to the rest of his contemporaries, a person in whom unimaginable humility and profundity of wisdom existed as a single natural characteristic. . . . Quite independent of his later day stature, he would have been a god to many of those who knew him in his pre-Pondicherry days.<sup>9</sup>

5. Nirodbaran, *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2001, pp. 100-03.

6. Charu Chandra Dutt, ‘My Friend and my Master’, *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, Eighth number, p. 136.

7. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 256.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 289.

9. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, April 2011, p. 294.



Sri Aurobindo’s modest temperament is reflected again when he spoke about his childhood to his disciples:

I was weak physically and could not do anything. Only my will was bright. Nobody could have imagined that I could face the gallows or carry on a revolutionary movement. In my case it was all imperfection with which I had to start and feel all the difficulties before embodying the divine Consciousness.<sup>10</sup>

Sri Aurobindo, when he was the Principal of the Bengal National College, was charged in the Bande Mataram Sedition Case and so “he resigned his post in order not to embarrass the College authorities”.<sup>11</sup> The teachers and students, saddened that they lost their beloved Principal, immediately gathered on 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 1907, to express their deep regret at his departure and also record their gratitude for his distinctive teaching ability as well as his personal sacrifice in developing the College in its first year of existence. The very next day they invited him for a farewell to honour him and to convey their sympathy in his time of troubles. On this occasion the teachers requested him to speak some parting words since the students were eager to receive some advice from him. Sri Aurobindo was visibly touched by this gesture of the teachers and students and his voice uncharacteristically betrayed a hint of emotion. A short excerpt of the speech reads:

I have been told that you wish me to speak a few words of advice to you. But in these days I feel that young men can very often give better advice than we older people can give. . . . The unanimity with which all classes have expressed their sympathy for me and even offered help at the moment of my trial, is a cause for rejoicing, and for the same reason. For I am nothing, what I have done is nothing. I have earned this fellow-feeling because of serving the cause which all my countrymen have at heart.<sup>12</sup>

Sri Aurobindo preferred to work “behind the curtain” but the sedition case forced him “to be publicly known and a ‘leader’”.<sup>13</sup> Referring to a later time, subsequent to his acquittal in the Alipore Bomb Case in 1909, Sri Aurobindo notes:

Sri Aurobindo had confined himself to writing and leadership behind the scenes, not caring to advertise himself or put forward his personality, but the imprisonment and exile of other leaders and the publicity given to his name by the case compelled him to come forward and take the lead on the public platform.<sup>14</sup>

10. *Reminiscences and Anecdotes of Sri Aurobindo*, 1999, compiled by M. P. Pandit, p. 67.

11. See *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 78.

12. *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, pp. 655-56.

13. See *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 71.

14. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, pp. 81-82.

The Mother has said: “Modesty is satisfied with its own charm and does not draw attention to itself.”<sup>15</sup>

After the sedition case it was the Surat Congress in December 1907 that compelled him to come out in public. Suresh Chandra Deb, a political associate, writes:

Sri Aurobindo had been chosen to help in transforming the thoughts and activities of his people, and it was enthralling to watch the evolution of this drama involving individuals who left home and family, and dared and did deeds that awed millions and thrilled them to a new realisation of their weaknesses and a new determination to rid their social polity of these. As the guiding spirit of the *Bande Mataram* he had been a distant figure; the Surat Congress ended that recluse life and pushed him before hundreds of thousands as the tribune of their rights, as the long looked-for guide and deliverer.<sup>16</sup>

After the Surat Conference, Sri Aurobindo was requested by Tilak to do a month long political tour of Maharashtra. In his Poona speech on 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1908, Sri Aurobindo modestly began by stating, “I must confess that making speeches is not my vocation. My weapon is the pen and not the tongue”,<sup>17</sup> yet he came across not only as a great speaker but a mesmerising one, who could change the thinking and consciousness of the people. A short extract of this inspiring speech reads: “We were thinking we were weak, we had many national defects, we were hypnotising ourselves or allowing others to hypnotise us. If we went on thinking that we were weak, we should ever remain so. Let us believe in our strength and let us take the idea from Vedanta, think that we are strong and divine and powerful. Never mind the difficulties but proceed.”<sup>18</sup>

During this tour Sri Aurobindo also stopped at Bombay to deliver three lectures. In a speech at Bombay on 19<sup>th</sup> January, he stated that even the principal political leaders including himself are all dispensable and it is God who is doing all the work from behind:

There is only one force, and for that force, I am not necessary, you are not necessary, he is not necessary. Neither myself nor another, nor Bepin Chandra Pal, nor all these workers who have gone to prison. None of them is necessary. Let them be thrown as so much waste substance, the country will not suffer. God is doing everything. We are not doing anything. When he bids us suffer, we suffer because the suffering is necessary to give others strength. When he

15. *CWM*, Vol. 14, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 152.

16. Suresh Chandra Deb, ‘Sri Aurobindo as I Knew Him’, *Mother India*, November 2002, pp. 948-49.

17. *SABCL*, Vol. 27, p. 62.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

throws us away, he does so because we are no longer required. . . . God will bring many more. He himself is behind us. He himself is the worker and the work. He is immortal in the hearts of his people. He Himself is behind us. He Himself is the worker and the work. (*Applause*)<sup>19</sup>

In the same speech Sri Aurobindo tells the audience to become conscious of an immortal power within:

If you have not the divine strength of faith and unselfishness, you will not be able to escape from other attachments, you will not like to bear affliction simply for the sake of a change by which you will not profit. How can courage come from such a source? But when you have a higher idea, when you have realised that you have nothing, that you are nothing and that the three hundred millions of people of this country are God in the nation, something which cannot be measured by so much land, or by so much money, or by so many lives, you will then realise that it is something immortal, that the idea for which you are working is something immortal and that it is an immortal power which is working in you.<sup>20</sup>

P. B. Chandwani, one of the students at Baroda College who later did his higher studies at Elphinstone College, Bombay, after getting a fine testimonial from Sri Aurobindo, attended these lectures. He writes:

Without any effort at oratory, his impassioned eloquence held us spell-bound and steeled our will to suffer and sacrifice for the liberation of the motherland from the fetters of foreign rule. Though he had by then risen to the pinnacle of national leadership and despite his heavy schedule of engagements at Bombay, he graciously found time one afternoon to accept my humble invitation to tea with a small gathering of Sindhi students, ascending three flights of stairs, and I still remember how he cut short my eulogistic address of welcome with the remark that individuals did not count — they would come and go — but Mother India would live forever.<sup>21</sup>

A couple of months later Sri Aurobindo, in an article in *Bande Mataram*, emphasised the necessity of cleansing ourselves from ego, possessiveness, pride etc. and substitute these with self-effacement and sacrifice and to be conscious that we are only mere instruments. While stating “no man is indispensable” he warned about

19. CWSA, Vol. 7, p. 827.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 829.

21. P. B. Chandwani, ‘Reminiscences of Sri Aurobindo and Impressions of His Ashram’, *Mother India*, August 1971, p. 469.

“the desire of leadership” and “the arrogance of egoism”. An excerpt:

. . . The clash of conflicting egoisms, the desire to monopolise, the pride of success must disappear from our midst and be replaced by our intense self-effacement, an enthusiasm of sacrifice, an exalted conception of the high Power at work and the constant sense that we are only His instruments. . . . If anyone tries to outstep his sphere and appropriate the work of others, there will be confusion, disturbance of harmony and temporary failure. The only way to avoid it is for all to realise that the work is not theirs, that their right is only to a portion, that no man is indispensable . . . This harmony is necessary for the rapid progress of the movement. If each man knows his place and keeps to it, the harmony is possible. All the discords, the quarrels, the failures which have marred our work have been due to the desire of leadership, the obstinacy of prepossessions, the arrogance of egoism which wishes to claim the ownership of God’s work.<sup>22</sup>

After Sri Aurobindo’s discharge from prison on 6<sup>th</sup> May, 1909, following the verdict of the Alipore Bomb case, he was treated as a hero, both by the élite and the general public, and the Press was effusive in their praise of him, but this did not concern him in the least. Even in victory over a most formidable foe — the British government, who tried their utmost to prove his guilt on the grievous charge of conspiring to wage war against the King — there was an atmosphere of calm, quiet and equanimity in his demeanour. Immediately on his release he was taken to the residence of C. R. Das where his cousin, Sudhi Ranjan Das, observed that Sri Aurobindo did not have an iota of elation in his moment of glory.<sup>23</sup>

In a letter to the editor of the *Bengalee* Sri Aurobindo expressed his gratitude to all those who had contributed to his legal defence fund and credited his escape to God and the love and prayers of his countrymen:

The love which my countrymen have heaped upon me in return for the little I have been able to do for them, amply repays any apparent trouble or misfortune my public activity may have brought upon me. I attribute my escape to no human agency, but first of all to the protection of the Mother of us all who has never been absent from me but always held me in Her arms and shielded me from grief and disaster, and secondarily to the prayers of thousands which have been going up to Her on my behalf ever since I was arrested.<sup>24</sup>

22. *CWSA*, Vol. 7, pp. 974-75.

23. See Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, July 2016, p. 535 (Sudhi Ranjan Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo Smritikatha’ in *Sri Aurobindo Smriti*, edited by Biswanath Dey).

24. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 263.

