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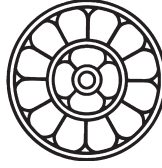
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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

MARCH 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. LXXVII

No. 3

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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Section 3: A Quiet and Humble Disposition

‘A TOUCH CAN ALTER THE FIXED FRONT OF FATE’

But many-visaged is the cosmic Soul;
A touch can alter the fixed front of Fate.
A sudden turn can come, a road appear.
A greater Mind may see a greater Truth,
Or we may find when all the rest has failed
Hid in ourselves the key of perfect change.
Ascending from the soil where creep our days,
Earth’s consciousness may marry with the Sun,
Our mortal life ride on the spirit’s wings,
Our finite thoughts commune with the Infinite.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Savitri*, Book II, Canto X, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 256)



‘THE COLUMN OF LIGHT’

July 21, 1914

There was no longer any body, no longer any sensation; only a column of light was there, rising from where the base of the body normally is to where usually is the head, to form there a disk of light like that of the moon; then from there the column continued to rise very far above the head, opening out into an immense sun, dazzling and multicoloured, whence a rain of golden light fell covering all the earth.

Then slowly the column of light came down again forming an oval of living light, awakening and setting into movement — each one in a special way, according to a particular vibratory mode — the centres above the head, in the head, the throat, the heart, in the middle of the stomach, at the base of the spine and still farther down. At the level of the knees, the ascending and descending currents joined and the circulation thus went on uninterruptedly, enveloping the whole being in an immense oval of living light.

Then slowly the consciousness came down again, stage by stage, halting in each world, until the body consciousness returned. The recovery of the body-consciousness was, if the memory is correct, the ninth stage. At that moment the body was still quite stiff and immobile.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 207)



‘THE CONSCIOUSNESS IS LIKE A LADDER’

The consciousness is like a ladder: at each great epoch there has been one great being capable of adding one more step to the ladder and reaching a place where the ordinary consciousness had never been. It is possible to attain a high level and get completely out of the material consciousness; but then one does not retain the ladder, whereas the great achievement of the great epochs of the universe has been the capacity to add one more step to the ladder without losing contact with the material, the capacity to reach the Highest and at the same time connect the top with the bottom instead of letting a kind of emptiness cut off all connection between the different planes. To go up and down and join the top to the bottom is the whole secret of realisation, and that is the work of the Avatar. Each time he adds one more step to the ladder there is a new creation upon earth. . . . The step which is being added now Sri Aurobindo has called the Supramental; as a result of it, the consciousness will be able to enter the supramental world and yet retain its personal form, its individualisation and then come down to establish here a new creation. Certainly this is not the last, for there are farther ranges of being; but now we are at work to bring down the supramental, to effect a reorganisation of the world, to bring the world back to the true divine order. It is essentially a creation of order, a putting of everything in its true place; and the chief spirit or force, the Shakti active at present is Mahasaraswati, the Goddess of perfect organisation.

The work of achieving a continuity which permits one to go up and down and bring into the material what is above, is done inside the consciousness. He who is meant to do it, the Avatar, even if he were shut up in a prison and saw nobody and never moved out, still would he do the work, because it is a work in the consciousness, a work of connection between the Supermind and the material being. He does not need to be recognised, he need have no outward power in order to be able to establish this conscious connection. Once, however, the connection is made, it must have its effect in the outward world in the form of a new creation, beginning with a model town and ending with a perfect world.

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 178-79)

SUPERMIND AND OVERMIND

Sri Aurobindo's work is a unique earth-transformation.

Above the mind there are several levels of conscious being, among which the really divine world is what Sri Aurobindo has called the Supermind, the world of the Truth. But in between is what he has distinguished as the Overmind, the world of the cosmic Gods. Now it is this Overmind that has up to the present governed our world: it is the highest that man has been able to attain in illumined consciousness. It has been taken for the Supreme Divine and all those who have reached it have never for a moment doubted that they have touched the true Spirit. For, its splendours are so great to the ordinary human consciousness that it is absolutely dazzled into believing that here at last is the crowning reality. And yet the fact is that the Overmind is far below the true Divine. It is not the authentic home of the Truth. It is only the domain of the *formateurs*, all those creative powers and deities to whom men have bowed down since the beginning of history. And the reason why the true Divine has not manifested and transformed the earth-nature is precisely that the Overmind has been mistaken for the Supermind. The cosmic Gods do not wholly live in the Truth-Consciousness: they are only in touch with it and represent, each of them, an aspect of its glories.

No doubt, the Supermind has also acted in the history of the world but always through the Overmind. It is the direct descent of the Supramental Consciousness and Power that alone can utterly re-create life in terms of the Spirit. For, in the Overmind there is already the play of possibilities which marks the beginning of this lower triple world of Mind, Life and Matter in which we have our existence. And whenever there is this play and not the spontaneous and infallible working of the innate Truth of the Spirit, there is the seed of distortion and ignorance. Not that the Overmind is a field of ignorance; but it is the borderline between the Higher and the Lower, for, the play of possibilities, of separate even if not yet divided choice, is likely to lead to deviation from the Truth of things.

The Overmind, therefore, does not and cannot possess the power to transform humanity into divine nature. For that, the Supramental is the sole effective agent. And what exactly differentiates our Yoga from attempts in the past to spiritualise life is that we know that the splendours of the Overmind are not the highest reality but only an intermediate step between the mind and the true Divine.

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 173-74)

‘THE IMAGINATION IS LIKE A KNIFE’

The imagination is like a knife which may be used for good or evil purposes. If you always dwell in the idea and feeling that you are going to be transformed, then you will help the process of the Yoga. If, on the contrary, you give in to dejection and bewail that you are not fit or that you are incapable of realisation, you poison your own being. It is just on account of this very important truth that I am so tirelessly insistent in telling you to let anything happen but, for heaven’s sake, not to get depressed. Live rather in the constant hope and conviction that what we are doing will prove a success. In other words, let your imagination be moulded by your faith in Sri Aurobindo; for, is not such faith the very hope and conviction that the will of Sri Aurobindo is bound to be done, that his work of transformation cannot but end in a supreme victory and that what he calls the supramental world will be brought down on earth and realised by us here and now?

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 156-57)



VICTORY OVER FALSEHOOD

The lords of Falsehood hold, at present, almost complete sway over poor humanity. Not only the lower life-energy, the lower vital being, but also the whole mind of man accepts them. Countless are the ways in which they are worshipped, for they are most subtle in their cunning and seek their ends in variously seductive disguises. The result is that men cling to their falsehood as if it were a treasure, cherishing it more than even the most beautiful things of life. Apprehensive of its safety, they take care to bury it deep down in themselves; but unless they take it out and surrender it to the Divine they will never find true happiness.

Indeed the very act of bringing it out and showing it to the Light would be in itself a momentous conversion and pave the way to the final victory. For the laying bare of each falsehood is in itself a victory — each acknowledgment of error is the demolition of one of the lords of Darkness. It may be an acknowledgment to oneself, provided it is absolutely honest and is no subtle regret apt to be forgotten the next moment and without the strength to make an unbreakable resolution not to repeat the mistake. Or it may be the acknowledgment to the Divine embodied in the Guru. As a result of direct personal confession to the Guru, your resolution remains no longer your own, because, if you are sincere, the Divine's fiat goes forth in your favour. To give you an idea of what this means I shall relate an experience of mine when I first met Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry. I was in deep concentration, seeing things in the Supermind, things that were to be but which were somehow not manifesting. I told Sri Aurobindo what I had seen and asked him if they would manifest. He simply said, "Yes." And immediately I saw that the Supramental had touched the earth and was beginning to be realised! This was the first time I had witnessed the power to make real what is true: it is the very same power that will bring about the realisation in you of the truth when you come in all sincerity, saying, "This falsehood I want to get rid of", and the answer which you get is "Yes."

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 141-42)

UNSHAKABLE CONVICTION

Another remarkable sign of the conversion of your vital, owing to Agni's influence, is that you face your difficulties and obstacles with a smile. You do not sit any more in sackcloth and ashes, lamenting over your mistakes and feeling utterly crestfallen because you are not at the moment quite up to the mark. You simply chase away depression with a smile. A hundred mistakes do not matter to you: with a smile you recognise that you have erred and with a smile you resolve not to repeat the folly in the future. All depression and gloom is created by the hostile forces who are never so pleased as when throwing on you a melancholy mood. Humility is indeed one thing and depression quite another, the former a divine movement and the latter a very crude expression of the dark forces. Therefore, face your troubles joyously, oppose with invariable cheerfulness the obstacles that beset the road to transformation. The best means of routing the enemy is to laugh in his face! You may grapple and tussle for days and he may still show an undiminished vigour; but just once laugh at him and lo! he takes to his heels. A laugh of self-confidence and of faith in the Divine is the most shattering strength possible — it disrupts the enemy's front, spreads havoc in his ranks and carries you triumphantly onwards.

The converted vital feels also a joy in the process of realisation. All the difficulties implied in that process it accepts with gusto, it never feels happier than when the Truth is shown it and the play of falsehood in its lower nature laid bare. It does not do the Yoga as if carrying a burden on its back but as if it were a very pleasurable occupation. It is willing to endure the utmost with a smile if it is a condition of the transformation. Neither complaining nor grumbling, it endures happily because it is for the sake of the Divine that it does so. It has the unshakable conviction that the victory will be won. Never for an instant does it vacillate in its belief that the mighty work of Change taken up by Sri Aurobindo is going to culminate in success. For that indeed is a fact; there is not a shadow of doubt as to the issue of the work we have in hand. It is no mere experiment but an inevitable manifestation of the Supramental. The converted vital has a prescience of the victory, keeps up a will towards progress which never turns its back, feels full of the energy which is born of its certitude about the triumph of the Divine whom it is aware of always in itself as doing whatsoever is necessary and infusing in it the unfaltering power to resist and finally conquer its enemies. Why should it despair or complain? The transformation is going to be: nothing will ever stop it, nothing will frustrate the decree of the Omnipotent. Cast away, therefore, all diffidence and weakness, and resolve to endure bravely awhile before the great day arrives when the long battle turns into an everlasting victory.

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1929-1931, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 3, pp. 138-40)

“I AM WITH YOU”

“I am with you.” What does it mean exactly?

When we pray or struggle with a problem within ourselves, are we really heard, always, in spite of our clumsiness and imperfection, in spite even of our bad will and our error? And who hears? You who are with us?

And is it you in your supreme consciousness, an impersonal divine force, the force of Yoga, or you, Mother in a body, with your physical consciousness? A personal presence that really knows each thought and each act and not some anonymous force? Can you tell us how, in what way you are present with us?

Sri Aurobindo and you, it is said, form one and the same consciousness, but is there a personal presence of Sri Aurobindo and your personal presence, two things distinct, each playing its own particular role?

I am with you because I am you or you are me.

I am with you, that signifies a world of things, because I am with you on all levels, on all planes, from the supreme consciousness down to my most physical consciousness. Here, in Pondicherry, you cannot breathe without breathing my consciousness. It saturates the atmosphere almost materially, in the subtle physical, and extends to the Lake, ten kilometres from here. Farther, my consciousness can be felt in the material vital, then on the mental plane and the other higher planes, everywhere. When I came here for the first time, I felt the atmosphere of Sri Aurobindo, felt it materially at a distance of ten miles, ten nautical miles, not kilometres. It was very sudden, very concrete, an atmosphere pure, luminous, light, light that lifts you up.

It is now long since Sri Aurobindo has put up everywhere in the Ashram this reminder that you all know: “Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you, because she is, indeed, always present.”

This is not a mere phrase, not simply words, it is a fact. I am with you in a very concrete manner and they who have a subtle vision can see me.

In a general way my Force is there constantly at work, constantly shifting the psychological elements of your being to put them in new relations and defining to yourself the different facets of your nature so that you may see what should be changed, developed, rejected.

But that apart, there is a special personal tie between you and me, between all who have turned to the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and myself, — and, it is well understood, distance does not count here, you may be in France, you may be at the other end of the world or in Pondicherry, this tie is always true and living. And each time there comes a call, each time there is a need for me to know so that I may send

out a force, an inspiration, a protection or any other thing, a sort of message comes to me all of a sudden and I do the needful. These communications reach me evidently at any moment, and you must have seen me more than once stop suddenly in the middle of a sentence or work; it is because something comes to me, a communication and I concentrate.

With those whom I have accepted as disciples, to whom I have said Yes, there is more than a tie, there is an emanation of me. This emanation warns me whenever it is necessary and tells me what is happening. Indeed I receive intimations constantly, but not all are recorded in my active memory, I would be flooded; the physical consciousness acts like a filter. Things are recorded on a subtle plane, they are there in a latent state, something like a piece of music that is recorded without being played, and when I need to know with my physical consciousness, I make contact with this subtle physical plane and the disc begins to turn. Then I see how things are, their development in time, the actual result.

And if for some reason you write to me asking for my help and I answer “I am with you”, it means that the communication with you becomes active, you come into my active consciousness for a time, for the time necessary.

And this tie between you and me is never cut. There are people who have long ago left the Ashram, in a state of revolt, and yet I keep myself informed of them, I attend to them. You are never abandoned.

In truth, I hold myself responsible for everyone, even for those whom I have met only for one second in my life.

Now remember one thing. Sri Aurobindo and myself are one and the same consciousness, one and the same person. Only, when this force or this presence, which is the same, passes through your individual consciousness, it puts on a form, an appearance which differs according to your temperament, your aspiration, your need, the particular turn of your being. Your individual consciousness is like a filter, a pointer, if I may say so; it makes a choice and fixes one possibility out of the infinity of divine possibilities. In reality, the Divine gives to each individual exactly what he expects of Him. If you believe that the Divine is far away and cruel, He will be far away and cruel, because it will be necessary for your ultimate good that you feel the wrath of God; He will be Kali for the worshippers of Kali and Beatitude for the Bhakta. And He will be the All-knowledge of the seeker of Knowledge, the transcendent Impersonal of the illusionist; He will be atheist with the atheist and the love of the lover. He will be brotherly and close, a friend always faithful, always ready to succour, for those who feel Him as the inner guide of each movement, at every moment. And if you believe that He can wipe away everything, He will wipe away all your faults, all your errors, tirelessly, and at every moment you can feel His infinite Grace. The Divine is indeed what you expect of Him in your deepest aspiration.

And when you enter into this consciousness where you see all things in a single

look, the infinite multitude of relations between the Divine and men, you see how wonderful all that is, in all details. You can look at the history of mankind and see how much the Divine has evolved according to what men have understood, desired, hoped, dreamed and how He was materialist with the materialist and how He grows every day and becomes nearer, more luminous according as human consciousness widens itself. Each one is free to choose. The perfection of this endless variety of relations of man with God throughout the history of the world is an ineffable marvel. And all that together is only one second of the total manifestation of the Divine.

The Divine is with you according to your aspiration. Naturally that does not mean that He bends to the caprices of your outer nature, — I speak here of the truth of your being. And yet, sometimes he does fashion himself according to your outer aspirations, and if, like the devotees, you live alternately in separation and union, ecstasy and despair, the Divine also will separate from you and unite with you, according as you believe. The attitude is thus very important, even the outer attitude. People do not know how important is faith, how faith is miracle, creator of miracles. If you expect at every moment to be lifted up and pulled towards the Divine, He will come to lift you and He will be there, quite close, closer, ever closer.

THE MOTHER

(Words of the Mother – I, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, pp. 72-76)



‘TO MY LITTLE STAR . . .’

(The Mother’s Letters to Tara Patel)

Born on 9 August 1912, Tara Patel joined the Ashram on 21 November 1929 at the age of seventeen. The Mother called her “Little Star”. She worked first in the Dining Room and then in the Mother’s Kitchen and the Embroidery Department. She lived in the Ashram for eighty-two years, until her passing on 12 June 2012 at the age of ninety-nine. Tara’s correspondence with the Mother covers the period from 1932 to 1942.

Tara,

It would be good if the kitchen was cleaned thoroughly once a week or at least once in a fortnight. Will you take the charge of this work? I am sure that A is ready to help you.

