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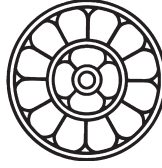
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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

JUNE 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. 6

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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‘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, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 256)



STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

The knowledge on which the doer of works in Yoga has to found all his action and development has for the keystone of its structure a more and more concrete perception of unity, the living sense of an all-pervading oneness; he moves in the increasing consciousness of all existence as an indivisible whole: all work too is part of this divine indivisible whole. His personal action and its results can no longer be or seem a separate movement mainly or entirely determined by the egoistic “free” will of an individual, himself separate in the mass. Our works are part of an indivisible cosmic action; they are put or, more accurately, put themselves into their place in the whole out of which they arise and their outcome is determined by forces that overpass us. That world action in its vast totality and in every petty detail is the indivisible movement of the One who manifests himself progressively in the cosmos. Man too becomes progressively conscious of the truth of himself and the truth of things in proportion as he awakens to this One within him and outside him and to the occult, miraculous and significant process of its forces in the motion of Nature. This action, this movement, is not confined even in ourselves and those around us to the little fragmentary portion of the cosmic activities of which we in our superficial consciousness are aware; it is supported by an immense underlying environing existence subliminal to our minds or subconscious, and it is attracted by an immense transcending existence which is superconscious to our nature. Our action arises, as we ourselves have emerged, out of a universality of which we are not aware; we give it a shape by our personal temperament, personal mind and will of thought or force of impulse or desire; but the true truth of things, the true law of action exceeds these personal and human formations. Every standpoint, every man-made rule of action which ignores the indivisible totality of the cosmic movement, whatever its utility in external practice, is to the eye of spiritual Truth an imperfect view and a law of the Ignorance.

Even when we have arrived at some glimpse of this idea or succeeded in fixing it in our consciousness as a knowledge of the mind and a consequent attitude of the soul, it is difficult for us in our outward parts and active nature to square accounts between this universal standpoint and the claims of our personal opinion, our personal will, our personal emotion and desire. We are forced still to go on dealing with this indivisible movement as if it were a mass of impersonal material out of which we, the ego, the person, have to carve something according to our own will and mental fantasy by a personal struggle and effort. This is man’s normal attitude towards his environment, actually false because our ego and its will are creations and puppets of the cosmic forces and it is only when we withdraw from ego into the consciousness of the divine Knowledge-Will of the Eternal who acts in them that we can be by a sort of deputation from above their master. And yet is this personal position the

right attitude for man so long as he cherishes his individuality and has not yet fully developed it; for without this view-point and motive-force he cannot grow in his ego, cannot sufficiently develop and differentiate himself out of the subconscious or half-conscious universal mass-existence.

But the hold of this ego-consciousness upon our whole habit of existence is difficult to shake off when we have no longer need of the separative, the individualistic and aggressive stage of development, when we would proceed forward from this necessity of littleness in the child-soul to unity and universality, to the cosmic consciousness and beyond, to our transcendent spirit-stature. It is indispensable to recognise clearly, not only in our mode of thought but in our way of feeling, sensing, doing, that this movement, this universal action is not a helpless impersonal wave of being which lends itself to the will of any ego according to that ego's strength and insistence. It is the movement of a cosmic Being who is the Knower of his field, the steps of a Divinity who is the Master of his own progressive force of action. As the movement is one and indivisible, so he who is present in the movement is one, sole and indivisible. Not only all result is determined by him, but all initiation, action and process are dependent on the motion of his cosmic force and only belong secondarily and in their form to the creature.

But what then must be the spiritual position of the personal worker? What is his true relation in dynamic Nature to this one cosmic Being and this one total movement? He is a centre only — a centre of differentiation of the one personal consciousness, a centre of determination of the one total movement; his personality reflects in a wave of persistent individuality the one universal Person, the Transcendent, the Eternal. In the Ignorance it is always a broken and distorted reflection because the crest of the wave which is our conscious waking self throws back only an imperfect and falsified similitude of the divine Spirit. All our opinions, standards, formations, principles are only attempts to represent in this broken, reflecting and distorting mirror something of the universal and progressive total action and its many-sided movement towards some ultimate self-revelation of the Divine. Our mind represents it as best it can with a narrow approximation that becomes less and less inadequate in proportion as its thought grows in wideness and light and power; but it is always an approximation and not even a true partial figure. The Divine Will acts through the aeons to reveal progressively not only in the unity of the cosmos, not only in the collectivity of living and thinking creatures, but in the soul of each individual something of its divine Mystery and the hidden truth of the Infinite. Therefore there is in the cosmos, in the collectivity, in the individual, a rooted instinct or belief in its own perfectibility, a constant drive towards an ever increasing and more adequate and more harmonious self-development nearer to the secret truth of things. This effort is represented to the constructing mind of man by standards of knowledge, feeling, character, aesthesis and action, — rules, ideals, norms and laws that he essays to turn into universal dharmas.

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* *

If we are to be free in the spirit, if we are to be subject only to the supreme Truth, we must discard the idea that our mental or moral laws are binding on the Infinite or that there can be anything sacrosanct, absolute or eternal even in the highest of our existing standards of conduct. To form higher and higher temporary standards as long as they are needed is to serve the Divine in his world march; to erect rigidly an absolute standard is to attempt the erection of a barrier against the eternal waters in their onflow. Once the nature-bound soul realises this truth, it is delivered from the duality of good and evil. For good is all that helps the individual and the world towards their divine fullness, and evil is all that retards or breaks up that increasing perfection. But since the perfection is progressive, evolutive in Time, good and evil are also shifting quantities and change from time to time their meaning and value. This thing which is evil now and in its present shape must be abandoned was once helpful and necessary to the general and individual progress. That other thing which we now regard as evil may well become in another form and arrangement an element in some future perfection. And on the spiritual level we transcend even this distinction; for we discover the purpose and divine utility of all these things that we call good and evil. Then have we to reject the falsehood in them and all that is distorted, ignorant and obscure in that which is called good no less than in that which is called evil. For we have then to accept only the true and the divine, but to make no other distinction in the eternal processes.

To those who can act only on a rigid standard, to those who can feel only the human and not the divine values, this truth may seem to be a dangerous concession which is likely to destroy the very foundation of morality, confuse all conduct and establish only chaos. Certainly, if the choice must be between an eternal and unchanging ethics and no ethics at all, it would have that result for man in his ignorance. But even on the human level, if we have light enough and flexibility enough to recognise that a standard of conduct may be temporary and yet necessary for its time and to observe it faithfully until it can be replaced by a better, then we suffer no such loss, but lose only the fanaticism of an imperfect and intolerant virtue. In its place we gain openness and a power of continual moral progression, charity, the capacity to enter into an understanding sympathy with all this world of struggling and stumbling creatures and by that charity a better right and a greater strength to help it upon its way. In the end where the human closes and the divine commences, where the mental disappears into the supramental consciousness and the finite precipitates itself into the infinite, all evil disappears into a transcendent divine Good which becomes universal on every plane of consciousness that it touches.

This, then, stands fixed for us that all standards by which we may seek to govern our conduct are only our temporary, imperfect and evolutive attempts to represent to ourselves our stumbling mental progress in the universal self-realisation towards which Nature moves. But the divine manifestation cannot be bound by our little rules and fragile sanctities; for the consciousness behind it is too vast for these

things. Once we have grasped this fact, disconcerting enough to the absolutism of our reason, we shall better be able to put in their right place in regard to each other the successive standards that govern the different stages in the growth of the individual and the collective march of mankind. At the most general of them we may cast a passing glance. For we have to see how they stand in relation to that other standardless spiritual and supramental mode of working for which Yoga seeks and to which it moves by the surrender of the individual to the divine Will and, more effectively, through his ascent by this surrender to the greater consciousness in which a certain identity with the dynamic Eternal becomes possible.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 188-92)



FOUR MAIN STANDARDS OF HUMAN CONDUCT

There are four main standards of human conduct that make an ascending scale. The first is personal need, preference and desire; the second is the law and good of the collectivity; the third is an ideal ethic; the last is the highest divine law of the nature.

Man starts on the long career of his evolution with only the first two of these four to enlighten and lead him; for they constitute the law of his animal and vital existence and it is as the vital and physical animal man that he begins his progress. The true business of man upon earth is to express in the type of humanity a growing image of the Divine; whether knowingly or unknowingly, it is to this end that Nature is working in him under the thick veil of her inner and outer processes. But the material or animal man is ignorant of the inner aim of life; he knows only its needs and its desires and he has necessarily no other guide to what is required of him than his own perception of need and his own stirrings and pointings of desire. To satisfy his physical and vital demands and necessities before all things else and, in the next rank, whatever emotional or mental cravings or imaginations or dynamic notions rise in him must be the first natural rule of his conduct. The sole balancing or overpowering law that can modify or contradict this pressing natural claim is the demand put on him by the ideas, needs and desires of his family, community or tribe, the herd, the pack of which he is a member.

If man could live to himself, — and this he could only do if the development of the individual were the sole object of the Divine in the world, — this second law would not at all need to come into operation. But all existence proceeds by the mutual action and reaction of the whole and the parts, the need for each other of the constituents and the thing constituted, the interdependence of the group and the individuals of the group. In the language of Indian philosophy the Divine manifests himself always in the double form of the separative and the collective being, *vyas̥ti*, *samḁṣ̥ti*. Man, pressing after the growth of his separate individuality and its fullness and freedom, is unable to satisfy even his own personal needs and desires except in conjunction with other men; he is a whole in himself and yet incomplete without others. This obligation englobes his personal law of conduct in a group-law which arises from the formation of a lasting group-entity with a collective mind and life of its own to which his own embodied mind and life are subordinated as a transitory unit. And yet is there something in him immortal and free, not bound to this group-body which outlasts his own embodied existence but cannot outlast or claim to chain by its law his eternal spirit.

In itself this seemingly larger and overriding law is no more than an extension of the vital and animal principle that governs the individual elementary man; it is the law of the pack or herd. The individual identifies partially his life with the life

of a certain number of other individuals with whom he is associated by birth, choice or circumstance. And since the existence of the group is necessary for his own existence and satisfaction, in time, if not from the first, its preservation, the fulfilment of its needs and the satisfaction of its collective notions, desires, habits of living, without which it would not hold together, must come to take a primary place. The satisfaction of personal idea and feeling, need and desire, propensity and habit has to be constantly subordinated, by the necessity of the situation and not from any moral or altruistic motive, to the satisfaction of the ideas and feelings, needs and desires, propensities and habits, not of this or that other individual or number of individuals, but of the society as a whole. This social need is the obscure matrix of morality and of man's ethical impulse.

It is not actually known that in any primitive times man lived to himself or with only his mate as do some of the animals. All record of him shows him to us as a social animal, not an isolated body and spirit. The law of the pack has always overridden his individual law of self-development; he seems always to have been born, to have lived, to have been formed as a unit in a mass. But logically and naturally from the psychological viewpoint the law of personal need and desire is primary, the social law comes in as a secondary and usurping power. Man has in him two distinct master impulses, the individualistic and the communal, a personal life and a social life, a personal motive of conduct and a social motive of conduct. The possibility of their opposition and the attempt to find their equation lie at the very roots of human civilisation and persist in other figures when he has passed beyond the vital animal into a highly individualised mental and spiritual progress.

The existence of a social law external to the individual is at different times a considerable advantage and a heavy disadvantage to the development of the divine in man. It is an advantage at first when man is crude and incapable of self-control and self-finding, because it erects a power other than that of his personal egoism through which that egoism may be induced or compelled to moderate its savage demands, to discipline its irrational and often violent movements and even to lose itself sometimes in a larger and less personal egoism. It is a disadvantage to the adult spirit ready to transcend the human formula because it is an external standard which seeks to impose itself on him from outside, and the condition of his perfection is that he shall grow from within and in an increasing freedom, not by the suppression but by the transcendence of his perfected individuality, not any longer by a law imposed on him that trains and disciplines his members but by the soul from within breaking through all previous forms to possess with its light and transmute his members.

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* *

In the conflict of the claims of society with the claims of the individual two ideal and absolute solutions confront one another. There is the demand of the group that the individual should subordinate himself more or less completely or even lose his independent existence in the community, — the smaller must be immolated or self-offered to the larger unit. He must accept the need of the society as his own need, the desire of the society as his own desire; he must live not for himself but for the tribe, clan, commune or nation of which he is a member. The ideal and absolute solution from the individual's standpoint would be a society that existed not for itself, for its all-overriding collective purpose, but for the good of the individual and his fulfilment, for the greater and more perfect life of all its members. Representing as far as possible his best self and helping him to realise it, it would respect the freedom of each of its members and maintain itself not by law and force but by the free and spontaneous consent of its constituent persons. An ideal society of either kind does not exist anywhere and would be most difficult to create, more difficult still to keep in precarious existence so long as individual man clings to his egoism as the primary motive of existence. A general but not complete domination of the society over the individual is the easier way and it is the system that Nature from the first instinctively adopts and keeps in equilibrium by rigorous law, compelling custom and a careful indoctrination of the still subservient and ill-developed intelligence of the human creature.

In primitive societies the individual life is submitted to rigid and immobile communal custom and rule; this is the ancient and would-be eternal law of the human pack that tries always to masquerade as the everlasting decree of the Imperishable, *eṣa dharmah sanātanaḥ*. And the ideal is not dead in the human mind; the most recent trend of human progress is to establish an enlarged and sumptuous edition of this ancient turn of collective living towards the enslavement of the human spirit. There is here a serious danger to the integral development of a greater truth upon earth and a greater life. For the desires and free seekings of the individual, however egoistic, however false or perverted they may be in their immediate form, contain in their obscure shell the seed of a development necessary to the whole; his searchings and stumblings have behind them a force that has to be kept and transmuted into the image of the divine ideal. That force needs to be enlightened and trained but must not be suppressed or harnessed exclusively to society's heavy cart-wheels. Individualism is as necessary to the final perfection as the power behind the group-spirit; the stifling of the individual may well be the stifling of the god in man. And in the present balance of humanity there is seldom any real danger of exaggerated individualism breaking up the social integer. There is continually a danger that the exaggerated pressure of the social mass by its heavy unenlightened mechanical weight may suppress or unduly discourage the free development of the individual spirit. For man in the individual can be more easily enlightened, conscious, open to clear influences; man in the mass is still obscure, half-conscious, ruled by universal

forces that escape its mastery and its knowledge.

Against this danger of suppression and immobilisation Nature in the individual reacts. It may react by an isolated resistance ranging from the instinctive and brutal revolt of the criminal to the complete negation of the solitary and ascetic. It may react by the assertion of an individualistic trend in the social idea, may impose it on the mass consciousness and establish a compromise between the individual and the social demand. But a compromise is not a solution; it only salves over the difficulty and in the end increases the complexity of the problem and multiplies its issues. A new principle has to be called in other and higher than the two conflicting instincts and powerful at once to override and to reconcile them. Above the natural individual law which sets up as our one standard of conduct the satisfaction of our individual needs, preferences and desires and the natural communal law which sets up as a superior standard the satisfaction of the needs, preferences and desires of the community as a whole, there had to arise the notion of an ideal moral law which is not the satisfaction of need and desire, but controls and even coerces or annuls them in the interests of an ideal order that is not animal, not vital and physical, but mental, a creation of the mind's seeking for light and knowledge and right rule and right movement and true order. The moment this notion becomes powerful in man, he begins to escape from the engrossing vital and material into the mental life; he climbs from the first to the second degree of the threefold ascent of Nature. His needs and desires themselves are touched with a more elevated light of purpose and the mental need, the aesthetic, intellectual and emotional desire begin to predominate over the demand of the physical and vital nature.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 192-97)



THE STRENGTH OF STILLNESS

There are two great forces in the universe, silence and speech. Silence prepares, speech creates. Silence acts, speech gives the impulse to action. Silence compels, speech persuades. The immense and inscrutable processes of the world all perfect themselves within, in a deep and august silence, covered by a noisy and misleading surface of sound — the stir of innumerable waves above, the fathomless resistless mass of the ocean's waters below. Men see the waves, they hear the rumour and the thousand voices and by these they judge the course of the future and the heart of God's intention; but in nine cases out of ten they misjudge. Therefore it is said that in History it is always the unexpected that happens. But it would not be the unexpected if men could turn their eyes from superficialities and look into substance, if they accustomed themselves to put aside appearances and penetrate beyond them to the secret and disguised reality, if they ceased listening to the noise of life and listened rather to its silence.