Sri Aurobindo launched the *Karmayogin* on 19<sup>th</sup> June, 1909. A few weeks later, on 11<sup>th</sup> July, 1909, Sri Aurobindo spoke at Kumartuli. A newspaper reported, “Babu Aurobindo Ghose rose amidst loud cheers and said that when he consented to attend the meeting he never thought that he would make any speech. In fact he was asked by the organisers of the meeting simply to be present there.” However, at the Chairman’s request, he reluctantly rose to speak, but what he delivered that evening was a memorable speech, eliciting cheers from the audience again and again.<sup>25</sup> Next he spoke at a meeting at College Square and according to the report in the newspaper that too was hailed with repeated loud cheers.<sup>26</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s temperament differed from other political leaders. He has stated that he took up politics not from any vitalistic motives of ambition or lust for power but simply because he had the Divine Command and he was compelled to obey It. In a conversation in 1925, Sri Aurobindo said, “The present-day political activity is intensely Rajasic in its nature and its reconciliation with Yoga is not easy. In fact, all those who took to this Yoga had to give up political activity. . . . It is not that we have no sympathy with the political aspirations of the country; only, we can’t go into them in the Rajasic way. We leave it to the Higher Power to do what She likes.” When a disciple interjected, “But you yourself did political work,” Sri Aurobindo replied, “Yes, I did it but it was done in the attitude I just now described — i.e. by leaving the work in the hands of the Higher Power.”<sup>27</sup>

About the lower Rajasic nature of politics the Mother in a 1954 declaration stated:

Sri Aurobindo withdrew from politics; and, in his Ashram, a most important rule is that one must abstain from all politics — not because Sri Aurobindo did not concern himself with the happenings of the world, but because politics, as it is practised, is a low and ugly thing, wholly dominated by falsehood, deceit, injustice, misuse of power and violence; because to succeed in politics one has to cultivate in oneself hypocrisy, duplicity and unscrupulous ambition.<sup>28</sup>

As a political leader Sri Aurobindo was aware that a leader’s popularity and esteem can fade in a trice. He believed that a true leader is “not led by personal ambition” and has a “self-abnegation which effaces the idea of self altogether”. In a *Bande Mataram* article dated 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1908, he writes:

The authority of a political leader depends on his capacity to feel and express the sentiments of the people who follow him; it does not reside in himself. He

25. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, November 2016, p. 899.

26. *Ibid.*

27. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 130.

28. *CWM*, Vol. 13, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., pp. 122-23.

holds his position because he is a representative man, not because he is such-and-such an individual. To take the position that because he has led in the past therefore his word must be law so long as he lives, is to ignore the root principles of political life. His past services can only give him the claim to be regarded as a leader in preference to others so long as he voices the sentiments of the people and keeps pace with the tendencies of the time. The moment he tries to misuse his position in order to impose his own will upon the people instead of making their will his own, he forfeits all claim to respect. If he has fallen behind the times, his only course is to stand aside; but to demand that because he is there and wishes to remain, the march of the world shall wait upon his fears and hesitations is to make a claim against which the reason and conscience of humanity rebels.

. . . These are times of revolution when tomorrow casts aside the fame, popularity and pomp of today. The man whose carriage is today dragged through great cities by shouting thousands amid cries of “Bande Mataram” and showers of garlands, will tomorrow be disregarded, perhaps hissed and forbidden to speak. So it has always been and none can prevent it. How can such-and-such a barrister, editor, professor whom his personal talents have brought forward for a time, say to Revolution, “Thou shalt be my servant” or to Chaos, “I will use thee as the materials of my personal aggrandisement”? As the pace of the movement is accelerated, the number of those who are left behind will increase. Men who are now acclaimed as Extremists, leaders of the forward movement, preachers of Nationalism and embodiments of the popular feeling will tomorrow find themselves left behind, cast aside, a living monument of the vanity of personal ambition. The old leaders claim eternal leadership because they have rendered services — some few eloquent speeches or well-written petitions, to wit; but before we are much older, those who are serving their country by personal suffering and self-sacrifice will find that they too must not presume on their services. Only the self-abnegation which effaces the idea of self altogether and follows the course of the revolution with a childlike belief that God is the leader and what He does is for the best, will be able to continue working for the country. Such men are not led by personal ambition and cannot therefore be deterred from following the will of God by personal loss of any kind.<sup>29</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s approach was unique, he impacted people, especially the youth, with his quiet humble demeanour, his aura and his inspired writings. When asked a question about political propaganda Sri Aurobindo said: “I never committed the crime of making propaganda in my life.”<sup>30</sup> Dilip Kumar Roy writes that Sri Aurobindo was

29. *CWSA*, Vol. 7, pp. 867-69.

30. See Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 464.

“always averse to self-advertisement.”<sup>31</sup> And Nirodbaran notes: “Sri Aurobindo was not a politician in the ordinary sense of the word: he was not interested in position, fame or money and, characteristically, he preferred to work silently from behind the scenes.”<sup>32</sup> Prof. Manoj Das in his biography of Sri Aurobindo states:

It is amazing that legends should grow around a person who was most reluctant for publicity. Though he was like the priest who invoked the aspiration for freedom dormant in the nation and who, in the words of the renowned historian R. C. Majumdar, “infused by his precept and example, courage and strength into everyone that came in touch with him,” he, it seems was by nature too self-effacing even to be conscious of his accomplishments.<sup>33</sup>

In the midst of his hectic political activity Sri Aurobindo had the realisation of Nirvana in January 1908, and since then he attained “entire silence of thought and feeling” and the “sense of ego disappeared”.<sup>34</sup> “Nirvana is extinction of the ego-limitations,”<sup>35</sup> he said. He stopped thinking about himself; and on his loss of ego-centricity he remarked:

It is the ‘I’ that comes in the way. One must forget it and experience as if it were happening to somebody else. If one could do that it would be a great conquest. When I had the Nirvana experience I forgot myself completely. I was a sort of nobody. What is the use of your being Mr. so and so, son of so and so? If your ‘I’ had died it would have been a glorious death.”<sup>36</sup>

On the subject of ego, Nirvana and the feasibility of acting without ambition Sri Aurobindo told his attendants:

. . . in order one may be able to act without ambition one should be able to take action lightly. That is to say, one should not be perturbed if it is done or not done. It is something like the Gita’s “inaction in action” and yet one must act, as the Gita says. The test is that even if the work is taken away or destroyed it must make no difference to the condition of your consciousness. . . .

Nirvana, as I know it, is a necessary experience in order to get rid of the nature-personality which is subject to ignorance. You cease to be the small individual ego in a vast world. You throw away that and become the One in Nirvana.

31. See Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 1984, p. 456.

32. Nirodbaran, *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages*, 1994, p. 36.

33. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, June 2011, p. 482.

34. See *CWSA*, Vol. 29, p. 406.

35. *Ibid.*, Vol. 17, p. 68.

36. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, p. 600.



Nirvana is a passage — for passing into a condition in which your true individuality can be attained. That individuality is not a small, narrow and limited self contained in the world, but is vast and infinite and can contain the world within itself; you can remain in the world and yet be above it, so to say. To get rid of the separative personality in nature, Nirvana is a powerful experience.<sup>37</sup>

However, Sri Aurobindo once candidly divulged that even after his “first complete realisation of the Nirvana in the Self”,<sup>38</sup> he still had a remnant of personal ambition. He revealed this when an attendant observed: “One cannot have freedom from ambition and other weaknesses unless one has the dynamic presence of the Divine all the time, or readily available whenever needed.” Sri Aurobindo replied:

Yes. That is one way; or, as I said, if you can establish peace, equality and calm right up to your physical consciousness, so that nothing in you stirs whatever happens, then you can be free from ambition.

These things, as I said, are very difficult to get rid of. When I had the Nirvana experience at Baroda I thought at that time that I had no ambition left — at least personal ambition — in the work that I was doing for the country. Then I used to hear a voice within me telling me all about my inner movement. When I reached Calcutta I heard this voice pointing out things within me which showed that there was personal ambition of which I was till then quite unconscious. So, you see, these things can hide for a very long time.

It is like the contest for Congress Presidentship in which both sides maintain that it is not ambition that is moving them, but the sense of duty, call of the cause, principles etc.! (*Laughter*)<sup>39</sup>

In 1938, when Subhas Bose was President of the Congress, a disciple wrote: “For Subhas Bose, country is the one thing that matters and nothing else.” Sri Aurobindo countered: “Excuse me — country is not the only thing for Subhas Bose — there is also Subhas Bose and he looms very large. You have illusions about these political heroes — I have seen them close and have none.”<sup>40</sup> About Subhas Bose the Mother has said that his psychic was “illuminated.”<sup>41</sup>

To a disciple Sri Aurobindo wrote:

37. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

38. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 255.

39. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., pp. 165-66.

40. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 200.

41. See Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 1989, p. 29.



All ambition, pride and vanity must disappear from the thoughts and the feelings. There must be no seeking now or in the future for place, position or prestige, no stipulation for a high seat among the elect . . .<sup>42</sup>

In 1919-20 Sri Aurobindo was offered the editorship of the organ of a new party of which Bal Gangadhar Tilak was one of the co-founders. He explicitly mentioned several reasons on why he could not accept the offer besides adding, “Now I have too much work on my hands”. He ended the letter on a courteous note:

Excuse the length of this screed. I thought it necessary to explain fully so as to avoid giving you the impression that I declined your request from any affectation or reality of spiritual aloofness or wish to shirk the call of the country or want of sympathy with the work you and others are so admirably doing. I repeat my regret that I am compelled to disappoint you.<sup>43</sup>

In 1920 B. S. Moonje and others requested Sri Aurobindo to preside over the Nagpur Congress Session — B. S. Moonje was one of the Nationalist leaders and with whom Sri Aurobindo stayed when he visited Nagpur in January 1908; he later helped found the Hindu Mahasabha. Sri Aurobindo in a measured and modest reply gave the reasons of his inability to accept the offer of the Congress Presidentship. He concluded his letter thus:

Might I suggest that the success of the Congress can hardly depend on the presence of a single person and one who has long been in obscurity? The friends who call on me are surely wrong in thinking that the Nagpur Congress will be uninspiring without me. The national movement is surely strong enough now to be inspired with its own idea especially at time of stress like the present. I am sorry to disappoint, but I have given the reasons that compel me and I cannot see how it is avoidable.<sup>44</sup>

Sri Aurobindo’s indifference to recognition and fame is again reflected in a conversation with his disciples:

PURANI: Paul Brunton has come out again with an article on Yoga in the *Indian Review*.

SRI AUROBINDO: What does he say?

PURANI: The same old thing — that Yoga must be practised for humanity, so that humanity may benefit.

42. *CWSA*, Vol. 32, pp. 382-83.

43. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, pp. 255-57, 580.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 257-59.

SRI AUROBINDO: He has always said that.

PURANI: He says that now he is under the guidance of a great Yogi who doesn't want to reveal himself. The Yogi has an eminent disciple whom everybody knows. If the disciple's name is disclosed, the Yogi will immediately be spotted. I wonder if he is hinting at you.