You will let me know what day you have chosen for the cleaning.

22 September 1932

*

Tara,

If you feel tired, it is better to stop the paper work in the evening for a few days. We have informed D. You must not overwork yourself.

7 October 1932

*

My little Tara,

Why did you not send me tonight your usual note in English? I would have been pleased to receive it.

With love

16 December 1933

*

My dear little child,

You have sent me a nice necklace with many sweet words.

I am sending you another one with my love and blessings.

25 January 1934

*

My little child,

I have received your nice letter so well written and the bag on which you have made such nice embroidery.

Yes, I agree with you that your mind must become quiet and peaceful and I hope it will happen soon.

With love and blessings

16 March 1934

*

My dear little child,

The three handkerchiefs are so pretty and nice ... and what a sweet little tomato!

With all my love

29 March 1934

*

My little child,

What people say is *not* true. I have given the charge of the work (and that only partially) to J only for the time of D's illness. As soon as D will get quite strong he will take back his work and you can always ask him all you want about the kitchen and the Dining Room work.

Certainly you can ask for the bowls from the Building Department.

Be quiet and happy, my love is always with you.

Blessings

10 April 1934

*

Little star-child,

Such a fine handkerchief you have sent me and made for me, my dear little child. I shall take it with me for pranam, this morning, and you will place your head upon it to receive a special blessing of love.

24 April 1934

*

Little star-child,

Do not worry about this morning's kitchen incident. You had no bad intention against T and this is the most important.

27 April 1934

*

Love and blessings to my little star-child.

Do not worry, all the obstacles will fall away.

27 April 1934

*

My little star,

Be quiet and courageous and do not lose confidence; all the difficulties are bound to come to an end one day.

With love and blessings

2 May 1934

*

My dear little star,

It is always our weaknesses that make us sad, and we can easily recover by advancing one step more on the way.

With love and blessings

12 May 1934

*

My dear little star-child,

I received the three beautiful roses, what fine smell they have! They are quite like the soul of my little child.

Love and blessings always

25 May 1934

*

My dear little child,

Indeed what a nice little bird you would make! But your soul is already like a bird and flies to me whenever it wants to see me and then goes back to you bringing from me love and strength.

26 May 1934

*

Dear little star,

I heard that you have finished the nice handkerchiefs, so to you also I shall say how pretty they are. Sri Aurobindo has taken his two in his room.

With love and blessings

3 June 1934

*

My dear little star,

You see the little light is still burning very well to meet my love and blessings.

5 June 1934

*

My dear little star,

Yes, you will become more and more quiet and happy; your mind also will be calm and silent and nothing more will disturb you.

With love and blessings

June 1934

*

All love and blessings to my little star whom I keep always in my arms

16 March 1935

*

My dear little star,

Yes, all my love and help will always be with you to keep you in a happy and peaceful condition. If wrong suggestions come do not listen to them and call me to help you in chasing them.

With our blessings always

22 June 1935

*

My dear little star,

I am sure you will do your best to remain quiet and happy and have no doubt about the success of your endeavour — our love, help and protection are always with you.

23 June 1935

*

My dear little star,

I am glad you are feeling all right now. The great thing is indeed to be quiet and to remain quiet — when the quietness is established the happiness is sure to follow.

Our love and blessings are always with you.

24 June 1935

*

My dear little star,

I am happy you have taken the decision to have patience until the end of August at least. I truly hope you will feel in a condition to come to me on your birthday.

My love is always with you, I so hope you can feel it . . .

4 August 1935

*

To our dear little star,

Our best wishes, love and blessings for her birthday and many happy returns of the day

9 August 1935

*

“Mon cher petit”, my dear little star,

It was indeed a very good and intimate meeting we had yesterday. You are truly my dear child, “my little one”, and uniting our strength, I am quite sure we shall overcome all that tries to disturb our sweet intimacy.

My love and blessings are always, always with you.

10 August 1935

*

“Mon cher petit”,

I take you in my arms and keep you on my heart with love and blessings.

18 November 1935

*

Mon cher petit,

I would like to have news from you, won't you write?

Our love and blessings are always with you.

5 December 1935

*

Mon cher petit,

Sri Aurobindo has written to you but somehow the letter has got lost. He will write to you again this afternoon.

With our love and blessings

28 December 1935

*

Mon cher petit,

Take refuge in my love and blessings which never fail you.

1 January 1936

*

Mon cher petit,

If you have some difficulty to overcome or something to say, do not hesitate to write.

Our love and blessings are always with you.

4 February 1936

*

My dear little star, "mon cher petit",

With all my love and affection I answer to your prayer and take you in my arms on my heart, so that you may find there protection and peace.

My blessings are always with you.

5 February 1936

*

Love and blessings to mon cher petit — what beautiful handkerchiefs you have done for me!

17 April 1936

*

Love and blessings to my dear little star — I hope the finger will soon get cured.

22 June 1936

*

Mon cher petit,

What a wonderful piece of work! I was truly moved when I received it.

All love and blessings to you, my little star

17 July 1936

*

My dear little star,

I have a very nice work for you if you wish to do it. A chaddar (upper cloth) is needed for Sri Aurobindo on the 24 November. Will you do it for him? D will give the size and the cloth.

Love and blessings to mon cher petit

11 September 1936

*

Dear little star,

Such a long time without a line from you! Will you not write to give us news?

Love and blessings to mon cher petit

3 October 1936

*

Love and blessings to mon cher petit,

Won't you go for a walk on the seashore with L daily? It would be nice . . .

21 October 1936

*

My dear little star,

Yes, the peace must come down, pure and sweet and settle in you to never leave you.

Love and blessings to mon cher petit

15 November 1936

*

Dear little star, mon cher petit,

My protection is always with you and nothing bad can happen. But you must take the decision to shake off the fear and then my force can work fully.

With my love and blessings

27 October 1937

*

My dear little star, mon cher petit,

You are already sleeping with me and that is why you must not be frightened because I am always there to protect you.

Love and blessings to my dear little star

31 October 1937

*

My dear little star, mon cher petit,

If the treatment gives you a relief, even if it be temporary, it might be better not to drop it altogether . . .

My love and blessings are always with you.

6 November 1937

*

My dear little star, mon cher petit,

If you have finished the medicine for your arm, you need not take anything more. As for taking medicine to become tall I do not advise you to do it as it may not be safe.

Love and blessings to "mon cher petit"

7 November 1937

*

My dear little star, mon cher petit,

To say that your cooking is bad would not be fair. At most what I can say is that it is not always equally good, but bad it is not, and some dishes are *quite successful*. It may be that a period of inner difficulty has passed over you, but you are bound to come out of it stronger than before. When the inner difficulty is removed the cooking will be as regularly good as it was before.

Love and blessings to "mon cher petit"

24 December 1937

*

"Mon cher petit",

It is not correct to say that I have dropped you — I never did — only I had to wait for your physical consciousness to be ready to open itself again.

I think you will understand me better if I speak to you, so I shall see you on the 25th Tuesday at 1.45 p.m.

Love and blessings to my dear little child

21 January 1938

*

"Mon cher petit",

It is very good that you have become conscious of the mistakes and defects of

the nature. Once you are conscious it is always possible to rise out of them and to change the nature. My help will always be with you for that.

Love and blessings to my dear little star

23 January 1938

*

Mon cher petit,

About the embroidery: the time in which it is finished does not matter. You can take all the time that is needed to finish it, but I do not want you to overstrain your eyes by too long embroidery work.

I cannot answer your question in the way you put it, because I make no difference between work and yoga. Work itself is yoga if it is done in a spirit of dedication and surrender. Love and blessings to my dear little star

25 January 1938

*

Mon cher petit,

It is not that you cannot do the yoga; you were doing it all right at one time. The difficulty is only in the physical mind where the resistance you speak of has a strong hold. If you can keep very quiet, not upset or discouraged and allow our force to work from behind the mind it will after a time eliminate the obstacle.

Love and blessings to mon cher petit

3 February 1938

*

Mon cher petit,

I told you already several times that I do not approve of your going. Do you believe that by insisting you will make me change my mind? I will tell you again and again:

1) I do not approve at all of your going.

2) I do not approve also of your jealousy which is baseless and meaningless and the best thing to do is to overcome it by thinking a little more of your work and a little less of yourself (I told you the same thing already once). I am not of the same opinion as you about the work you are doing, I find it quite useful.

3) I still hope that you will pick up some courage to overcome the present difficulty and to come back to a normal condition in which you can do your work quietly without disturbance.

My love and help are always with you — you have only to remember them and you will easily find them.

Blessings

20 June 1939

*

Mon cher petit,

I am quite satisfied with your work, both with the quantity and the quality and all I want is that you should go on like that. When I speak of the work, what I mean to say is that when you work in a satisfactory way you ought to feel at peace and happy.

My love and blessings

21 June 1939

*

My dear child,

Do not make mountains out of small things. All this has no importance whatever and ought not to disturb you or your work.

I hope that by tomorrow you will be quite well and that you will do your work as usual.

My love and blessings

24 August 1939

*

Mon cher petit,

It is very good of you to offer your services at this time that there will surely be the need of them. I will let you know what can be done; meanwhile if any good idea comes to you for the work you can inform me of it.

My love and blessings

13 September 1939

*

My dear child,

Now times are difficult for everybody. There is war and everybody suffers.

Those who have the immense privilege of being here quiet and in safety must at least show their gratitude by discarding all petty quarrels and silly grievances.

Everyone must do his or her work conscientiously and earnestly, and overcome all obscure selfish movements.

My help, love and blessings are always with you.

27 September 1939

*

My dear little star,

I have not yet decided on what work to give you — but I appreciate your wish to do the work in the right spirit and I will look for some occupation that will help you in your resolution.

My love and blessings

15 February 1940

*

My dear little star,

I am glad to hear that you are getting better and I hope you will soon be quite all right.

It is not because of the past — let the past be past and no more think of it! — that more work was not given to you; it was because I did not want to make you tired. Now that I know you are better D will give you more work, and when I shall have something to be done I will give it to you also.

The curtains you did are quite well done; they are put in place since the 24th.

With my love and blessings

29 April 1940

*

My dear little star,

Well if you are sure that the servants are robbing, it proves that they are not properly supervised and you will have to look to it more carefully.

My love and blessings

19 July 1940

*

My dear little star,

You must not be sorry or depressed. I am quite satisfied not only with your work which is excellent but also with your spiritual progress.

If somebody has told you otherwise, do not listen to what this person says, because it is not true.

With my love and blessings always

26 October 1941

*

My dear little star,

I trust you fully and know you are capable of fulfilling quite well your responsibilities. As for the difficulties and deficiencies, everybody has some and one is here to overcome them. This is the meaning of the sadhana of works. Moreover I know nobody to whom I could entrust this responsibility — so I must ask you to go on courageously with your duties, keeping all faith in the Divine and relying only on the Divine's help and grace.

With my love and blessings

6 January 1942

*

My dear Mama,

It would be better if somebody helps me in embroidery. If you prefer to give the whole work to someone else than me, I have no objection to it.

Can you propose somebody who could help you? I do not see how it could be given entirely to somebody else. Even if you could not do at all embroidery yourself you would have to supervise and see that it is done properly.

Among those who know embroidery several have not much work just now and could help you. But I do not know with whom you would like to work. That is why I ask you to suggest one or two names.

Love and blessings to "mon cher petit"

Undated

*

O my dear Mama,

Mama, I pray and pray and pray to You. Come, come, come, O my sweet Divine Mother. Come spread thy light in the heart and make it bright, for it is full of darkness.

Surely, dear little star, you will become all luminous as it is the nature of a star to be.

My love and blessings to mon cher petit

Undated

GOETHE — THE SUFI UNFULFILLED*

Goethe and Shelley were by far the most gifted poets of their age. Nor does their similarity end with the high excellence of their poetic gifts. Although different in various respects owing to outward circumstances as well as to Goethe's being much more complex and versatile, they had a remarkable kinship in the power of what may be termed "mysticism of artistic love". In Shelley this power can be seen by all; in Goethe it has to be discerned from amidst a multitude of qualities — the balanced Greek intellectuality, the humanism of the Renaissance temper, the Modern Man's Faustian rebelliousness and curiosity — but it is the central power of the poet in him, and to overlook it is to miss the intensest point in his psychology and the deepest tone in his self-expression.

Pantheism and the Eternal Feminine

Goethe was a pantheist: he declared that Divinity is not outside of the universe but that a Divine Substance underlies all phenomena and the forms of outward Nature have an inward animating Spirit which is perfect and which in its Wholeness carries all phenomena as phases of its perfection. In that Wholeness it is a tremendous mystery — the Absolute of the philosophers, "the inconceivable, utterly unimaginable highest Being" of which Goethe used to speak in awed accents to Eckermann. But between the Absolute and the relative, the Divine was for him an active Presence ordering from ineffable eternity the universe in time. While Goethe the poet found in the Absolute little matter for thought, the active ordering World-Presence haunted him. Not only did he intellectually live with it. Again and again, like Shelley, he passed through an exaltation which made outward phenomenal Nature so transparent a medium of inward divine Nature that, when Jacobi asserted in view of the obvious imperfection of things that "Nature hid God", he could in truth flash out: "Not from everyone!" The intellect, to him, was merely an instrument to formulate the findings of an intuition born of an emotional and aesthetic response to things. "Man cannot learn to know a thing," wrote Goethe,¹ "unless he loves it, and the deeper and fuller the knowledge is to be, the stronger, the more intense and the more living must be the love, I will even say the passion." His pantheism, therefore, is best summed up in his famous dictum: "The core of Nature is set within man's heart." Its most poetic utterance is the oft-quoted passage where Faust makes his confession of faith to

* (First published in *Mother India*, 9 July 1949, with a box-note: "The celebration, in Europe and America, of the bi-centenary of Goethe's birth began on June 27 and will continue up to July 11. A notable contribution to the large amount of Goethean literature seeing the light during this festival is the following specially written article which draws attention to an aspect of the great German poet not often emphasised.")

Margaret that Love, Rapture and God are one and the same Omnipresence containing and sustaining all.

According to Goethe, the Love and Rapture that is God is the infinite never-ending union of an Eternal Feminine with an Eternal Masculine. In this union the two cannot be differentiated but on the level of our own existence where man and woman stand apart, Divinity in order to remove all differentiation must come as a Love and Rapture with the face and force of the opposite sex idealised. So, man attains blessedness by following what Goethe apostrophised as “the Woman in woman”: under the aspect of feminine perfection — “Maiden, Mother, Goddess of all life” — the World-Presence attracts and fulfils man, giving at the same time to woman the opportunity to rise morally to the full height of her destiny as the incarnation of Divine Grace — Grace in both its meanings, the Everlasting Mercy as well as the “Beauty of ancient days which is ever new.” Hence, like the Sufi and the Tantric, Goethe dwelt in the feeling of a Universal Creatrix who was also a Mediatrix between his soul and the ultimate completion of its existence, and he assimilated into his feeling the personal passion of Christian Mariolatry and the impersonal ardour of Platonic idealism seeking the one Perfect Form which the manifold time-process images.

Physical Interpretation of Sufism

But he could not keep it on the rare oriental level. What was to the Persian mystics and the Indian Yogis a powerful symbol became for him more real than the Truth itself; for, while they regarded woman as only an earthly simile of the Divine, to be renounced as an object of lust and worshipped only in the spirit for the sake of the Reality behind, Goethe looked upon woman not as a simile but a visible synonym. Though human love thus took on the colour of a sacred rite, the initiation into which he esoterically described as the dying into the Life of life, yet his physical interpretation of Sufism debarred him from directly realising what was the quintessence of his religious perception, the “Mater Gloriosa” concealed behind each Gretchen. “The Woman clothed with the Sun”, the Archetypal Beauty which made the earth so fair, the highest Idea-Force by which the whole universe, according to him, was harmoniously expressed and which glowed through even the thickest of Jacobi’s veils, became lost in the heat and tumult of carnal desire.