The greatest exertions are made with the breath held in; the faster the breathing, the more the dissipation of energy. He who in action can cease from breathing, — naturally, spontaneously, — is the master of Prana, the energy that acts and creates throughout the universe. It is a common experience of the Yogin that when thought ceases, breathing ceases, — the entire kumbhak effected by the Hathayogin with infinite trouble and gigantic effort, establishes itself easily and happily, — but when thought begins again, the breath resumes its activity. But when the thought flows without the resumption of the inbreathing and outbreathing, then the Prana is truly conquered. This is a law of Nature. When we strive to act, the forces of Nature do their will with us; when we grow still, we become their master. But there are two kinds of stillness — the helpless stillness of inertia, which heralds dissolution, and the stillness of assured sovereignty which commands the harmony of life. It is the sovereign stillness which is the calm of the Yogin. The more complete the calm, the mightier the yogic power, the greater the force in action.

In this calm, right knowledge comes. The thoughts of men are a tangle of truth and falsehood, *satyam* and *anṛtam*. True perception is marred and clouded by false perception, true judgment lamed by false judgment, true imagination distorted by false imagination, true memory deceived by false memory. The activity of the mind must cease, the chitta be purified, a silence fall upon the restlessness of Prakriti, then in that calm, in that voiceless stillness illumination comes upon the mind, error begins to fall away and, so long as desire does not stir again, clarity establishes itself in the higher stratum of the consciousness compelling peace and joy in the lower. Right knowledge becomes the infallible source of right action. *Yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*.

The knowledge of the Yogin is not the knowledge of the average desire-driven

mind. Neither is it the knowledge of the scientific or of the worldly-wise reason which anchors itself on surface facts and leans upon experience and probability. The Yogin knows God's way of working and is aware that the improbable often happens, that facts mislead. He rises above reason to that direct and illuminated knowledge which we call *vijñānam*. The desire-driven mind is emmeshed in the intricate tangle of good and evil, of the pleasant and the unpleasant, of happiness and misfortune. It strives to have the good always, the pleasant always, the happiness always. It is elated by fortunate happenings, disturbed and unnerved by their opposite. But the illuminated eye of the seer perceives that all leads to good; for God is all and God is *sarvamaṅgalam*. He knows that the apparent evil is often the shortest way to the good, the unpleasant indispensable to prepare the pleasant, misfortune the condition of obtaining a more perfect happiness. His intellect is delivered from enslavement to the dualities.

Therefore the action of the Yogin will not be as the action of the ordinary man. He will often seem to acquiesce in evil, to avoid the chance of relieving misfortune, to refuse his assent to the efforts of the noble-hearted who withstand violence and wickedness; he will seem to be acting *piśācavat*. Or men will think him *jaḍa*, inert, a stone, a block, because he is passive, where activity appears to be called for; silent, where men expect voicefulness; unmoved, where there is reason for deep and passionate feeling. When he acts, men will call him *unmatta*, a madman, eccentric or idiot; for his actions will often seem to have no definite result or purpose, to be wild, unregulated, regardless of sense and probability or inspired by a purpose and a vision which is not for this world. And it is true that he follows a light which other men do not possess or would even call darkness; that what is a dream to them, is to him a reality; that their night is his day. And this is the root of the difference that, while they reason, he knows.

To be capable of silence, stillness, illuminated passivity is to be fit for immortality — *amṛtatvāya kalpate*. It is to be *dhīra*, the ideal of our ancient civilisation, which does not mean to be tamasic, inert and a block. The inaction of the tamasic man is a stumbling-block to the energies around him, the inaction of the Yogin creates, preserves and destroys; his action is dynamic with the direct, stupendous driving-power of great natural forces. It is a stillness within often covered by a ripple of talk and activity without, — the ocean with its lively surface of waves. But even as men do not see the reality of God's workings from the superficial noise of the world and its passing events, for they are hidden beneath that cover, so also shall they fail to understand the action of the Yogin, for he is different within from what he is outside. The strength of noise and activity is, doubtless, great, — did not the walls of Jericho fall by the force of noise? But infinite is the strength of the stillness and the silence, in which great forces prepare for action.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 57-59)

THE PRINCIPLE OF EVIL

The problem of evil is one that has taxed human thought and evolved various and conflicting solutions. To the rationalist who does not believe in anything not material, the problem does not exist. Everything is in nature as the result of evolution. Nature is blind and unintelligent and has therefore no conception of good or evil; the conception belongs to the human mind and is the result of the social sense and the ideas of pleasure and pain developed in human beings by a perfectly intelligible natural process. It is to men who believe in Intelligence as governing and developing the world that the problem exists. Why did evil come into existence and what is its purpose?

The unwillingness of the devout soul to admit that evil can have its existence in God, has led to variations of the Manichean theory which sees a double control in the world, God as the Principle of good and Satan as the Principle of evil. Those who regard the belief in the existence of an intelligent evil power as superstition, find the origin of evil in man who abuses his freedom and by his revolt and self-will gives birth to sin. This solution solves nothing, for it does not explain why there should have been a possibility of evil at all. Unless we limit our conception of God as the source and creator of all, that from which all proceeds, we must admit that evil as part of the economy of the world must have proceeded from Him no less than good. Even if we violently posit another creative force in the world limiting His universality, we shall have to assume that He, having the power to prevent evil, permits it; for He is omnipotent, and none can do anything except by the permission of His all-wise and overruling Providence. And if we limit the omnipotence of God, we reduce Him to a mere Demiurgus, a great Artificer of things struggling amongst forces over which He has not entire control. Such a conception is unphilosophical and contrary to the universal spiritual experience of mankind. The problem remains why, if He is God, All-Love, *sarvamaṅgalam*, He creates evil or, if He does not create it, permits it.

To our mind there is no escaping from the belief that, if God exists, He is All. All proceeds from Him; from what other source can it proceed? All exists in Him; in what other being or continent can it exist? Therefore evil must proceed from Him, evil must exist in Him. Since He is All-Wise, for all knowledge is His, it must exist for some wise and perfect purpose. Since He is All-Love, it must exist for good and not for anything which contradicts the good. Only, His is an infinite wisdom, ours a finite, His perfect, ours undeveloped. His is an infinite and all-wise love, ours a finite and unwise love, a love imperfectly informed by knowledge, full of *māyā*, attachment to passing happiness and pleasure. God's love looks beyond, ours fixes its eyes on the moment.

Experience must always be the basis of true knowledge, but it must be experience

illuminated by true perception, not experience dominated by surface impressions. The experience of the mind which has compassed calm and is able to preserve its tranquillity under the most strenuous assaults of pain, misfortune and evil, is alone worth having. The mind which is not *dhīra*, which feels grief and thinks under the influence of affection and passion, even if it be noble affection and passion, cannot arrive at the *samyag jñānam*, the complete and perfect truth. Emotion is for the heart, it should not besiege the intellect; for the proper business of the intellect is to observe and understand, not to be obscured by the slightest prejudice, the least trace of feeling. One who is *dhīra* will look narrowly at every incident and, if he cannot see at once, wait for enlightenment as to its ultimate purpose and issue; so waiting, so calmly considering, the meaning of life dawns on the mind, an infinite purpose reveals itself in things small and great, in occurrences good and bad: omniscient Providence reveals itself in the fall of the sparrow and the death of the ant as well as in the earthquake that destroys great cities and the floods that make thousands destitute and homeless. Rudra and Shiva reveal themselves as one. The Yogin sees God in all things, not only in all beings but in all events. He is the flood, He is the earthquake, He is Death that leads to a higher life, He is Pain that prepares us for a higher bliss. This is a thing that cannot be argued; it has to be seen. *Paripaśyanti dhīrāḥ*. And sight is only possible to the calm heart and the unperturbed understanding.

The materialist is not wrong when he holds good and evil to be merely operations of Nature which she uses impartially and without making a distinction, and that the distinction is an evolution in the human mind. Evil is good disintegrating to prepare for a higher good. That which is now tyranny, was once necessary to consolidate human society. What was once an ideal state of society, would now be barbarous and evil. Morality progresses, religion widens with the growing manifestation of that which is divine in the human race. As with the individual, so with the race and the world, evil tends to good, it comes into existence in order that men may reject the lesser good and rise to the higher.

The problem of pain remains. Was it necessary that the process should be accompanied with pain to the individual? At one time the capacity for pain, physical and mental, was infinitely less than it is now, so little that it might be pronounced to be nil. It is a remarkable fact that disease, pain and grief have grown keener with the growing fineness of the human organisation. Obviously this can only be a temporary development necessary to prepare a higher race which shall rise above pain to a higher capacity for pleasure and happiness. The lower organisation resisted the *samskāra* of pain and grief by the coarseness of its composition, it rejected pain in the sense of not knowing it. The higher organisation of the future will not be below it, but rise above it. It was the knowledge of good and evil that brought grief and sin into the world; when that knowledge is surmounted, man will rise above grief and sin. Before he ate the forbidden fruit, he had the innocence of the animal; when he shall cease to eat it, he will have the innocence of the God. Is it not so that

in nature pain is a possibility which has to be exhausted and man has been selected as the instrument to bring it into existence, in a limited space, for a limited time, and work it out of the cosmos? In the light of this idea the Christian doctrine of the Son of Man on the cross acquires a new significance and man himself becomes the Christ of the universe.

Another question occurs. Is pain real or a shadow? The Vedantist believes that the soul is a part of God or one with God Himself, and cannot feel pain or grief, but only *ānanda*, bliss. The *jīva* or soul takes the *rasa*, the delight of the dualities, and it changes to bliss in his nature; but this is veiled by the ignorance and separates the *jīva* in his *svarūpa* from the mind and the heart. Pain is a negative *vikāra* or corruption of true experience in the mind, pleasure a positive *vikāra*. The truth is *ānanda*. But this is a knowledge for which mankind is not ready. Only the Yogin realises it and becomes *sama*, like-minded to pain and pleasure, good or evil, happiness or misfortune. He takes the *rasa* of both and they give him strength and bliss; for the veil between his mind and his soul is removed and the apparent man in him has become one with the *svarūpa* or real man. If mankind as a whole came too early by that knowledge, the evolution of the perfect good would be delayed. The utter sweetness of *dayā* and *prema*, pity and love, might never be extracted from the *līlā*.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 60-63)



THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE USEFUL

There is a tendency in modern times to depreciate the value of the beautiful and overstress the value of the useful, a tendency curbed in Europe by the imperious insistence of an agelong tradition of culture and generous training of the aesthetic perceptions; but in India, where we have been cut off by a mercenary and soulless education from all our ancient roots of culture and tradition, it is corrected only by the stress of imagination, emotion and spiritual delicacy, submerged but not yet destroyed, in the temperament of the people. The value attached by the ancients to music, art and poetry has become almost unintelligible to an age bent on depriving life of its meaning by turning earth into a sort of glorified anthep or beehive and confusing the lowest, though most primary in necessity, of the means of human progress with the aim of this great evolutionary process. The first and lowest necessity of the race is that of self-preservation in the body by a sufficient supply and equable distribution of food, shelter and raiment. This is a problem which the oldest communistic human societies solved to perfection, and without communism it cannot be solved except by a convenient but inequitable arrangement which makes of the majority slaves provided with these primary wants and necessities and ministering under compulsion to a few who rise higher and satisfy larger wants. These are the wants of the vital instincts, called in our philosophy the *prāṇa koṣa*, which go beyond and dominate the mere animal wants, simple, coarse and indiscriminating, shared by us with the lower creation. It is these vital wants, the hunger for wealth, luxury, beautiful women, rich foods and drinks, which disturbed the first low but perfect economy of society and made the institution of private property, with its huge train of evils, inequality, injustice, violence, fraud, civil commotion and hatred, class selfishness, family selfishness and personal selfishness, an inevitable necessity of human progress. The Mother of All works through evil as well as good, and through temporary evil she brings about a better and lasting good. These disturbances were complicated by the heightening of the primitive animal emotions into more intense and complex forms. Love, hatred, vindictiveness, anger, attachment, jealousy and the host of similar passions, — the *citta* or mind-stuff suffused by the vital wants of the *prāṇa*, that which the Europeans call the heart — ceased to be communal in their application and, as personal wants, clamoured for separate satisfaction. It is for the satisfaction of the vital and emotional needs of humanity that modern nations and societies exist, that commerce grows and Science ministers to human luxury and convenience. But for these new wants, the establishment of private property, first in the clan or family, then in the individual, the institution of slavery and other necessary devices the modern world would never have come into existence; for the satisfaction of the primary economic wants and bodily necessities would never

have carried us beyond the small commune or tribe. But these primary wants and necessities have to be satisfied and satisfied universally, or society becomes diseased and states convulsed with sedition and revolution.

The old arrangement of a mass of slaves well fed and provided and a select class or classes enjoying in greater or less quantity the higher wants of humanity broke down in the mediaeval ages, because the heart began to develop too powerfully in humanity and under the influence of philosophy, ethics and religion began to spread its claim beyond the person, the class, the family, the clan to the nation and to humanity or to all creation. A temporary makeshift was invented to replace slavery, called free labour, by which men were paid and bribed to accept voluntarily the position of slaves, contenting themselves with the coarse satisfaction of the animal necessities and in return providing by their labour the higher wants of their masters now called superiors or higher classes. This also has become a solution which will no longer serve. The whole of humanity now demands not merely the satisfaction of the body, the *anna*, but the satisfaction also of the *prāṇa* and the *citta*, the vital and emotional desires. Wealth, luxury, enjoyment for oneself and those dear to us, participation in the satisfaction of national wealth, pride, lordship, rivalry, war, alliance, peace, once the privilege of the few, the higher classes, of prince, burgess and noble are now claimed by all humanity. Political, social and economic liberty and equality, two things difficult to harmonise, must now be conceded to all men and harmonised as well as the present development of humanity will allow. It is this claim that arose, red with fury and blinded with blood, in the French Revolution. This is Democracy, this Socialism, this Anarchism; and, however fiercely the privileged and propertied classes may rage, curse and denounce these forerunners of Demogorgon, they can only temporarily resist. Their interests may be hoary and venerable with the sanction of the ages, but the future is mightier than the past and evolution proceeds relentlessly in its course trampling to pieces all that it no longer needs. Those who fight against her fight against the will of God, against a decree written from of old, and are already defeated and slain in the *kāraṇa jagat*, the world of types and causes where Nature fixes everything before she works it out in the visible world. *Nihatāḥ pūrvameva*.

The mass of humanity has not risen beyond the bodily needs, the vital desires, the emotions and the current of thought-sensations created by these lower strata. This current of thought-sensations is called in Hindu philosophy the *manas* or mind, it is the highest to which all but a few of the animals can rise, and it is the highest function that the mass of mankind has thoroughly perfected. Beyond the *manas* is the *buddhi*, or thought proper, which, when perfected, is independent of the desires, the claims of the body and the interference of the emotions. But only a minority of men have developed this organ, much less perfected it. Only great thinkers in their hours of thought are able to use this organ independently of the lower strata, and even they are besieged by the latter in their ordinary life and their best thought suffers

continually from these lower intrusions. Only developed Yogins have a *viśuddha-buddhi*, a thought-organ cleared of the interference of the lower strata by *cittaśuddhi* or purification of the *citta*, the mind-stuff, from the *prāṇa* full of animal, vital and emotional disturbances. With most men the *buddhi* is full of *manas* and the *manas* of the lower strata. The majority of mankind do not think, they have only thought-sensations; a large minority think confusedly, mixing up desires, predilections, passions, prejudgments, old associations and prejudices with pure and disinterested thought. Only a few, the rare aristocrats of the earth, can really and truly think. That is now the true aristocracy, not the aristocracy of the body and birth, not the aristocracy of vital superiority, wealth, pride and luxury, not the aristocracy of higher emotions, courage, energy, successful political instinct and the habit of mastery and rule, — though these latter cannot be neglected, — but the aristocracy of knowledge, undisturbed insight and intellectual ability. It emerges, though it has not yet emerged, and in any future arrangement of human society this natural inequality will play an important part.