SRI AUROBINDO: Me? But I have no eminent disciple!<sup>45</sup>

In 1938, a disciple asked: “Is it not natural for us to feel proud of the praises bestowed on Duraiswami or feel a little ‘embarrassed’ when things are said against X?” Sri Aurobindo answered:

If the praise and blame of ignorant people is to be our standard, then we may say good-bye to the spiritual consciousness. If the Mother and I had cared for praise or blame, we would have been crushed long ago. It is only recently that the Asram has got “prestige” — before it was the target for an almost universal criticism, not to speak of the filthiest attacks.<sup>46</sup>

About the sadhaks Sri Aurobindo was asked: “I understand your protesting against “great” or “big” sadhaks, but why against “advanced” sadhaks? Is it not a fact that some are more advanced than others? If we speak of X as an advanced sadhak, we don't mean anything else.” He cautioned with a touch of humour:

Advanced indeed! Pshaw! Because one is 3 inches ahead of another, you must make classes of advanced and non-advanced? Advanced has the same puffing egoistic resonance as “great” or “big”. It leads to all sorts of stupidities — rajasic self-appreciating egoism in some, tamasic self-depreciating egoism in others, round-eyed wonderings why X, an advanced sadhak, one 3 inches ahead of Y, should stumble, tumble or fumble while Y, 3 inches behind X, still plods heavily and steadily on, etc. etc. Why, sir, the very idea in X that he is an advanced sadhak (like the Pharisee, “I thank thee, O Lord, that I am not as other unadvanced disciples”,) would be enough to make him fumble, stumble and tumble. So no more of that, sir, no more of that.<sup>47</sup>

Elsewhere Sri Aurobindo wrote: “Yes, the talk about advanced sadhaks is a thing I have always discouraged — but people go on because that appeals to the vital ego.”<sup>48</sup>

The Mother has said: “Once and for all, wash away the feeling that you are

45. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, pp. 435-36.

46. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, pp. 694-95.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 671.

48. *Ibid.*

‘superior’ to others — for no one is superior or inferior before the Divine.”<sup>49</sup> She also said that those who try to show their superiority are petty and mean:

. . . you cannot think yourselves superior unless you are unconscious. The minute you are truly conscious you lose this notion of superiority and inferiority completely. So, in both the cases, you must not feel yourselves superior — for it is a smallness and a meanness — but feel full of goodwill and sympathy and not care at all for what people say or don’t say, but be polite, because it is always preferable to be polite rather than impolite, for you put yourself into contact with more harmonious forces and can fight much better against the forces of destruction and ugliness, for no other reasons than these, because we like harmony and it is better to keep that; but essentially you should be far above all this and feel interested only in your relation with the Divine, what He expects from you and what you want to do for Him. For *this* is the only thing which matters. All the rest has no importance.

There are people who want to show their superiority. This proves that they are quite small. The more one wants to show his superiority, the more it proves that he is quite small. You see, a little child who lives simply without looking at itself and how it lives, is much greater than you because it is spontaneous.<sup>50</sup>

Sri Aurobindo told a sadhak, “What is all this obsession of greater or less? In our Yoga we do not strive after greatness”,<sup>51</sup> and to another he said: “The psychic being does the same for all who are intended for the spiritual way — men need not be extraordinary beings to follow Yoga. That is the mistake you are making — to harp on greatness as if only the great can be spiritual.”<sup>52</sup> The Mother has said: “Sri Aurobindo always spoke of his experiences but rarely did he say ‘I’ — it always sounds like boasting.”<sup>53</sup>

Sri Aurobindo once told his disciples: “A Yogi doesn’t say all that he knows. He says only what is necessary. If I wrote all that I know, then it would be ten times the amount I have written.” A disciple interjected, “People will judge you by what you have written,” to which Sri Aurobindo laughingly replied, “That does not matter.”<sup>54</sup>

And when a sadhak wrote to Sri Aurobindo: “What a difference there is between Ramakrishna’s expressions of knowledge and those of a perfectly developed intellect like yourself!” pat came the reply: “His expressions are unsurpassable in their quality. Don’t talk nonsense. Moreover I never developed my intellect and I

49. *CWM*, Vol. 16, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 53.

50. *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, pp. 388-89.

51. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 407.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 418.

53. A disciple’s conversation with the Mother on 4 June 1960.

54. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, 2009, pp. 205-06.

made zero marks in Logic.”<sup>55</sup>

Sri Aurobindo and Ramakrishna were devoid of ambition and ego. The Mother has said that “Ambition has been the undoing of many Yogis,” and goes on to explain that “a great ambition, the desire to have an exceptional position, to be respected by everybody . . . that is, the ego.”<sup>56</sup> When a seeker told Sri Aurobindo, “I feel elated people honour me,” he replied: “If people honour you it is none of your concern to accept the honour. You need to become indifferent to it and go on doing your work.”<sup>57</sup>

The problem of ego is a sticky one for none is immune from it. Yogis too can be ambitious. To a disciple Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Well, that [*acting as a great musician etc.*] is an almost universal human weakness, especially with artists, poets, musicians and the whole splendid tribe — I have known even great Yogis suffer from just a touch of it! If one can see mentally the humour of it, it will fall off in the end.<sup>58</sup>

Sri Aurobindo writes: “A kind of siddhi or siddhis can come [*even if there is ambition in the nature*] — siddhis of power etc. There are Yogins who have great powers and also a big ego. Of course there can be no liberation without overcoming ambition and ego.”<sup>59</sup>

On liberation and deliverance from the ego, Sri Aurobindo writes:

To get into the universal Self — one in all — is to be liberated from ego; ego either becomes a small instrumental circumstance in the consciousness or even disappears from our consciousness altogether. That is the extinction or *nirvāṇa* of the ego. To get into the transcendent self above all makes us capable of transcending altogether even cosmic consciousness and action — it can be the way to that complete liberation from the world-existence which is called also extinction, *laya*, *mokṣa*, Nirvana.<sup>60</sup>

Sri Aurobindo has written that it was in activity and in work rather than in solitude that he developed “equanimity and egolessness”:

No path of Yoga is easy and to imagine that by leaving the world and plunging inside oneself one automatically shuffles off the vital and external nature is an

55. *CWSA*, Vol. 35, p. 162.

56. *CWM*, Vol. 5, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 8.

57. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., p. 46.

58. *CWSA*, Vol. 29, p. 291.

59. *Ibid.*, Vol. 31, p. 239.

60. *Ibid.*, Vol. 30, p. 326.

illusion. If I ask you to develop equanimity and egolessness by work done with opening to the Divine, it is because it is so that I did it and it is so that it can best be done and not by retiring into oneself and shutting oneself away from all that can disturb equanimity and excite the ego. As for concentration and perfection of the being and the finding of the inner self, I did as much of it walking in the streets of Calcutta to my work or in dealing with men during my work as alone and in solitude.<sup>61</sup>

About the self-effacement of the ego, Sri Aurobindo wrote: “Without the liberation of the psychic and the realisation of the true Self the ego cannot go, both are necessary. If there is no consciousness of the Self how can the ego disappear?”<sup>62</sup> And the Mother has said: “The best way to get rid of the rule of the ego is to find the psychic being”.<sup>63</sup>

Sri Aurobindo has written innumerable letters to his disciples on the method of overcoming the ego. In one of the letters he writes:

Everybody has the ego and it is impossible to get rid of it altogether except by two things — the opening of the psychic within and the descent of a wider ego-free consciousness from above. The psychic being opening does not get rid of the ego at once but purifies it and offers it and all the movements to the Divine, so that one becomes unegoistic through self-giving and surrender. At the same time the nature opens above and the wider ego-free consciousness comes down and ego disappears and by the power of the psychic you know your own true being which is a portion of the Mother. This is what has to happen, but it cannot happen in so short a time. Do not be always thinking of the vital movement and the ego — you have seen them and know that they are, it is enough. Concentrate rather in the heart on the opening there; concentrate persistently and aspire persistently and do not mind if it takes time. Call in any way even if you cannot call yet deeply — then the deeper call will come.<sup>64</sup>

In another letter he writes:

To get rid of the ego altogether however comes usually only by the descent of Consciousness from above and its occupation of the whole being aided of course by the rule of the psychic in the nature.<sup>65</sup>

61. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, pp. 262.

62. *Ibid.*, Vol. 31, p. 238.

63. *CWM*, Vol. 14, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 336.

64. *CWSA*, Vol. 31, p. 236.

65. *Ibid.*

He also writes:

Work should be done for the Mother and not for oneself, — that is how one encourages the growth of the psychic being and overcomes the ego.<sup>66</sup>

Sri Aurobindo had also made it abundantly clear that pride, vanity and ambition have been the downfall of many a disciple. The development of egoism “is a thing which often happens in the first rush of experience”,<sup>67</sup> he remarked. The Mother has cautioned us that self-gratification in one’s virtues increases our vanity and ego:

All the virtues — you may glorify them — increase your self-satisfaction, that is, your ego; they do not help you truly to become aware of the Divine. It is the generous and wise people of this world who are the most difficult to convert. They are very satisfied with their life. A poor fellow who has done all sorts of stupid things all his life feels immediately sorry and says: “I am nothing, can do nothing. Make of me what You want.” Such a one is more right and much closer to the Divine than one who is wise and full of his wisdom and vanity. He sees himself as he is.<sup>68</sup>

In a conversation with his disciples Sri Aurobindo said that humility is recognition of one’s defects and an absence of arrogance:

True humility is when you are ready to admit your own defects for which, again, you need not feel *adhama* — fallen. You feel that you have all the defects that are in universal nature and that you are not personally superior to anyone. You need not keep this feeling when the defects are gone and go on repeating “I am nothing, let me be full of sin,” — also one should not be swollen-headed about it. Really speaking, it is absence of arrogance — humility is not a good word.<sup>69</sup>

The Mother has said: “A true and sincere humility is our safeguard — it is the surest way to the indispensable dissolution of the ego.”<sup>70</sup> She has also lucidly explained about the deep rootedness of vanity and how a combination of a sincere discernment and a complete reliance on the Divine help to cultivate the indispensable virtue of humility:

66. *Ibid.*, Vol. 32, p. 413.

67. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 343.

68. *CWM*, Vol. 5, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 14.

69. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2007, pp. 457-58.

70. *CWM*, Vol. 14, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 153.

There is one thing that has always been said, but always misunderstood, it is the necessity of humility. It is taken in the wrong way, wrongly understood and wrongly used. Be humble, if you can be so in the right way; above all, do not be so in the wrong way, for that leads you nowhere. But there is one thing: if you can pull out from yourself this weed called vanity, then indeed you will have done something. But if you knew how difficult it is! You cannot do a thing well, cannot have a fine idea, cannot have a right movement, cannot make a little progress without getting puffed up inside (even without being aware of it), with a self-satisfaction full of vanity. And you are obliged then to hammer it hard to break it. And still broken bits remain and these begin to germinate. One must work the whole of one's life and never forget to work in order to uproot this weed that springs up again and again and again so insidiously that you believe it is gone and you feel very modest and say: “It is not I who have done it, I feel it is the Divine, I am nothing if He is not there”, and then the next minute, you are so satisfied with yourself simply for having thought that!<sup>71</sup>

*(To be continued)*

GAUTAM MALAKER

71. *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, pp. 44-45.

*India has from ancient times held strongly a belief in the reality of the Avatara, the descent into form, the revelation of the Godhead in humanity. In the West this belief has never really stamped itself upon the mind because it has been presented through exoteric Christianity as a theological dogma without any roots in the reason and general consciousness and attitude towards life. But in India it has grown up and persisted as a logical outcome of the Vedantic view of life and taken firm root in the consciousness of the race.*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Essays on the Gita, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 13)*

## THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHT — CHRISTMAS

Many Ashramites and devotees think, unsurprisingly, that Christmas is primarily connected with the birth of Christ. Someone, once, asked the Mother, “Sweet Mother, why do we celebrate Christmas here? What special meaning does this day have for us?” The Mother replied:

Long before the Christian religion made December 25<sup>th</sup> the day of Christ’s birth, this day was the festival of the return of the sun, the Day of Light. It is this very ancient symbol of the rebirth of the Light that we wish to celebrate here.<sup>1</sup>

### The Advent of Christmas in the Ashram

December 25, 1929 was perhaps the first occasion when Christmas was celebrated in the Ashram. That evening after the Soup ceremony, before going up to her room, the Mother gave, from the stairs in the Meditation House, some small green leaves to the disciples. At the time of the distribution, she said, “These leaves are called New Birth; not a new birth in the body but a birth in the new consciousness. These will be given to all, and according to each one’s receptivity will be the realisation.” She gave a bunch of these leaves to each one in turn. The appearance of her face was remarkable, truly an embodiment of the Divine.<sup>2</sup>

When the distribution was drawing to a close, Nolini-da noticed that Barin had not yet arrived and thus sent a sadhak to call him. Barin, though, was not to be found in his room. The next morning Nolini-da and Amrita-da visited Barin’s room only to find a letter addressed to Sri Aurobindo, stating that he was leaving the Ashram. Perhaps he could not accept the Mother’s arrangements.<sup>3</sup>

In England, Christmas is the most important festival of the year and celebrated fervently. From early December preparations begin and in spite of the short daylight hours and the cold biting winter, a festivity pervades the atmosphere, with decorations on the streets, cultural events, shopping offers and Christmas carols. People go shopping, looking for suitable Christmas presents for their friends and relatives.

On Christmas day the whole country is on holiday and you will hardly find a soul or any traffic on the road since everybody is in their homes with their families. My mother, Mona Pinto, comes from a very affectionate and close English family and for them Christmas was a very special family get-together. Although some people go to church for the midnight mass on Christmas Eve, the celebration at home is not as

1. *CWM*, Vol. 17, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 360.

2. See Mrityunjoy, ‘A Look Behind’, *Breath of Grace*, edited by M. P. Pandit, 2002, p. 65.

3. *Ibid.*



such a religious event; the English are not very spiritual although there are exceptions. Christmas celebrations include spending time with the family, decorating the entire house, adorning the Christmas tree — which serves as the central meeting place in the house — with twinkling lights, festoons and gifts. Christmas with the family is very important and members spend time in baking cookies, cake, and preparing a special Christmas meal. The children particularly are thrilled to receive gifts and toys that Santa Claus has brought for each of them. Everyone feels fortunate to be with their close ones at Christmas time; families, relatives and friends gather together in their homes in bonhomie, bonding and togetherness. The exchange of gifts is an intrinsic part of the celebrations and is a symbol of love and affection for one's family members and friends.

After my mother arrived in India she, despite being in a foreign country, was still very keen on celebrating Christmas. And like in England she wanted to celebrate with Christmas tree, decorations, gifts, food etc. In 1937-38 my parents lived in a small house, appropriately called the Little House, near the Park Guest House. After I was born my mother celebrated her first Christmas in India, in 1938; I was then one year old. She invited to our house for Christmas Margaret Wilson (named Nishtha by Sri Aurobindo), the daughter of the US President, Woodrow Wilson, and François Sammer, the Czechoslovakian architect and artist who helped in the building of *Golconde* in the Ashram. We had a Christmas tree and Nishtha made the star for the tree. The tree was later planted in front of Bula-da's room. For years I used to say that the tree is my brother. On this first occasion that my mother celebrated Christmas here, she offered presents to Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

After that my mother would celebrate Christmas every year until we shifted to the Red House, which is located opposite the present main Ashram library. During the Second World War children of the devotees from Bengal and other states started coming to the Ashram. After the school was inaugurated in December 1943, the Mother asked my mother to arrange a Christmas get-together for all the school children and to give each one a present. Thus Christmas festivities in the Ashram started in 1944, in our Red House. We had a big garden and a lawn where the celebrations were held. My mother and her helpers at *Golconde*, Mani-ben, Pushpa, Lilou, Kusum-ben, Kumud, Mridula etc. (who were one group) worked hard the previous night to organise, arrange and decorate the place. On Christmas day games were organised which the children enjoyed. There was also singing of songs and distribution of presents to the children. We have photographs of all the children who participated that day. They were the first batch of Ashram children, they were 34 (or 39) of them. From that day onwards the Christmas tradition continues till date.

Christmas festivities were held in the Red House in 1944 and 1945. After the celebrations, the children went to the Ashram to greet the Mother. Subsequently the owners wanted the house back and so Mother found *Fenêtres* (next to *Senteurs*) for us and we shifted there. At that time *Fenêtres* too was a rented house. The Christmas of

1946 was celebrated there. Pranab-da had joined the Physical Education Department and he too was invited. He liked the Christmas function and the arrangements so much that he asked the Mother if in the future we could have Christmas celebrations for everybody in the Ashram. So from the next year Christmas was celebrated in the Playground, as it was a far larger place.

### Christmas in the Ashram

Christmas in the Playground started in 1947. A traditional Christmas tree in a garden-pot would be placed on the eastern side near the boundary wall of the Playground and a large area around it would be cordoned off. We used to decorate this area with balloons and colourful festoons. A few presents for the children were hung on the tree and the rest were arranged on the floor around it. We used to go to the Playground early in the morning to begin our decoration work.

The Mother used to come to the Playground after her game of tennis. She would take her seat near the tree. After a short programme of music the Mother would distribute presents and cake to all the children. Other than the children all those who were present would also receive gifts and cake from the Mother. My father, Udar Pinto, would dress up as Father Christmas in the traditional red costume, wearing a long snowy beard and would cheer up all the children by tinkling a bell and wishing them “Merry Christmas”.

After the first event, the Mother decided that presents should be given to everyone in the Ashram. We had the festivities in the Playground from 1947 to 1957. At times, due to the north-east December breeze, it got very windy. It then became very difficult to do the decorations as the balloons and other things used to fly all over the place. On the odd instance it rained and we had to rush into one of the adjoining school classrooms — till 1952 our school classes were held in the Playground. There are photos of the Mother giving presents to us children in these classrooms. The Christmas gifts were always distributed by the Mother.

There is also a photo of a choir singing to the Mother at the Playground on the occasion of Christmas in 1949. There was a lady called Marie Amélie who visited the Ashram and taught singing in the Western classical style. She had formed a choir consisting of students and Ashramites. She conducted the choir in front of the Mother at Noël of 1952 and 1953.

There is also the instance of Christmas Eve 1968 where my father, Maggi, Constance and Kusum-ben embarked on a mission to sing Christmas carols to the Mother. So in the middle of the night they, with my father’s accompaniment on the harmonica, sang *Silent Night* in an empty street under the Mother’s window on Rue St. Gilles.

There is also a photo of Alys with Pavitra-da at the Playground celebrating the Christmas of 1947, just months after our independence. Alys was French and she

was very sweet and gentle. My Mother was very fond of Alys. She said that Alys was the sweetest lady she had ever met. We stayed with Alys and her husband Ali (son of Sir Akbar Hydari) in Hyderabad.

Sometime in 1956 the Theatre site was acquired. It was inaugurated in 1958, on Mother's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Since it had a roof and thus protected us from the rain and the wind the Theatre became the venue for Ashram Christmas celebrations from 1958 onwards.

I recall a Noël story that occurred in the Theatre where a glass of Power syrup was given to us all as Mother's prasad. One of my father's commercial undertakings was called "Honesty Engineers and Contractors". A close Gujarati friend of my father's worked there. He knew Ayurveda and made a soft drink called "Sodalicious" which was sold in the market. My mother had given it the name and I designed the label. For health reasons Mother had told my father to use sugar and not saccharin. On the Noël of 1960 or 1961, Sodalicious was served to all who came to the Theatre. We have photos of Mother going to the stall with Pavitra-da, my father and others to taste the first drink. After Mother sipped the drink it was poured into a large vessel that contained Sodalicious for us all and then individually offered to each of us as *prasad*.

