



SRI AUROBINDO

HIS LIFE AND YOGA



Promode Kumar Sen

Translated from the Bengali by Prasenjit Sen

SPIRITUAL MASTERS



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Indian Spirit, Universal Wisdom

To the Memory of my Parents

Promode Kumar Sen and Jyotirmoyee Sen,
who led me literally holding my hand to Her Grace.

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FOREWORD

During almost a score of years, a systematic attempt from various quarters has been hurling disgrace to Indian spirituality by brandishing jihad against so-called traditional hagiography in order to establish a novel methodology based on pseudo-psychoanalytical barbarism, for penning blasphemous pages in the name of biography. In the teeth of such vanity, we remain, however, fond of a possible and evident sanctity in personalities who, behind their resemblance to Tom, Dick and Harry, do embody from time to time superhuman values. At such a critical juncture, we congratulate Prasenjit Sen for bringing out in English translation the Bengali biography of Sri Aurobindo—a classic since more than half a century — written by his father late Promode Kumar Sen (1899-1952).

Almost a decade before the coming out of the well-known biography by Professor K.R.S. Iyengar, what did people know of Sri Aurobindo, when the first edition of this gem of a book appeared in 1939? Merely a legendary figure who had given up a comfortable job at Baroda to become the founder president of the National College? Or else, as the editor of the spitfire nationalist journal in English, the *Bande Mataram*? Or even, an escapist who fled government persecution, leaving in the lurch the freedom movement under the plea of his spiritual seeking? Soon he was even to be censured bitterly for sending a donation to the war-fund in support of the British.

*

Son of Shri Yogendranath Sen, a revolutionary activist in Jessore connected with organisations influenced by Sri Aurobindo's movement, since his childhood the author, Promode Kumar Sen, had been familiar with journals edited by Sri Aurobindo; his father

received them as subscriber and read them with due enthusiasm: the *Bande Mataram*, the *Karmayogin*, the *Dharma*. Once a learned critic, fascinated by the structure of the present biography, objected however, to the emotional undertone in the book as maintained by the author. In reply, Promode Kumar admitted that in spite of being a journalist by profession, busy analysing events and commenting on them, perpetually overwhelmed by the awe-inspiring personality of Sri Aurobindo, he could not restrain his emotion, just as people cannot help feeling spontaneously fascinated in the presence of the beautiful Himalayan peaks or before the solemn grandeur of the ocean.

*

By the time the second edition of the book appeared in December 1952, the author had passed away in April, after completing a thorough revision of the book, while the second edition was in press. On 1 August 1949, during this revision, he had looked back at the austere atmosphere of the Ashram when the book had been first published, shortly after the beginning of the World War; he observed with admiration how, in such a short lapse of time, the Ashram had grown into a vast laboratory of yoga in action (*karmayoga*). Not only action: the tremendous spiritual force of Sri Aurobindo had programmed even intensive physical culture and sports. Liberated from the clutch of the little self, all human activities had been getting transformed, thus, into action of the undividable consciousness. The perennial yoga of India here assumed an unprecedented expression.

*

Divided into twenty-six chapters, including two preliminary ones (I and II) which contain the Author's views and methods, the book describes faithfully, step by step, aspects and phases of the Master's life and times, along with the blossoming of his vision. The author has examined in this last chapter the future evolution of humanity and the great objective that Sri Aurobindo proposed through his labour of transforming mankind.

In addition to a much awaited simplified presentation of Sri Aurobindo's lofty writings—thanks to a profound familiarity with them and an elegant Bengali style—Promode Kumar, in his relentless look

out for unknown and less known facts concerning the Master, has enriched this narration: for instance the affectionate father Krishnadhan with his prediction about the potentials of his three elder sons—Benoybhushan, Manmohan and Aurobindo—studying in England, gives a special flavour to this book. Or else, the revolutionary role Sri Aurobindo played by preceding and anticipating the mass movement that Gandhiji was to lead fifteen years later with the blueprint left by Sri Aurobindo. Further, almost twenty years later, the role of visionary that Sri Aurobindo played in the decisive proposal presented by Stafford Cripps. In all humility—often in form of footnotes—Promode Kumar has mentioned here and there his significant meetings, such as with Ketkar, grandson of Lokamanya Tilak, to learn that Sri Aurobindo's obituary tribute after Tilak's passing has been considered to be the most pertinent; such as, while speaking of President Wilson, Promode Kumar's casual reference made to his interview with Margaret, Wilson's daughter who had chosen to live as an inmate of Sri Aurobindo's Ashram till her last breath.

*

It is expected that, with the success of the English edition, the publishers will look for translators to share with readers of regional languages this loving homage so delicately composed by an accomplished devotee of an exceptional Guru.