Above the *buddhi* are other faculties which are now broadly included in the term spirituality. This body of faculties is still rarer and more imperfectly developed even in the highest than the thought-organ. Most men mistake intellectuality, imaginative inspiration or emotional fervour for spirituality, but this is a much higher function, the highest of all, of which all the others are coverings and veils. Here we get to the fountain, the source to which we return, the goal of human evolution. But although spirituality has often entered into humanity in great waves, it has done so merely to create a temporary impetus and retire into the souls of a few, leaving only its coverings and shadows behind to compose and inform the thing which is usually called religion. Meanwhile the thought is the highest man has really attained and it is by the thought that the old society has been broken down. And the thought is composed of two separate sides, judgment or reason and imagination, both of which are necessary to perfect ideation. It is by science, philosophy and criticism on the one side, by art, poetry and idealism on the other that the old state of humanity has been undermined and is now collapsing, and the foundations have been laid for the new. Of these science, philosophy and criticism have established their use to the mass of humanity by ministering to the luxury, comfort and convenience which all men desire and arming them with justification in the confused struggle of passions, interests, cravings and aspirations which are now working with solvent and corrosive effect throughout the world. The value of the other side, more subtle and profound, has been clouded to the mass of men by the less visible and sensational character of its workings.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Early Cultural Writings*, CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 433-37)

TO JOSEPH BAPTISTA

Pondicherry
Jan. 5, 1920

Dear Baptista,

Your offer is a tempting one, but I regret that I cannot answer it in the affirmative. It is due to you that I should state explicitly my reasons. In the first place I am not prepared at present to return to British India. This is quite apart from any political obstacle. I understand that up to last September the Government of Bengal (and probably the Government of Madras also) were opposed to my return to British India and that practically this opposition meant that if I went back I should be interned or imprisoned under one or other of the beneficent Acts which are apparently still to subsist as helps in ushering in the new era of trust and cooperation. I do not suppose other Governments would be any more delighted by my appearance in their respective provinces. Perhaps the King's Proclamation may make a difference, but that is not certain since, as I read it, it does not mean an amnesty, but an act of gracious concession and benevolence limited by the discretion of the Viceroy. Now I have too much work on my hands to waste my time in the leisured ease of an involuntary Government guest. But even if I were assured of an entirely free action and movement, I should yet not go just now. I came to Pondicherry in order to have freedom and tranquillity for a fixed object having nothing to do with present politics — in which I have taken no direct part since my coming here, though what I could do for the country in my own way I have constantly done, — and until it is accomplished, it is not possible for me to resume any kind of public activity. But if I were in British India, I should be obliged to plunge at once into action of different kinds. Pondicherry is my place of retreat, my cave of tapasya, — not of the ascetic kind, but of a brand of my own invention. I must finish that, I must be internally armed and equipped for my work before I leave it.

Next in the matter of the work itself. I do not at all look down on politics or political action or consider I have got above them. I have always laid a dominant stress and I now lay an entire stress on the spiritual life, but my idea of spirituality has nothing to do with ascetic withdrawal or contempt or disgust of secular things. There is to me nothing secular, all human activity is for me a thing to be included in a complete spiritual life, and the importance of politics at the present time is very great. But my line and intention of political activity would differ considerably from anything now current in the field. I entered into political action and continued it from 1903 to 1910 with one aim and one alone, to get into the mind of the people a settled will for freedom and the necessity of a struggle to achieve it in place of the futile ambling Congress methods till then in vogue. That is now done and the Amritsar

Congress is the seal upon it. The will is not as practical and compact nor by any means as organised and sustained in action as it should be, but there is the will and plenty of strong and able leaders to guide it. I consider that in spite of the inadequacy of the Reforms, the will to self-determination, if the country keeps its present temper, as I have no doubt it will, is bound to prevail before long. What preoccupies me now is the question what it is going to do with its self-determination, how will it use its freedom, on what lines is it going to determine its future?

You may ask why not come out and help, myself, so far as I can, in giving a lead? But my mind has a habit of running inconveniently ahead of the times, — some might say, out of time altogether into the world of the ideal. Your party, you say, is going to be a social democratic party. Now I believe in something which might be called social democracy, but not in any of the forms now current, and I am not altogether in love with the European kind, however great an improvement it may be on the past. I hold that India having a spirit of her own and a governing temperament proper to her own civilisation, should in politics as in everything else strike out her own original path and not stumble in the wake of Europe. But this is precisely what she will be obliged to do, if she has to start on the road in her present chaotic and unprepared condition of mind. No doubt people talk of India developing on her own lines, but nobody seems to have very clear or sufficient ideas as to what those lines are to be. In this matter I have formed ideals and certain definite ideas of my own, in which at present very few are likely to follow me, since they are governed by an uncompromising spiritual idealism of an unconventional kind and would be unintelligible to many and an offence and stumbling block to a great number. But I have not as yet any clear and full idea of the practical lines; I have no formed programme. In a word, I am feeling my way in my mind and am not ready for either propaganda or action. Even if I were, it would mean for some time ploughing my lonely furrow or at least freedom to take my own way. As the editor of your paper, I should be bound to voice the opinion of others and reserve my own, and while I have full sympathy with the general ideas of the advanced parties so far as concerns the action of the present moment and, if I were in the field, would do all I could to help them, I am almost incapable by nature of limiting myself in that way, at least to the extent that would be requisite.

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

Yours sincerely,
Aurobindo Ghose

(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest,
CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 254-57)

‘A MORE CONSCIOUS, A MORE CONSTANT RELATION WITH THEE . . .’

July 25, 1914

At the rising of the sun I sang the praise of this world in which it is possible not only to desire Thee but to know Thee and even to become Thee. And I was astonished that there should be some who so ardently aspire to leave this universe and enter another world of perfection.

Thou hast placed such contentment in my heart that it has become impossible for me not to feel satisfied in all circumstances, inner or outer. And yet something in my being always aspires for more beauty, for more light, for more knowledge, for more love — in a word, for a more conscious, a more constant relation with Thee. . . . But this too depends upon Thy will, and when it is Thy will, Thou shalt grant me the entire transfiguration.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 210)



ANGLE OF QUEST

One day, I don't remember on what occasion, I saw what had motivated the 'fore-fathers' who wrote the Vedas: it was the need for immortality; they were in quest of immortality. From there, I went on to Buddha and saw what had set the Buddha on his way: this kind of need for permanence, purely and simply; the vision of the impermanence of things had profoundly troubled him, and he felt the need for Permanence. His whole quest was to find the Permanent (why was he so anxious to have the Permanent? . . .). There are a few things like that in human nature, in the deep human need. And then I saw another such need: a need for the Certitude which is security. I don't know how to explain it. . . . Because I had the experience of it, I saw it was one of the human needs; and I understood it very intensely, for when I met Sri Aurobindo, this Certitude is what made me feel I had found the Truth I needed. And I didn't realise how *deep* this need was until he left his body — just then, at the moment of the transition. Then the entire physical consciousness felt its certitude and security collapse. At that moment I saw (we spoke about it with Nolini a year later and he had had exactly the same impression), I saw this was similar to Buddha's experience when he realised that everything was impermanent and so all of life collapsed . . . in other words, Something Else *had* to be found. Well, at that moment. . . . I'd already had all my experiences, but with Sri Aurobindo, for the thirty years I lived with him (a little more than thirty years), I lived in an absolute, an absolute of security — a sense of total security, even physical, even the most material security. A sense of absolute security, because Sri Aurobindo was there. And it held me up, you know, like this (*gesture of being carried*): not for *one minute* in those thirty years did it leave me. That was why I could do my work with a Base, really, a Base of absoluteness — of eternity and absoluteness. I realised it when he left: *that* suddenly collapsed.

And then I understood that it is one of life's needs (there are several); and it's what spurs the human being to get out of his present state and find another one. These needs are (what's the word?) . . . the seeds, the germs of evolution. They compel us to progress. The whole time Sri Aurobindo was here, as I said, individual progress was automatic: all the progress Sri Aurobindo made, I made. But I was in a state of eternity, of absoluteness, with a feeling of such security, in every circumstance. Nothing, nothing unfortunate could happen, for he was there. So when he left, all at once — a fall into a pit. And that's what projected me wholly . . . (*Mother gestures forward*).

That is, I understood why he left. The whole terrestrial evolution had come to a halt. One progressed — one can always progress, that's nothing — but the entire *terrestrial* evolution was at a standstill. If there were permanence in life, nothing

would budge. And these needs are the seeds of evolution. So that's what I saw: in the past, in the future, universally. It was very interesting.

And with no effort, no tension, no . . . as if they were the most natural things in the world. Things like this happen all the time.

As soon as I saw that I understood. "Well", I told myself, "if I were a philosopher I could write a thick book about this!" It made me laugh. Because it's not just *one* thing: there are heaps of them, all the time, all the time. Things like this are happening all the time.

The Lord is enjoying himself!

* * *

Once I told you about an experience I had, I told you that every time a divine manifestation occurs (what is called an Avatar), there's always a particular 'angle of quest', in the sense of an intense *need* urging men along the road of evolution towards the Goal, the Transformation, and each avatar saw from a particular angle, believing it to be *the* Goal. When I had that experience, I saw it was the need for Immortality that drove the Vedic Rishis. It came back to me yesterday, and I noted it down:

(Mother reads a handwritten note)

The Vedic Rishis thirsted for Immortality,
Buddha wanted Permanence . . .

Then I looked, wondering, "And what was Christ's path?" . . . Basically, he always said, "Love thy neighbour," in other words brotherhood (but that's a modern translation). For him, the idea was compassion, charity (the Christians say it's the "law of Love," but we're not yet there — that will come much later). So I wrote:

Jesus preached Compassion . . .

Then I thought: now, Sri Aurobindo, it's quite clear; for him, the goal was Perfection. Perfection not in the sense of a summit but of an all-inclusive totality in which everything is represented, has a place. And I saw that this Perfection would come — must come — in stages. He announced something the realisation of which will stretch over thousands of years. So it must come in stages. And I saw that what I find essential, indispensable (everything is there, everything finds a place, yet there is a kind of anguish — not a personal anguish but a terrestrial anguish), is Security. A need for Security — whatever you attempt, whatever you seek, even Love, even Perfection, it needs Security. Nothing can be achieved with the feeling that all opposing forces can come and sweep everything away. We must find the

point where nothing can be touched or destroyed or halted. Therefore, it's Security, the very essence of Security. So I wrote:

Sri Aurobindo promised Perfection
and to attain it, the first requisite,
what men need today,
is Security.

All the global trends that result in 'peace movements' of one kind or another, are nothing but this: they are expressions of the quest for Security. My own experience is a supersecurity, which can be really found only in union with the Supreme — nothing, nothing, nothing in the world can give you security, except this: union, identification with the Supreme. That's what I told you: as long as Sri Aurobindo was here in his body, I had a sense of perfect Security — extraordinary, extraordinary! Nothing, nothing could make a dent in it — nothing. So his departure was like . . . like a smashing of that experience. In truth, from the supreme point of view, that may have been the cause of his departure. . . . Though it seems to me a very small cause for a very big event. . . . But since in the experience that Security was taking root more and more, more and more firmly, and was spreading. . . . Probably the time had not come. I don't know. As I said, from a universal and *everlasting* (I can't say 'eternal'), *everlasting* point of view, it's a small cause for a big effect. . . . We could say it was probably *one* of the causes that made his departure necessary.

Consequently, according to the experience of these last few days, the quest for Security is but a first step towards Perfection. He came to announce (I put 'promise' deliberately), to *promise* Perfection, but between that promise and its realisation, there are many steps; and in my experience, this is the first step: the quest for Security. And it corresponds fairly well to the global state of mind.

(*silence*)

The nations of the world legitimise that destructive madness of the arms race by saying it's a way to prevent destruction through fear — that's futile. As an argument, it's futile, but that's the way they think. It's part of that same thirst or need for Security: nothing can be achieved except in peace, nothing can be arrived at except in peace, nothing can be realised except in peace — we need peace, individually, collectively, globally. So let's make horrifying weapons of destruction so that men will be so frightened that nothing will happen — how childish! But that's the current state of mind. It is still one of those . . . in English they say *device*, a ploy (it's not a 'ploy', it's a means — between 'ploy' and 'means') to urge the human race on towards its evolutionary goal. And for that, we must catch hold of the Divine: it's a means of catching hold of the Divine. For there is nothing — nothing, nothing exists

from the point of view of Security, except the Supreme. If we *are* the Supreme, that is to say, the supreme Consciousness, supreme Power, supreme Existence, then there is Security — outside of that, there is none. Because everything is in perpetual motion. What exists at ‘one moment in time’, as Sri Aurobindo says (time is an unbroken succession of ‘moments’), what exists at a given moment no longer exists the next, so there’s no security. It’s the same experience, seen from another angle, as that of Buddha, who said there was no ‘permanence’. And basically, the Rishis saw only from the angle of human existence, that’s why they were after Immortality. It all boils down to the same thing.

(Mother remains in contemplation)

* * *

(From the next conversation)

Last time, you said, “As that Security was taking root more and more, more and more firmly, and was spreading . . .” Do you mean that Sri Aurobindo’s very presence . . .

Yes. Yes.

Yet, the world was in quite a turmoil?

That’s just what I mean: the world wasn’t ready, and there was . . . (what shall I say?) the paradox of a centre of Security in total contradiction with the general world condition.

He himself said it: “The world is not ready.” So . . .

That’s what I meant, his physical presence was the sign of Security taking root, but the world wasn’t ready. So, as the effect of his presence kept increasing, it brought about an increasing contradiction — an increasing *opposition*.

THE MOTHER

(From the conversations with a disciple on November 27, 1962, March 27 and 30, 1963)

A CONVERSATION OF 18 MAY 1966

You have heard about those drugs?¹ Have you seen any pictures? . . . I have. People are thrust without the least defence into the lowest vital, and according to their nature they find it either frightful or marvellous. For example, the cloth covering a cushion or a chair suddenly takes on a wondrous beauty. This lasts for about two or three hours. Naturally, they are completely out of their senses the whole time. And the pity of it is that people call these “spiritual experiences”, and there is nobody to tell them that this has nothing to do with spiritual experience.

Some time ago I received a letter from someone who told me he had taken these drugs, and he said he had had terrible visions, that the walls of his room were alive with thousands of evil and desperate faces which persecuted him till nightfall. There you are!

And so this gave me yet another proof. . . . I saw pictures in *Life* — there were some photographs — it was as though you had entered a madhouse. For these are images registered in the subconscious — images of thoughts, images of sensations, images of feelings, registered in the subconscious — which become objective, which come up to the surface and become objective. Thus they give the exact picture of what is within.

For instance, if you have the feeling or thought that someone is wicked or ridiculous or does not like you, in short, ideas of this kind — generally all this comes up in dream, but here you are not asleep and you have the dream! — they come to play the game you have thought of; what you have thought of them comes back upon you in their form. So this is an indication: for those who see happy, amiable, beautiful images, this means that within, everything is going on quite well (vitality), but for those who see terrifying or evil things, or things of that sort, it means that the vital is not pretty.

Yes, but isn't there an objective vital, where these visions have no relation with our own subconscious?

Yes, there is, but it hasn't the same character.

Not the same character?

One cannot know it unless one goes into the vital *fully* conscious — conscious of his own vital and conscious in the vital world as one is conscious in the physical world.

1. Mother is referring to the hallucinogenic drug called LSD, a derivative of lysergic acid.

One goes there consciously. It is not a dream, it hasn't the nature of a dream; it is like an activity, an experience, and it is quite different.

But there do exist also these vital worlds where one is persecuted, terrible worlds, worlds of torture and persecution, isn't it so?

Ninety per cent subjective.

Ninety per cent subjective. For more than a year, regularly, every night, at the same hour and in the same way, I used to enter the vital to do some special work there. This was not due to my own will: I was destined to do it. It was something I had to do. Now, for instance, this entry into the vital has been often described: there is a passage where beings are posted to keep you from entering (much has been said about these things in books of occultism). Well, I know by an experience, not casual, but repeated and understood, that this opposition or this malevolence is ninety per cent psychological, in the sense that if you do not anticipate it or fear it, or that there isn't something in you that fears the unknown nor has all these movements of apprehension and so forth, then it is like a shadow across a picture or the projection of an image: it has no concrete reality.