He found the immaculate splendour too bright, because he did not know that in order to enter what the ancients called “the gates of the Sun” and pass to “where the Immortal Spirit wastes not nor perishes”, one has to gaze inward — a practice which he curiously distrusted as liable to lead to inactivity. The wisdom of the seers who sought in the heart a core deeper than the emotional-aesthetic centre was not fully open to him, though ever and anon he felt a blind affinity to it; and he never did learn to understand that the realisation of the Supreme Spirit by an inward mystical

discipline could be used as a fount of inspired action in the world, a stress of God-willed energy overflowing through the transformed individual instrument. Unable to stand the pressure of the profound intuition which he sometimes had, the intense pang of revelatory pleasure which is mysticism, be it only a mysticism of artistic love, his was fated to be the cry of Faust at the hour of dawn when awakened by the song of the elves:

The sun is here! — Alas, my eyes are blinded!
 I turn away, I cannot bear his radiance.
 Even so it is when all the self is minded
 To force the goal of our own confidence
 And wide are flung the gates of all fulfilment,
 Sudden there bursts from that eternal portal,
 A sea of flame, past mercy, past concealment;
 We thought to light a candle, — fire immortal
 Wraps us, engulfed in unknown glowing seas:
 Is it hate or love that those great gates outpour?
 That ocean full of rapture and of tears?
 Awakened we shrink and turn to earth once more,
 Hiding our faces in our childish fears.²

The ring of the mystical intuition here is no doubt authentic; but like Icarus Goethe sought the empyrean with wings that were not quite genuine. Suffering “the fall precipitant”, he was obliged to make it the first article of his credo that man is born to look at lit things, not at light:

Then be the Sun behind me, not before!
 I turn and gaze, my heart a-brim with wonder,
 Where the wild torrent down the torn cliff rushes.
 From ledge to ledge it leaps in joyous thunder,
 Forth in a thousand swirling streams it gushes,
 Bursting in foam, tossing the spray on high.
 Lo, in calm glory from the tumult springing
 The million-coloured bow that cannot die!
 Through change unchanging, now its pure arch flinging
 In full clear lines, now faint where the winds fly,
 While still the coolness and the fragrance hover.
 Torrent and rainbow! — So our efforts seem.
 Follow that thought, that image and discover
 Our life lies in the changing coloured gleam.³

This surely is one of Goethe's marvellous poetic victories; but it is also an expression of his spiritual defeat. Indeed he that has felt the Divine, however passingly, cannot be the same man again. And Goethe, who had a feel and sense of the Sun, went always vaguely thirsting after the Eternal and the Perfect and straining through all phenomenal objects to glimpse the Everlasting Moment of flawless rhythm which is the Time-experience of God, "the calm of His celestial Day", in which the shift and commotion of the world are elevated and transfigured into the divine archetype behind its imperfect course of history. "In the true symbolism," Goethe opines elsewhere, "the particular represents the Universal not as a dream or shadow, but as a living momentary revelation of the Unfathomable . . ."⁴ By the definite embrace of the Earth in preference to the Sun as his domain, he lost something which mundane Nature really hid and which no amount of poetic philosophy could supply, clutch as it might at love as the phenomenon super-symbolic of the Eternal.

"The Desire of the Moth for the Star"

This is not to say that Goethe did not feel the transcendental phase of human emotion: in his relation with Charlotte Von Stein he did feel it unmistakably:

For, all that men within their earth-bound limits
Learn of high bliss and call by holy names. . . .
The light that only in their loneliest thoughts
Burns for the wise, for poets in their dreams,
Their heavenliest — I too in my best hours
Found it in her and found it there for me.⁵

But the concupiscent part of him was too vehement in its demands to bear the strain of Charlotte's idealism. Finding no satisfactory solution to his liaison with her, he fled to Italy where, in Rome, he gave vent to himself in "the sweet flower gardens" of Armida in sensual experiences which formed the undertone of some of the most antinomian of his *Roman Elegies*. But he was not satisfied with this heartless sort of enjoyment, either. He wanted true love, and on returning formed a union with the young and pretty Christiane Vulpius which fully afforded him that, without at the same time starving his passions.

It cannot be denied that he combined with human love a superhuman longing and, even at his most earthly, felt "the desire of the moth for the star." For, men and women he saw as but human fronts and faces of the world-creative Divine Polarity of God the lover and God the beloved, the Eternal Masculine and the Eternal Feminine. All this hectic yearning of the flesh, he therefore held, points to a consummation in which the human lovers lose the cravings of their separate limited egos and fuse into an ecstasy in which Matter falls off like a withered garment and Spirit, with the

Divine Polarity ever implicit in it, shines out pure of the aberrations of the earthly Eros. It was to this strange dematerialisation that he gave, in Shelleyan fashion, the name Death: so that Death signified to him not merely the cessation of terrestrial life but the flight to a heavenly consciousness in which “all failure shall grow to achievement.” The mere brute fact of death meant only the casting off of one material body for another, a reincarnation of the soul for still further progress:

Like water it wanders,
The spirit of man:
It comes from the sky,
To the sky it goes.
Then down once more,
Drawn down to the earth,
It changes, it flows.⁶

In a letter to Weiland Goethe writes with reference to Charlotte Von Stein: “I cannot explain to myself the significance of the power which this woman has over me, unless by metempsychosis. Yes, we were once man and wife.” The same idea he expresses in an exquisite poem to Charlotte herself, for, had he not too strong an intuition that nothing could be which did not in one form or another exist before to prepare for its present condition and that if the human soul were an “entelechy” — that is, in Goethe’s own words, “a piece of eternity which the few years of its connection with the body does not age” — it would be absurd to think of it as not having had its own definite soul-nature from the beginning of time, developing its possibilities of manifestation on earth through many births? Death, therefore, was, from the natural point of view, a transition to another plane of being, with a subsequent return to this; but in the high esoteric sense, it stood for the Shelleyan trampling of life into fragments, the trampling of that imperfection which,

like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity.

To make the brute fact at the same time a celestial truth was, in Goethe’s eyes, the aim and end of living. His own failure, owing to the downward trend of his passions, to realise the light of the Divine had led him to the conclusion that man is condemned never to dwell in the ideal and perfect Consciousness, the Solar Glory, while alive: striving is all his lot, never achievement. But when the fetters of the body are broken, surmised Goethe, there must be the possibility of attainment: the very futility of the effort here towards the Divine implied for him fulfilment elsewhere, in a poise of consciousness in which, to employ Tantric terms, the pure Shakti, the one supreme Creatrix, is in everlasting union with the supreme Ishwara, “the

Untenable” — “*das Unbeschreibliche*”. To penetrate into this beatific condition was, in his philosophy, love’s crown of Love, and the soul’s preparation for this leap into the Infinite with the help of “the unknown Eros” which sustains the world, in Shelley’s phrase, “from beneath and kindles it above”, was the height of wisdom leading to the *grand finale* of human life — the divine death.

Thus we find him striking in one of his mystical poems a note such as has been sounded with an equal poignancy and richness by only Wagner at the close of *Tristan und Isolde*:

Tell no man, tell wise man only,
 For the world might count it madness,
 Him I praise who thirsts for fire,
 Thirsts for death and dies in gladness.

Thou wast got and thou begettest
 In dewy love-nights long ago;
 Now a stranger love shall seize thee
 When the quiet lamp burns low.

Thou art freed and lifted, taken
 From the shadow of our night,
 Thou art drawn by some new passion
 Towards a nobler marriage-rite.

Distance cannot weight thee, soaring
 Where the far enchantment calls,
 Till the moth, the star-fire’s lover,
 Drinks the light, and burns, and falls.

Die and grow! Until thou hearest
 What that word can say,
 The world is dark and thou a wanderer
 Who has lost his way.⁷

Tragedy of Spiritual Unfulfilment

But the divine death thus glorified is not achievable, as the spiritual experiences of all ages unanimously show, without transcendence of the temporal symbol of Eros. No shuffling off the mortal coil can kill the roots of desire, nor lead to godlike Bliss until they are killed. As Goethe himself recognised, in order to partake of that Bliss the human entelechy must be made fit for it while still alive. It must die and grow every minute if finally with the physical dissolution it is to die into God. But, it may be remarked, once the fitness for God’s Bliss is reached, the very necessity of physically dying for the sake of entering the deific is removed. When the true Yogi

dies, he only continues the state of blessedness which was his during life; for “he in whom the knot of the heart-strings has been rent asunder,” says the Katha Upanishad, “enjoys the Bliss of Brahman even in this body of clay.” Goethe, however, could not snap the cords of human attachment by diving deep into his psyche in constant meditative adoration of the Supreme. Perhaps his most magically Sufi address to Love the Universal Mediatrix is:

Thou mayst choose a thousand forms to hide thee,
 Yet, All-beloved, I shall know thee there;
 Thou mayst take enchanted veils to shroud thee,
 Yet, thou All-present, I shall feel thee near.

In the pure springing of the tall young cypress,
 All-statiest, I know thee well the while,
 In the pure lakelet’s limpid, laughing ripple,
 Thou, All-beguiler, I behold thy smile.

And when the fountain lifts her jet and opens,
 All-playfullest, I gaze upon thy glee,
 And when the cloud-forms change their changing fashion,
 All-myriad-natured, I am sure of thee.

Gay in the meadow’s flower-embroidered raiment,
 All-starry-brightness, I can see thy face;
 Where the light-handed ivy climbs and clusters,
 All-clamberer, I catch thy eager grace.

When the new morning flames upon the mountains,
 All-gladdener, gladly I welcome thee,
 And when the pure sky arches out above us,
 All-heart-enlarger, I know it breathes of thee.

If aught I learn by outward sense or inward,
 All-learned teacher, I learn it all through thee,
 And when I name the hundred names of Allah,
 There echoes with each one a name for thee.⁸

But this most inspired address of his to the Eternal Feminine is tragically typical of the spiritual unfulfilment of his whole life, because it was after all an apotheosis of his attachment to Marianne Von Willemar! The only other tragedy equally typical and regrettable is Shelley’s passionate confusion of the Divine Beauty, which so urgently beckoned to his soul, with the human all-too-human Emilia Viviani.

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

Notes and References

1. Letter to Jacobi, May 10, 1812.
2. *Faust*, Part II, Scene 1, II. 4708-713.

The verse-translations quoted in this article are by Miss F. M. Stawell and G. Lowes Dickinson, to whose admirable book *Goethe and Faust* the present article owes several suggestions.

3. *Ibid.*, II. 4714-727.
4. *Maxims and Reflections*, 314.
5. 'The Secrets'.
6. 'Gesang der Geister über den Wassern', October 1779.
7. *The Divan of East and West, The Singer's Boon* — 'Sacred Longing'.
8. *Ibid.*, *Book of Zuleika* — last poem.

It is news to me that I have excluded Mahomedans from the Yoga. I have not done it any more than I have excluded Europeans or Christians. As for giving up one's past, if that means giving up the outer forms of the old religions, it is done as much by the Hindus here as by the Mahomedans. The Hindus here — even those who were once orthodox Brahmins and have grown old in it, — give up all observance of caste, take food from Pariahs and are served by them, associate and eat with Mahomedans, Christians, Europeans, cease to practise temple worship or Sandhya (daily prayer and mantras), accept a non-Hindu from Europe as their spiritual director. These are things people who have Hinduism as their aim and object would not do — they do it because they are obliged here to look to a higher ideal in which these things have no value. What is kept of Hinduism is Vedanta and Yoga, in which Hinduism is one with Sufism of Islam and with the Christian mystics. But even here it is not Vedanta and Yoga in their traditional limits (their past), but widened and rid of many ideas that are peculiar to the Hindus. If I have used Sanskrit terms and figures, it is because I know them and do not know Persian and Arabic. I have not the slightest objection to anyone here drawing inspiration from Islamic sources if they agree with the Truth as Sufism agrees with it. On the other hand I have not the slightest objection to Hinduism being broken to pieces and disappearing from the face of the earth, if that is the Divine Will. I have no attachment to past forms; what is Truth will always remain; the Truth alone matters.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Yoga – I, CWSA, Vol. 28, pp. 411-12)

A HISTORICAL DOCUMENT ON SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM AND PONDICHERRY

Reply to the letter of Purushottam Reddiar by an Ashramite¹

Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry
June 28, 1949

Dear Friend,

Here, I am trying to summarise our recent conversation and am replying to your specific questions, which, according to you, are the causes of people's anti-Ashram feelings. You can make use of these as you think best.

1) It is not true, as some say, that the French India Socialist Party was formed in the Ashram. A few members of this party were interested in the Ashram for a long time, i.e., long before their party came into existence. Their interest was mainly intellectual. That means they neither accepted the Ashram life nor the spiritual discipline of the Ashram in their daily life. They felt the influence and had their respect for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. When their party was formed, early in 1947, they naturally felt inclined to have the support of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Hence they submitted their party's plan and prayed for their guidance. They got it — because they approached the Mother and Sri Aurobindo with that spirit. Their programme with Sri Aurobindo's touches got a new life, in its far reaching outlook and aim. They circulated it in June 1947 to all interested and began to work in the French Assembly for achieving that end. If you have not read that programme, known as the Future Union, I would like you to read that first, so that you may understand for yourself the motive behind it. Whether people agree with that or not, is another matter. But certainly nowhere in that programme of the French India Socialist Party of 1947 was there any hint, hidden or expressed to eternalise the French domination over these colonies in India. I quote a few passages, as reference:

(p. 6) “. . . For this, the present colonial system and its bureaucratic government must cease to exist, and this should be done as soon as possible. Neither the people nor any party are willing to remain subjected to the old system, only a

1. The letter was written by an Ashramite in response to the points raised by Purushottam Reddiar, President of the French India National Congress, in his letter dated 20 February 1948 (also reproduced here) to Rajkumar, Secretary of Foreign Dept., AICC, Delhi. Copies of both the letters were found in the papers of Purushottam Reddiar at the Pondicherry National Archives.

few whose professional interests are bound up with the old state of things are in its favour, and any long continuance of it would be a severe strain on the feelings of the population”

or (p. 7) “. . . there should be an immediate transfer of powers to the French India Representative Assembly. The power of the Governor to govern by decree should disappear.” “. . . the status of the population of French India should be that of a free self-governing people . . .”

“. . . the link with French culture will be retained and enlarged but also, inevitably a much larger place will be given to our own Indian culture etc. etc.”

Would you understand from this that the Ashram is advocating the continuance of the French imperialism over these territories?

The Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, is famous for his international outlook in his Government’s foreign policy, and for that reason he has been a target of violent criticism even from some of his camp followers. But if you had read about the proposed “dual citizenship” in the said programme of the F.I.S. Party, you will see that the door was open for a future marvel:

(p. 8) “The final logical outcome of the dual situation of French India People would be a dual citizenship under certain conditions through which French India could be in the French Union and participate without artificial barriers in the life of India as a whole. The present state of International Law is opposed to such a dual citizenship but it would be the natural expression of the two sides of our life situated as we are in India and having the same fundamental nationality, culture and religions and social and economic life but also united for a long time by cultural influences and a historical connection with France. It may well be that such arrangements might become a natural part of the development and turn towards greater unity between peoples and breaking down of old barriers which began at San Francisco and a not unimportant step in the movement towards the removal of the old separatism, oppositions and incompatibilities which are the undesirable side of nationalism and towards international unity and the growth of a new world and one world which is the future of humanity.”

It was also stated,

“. . . We are of the opinion that if this programme is properly carried out with the approval of public opinion, it will assure our future evolution and progress without violence and strife. We would be able to take a fuller part in the total life of the Indian nation and be at the same time an instrument for the closer drawing together of nations and play a part in the international life of mankind.”

Is it Anti-Indian in its outlook? But prejudiced quarters thought ill of it, and began to throw mud on the Ashram.

Before proceeding further, let me take up the story of the contact with the Ashram, of Monsieur Charles François Baron, who was the Governor of French India at that time. It appears to be very enigmatic and hence surcharged with political doubts and disbeliefs even now.