~ Prithwindra Mukherjee

Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres Paris, July 2015

AUTHOR'S NOTE

It is a difficult task to write the biography of Sri Aurobindo. He alone can enlighten us about himself. So I am uncertain why I embarked upon this task. How little do I know of his Great Life! I do not have the least amount of courage to get acquainted with his inner Self. I have got engaged in this work only due to my own inner inspiration—to pay homage to Sri Aurobindo.

I was inspired by my father Jogendra Nath Sen to pay homage to Sri Aurobindo. He was involved in politics, an adherent of Sri Aurobindo, and his work during the *Swadeshi* Movement was based on the latter's ideals. My father did not have any direct contact with Sri Aurobindo; however, he participated in the 1909 Hooghly Provincial Conference as a representative of Sri Aurobindo's Nationalist Party. He used to read regularly journals like *Bande Mataram*, *Karmayogin* and *Dharma* which were edited by Sri Aurobindo. I remember in my boyhood days I used to see those journals and my innocent mind was curious to know what was written in them. But at that time, I lacked the ability to understand them.

My curiosity to know more about Sri Aurobindo continued in the later period too. I could not fathom why he left politics; I had no knowledge about yoga, I could not understand the writings of Sri Aurobindo and did not pursue to understand them in depth. I remember that in our hostel one of the students had subscribed to the *Arya*—the publication of *Arya* had then recently begun. Though I was a student of philosophy, I had not once turned the pages of the *Arya*. Even then, when on the order of the college principal a few books from our hostel library, such as *War and Self-Determination* authored by Sri Aurobindo, had to be returned, although purchased, it had pained me. Of course, I had no capacity to understand those

books but I felt sad wondering why the books by a great person were being sent off from the domain of knowledge. Later, after reading that book I was surprised that our Englishman principal had paid no heed to that book. He had definitely not read it; otherwise he would have been moved by the logic and the liberal thoughts in it. We are at times judgemental without taking the efforts to know a person or topic.

Subsequently I developed an understanding of some of Sri Aurobindo's writings. But it appeared a mystery as to why he had taken to yoga. Once in a while I would discuss this topic with those who had visited Pondicherry or knew about that place. Then I was wonderstruck when I learnt Shri Anil Baran Roy and Shri Dilip Kumar Roy had left for Pondicherry to live there permanently.

Later, reading the article of Dilip Kumar Roy "Sri Aurobindo Sandarshane" (in Bengali) I marvelled at the portrayal of Sri Aurobindo—this ignited in me the curiosity to know what the yoga of Sri Aurobindo was and hence, I started reading the writings of Sri Aurobindo. Hopefully, this book will help leave a mark with whatever little knowledge I have acquired on him.

Having joined the profession of journalism, I gained the experience of some of the political movements (1920s). I learnt more about the country, there arose in me the interest to know about the future of the human race and I became eager to understand the riddles of the world. However, in spite of reading various books and articles, I could not fathom much in this path. During that time, due to the courtesy of a friend, I got my hands on the first volume of the *Arya*. After reading the *Life Divine* in that volume, I was wonderstruck—the liberal views, such indisputable reasoning, such vast knowledge I had not found anywhere before. After reading several volumes of the *Arya*, I felt as though I had a new birth—the ideas, thoughts, and beliefs which I had held so far, changed radically! I got the urge to solve the mysteries of life, got the indication of a greater and nobler life, and also developed the conviction about the existence of the true form of *Brahma* and the universe. I understood why Sri Aurobindo left politics—he had resolved to align himself to a nobler and more sacred aim. *Life Divine* elucidates the philosophical

explanation of Sri Aurobindo's Divine Yoga, the indication on establishing harmony between the world and life, and by reading it one gets a realistic description of the wonderful ideals of Sri Aurobindo. It is happy news that *Life Divine* is getting published as a complete tome very soon.¹

Some indication in simpler words on the ideal of Sri Aurobindo can be found in the chapter captioned "Sri Aurobindo", in *Teerthankar* (Bengali) by Dilip Kumar Roy.² This was unpublished while I was writing this book; naturally I could not take the help of this while analysing the yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Dilip babu is truly fortunate for he has heard directly from Sri Aurobindo on the mysteries of his yoga. It is all the more fortunate that he had immediately written down those words, hence we have today the opportunity to learn from the narrations of Sri Aurobindo about his yoga mysteries.

By reading *Teerthankar* one understands the reason why Sri Aurobindo retreated to yoga and the wonderful experience he had after the realisation. I could not resist the temptation of quoting here an extract:

Sri Aurobindo: "...Previously, I too had a desire to change the world in a single moment, recast the human nature— whatever evil there is, whatever misery there is, I obliterate them at this very moment by the power of my yoga. Initially I came here with this purpose—although the principle aim of coming here was to pursue my *sadhana* as I had received the *adesh* (command from the divine)

...