I have had, it is true, one or two real vital battles in going to the rescue of someone who had gone astray. And twice I have received blows, and the next morning when I woke up there was the mark (*Mother touches her right eye*). Well, in these two cases, I know it was something in me — not any fear, I have never been afraid there, but because I anticipated it. The idea that “this could very well happen” and the fact that I was expecting it, made the blow come. I knew it for certain. And if I had been in what may be called my “normal state”, of inner certitude, this could not have touched me, it could not. And I had had this apprehension because an occultist whom I knew, had lost an eye in a vital fight and she had told me about it; and so (*Mother laughs*), that gave me the idea that this was possible, because it had happened to her! But when I am in my own state — I cannot even say that, it is not “personal”, it is a way of being — when one is in the true state, when one is a conscious being and has the true way of being, this *cannot* touch one.

It is like the experience of meeting an enemy and wanting to strike him, and then the blows do not go home and all that you do has no effect — it is always subjective. I have had every proof, every proof.

But then, what is objective?

There are worlds, there are beings, there are powers, they have their own existence; but what I mean is that their relation with the human consciousness depends upon this human consciousness for the form they take.

It is as with the gods, my child, it is the same thing. All these beings of the

Overmind, all these gods, the relation with them, the form of these relations, depend upon the human consciousness. You may be . . . It has been said, “Men are cattle for the gods”, but if men *accept* to be cattle. There is in the essence of human nature a sovereignty over all things which is spontaneous and natural, when it is not falsified by a certain number of ideas and so-called knowledge.

One could say that man is the all-powerful master of all the states of being of his nature, but that he has forgotten to be this. His natural state is to be all-powerful — he has forgotten to be this.

In this state of forgetfulness, everything becomes concrete, yes, in the sense that one may have a mark left on the eye; it may translate itself like this, but it is because . . . because one has allowed it to happen.

It is the same thing with the gods. They can govern your life and torment you a lot (they can help you a lot also), but their power, *in relation to you*, to the human being, is the power you give them.

This is something I learnt gradually over several years. But now I am sure of it.

Naturally, in the evolutionary curve, it was necessary for man to forget his omnipotence, because it had simply puffed him up with pride and vanity, and so had become completely distorted; and he had to be made to feel that many things were stronger and more powerful than he. But essentially this is not true. It is a necessity of the curve of progress, that’s all.

Man is potentially a god. He believed himself an actual god. He needed to learn that he was nothing better than a poor little worm crawling on the earth, and so life scraped, scraped, scraped him in every way until he had . . . not understood, but at least felt a bit. But as soon as he takes the right stand, he knows that he is potentially a god. Only, he must become this, that is, overcome all that is not this.

This relationship with the gods is extremely interesting. . . . As long as man stands dazzled, lost in admiration of the power, beauty, accomplishments of these divine beings, he is their slave. But when these become for him different ways of being of the Supreme and nothing more, and himself yet another way of being of the Supreme, which he must become, then the relation changes and he is no longer their slave — he is *not* their slave.

Then the only objectivity is the Supreme.

There, you have said it, my child. It is this. It is exactly this.

If the word “objectivity” is taken to mean “real independent existence” — self-existence, independent and real — there is only the Supreme.

Nevertheless, there is something disquieting about this almost total subjectivity.

Ah, why?

One wonders what is real, what one really comes across? Isn't everything a tissue of imagination? This is rather disquieting.

But when one has the positive experience of the one and only existence of the Supreme and that all is only the Supreme playing to Himself, instead of being something disquieting or unpleasant or troubling, it is on the contrary a sort of total security.

The one reality is the Supreme. And all this is a game He plays to Himself. I find this much more comforting than the opposite view.

And after all, this is the only certitude that all this may become something marvellous; otherwise . . .

And this too depends altogether on the stand one takes. A complete identification with the game as a game, as something self-existent and independent, is probably necessary in the beginning, in order to play the game properly. But there's a moment when one reaches precisely this detachment and so complete a disgust for all the falsehood of existence, that it is no longer tolerable unless one sees it as the inner play of the Lord in Himself, for Himself.

And then one feels this absolute and perfect freedom which makes the most marvellous possibilities become real, and all the most sublime things imaginable are realisable.

(Mother enters into contemplation.)

You will see, there is a moment when one cannot bear oneself or life unless one takes the attitude that it is the Lord who is everything. You see, this Lord, how many things He possesses, He plays with all this — He plays, He plays at changing the positions. And so, when one sees this, this whole, one feels the illimitable marvel, and that all our most wonderful aspirations, all these are quite possible and will even be surpassed. Then one is comforted. Otherwise, existence . . . it is inconsolable. But like this, it becomes charming. I shall tell you about this one day.

When one feels the unreality of life, the unreality of life when compared with a reality which is certainly beyond, above, but at the same time *within* life, then, at that moment . . . “Ah, yes, at last this, it is true — at last this, it is true and deserves to be true. This is the realisation of all possible splendours, all possible marvels, yes, of all possible felicities, all possible beauties, yes, this; otherwise . . .”

I have come to that!

And then, I feel as though I still have one foot here, one foot there, which is not a very comfortable position, because . . . because one would wish that there be nothing but That.

The present way of being is a past which truly should no longer be there. While the other: “Ah! At last! At last! It is for this that there is a world.”

And everything else remains quite as concrete and real — it does not become

hazy! It is just as concrete, just as real, but . . . but it becomes divine, because . . . because it *is* the Divine. It is the Divine who plays.

THE MOTHER

(*Notes on the Way*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 11, pp. 35-40)



“A SONG OF QUIET” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

I don't suppose there is anything much in this.

A SONG OF QUIET

I would be very still,
That no enhaloed drop
Of Her confiding love might spill
From the heart's cup.

I would be very calm,
For the dark mind to fill
With her desire-uplifting psalm
Of shadowless will.

I would be very mute,
Lest one harsh breath destroy
The burgeoning¹ flame of Her absolute
Rhythmic joy.

(Amal's question:)

1. Is “flowering”, though hackneyed, better than “burgeoning” here?

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

1. “flowering flame” is hackneyed, burgeoning does not quite suit the simplicity of the rest. Why not “The flower and flame”?

There is a good deal in it — this too is very successful.

30 August 1933

(Amal's explanation:)

Most probably I did not choose the hendiadys you suggest because it did not convey the precise shade of meaning I wanted there. I want to imply a state of incipience — “Her absolute rhythmic joy” beginning to disclose itself to my being. In that condition it is likely to be “destroyed” — I mean its incipience can be quite quelled. “Flower” gives the impression of something full and definite, describing the fact of

the joy and not its growth in me. Besides, “burgeoning” seems to my mind to give greater distinction to the style, a depth and gravity and a suggestive sound going very well with “flame”, but saved from becoming quite out of tune with the simplicity of the rest by its delicate sense. However, I await your final opinion.

Sri Aurobindo’s reply:

Very well

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

A poetry whose task is to render truth of the Spirit by passing behind the appearances of the sense and the intellect to their spiritual reality, is in fact attempting a work for which no characteristic power of language has been discovered, — except the symbolic, but the old once established symbols will no longer entirely serve, and the method itself is not now sufficient for the need, — no traditional form of presentation native to the substance, no recognised method of treatment or approach, or none at once sufficiently wide and subtle, personal and universal for the modern mind. In the past indeed there have been hieratic and religious ways of approaching the truths of spirit which have produced some remarkable forms in art and literature. Sufi poetry, Vaishnava poetry are of this order, in more ancient times the symbolic and mystic way of the Vedic singers, while the unique revelatory utterance of the Upanishads stands by itself as a form of inspired thought which penetrates either direct or through strong unveiling images to the highest truths of self and soul and the largest seeing of the Eternal. One or two modern poets have attempted to use in a new way the almost unworked wealth of poetical suggestion in Catholic Christianity.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Future Poetry, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 128)

SOME RAMBLING THOUGHTS ON SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI

(Notes from an old typescript)

Savitri —

. . . the mystic volume of the book of Bliss
And the message of the superconscient Fire. (p. 232)¹

Sri Aurobindo's own words: how beautifully they describe his poem! "The mystic volume". Sri Aurobindo says: "*Savitri* is . . . spiritual poetry cast into a symbolic figure",² he calls it "A Legend and a Symbol", and indeed the whole poem unfolds a continuous symbol, from the opening "Symbol Dawn" to "The Return to Earth" and the proclamation of "a greater dawn" in its last line. Behind the "legend", the story, there is another meaning, another story, and it is this ever-unfolding significance, the multi-layered meaning which gives us perhaps a first true glimpse of the stupendous depths and the magnificence of the poet's mind; for it is the nature of the mystic mind to see simultaneously the many strata of significance within every thing. Blake, for one, speaks of this clearly:

Now I a fourfold vision see,
And a fourfold vision is given to me,
'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight . . .³

The poet's moments of intense ecstasy open to and see levels of meaning simultaneously and embody them in multi-tonal words. All through *Savitri* this happens.

There are actually only two characters in the "story", two "protagonists", "wrestlers with destiny".

1.) Aswapathy, the "Protagonist of the mysterious play" (p. 22), the avatar, "colonist from immortality" (p. 22), "eternity's delegate" (p. 23), "one in the front of the immemorial quest" (p. 22), who calls down "to earth's dumb need" (p. 22) the radiant power of the Divine Mother; and

2.) Savitri, the embodied Truth-Consciousness, the Divine Mother, the Supramental Dawn, "Ambadress twixt eternity and change" (p. 4), who descends and becomes one with the soul of the earth, Satyavan, her body the body of earth, her body, *the* earth. We may recall her being spoken about frequently from Book IX

1. The page references to *Savitri* have been standardised to the CWSA edition. – Ed.

2. *Letters on Poetry and Art*, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 282.

3. William Blake, Letter to Thomas Butt, 22 November 1802. *The Letters of William Blake* (1956).

onwards as “the woman”, the “mortal woman” (p. 576), and consider the indication given about her mother, the Queen, in Book VI, Canto 1: in rather unusual terms the latter is described as “the human mother of Savitri” (p. 417), an adjective which no ordinary man needs to add when speaking of his mother, a special differentiation and pointer to Savitri’s “humanity”, her earth-body.

And the two protagonists are in a sense also one: they have the same fundamental spiritual, yogic experiences, and they make the same descent into Night for the conquest of the Inconscient, the victory over Death.

Mother describes *Savitri* as the “the epic of the victory over death”⁴ and perhaps the key-lines of the poem are

I am stronger than death and greater than my fate (p. 432)

and

Her will must cancel her body’s destiny (p. 12).

What is the destiny of the body? . . . So far in the world’s history the “destiny” of all physical things here upon earth has been to finally deteriorate and “die”. Is Death then the law of deterioration, “the iron law” (p. 19) of all living things? What then is or would be the process of the conquest over this deterioration? . . . The Divine’s question comes to Aswapathy in the course of his yoga:

How shall thy mighty spirit brook repose
While Death is still unconquered on the earth
And Time a field of suffering and pain? (p. 335)

And along with the question comes also the clear realisation that

. . . vain are human power and human love
To break earth’s seal of ignorance and death (p. 315),

A Power that lives upon the heights must act (p. 315),

a greater power must come, a larger light. This supramental power, then, is invoked, called down, to change the very texture of earth, of man’s nature-being, finally the very cells of the body which, filled with this new light, will not decompose. Many of the *Notes on the Way* describe Mother’s experiences in the process of this work — a work both ecstatic and agonising alternately. The whole problem of the

4. Conversation with a disciple on 19.8.1966.

transformation of the earth, the transformation of Matter, is focussed in the body, one human body, *here*. We would recollect Sri Aurobindo's passing hint in 'A God's Labour' of a part of this process:

[He] plunged through the body's alleys blind
To the nether mysteries.⁵

Mother says Sri Aurobindo used to tell her that her body had been chosen and prepared for "the Work". It is interesting to recall here what is said in Book IV, Canto 1, about the fashioning of the child Savitri's body before her birth:

And instruments were sovereignly designed
To express divinity in terrestrial signs.
Outlined by the presence of this new descent
A lovelier body formed than earth had known. (p. 354)

And Mother herself confirms the purpose: "After all, that's what I am here for; . . . it [the work] *must* be done, it has to be done."⁶

But the path is new, it has to be found, it is like "a path-finder hewing his way through a virgin forest",⁷ as Sri Aurobindo puts it in the *Synthesis*, and both He and the Mother repeat that there is no path. "no one has ever followed this path" Mother says, "Sri Aurobindo was the first. . ."⁸ For the upward way "the whole yoga has been done — like a path blazed . . . the landmarks are there and one follows them . . . But here [for the passage down, below] nothing has been done . . . no one has ever done it."⁹ Sri Aurobindo in 'A God's Labour' affirms this:

A voice cried, "Go where none has gone,
Dig deeper, deeper yet . . ."¹⁰

And he had to trample "a road through mire and waste"¹¹ to find a new path. In *Savitri* he speaks with clear emphasis of the struggle in the Inconscient depths:

There was no course, no path, no end or goal (p. 584)

and

5. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 537.

6. Conversation with a disciple on 6.6.1961.

7. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 57.

8. Conversation with a disciple on 15.7.1961.

9. Conversation with a disciple on 25.4.1961.

10. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 536.

11. *Ibid.*

. . . in a blind stress of woods she moved . . .
Journeying as if upon an unseen road (p. 577)

“ . . . that unreal journey through blind Nought” (p. 592), “A walk to Nowhere in a land of Nought” (p. 599). And we wonder whether the question Savitri asks Satyavan when they first met is casual or indeed meaningful as all the rest in the poem: “Why is thy dwelling in the pathless wood”? (p. 403) . . .

* * *

To come back now to the central point. “Her body’s destiny . . .”, the earth’s destiny? Throughout the poem this identification is visible: her body, the earth; she “Bearing the burden of universal love” (p. 695), “she carried in herself the world” (p. 8). “The world unknowing, for the world she stood” (p. 13), “the whole destiny of mankind was hers” (p. 377). For “Sometimes one life is charged with earth’s destiny” (p. 460). Mother tells us how often in her experiences she felt “the weight of a whole world of darkness, unconsciousness, universal bad will, total incomprehension . . . a frightful weight” and she thought this was “what Christ must have experienced when . . . he felt the weight of the cross.”¹² When her “battle”, the issue, the struggle was poised on a “perilous verge” (p. 455), it is “a deciding hour in the world’s fate” (p. 461). In the First World War the Mother had the following experience: “Every part of my body . . . represented a battlefield”¹³ she says, and during the later years of her work, when the struggle in the Inconscient had grown more acute, she exclaimed, “my God, there’s always farther down to go . . .” “going down into the most incredible dark dregs of mud”. She speaks also of Sri Aurobindo’s experience “of all the tortures”, and again we would recall his own words:

I have been digging deep and long
Mid a horror of filth and mire . . .¹⁴

I am full of wounds and the fight merciless . . .¹⁵

And plunged through the body’s alleys blind . . .¹⁶

In this work the body has become the focus, the representative focus of the entire world. Discussing the symbolism of *Savitri*, Mother points out that Savitri has

12. Conversation with a disciple on 20.8.1960.

13. Conversation with a disciple on 10.8.1963.

14. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2 p. 534.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 614.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 537.