From 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1958, the Mother withdrew from all external participation in the physical education programmes. Since then and up to February 1962, the Mother came to the Playground only on Darshan Days. In addition she would go to the Sports Ground for the rehearsal of the 2<sup>nd</sup> December programme. She also made it a point to visit the Theatre to distribute the gifts on Christmas. The Christmas of 1961 was her last visit to the Theatre where she came only for a short while. After seeing the decorations, she distributed gift-packets to a few people and departed. Since then my mother, on the instructions of the Mother, distributed the presents each year.

About the Christmas celebrations, a sadhak, Narayan Prasad, wrote in 1964:

Similar are the circumstances which led to the celebration of the Christmas Festival, observed here as the rebirth of Light. When there were only about a dozen children in the Ashram, an English Sadhika would invite them to her residence, entertain them and give them some toys. In those days the Mother used to appear on the roof-terrace of the Ashram between 11 and 12 in the morning. The excited children, merrily singing and dancing, would go for her darshan with their red, blue or green paper caps on. As their number increased the festival began to be observed at the Playground in the traditional way with an Xmas tree decorated by the children themselves. Sometimes balloons used to be flown from the roofs. The Mother used to distribute cakes and toys in plastic bags to the young and the old alike. Since 1953 a few bags have in them diaries with the words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on each page. For

the last two years the Sadhika who initiated this festival has been distributing the plastic bags. Last year it was celebrated at the Theatre, where soft drinks manufactured by the Ashram soda fountain were given to everyone.<sup>4</sup>

Janina had a most interesting experience with the Mother at Christmas. About the last Christmas celebration at the Playground in 1957 she wrote:

So I wanted to tell you that on Christmas day She just sat in an armchair under the Christmas tree in the playground and not only we, the sadhaks, but other people too could come and get some sweets from Her, which, of course, meant the contact with Grace. We, the sadhaks got more (I got a kind of diary with Her words), and when She gave it to me and looked at me, I just became again a different being. I even did not know how I passed farther and I stood for a time in a corner of the playground filled with something that cannot be described.<sup>5</sup>

Janina also noted: “On Christmas day, She flooded me with a vibration of such sweet Love that I did not know how I could possibly bear it.”<sup>6</sup>

### **The Festival of Light**

Long before the birth of Jesus Christ, Christmas was celebrated as the Festival of Light. It was an old tradition. Later, after Christ’s birth and the ensuing establishment of Christianity, the festival became part of the Christian religion. Once in a Wednesday class in 1950, a few days prior to Christmas, the Mother explained to us the origin and the significance of the Festival of Light. She said that in the ancient times some wise men, noticed that at the end of the year, the days were getting shorter and the dark nights becoming longer. They got concerned that the increasing darkness might soon engulf the world and cause great suffering to mankind. So they sat around a fire and meditated and prayed, aspiring for the return of the light. Mercifully the days and daylight hours gradually started to become longer and the dark nights got shorter. Since then this event was celebrated as the return of light in Ancient Egypt.

When a disciple said that the shortest day of the year corresponds to the greatest declination of the sun to the south, about the 21<sup>st</sup> of December and then the sun again mounts to the north, the Mother commented:

That is why the 25<sup>th</sup> of December was a festival of Light long before Jesus Christ. This festival was in vogue long before Christianity; it originated in

4. Narayan Prasad, ‘Sri Aurobindo Ashram: Ashram Festivals’, *Mother India*, June 1960, pp. 43-44.

5. Janina Stroka, ‘A Captive of Her Love’, *Mother India*, October 2012, p. 837

6. *Ibid.*, November 2012, p. 914.

Egypt and very probably the birthday of Christ was fixed on the same day as that of the return of the Light.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, the day is symbolic, as we see from the Mother's Christmas message in 1968:

Let the light dawn in your consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

And earlier on 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1954, the Mother wrote:

A new light shall break upon earth, a light of Truth and Harmony.<sup>9</sup>

And a report of 1966 from my father, Udar Pinto, stated:

On Christmas Day the Mother told me that on every Christmas there is a descent of Peace on the world, but that for this Christmas there was a particularly strong descent of the Peace — very powerful yet extremely lovely. This was perhaps because the world, at this moment, is in such a chaotic state that the Peace has become so very necessary. (27-12-1966)<sup>10</sup>

### **Partaking of Lunch with the Mother**

As a young child I used to take my lunch with my uncle, Wilfy. But I wasn't eating properly and became a sickly child. My mother got concerned about my health and she consulted the Mother. The Mother told my mother that she will teach me how to eat and asked her to bring me upstairs to have lunch with her. It was extremely benevolent of her since she already had hundreds of tasks to do. So my mother, my father and I would join the Mother and Pranab-da for lunch every day in the *boudoir*.<sup>11</sup> When we went there she showed me a dragon painted on a cupboard door and told me that every time that I come in the morning, I should greet the dragon with a "Bonjour". I must have been about ten years old then and our lunch with the Mother continued till I was thirteen. The Mother used to serve us the dishes. And when Ali and Alys would visit the Ashram they used to join us for lunch. After Sri Aurobindo's passing in 1950 Mother stopped having her meal with us, she used to eat alone with Pranab-da. Our lunch, though, continued to be served in the *boudoir*.

7. *CWM*, Vol. 4, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 6.

8. *Ibid.*, Vol. 15, p. 197.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

10. 'The Mother on Christmas', *Mother India*, December 1967, p. 672.

11. The *boudoir* was Mother's private sitting room where she would dress, take her meals etc. It has beautiful paintings of fishes and sea life on its cupboard doors.

After 1950, Gautam Chawalla, who used to work upstairs in Mother's rooms, joined us for lunch. This continued for many years. We used to go to the *boudoir* for lunch every day. Once Mother started a facility for someone she wouldn't stop it. Even after she left her body Dyuman-bhai never discontinued the service and we would get food from Mother's kitchen. Gautam Chawalla and I used to eat in the *boudoir*.

### **Does Father Christmas (Santa Claus) Exist?**

One day on Christmas Eve, somebody asked the Mother a question at lunch. The question was: "Does Father Christmas exist?" The Mother replied that one cannot imagine anything that doesn't already exist on some plane or the other. It exists on a plane. Maybe not in the physical plane but on some plane it exists, otherwise you cannot imagine it.<sup>12</sup> Then she said we would have a midnight Christmas dinner tonight and we will invite Father Christmas (Santa Claus). She then wrote in red ink on a slip of paper inviting Father Christmas for our midnight feast. I don't exactly remember what she wrote but it was an invitation to Father Christmas for dinner with her upstairs at midnight. And four of us, my mother, my father, Pranab-da and I were the other invitees.

We now had to send this invitation to Father Christmas. Since Harpagon used to process steel, cast metal fittings etc. in their workshop they had a furnace. That day my father told Panu-da to clean out the furnace. In the afternoon, on the way to the Tennis Ground, Mother stopped over at Harpagon. My friend Lucy and I were standing there when the Mother arrived. All those who accompanied the Mother for tennis were also there, Amiyo-da, Pranab-da and others. My father took her to the furnace. The invitation that Mother had addressed to Father Christmas had been torn into small pieces and put in an envelope. The Mother put those pieces of paper in the furnace and *phoosh* all went up into the air, skywards.

### **Father Christmas and the Midnight Feast**

The Mother wanted that the dinner with Father Christmas should be special, a midnight feast. And so arrangements had to be made. Dyuman-bhai was very happy to hear about the upcoming feast and went about organising it. I was naturally very excited at the prospect of the Christmas midnight feast, I had never heard of it before. That evening my mother, who was quite strict, warned me that if I did not sleep early, she would not wake me up for the midnight feast. That prompted me to fall asleep and rather fast. Later when she woke me up, I had my bath and got ready. Then my father, my mother and I went up to the Mother at midnight.

12. "You cannot imagine anything which doesn't exist in the universe! It is impossible to imagine something that doesn't exist somewhere." – The Mother (*CWM* 9: 379)

When we reached Mother's place it was quite dark. Before entering the *boudoir* I passed through the *salon*<sup>13</sup> which had dim lights but was quite dark. I looked out for Father Christmas but I couldn't see him. So I searched and searched but couldn't find him. I looked in every corner but all in vain. I thought the reason I couldn't meet him was because there might be something lacking in me, but I didn't tell this to my parents.

In the *boudoir* the Mother had arranged a table for the feast. The Mother, as usual, sat at her small table. Pranab-da, my father, my mother and I sat around it on the carpet on the floor. The Mother was very kind, she had placed a gift for each of us on our seats. Dyuman-bhai had enthusiastically organised everything to give it an appearance of a joyous occasion. For instance, he procured special sleek wine glasses. And to replicate the colours of wine there was tomato juice, apple juice, orange juice and beetroot juice which were poured into these attractive goblets. Dyuman-bhai had the food and the special dishes prepared in the Mother's kitchen. He happily served us the drinks and the dishes.

Though I didn't see Father Christmas we had a lovely feast. But the icing on the cake was the lovely gifts that we got from the Mother. There were exquisite artefacts. I am fascinated by tiny things because I find them cute and adorable. The Mother must have known my taste for she gave me a box with six or seven tiny items which she had brought from Japan. The Mother presented my mother two beautiful Japanese dolls that were very artistic. I later gave these to *Sri Smriti*, which is the museum that houses some of Mother's belongings. And my father received a bunch of note pads in a beautiful wooden box. I don't remember what Pranab-da received.

I think Mother organised this joyous event to prove that Father Christmas does exist. It was a most memorable evening.

Later, on a Christmas day, the Mother wrote the following message to Father Christmas.

Père Noël

Je t'évoque aujourd'hui! réponds à notre appel. Viens chargé de tous tes présents merveilleux. Tu es le grand dispensateur des biens de ce monde; tu es l'ami inlassable qui entend toutes les requêtes et y répond généreusement. Donne à chacun la chose matérielle qu'il désire; et quant à moi, donne moi assez, donne moi beaucoup pour que je puisse donner à tous largement.

The translation in English reads:

13. The *salon* was Mother's bedroom where she would take rest. Sri Aurobindo would also come here to consult the Mother and write letters to the disciples during the night.



Father Christmas,

I evoke you today!