"...That is why I tell Lele, that I am prepared to seek yoga but do not want to leave my karma *sadhana*. I love both the country and the work . . . Lele agreed to give me *diksha* (initiation to yoga).³ Some days later, he told me to follow my inner guidance and took leave. After coming to Pondicherry I took recourse completely to yoga. But my complete outlook changed in the course of my seeking and *sadhana*. I found that what I had thought was possible instantly, was due to my ignorance."

Dilip: "Ignorance?"

Sri Aurobindo: “Yes, because I did not know then the truth that for the man of this world it is not enough for one person to attain the supreme solution—howsoever extraordinary the person might be. This singular attainment is not enough for him to reach the immortal world—the man in the universe has the right to gain the heaven. But for that, the time has to be favourable. The real problem lies there. It will not be done if only the light from above consents to come down—It can come down occasionally—but it would not be possible to hold and establish It on the base below unless the recipient is able to accept It . . . It is impossible to spell out a quick solution or a wonder drug for this world’s misfortune. The proof of this lies in the pages of history.”

Dilip: “Then what is your *sadhana* for? Is it for your own deliverance or realisation?”

Sri Aurobindo: “No, in that case it would not have taken so much time . . . I seek to bring down in this world a Light from the higher world, to initiate such a Power as a result of which there would be a radical transformation in the human nature; such a divine power that has not so far been explicitly active in this world.”

Only a part of this heartfelt conversation is quoted here. Maybe, none will feel satisfied without reading the whole book. Here we get merely the glimpses of Sri Aurobindo’s ideals. One can imagine the extent of his deep faith in the realisation of his ideals—the Supreme Truth.

Sri Aurobindo: “I surely know that Supramental is a truth, and it will certainly make an appearance at the right time... It is my belief and I feel that this miracle will take place in this age itself. This Supramental power can find its own way, if it can descend once—that is if the earth consciousness can accept and support it.”

Dilip Kumar further asks if the working of this power will be only on a countable few or many. In reply Sri Aurobindo says, “If the Integral Yoga were for only a few like me, then its value would have been very little. Because I am not desirous of leaving this real world—I want its deep and radical transformation.”

Dilip: “But for this transformation shouldn’t your followers and successor accomplish severe *sadhana*, like yours?”

Sri Aurobindo (*smiles*): “No, they do not have to. As earlier mentioned, my yoga is not for myself but for the whole of humanity. He, who has to cut and make the way and move through an unknown forest, has to bear lots of hardship in order to make the path easier for the followers.”

It is a unique *sadhana* he has been living for the last thirty years in Pondicherry!⁴ Through his *sadhana*, unique transformation is possible in the human nature, by which the human civilisation will accept a new form! Why this transformation is inevitable has been explained by him in detail in the *Arya* continuously for seven years. I have tried to provide some glimpses of this in this book, whether successful or not the readers will decide. I have also mentioned what Sri Aurobindo has written in different books on Supramental, but I am unable to give its description or identity here. I have no experience in yoga. By taking refuge in Sri Aurobindo perhaps I have been able to write something. Merely with my own intellect, completing this work would have been an astonishing feat like a lame person scaling a mountain.

I have had no direct contact with Sri Aurobindo. Those who were acquainted with him in Baroda, or have been his colleagues in politics and above all those who have been with him for the last thirty-five years, could write much more. I have taken guidance particularly from two books by Shri Jyotish Chandra Ghosh and Shri Dinendra Kumar Roy for a better understanding of the life of Sri Aurobindo. I have also referred to some facts from various writings of Shri Barindra Kumar Ghose (younger brother of Sri Aurobindo). There could be some errors—such as I learnt after the publication of this book that Barindra Kumar was born not on board a ship but somewhere in the Norwood area of London.

I do not have the audacity to write the biography of Sri Aurobindo. However, only with the joy of realisation, I desired to present some beliefs of his life and yoga, to give an indication of his great spirit, because the common man has lots of misgivings about him. It is not my aim to propagate Sri Aurobindo's ideals, for they do not need publicity; because they are self-evident. And he, from the very

beginning was against self-publicity. Moreover, neither do I have the capacity to promote him. I still nurture hope in my heart that this initiative would enlighten his countrymen and they would acknowledge the great soul present among them and comprehend that through his *sadhana* there exists the possibility of our highest realisation. It is also hoped that to appreciate and comprehend the superb writings of Sri Aurobindo study circles would be formed all over the country and there would be a rising eagerness to adopt the concept of Integral Yoga among the ordinary men and women.