“chosen” Satyavan for her work, Satyavan, “the soul of the earth”, the “earth”, the body, Matter: “thou art he my spirit has sought” (p. 406), “The one for whom her heart had come so far” (p. 393). Savitri weds herself to Matter in order to divinise it, “save” it, for it is in the grip of Death and Ignorance. Only by the Divine’s descent into matter can it be fully redeemed. This is the culmination or the final part of the Avatar’s work on earth, *for* earth — “Establishing the empire of the soul/On Matter. . .” (p. 348)

As an individual being in the story Satyavan stands apart only in Book V. In Book XI, the Divine Voice explains clearly what he represents: “He is the soul of man climbing to God/In Nature’s surge out of earth’s ignorance” (p. 703) the soul “that climbs from nescient Night” (p. 702) back “to the greatness it has left behind/ And the beauty and joy from which it fell . . .” (p. 703); the soul “that gropes out of the beast/To reach humanity’s heights of lucent thought” (p. 703). “He is the godhead growing in human lives/And in the body of earth-being’s forms.” (p. 703) After Book VIII he vanishes almost completely from the story (being “dead”), becomes a passive entity, moving only, as it is put, “in her [Savitri’s] soul-scene” (p. 579), “as if in herself he moved” (p. 473). If we study the symbolism, the meaning that moves parallel to or behind the story, Satyavan clearly appears as Savitri’s “adhar” into whom She, the Divine Mother and her Consciousness, descends. The Two are really one being. Right through Book V this is very evident.

The Divine Mother is invoked to incarnate, first by Aswapathy

O Wisdom-Splendour, Mother of the universe . . .
 Incarnate the white passion of thy force,
 Mission to earth some living form of thee. . . . (p. 345)

and again, in a doubling of the significance, Savitri calls Satyavan, “the soul of the world” (p. 666). Satyavan asks her to descend from the chariot, her chariot of light “disdaining not our soil” (p. 408): “Descend. Let thy journey cease, come down to us.” (p. 402) and a second time,

Descend, O happiness, with thy moon-gold feet
 Enrich earth’s floors upon whose sleep we lie. (p. 408)

How significant are the words! He opens his being to her and specifically asks her, “Enter my life, thy chamber and thy shrine” (p. 408). She is invited to go and live under “The thatch that covered the life of Satyavan” (p. 411), the human body, her “future home”, “the hermit thatch . . . Preferred to heaven her soul’s temple and home.” (p. 412) It is the complete human being, soul and body, calling down the descent. Satyavan, son of Dyumatsena, son of fallen man, looks upon

. . . the meaning of myself,
A soul made ready on earth's soil for thee (p. 406)

and elsewhere we are told that

. . . A soul made ready through a thousand years
Is the living mould of a supreme Descent. (p. 398)

a fit adhar, a cup "fit for love's nectar wine" (p. 398) "the vessel that can hold God's birth" (p. 398), "his perfect shrine" (p. 14). When the Descent takes place, in the "moment of [his] heart's rebirth" (p. 406), the two become one being. They "joined together and grew one." (p. 411) Most significant becomes this small phrase "grew one", when we think of how once again Sri Aurobindo has used it, repeated it (surely not for want of words!), deliberately, perhaps or through the Truth-inspiration's spontaneity, when describing the merging of the "secret deity and its human part" in Book VII, Canto 5 (p. 527) where Savitri finds her soul:

Here in this chamber of flame and light they met;
They looked upon each other, knew themselves,
The secret deity and its human part,
The calm immortal and the struggling soul.
Then with a magic transformation's speed
They rushed into each other and grew one. (p. 527)

There are several passages in Book V, Canto 3 which build up towards this "merging" of the spirit and the body, the Divine and the human, the descent of the Divine into the adhar:

[He] let her penetrate his very soul
As is a world by the world's spirit filled,
As the mortal wakes into Eternity,
As the finite opens to the Infinite. (p. 410)

How the fact and the analogy also become one! So too in another passage:

In a wide moment of two souls that meet
She felt her being flow into him . . .
As when a soul is merging into God
To live in Him for ever and know His joy,
Her consciousness grew aware of him alone
And all her separate self was lost in his. (p. 410)

This identification is vividly brought out much later also in Book IX, Canto 1, when Savitri is in the “Black Void” in a deep trancelike state:

Her trance knew not of sun or earth or world; . . .
She knew not self . . . (pp. 578-79)

Yet here she

. . . Possessed in a supreme identity . . .
Satyavan . . . herself
But different still. (p. 579)

If we miss this identification, the whole meaning of the later half of the poem, Part Three, is lost. But we shall come to this again later. Let us go back and see this also from what Satyavan says in Book V, Canto 3 when he first meets Savitri. Satyavan realises that in his development he has arrived at only a certain point of perfection and needs to go further:

I looked upon the world and missed the Self,
And when I found the Self, I lost the world,
My other selves I lost and the body of God, . . .
The mystic aim for which the world was made, . . . (pp. 407-08)

He says he cannot yet “clasp the body of my God” (p. 405) and knows that “Matter still slept empty of its Lord” (p. 405). But now he also knows that with Savitri’s coming “the gold link” (p. 408) comes to him and

My Matter shall evade the Inconscient’s trance.
My body like my spirit shall be free.
It shall escape from Death and Ignorance. (p. 406)

The body is, the earth, represents the earth, and all the problems of life on earth, in the subconscious and inconscient — specially the problem of “death”. The battle is therefore in the body, for the body, all the rest is “redeemable”. The focus of the fight is the body (Mother says again and again in her *Notes*, “My body has become the battlefield”¹⁷), with all its “burdensome heirship” (p. 12), the atavism it carries, the load of the subconscious with all its negations: defeatism, pessimism, wrong habits, even the age-long habit of death — for, as Mother says, “death is nothing but a bad habit”.¹⁸ The body, the earth, is

17. For instance, conversation with a disciple on 15.7.1961.

18. *On Education*, CWM, Vol. 12, p. 84.

in the grip of Death, of the Inconscient. Savitri's battle is to rescue it from this. Death has "taken" the earth, the body, (Satyavan, "the soul of the world"), it is the law of physical things, "the iron law", "The iron rampart of accomplished things" (p. 654). She must break that law, the law of Karma too, the law of Fate:

Acquittance she must win from her past's bond,
 An old account of suffering exhaust,
 Strike out . . .
 . . . the heavy servitudes of the Karmic Gods,
 The slow revenge of unforgiving Law (p. 13).

She must "Disown the legacy of our buried selves" (p. 12), disrupt

The fixity of the cosmic sequences
 Fastened with hidden inevitable links (p. 12)

"dislodge by her soul's force/Her past", and "shape anew her fate" (p. 12). The struggle is to put light and consciousness in the mud and mire of the inconscient dark (we recall Sri Aurobindo's words in 'A God's Labour': "I have been digging deep and long/Mid a horror of filth and mire"), to awaken it to the Truth-Light, to inner harmony —

This mire must harbour the orchid and the rose. (p. 107)

When changed with this new Power the body need not, cannot "die". This "atheist body" (p. 649) has to be made to believe, has to be "convinced" (conquered), has to feel the Presence, become divine, immortal.

He must call light into its dark abysses,
 Else never can Truth conquer Matter's sleep
 And all earth look into the eyes of God. (p. 450)

What then is "death"? What is Savitri really fighting? — "annihilation's mystery" (p. 565) which puts on "a sensible form" (p. 565) because the "wrestler" (the protagonist) calls it to "wrestle with [her] soul" (p. 593) it takes on "a face, a form, a voice" (p. 593). It is the "huge denial" (p. 643), total negation, it is "embodied Nothingness" (p. 12), "nothingness made real" (p. 574) A reality then or illusion? Like all "negations", "positive in practical effect, negative in essence, . . ." ¹⁹

Mother experiences the unreality of Death, the illusoriness of Death: "I have

19. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 56.

reached the conclusion . . . that there is really no such thing as death” she says.²⁰ A border line is there, a “brink”, an “edge”, a “verge”, “extinction’s verge”, “a dangerous brink”, an edge between dissolution and glory, “between Timelessness and Time”: Matter falls to pieces or can become immortal. On which side of the “border” is the Consciousness? . . . when one is “alive” “and when one is “dead”? Mother, in her *Talks* has a beautiful observation:

. . . that Divine Presence within you, . . . stronger than everything. . . . It could revive all the dead if It wanted. . . . To that Presence . . . it doesn't make any difference.²¹

Then, to what does it make a difference? — To the consciousness that is not seated in or one with that Divine Presence? Only to this separative body-consciousness, perhaps, “death” has a meaning? Again and again the human being, though ready to undertake the fight, voices this consciousness, calls and complains, pleads and protests:

How long shall our spirits battle with the Night
And bear defeat and the brute yoke of Death . . . ?
Where in the greyness is thy coming's ray?
Where is the thunder of thy victory's wings? (p. 341)

This is Aswapathy working and yearning for the change, aspiring fervently to the Divine Mother And again Savitri: “Are there not still a million fights to wage?” (p. 687) And Mother in her *Talks* echoing so closely the same image: “There are still too many battles to wage on earth”.²² Also elsewhere Sri Aurobindo:

Each battle for ever is fought and refought²³

and

I am full of wounds and the fight merciless:
Is it not yet Thy hour of victory?²⁴

Indeed, how can the mighty spirit, the heroic spirit

20. Conversation with a disciple on 7.3.1967.

21. Conversation with a disciple on 29.7.1972.

22. Conversation with a disciple on 17.2.1962.

23. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 535.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 614.

. . . brook repose
While Death is still unconquered on the earth . . . ? (p. 335)

So, truly, *Savitri*, as the Mother says, “is the epic of the victory over death”,²⁵ a powerfully mantric poem whose very vibrations create and realise the Truth they speak of and embody.

* * *

The culmination of *Savitri* is the battle with and conquest of Death:

Her will must cancel her body's destiny. (p. 12)

The whole of Part Three, Books IX, X, XI and the Epilogue, is given to this. Already the “Issue” was announced in Book I, Canto 2:

Whether to bear with Ignorance and death
Or hew the ways of Immortality, . . .
Was her soul's issue . . . (p. 17)

To wrestle with the Shadow she had come . . . (p. 17)

For this she had accepted mortal breath . . . (p. 17)

Indeed, Book I, Canto 2 shows the very heart of the struggle:

On the bare peak where Self is alone with Nought . . .
She must plead her case upon extinction's verge,
In the world's death-cave uphold life's helpless claim . . . (p. 12)

And again,

A heart stood in the way of the driving wheels . . . (p. 20)

the Wheels of Karma, the Wheels of Law, the Wheels of Doom, which she must break, so to prove “stronger than death and greater than my fate”. (p. 432)

The victory too is announced at the end of this very canto:

25. Conversation with a disciple on 19.8.1966.

A flaming warrior from the eternal peaks
 Empowered to force the door denied and closed
 Smote from Death's visage its dumb absolute
 And burst the bounds of consciousness and Time. (p. 21)

The whole of Part Three is the story of “the day when Satyavan must die” (p. 10), of a single “day”, for it moves really in other dimensions of Time. But this story begins actually in Book VIII, “The Book of Death”, at the end of which we find “Annihilation’s mystery” (p. 565) taking “a sensible form” (p. 565) and standing above Savitri or confronting her, ready “to wrestle with [her] soul” (p. 593). The day Narad spoke of has arrived: “A day may come when she must stand unhelped” (p. 461); it is the “deciding hour in the world’s fate” (p. 461). She finds herself on “extinction’s verge” (p. 12), on “a dangerous brink of the world’s doom and hers” (p. 461). For she is fighting the battle of the world, for the world, for Satyavan “the soul of the earth”.

The struggle with Death passes through three stages:

1) in the depths of the Inconscient with the very constitution of Matter, the swallowing forces of dissolution — “the jaws of Night” (p. 581) — , the “law” of disintegration, of the decomposition of Matter, till at last the ‘light prevails’ and ‘grows’ (see p. 585), and Savitri awakes from her ‘trance’ to her “lost self” (p. 585). This Descent into the Inconscient in Book IX is the experience of “death”. Mother says she went through it, “was dead” and came back to life. This was in 1962.²⁶

“The iron law” Savitri must break, win “freedom from the heart-strings’ clutch”. Her “discarded sheaths dropped dully down”, (p. 578) but “She lived in spite of death, she conquered still” (p. 584) “Her mortal members fell back from her soul”, she was swallowed up in the “jaws” of death, in a “monstrous, cavernous, . . . throat”, she endured “The fierce spiritual agony of a dream” (p. 583).

In the smothering stress of this stupendous Nought
 Mind could not think, breath could not breathe, the soul
 Could not remember or feel itself . . . (p. 583)

On all the true values of existence “there fell/The immense refusal of the eternal No” (p. 583). The battle here is in the body, in the sheer physical, in Matter.

2) The second phase is the struggle in the “Dream Twilight” of the subconscious mind and life and physical, the terrible, persistent “negations” of the physical consciousness, the “material mind”, the unreality, the illusoriness of both the mental

26. Conversation with a disciple on 12.6.1962.

ideals (Book X, Canto 2) and the physical “realities” (Book X, Canto 4). In Book X the battle shifts to another “plane”, another part of the being: the material, physical consciousness and the subconscious mind. All the age-long habits, the so-called “laws” — “habits aping Law” (p. 20), — the pessimism, defeatism of the material mind and consciousness, the inertia, the *tamas*, the doubts and constant denials, the breaking of all ideals, questioning of the values of life, of the “Huge revolutions of life’s fruitless gyre” (p. 342), the cycles of Time, “the sad Enigma” (p. 342) and “riddle of man’s birth” (p. 17), all this Savitri must confront, resolve or destroy. The assailing negations from the materialistic environment, from man’s negative habitual thoughts and their pressures, all this she must face. Mother in her Talks speaks constantly of this inner battle.

3) The third stage is the temptation of Nirvanic Peace in “worlds of deathless bliss” (p. 671), the lure of personal salvation, the lure to give up the struggle, forget “the earth”. The Voice invites Savitri to “Renounce the tie that joins thee to earth-kind” (p. 685).

Leaving thy borrowed body on the sod,
Ascend, O soul, into thy blissful home. . . .
O Immortal, to felicity arise. (p. 685)

This is at the beginning of Book XI. Savitri refuses the offer:

I sacrifice not earth to happier worlds. (p. 692)

“Everything she must refuse”, says Mother, “to continue her terrestrial labour”.²⁷ Mother explains this very clearly in her Talks: “She has chosen the soul of the earth for her work, saying, ‘Here is where I shall do my work . . .’ . . . The thing is worked out Here, the place of work is Here”.²⁸ How strongly is this affirmed in the poem:

Earth is the heroic spirit’s battlefield . . .
There where the gods and demons battle in night . . .
To dare the impossible with these pangs of search,
In me the spirit of immortal love
Stretches its arms out to embrace mankind. (p. 686)

So she will not forsake the earth:

27. Conversation with a disciple on 22.1.1961.

28. Conversation with a disciple on 28.7.1961.

Too far thy heavens for me from suffering men. (p. 686)

Only on earth “Can the great choice be made . . .” (p. 694). “I choose to work Here”,²⁹ Savitri says.

“The Return to Earth” celebrates the transformation of the Earth. Savitri “descends”, bringing in her arms the transformed earth. Mother says in her Talks: “Satyavan is the soul of the Earth, the Earth’s *jīva*. When the Lord speaks to her of the ‘one whom you love and whom you have chosen’, it means the earth.”³⁰ Mother explains that when Death has yielded at last the Lord tells her to go down with the one she has chosen (“Descend to life with him thy heart desires . . .” [p. 702] and this Sri Aurobindo describes beautifully: “He says that she very carefully takes the soul of Satyavan into her arms, like a little child, to pass through all the realms and come back down to earth.”³¹

Amidst the headlong rapture of her fall
Held like a bird in a child’s satisfied hands, . . .
She kept within her strong embosoming soul
Like a flower hidden in the heart of spring
The soul of Satyavan drawn down by her
Inextricably in that mighty lapse. (p. 711)

This is “the fruit” of her great labour “for earth and men”: the transformed earth, “the Spirit’s manifest home”, where life at last becomes “the life divine”.

“T”

29. *Ibid.*

30. Conversation with a disciple on 22.1.1961.

31. *Ibid.*

For all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony. They arise from the perception of an unsolved discord and the instinct of an undiscovered agreement or unity.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Life Divine, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 4)

15TH AUGUST 2022 A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

Sri Aurobindo, the dazzling spiritual Sun of modern India, who envisioned, worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured, willed, prepared, achieved all to realise and bring down a higher consciousness for the future evolution of the earth, needs no introduction.

One of Sri Aurobindo's five dreams,¹ was,

. . . The spiritual gift of India to the world, has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.²

Long back Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Spirituality is indeed the master-key of the Indian mind; the sense of the infinite is native to it.³

And Sri Aurobindo explained beautifully what ancient India meant by spirituality — *adhyatmikta*.