Monsieur Baron approached the Mother not as a politician, in fact he is by nature more a poet than a politician, but as an ardent admirer of Sri Aurobindo. There was no doubt about the sincerity in his approach in the earlier days, which continued for years before he became the Governor of French India. His childlike approach to the Mother was a source of inspiration to some who had the opportunity of being in that close quarter. Later his arrival as the head of the Government of these territories opened new possibilities for a far reaching solution of the political problems, especially for a quick action from the Paris Government towards giving full autonomy to the people of Pondicherry. By his active efforts supported and guided by the Mother, he succeeded to convince the Paris Government that the entire Government machinery had to be removed immediately. That meant they accepted in principle the proposals of the French India Socialist Party. It was wisely proposed, after removing the imperial colonial machinery, to keep the best and beneficial relation between France and India, the only course then was to establish cultural contacts. The spiritual heritage of the two ancient Mother countries by their mutual give and take process would lay the foundation of a future advancement of humanity. Immediately there was to be established a University, with centres of Oriental studies, for French people, who would come specially from France, and occidental studies for the Indians and other Eastern countries. A medical centre including a college, a research centre and a Pasteur Institute were to be another branch of the project, where latest scientific advancements in France would enrich the Indian students, and the Indian systems like Ayurveda etc. were to be studied and introduced to the Occidental sphere through these centres. The idea was welcomed in New Delhi, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had even thought of sending the young Indian diplomats to Pondicherry to perfect themselves in the French language before starting on their overseas careers. Not only was the proposal accepted, but even the approximate amount of money, a few million rupees, demanded by M. Baron was sanctioned by the Paris Government. Meanwhile sites for the university were being searched for in and around Pondicherry. Evidently as a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, M. Baron was labouring for the establishment of a great cultural centre in Pondicherry, a novel conception here, in the line of Nalanda and Taxila of the days gone by. He could quite naturally think of Sri Aurobindo guiding this centre with his silent advice and influence. The French Government at home not only agreed to this idea but went ahead. They sent Monsieur Maurice Schumann, one of the very famous war time spokesmen of General de Gaulle, to Pondicherry to offer their

homage to Sri Aurobindo and also to make a first-hand report about the immediate prospects of putting the plans into action. M. Schumann came not only on behalf of his government, but also with his own inner urge to see Sri Aurobindo, because, he said, since he read some of Sri Aurobindo's works and had benefited by them at a critical period in his life, it was his dream to take the first opportunity to approach the sage and offer his personal homage.

It was this unique coincidence of circumstances that brought M. Schumann in front of Sri Aurobindo, on a day other than the Darshan days, with a purpose that was historic and for a higher motive than to plan the eternal domination of the French colonies in India.

You can now explain to the people, why Sri Aurobindo should have chosen to break his silence and seclusion to grant an interview to someone from France. You can also tell them that Sri Aurobindo chooses to break his silence and seclusion at times for other men also from India. It depends on who and how they approach him. A very recent example is the visit of Sir C. R. Reddy, the vice-chancellor of the Andhra University who came here and had an interview with Sri Aurobindo.

But unfortunately this grand project failed to materialise. The Paris Government, I do not know for what reason and under whose unwise influence, did not keep to its promise of granting full autonomy to Pondicherry. Automatically the conception of the cultural centres could not come into being.

A dark period began. The people of Pondicherry turned violently and actively against the Ashram, because they believed the Ashram to be the mainspring of all activities opposing French India's Freedom. Their violence reached its climax on the evening of the 15th August 1947, when they stabbed one of the Ashramites to death and wounded a few others and contrived to be actively hostile to the Ashramites for a long time. That the local Congress people were among the active agents of violence against the Ashramites is a fact, observed and verified by many, although the Ashram did nothing about it.

A statement was sent on the 20th August 1947, to the Editor of "The Statesman", Calcutta, by the Ashram Secretary, to correct some wrong statements and to explain the Ashram's stand regarding the French Indian Settlements. I quote a portion from that statement for you:

"Everybody in Pondicherry without exception supports the right of self-determination for the people of French India and Sri Aurobindo has always been a firm supporter of that right for all peoples everywhere. Nobody here is for the continuation of French rule, but the people were prepared to accept the French proposal of a free and completely autonomous French India within the French Union. It was only when it appeared that the reforms offered by the French Government would fall short of what was promised that the cry arose for the immediate transfer of power and the merging of French India in the

Indian Union. Sri Aurobindo, not being a citizen of French India, made no public declaration of his views, but privately supported the views set forth in a manifesto of the French India Socialist Party demanding the end of colonial rule and a complete autonomy within the French Union, accompanied by a dual citizenship and a close association with the Indian Union which should control Customs, Communications and a common system of Industry and Commerce.”

This is what was given out to the press on the 20th August 1947 in the name of Sri Aurobindo, and this, I have reason to believe, is the considered opinion of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother today also. They are not politicians, they do not change their opinions, — if that can be called opinion. Because the spiritual truth and knowledge in which they live give them a direct perception, a perception by identity, which can stand the challenge of the whole world against it. They cannot be mistaken, but neither do they dictate, nor perform miracles; they take nature as it is — an immense mass of conflicting forces and conditions, and out of that they arrive at the result of a higher consciousness on earth and a higher state, working slowly with unimaginable patience. They do not change their opinion, but they do change their method of working, according to the nature of the response they get. The only lamentable part is that we do not understand at times, neither do we care to approach them with an attitude of respect that common sense demands; we are overconfident about their mistakes and we begin throwing mud on them!

Anyway, even though the plan failed hope was not given up by the members of the French India Socialist Party, they prayed for the guidance of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to continue, and it was there.

But the whole situation grew worse, when M. Baron gradually failed to retain the purity of his purpose. He became completely eclipsed and unbalanced and not only doubted but began to speak against Sri Aurobindo, that his spiritual vision was unrealistic and imaginary and that he had personal motives behind his work etc. Right up to the last day of his stay in Pondicherry, his car was to be seen at the Ashram gate. People were now experiencing his mishandling of the French Indian political situation, so they thought that it was all due to the Mother, who must be supporting his errors. This statement has been sent, with vilifications against the Mother to the Government of India, as much by local Congress as by the Indian Consul here, who unfortunately completely misunderstood the Ashram, and naturally his reports to Delhi are prejudiced against all activities of the Ashram. Any other institution would have given Press communiqués and exposed to the world the betrayal of the French Government in Paris, and that of M. Baron in Pondicherry, to save itself from the ill will and contempt of the Indian Government on one side, and the violent attacks of the local people in all the meanest possible forms on the other.

I do not remember all the manifestations, but I do know that the Indian Consul and the local Congress people were behind such an incident as inviting Ravindra

Varma, President of the All India Students' Association and allowing him to vilify Sri Aurobindo at a meeting, in a language that would put to shame the most vulgar of men in the lowest rank of any society. In spite of all this Sri Aurobindo and the Mother not only kept silent themselves but would not allow us to divulge the whole truth. So the Ashram carried on in its own peaceful way, swallowing the poison spread from all quarters due to misunderstanding and misrepresentation. M. Baron still continued to approach the Mother and to exploit his visits to the Ashram to lower its prestige to the people, which he succeeded in doing to a certain extent. The Mother, with her supreme patience and energy, still tried to set him right. But the human in him was too weak to shake off the falsehood which had taken a firm hold.

Meanwhile the situation in the French Indian Assembly grew worse for the Socialist Party and finding it useless to labour for the present, to change the consciousness of such a hard nut, the Mother withdrew from it, and the ministers resigned at once. What the new amalgamation of opportunity hunters have done with the situation, people are now experiencing, and will continue to do so until after the referendum.

2) You asked me why the Ashram participated in the Fête Nationale on the 14th July 1947, and not in any other Indian function, as this made the public feeling still worse.

The participation of the Ashramites in the procession on the 14th July, the "Fall of Bastille Day", was not to honour the Frenchmen of Pondicherry but if at all it was for the purpose behind the function. The celebration of this victorious day has a deeper significance in history for the whole of mankind though perhaps none remember that now. Yet it is a celebration that should be observed by all people on the earth. The Ashram celebrates, in its own way, the Hindu festivals like Durga puja, Ayudh puja etc. and also the Christian festival of Christmas. That is one point. The other point is, as I mentioned before, even though the Paris Government betrayed the political issues of the French settlements in India, the Ashram — following its principles, never behaves like an enemy to people. Hence the contact with all who approach the Mother in good spirit, is amicable to us. The chief of the police at that time, who was on good terms with the Ashram, asked the Mother to allow her children in the Sports Section, to participate in the Fête Nationale with the other Sports Groups of Pondicherry. He assured the Mother that he would see that these boys and girls of the Ashram were protected against hostility. He put them at the head of the procession and drove by their side in his car. Yet the local people stoned the Ashram group and tried to disrupt them, but the Chief of police handled the situation admirably.

Had the leader of any Indian function approached the Mother in the same way, we may have seen the Ashramites participating. But from the leaders of Indian movements we have experienced only abuses and hostility, and the local people have garlanded the Mother's photograph in the most objectionable way and burnt

it in public. Yet, we hold no grudge against them. We know that ignorance and misunderstanding has covered their senses. The moment they take to reason and approach with confidence they will be welcome.

The Ashram is not a social body, and certainly not a political one. Its purpose is spiritual and in the daily life it tries to follow the principles that suit its purpose. Food, work, sports, etc. are part of the normal life, balanced and suited to the individual's capacity, the same as meditation and concentration. When a person dies, the Ashramites have learnt from their Master, that the soul departs to its place of rest, and remains there until it takes a new body and is re-born. They also pray for the departed soul to rest in peace, and also for the mind and vital which also withdraw after death to their respective levels and remain there until they are completely dissolved. Funeral and cremation ceremonies have this deeper meaning. This is done by the Ashramites, in their spiritual way, by removing their personal attachments to the dead, and by praying through their Master to God, to help the departed one. They do not observe any social function when someone dies in the Ashram, other than sending the body to be cremated or buried according to the custom of the people. They believe in the spiritual method of praying for the peace, which is the most effective process. That was the reason why they did not make a ceremony of "sorrow" or "mourning" when Mahatmaji died, or make any special manifestation by stopping their normal activities. The employed work people who number about a thousand of course were given a full day's holiday as they are not expected to understand these things in the way the Ashramites do. This story of the Ashram's non-participation in the cremation or the mourning ceremony of Gandhiji, has been conveniently scandalised to belittle its prestige in all quarters. High Government officials in Delhi have denounced the Ashram for it. But if they had cared to enquire, before taking offence, as you have done, it could have been explained quite easily. If the mortal trustees on earth of Gandhiji could have communicated with his soul, they would have been convinced of his satisfaction to the homage the Ashramites paid in their silent prayer to the Divine. But here on earth we are accustomed to find an excuse to pronounce pre-arranged denunciations. Here also, the opportunity was not missed.

3) There is a long standing grievance in the Congress quarters, and it is being carefully cherished and fomented for the purpose of maligning the Ashram, that Sri Aurobindo refused an interview to Gandhiji in 1934 when he visited Pondicherry whilst on his South India Harijan tour. But facts give a lie to this statement. When Gandhiji wrote about his intention of visiting the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo himself answered the letter, explaining why he could not grant permission at that time. That letter should have reached Gandhiji before his departure from Sabarmati Ashram, but it arrived only after his return. Gandhiji wrote later on acknowledging the letter. Now at that time the Ashram was passing through very hard days of political pressure

from the French Government who, believing the Ashram to be an organisation other than spiritual, wanted to prove it a secret political or revolutionary one, and to take serious measures against it. The presence of Gandhiji just at that juncture would have complicated the situation still more. That the letter had not reached Gandhiji was obvious, for when he arrived in Pondicherry he sent a telegram to a Gujarati Sadhak (named Govindbhai Patel) previously one of Gandhiji's intimate followers, to arrange for his visit. That telegram, when communicated to Sri Aurobindo, revealed the fact that Sri Aurobindo's letter to Gandhiji must have missed him. Govindbhai Patel was sent immediately to Gandhiji on behalf of Sri Aurobindo, to explain the whole situation; and the very day of Gandhiji's arrival in Pondicherry, the Ashram was expecting a visit from Government officials to interrogate the members about their life and their purpose here. It goes without saying that the delay in the delivery of that letter was intentional and not accidental in the British India Post Office. The fact that it was in Sri Aurobindo's own handwriting, and to Gandhiji, was probably the reason. I believe all this was known by Gandhiji's followers. But its repetition in the same tone of complaint surprises us. Certainly Sri Aurobindo's views on many things differ from Gandhiji's, as the spiritual truth and knowledge of one is different from the ideals and ways of life of the other. Yet never could there be any antagonism between them. But as usual on earth, it is the followers of great men, at times over confident about their correct understanding and interpretation of their Masters, do judge and paint, not necessarily with any bad intention, the different views of the leaders of other paths as antagonistic to each other. I have heard that, a few months before his assassination, Gandhiji wrote a letter to a Gujarati Sadhak of the Ashram here, expressing his respect for Sri Aurobindo and his work.

About the Mother of the Ashram, — against whom, thanks to the French Indian political enigma, there has been plenty of slander, especially because of her nationality, — when Gandhiji received long ago, a small booklet, "Words of the Mother", he said after reading it they are "Amrit Bindu" (drops of nectar), and praised her high realisations. We adore her as our spiritual Mother, because we have and are realising that in our daily life. It is a question of faith and consciousness. Those that are sceptical and will not believe, if they studied her in the most earthly way, or in any way they liked, they cannot deny that she stands unique and above. Her French birth has been an asset for us, for we have benefited at each step, literally at each step of our life's movements, by her directions at once methodic, scientific, calculated, healthy and energetic, always encouraging and progressive. Even her worst critics do not deny that she looks after every detail of her six or seven hundred disciples, whose ways of living are clean and orderly. Can any human being imagine — only the burden of such a number with their various problems, 365 days in the year — not to speak of innumerable other ones? And yet it is She who is always calm and quiet and radiating. The one nearest to her also will never know unless She tells whether there has been any problem anywhere. Hardly a person in the Ashram knew from her

about the betrayal of the Paris Government vis-à-vis the French possessions in India, and the lack of faith of M. Baron.

I have been strictly careful not to use spiritual or philosophical expressions here, as far as possible, lest some say that I have avoided the realities while indulging in philosophy. I for one believe that, however enigmatic the Sri Aurobindo Ashram may appear to be, if one approaches with a good heart and a sincere intention of understanding, what is being done and why, he will surely be convinced — (even if he does not share the views or agrees with the methods of the Ashram) that there is nothing being done or encouraged here that is Anti-Indian. Had this been so, or if it ever happens I can tell you frankly that I, being an Indian, would be the first to leave. I challenge all the awe inspired Indians to come and verify the truth here in the Ashram.

4) You complained about the loose talk of some of the Ashramites against the national leaders, and about rumours such as making Pondicherry an International City to be given as a gift to Sri Aurobindo etc. etc. My one request to you is, do not accept a single word from anyone as an authentic message of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother unless it is officially stated as such. Whenever there is any doubt please refer directly to the secretary, and you will have the points clarified. Nobody here is encouraged to speak against the National leaders. Whoever does so, does it on his own responsibility. But I must also say that, as you and the followers of our great leaders feel wounded by the talk of some of the Ashramites, — how must members of the Ashram feel when they hear vilifications against Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, not only by the public but also by hired platform speakers? Furthermore the students of the local association gathered round the Ashram on 24th November 1947, Darshan Day, and people from all over India who had come to pay their homage, heard many vulgar remarks against the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. What is still worse is the unrestrained talk of some of the leaders in New Delhi against the Mother. Some who want to show their reasonableness say, their grudge is not against Sri Aurobindo, but the Mother.