Answer our call. Come bearing all your marvellous gifts. You are the great dispenser of worldly possessions; you are the untiring friend who hears every request and grants it generously. Give each one the material object he desires, and as for me, give me enough, give me much so that I may give largely to all.<sup>14</sup>

There was a Swiss boy who gave us a letter. I found the letter was so beautiful that I wrote it in a calligraphic style and put it on the Christmas board at the Ashram during Christmas.

Once, in a conversation the Mother told a disciple:

Regarding Christmas, I'll tell you a curious story.

For a while, there was a Muslim girl close to me (not a believer, but her origins were Muslim; in other words, she wasn't at all Christian) who had a special fondness for Santa Claus! She had seen pictures of him, read some books, etc. Then one year while she was here, she got it into her head that Santa Claus had to bring me something. "He has to bring you something for Christmas," she told me.

"Try," I replied.

I don't know what all she did, but she prayed to him to bring me money. She fixed a certain sum. And on Christmas Eve, exactly this sum was given to me! And it was a large sum, several thousand rupees. Exactly the amount she had specified. And it came on that very day in quite an unexpected way.

I found it very interesting.<sup>15</sup>

## Christmas Presents and Decorations

When we started celebrating Christmas in the early forties, the Ashram did not have much money. The Mother used to send lots of Christmas presents for the children from her personal collection. In those days nobody bought things for Christmas, we would utilise whatever Mother gave us. Also the girls who worked with my mother at *Golconde* made caps and other small gift items for Christmas. All the children would get a fancy cap to wear at the Christmas party. Mani-ben was very good at making things, she was very skilful. Laxmi, Chiman-bhai's sister, was also very talented; she made beautiful decorations for Christmas. The *Golconde* girls too did the Christmas decorations.

We also had to be resourceful in re-cycling things that could serve as Christmas

14. *CWM*, Vol. 15, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 198.

15. Mother's conversation with a disciple on 20 December, 1960.



gifts. For instance after Mother finished her tennis game the tennis balls were later used by other tennis players. Afterwards, when the balls became completely bald and unusable for tennis, they were dyed in bright colours of red, blue, green etc. These were given as Christmas toys to the children. Harpagon would also contribute to the Christmas gift kitty; they would make spinning tops, possibly from the left-over wood. In another instance an Ashramite sought permission from the Mother to borrow the book *The Puppet Theatre* by Jan Bussell for making hand-puppets as gifts to the children for Christmas. The Mother's instructive reply read, "Yes, on loan and with care."<sup>16</sup> Later Manoranjan-da too would also go to Madras and buy little plastic toys.

A student at one of the Ashram boardings recalls: "We remember how happy we were to find a present on top of our mosquito nets on the morning of 25<sup>th</sup> December and how Udar would come in his red Father Christmas costume and a big white beard, ringing a bell."<sup>17</sup>

On Christmas day Dyuman-bhai would bring our fruit basket and we would give him a trumpet as a Christmas present. He would play the trumpet all the way back from Red House to the Ashram. And so every Christmas, till he passed away, we would present him a trumpet. The trumpet became a kind of symbol for Dyuman-bhai. I used to make a cake for Christmas and go to his place to offer him some. He loved the cake and would show me his trumpet and triumphantly say, "See it is hanging there."

During one Christmas, the Mother, after having finished distributing all the presents, asked, "Where is my present?" My mother was so embarrassed. So the next Christmas they tried to replicate a Christmas cake which was shaped like a pie. Mani-ben created a pie made of paper which comprised several compartments, each with a tiny gift inside it. Each compartment had a string or ribbon attached to it and when one pulled it the paper tore and a gift popped out. My father, dressed up as a chef, went to the Mother and presented it to her. Mother initially didn't like it as she thought if one pulled these strings it would make a noise. But when she saw its noiseless mechanism she was very happy. In the photographs that were then taken one can see her expression change from not so happy to happy and to very happy. And in one photo one can see Pranab-da and my mother laughing. Mother truly enjoyed this incident and took the paper pie-present home.

During the early decades the children, despite our modest means, were quite happy receiving Christmas presents. These days, however, things are different, the devotees are better off so their children, especially the older ones, don't find our presents as exciting as the earlier children did. But we try our best to improvise.

Over the past several years some persons have been offering gifts like toys,

16. *CWM*, Vol. 15, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 272.

17. *Udar – one of Mother's children*, p. 79.

stationery, chocolate, T-shirts, tops etc. for the Ashram Christmas celebration. Over several months we collect, sort and store these. From these we make Christmas packages which contain an assortment of these items. For each age-group the contents of the packet vary. The packing of the hundreds of presents for the students and the Ashramites takes several days and we have a team who do it. All the students receive a largish Christmas packet and there is an air of excitement for them when they open their gift packets.

The organisation of the Christmas function is a big project and most people in the Ashram — students, ex-students, Ashramites and voluntary workers — attend it. There is a lot of work involved in its organisation. The Christmas tree, cakes, presents, boxes etc. have all to be prepared over several weeks. On the gala day they have to be loaded onto a lorry and transported to the Theatre and unloaded there. The Christmas tree has to be decorated and all the presents and boxes arranged. Then on 26<sup>th</sup> the lorry will return to the Theatre and we have to load the tree, boxes, leftover cakes and presents back onto the lorry and unload it at *Golconde*. In the basement of *Golconde* we have a Christmas room where we store the Christmas tree, the presents and the decorations.

Every December I make the board for Christmas that is displayed in the Ashram. We collect Christmas cards and I then arrange them and paste them on a board. Tehmi-ben and Jhumur would help with the quotes under the cards. I would also do calligraphy to further embellish the board. This work does take time. The theme on the Christmas board could be Father Christmas, the Christmas fir tree or landscapes. But there are variations: for instance, one year it was on the Shepherd and on another it was the Reindeer which is said to pull the sleigh through the night sky to help Father Christmas distribute the gifts. On another instance it was animals like cats or lions etc. Or it is the Three Kings from the East along with the star from Bethlehem.

## Christmas Cake

I think the Christmas cake is something everybody appreciates, especially the students. The Mother was particular that one must have cake during Christmas. All children were given a small, round, chocolate-coated cake on Christmas. Soon after, all Ashramites too were included. It was, I think, during the Indo-China war in 1962 that Dyuman-bhai mentioned to the Mother that we didn't have icing for the cake. The Mother told him that the Christmas cake must have icing. She went to her cupboard, took out some money and gave it to Dyuman-bhai so that these popular eggless cakes were as good as usual.

I will tell you a story about the Christmas cake. We used to keep the Christmas cakes in the store room which had ventilators. On one particular Christmas, some of the Ashram boys got in through the ventilators and stole quite a few cakes. But it was so quietly done that we didn't know about the theft. On Christmas day the Mother

was distributing the cakes but towards the end the shortage was discovered. Since the queue was still there we were in a panic. My mother was puzzled as we always meticulously count the cakes. We then started taking down the decorations from the Christmas tree and started giving these to the Mother to distribute.

By then we realised that the cakes had been stolen. The Mother was very annoyed. As Mona Sarkar was the group captain, the responsibility of the theft fell on his shoulders. The Mother told him that everything is given to the group members, they don't have to steal. I don't think Mona stole but he took the whole blame because it was his group. He took Mother's anger on himself because he was the captain of the group. He didn't pass on the offence to those who were actually guilty. It was very brave and noble of him.

### Christmas Baskets

In the early days, till Mother's passing, Christmas baskets were given to a select few. Christmas baskets were cane baskets containing gifts, specially prepared for foreigners, most of whom were from Europe and the U.S. A day before Christmas the Mother would arrange the baskets along the corridor. The corridor, whose access is the staircase next to Nirod-da's room, is along the adjoining rooms of Mother's *salon*, *boudoir*, washing room and Pavitra da's room. From the Samadhi one can see the windows of the corridor running east to west. When I used to go up for my lunch with my parents, I used to see these cane baskets all smartly arranged in a straight line. The gifts were neatly packed in these baskets. I don't know why the Mother took so much effort and what was the criteria for selecting the beneficiaries. It was possibly because their home or homelands were far away.

These Christmas gifts was not solely a Christian thing, for instance the Chinese artist Hu Tsu would always get a gift. I think it was for people who were away from home. For instance, after the Chinese invasion of Tibet, some Tibetan guests came here in December. All the 17 Tibetan guests got Christmas baskets.

The Mother was aware of each one's taste and would carefully choose the gifts. For Hu Tsu, I remember, the Mother used to specially keep tea for him. My mother used to be with the Mother, helping her arrange all the things. One can imagine the amount of time and care the Mother took for each. We have a list of the people who received the Christmas baskets in 1969 — there were almost 200 people, including about 75 Aurovilians. The Mother, out of her graciousness, even sent baskets to some 16 Italian visitors and some American students who were staying at *Parc-à-Charbon* (presently, Park Guest House).

About the Mother's care in arranging the baskets during Christmas, Nirodbaran mentions: "On its eve she would sit down in a chair or on a low stool and with the help of some sadhikas arrange each basket, consider each individual's taste, necessity, fancy, giving cheese, chocolate, fruits, etc., etc. while time would stop

flowing for her. We were waiting in Sri Aurobindo's room for his meal, but we knew and would joke with one another that the Mother was in her element, for though Divine, her human motherly instinct could not be forgotten."<sup>18</sup>

On Christmas day the whole corridor upstairs was lined with gift baskets. Then my father and Gautam Chawalla would go in the jeep and distribute the gifts to the concerned people.

About the beneficiaries of the Christmas baskets Nirodbaran has noted: "During Christmas, it was her custom to send 'baskets' to the European and American inmates, out of consideration for their national sentiments, I suppose."<sup>19</sup>

The Mother was once asked, ". . . why is a distinction made here between Europeans and Indians on Christmas Day?" She replied,

As far as I know, everyone in the Ashram is allowed to come to the Christmas tree and the distribution.

The custom of sending special baskets to the Europeans and Americans comes from the fact that in those countries they usually give presents to each other on Christmas Day, instead of on January first. That is all.<sup>20</sup>

### **Mother's Christmas Messages**

From 1959 until 1972 Mother gave messages for Christmas which were pinned on the Ashram notice-board along with a collection of beautiful Christmas cards. Some of the messages that Mother gave are:

**1962**

May the New Light illumine your thoughts and your lives, govern your hearts and guide your action.