. . . spirituality is not a high intellectuality, not idealism, not an ethical turn of mind or moral purity and austerity, not religiosity or an ardent and exalted emotional fervour, not even a compound of all these excellent things; a mental belief, creed or faith, an emotional aspiration, a regulation of conduct according to a religious or ethical formula are not spiritual achievement and experience. These things are of considerable value to mind and life; they are of value to the spiritual evolution itself as preparatory movements disciplining, purifying or giving a suitable form to the nature; but they still belong to the mental evolution, — the beginning of a spiritual realisation, experience, change is not yet there. Spirituality is in its essence an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a spirit, self, soul which is other than our mind, life and body, an inner aspiration to know, to feel, to be that, to enter into contact with the greater

1. Sri Aurobindo wrote this message at the request of All India Radio, Tiruchirapalli, for broadcast on the eve of the day when India achieved independence, 15 August 1947.

2. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 477.

3. CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 6.

Reality beyond and pervading the universe which inhabits also our own being, to be in communion with It and union with It, and a turning, a conversion, a transformation of our whole being as a result of the aspiration, the contact, the union, a growth or waking into a new becoming or new being, a new self, a new nature.⁴

If India is to share her spiritual wisdom and experiences with those who seek, isn't it time that India declares that spirituality is the core value and guiding principle of our nation?

Therefore, as a citizen of India, I humbly suggest that we seize this Golden Opportunity, the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo to include the word “spiritual — *adhyatmik*” in our constitution, along with adoption of the most profound, timeless and universal definition of Spirituality as given by Sri Aurobindo.

From this it becomes quite clear that spirituality includes everyone regardless of a person's beliefs, religion, gender, birth, age, colour, language or geography. It elevates the ideal of human civilisation, for making each one of us a better, a newer, a more universal, a greater human being. Spirituality as understood in this widest and deepest sense frees human beings from bondages of lower nature and gives complete freedom to explore the Infinite Reality, the Truth, in one's own way. Acceptance of this spiritual basis inculcates humility and openness with the realisation that one can approach the Supreme Infinite Reality in infinite ways, and thereby has the power of uniting diversity without conflict.⁵ It is through this all-encompassing spirituality, a master key, a universal solution, that India will be able to lead the world through sectarian morass and religious strife that is tearing the world apart and bring humanity to a higher stage of peaceful collaborative coexistence. That is the mandate given to India. It can be fulfilled only when India herself embraces and declares to the world her firm allegiance to spirituality — *adhyatmikta* as her most important core value in her very foundation.

Let us take this Golden Opportunity to unite the constitution of India with her most ancient light and wisdom, India's spirituality, by including it into our constitution.

For all of us who have been enriched by the nectar of spirituality flowing from mother India's Soul, this recognition is not just our duty but an expression of our gratitude at her feet.

Let us constitutionally declare India a “sovereign, . . . spiritual Republic of India”.

KALPESH J. GAJIWALA

4. CWSA, Vol. 22, pp. 889-890.

5. Secularism is a noble idea to counter and contain interreligious conflict, but stops short of addressing the root cause. Spirituality resolves the conflict at the deepest level, and transcends religion and secularism.

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

(Part 26)

(Continued from the issue of May 2022)

Section 3: A QUIET AND HUMBLE DISPOSITION

Sri Aurobindo’s quiet disposition did not hinder him from cultivating some warm friendships. In the political field Sri Aurobindo was close to several Nationalist leaders, but the most special relation was with the great Nationalist leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920). Tilak knew Sri Aurobindo intimately and enjoyed his friendship and confidence. They shared similar political views and had a deep respect for each other. Their alliance created a paradigm shift in Indian politics; from the earlier Congress Moderate policy of prayer and petition and they truly triggered India’s independence struggle movement through their Swadeshi movement. Sri Aurobindo has noted that the Swadeshi movement was “prepared from 1902-5 and started definitely by Sri Aurobindo, Tilak, Lajpatrai and others in 1905. . . .”¹ Their fourfold programme of “Swaraj, swadeshi, boycott, national education” changed India’s political destiny. In his short life sketch Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Sri Aurobindo persuaded its [*Nationalists*] chiefs in Bengal to come forward publicly as an All-India party with a definite and challenging programme, putting forward Tilak, the popular Maratha leader at its head, and to attack the then dominant Moderate (Reformist or Liberal) oligarchy of veteran politicians and capture from them the Congress and the country. This was the origin of the historic struggle between the Moderates and the Nationalists (called by their opponents Extremists) which in two years changed altogether the face of Indian politics.²

Sri Aurobindo mentioned that a certain Mr. Manthalé introduced him through someone to the secret society where he came in contact with Tilak and others.³ And when in 1940 an attendant remarked, “I thought that your political career began with the Bengal Partition,” Sri Aurobindo replied, “Oh no! It began long before in Baroda. It was our men who got hold of the movement in Bengal and gave it a

1. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 14.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

3. See A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 657.

revolutionary character. Otherwise it would have been a moderate movement. We were training people in our secret society started by Tilak.”⁴

Tilak first heard of Sri Aurobindo in 1893-94 when he read his path-breaking political series *New Lamps for Old* in the *Indu Prakash*. About these articles Rishabchand, in his biography of Sri Aurobindo, comments: “Sri Aurobindo’s slashing criticism of the mendicant policy of the Congress must have impressed Tilak, as it had done many others, by its originality and brilliance.”⁵

Both these Nationalist leaders faced the coercive wrath and incessant threats of the British government. Sri Aurobindo was charged for sedition twice besides being imprisoned for a year on the grave charge of conspiring to wage war against the King. He was acquitted of all the three charges. Tilak on the other hand was thrice charged for sedition for his writings in his Marathi newspaper *Kesari* for which he was imprisoned in 1897 for 18 months and later in 1909 for 6 years.

Tilak was sixteen years elder to Sri Aurobindo and joined the Congress as far back as 1890. Both were deeply disappointed that the English-educated Congress leaders of the late 19th century were Europeanised, undermined the greatness of Indian civilisation and culture, and had not the imagination or drive to envisage an independent India. Sri Aurobindo writes:

It is not surprising that our politicians of the nineteenth century could not realise these elementary truths of modern politics. They had no national experience behind them of politics under modern conditions; they had no teachers except English books and English liberal “sympathisers” and “friends of India”. Schooled by British patrons, trained to the fixed idea of English superiority and Indian inferiority their imaginations could not embrace the idea of national liberty and perhaps they did not even desire it at heart preferring the comfortable ease which at that time still seemed possible in a servitude under British protection to the struggles and sacrifices of a hard and difficult independence. Taught to take their political lessons solely from the example of England and ignoring or not valuing the historical experience of the rest of the world, they could not even conceive of a truly popular and democratic Government in India except as the slow result of the development of centuries, progress broadening down from precedent to precedent. They could not then understand that the experience of an independent nation is not valid to guide a subject nation, unless and until the subject nation throws off the yoke and itself becomes independent. They could not realise that the slow, painful and ultra-cautious development, necessary in mediaeval and semi-mediaeval conditions when no experience of a stable popular Government had been gained, need not

4. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, 2013, p. 955.

5. Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., 1981, p. 205.

be repeated in the days of the steamship, railway and telegraph, when stable democratic systems are part of the world's secured and permanent heritage.⁶

Sri Aurobindo continues:

Their whole political outlook was bounded by the lessons of English history, and in English history they found only two methods of politics, — the slow method of agitation and the swift decisive method of open struggle and revolt. Unaccustomed to independent political thinking they did not notice the significant fact that the method of agitation only became effective in England when the people had already gained a powerful voice in the Government. In order to secure that voice they had been compelled to resort no less than three times to the method of open struggle and revolt. Blind to the significance of this fact, our nineteenth century politicians clung to the method of agitation, obstinately hoping against all experience and reason that it would somehow serve their purpose. From any idea of open struggle with the bureaucracy they shrank with terror and a sense of paralysis. Dominated by the idea of the overwhelming might of Britain and the abject weakness of India, their want of courage and faith in the nation, their rooted distrust of the national character, disbelief in Indian patriotism and blindness to the possibility of true political strength and virtue in the people, precluded them from discovering the rough and narrow way to salvation.⁷

Both Sri Aurobindo and Tilak were far more daring and enterprising than the antiquated effete Moderate leaders. Sri Aurobindo has noted that “He has always stood for India's complete independence which he was the first to advocate publicly and without compromise as the only ideal worthy of a self-respecting nation,”⁸ while Tilak declared: “Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it.” Both these great leaders captured the imagination of the people and emboldened them.

Tilak was the first leader to awaken the Indian spirit and Sri Aurobindo later built on this, awakening Indians to their rich cultural and spiritual heritage and developing the political consciousness of the masses. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The Congress movement was for a long time purely occidental in its mind, character and methods, confined to the English-educated few, founded on the political rights and interests of the people read in the light of English history and European ideals, but with no roots either in the past of the country or in the inner spirit of the nation. Mr. Tilak was the first political leader to break

6. *CWSA*, Vol. 6, pp. 272-73.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 273-74.

8. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 472.

through the routine of its somewhat academical methods, to bridge the gulf between the present and the past and to restore continuity to the political life of the nation. He developed a language and a spirit and he used methods which Indianised the movement and brought into it the masses. To his work of this period we owe that really living, strong and spontaneously organised movement in Maharashtra, which has shown its energy and sincerity in more than one crisis and struggle. This divination of the mind and spirit of his people and its needs and this power to seize on the right way to call it forth prove strikingly the political genius of Mr. Tilak; they made him the one man predestined to lead them in this trying and difficult period when all has to be discovered and all has to be reconstructed. What was done then by Mr. Tilak in Maharashtra, has been initiated for all India by the Swadeshi movement. To bring in the mass of the people, to found the greatness of the future on the greatness of the past, to infuse Indian politics with Indian religious fervour and spirituality are the indispensable conditions for a great and powerful political awakening in India. Others, writers, thinkers, spiritual leaders, had seen this truth. Mr. Tilak was the first to bring it into the actual field of practical politics.⁹

In 1920 Sarala Devi Chowdhurani, educationist, political activist and niece of Rabindranath Tagore, came to visit Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry. Sri Aurobindo told her: “India must want freedom because of herself, because of her own Spirit.”¹⁰ Sri Aurobindo has also explained to his disciples how Tilak infused politics with religion:

The energy of action is the energy which does something, carries out something. The energy of creation is that which forms. There are all kinds of creation. Some people throw out their energy on the mental plane, but cannot form or build. Some people can put out the mental energy, but cannot bring it down into the vital and physical. Creation in life is different from creation in art. If you want to create in life you must have a firm hold of life and of the physical world. Some people create in the vital. Blavatsky’s creation was on the vital plane, supported by a mental element, an element of the vital mind. Besant could not create anything; where she tried to create, she failed. . . . [Chittaranjan] Das had not much power of creation; his only creation was the Swarajya Party. If he had lived longer he might have created something on the vital plane. He was too full of ideas to create anything. If you have ideas, too many of them, they are an obstacle; you must have the power to make them effective. Tilak is an instance of that practical force. Whatever idea he had in mind, he could make

9. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 645.

10. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 25.

effective in life; for instance Ganapati Puja and Shivaji Festival. He saw that he could gather the life of Maharashtra round these occasions and he succeeded in doing it.¹¹

Award winning historian Leonard A. Gordon writes that Sri Aurobindo and Tilak were the forerunners of change in the sluggish state of Indian politics:

During the last quarter of the 19th century, other voices began to be raised, usually in the background, often individual, critical of the British Raj and of the Moderate leaders. These voices, among them those of B. G. Tilak in Maharashtra and Aurobindo Ghose, called for a rapid end to British rule, and suggested directly or indirectly that unconstitutional means, non-violent and perhaps even violent, might have to be used to achieve this goal.¹²

Rishabchand writes: “Tilak had seen Sri Aurobindo at Baroda in 1901 . . . From about this time on, a sort of mutual regard began to grow in these two outstanding leaders. Tilak consulted Sri Aurobindo on almost every important political question.”¹³ The first Congress conference that Sri Aurobindo attended was at Ahmedabad in December 1902 where

. . . he contacted Tilak whom he regarded as the one possible leader for a revolutionary party and met him at the Ahmedabad Congress; there Tilak took him out of the pandal and talked to him for an hour in the grounds expressing his contempt for the Reformist movement and explaining his own line of action in Maharashtra.¹⁴

Later, at the Benaras Congress session of 1905, there was constant consultation between Sri Aurobindo and Tilak.¹⁵ Subsequently, at the Calcutta Congress of December 1906 Sri Aurobindo gave solid support to Tilak and took a prominent part in the private discussions. About this Congress session Sri Aurobindo said that “the Extremists, though still a minority, succeeded under the leadership of Tilak in imposing part of their political programme on the Congress.”¹⁶ Sri Aurobindo adds: “The first great public clash between the two parties took place in the sessions of the Congress at Calcutta where Sri Aurobindo was present but still working behind the scenes . . .”¹⁷ Sri Aurobindo told his attendants: “At the 1906 Congress [at Calcutta]

11. V. Chidanandam, ‘Sri Aurobindo at Evening Talk’, *Mother India*, January 1970, pp. 792-93.

12. Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers Against the Raj – a Biography of Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose*, p. 38.

13. Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., 1981, p. 205.

14. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 51.

15. See Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., 1981, p. 205.

16. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 54.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

Tilak had to do the whole fighting alone against Pherozeshah and the rest and Bepin Pal could be of no help to him! I was then working behind the scenes.”¹⁸

Sri Aurobindo was the brain behind the fourfold Swadeshi policy — expounded in the columns of the *Bande Mataram* — and this caught the imagination of the public. At the Calcutta Congress Sri Aurobindo noted that he “took a part in the counsels of the extremist party and in the formation of its fourfold programme — ‘Swaraj, swadeshi, boycott, national education’ — which the Moderate leaders after a severe tussle behind the scenes were obliged to incorporate in the resolutions of 1906.”¹⁹ Leonard A. Gordon in his *Brothers Against the Raj — a Biography of Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose*, considered the definitive biography of Subhas Bose, has given prominence to Sri Aurobindo in the formulation of the Swadeshi policy. He writes:

Tilak became a national leader of the minority Extremist group within the Congress and one of his supporters was young Aurobindo Ghose who became one of the ablest Swadeshi publicists, a secret plotter of revolutionary violence, and the political hero of Subhas Bose’s teenage years.²⁰

Tilak became one of the principal implementers of the Swadeshi policy. Sri Aurobindo said of Tilak: “The Swadeshi was not his creation, but as a politician and a leader he took advantage of it.”²¹

It was Sri Aurobindo, along with Tilak, who first pioneered the idea of Boycott. In an article ‘Practicable Boycott’, Sri Aurobindo writes:

When the boycott movement first began, it was the opinion of Mr. Tilak and other Nationalist leaders that the exclusion of foreign goods should be directed against British products first of all.²²

Subsequently, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Both Tilak and Sri Aurobindo were in favour of an effective boycott of British goods — but of British goods only; for there was little in the country to replace foreign articles: so they recommended the substitution for the British of foreign goods from Germany and Austria and America so that the fullest pressure might be brought upon England. They wanted the Boycott to be a political weapon and not merely an aid to Swadeshi; the total boycott of all foreign goods was

18. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book V, p. 346.

19. CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 78-79.

20. Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers Against the Raj — a Biography of Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose*, p. 38.