In this book there are some discussions on international politics, but behind it there is no intention to spread any political thoughts. Politics is the exterior of man's life and is ever changing. Even then, there too one gets the indication of life's ideals in man. I have tried to provide some glimpses, based on the ideals written by Sri Aurobindo twenty-five years back. Research-oriented readers would get the relevant matter by reading "Psychology of Social Development" and "Ideal of Human Unity" published in the *Arya*.⁵ Also, we witness happening before us, what Sri Aurobindo had previously written about the future evolution of the human race. At present, a world war has broken over Europe;⁶ it is hoped that after the end of this war, there would be novel change in the ideals of man, justice would prevail, and the human race would discover unity.

For those who helped in the writing of this book, giving it a good layout, and gave inspiration, as appreciation for their love, a formal "thank you" may seem inadequate.

~ **Promode Kumar Sen**

Calcutta

Ashwin, 1346 (Bengali Calendar)
(Corresponds to October 1939)

To
Pramode
with blessings
Sri Aurobindo

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

I have embarked upon translating a comprehensive biography of Sri Aurobindo, the Bengali book *Sri Aurobindo: Jeebon O Jog* authored by my father, (late) Promode Kumar Sen. The first edition came out in 1939, when writing anything about Sri Aurobindo would invite the ire of the British government. The author had, therefore, taken this as a *cause célèbre*. It is a well-researched biography, which was approved by Sri Aurobindo. The author, in his lifetime, made one revision in early '50s incorporating the spiritual significance of the independence of India.

The reader will find it interesting to note how the author has discussed with measured details a forgotten phase of our freedom movement. He has carried it forward to show the evolution of the Congress Party from a moderate party, dominated by bourgeoisie, to a national party. The turmoil and clash in the Surat Congress between the Moderates and the Nationalist Party, which had the leadership of Sri Aurobindo, Lokmanya Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai, was the turning point. Thereafter the spirit of Swadeshi and Swaraj—the mantra of the Nationalist Party—had spread among the masses. The readers will find in the book, that the subsequent movement led by Mahatma Gandhi was a continuation of the same spirit and that the Congress Party's resolution for *Purna Swaraj* championed by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is the manifestation of this evolution of nationalism.

The inspiration for undertaking this translation work came from Prof. Arabinda Basu (formerly Professor of Philosophy, Benares Hindu University and also University of Leeds, and a great exponent of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy). The translator expresses profound gratitude for the affection this erudite philosopher showered on him.

Unfortunately he is no more to give his blessings to this complete work.

The translation of such a book from Bengali to English, which has revealed Sri Aurobindo's political life and yoga, was by no means simple or straightforward. The style of Bengali in this book is lyrical at places and elsewhere rich with words based on Sanskrit. I consider it is the Grace of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo that a graceful and erudite person, Ms. Sonavi Desai, has taken the responsibility of publishing this as a book. She had tirelessly gone through the manuscript, checked, rechecked and compared some typical sentences and improved the text taking the appropriate nuances of the language. It would be an unpardonable omission if sincere thanks are not expressed for the contribution of Shri Amarnath Dutta who had ventured into the translation of the initial chapters of the book. That had encouraged me to proceed further and complete the work. The encouragement received from Dr. Prithwindra Mukherjee is immense. He had inspired me all through, citing his affectionate relationship with the author. I would like to recall the kind help of my old friend Dr. Raghavendra Vasudevan in interpreting the Sanskrit expressions appearing in the book. I would also like to thank Dr. Prema Nandakumar for so readily, and in such a short time, giving her valuable suggestions on the manuscript. No simple word of thanks would be enough for this noble gesture. Support and suggestions from family members—my wife Nandini, son Anandarup and his wife Suneha—must also go on record.

It would be seen that the date of the second edition of the original Bengali version has been shown as 1949, whereas at many places the events referred to in the book (for example, the Epilogue) are after that year. The publisher has explained this in his note dated December 1952. He says there had been inordinate delay in the printing press, when the author incorporated some material to this edition. Unfortunately, the author passed away before this edition came out.

It is heartening to learn that a Marathi translation of the book from original Bengali is about to be completed. Dr. Vilas Gitay has enthusiastically undertaken this arduous work.

My sincere gratitude and *Pranam* to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother for showering their divine Grace towards completion of this work.

~ **Prasenjit Sen**
Mumbai, 30 July 2015

THE BEGINNING: THE BECKONING

In the history of India, 15 August 1947 is a memorable day. On this day, our motherland got independence after centuries of imperialism. With great joy and exuberance on the midnight of 14 August, declaration of complete independence was proclaimed with the chanting of *Bande Mataram* in the Parliament. Thus, the dreams of the ages of so many seer-poets was realised, the sacrifices of thousands of patriots came to fruition, and the sacrifice of millions of men and women at the feet of the motherland was enriched by complete accomplishment.