Blessings.<sup>21</sup>

\*

**1963**

Joyeux Noël.

Let us celebrate the Light by letting it enter into us.<sup>22</sup>

\*

18. Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2000, pp. 101-02.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

20. *CWM*, Vol. 17, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 360.

21. *Ibid.*, Vol. 15, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p. 195.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

**1964**

If you want peace upon earth, first establish peace in your heart.  
 If you want union in the world, first unify the different parts of your being.  
 Blessings.<sup>23</sup>

\*

The significance of Mother's Christmas message can be gauged when in February 1965 She sent again the Christmas 1964 message. She wrote:

The message written for Christmas was blocked for that very purpose. You must utilise it.

If you want peace upon earth,  
 first establish peace in your heart.  
 If you want union in the world,  
 first unify the different parts of your own being.<sup>24</sup>

\*

**1966**

Bon Noël to all, in Peace and Joy.

May this new Christmas be for you the advent of a new light, higher and purer<sup>25</sup>

\*

**1967**

Union and goodwill upon earth.

Behind the rigidity of the outward celebrations there is a living symbol; it is this that we must remember.

Peace and goodwill to all.

<sup>23</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>25</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

Unless a break is made with the habits and the beliefs of the past, there is little hope of advancing rapidly towards the future.<sup>26</sup>

\*

**1968**

Love the Truth.

Let the light dawn in your consciousness.  
Blessings to all.<sup>27</sup>

\*

**1969**

Hail the new light.  
That it may grow in all hearts.  
Blessings.<sup>28</sup>

\*

**1971**

The time has come for the rule of falsehood to end.  
In the Truth alone is salvation.<sup>29</sup>

\*

**1972**

We want to show to the world that man can become a true servitor of the Divine.  
Who will collaborate in *all sincerity*?<sup>30</sup>

\*

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 196-97.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

## The Day of Epiphany (Three Kings Day)

6 January is known as the money day in the Ashram. It was the day that the three Kings — referred to as the three wise men, the Magi — from the East followed a guiding star to Bethlehem to pay homage to baby Jesus, who was still in a cradle, and to hail him as a king. They offered him Frankincense, Myrrh and Gold. It is called the day of Epiphany or Three Kings Day. Mother said it was very important, more important than his birth because those Kings accepted his divinity. The Mother has given the significances of the gifts offered by the three Magi to Jesus at the time of his birth:

Gold: wealth of the world and supramental knowledge.

Frankincense: purification of the vital.

Myrrh: immortalisation of the body.<sup>31</sup>

The arrival of the three kings has been depicted in many works of art — “Adoration of the Magi” — including paintings by artists like Leonardo da Vinci, Sandro Botticelli, etc. Joan of Arc, of whom Mother spoke so highly, was believed to be born on the Day of the Epiphany on 6 January, 1412, in the village of Domrémy.

Narayan Prasad in his *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram* writes about the importance of Christmas day and the day of Epiphany:

In the year 1933-34, besides the Darshan Days and the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, no anniversary was celebrated in the Ashram except four other days on which the Mother gave her general blessings with the leaves of a plant named by her “New Birth” or with other flowers of a special significance. These four days were the 29<sup>th</sup> March, the day of the Mother’s first arrival in Pondicherry (1914); the 4<sup>th</sup> April, the day of Sri Aurobindo’s arrival (1910); the 25<sup>th</sup> December, the day of the rebirth of Light; and the 6<sup>th</sup> January, the festival of Epiphany.<sup>32</sup>

My mother had a money box which served like a piggy bank. It was a simple box made of cardboard with a wooden base, with a slit on the top to drop the coins. It had a picture of Noah’s Ark with animals like the elephant, giraffe, zebra, lion etc. painted on the cardboard. During the Second World War the economic situation was very bad, yet my mother put coins in the money box. She would collect these coins for the whole year and then on 6 January, money day in the Ashram, she would give me this box to go and give it to the Mother. When I would offer the money box to the Mother She would be so happy. She would personally count all the coins herself.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Narayan Prasad, *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, 2010, p. 142.

And after that She put one or two coins back inside the box and I recall her saying, “these will have babies”, akin to a seed that reproduces. The Mother would return the box the next day. This went on for many years, my mother collecting the coins over the year and I taking the box to the Mother.

I would like to make an observation here. The Mother’s way in accepting gifts and offerings was always very touching. I remember when I was a small child my father had made a bank deposit in my name. When I was a teenager the deposit matured; it was a sum of Rs. 300. My parents gave it to me and told me to give it to Mother. You cannot imagine how gracious and happy Mother was with the offering. She behaved as if I had parted with the Kohinoor diamond. I was quite puzzled because it was not as if I had earned the money. She asked if I was sure that I did not need the money to buy something. I said “No”, but She made me feel so special, even though the money was not a colossal amount. The Mother was always caring and she was so full of love and graciousness. She showed us how to be grateful and gracious when offered something.

There is the incident of a villager or a poor person who sent a money order of one Rupee and told the Mother, “Mother, please buy a mango for yourself.” Now Mother was not fond of mangoes but she called Dyuman-bhai and told him to buy a mango for her. She ate a piece of that mango.

Another episode concerned the Bengali devotees who used to come from Calcutta by train. I think they used to stop at Doraiswamy’s house in Chennai, take rest, and later take the train to Pondicherry. Once, while travelling in the train from Calcutta they were talking about the Mother. There was one villager travelling in the same compartment, listening quietly. To him, their love for the Mother was so obvious and palpable. And when his destination came, he had to disembark. At that time he told these devotees that what he heard about the Mother was so beautiful that he gave one Rupee and requested them to offer it to the Mother. He was a poor man and in those days one Rupee was not a modest amount. When the devotees arrived in Pondicherry and met Mother they gave the one Rupee and told her the background of the story. The Mother then wondered how she could ever repay that man. It was then that the devotees realised the full significance of the offering. Can one imagine the Mother saying such a thing. We learnt the meaning of gratitude from her.

These gestures of love and compassion from the Mother get etched in one’s memory or perhaps in one’s soul. She used to receive everybody so sweetly. Whenever people used to offer her something she would accept it with so much love. There was a lady who handcrafted something, which was not at all beautiful. In fact it was so bad that we children smiled to ourselves. But when she offered it, Mother received it so graciously. At times children made awful drawings and offered them to the Mother. But she accepted everything with such compassion. Recently we have been cleaning Her clothes in her room upstairs and we have discovered many small embroidered handkerchieves which must have been offered by children. Some of



these are tiny, yet Mother has preserved them. Everything was precious for her and she kept them all with so much care.

### **The Mother and Mona**

In this concluding section we briefly examine Mona Pinto's relationship with the Mother. The Mother has called my mother, "Mona, my dear and faithful collaborator."

The Mother loved my mother a lot. Every Christmas the Mother was particular to give her a gift. Even on her birthday Mother used to take care. Gautam Chawalla, who used to work with Mother, mentioned that Mother used to say: "Mona's birthday is coming what can I give her, what can I give her."

On Christmas Eve my mother would assist the Mother in arranging the Christmas baskets which were to be sent to the foreigners.

The following day at Christmas she would hand over the gifts packed by us to the Mother whilst she distributed these presents to the children. One Noël evening I was given the honour of passing the cakes to Mother, while on her other side, my mother was passing the bag with the gift. We tie both the gift packet and the cake packet with a colourful paper ribbon. While I was going to pass a cake, I saw that the ribbon had opened up and was hanging. Thinking it might disturb the Mother, I quickly tore off the ribbon. On hearing the sound of the tearing paper the Mother looked down, rather annoyed. So I then knew that I had done something wrong. I should have just left the cake on the tray and given another one. Mother never made hasty actions, even when she was late. She always did things fully conscious, without haste.

After the Christmas in 1961 the Mother was unable to come to the Theatre to distribute the gifts to the children and the devotees. In 1962, the Mother told my mother, "I won't give anymore, you give." Since, the Mother was no longer able to attend, my mother suggested that we stop the Christmas celebrations. The Mother then touched my mother's heart and said, "No, no, no. I am here, inside you. You give it from now on. You give the presents and I am in you." So my mother had to continue the Christmas celebrations and it is going on till this day. The children remembered my mother as the smiling lady who wished them "Merry Christmas" as she handed them their gifts.

I also remember an instance where my mother wanted to present a Christmas gift to the Mother. When she came to India to marry my father, Udar Pinto, she brought many things from England, for at that time one could bring loads of luggage on the ship. She wanted to present a pretty vase to the Mother and so she spoke to Nolini-da about it. All Nolini-da said was "Vase", "Mother", "Offer." One could speak to him for a long time and he would sweetly utter only a word or two. He was so wise, yet spoke little.

In fact, I have a letter dated 11<sup>th</sup> September, 1938, that my mother wrote to the

Mother. It states:

Mother,

I am sending you a flower vase which I brought with me from England. It was at that time the very “latest thing” in vases and it still is. Do you think that Sri Aurobindo could have it for his table? . . .

Sri Aurobindo himself replied to the letter saying, “The Mother likes the vase very well — it is new and gives a pleasing effect when flowers are arranged in it.”

Aniruddha Sircar, an English teacher at the Ashram School, writes about Mona:

From 1944 when the Mother decided to celebrate Christmas as the Festival of Light, She gave Mona the responsibility of arranging the Christmas Tree and conducting the gift distribution every year. So long as the Mother went to the Theatre, she used to take the beautifully packed gifts from Mona’s hands and herself distribute them to everybody. In the Ashram, just as one could not think of the Golconde without Mona, so too had Christmas and Mona become synonymous.

About the significance of Mona’s birthday the Mother once said, “Mona’s birthday is on the eleventh. She was born on the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1911. Eleven — that is the number of progress . . . She is someone who truly loves to do things well, and wants to do them well and whatever she does, she does lovingly and very well.”

What the Mother thought of Mona’s dedicated service is reflected in one of the many birthday cards that the Mother had written to her:

Bonne Fête

To Mona

Here is one more occasion to tell you physically what I tell you so often when we meet in the night. How much I appreciate the quality of your work and how much I rely on your faithful steadiness. We are very close inside although we meet rarely outside, but my love and blessings are always with you.