5) You also asked, why the Ashram did not hoist the Indian Union Flag on August 15th 1947, when throughout India, even in Pondicherry, it was hoisted. The reason is this. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother do not recognise the partitioned India as the true India. To them India, the real Mother India, is undivided. The flag that the Ashram hoisted for the first time was to celebrate specially the liberation of India. It was also Sri Aurobindo's birthday, and that day is celebrated every year but never with any flag. The flag expressed also, "the spiritual mission of the whole of India. It is therefore, to the Ashram, the symbolic flag of a resurgent, united and victorious India which has raised itself out of the torpor of centuries and has cast off the shackles of enslavement, and passed through all the pangs of a new birth,

has emerged once more as a great and united nation leading the world to the highest ideals of the Spirit.”

I have copied this portion from the authorised interpretation of the Ashram flag. You can now understand that the hoisting of this flag on the day of India’s liberation was not to lower our country but to raise it, much higher than her political trustees can conceive.

The flag is a lotus in full bloom, two circles of petals (four inside and twelve out) all in gold, set in a silk square of silvery blue. This blue is the blue of the Spirit, and the gold is the colour of the Supreme Mother.

On this great day in August 1947, the Mother blessed all the Ashramites with the words, “Jai Hind”, not to satisfy any political group but because She felt that it really expressed everyone’s thoughts, — Glory to India. As this could not be used against the Ashram, the critics omitted to mention this.

I am glad that we have had the opportunity to discuss these matters in detail. Perhaps now, you will be able to banish all the confusion caused by a great misunderstanding.

With love and best wishes for you

(An Ashramite)

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Letter of Purushottam Reddiar to N.V. Rajkumar²

To
Sri N.V. Rajkumar
Secretary, Foreign Department
All India Congress Committee
Delhi
20th Feb 1948

Dear Sir,

I beg to acknowledge with thanks the receipt of your kind letter of the 13th inst. regarding the Ashram affair.

I have also received a similar letter from Sri K. Kamaraj, President, T.N.C., Madras.

2. The letter dated 28 June 1949 was written by an Ashramite in response to the allegations raised against the Ashram in the following letter (dated 20 February 1948) of Purushottam Reddiar to Rajkumar.

Even before receiving your esteemed letter the Congress had done all it could to warn the people against being misled by the false propaganda against the Ashram.

The whole thing appears to be the work of some irresponsible elements done under the cover of night a day or two after Bapuji's assassination.

I can guarantee that none connected with the local Congress was in any way connected with such mean acts. The Congress has doubtless grievance against the Ashram for the latter's support for and close connections with the enemies of the Freedom Movement but the Congress has all along been extremely cautious in even giving expression to its protest against Ashram's (a spiritual body) interfering with and controlling and guiding local politics in a manner as to hinder French India's freedom and its merger with Indian Union.

We ourselves had many a time thought of bringing the ways of the Ashram to the notice of the Congress authorities but did not do so as we thought it would only be adding to the worries of our leaders by raising such an issue then.

Now, in view of the recent development under reference, I beg to submit hereunder a somewhat detailed account of some of the causes which, I understand, are alienating the public day by day from the Ashram: —

1) For some months past there has been some bitterness against the Ashram in the minds of different sections of the public over the identification of the Ashram Management with the French India Socialist Party, which is out for suppressing all activities opposed to its declared policy of retaining French India in the French Union.

2) The daily and regular audience of the Governor, Mr. Baron, with the Mother of the Ashram, who is a French lady, and the devoted discipleship of some prominent members of the said Socialist Party are factors, I understand, which have strengthened the suspicion of many here that the Ashram favours the continuation of the foreign rule here.

3) The participation of some 50 Ashram members, for the first time, in the procession of the "Fête Nationale" (Republican Festival) annually conducted by the local Government on 14th July (1947) still further worsened the feelings of the public.

4) Loose talks emanating, as inquiries show, from some Ashramites themselves of making Pondicherry an "International City", existing outside Indian Union with citizenship for all nationals of the world and Pondicherry being given as a gift to Sri Aurobindo through the offices of the present Governor Mr. Baron and Mr. Schumann, an advocate of French culture who recently arrived from France and interviewed Sri Aurobindo, were taken in all seriousness by certain sections of the public. What

made them swallow down such wishful thinking of the Ashramites was the fact, I understand, that Sri Aurobindo who had refused interview to Gandhiji during the latter's visit to Pondicherry in the course of Harijan tour in the South in 1934 and who is not accessible usually to anyone and who gives Darshan even to the inmates of the Ashram only four times in the year, should have chosen to break his silence and seclusion to grant an interview to some man from France, who comes to India talking culture to cloud the freedom issue.

5) Besides these, there are some groups, as everywhere, who hate the Ashram for the competition it makes in the economic life of the people here and for the Ashram's alleged contempt for the non-Bengalees.

6) It was in this background that the agonising news of Bapuji's assassination came. On the following day hand-written posters suggesting the Ashram's complicity in the tragedy appeared in some parts of the town — not, I understand, on the walls of the Ashram. This, as I have already stated, is the work of mischievous elements who wanted to make a capital out of the commotion.

7) But it must be mentioned that there was a talk everywhere in the town denouncing the Ashram for its apathy to Gandhiji's death and for its having carried on its school and sports and other items of normal life on the day of Gandhiji's cremation when the whole town, including the Government Offices, was in hartal, steeped in sorrow.

The Congress, however, lost no time in taking all possible steps to see that none was carried away by such false and biased propaganda.

We could not go further in the matter as the Ashram is generally believed to be the mainspring of all activities opposing French India's Freedom and its merger with Indian Union, and as any positive help from the Congress side in the present context will result only in the Congress risking its hold on the public — of course, so long as the Ashram does not give up its reactionary politics here.

These are what I have been able to gather as contributing to the conflict.

Beyond the appearance, on a single day, of some posters and some pictures damaging the Mother of the Ashram, there has not been any manifestation, or agitation. This too, I believe, is the work of bad characters and I hope it may not reappear.

After seeing your esteemed letter and that of Sri Kamaraj's we are issuing an appeal to the people, whoever they are, not to indulge in undignified oppositions, however genuine their grievances may be.

In conclusion, I beg to sincerely assure you that the Congress will under no circumstances countenance in the least any move against the Ashram prompted by

any section of the public in a manner unworthy of Gandhiji and the highest traditions of our Mother organisation, Indian National Congress.

With regards

Jai Hind

Yours sincerely
President

From: Purushottam Reddiar
President
French India National Congress
Pondicherry

Compiler's Note

The letter dated 28 June 1949 written by an Ashramite in response to the letter of Purushottam Reddiar (President of the French India National Congress) to Rajkumar (Secretary of Foreign Dept., AICC, Delhi) explains in detail how Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were misunderstood by the pro-merger parties in Pondicherry in the years 1946-49. The main cause of the misunderstanding, as mentioned in Reddiar's letter, was the Ashram's proximity to the French administration when a freedom struggle was going on in Pondicherry to liberate itself from French rule and merge with the Indian Union. Not only François Baron, the Governor of Pondicherry, frequently visited the Ashram, but some of the prominent members of the French India Socialist Party (notably Lambert Saravane, Padmanabhan Counouma and Dr. André), who wanted to retain French India within the French Union, were disciples of the Mother. The Ashram was thus believed to be in favour of the continuation of French colonial rule and the main opposition to the merger of Pondicherry with India.

The letter defending the Ashram's position begins by denying that the French India Socialist Party was formed in the Ashram, and says that its members were influenced by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother long before the formation of their party. So when they founded their party in 1947, they naturally sought Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's advice and support for their party's manifesto, to which Sri Aurobindo gave his final touches. The reply then quotes passages from their Manifesto to show that the party never supported French domination, and all they wanted was a close association of France with India, and autonomy and dual citizenship for the people of Pondicherry. This would permit them to be both Indian and French nationals at the same time and bring the two great nations together in a collaborative effort than having to choose one over the other.

The writer then tells us about Charles François Baron, who was an ardent admirer of Sri Aurobindo even before he became Governor of Pondicherry in April 1946.

Baron had convinced the Paris Government to accept the proposal of the French India Socialist Party and implement the cultural plan of establishing a University in Pondicherry in the line of Nalanda and Taxila for the study of Oriental and Occidental studies. A few million rupees had been sanctioned and even sites for the University were being searched for in and around Pondicherry. The French Government sent Maurice Schumann in September 1947 to pay homage to Sri Aurobindo, who was to be the spiritual centre of the University. Schumann was then supposed to submit a first-hand report on “the immediate prospects of putting the plans into action.”

The next few paragraphs describe how this grand project failed to materialise when the French Government failed to deliver its promise of granting full autonomy to French India. A dark period began for the Ashram when some of the local people turned actively hostile towards it because the Ashram was believed to be the “mainspring of all activities opposing French India’s freedom” from colonial rule. The hostility reached its climax on the 15th of August 1947 when the Ashram was attacked and one person was fatally stabbed and a few others wounded. Things became worse when Governor Baron mishandled the already volatile political situation and the Ashram was blamed for it. Meanwhile the ministers of the French India Socialist Party, who were under the Mother’s influence, found it impossible to continue to be in the Pondicherry Assembly and resigned from it shortly before the municipal elections of 24 October 1948.

This is the main story and a few other minor accusations are refuted and explained point by point by the letter of the Ashramite: (1) Why did the Ashram groups participate in the procession of the French Republic Day? (2) Why did not the Ashram observe the mourning of Gandhi-ji’s death? Why did not Sri Aurobindo meet Gandhi-ji in 1934 when the latter asked him for an interview? Why did not the Ashram hoist the Indian flag on the day of India’s independence? All these the letter explains with great conviction and clarity, and one comes to know how Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were misunderstood for their spiritual stand in political and social matters.

From a historical point of view, the letter throws considerable light on this not so well-known aspect of Ashram history *vis-à-vis* the freedom movement of Pondicherry in the late forties. Finally, the fact that this long and neatly-typed letter was found among the papers of an early sadhak with a note saying that the Mother told him “that Sri Aurobindo had approved it” and had allowed it “to be circulated to all Central Ministers, including the Prime Minister, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru”, lends it further credibility. The sadhak also notes that the circulation of the letter had the desired effect of dispelling wrong notions about the Ashram, and the current Indian Consul (who was responsible for giving an adverse impression of the Ashram to the Indian Government in Delhi) was quickly replaced in December 1949 by Sanat Bannerjee, who happened to be a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Things

seemed to have fared better for the Ashram from this point onwards until the political problem was permanently solved by the *de facto* merger of Pondicherry with India on the 1st of November 1954. After the first visit of Jawaharlal Nehru to the Ashram on 26 January 1955, a close and long-standing relationship was established with the Congress Govt. even though the Ashram remained apolitical, and a number of Congress dignitaries, including Smt. Indira Gandhi herself, visited the Ashram and sought blessings from the Mother.

Compilation and notes by RAMAN REDDY

The Supermind is in its very essence a truth-consciousness, a consciousness always free from the Ignorance which is the foundation of our present natural or evolutionary existence and from which nature in us is trying to arrive at self-knowledge and world-knowledge and a right consciousness and the right use of our existence in the universe. The Supermind, because it is a truth-consciousness, has this knowledge inherent in it and this power of true existence; its course is straight and can go direct to its aim, its field is wide and can even be made illimitable. This is because its very nature is knowledge: it has not to acquire knowledge but possesses it in its own right; its steps are not from nescience or ignorance into some imperfect light, but from truth to greater truth, from right perception to deeper perception, from intuition to intuition, from illumination to utter and boundless luminousness, from growing widenesses to the utter vasts and to very infinitude. On its summits it possesses the divine omniscience and omnipotence, but even in an evolutionary movement of its own graded self-manifestation by which it would eventually reveal its own highest heights, it must be in its very nature essentially free from ignorance and error: it starts from truth and light and moves always in truth and light. As its knowledge is always true, so too its will is always true; it does not fumble in its handling of things or stumble in its paces. In the Supermind feeling and emotion do not depart from their truth, make no slips or mistakes, do not swerve from the right and the real, cannot misuse beauty and delight or twist away from a divine rectitude. In the Supermind sense cannot mislead or deviate into the grossnesses which are here its natural imperfections and the cause of reproach, distrust and misuse by our ignorance. Even an incomplete statement made by the Supermind is a truth leading to a further truth, its incomplete action a step towards completeness. All the life and action and leading of the Supermind is guarded in its very nature from the falsehoods and uncertainties that are our lot; it moves in safety towards its perfection. Once the truth-consciousness was established here on its own sure foundation, the evolution of divine life would be a progress in felicity, a march through light to Ananda.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 558-59)

EVOLUTION IS ON . . .

From Matter to Life, from Life to Mind, from Mind to Overmind and beyond to further new and higher faculties in the series — the evolution is on.

Within Mind itself, as well as in the gradations of Matter and Life, we can observe the operations of different levels: for instance, in the earliest phases of our developing, a more physical Mind operated when survival against enemy's swords and spears was among the very first necessities. And when we try to map these early stages we largely tend to evaluate the unfolding of events and the various stages of evolution as occurring mechanically, from one to the next, without taking cognisance of the fact that higher faculties within the Mind levels had first to emerge.

Today, we are aware of newer facets of creation, for instance, that particles interact at a more fundamental level: a cognisance that requires a subtler Mind level, to cite just one instance. But there is more to evolution: from Mind . . . to Overmind . . .

The Overmind — a cardinal step forward in human evolution beyond Mind. And beyond to further new and higher levels in the series . . . the Supermind — whose descent Sri Aurobindo prepared.

Strong assertions were made, particularly in the West, that Matter is the one and only reality and that there can be nothing else, before and beyond. But, on the contrary, Einstein went on to prove that Matter is only a form of Energy and that Mass and Energy are interchangeable and his equation for it as $E = mc^2$ is well-known in terms of taking our understanding of the reality to the next level: thereby Energy became the fundamental unit of the known universe.

We are yet to hear from The Materialistic Paradigm Inc. regarding what is next in their varying and changing criterion; nothing is final yet after the relatively new Energy paradigm was established as fundamental unit — it is not Matter as erroneously proclaimed earlier in a sweeping hurry and generalisation.

Life, Mind and Matter therefore are explained as expressions of Energy. In fact, there is nothing called 'Matter' independently — Matter retains its presence only as a form of Energy.

This could have far-reaching implications in many fields especially in medicine as in the directions of our own self-development and self-evolution. Would medicine, shaped by the emerging Energy paradigm, be oriented and guided towards the therapeutical usage in the transmission of energies instead of the use of chemicals in the form of pills, injections and surgical knives? Would the newer therapeutics see the patient as a field of Energy first and not just an amalgamation of a few chemical reactions called a body? Disease could then be defined as the deviation or the disturbance of the body's life-supporting vitalities since Life is not just a fixed block of Matter but a constantly varying and changing field of Energy supported by

a materialistic base which further is a mode of Energy at a fundamental level.

Could more precisely directed mediums of other forms of energies, already being researched upon very actively, be brought into the field of clinical therapeutics?

Lasers are already in use at various frequencies as a medium of energy in various therapeutics; certain radiations and light energies such as the ultraviolet rays have shown remarkable capabilities with their action to destroy and eliminate bacteria across various mediums with large industrial potentials and applications; UV-treated packaged drinking water is one such instance where the water is rendered free of disease-causing germs, bacteria and other impurities.

Extending the idea, can similar rays destroy and eliminate germs and bacteria from the blood or the serum as well? Only the practical methodology will need to be worked out so that these new ways can be integrated into the regular medical practice with all due safety checks ensured.

Nor are chemical-based drugs and antibiotics a solution as they often have serious side effects.

All these methods are still matter-based. An exploration of other forms of energy would be the way forward.

A newer approach is called for.

Sri Aurobindo specifies that we are not just a one-piece entity; we have other parts, namely, the mind where our thoughts can be observed and scanned, the analytical and logical sides of our personality that act as a compass or radar on our life's pathway and without which we would feel directionless, almost lost on the seas of life; the vital part of the being which, as the name indicates, provides us with our dynamisms, our zeal and our courage that spark our inspirations, our enthusiasm and élan and those "come on, I can do it" pushes that keep us tackling the various challenges and obstacles of life; the body, the material part of ourselves that acts as a base, the executive platform without which all our mental, vital and spiritual endeavours would remain in the realm of ideas, a "wish I could" state of abstraction without potentialities or active and concrete results; and finally the spiritual being, that dimension of our personality that provides the functionality and the light to all other parts of our being as the sun does to all the other planets around it and without whom the planets cannot be defined as planets at all as the sun is the matrix of the entire solar system.