On this auspicious day a pious celebration took place in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry—the place selected by the Master for his *sadhana*. Truly blessed are those who could participate in this celebration! The flag of independent India embedded with the *dharmachakra* (sacred wheel) of Lord Buddha was hoisted all over India. The Mother herself raised the ensign of *Victory of the Supreme Spirit* from Sri Aurobindo's residential abode. The existence of India is based on religion and spirituality, however, India's aim is not only the establishment of the religion created by men; the supreme ideal of India is the formation of a divine foundation. Ancient India has given the world knowledge, God, and explained what spirituality is. But the revival of the past is not India's only significant goal; the heart of new India is filled with a novel inspiration—India has to be transformed to a divine idol; *Bharat* will be the land of “realisation of the Divine”. The all-round prosperity of India would be the manifestation of the divine wealth. The subtle indication of this truth was seen when Mother raised the blue ensign bedecked with golden lotus at the abode of the Master on

Independence Day, which also is the holy birthday of Sri Aurobindo. The Mother is indeed the human face of Mother India.

The wonderful significance of 15 August 1947 is that on this day seventy-five years ago Sri Aurobindo was born. This coincidence is really surprising and Sri Aurobindo himself expressed joy on this occurrence. The reason for this joy is that God responded at the invocation of the spirit of India. India began a new life with the blessings of the Almighty, and the progress of this new life was towards spirituality and its success would be a complete manifestation of godliness in India's life. Sri Aurobindo has explained this through the term "Divine Birth". Today such "Divine Birth" might appear impossible, but just as the poet Rabindranath Tagore at the beginning of the freedom movement had composed in a well-known Bengali poem (Jatiya Sangeet no. 12):

*This is not a fable, not a dream
That day shall come, shall come...*

Likewise, those who believe get in their heart the sign of this Supreme Truth.

With this view, if we realise the coincidence of the Independence Day with Sri Aurobindo's birthday then this mystery becomes clear. And it is well-known that the whole life of Sri Aurobindo was dedicated to the freedom struggle of the motherland even before the end of the nineteenth century. Commonly it would appear as though there is a gap between his ordinary life and the life dedicated to yoga, but in reality his whole life is yoga—and the aim of this yoga is progress and prosperity of his motherland. And the foundation of this prosperity is in the establishment of the Supreme Truth.

The supreme mystery of Sri Aurobindo's life was narrated in the famous poem in his adoration by poet Rabindranath (Tagore) in 1907: (This poem written in Bengali is rich with poetic metres and words, and is soul stirring. In its translation, the same sentiment has perhaps lost its spirit.)

Rabindranath, O Aurobindo, bows to thee!

O friend, my country's friend, O voice incarnate, free.

In the initial part of his life, Sri Aurobindo had fought for basic rights of humanity (for the countrymen), and in his later life the aim of his *sadhana* was for India and the entire mankind to gain the right to divinity. So it can be said that Sri Aurobindo's life is India's life—this has also been said by Rabindranath (Tagore) in his immortal poetry:

When I behold thy face, 'mid bondage, pain and wrong
And black indignities, I hear the soul's great song
Of rapture unconfined, the chant the pilgrim sings
In which exultant hope's immortal splendour rings,
Solemn voice and calm, and heart-consoling, grand
Of imperturbable death, the spirit of Bharat-land,
O poet, hath placed upon thy face her eyes afire
With love, and struck vast chords upon her vibrant lyre,
Wherein there is no note of sorrow, shame or fear,
Or penury or want.

THE ADVENT

Sri Aurobindo was born at the dawn of 15 August 1872 in the metropolis of Calcutta at 8 Theatre Road (presently known as 8 Shakespeare Sarani). He was the third son of his parents. His father, Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose, was a renowned personality and his mother, Swarnalata, was the versatile and graceful daughter of Rishi (seer) Rajnarayan Bose, an erudite scholar, a well-known patriot, and a gem of a man.

Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose was a staunch antagonist of superstitions. That is why, despite being a Hindu, he married the daughter of Rishi Rajnarayan Bose, an adherent of the Brahmo Samaj, defying the social customs of his time. Similarly, he set out for England to study medicine disregarding the diktat of the society of that era in regard to sea voyages. Krishnadhan was a descendent of the Ghose family living in the illustrious village of Konnagore, bordering Calcutta. Every Bengali knows what a pride of place the district of Hooghly occupies in the cultural history of Bengal. Indeed, this tiny district has given birth to a host of great men, spiritual seekers, intellectuals, litterateurs, and social reformers.