Mother<sup>33</sup>

GAURI PINTO  
(With the help of several friends)

33. Aniruddha Sircar, ‘Mona’, *Mother India*, July 2004, pp. 613-14.

Père Noël

Je t'évoque aujourd'hui !  
réponds à notre appel. Viens  
chargé de tous tes présents merveilleux.  
Tu es le grand dispensateur des  
biens de ce monde; tu es l'ami  
inlassable qui entend toutes les  
requêtes et y répond généreusement.  
Donne à chacun la chose matérielle  
qu'il désire; et quant à moi,  
donne moi assez, donne moi  
beaucoup pour que je puisse  
donner à tous largement.

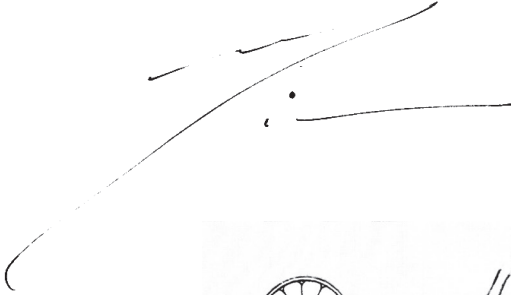
The Mother's letter to Father Christmas

11-11-60

To Mona, my dear and faithful collaborator

Bonne Fête!

With love and blessings  
for ever



11-11-63

Bonne Fête!

To Mona

Here is one more occasion to  
tell you physically what I tell  
you so often when we meet  
in the night. How much  
I appreciate the quality of  
your work and how much  
I rely on your faithful  
steadiness. We are very close  
inside although we meet rarely  
outside, but my love and  
blessings are always with you.

Two birthday notes from the Mother to Mona





Children and others at Red House, Christmas 1945

*Front row:* 1. ?? 2. Nirakar 3. ?? 4. Jyotindra 5. Bhai 6. Chitra 7. Purnima 8. Krishna Kumar 9. Namita 10. Bubu 11. Kuku  
12. & 13. Two neighbours

*Second row:* 1. Chum 2. ?? 3. Ranga 4. Chinu 5. ?? 6. Aruna 7. Gauri 8. Sudha 9. Lucy 10. Bijju

*Third row:* 1. Pavita 2. Arvind Prasad 3. Gopinath 4. Kalu? 5. Parul 6. Jhumur 7. Nirata 8. Usha 9. Prabha 10 ?? 11. Tara 12. Prabir  
13. Narendra 14. Arunkumar 15. Anu P 16. Kusum N 17. Chellama

*Back row:* 1. Norman 2. John L 3. Manu-bhai 4. Kumud 5. Lilou 6. Amita 7. Tanima 8. Pushpa 9. ?? 10. Dhanavanti? 11. ?? 12. Urmila  
13. Lata 14. Paru 15. Pran-bhai? 16. Pearson





Children in the Ashram Courtyard, Christmas 1946

*Left to Right:* 1. Ranga 2. Ambu 3. ?? 4. Pritindra 5. ?? 6. ?? 7. Gopinath 8. Hriday N 9. ?? 10. Shanta 11. Sumantra  
12. Ramesh 13. Arunkumar 14. Subodh 15. Ramraj 16. Bhai 17. Arvind Prasad



The Mother listening to a choir conducted by Marie Amelie, Christmas in the Playground, 1952

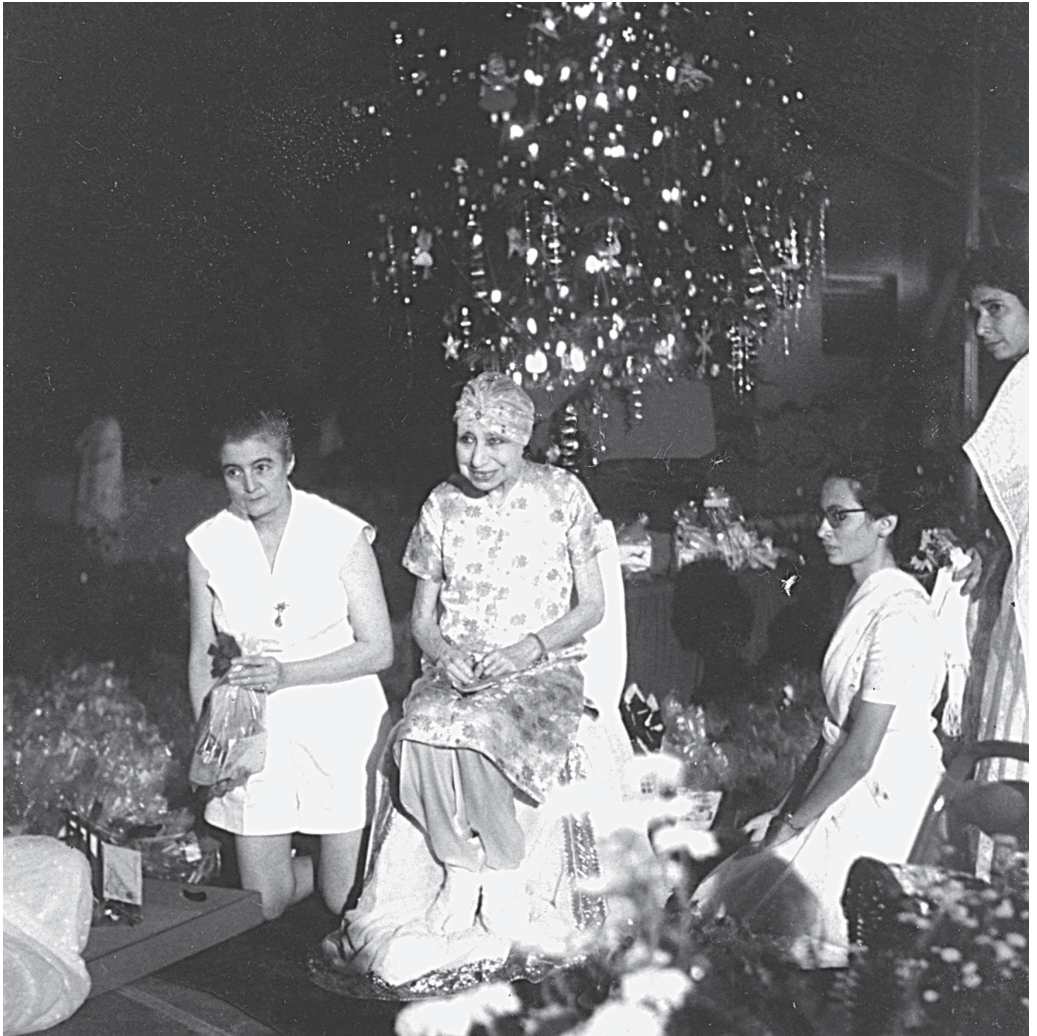


Christmas decorations and gifts in the Playground, 1954





Udar bringing the Christmas pie to the Mother in the Playground  
*Left to Right: Mona, Pushpa, Lilou, Siloo, Gauri, Pranab*



Christmas at the Theatre, 1961  
(Mona, Gauri, Siloo)



The Mother At the Theatre, Christmas 1960





The Mother At the Theatre, Christmas 1960



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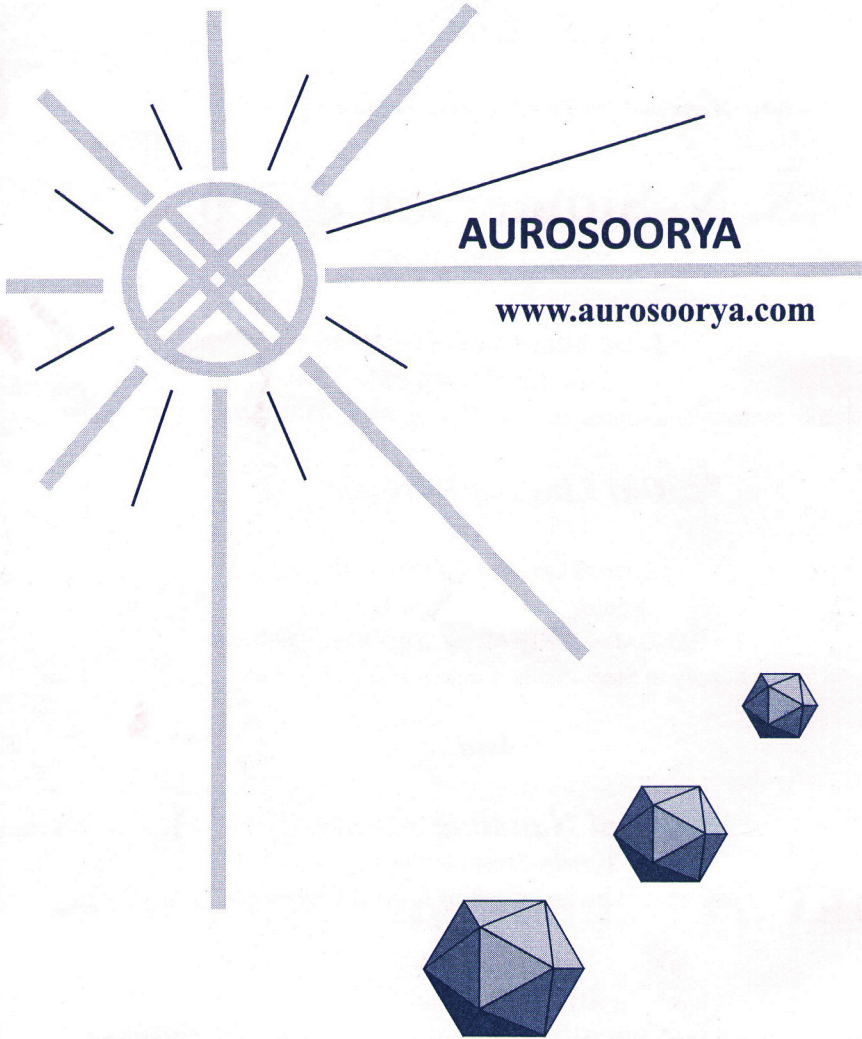
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