Further, with our thousand limitations and present shortcomings, can we call a halt to the newer and higher faculties which are to emerge in the future? We cannot, as the following series is obvious when we take a more deliberate view of the world's working: from Matter to Life, from Life to Mind, from Mind to Overmind and beyond to further new and higher ranges of consciousness.

Evolution is on . . .

SUDHAKAR KAMBOJ

GOLDEN MEMORIES OF SWARNAPRABHA — I

Most of the time these four sadhikas would sit quietly. Just before dusk, when they found a little time for themselves, they sat together on the open terrace.

In those days chatting was uncommon. Only those words were exchanged which were meaningful, and which could open the mind to glowing and new horizons.

On one such evening, bathed by the setting sun, one of the sadhikas beckoned the other three and asked, “Do you know what the Mother has said today?” Curious to know, the other three drew closer.

“Well, the Mother has said that she has found four beautiful flowers,” the sadhika continued.

“Why only four,” enquired one of them, “when the Mother receives so many flowers?”

“Listen, that is what I’ll reveal. The Mother said: ‘One flower is Datta . . . entire self-giving, the other is Nishtha, Concentration on the Divine . . . another is Jwalanti . . . burning flame, and finally . . .’

The other three awaited eagerly to hear the name of the fourth.

She continued, “Finally, the fourth flower is Swarnaprabha — our Swarna — do you know Swarna represents Service — the one who is offering her untiring services to the Mother.”

The four ladies of the terrace are the Mother’s four flowers! The sun had set. But their hearts were illumined by an unearthly joy. They did not exhibit any outward expression of their glowing happiness, instead they turned quietly inward. Considering their state or stage of their work and sadhana they realised that the Mother had bestowed upon them a superior reward than was due, a shower of her loving affection and free flowing grace.

Datta (Dorothy Hodgson) was the wisest of the four and the earliest to take to Yoga. She came to the Ashram in 1920 from Japan. Dorothy was English by birth. She and her brother had left England in search of a life elsewhere. She settled in Japan, while her brother settled in Calcutta. Dorothy was a teacher in a school of repute. About 3000 students were enrolled in that institute.

After school hours, Dorothy used to go for a stroll in a garden full of cherry blossom trees. These trees were devoid of fruits but were laden with flowers displaying a riot of colours, resembling a magnificent garden of paradise. A fountain here, a leisurely flowing stream there, and arching over them were small bridges, which enhanced the beauty of the scene. The garden used to be vibrant with the chirping of birds. It was an ideal setting for poets, philosophers and nature lovers. Here the Mother would come for her evening walks. Datta’s first meeting with the Mother took place there. She had also seen Rabindranath Tagore a couple of times there.

The Mother's persona and her ideals were what attracted Datta, from the very beginning. A deep friendship developed between them. Very soon she understood that though the Mother seemed so human, she was in reality a living divinity. The Mother was six years older than her. Over a period of time Datta realised that the Mother was very much greater, and their difference was not just between two individuals but between a human being and a God! That is why when she came to the Ashram, she could at once humbly offer her being with total submission to the service of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo named her "Datta" — entire self-giving — having seen in her such a rare and exemplary surrender.

Datta aspired for her work to be as perfect and neat as possible. She kept a watchful eye on those who assisted her. This led to occasional disputes.

It was possibly between 1920 and 1922, the period when Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and some other devotees lived in the Guest House. Datta was in charge of cooking, a job dear to her, which she held very close to her heart. She was innovative and created a fusion of Oriental and European cuisines. She excelled in making salads, which she served to the Mother every day. For Sri Aurobindo she prepared a variety of vegetables.

In Japan too she had made salads, because the Mother was not fond of Japanese-European style of cooking.

Now, Datta did not like sloppy work. One day she scolded Vatel, who assisted her in the kitchen, for having been negligent in his work. He was visibly angry and he shot back at her saying that very soon all the inmates would be compelled to leave the house. Vatel stormed out in a huff. Soon after, a weird phenomenon began to happen. Stones started falling in the house compound from all sides. Very disturbing indeed. No one was around, yet stones were being thrown by someone unseen. One day Datta was hit on her arm. Ultimately the police were informed. After having heard and seen everything, the police posted a guard on vigil. But whom should he apprehend? . . . Because no one was seen! The guard concluded that Vatel was the culprit.

Vatel had colluded with a Muslim man who knew black magic. That it was his handiwork was now clear. Stones continued to fall. It was then that the Mother stepped in. She sat in concentration. She discovered that there were little beings — entities — behind the pelting. These entities didn't possess individual power of volition, instead their actions were under the control of the black magician. The Mother admonished them, and ordered them to vacate the premises forthwith.

That was the end of the stone-falling episode.

After 1922, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, along with the sadhaks, shifted from the Guest House to the present-day Ashram compound.

They came to live in the Library House (which now houses the Reception and the Philately Section). Sri Aurobindo and the Mother resided in rooms on the first floor, and adjoining their rooms was a room occupied by Datta, their permanent servitor and friend.

Thence on Datta attired herself in a saree, with the end-part covering her head, just like Indian women. During her stay in the Library House the Mother had suffered from acute pain in her legs, so much so that she became incapacitated and unable to walk. Throughout this period Datta used to carry the Mother in her arms. Dr. Upendranath Bandyopadhyay arrived for the Mother's treatment.¹

A few years later the Mother and Sri Aurobindo moved into the 'Meditation House', to be exact, the portion above the Meditation hall. We are now familiar with the rooms where Sri Aurobindo and the Mother lived. The Ashram is a charming ensemble of four buildings. They were purchased at different times and then linked together.

The Library House too saw some changes. Anilbaran occupied Sri Aurobindo's room, Champaklal got the Mother's, whereas Rajangam was given Datta's room. Now, Rajangam was a doctor. Instead of pursuing the career of a physician he chose to live in the Ashram to follow the path of Yoga. Having done so, he did not, however, give up his rights over the family assets. He reasoned with his father and carved out for himself a considerable sum of money. With that amount the Ashram bought over not only the Library House but also the building on the Western side. (i.e. the Quadroze House, beside which is now lodged the Bakery and then the Laundry). This building was given to Datta. She made use of the sprawling area quite wisely. There was space enough for cooking and washing utensils, yet still more for washing and drying of clothes. She lived there happily.

The year 1933 witnessed the arrival of Swarnaprabha in the Ashram. She hailed from Chattagram — now in Bangladesh. She was already in quest of knowledge and aspired to lead a higher life. She used to correspond with Sri Aurobindo, who guided her through his letters. Swarna was married, she had to confront family problems. Keeping her six-year-old daughter in her mother's custody, she came to the Ashram. Just like gold which never loses its shine under any circumstances, similarly Swarna did not lose sight of her goal and stood firmly in the battlefield of life. Rather, the hostilities kept alive the flame of aspiration. In the end she could trample over all obstacles and establish herself in the Ashram — her intended domain of sadhana.

She was graceful and charming, petite, with a golden complexion. She was softspoken yet firm. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were pleased to see Swarna. They were in touch with her through letters, maybe even through subtle vision, but this was the first time that they laid eyes on her. In what work was this golden-hued girl to be engaged in? One who had forsaken everything to be in the Ashram? The Mother had already decided. She asked her to show her skill in needlework. Swarna embroidered a butterfly on one of the Mother's sarees. And the Mother was extremely pleased. She called Datta, and instructed her to take Swarna in her fold.

Datta was happy to have Swarna as her assistant. With the Mother's approval

1. See *Mother India*, January, 2021

she was given cutting, stitching and darning jobs. Swarna's apprenticeship began with stitching old pillow-covers, bed sheets, towels, Mother's clothes and handkerchiefs. She used to work in the courtyard of Datta's house.

Both the Mother and Datta were very pleased not only with her skill but also with her dedication and sincerity. Swarna worked merrily from 6 o'clock in the morning till as late as 9 in the evening. In between she would walk down to the Dining Room for the meals. She laboured relentlessly.

Datta kept a close watch on Swarna's method and quality of work, her stitching, threading a needle and cutting. One day she observed Swarna putting the end of a thread in between her lips. She was moistening it before the threading.

Datta stopped her and said, "Swarna, always remember that the Mother is Divine, therefore make your work pure. Maintain cleanliness."

Swarna understood. She changed her method. Instead, she ran her fingertip through her hair, to make it oily, and then applied it around the end of the thread. This too didn't go unnoticed. Datta explained that it was highly probable that the oil would soil the fabric.

Swarna stopped applying oil to her hair.

A Tamil lady assisted Datta in the kitchen. One day Datta instructed her to clean and steam some walnuts. Datta would cook ridge-gourd with crushed walnuts for Sri Aurobindo. She went to the Ashram to keep the Mother's salad in the refrigerator. The assistant sought Swarna's help. After all it was for Sri Aurobindo; so she eagerly lent a helping hand. On her return, Datta quickly surveyed the kitchen and then went to the courtyard where Swarna was busy stitching. She took one look at Swarna's hands and asked, "Why are your fingers black and seem dirty?" Swarna stiffened with remorse. Truly the fingertips were sullied. She related what had transpired. Datta was cross and she rebuked Swarna for acting without thinking. She also commented that it was unbecoming of the kitchen-help to have sought for assistance without her prior permission. Swarna was embarrassed and ashamed of herself. She mended her ways. She became so conscious and one-pointed in her duty, that even the very vigilant eyes of Datta could never find a fault in her work!

Thereafter Swarna had to shoulder more responsibilities. The Mother used to receive plenty of dress material. The Mother's gowns and other dresses were all handmade, because there were no sewing machines. Swarna had acquired a thorough knowledge of washing, ironing and stitching. She was also aware of the Mother's preference of design, her choice and taste. The Mother would dictate the body measurements, and Swarna had to note them down quickly. This was the procedure not only for new dresses but also for old ones which had either shrunk or lengthened depending upon the fabric. In the beginning, Swarna would be nervous. She often showed the jottings to Datta and Chinmayee for confirmation.

Swarnaprabha's dress-making always lived up to the Mother's expectations.

(To be continued)

MARGUERITE

(Translated by Dr. Shyam Sundar Majumdar from the original Bengali 'Swarnasriti Prangonae', by Marguerite, in the journal *Bortika* published by Sri Aurobindo Pathmandir, Calcutta.)

Work done for the Mother without claim or desire alone has a spiritual value — you must not bring your ego into it.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Mother with Letters on the Mother, CWSA, Vol. 32, p. 418)

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

(Part 23)

(Continued from the issue of January 2022)

SECTION 3: A QUIET AND HUMBLE DISPOSITION

Sri Aurobindo was a silent and self-effacing person. Sri Aurobindo’s eldest brother, Benoybhusan, remarked: “Auro was a very quiet and gentle boy”.¹ And when Sarojini met him for the first time, at Deoghar, in 1894 she noticed his reserved nature.² Later Barin too noticed his retiring disposition.³ And when in 1902, he stayed with Sri Aurobindo at Baroda, he got to know him better. He observed Sri Aurobindo in his study at Khaserao Jadhav’s house; he writes:

... a quiet small unassuming man buried there for hours in a trance of thought and very often writing page after page of poetry, that was the habitual picture I became accustomed to daily.⁴

About their difference in temperament, Barin felt that while he himself engaged in conversation, songs and arguments, “Aurobindo was always quiet, focussed and serene.”⁵ Barin also noticed that Sri Aurobindo never openly revealed his kind nature since his movements were restrained.⁶ Sri Aurobindo’s reserve is palpable in his June 1902 letter to his wife which he ends by stating: “Give my respects to your father and your mother. You will understand all that I leave unexpressed.”⁷

Dinendra Kumar Roy who “lived with Sri Aurobindo as a companion” spoke of him as “a man of few words, balanced in his diet, self-controlled, always given to study”.⁸ It was in 1898 that Sri Aurobindo, on the recommendation of his uncle Jogendranath Bose, employed Dinendra Kumar Roy with the objective of learning some of the nuances and subtleties of the Bengali language. They first met in Calcutta in the house of K. K. Mitra, travelled to Deoghar and finally took the train to Bombay.

1. Charu Chandra Dutt, ‘My Friend and my Master’, *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1952, p. 123.
2. See Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 56.
3. See Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, May 2012, p. 348.
4. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1st Ed., p. 11.
5. See Barindra Kumar Ghose, *The Tale of my Exile*, p. xxix.
6. See Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, May 2012, p. 348.
7. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1st Ed., p. 56.
8. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 51.

They arrived at Bombay in the morning, stayed at a big European hotel till evening and boarded the 10 p.m. overnight train to Baroda. They reached Baroda early in the morning where Lt. Madhavrao was waiting at the railway station to take them to Khaserao Jadhav’s mansion. Sri Aurobindo boarded Madhavrao’s carriage and Roy followed in another carriage. During this long journey from Bengal to Baroda, Roy noticed Sri Aurobindo’s reflective nature:

Sri Aurobindo had hardly anything with him apart from minimum necessary clothes of quite ordinary quality, though his several trunks were packed with books. He looked like a self-absorbed ascetic travelling from one end of the country to another for fulfilling some spiritual vow.⁹

Books were an accessory when Sri Aurobindo travelled. On his first visit in 1894 to his grandfather’s house in Deogarh, which used to be the annual meeting place for the entire family, Sri Aurobindo arrived with trunkloads of books. Basanti Mitra writes that “Aurobindo loved reading so much! . . . Aurobindo would pass those sweet days with his books!”¹⁰

Sri Aurobindo spoke little. He never felt it necessary to speak about himself and rarely, if ever, spoke of his innumerable achievements, experiences, realisations or associations. If queried, his replies would normally be short and succinct. G. S. Sardesai, a well-known Marathi historian who was a colleague of Sri Aurobindo in the Baroda State Service, observed Sri Aurobindo’s reticent yet profound nature:

I used to go walking with Sri Aurobindo in those days. He usually was reserved and non-communicative. To a question he would reply “yes” or “no” and not go beyond. There was something of the mystic in him.¹¹

Later at Pondicherry, A. B. Purani, who participated in innumerable talks that Sri Aurobindo had with his disciples, made the following observation:

How much were these sittings dependent on him may be gathered from the fact that there were days when more than three-fourths of the time passed in complete silence without any outer suggestion from him, or there was only an abrupt “Yes” or “No” to all attempts at drawing him out in conversation. And even when he participated in the talk one always felt that his voice was that of one who does not let his whole being flow into his words; there was a reserve and what was left unsaid was perhaps more than what was spoken. What was

9. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo – Life and Times of the Mahayogi*, 1st Ed., 2020, p. 104.

10. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, November 2012, p. 885.

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

spoken was what he felt necessary to speak.¹²

Sri Aurobindo and his two elder brothers largely grew up in a far-away alien country where they seldom received letters from their father and had no connection with their mother. Furthermore, after they shifted to London, following their five-year-stay in Manchester with their guardians Mr. and Mrs. Drewett, they had to largely fend for themselves as remittances from their father almost stopped coming. At one time the poverty was so acute that Sri Aurobindo remarked, “Manmohan could not stand it, so he went to a boarding house and ate nicely without paying anything.”¹³ Manmohan, a poet and romantic, acutely felt the lack of direct parental love and the economic deprivations during their 14-year stay in England and it so affected him that he was subject to fits of gloom and despondence. Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, was resilient; he was quiet and rarely mentioned the adversity he faced in his childhood and early youth in England. Temperamentally he was reserved but his will was firm. Nirodbaran writes:

Sri Aurobindo once wrote to D that he had been deprived from his childhood of what could be called love, and brought up as he was in a Europeanised home and then in a foreign land his nature became reserved and shy of expression.¹⁴

About his student days in England Sri Aurobindo has said:

Few friendships were made in England and none very intimate; the mental atmosphere was not found congenial.¹⁵

However, Sri Aurobindo has told his attendants that Norman Ferrer was a close English friend. Ferrer later practised as a barrister in the Straits Settlement and passed through Calcutta on his way to Singapore in 1908 when the Alipore trial was going on. He went to the High Court and was anxious to render help to Sri Aurobindo, but did not know how to do it.¹⁶ Sri Aurobindo also had several staunch well-wishers in England like Dr. F. W. Walker (the Head Master of St. Paul’s School), Mr. James Cotton (brother of Henry Cotton, Chief Commissioner of Assam 1896 to 1902), G. W. Prothero (a senior fellow at King’s College, Cambridge, a writer and historian who was later knighted), Oscar Browning (an educationist, historian and a well-known Cambridge personality) and others. At Cambridge, Sri Aurobindo was admired for his scholarly brilliance and liked by the students who knew him.

12. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 10.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 624.

14. Nirodbaran, *Mrinalini Devi*, 1988, p. 28.

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

16. See A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 23.

Amongst whom, besides Ferrer, were Percy Mead, Prof. R. S. Lepper and others. Sri Aurobindo was well known to the Indian student community at Cambridge and “as a member and for some time secretary of the Indian Majlis at Cambridge he delivered many revolutionary speeches”.¹⁷

At the Baroda College Sri Aurobindo was known for his wide knowledge but also for his quiet ways. His student R. S. Dalal recalls, “He was revered by all, but being by nature shy and reserved, was not easily accessible.”¹⁸ P. B. Chandwani, another student who revered Sri Aurobindo, writes:

Principal Ghosh struck us in those days as somewhat reticent and shy. He invariably wore a white suit and turban with a black tie and though he shaved his beard, he sported a luxuriant moustache. Above all he had the eyes of a mystic and his mind seemed to be in a ferment, as if in preparation for the coming event of his total renunciation at the altar of the motherland.¹⁹

Elsewhere Chandwani has said,

Sri Aurobindo used to be very silent, almost shy. He was greatly respected by the students. We got the impression that he was preparing for something great. He used to be terribly serious and never joked in the classroom. When he would come he would sit against the table with his thumb on the forefinger. Mostly he would keep his eyes down and speak as if in half meditation.²⁰

Chandwani adds: “He used to attend social gatherings and dramatic performances. But mostly he remained silent,” but then goes on to illustrate that Sri Aurobindo spoke when it was helpful, “I remember how he appreciated Shakespeare’s play, *The Merchant of Venice*, in which I took part as Portia. Barindra, his younger brother, was also there during those days. Later Sri Aurobindo left Baroda College and joined the National College in Calcutta. His articles in the *Bande Mataram* used to inspire me greatly. I still remember one of his articles which appeared in this paper under the caption, ‘The Wheat and the Chaff.’”²¹

Shankar Balwant Didmishe, a student at Baroda College, remarked, “It was not customary at that time to go to his residence and so we did not go to the bungalow.”²²

17. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 32.

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

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

20. P.B. Chandwani, ‘Sri Aurobindo Through the Eyes of One of His Students’, *Mother India*, 15 August 1963, p. 25.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

22. Reminiscences of Shankar Balwant Didmishe; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

Another student, G. H. Gokhale, writes: “He had not much of a social life.”²³ Yet, Gokhale notes: “As there were few students he knew each student intimately.”²⁴ Gokhale has also remarked about Sri Aurobindo’s calm manner.²⁵

K. M. Munshi, one of Sri Aurobindo’s students, writes of Sri Aurobindo’s demeanour at college: “. . . walking with eyes downcast, he did not mix with the students”.²⁶ K. M. Munshi also notes:

To the students of our College, Prof. Ghosh was a figure enveloped in mystery. . . . Many stories of his doings were whispered from mouth to mouth among the students almost with awe.²⁷

Another student M. K. Sharangpani recalls:

Professors Manubhai and Arvind Ghose, no doubt, held the students spell-bound during the time of their lectures; but they did not mix with the students as much as Masani, Tapidas and Naik.²⁸

Despite Sri Aurobindo’s reserved nature his students at Baroda College like K. M. Munshi, R. N. Patkar, Shankar Balwant Didmishe, R. S. Dalal, G. H. Gokhale, M. H. Kantavala, M. K. Sharangpani, N. K. Dikshit and others have documented their respect for Sri Aurobindo and his brilliance as a teacher.²⁹ Dinendra Kumar Roy too notes that the students truly revered him and found him an exceptional teacher.³⁰

The Maharaja, who respected and trusted Sri Aurobindo, gave him charge of tutoring the princes and the lone princess for a short period in 1901, as the regular tutor, an Englishman, had gone on vacation. The Maharaja’s daughter, Indira, who became the Maharani of Coochbehar and whose daughter was the famous Gayatri Devi, recalled:

I was so small when Aurobindo used to come to teach us! But he used to be so concentrated in his own studies and thoughts that he could not pay us much attention.³¹

Sri Aurobindo has remarked that Indira was more interesting than the other princes and there was something sturdy in her.³²

23. Reminiscences of G. H. Gokhale, papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. K. M. Munshi, *Swapnaadrashita*; papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

27. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, pp. 226-27.

28. *Sri Aurobindo in Baroda*, compiled and edited by Roshan and Apurva, 1st Ed., p. 83.

29. Sourced from papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

30. See Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st Ed., 2006, pp. 25-26 (Dinendra Kumar Roy, *Aurobindo Prasangma* – Translated from Bengali by Maurice Shukla).

31. See Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 20.

32. See A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 700.

Nirodbaran noted that Sri Aurobindo was loved and respected by his students and others in Baroda; he wasn't a social man at all and had few friends.³³ Nolini Kanta Gupta explains why Sri Aurobindo restricted his social interactions:

... he came to Baroda, entered the State service — as Secretary to the Maharaja and professor of the College. That life was also externally a very normal and ordinary life — an obscure life, so to say, but he preferred obscurity for the sake of his inner development and growth.³⁴

About Sri Aurobindo's life in society, A. B. Purani writes:

Sri Aurobindo was never a social man in the current sense of the term and definitely he was not a man of the crowd. This was due to his grave temperament, not to any feeling of superiority or to repulsion for men. At Baroda there was an Officers' Club which was patronised by the Maharajah and though Sri Aurobindo enrolled himself as a member he hardly went to the Club even on special occasions. He rather liked a small congenial circle of friends and spent most of his evenings with them whenever he was free and not occupied with his studies or other works. After Baroda when he went to Calcutta there was hardly any time in the storm and stress of revolutionary politics to permit him to lead a 'social life'. What little time he could spare from his incessant activities was spent in the house of Raja Subodh Mallick or at the Grey Street house. In the *Karmayogin* office he used to sit after the office hours till late chatting with a few persons or trying automatic writing.³⁵

Rajaram Patkar observed that Sri Aurobindo liked his periods of solitude. He writes:

Being a man of retiring disposition I invariably used to find him confined to his room, fully absorbed in reading. His concentration was so great that he felt himself the least perturbed by any outside disturbance.³⁶

The link between concentration and silence is explained by Sri Aurobindo to a disciple:

It is also a characteristic of this inner consciousness that even when it is active, there is felt behind the action or containing it a complete quietude or silence. The more one concentrates, the more this quietude and silence increases.³⁷

33. See Nirodbaran, 'Sri Aurobindo – Perfect Gentleman', *Mother India*, August 1970, p. 408.

34. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol. 5, 1st Ed., 1974, pp. 10-11.

35. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, pp. 8-9.

36. A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, 2001, p. 63.

37. CWSA, Vol. 30, p. 224.

Early in 1905, Sri Aurobindo and his friend K. G. Deshpande went on a pilgrimage to Chandod and Brahmananda’s ashram in Ganganath. After the trip, K. G. Deshpande’s young brother-in-law, Rajaram N. Patkar, noticed that Sri Aurobindo became immersed spiritually and thus a bit aloof. He “looked serene and calm” and Patkar often found him alone in his room in a contemplative mood.³⁸ Patkar also writes that during this phase of his life Sri Aurobindo

... used to spend most of his spare time in meditation and prayers. He had given up his extensive reading of yore. He used to get up early in the morning and after having his bath, performed his worship of the Mata (Goddess) which took nearly three hours in the morning. When he came out of the worship room, his expression was very serene and thoughtful. In the evening when he returned from office, he used to meet very few people, and the only persons with whom he had a free talk were his old friends Messrs Deshpande and Jadhav, with whom he was seen often closeted for an hour or two in the evening.³⁹

A year later, in March 1906, Sri Aurobindo took leave to visit Bengal and on the day of his departure from Baroda he informed Mrinalini Devi that he needed a secluded place in Calcutta for an hour and a half in the morning and evening each day to practise his sadhana.⁴⁰ Alluding to this time, right until his imprisonment in May 1908, he has written that he “was in the habit of sitting down for meditation for an hour in the morning and evening.”⁴¹

Sri Aurobindo’s reticence meant that every word of his carried some weight. His cousin Sukumar Mitra writes to his Auroda on 19th March 1904: “I hear from Abinash today that you sent a letter to me which Abinash has accidentally destroyed. Will you kindly let me know what you wrote in the letter. I think you wrote something urgent, because you never write unless it is urgent.”⁴²

Sri Aurobindo’s reserved nature was perhaps more an indication of a meditative state of consciousness as discerned in 1906 by the brave editor of the nationalist paper, *Sandhya*, Brahmabandhav Upadhyay, who said that Sri Aurobindo was “a man rich in knowledge, self-lost in meditation.”⁴³ Sri Aurobindo’s attendant, Abinash Bhattacharya, has remarked, “Usually he was absorbed in thought.”⁴⁴

On Sri Aurobindo’s return to Calcutta, Dinendra Kumar Roy introduced him to Suresh Chandra Samajpati (1870-1921), a well-known writer and editor of the Bengali journal *Sahitya*. Roy writes: “Samajpati was impressed by that very first

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

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

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

41. Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*, 2014, p. 38.

42. Papers at Sri Aurobindo Archives.

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

44. Abinash Bhattacharya, ‘Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, July 2012, p. 539.

meeting, by the few words spoken by Aurobindo who was taciturn by nature. He realised what stuff Aurobindo’s being was made of.” He adds, “During the first national movement when Aurobindo quit his Baroda job and came away to Calcutta, he became quite close to Samajpati.”⁴⁵

The Mother has said:

There is a great strength in the power to keep silent.⁴⁶

She has also said:

In silence one finds the greatest power.⁴⁷

At the Bengal National College, Balai Dev Sharma, a student who later became a Bengali writer, recalls the time when he first saw Sri Aurobindo:

We were admitted to the college on the very first day. Sri Aurobindo was the first Principal and the sage Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyay (founder of the Dawn Society) the Superintendent . . .

I saw a young man of serene appearance seated at the central hall. He wore a shirt wrapped by a chuddar . . . His eyes, detached from the world around, was as if concentrated in the free realm of his inner being. He was Sri Aurobindo who gave a talk addressing the professors and the students that day . . .⁴⁸

Satish Chandra Mukherji, the Superintendent of the college and later Sri Aurobindo’s successor as Principal, remarked: “he was hardly in the habit of speaking much.”⁴⁹ Sri Aurobindo’s friend and colleague at the Bengal National College, Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjee, has said that Sri Aurobindo’s intrinsic spirituality “made him always keep calm and reticent.”⁵⁰ Another colleague at the same college, Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay, noted: “We always knew him to be reticent and reserved in speech.”⁵¹ Sri Aurobindo was reticent for good reason; about his yoga, he noted:

45. Dinendra Kumar Roy, *With Aurobindo in Baroda*, 1st Ed., 2006, p. 39.

46. *CWM*, Vol. 14, 2nd Ed., p. 203.

47. Mona Sarkar, *A Spirit Indomitable*, 1st Ed., p. 22.

48. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, December 2013, p. 1025 (Balai Deb Sharma, ‘Sri Aurobindo Smriti’ – translated from Bengali).

49. See Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, January 2016, p. 38 (Deposition of P.W. No. 122; The Alipore Conspiracy Case documents).

50. See Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjee, ‘Some Reminiscences of Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, December 1963, p. 20.

51. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 335.

My yoga begun in 1904 had always been personal and apart; those around me knew I was a sadhak but they knew little more as I kept all that went on in me to myself. It was only after my release that for the first time I spoke at Uttarpara publicly about my spiritual experiences.⁵²

Pramathanath also observed that behind Sri Aurobindo’s quiet disposition there was an emanation of radiant serenity:

But those who associated with him in the National College saw his serene figure, glowing with a mellow lustre. . . . Sri Aurobindo sat, silent and immobile, like Shiva in a trance. Even now when I shut my eyes his gracious, tranquil, luminous face swims up in into my vision.⁵³

The Mother has said:

When somebody lives in a higher consciousness, the vibrations of this higher consciousness are manifested in whatever this person does, says or thinks. These higher vibrations are manifested by the very fact of the presence of this person upon earth.⁵⁴

Sri Aurobindo’s atmosphere of peace and goodness was palpable to the Swadeshi leader from Uttarpara, Amarendranath Chatterji (1880-1957), when he first met him. He writes:

My friend Upendranath (Bandopadhyay) left me near Aurobindo and went away. I sat wonder-struck gazing at his face. I forgot even to offer a Namaskar to him. The peaceful, self-realised, Vedantic figure opened up a new universe before me — my entire heart was filled with light and delight. I do not know what one feels when one obtains Darshan of the Divine, but at the Darshan of Aurobindo my mind and life were charged with the warmth of a new spirit. I wondered if I had ever met such a person before.⁵⁵

The Mother has spoken of the effectiveness and influence of a person’s atmosphere:

An atmosphere of spirituality is sometimes a far greater help than an exchange of words; the most beautiful thoughts cannot make us progress unless we have a persistent will to translate them within ourselves into higher feelings, more

52. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 98.

53. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, pp. 334-35.

54. CWM, Vol. 12, 2nd Ed., p. 238.

55. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo – Life and Times of the Mahayogi*, 1st Ed., 2020, p. 5.

exact sensations and nobler actions.

Thus, to improve our meetings, the essential condition is our own self-improvement.

If we unify ourselves and identify our consciousness with the consciousness of our Divine Self, our group will become unified. If we enlighten and illumine our intellectual faculties, our group will manifest the light. If we allow impersonal love to permeate our whole being, our group will radiate love. And finally, if we bring order into ourselves, our group will become organised of itself, without our needing to intervene arbitrarily in its formation.⁵⁶

In June 1906 Sri Aurobindo returned to Baroda to request 12 months leave without pay. After its sanction he returned to Calcutta in early July 1906. Abinash Bhattacharya's younger brother, Upendrachandra, writes of Sri Aurobindo's calm demeanour on his return to Bengal:

Whenever I came to Calcutta I visited the *Yugantar* office to meet my brother. In the beginning of July 1906, on my arrival there I heard that Sri Aurobindo was about to arrive and that my brother and Barin-da had gone to Howrah station to receive him. I had waited long for an auspicious Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. The opportunity had come at last! Gratefully I waited with bated breath. Soon a 2nd class horse-carriage carrying Sri Aurobindo, my brother and Barin-da arrived. From what I had heard about the unearthly genius and powers of Sri Aurobindo, I had visualised a picture of him — solemn like the other contemporary leaders, ready to shoot out oratorical fire. But the one alighting from the carriage was a lean young man, clad in trousers, turban and boots. His physique, though slim, suggested a personality that was unusually strong. His tender face combined gravity and a contented geniality. But what surprised me were his elongated luminous eyes. They exuded a certain radiance and one could not shift one's look from them. I kept surveying him with wonder. He spoke softly to the two in English but only a few words and then climbed the stairs. I followed them. He took off his boots and said something to Dada. Dada went out at once and I gave him company. Dada bought a pair of *dhotis* from the Chhatra Bhandar and a pair of shirts from Kamalalaya. He also met Sukumar Mitra and informed him of Sri Aurobindo's arrival. . . . Within that short time I saw Shyamsundar Chakravorty, Brahmabandhav Upadhyay and Sukumar Mitra arriving there.