Dr. Krishnadhan, however, got rid of his attachment towards Konnagore through a flick of fate. When he came back from England, the orthodox Hindu society of Konnagore, in conformity with the existing social practice, enjoined him to go through the ceremony of *prāyaschitta* (प्रायश्चित्त) or purification for having crossed the “black waters” and having sojourned in an alien land. The ultra-progressive Krishnadhan preferred leaving Konnagore for good rather than conforming to this superstitious custom. Much later, Sri

Aurobindo set foot on Konnagore twice with a view to attending certain sessions of political parleys. His Uttarpara speech has rendered Uttarpara historically famous. Chinsurah, the town of Hooghly, and Chandernagore have also had his *darshan*. Be that as it may, after his return from England, Dr. Krishnadhan sold his ancestral home for a song to a certain Brahmin in order to keep his promise, though there were many willing to pay him more for the house and the landed property. But as he had given his word to the Brahmin, he did not pay attention to the profit or loss arising out of the deal.

Dr. Krishnadhan on one hand loved “Europeanism” or the Western way of life and on the other hand he was very close to the people of India. It is due to this love for “Europeanism” that his three sons had to start living abroad from their very childhood. In contrast, his heart was so full of affection and compassion that he would appear to the people as *Narayana* (the deliverer Lord Vishnu), a friend of the poor. He was a civil surgeon and in those days, the status of the civil surgeons was equivalent to that of the high-level functionaries of the districts. In other words, only a few civil surgeons had contact with the people in general; further, most of the people would not even dare to approach them. But Krishnadhan was an affable helper to the needy. Let alone allowing them to pay for his visit, he used to give them money from his own pocket for their medicines and diet. As a consequence, whenever Krishnadhan got transferred from a town, the people living there would lament for having lost a kind-hearted friend. In the towns of Rangpur and Khulna (now in Bangladesh), Dr. Krishnadhan is spoken about with reverence even today. Sri Aurobindo, as a child, had once visited the town of Khulna. But even before his achievements became widely known, every educated and cultured family of Bengal was aware of the generosity and the kindness of Dr. Krishnadhan.

And what wonderful affection Dr. Krishnadhan had towards his family! He went to London along with his wife and all his children to arrange for the education of his three sons abroad. There, in the region of Norwood, was born Barindra Kumar, the revolutionary leader of the fiery epoch, famed all over India, and the youngest son

of Krishnadhan. But immediately after that, a family disaster set in as Sri Aurobindo's mother was affected by an incurable disease. Swarnalata came to stay with her father Rajnarayan at Deoghar (now in Jharkhand). Their fourth child, Sarojini, and the fifth child, Barindra Kumar, lived for some time with their ailing mother, but afterwards, Krishnadhan brought them to live with him. So, it was Krishnadhan who acted at once as their father and mother.

Benoy Bhushan, Mano Mohan, and Aurobindo—the three sons living abroad, got very little taste of direct affection from their parents. They were being brought up in a different atmosphere—the little care and affection they received was from foreigners. The paternal heart of Krishnadhan was brimming with the hope that his three sons were being well-educated; therefore, he remained satisfied with whatever arrangements he could make for their subsistence and all of his love and affection he used to pour on his infant daughter Sarojini, and son Barindra.

A letter written by Dr. Krishnadhan to his eldest brother-in-law Jogendranath has been published some time ago in a weekly magazine from Calcutta.⁷ A perusal of this letter reveals the notion Dr. Krishnadhan had of his three sons staying abroad. The letter was written on 2 December 1890 from Khulna. The letter is long but its contents are wonderful. A part of it has been quoted below:

The two maxims I have followed in life, and they have been my ethics and religion, i.e. to improve my species by giving to the world children of a better breed of your own and to improve the children of those who have not the power of doing it themselves. That is what I call devotion—not attained by empty prayers which mean inaction and worship of a god of your own creation. A real God is God's creation, and when I worship that by action I worship Him. It is easy to propound a plausible theory but it is difficult to act in a world where you are hampered by stupid public opinion and stereotyped notions of religion and morality. My life's mission has been to fight against all these stereotyped notions.

If we evaluate in depth the lines above, some prominent features of his character will come to light, and we will see that the aspiration for the divine that lay latent in him as a seed has developed into a giant tree in the self of Sri Aurobindo.

The fundamental aim of Dr. Krishnadhan's life was the uplift of the human race over generations. The aim of Sri Aurobindo's *sadhana* is to make man ascend to a higher level of existence and he believes that the time had come for the divine birth of the human race. Dr. Krishnadhan has personally expressed his joyfulness, thus: "...the three sons I have produced, I have made giants of them."

Dr. Krishnadhan regards good action as the true devotion to the Divine. In Sri Aurobindo's *sadhana*, the yoga through work (*karma* yoga) occupies the foremost place. His father, Krishnadhan, has rightly said that most of the people consider themselves blessed while praying for material things and worshipping the God of their own creation; his ideal was to adore God in reality, that is, through action. His son Aurobindo, not being satisfied with the formal *dharma*, surrendered his whole life to the seeking of the Divine. And as his father Krishnadhan has said, "The truth—God is God's creation", likewise his son Aurobindo seeks the Divine Presence, Union, and the Divine Abode (सामीप्य, सायुज्य, सालोक्य) that is Absolute *Brahman* (ब्रह्मैवकेवलम्). Not only that, Sri Aurobindo has shown that the worship of the divine attains its perfection also through action or through external means.