21. V. Chidanandam, ‘Sri Aurobindo at Evening Talk’, *Mother India*, January 1970, p. 793.

22. CWSA, Vol. 8, p. 396.

an impracticable idea and the very limited application of it recommended in Congress resolutions was too small to be politically effective. They were for national self-sufficiency in key industries, the production of necessities and of all manufactures of which India had the natural means, but complete self-sufficiency or autarchy did not seem practicable or even desirable since a free India would need to export goods as well as supply them for internal consumption and for that she must import as well and maintain an international exchange.²³

Securing India’s independence was *sine qua non* for both and in this respect Sri Aurobindo notes that he and Tilak were not strict adherents to non-violence:

Sri Aurobindo has never concealed his opinion that a nation is entitled to attain its freedom by violence, if it can do so or if there is no other way; whether it should do so or not, depends on what is the best policy, not on ethical considerations of the Gandhian kind. Sri Aurobindo’s position (and practice) in this matter was the same as Tilak’s and that of other Nationalist leaders who were by no means Pacifists or worshippers of Ahimsa.²⁴

Sri Aurobindo told Sarala Devi Chowdhurani: “I would very much like India to find her own Swaraj and then, like Ireland, to work out her salvation even with violence — preferably without violence.”²⁵

Lala Hardayal (1884-1939), the famous revolutionary leader of Punjab, wrote:

If we could get independence through *Charkha*, Aurobindo and Tilak would have taken to it.²⁶

In 1905, Sri Aurobindo wrote ‘Bhawani Mandir,’ a revolutionary piece that was an inspiration and driving force to innumerable revolutionaries. A Marathi translation was published in Tilak’s newspaper *Kesari*.²⁷ However, Tilak, unlike Sri Aurobindo, could not be truly described as a revolutionary leader. Sri Aurobindo has clarified this in an essay:

It is equally a mistake to think of Mr. Tilak as by nature a revolutionary leader; that is not his character or his political temperament. The Indian peoples generally, with the possible exception of emotional and idealistic Bengal, have

23. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, pp. 57-58.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

25. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 25.

26. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo – Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, March 2015, p. 219.

27. See Website: https://aurobindo.ru/workings/sa/37_06_07/part_01_e.htm/dated 4 May 2021.

nothing or very little of the revolutionary temper. . . . Mr. Tilak, though a strong-willed man and a fighter by nature, has this much of the ordinary Indian temperament [conservative in temperament and deliberate in action] that with a large mind open to progressive ideas he unites a conservative temperament strongly in touch with the sense of his people.²⁸

The noted British journalist and author, Henry Nevinson, also noted the difference of temperaments between Sri Aurobindo and Tilak when he said: “Mr. Aurobindo Ghosh . . . was now the leader of the Nationalists or young extremists who regarded even Mr. Tilak as the cautious moderation of the past.”²⁹ Even Tilak’s biographers, G. P. Pradhan and A. K Bhagwat, recognised that Sri Aurobindo’s politics was more intense than Tilak’s besides having a gift to inspire people. They write:

Tilak and Aurobindo were master minds and when they came together each had his impact on the other. Though Tilak did not approve of Aurobindo’s attitude of welcoming repression, he realised the greatness of the “prophet of nationalism” and for the time at least came under the spell of his magnetic personality. Tilak knew that Aurobindo symbolised a new force in Indian politics and he was aware that Aurobindo could and did rouse in hundreds of young men a desire to sacrifice everything for the sake of the motherland. . . . To him (Sri Aurobindo) India’s fight for freedom was really an effort for the realisation of her soul. Under Aurobindo’s leadership the New movement transcended the limitations of politics and embraced life. . . . The association of Tilak and Aurobindo was a happy coincidence. . . .³⁰

Let us examine Pradhan and Bhagwat’s statement about Sri Aurobindo’s “attitude of welcoming repression”. Sri Aurobindo had “presided over the Nationalist Conference at Surat in 1907 where in the forceful clash of two equal parties the Congress was broken to pieces.”³¹ In this historic Congress conference Sri Aurobindo describes how the two factions of Nationalists and Moderates split and the significant developments that took place later:

It was known that the Moderate leaders had prepared a new constitution for the Congress which would make it practically impossible for the extreme party to command a majority at any annual session for many years to come. The younger Nationalists, especially those from Maharashtra, were determined to prevent

28. CWSA, Vol. 1, pp. 648-49.

29. Narayan Prasad, ‘Sri Aurobindo and the Indian National Movement’, *Mother India*, August 1958, p. 14.

30. Cited in Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., 1981, pp. 205-06.

31. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 8.

this by any means and it was decided by them to break the Congress if they could not swamp it; this decision was unknown to Tilak and the older leaders but it was known to Sri Aurobindo. . . . Meanwhile Lajpatrai came to Tilak and informed him that the Government had decided, if the Congress split, to crush the Extremists by the most ruthless repression. Tilak thought, and the event proved that he was right, that the country was not yet ready to face successfully such a repression and he proposed to circumvent both the Moderate plan and the Government plan by the Nationalists joining the conference and signing the statement of adhesion to the new constitution demanded by the Moderates. Sri Aurobindo and some other leaders were opposed to this submission; they did not believe that the Moderates would admit any Nationalists to their conference (and this proved to be the case) and they wanted the country to be asked to face the repression. Thus the Congress ceased for a time to exist; but the Moderate conference was not a success and was attended only by small and always dwindling numbers. Sri Aurobindo had hoped that the country would be strong enough to face the repression, at least in Bengal and Maharashtra where the enthusiasm had become intense and almost universal; but he thought also that even if there was a temporary collapse the repression would create a deep change in the hearts and minds of the people and the whole nation would swing over to nationalism and the ideal of independence. This actually happened and when Tilak returned from jail in Burma after 6 years he was able in conjunction with Mrs Besant not only to revive the Congress but to make it representative of a nation pledged to the nationalist cause. The Moderate party shrank into a small body of liberals and even these finally subscribed to the ideal of complete independence.³²

About the split at the Surat Congress, Sri Aurobindo clarified to a disciple:

Very few people know that it was I (without consulting Tilak) who gave the order that led to the breaking of the Congress and was responsible for the refusal to join the new-fangled Moderate Convention which were the two decisive happenings at Surat.³³

C. C. Dutt has recorded that a few boys carrying fire-arms accompanied Barin to Surat, and had instructions from Dutt “to close round Aurobindo Babu in case there was a row.”³⁴ Despite the split, Tilak requested Sri Aurobindo at Surat to do a political tour of Maharashtra during which he visited several towns to deliver speeches. After the break-up between the Moderates and the Extremists at Surat,

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

33. *Ibid.*, Vol. 35, p. 26.

34. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, footnote, p. 266.



Sri Aurobindo with Nationalist leaders at Surat in December 1907, at the time of the Surat Congress, 24-31 December



Sri Aurobindo presiding over a meeting of Nationalists at Surat in December 1907. Lokamanya Tilak is addressing the gathering

Lala Lajpat Rai wrote about the Moderate leaders, with whom he had some rapport:

In their heart of hearts they blessed the new movements and they were heartily glad that it came. It acted and reacted on their own movement. It made possible for them to put strength and force into their demands for concessions. Whenever an extremist leader recanted or used compromising language, they were sorry. They wanted the movement to continue and to live, though they would not join it and though they believed it was harmful to the country in some respects. They deplore the lack of enthusiasm and sacrifice in their own ranks, but they admire the selflessness of the extremists and respect their real leaders. An Aurobindo Ghose and a Tilak simply compel admiration and respect.³⁵

That Sri Aurobindo was politically more extreme than Tilak was perhaps the reason that stirred Manmohan to say: “There are two and a half men in India — my brothers Aurobindo and Barin, two, and half is Tilak!”³⁶ Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had referred to Barin as the pioneer of the terrorist movement in India.³⁷

Sri Aurobindo’s decision to break the Surat Congress was perhaps because he had the foresight. Pradhan and Bhagwat also state: “Aurobindo was a visionary and had a mystic touch about him. Tilak was a realist and relied on intellect rather than on intuition.”³⁸ Henry Nevinson too speaks of Tilak’s shrewd political judgment and Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual elevation.³⁹ About this difference in temperament, Rishabchand, in his biography of Sri Aurobindo, writes:

He [Tilak] had come under the spell of Sri Aurobindo’s magnetic personality, as his biographers rightly observe, and imbibed something of his spiritual force and drive, and, though there were differences of vision and views between them, his sturdy realism, directed by his sharp and prodigious intellect, seldom failed to yield precedence to Sri Aurobindo’s intuitive perception and inspired action. The mystic vein of Sri Aurobindo’s nature was so patently and powerfully impressive that no sensitive nationalist could escape its influence. Tilak was fully aware of it . . .

In spite of the one being led by his reason and intellect, and the other by his intuition and inspiration, Tilak and Sri Aurobindo were the twin most creative forces in contemporary Indian politics . . .⁴⁰

35. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo – Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, November 2014, pp. 887-88.

36. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 625.

37. See Nilima Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo – The Soul of India’, *Mother India*, May 1996, p. 398.

38. Cited in Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., 1981, p. 206.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 206 (footnote).

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 206, 208.

J. Ramsay MacDonald, the future Prime Minister of England, who met Sri Aurobindo in Alipore jail, remarked, “I called on one whose name is on every lip as a wild extremist across whose path the shadow of the hangman falls. . . . He was far more a mystic than a politician. He saw India seated on a temple throne. . . . Man has to fulfil God, he has written, and that is only possible by fulfilling himself, this again being possible only through nationality.”⁴¹ In his autobiography Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose eulogised Sri Aurobindo. An extract, relating to his mystic nature, reads:

On the Congress platform he had stood up as a champion of left-wing thought and fearless advocate of independence at a time when most of the leaders, with their tongues in their cheeks, would talk only of colonial self-government. He had undergone incarceration with perfect equanimity. His close association with Lokamanya B. G. Tilak had given him an all-India popularity. . . . Last but not least, a mixture of spirituality and politics had given him a halo of mysticism.⁴²

Incidentally, in 1917, Tilak wanted R. D. Ranade (1886-1957), an eminent scholar-philosopher, to enter politics. Ranade told the great leader that he was temperamentally inclined to spirituality and had no call for politics. To this Tilak replied with a smile: “Aravinda Babu is (also?) a mystic.”⁴³

In 1908, Tilak’s Guru, Anna Saheb Patwardhan, who was a Yogi, presided over a meeting held at Tilak’s residence at Poona where Sri Aurobindo was the principal speaker. It was said that Patwardhan predicted the yogic greatness of Sri Aurobindo and considered him to be the greatest of all contemporary leaders. He had a private interview with Sri Aurobindo just after the said meeting, but what they talked about in that interview remained a secret.⁴⁴

Interestingly, the future Sankaracharya of Sri Sharada Peetham (one of the four Muths founded by Adi Sankaracharya) was a follower of Tilak during his student days in 1908. During that period he and his young companions read the Gita and wherever the phrase ‘Thus spake God’ occurred they replaced it with ‘Thus spake Aurobindo.’ Such was the reverence the youth had for Sri Aurobindo during his political days.⁴⁵

There was another aspect where the temperaments of the Nationalist leaders differed. Sri Aurobindo has written that although Tilak “has ideals, he is not an idealist by character. Once the ideal fixed, all the rest is for him practical work, the

41. Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came to Me*, p. 268. (J. Ramsay MacDonald, *The Awakening of India*).

42. Cited in Nilima Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo – The Soul of India’, *Mother India*, May 1996, pp. 397-98.

43. See Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., 1981, p. 207.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 207 (footnote).

45. See Nolinikanto Sarkar, *Asa Jaoar Majhkhane* (translated from Bengali by Aniruddha Sircar), *Mother India*, June 2004, p. 516.

facing of hard facts . . .”⁴⁶ Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, in a letter to Dr. B. S. Moonje, in response to a request to take up the Presidentship of the Nagpur Congress soon after Tilak’s death, writes:

I may say that in any case I think you would be making a wrong choice in asking me to take Tilak’s place at your head. No one now alive in India, or at least no one yet known, is capable of taking that place, but myself least of all. I am an idealist to the marrow and could only be useful when there is something drastic to be done, a radical or revolutionary line to be taken, (I do not mean revolutionary by violence) a movement with an ideal aim and direct method to be inspired and organised.⁴⁷

However, besides being an idealist Sri Aurobindo was also a realist. As historian R. C. Majumdar notes Sri Aurobindo “revived the theoretical teachings of Bankim Chandra and Vivekananda and introduced them in the field of practical politics.”⁴⁸

In 1906 Sri Aurobindo gave Tilak the ultimate compliment by describing him as a “man who has suffered and denied himself for his country’s sake and never abased his courage nor bowed his head under the most crushing persecution . . .”⁴⁹ Indeed, in one of the sessions of Barin’s experiments with planchette and table tapping at Baroda sometime in 1905, which Tilak had attended, Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose’s spirit was called and asked what kind of man the Lokamanya was. The answer came: “When all your work will be ruined and many men bow their heads down, this man will keep his head erect.”⁵⁰ Sri Aurobindo has noted:

Barin had done some very extraordinary automatic writing at Baroda in a very brilliant and beautiful English style and remarkable for certain predictions which came true . . . there was notably a symbolic anticipation of Lord Curzon’s subsequent unexpected departure from India and, again, of the first suppression of the national movement and the greatness of Tilak’s attitude amidst the storm; this prediction was given in Tilak’s own presence when he visited Sri Aurobindo at Baroda and happened to enter just when the writing was in progress.⁵¹

Sometime in 1907-08, Tilak came to meet Sri Aurobindo in his house at Calcutta. Abinash Bhattacharya, who received him, did not recognise the great man. From Abinash Bhattacharya’s reminiscence we can ascertain that Tilak was an engaging conversationalist with a magnanimous personality:

46. *CWSA*, Vol. 1, p. 649.

47. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 258.

48. See Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., 1981, pp. 192-93.

49. *CWSA*, Vol. 6, pp. 116-17.

50. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, p. 192.

51. *CWSA*, Vol. 36, p. 95.

One day about noon a dignified-looking Marwari arrived and asked to speak to Aurobindo. I requested him politely to come back in an hour. He was stubborn. “Well, let me sit here in the drawing room and chat with you. An hour will pass quickly.”

He said that so jovially that I could not refuse him. Helplessly I sat down and began to chat with him. Talking with him was really a pleasure. Barely fifteen minutes had passed before Aurobindo-babu slowly came down the stairs with his slippers on. Recognising the visitor from a distance he called out happily: “Tilak, it’s you!” I gave a start. Bal Gangadhar Tilak! I bowed down at his feet and apologised. He took my hands close to his chest and said: “Forgive you for what? You haven’t done anything wrong.”

“Why didn’t you tell me at once that you were Bal Gangadhar Tilak? I would have called him down.”

“I knew that. But I was aware that Aurobindo was resting.”⁵²

On Tilak’s generosity of spirit, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

But he is entirely a democratic politician, of a type not very common among our leaders . . . He has that closeness of spirit to the mass of men, that unpretentious openness of intercourse with them, that faculty of plain and direct speech which interprets their feelings and shows them how to think out what they feel, which are pre-eminently the democratic qualities.⁵³

Amongst all the political leaders in the freedom struggle, Bal Gangadhar Tilak recognised Sri Aurobindo to be the most inspiring, committed and composed political leader. Tilak’s biographers G. P. Pradhan and A. K. Bhagwat wrote in their *Lokmanya Tilak*:

Tilak knew very well that strategically it was desirable to keep the two planks of civil revolt and revolutionary activity away from each other. . . . As a leader, however, it was his responsibility to see that all efforts for achieving freedom were carried on in the correct manner, and he therefore gave advice to the leaders of the revolutionary wing. He did not want the decision of the opportune moment to be entrusted to a less mature person who would be swayed by sentiments and affected by some passing phases in politics. He thought that only Aurobindo and himself could take such a momentous decision.⁵⁴

52. Abinash Bhattacharya, ‘Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, July 2012, p. 533.

53. *CWSA*, Vol. 1, p. 648.