I went back to my mess and came at 12 noon and saw a number of people gathered. Sri Aurobindo was resting inside a closed room lying on a mat.

Many more had come by 3 p.m. He smiled softly but never uttered more than a few words. Soon, his friend Charu Dutta reached there accompanied by

56. *CWM*, Vol. 2, 2nd Ed., p. 63.

Raja Subodh Mullick. Also came Shyamsundar Chakravorty, Krishnakumar Mitra, Haridas Haldar, Brahmabandhav Upadhyay and others. They sat talking. A little before evening Sri Aurobindo left with Charu Dutta and Subodh Mullick. I learnt that he would reside at Raja Subodh Mullick’s house.⁵⁷

When Sri Aurobindo went to Subodh Mullick’s house he discarded some of his belongings — his trousers, coat, turban, boots, socks etc. — suggesting that he was now free from the fetters of the Baroda Service, and fully immersed in the Swadeshi movement. Upendrachandra, with Barin’s permission, took these clothing items to his village where the youth placed their hand on these objects and took an oath to serve their Motherland.⁵⁸

The following month Sri Aurobindo joined *Bande Mataram*. Nirmal Dutt, a 14-year-old boy who joined this office towards the end of 1906, refers to this period and how the newspaper impacted the nation. At the same time he also writes about Sri Aurobindo’s meditative poise coupled with his quiet comportment:

It was the beginning of the Swadeshi movement. The whole country was in a turmoil. Bengal had just been divided into East and West. But Khudiram’s sacrifice was yet to come. The heads of the nation met once a year during the Congress session but were quite at loss how to acquire independence for the country.... Some great men of Bengal, at this juncture, founded a nationalist paper with extreme views, called *Bande Mataram*. The office was located in a two-storied house in Creek Row, which was, and still is, by the side of a narrow street. Very fortunately, the Chief Editorship of this paper was offered to Aurobindo Ghose shortly returned from England. He was a master of the English language and had just escaped from the tempting bondage of the I.C.S. — an act on his part, which I, of course, thought to be unwise. My family at this time having been rather poor, I had accepted a job in the paper, leaving aside my studies for a while.

The very first day, on going to my office, I met him. He had been allotted a small room on the first floor, entirely to himself. I never found anybody else in the room. He was not yet Sri Aurobindo, but simply Aurobindo Ghose, and I had no fear or worry about my work, which was simply to take his article from his hand and read it out to the Proof Readers in another room. I could do it easily, for his handwriting was one of the very best I had ever seen and his English perfect. Yet one day I thought I found a mistake in his writing, or rather to me it appeared to be a mistake. I showed it to others and they also were inclined to agree with me. They advised me to take it to him, which I did without hesitation. I asked him whether it was a mistake. He looked at it and

57. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo – Life and Times of the Mahayogi*, 1st Ed., 2020, pp. 237-38.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

said “No.” He spoke no other word either to explain it or to disparage a cheeky boy but remained immersed in deep thought, as he always was . . .

He was always meditating deeply about something. When he looked at one, he seemed not to view one, as if mentally he were soaring far, far away. I found him always in the same posture with a pen in his hand, deeply immersed in thought. That he had few words for others was not due to any inherent pride or superciliousness. It was probably in his nature. After the first day I was not at all surprised that he was the only person in the office who did not talk to me.

Bande Mataram grew increasingly popular, probably it gave vent to what was boiling in men’s hearts. It said things which others did not, could not or dared not articulate. It campaigned for the freedom of India, freedom from the hands of the British. To utter such things was rank sedition in those days, but somehow it touched the hearts of a people lulled into slavery for so long. One day, however, I found the room vacant as I entered the office and no one was sitting in his chair. I learnt that he had been arrested in a bomb case along with some others and was lodged in prison.⁵⁹

There were others in *Bande Mataram* who noticed Sri Aurobindo’s temperament. Sukumar Sen, a share-holder in the Company which floated *Bande Mataram*, notes that Sri Aurobindo “was rather reserved and of retiring disposition”.⁶⁰ Hemendra Prasad Ghose, a writer for *Bande Mataram*, observed that Sri Aurobindo by inclination was a recluse.⁶¹ Suresh Chandra Deb, who also joined the *Bande Mataram*, writes:

The ‘Chief’, the title by which he was known in the *Bande Mataram* Office, showed an instinct for journalism that was remarkable for one of his retiring and reclusive habits.⁶²

And Upendranath Banerjee, a sub-editor at *Bande Mataram*, writes that Sri Aurobindo “spoke little, he was a person of few words.”⁶³

Remarkably, Sri Aurobindo’s serene presence pervaded his hectic political life. On the eve of the Benaras Congress Conference in December 1905, Suresh Chandra Deb, a young teenaged political worker, was a witness to a meeting where the resolutions for the forthcoming Congress were discussed. At the gathering were eminent Nationalist leaders like Bipin Chandra Pal, C. R. Das and others. Suresh

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

60. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo: Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, January 2016, p. 37 (Deposition of P.W. No. 92; The Alipore Conspiracy Case documents).

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

62. Suresh Chandra Deb, ‘Sri Aurobindo as I Knew Him’, *Mother India*, November 2002, p. 948.

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

Chandra Deb recognised all the leaders except “a retiring figure sitting quietly on a chair, whose name I later came to know was Aurobindo Ghose.”⁶⁴ Soon after, Tilak and Lajpat Rai also joined the discussions at the meeting. Deb writes:

All the possibilities of the situation were discussed at this meeting. Sri Aurobindo remained a silent listener. It appeared that he was a watcher of the sky over Bengal and was satisfied with the signs on the weather-chart; he could wait.⁶⁵

Bearing in mind that Sri Aurobindo was considered a political genius —Tilak was highly impressed with his insightful articles in the *Indu Prakash* whilst other Congress leaders were stunned with its originality and revolutionary style — his silence during the meeting was noticeable. One could surmise that Sri Aurobindo’s presence was enough to be a guiding influence in the decisions taken. The Mother has said:

I believe rather in the influence of atmospheres. Each one has around him an atmosphere made of the vibrations that come from his character, his mood, his way of thinking, feeling, acting. These atmospheres act and react on each other by contagion; the vibrations are contagious; that is to say, we readily pick up the vibration of someone we meet, especially if that vibration is at all strong. So it is easy to understand that someone who carries in and around himself peace and goodwill, will in a way impose on others at least something of his peace and goodwill, whereas scorn, irritability and anger will arouse similar movements in others.⁶⁶

In 1906, Suresh Chandra Deb also had the privilege of accompanying Sri Aurobindo, Bipin Pal and Subodh Chandra Mullick on a political tour of great significance. He writes,

. . . the impressions of these 45 days of April-May 1906, as these related to Sri Aurobindo, were those of a silent distant figure lost in his own thoughts, speaking the fewest of words, observing the effect of the language in which Bipin Chandra Pal clothed the present degradation and the future ennobling of his people. For he was the orator of the party; neither Sri Aurobindo nor Subodh Chandra would open their lips at public meetings. They had their closed-door discussions with active politicians . . .

We, “volunteers”, sensed that something was afoot, some “new departure” from the lines of the then current politics. Hints were thrown at us, suggestions

64. See Suresh Chandra Deb, ‘Sri Aurobindo as I Knew Him’, *Mother India*, November 2002, p. 943.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 944.

66. *CWM*, Vol. 16, 2nd Ed., p. 32.

made that told us of days big with brave deeds and sacrifices in the service of the Mother, as Sri Aurobindo used to call the land of his birth. Thousands chose and trod the path indicated by the new prophets of a new life. The tour with its flaming words and silences created the history which reached its end on August 15, 1947.⁶⁷

Sri Aurobindo has referred to this tour when he writes about himself in third person:

. . . he took long leave without pay in which, besides carrying on personally the secret revolutionary work, he attended the Barisal Conference broken up by the police and toured East Bengal along with Bepin Pal and associated himself closely with the forward group in the Congress.⁶⁸

About the Barisal Conference Suresh Chandra Deb writes:

The next occasion on which I saw Sri Aurobindo was during the days when the Bengal Provincial Conference was scheduled to meet at Barisal in April, 1906, during the Easter holidays. I accompanied Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya to Barisal as a delegate to this Conference. Chittaranjan Das, Bipin Chandra Pal, Surendra Nath Halder and Sarat Chandra Sen were guests of the Lakutia House, a famous zamindar family of the district. I found Sri Aurobindo there, studying the situation. The Conference was dispersed by the bureaucracy at the point of the bayonet and the “regulation lathi”. This outrage inflamed even the leaders of the “Moderate” party, one of whom, Bhupendranath Basu, declared “This is the end, the beginning of the end of the British Rule in India”. The feeling all over India was electric; the Barisal episode laid the foundation of terrorism in Bengal. I recall that while all the others were excited, Sri Aurobindo was unperturbed; and interpreting the past in the light of later events I can say that he was satisfied with the evolution of thought and activity precipitated at Barisal.⁶⁹

Whilst describing another of Sri Aurobindo’s political tours in 1907, Barin writes that “this quiet unobtrusive man was very often lost in the crowd of his own admirers.”⁷⁰

Lizelle Reymond, in her official biography of Sister Nivedita, writes that Sri Aurobindo as a political leader was “In appearance a passive type, a quiet — even silent — figure, he was a man of iron will . . .”⁷¹

67. Suresh Chandra Deb, ‘Sri Aurobindo as I Knew Him’, *Mother India*, November 2002, p. 945.

68. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 54.

69. Suresh Chandra Deb, ‘Sri Aurobindo as I Knew Him’, *Mother India*, November 2002, p. 944.

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

71. Cited in Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., p. 194.

Sri Aurobindo’s composure was of such a high order that he has stated that “out of that calm and silence I conducted a pretty strenuous political activity . . .”⁷²

Jitendralal Bandhopadhyay, an eminent professor of English, who obtained first position in 1902 in his Master’s degree in English Literature from Presidency College, wrote in 1909 of Sri Aurobindo’s entry into politics in the *Modern Review*, a monthly journal considered to be objective and the leading journal of the progressive Indian intelligentsia and edited by the highly respected scholar Ramananda Chatterjee:

How was a young reticent stranger from distant Baroda to replace these giants of old? How was he to grasp in his young and unproven hands the reins which were slipping from the rougher, stronger hands of others? And yet these things have come to pass. The quiet and grave young man, “fresh from long years at Cambridge” (as Mr. Nevinson described him with a slight pardonable inaccuracy), with his many silences and few golden utterances, has established himself firmly in the hearts and minds of his countrymen; and today the magic of his name has spread its spell over the whole broad continent of India and his every word comes as a gospel of healing, a message of salvation to thousands of people living therein.⁷³

The distinguished writer and journalist Henry W. Nevinson, who worked at the influential newspaper *Manchester Guardian*, considered Sri Aurobindo to be in the forefront of the Swadeshi movement. He wrote: “Grave with intensity, careless of fate and opinion and one of the most silent men I have known”.⁷⁴ About the Surat Congress Conference, Nevinson notes:

In the afternoon the Extremists also held a convention, and also appointed a committee to watch events. In the large courtyard of a private house they met in silent crowds. Grave and silent — I think without saying a single word — Mr. Arabindo Ghose took the chair, and sat unmoved, with far-off eyes, as one gazes at futurity. In clear, short sentences, without eloquence or passion, Mr. Tilak spoke till the stars shone out and someone kindled a lantern at his side.⁷⁵

At the convention of the Extremists during the Surat Congress session, Suresh Chandra Deb, a political worker, observed:

Sri Aurobindo presided over this Conference. He was no orator. But the Conference hung on his words limpid and flowing, instinct with a new meaning,

72. CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 347.

73. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo – Life and Times of the Mahayogi*, 1st Ed., 2020, p. 554.

74. Manoj Das, *Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Ed., p. 15 (Henry W. Nevinson: *The New Spirit in India*).

75. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 427.

though the words had been familiar enough. Even during this Conference Sri Aurobindo appeared as a soul that dwelt apart from the tumult and shouting of politics . . .

During those tumultuous days at Surat, he had been his own self, unaffected by them, in-drawn generally to a world of which we know little.⁷⁶

Sri Aurobindo has mentioned that even during his outward life Yoga was going on in him and though some of his friends thought he was too withdrawn he preferred not to reply to questions and instead “took refuge in silence.”⁷⁷ Sri Aurobindo has also said:

If one keeps the inner silence even when among the friends, that is the real thing; the outer silence need only be relative until the time comes when speech itself is an expression out of the silence.⁷⁸

The Mother has said:

True quietude is a very great force, a very great strength. In fact one can say, looking at the problem from the other side, that all those who are really strong, powerful, are always very calm. It is only the weak who are agitated; as soon as one becomes truly strong, one is peaceful, calm, quiet, and one has the power of endurance to face the adverse waves which come rushing from outside in the hope of disturbing one. This true quietude is always a sign of force. Calmness belongs to the strong.⁷⁹

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

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

77. See *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 111.

78. *CWSA*, Vol. 31, p. 94.

79. *CWM*, Vol. 8, 2nd Ed., p. 329.

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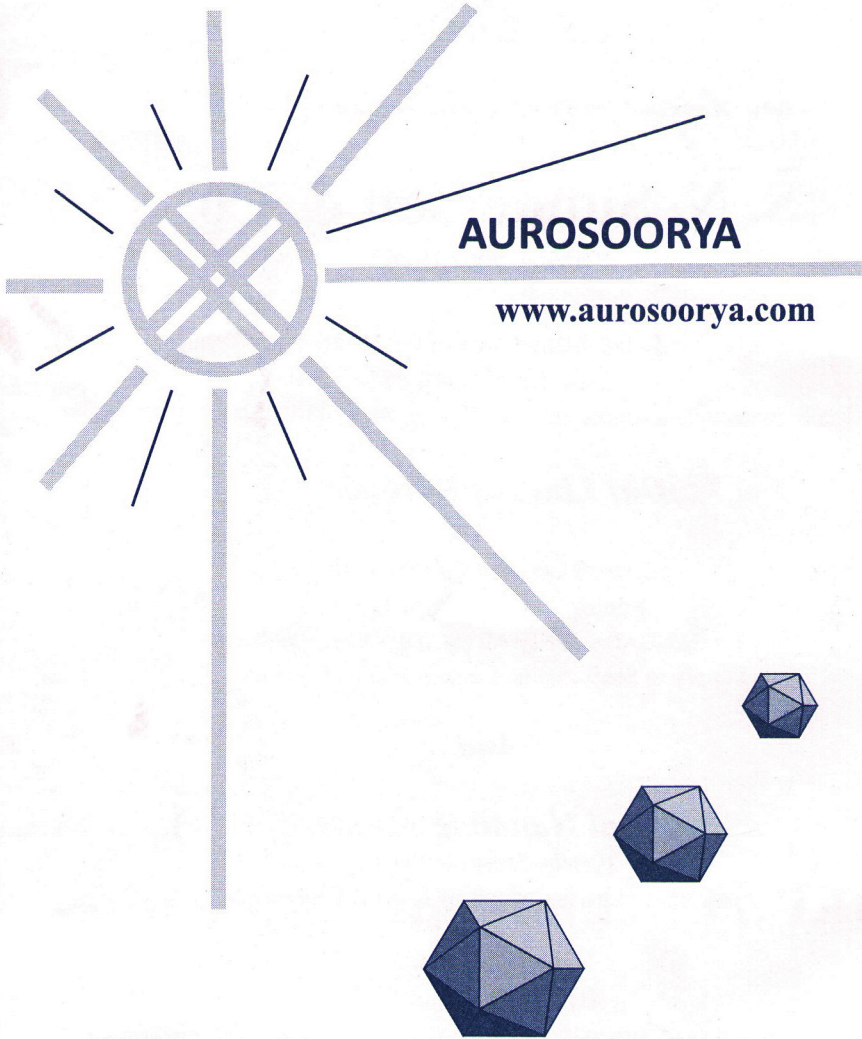
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