What is more, the watchword or the *Weltanschauung* of the father Krishnadhan, was to fight against the traditionalism in morality and religion; the goal of Aurobindo, the son, is to realise the eternal and infinite self of *Brahman* which is beyond the highest faith and the highest principle—*dharma* and to acquire that, one has to abandon all formal *dharmas*.

It is unclear whether Sri Aurobindo had seen this wonderful letter (of his father) before it came out in the printed form, but we are overwhelmed by this wonderful inner connection of the souls between father and son. What a great expectation the father had regarding the future of his sons! He writes to his brother-in-law: "I

may not, but you will live to be proud of three of your nephews who will adorn your country and light up your name.”

After this wonderful prophecy, he further says,

“Who knows what achievement the next generation will make, and if I can make my three sons the forerunner in this achievement, what more can I hope in my lifetime.”

Apropos to this, his separate comments on his three sons: “... Beno (Benoy Bhushan) will be (like) his ‘father’ in every sphere of activity—self-sacrificing, but his sphere of action will be limited. Mano (Mano Mohan) will combine the feelings of his father, the grand aspiration of a cosmopolitan spirit that hates and abhors all narrowness. And in him the poetic talent of his famous grandfather Rajnarayan Bose will be evident.”

Thereafter, regarding Sri Aurobindo he writes: “Auro (Aurobindo), I hope, will yet glorify the country by a brilliant administration and organisation; I shall not live to see this; if you live do remember this letter.”

Subsequently, the father has expressed his great delight on the attainments and scholarship of his son Aurobindo. He further narrates how Oscar Browning, the successful son of the celebrated English poet, Robert Browning, in a tea party of the professors, showered unstinted encomium on the exceptional scholarship of Sri Aurobindo.⁸ Unfortunately, Krishnadhan did not live long enough to see the success achieved by his three sons. Erroneous news came to him which stated that the ship in which Sri Aurobindo was returning to his motherland had sunk. Shocked beyond measure, he took to his bed and breathed his last prematurely. However, Sri Aurobindo had boarded the next ship to India and not the ill-fated one that sank.

The prediction of the father about his three sons proved true in course of time. The eldest son, Benoy Bhushan, was appointed in the Royal Court of Cooch Behar State. His field of activity was, however, limited. Mano Mohan, the second son, became a professor of English at the Presidency College, Calcutta, and not only the Indians but also the English scholars were charmed by the effulgent

fragrance of his poetic genius. All the brothers were of quiet disposition, serene in nature and endowed with a sweet temper. Those in contact with Mano Mohan spoke of him with emotion. The minds of so many students have also been kindled by the light of his erudition.

And Auro—the genius of Sri Aurobindo, flowing like a stream that originates from the mountain cave, meandered in the beginning in a narrow space but with tremendous current, turned subsequently into a huge river. That river is now linked to the ocean. Only after a year of his returning from England, the glory of his genius began to shine on the auspicious firmament of India like the mid-day sun.

Krishnadhan had anticipated that his third son would earn fame and “glorify the country by a brilliant administration and organisation”. Perhaps he had thought that Sri Aurobindo would join the civil service and, thereafter, attain higher offices in the government; he would then organise effectively and efficiently the administration of this country. It is true that this expectation of the father has not been fulfilled but the hint he gave has proved to be true in a novel way. We will discuss in later chapters about the extraordinary capacity that Sri Aurobindo had shown in turning the tide of the national movement. In his later life, he sought to establish a new consciousness in human nature. When we discuss Integral Yoga, we will see how we have to ascend step by step in order to transform our nature without evading or eschewing any of its tiny details. And what a wonderful fare Sri Aurobindo has provided for us in the form of each of these steps! It is at once a yogic proficiency and skilfulness at work. Was Krishnadhan alluding to this?

Rishi Rajnarayan, the maternal grandfather of Sri Aurobindo, was renowned all over India. Bengal was known to have had a galaxy of great persons; Rishi Rajnarayan was one of the prominent personalities. The Bengalis still carry in their heart the memory of the sweetness of his character. Rajnarayan is said to be the grandfather of the freedom movement of our country, the Bhagirath⁹ (the king who invoked the holy River Ganga to come down from the heaven and flow into the lives of the humans on Earth) of the Congress, our

national political party. He brought our nation back to her own self and initiated her with a new culture. The portrayal of Rajnarayan made by poet Rabindranath Tagore thoroughly reveals the striking traits of his character. We quote here a few lines from his writings:

When I first met Rajnarayan babu, I was not old enough to appreciate his many-sidedness. In him were combined many opposites. In spite of his hoary hair and beard, he was as young as the youngest of us, his venerable exterior serving only as a white mantle for keeping his youth perpetually fresh. Even the colossus of his erudition had not been able to do him any damage, for he was still a simple man. Towards the end of his life the incessant flow of his hearty laughter suffered no hindrances neither from the gravity of age, nor ill-health, nor domestic affliction, nor profundity of thought, nor variety of knowledge, all of which could not stop the flow of his cheerful laughter.