54. Cited in Rishabhchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., 1981, p. 207.

It was Tilak’s strong character and firm determination that convinced Sri Aurobindo that he should be positioned as the most important leader of India. In 1938 he told his attendants:

One day I called the Bengal leaders and said, “It is no use simply going on like this. We must capture the Congress and throw out the Moderate leaders from it.” Then I proposed that we should follow Tilak as the all-India leader. They at once jumped at the idea. Tilak, who was not well known in the northern parts of India, accepted the leadership. He was a really great man and a rare disinterested one.⁵⁵

Elsewhere Sri Aurobindo has said, “Tilak is a true politician. He places the country above his personal predilections.”⁵⁶ Sri Aurobindo considered Tilak to be a great leader who had no equal in India. He writes:

He is the very type and incarnation of the Maratha character, the Maratha qualities, the Maratha spirit, but with the unified solidity in the character, the touch of genius in the qualities, the vital force in the spirit which make a great personality readily the representative man of his people. . . . He occupies a position in his province which has no parallel in the rest of India.⁵⁷

Sri Aurobindo notes that the principal facets of Tilak’s character were his will-power, courage and self-sacrifice for his country:

First, the inflexible will of the patriot and man of sincere heart and thorough action which has been the very grain of his character: for aspirations, emotion, enthusiasm are nothing without this; will alone creates and prevails. And wish and will are not the same thing, but divided by a great gulf: the one, which is all most of us get to, is a puny, tepid and inefficient thing and, even when most enthusiastic, easily discouraged and turned from its object; the other can be a giant to accomplish and endure. Secondly, the readiness to sacrifice and face suffering, not needlessly or with a useless bravado, but with a firm courage when it comes, to bear it and to outlive, returning to work with one’s scars as if nothing had happened. No prominent man in India has suffered more for his country; none has taken his sacrifices and sufferings more quietly and as a matter of course.⁵⁸

55. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, p. 41.

56. V. Chidanandam, ‘Sri Aurobindo at Evening Talk’ *Mother India*, August 1972, p. 486.

57. *CWSA*, Vol. 1, p. 647.

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 655-56.

Sri Aurobindo shared with Tilak the above qualities. In his paper Tilak writes:

None is equal to Aravinda in self-sacrifice, knowledge and sincerity. . . . It is a dispensation of benign Providence that persons like Aravinda have been drawn to the national work. . . . His failure [he disqualified himself by not appearing in the riding test] in the Indian Civil Service examination was a blessing in disguise. . . . His erudition, sattwic temperament, religious mind, and self-sacrifice. . . . He writes from divine inspiration, sattwic intelligence, and unshakable determination. . . .⁵⁹

And after Sri Aurobindo’s acquittal in the *Bande Mataram* Sedition Case in September 1907, Tilak’s *Kesari* wrote: “His learning and patriotism are so profound that in his acquittal we discern the hand of Providence.”⁶⁰

On Tilak’s steely determination, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Arguments and speeches do not win liberty for a nation; but where there is a will in the nation to be free and a man to embody that will in every action of his life and to devote his days to its realisation in the face of every difficulty and every suffering, and where the will of the nation has once said, “This man and his life mean what I have in my heart and in my purpose,” that is a sure signpost of the future which no one has any excuse for mistaking.

That indomitable will, that unwavering devotion have been the whole meaning of Mr. Tilak’s life; they are the reason of his immense hold on the people.⁶¹

When Prafulla Chaki and Khudiram Bose threw a bomb at a carriage, believed to be that of the Chief Presidency Magistrate, Douglas Kingsford, in a case of mistaken identity, two British ladies were killed. This incident led to the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy Case. Tilak, in his paper *Kesari*, defended the two revolutionaries and called for immediate Swaraj or self-rule. The Government swiftly charged him with sedition and imprisoned him in Mandalay, Burma from 1908 to 1914. In his Uttarpara speech, after his release from Alipore Jail in 1909, Sri Aurobindo first referred to Tilak:

It is I this time who have spent one year in seclusion, and now that I come out I find all changed. One who always sat by my side and was associated in my work is a prisoner in Burma . . .⁶²

59. Cited in Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., 1981, p. 119.

60. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo – Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, January 2014, p. 37.

61. *CWSA*, Vol. 1, pp. 642-43.

62. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, p. 3.

Several historians gave Sri Aurobindo and Tilak a prime place in the Indian freedom struggle. Referring to an era of India’s freedom struggle eminent historian Dr. R. C. Majumdar writes:

The period from 1905 to 1918 was dominated by Aurobindo and Tilak; the former putting nationalism and patriotism on the high pedestal of religion, and the latter bringing them to the masses and thus making them inspiring forces in practical politics. They gave the death-blow to the old Congress ideal and method . . .⁶³

Feroz Chand in his *Lajpat Rai — Life and Work* writes:

Aurobindo Ghose was by many looked upon as the person sharing with Tilak the responsibility, work and privilege of shaping nationalist politics . . .⁶⁴

Dr. R. C. Majumdar writes in his *History of the Freedom Movement in India*:

With the growth of the Extremist Party, initiative of the new spirit generated by the Swadeshi movement and neo-nationalism gradually passed from the hands of the old leaders like Surendranath into those of Aurobindo and Bipin Chandra who were always in touch with Tilak and Lajpat Rai. These four were the great leaders of the new movement, but Aurobindo soon gained the position of supremacy. . . .⁶⁵

Tara Chand, who was requisitioned by the Government of India to write on India’s freedom struggle, wrote in his *History of the Freedom Movement in India*:

Aurobindo Ghose was amongst the youngest leaders of the new nationalist movement which exploded like a volcano in the wake of the partition of Bengal. He was the most brilliant among the galaxy of talented men who challenged the Government and directed the people’s agitation. . . .

It is, however, impossible to understand the history of the freedom struggle without giving serious consideration to the thought of Aurobindo Ghose.

There is no doubt that his master-mind largely inspired, both in thought and action, the anti-partition agitation in Bengal and that he played an important role in the politics of India as a whole. Bal Gangadhar Tilak and he anticipated the ideals and programme of the struggle which under Gandhiji’s guidance

63. R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. II, 1962, p. xxiii.

64. Feroz Chand, *Lajpat Rai – Life and Work*, September 1978, p. 226.

65. Cited in Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., 1981, p. 220.

took a practical shape and culminated in independence. He was undoubtedly a powerful influence in the nationalist upsurge which stirred the country.⁶⁶

Alluding to the Swadeshi movement, Tara Chand elsewhere wrote:

In all these cases the main object of the leaders was to give a popular and mass character to the movement as Aurobindo Ghose and Tilak desired. Although their success was modest they laid the foundation on which Gandhiji built his mass activity.⁶⁷

Historians Prof. Haridas Mukherjee and Prof. Uma Mukherjee also note how Gandhi benefitted from Sri Aurobindo:

In the political arena he exhibited two distinct but inwardly allied personalities — as a Passive and as a Revolutionary, — and in both the capacities he cast a powerful influence over the whole course of India’s Freedom Movement which had its culmination in the transfer of power in 1947. His spirit of passive resistance found a veritable incarnation in Mahatma Gandhi while that of revolution a living embodiment in Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.⁶⁸

R. C. Majumdar states that Gandhi wrote in 1908 “that the real awakening of India took place after the Partition of Bengal which might lead to the partition of the British Empire.” Majumdar postulates that it is impossible to understand the history of India’s freedom struggle without a thorough knowledge of the Swadeshi movement and adds that a close

... examination will reveal the fact that almost all the characteristic features that marked India’s struggle for freedom up to 1947, may be traced to the Swadeshi movement. Even the Non-co-operation and Passive Resistance — the two *Brahmastras* with which Gandhi is supposed to have fatally struck the British rule in India had their origin in the Swadeshi movement. Arabinda preached Non-co-operation and Passive Resistance during the Swadeshi movement, long before Gandhi, and also anticipated his enunciation of the high moral and spiritual values of a non-violent struggle.⁶⁹

R. C. Majumdar also mentions how Gandhi employed Sri Aurobindo’s ideas:

66. Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. 3, 1972, pp. 149-50.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 333.

68. Cited in Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., p. 222.

69. R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. II, 1962, pp. xvi-vii.

Arabinda Ghose wrote a series of articles on ‘Passive Resistance’ in the *Bande Mataram* between 9 and 23 April 1907. These contain a masterly exposition of the doctrine of ‘Passive Resistance’ which later, in the hands of Gandhiji played an important role in India’s struggle for freedom.⁷⁰

Indeed, Sri Aurobindo’s doctrine of non-cooperation and passive resistance — as reflected in his series of articles ‘Doctrine of Passive Resistance’ in the *Bande Mataram* — was a precursor to Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement. On the Swadeshi movement Sri Aurobindo has noted:

Mahatma Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement was a repetition of the “Swadeshi”, but with an exclusive emphasis on the spinning-wheel and the transformation of passive resistance, (“Satyagraha”) from a political means into a moral and religious dogma of soul-force and conquest by suffering.⁷¹

About the roles of Sri Aurobindo and Tilak historian Dr. R. C. Majumdar noted:

While Tilak popularised politics and gave it a force and vitality it had hitherto lacked, Aurobindo spiritualised it and became the high priest of Nationalism as a religious creed. . . . Tilak had raised his voice against the policy of mendicancy followed by the Congress, but it was reserved for Aravinda to hit upon a positive approach to the problem. He anticipated Mahatma Gandhi by preaching the cult of passive resistance and non-cooperation as far back as 1906. But however much opinions might differ on these points, one must recognise that apart from the general forces working for nationalism, the movement was especially or more directly inspired by the teachings of Bankim Chandra, Vivekananda and Aravinda, who placed the country on the altar of God and asked for suffering and self-immolation as the best offerings for His worship . . . these teachings . . . inspired the lives of many a martyr who hailed the scaffold with a smile on their lips or suffered torments worse than death without the least flinching. . . .⁷²

The significance of Sri Aurobindo’s and Tilak’s work can be gauged from an extract from Sri Aurobindo’s writings:

The lavalike flood of the Swadeshi movement fertilised the soil and did for the country in six years the work of six ordinary decades; it fixed the goal of freedom in the mind of the people.⁷³

70. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

71. CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 14.

72. Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., 1981, pp. 192-93.

73. CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 656.

The historian Percival Spear in his *India — A Modern History* writes:

Today it is rather the fashion to regard the Moderates as timid time-servers and Tilak as a fearless patriot and political seer. Indeed, there is something to be said for this view of Tilak; for it was his program, not the Moderate one, which achieved fulfilment in 1947, and it was his method of active resistance to government, rather than the Moderate one of remonstrance, which secured it.⁷⁴

Later Sri Aurobindo differed with Tilak’s Lucknow Pact of 1916 with Jinnah, and called it “a great blunder . . . the recognition of the communal principle at Lucknow made them [the Muslims] permanently a separate political entity in India . . . [and] the Khilafat affair made that separate political entity an organised separate political power.”⁷⁵

In 1919 there was a feeling in Nationalist circles that Sri Aurobindo should somehow be persuaded to return to active politics. At Tilak’s instance, his colleague Joseph Baptista, a well-known barrister, therefore wrote in December 1919 requesting Sri Aurobindo to accept the editorship of a paper that was to be the organ of the Social Democratic Party of Bombay. It was to give Sri Aurobindo an opportunity to spread the message of patriotism and educate the nation in the tasks of political debate and action. In his long reply of 5 January 1920, Sri Aurobindo set forth the reasons that weighed with him when he felt compelled to reject the “tempting offer”.⁷⁶

On Tilak’s passing in 1920 Bipin Chandra Pal requested Sri Aurobindo to write an obituary. Sri Aurobindo consented and wrote:

He brought to his work extraordinary qualities, a calm, silent, unflinching courage, an unwavering purpose, a flexible mind, a forward-casting vision of possibilities, an eye for the occasion, a sense of actuality, a fine capacity of democratic leadership, a diplomacy that never lost sight of its aim and pressed towards it even in the most pliant turns of its movement, and guiding all, a single-minded patriotism that cared for power and influence only as a means of service to the Motherland and a lever for the work of her liberation. He sacrificed much for her and suffered for her repeatedly and made no ostentation of his suffering and sacrifice. His life was a constant offering at her altar and his death has come in the midst of an unceasing service and labour.⁷⁷

Sri Aurobindo’s quiet disposition helped him to keep calm during his hectic political life. From Sri Aurobindo’s account we know that from early 1908 his

74. Manoj Das, ‘Sri Aurobindo – Life and Times of the Mahayogi’, *Mother India*, September 2014, p. 725 (Percival Spear: *India – A Modern History*; Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1961).

75. B. Krishna, ‘The Genius of Sri Aurobindo’, *Mother India*, August 1997, p. 612.

76. See K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo – a biography and a history*, 5th Ed., 2006, pp. 521-22.

77. *CWSA*, Vol. 1, p. 658.

political activity was wholly dominated by his inner spiritual life or at least secondary to it. He writes:

I may add in explanation that from the time I left Lele at Bombay after the Surat Congress and my stay with him in Baroda, Poona and Bombay, I had accepted the rule of following the inner guidance implicitly and moving only as I was moved by the Divine. The spiritual development during the year in jail had turned this into an absolute law of the being. This accounts for my immediate action in obedience to the adesh received by me.⁷⁸

Indeed, Tilak knew of Sri Aurobindo’s imperturbable composure. Referring to Sri Aurobindo, Tilak’s biographers G. P. Pradhan and A. K. Bhagwat write:

He [Tilak] knew that a revolutionary action was too serious a matter to be decided by anyone except those who had attained a philosophic calm of mind or the radiant placidity of a *sthitaprajña*.⁷⁹

During a conversation in 1924, Sri Aurobindo said:

Few can be extremists while retaining their calmness.⁸⁰

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

78. *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, p. 90.

79. Cited in Rishabchand, *Sri Aurobindo – His Life Unique*, 1st Ed., 1981, p. 207.

80. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 4th Ed., 2007, p. 283.

All renunciation is for a greater joy yet ungrasped. Some renounce for the joy of duty done, some for the joy of peace, some for the joy of God and some for the joy of self-torture, but renounce rather as a passage to the freedom and untroubled rapture beyond.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 433)

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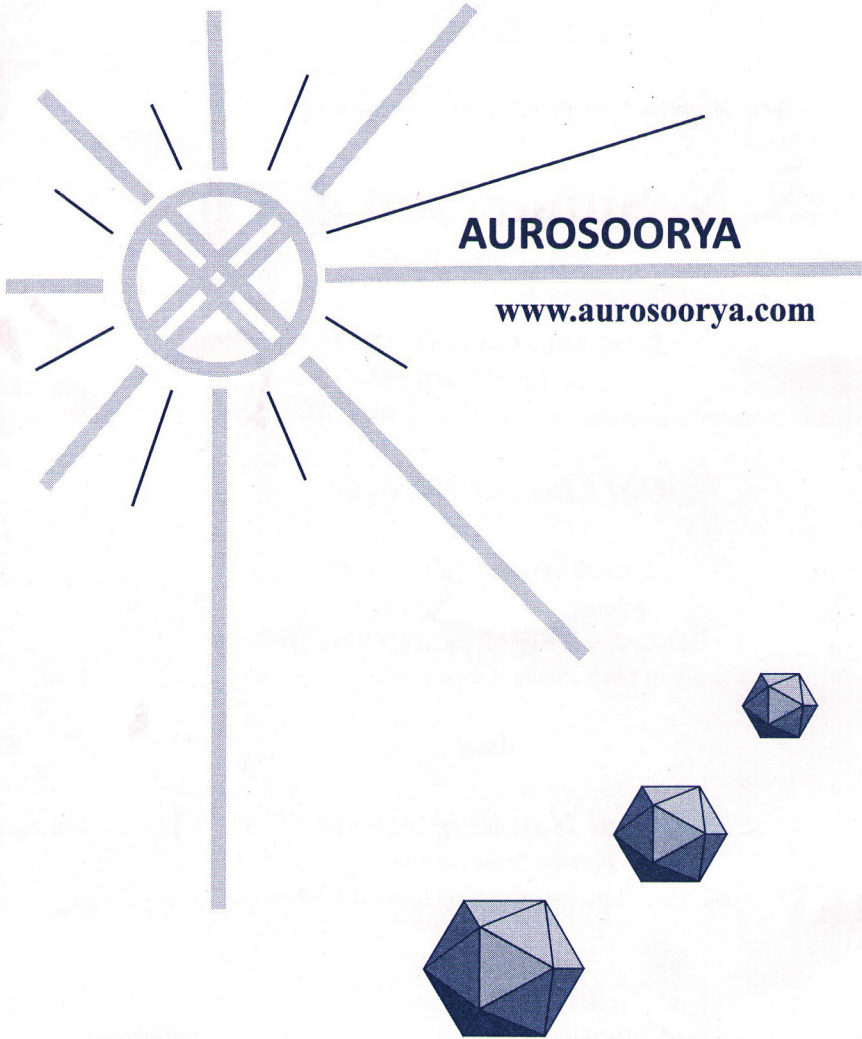
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