He had completely surrendered his life and family at the feet of the Divine and at the same time for the improvement of the country he was constantly engaged in planning all possible and impossible tasks that there is end to that. He had been a favourite student of Richardson and brought up in an atmosphere of the English schools, nevertheless he entered lovingly and devotedly into the realms of Bengali language and literature, pushing aside the obstacles of unfamiliarity due to his early English education. Though the meekest of a man, he was full of fire which flamed its fiercest in his patriotism, as though to burn to ashes the shortcomings and privation of his country. The two of his eye would light up in fire, heart enflamed, he would with great enthusiasm wave his hands and would sing chorus with us, without caring if his voice would be melodious or not,

...Thousand minds are bound in one single string,

Thousand lives are dedicated to one single aim.

There is no doubt that the memory of this god-loving, ever youthful, saintly life, radiant and sweet-smiling, unfazed by

death or disease must be cherished and protected as a national treasure.¹⁰

The personal qualities of Rishi Rajnarayan Bose namely, his devotion to and wisdom of God, his erudition, patriotism, nationalism, and other noble qualities have acquired greater fulfilment as they manifested in the self of Sri Aurobindo. While Rishi Rajnarayan was alive, he did not get much of the company of Sri Aurobindo, but the divine character and scholarship of his grandson did fill his heart to the brim. Sri Aurobindo loved and venerated his maternal grandfather. Although Sri Aurobindo had never entertained any special relations with his kith and kin and he hardly wrote anything about anyone of his family, he was pained at the demise of Rishi Rajnarayan. He made his reverential offerings towards him through a poem written in English:

Transiit, non Periit¹¹

(My grandfather, Rajnarayan Bose, died September 1899)

*Not in annihilation lost, nor given
To darkness art thou fled from us and light,
O strong and sentient spirit; no mere heaven
Of ancient joys, no silence eremite
Received thee; but the omnipresent thought
Of which thou wast a part and earthly hour,
Took back its gift. Into that splendour caught
Thou hast not lost thy special brightness.
Power remains with thee and the old genial force
Unseen for blinding light, not darkly lurks
As when a sacred river in its course
Dives into ocean, there its strength abides
Not less because with vastness wed and works
Unnoticed in the grandeur of the tides.*

(West Bengal has only recently taken the initiative in preserving the hallowed memory of Rishi Rajnarayan Bose in the village called

Boral, his ancestral paternal dwelling place, situated in the vicinity of Calcutta.)

2

CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION ABROAD

In 1879, when Sri Aurobindo was seven years old, Krishnadhan went to England to arrange for the education of his three children. Overly obsessed with anglicised culture, he did not give his children, even in matters of education, the least opportunity to become familiar with Indian culture. He sent his three sons to Loreto Convent in Darjeeling when they were very young (Aurobindo was only five years old then). As a consequence, Sri Aurobindo became “a non-resident in his own land” along with his two brothers.

In England, Krishnadhan placed his three sons with the Drewett family in Manchester. The two elder brothers began studying in the Grammar (primary) school of the city, but Sri Aurobindo was taught at home by the Drewett couple. Mr. Drewett was well-versed in Latin; hence, Sri Aurobindo in his very childhood got a good grounding in Latin from him.

After a few years, the Drewett couple migrated to Australia. Sri Aurobindo was sent to the famous Saint Paul’s School, London (1884). The headmaster of this school was an erudite scholar in Greek. He took it upon himself to teach Aurobindo Greek in the best possible manner. Sri Aurobindo was in Saint Paul’s school for five years. During the last three years he engaged himself in self-learning and finishing his school curriculum within a very short time. Thus, he plunged himself in the world of English and French literature and also started reading the history of Europe with utmost attention.

The stamp of his vast erudition on human civilisation, borne by some beautiful essays entitled “The Ideal of Human Unity” and “The Psychology of the Social Evolution” published in the *Arya* or the

vision of a wonderful creative world that we find from his various articles on art and literature, are the nectareous products of this profound self-learning. The “Europeanism” of Krishnadhan thus provided an opportunity for Sri Aurobindo’s life to attain perfection; as a matter of fact, from his very childhood he was acquainted deeply with Western civilisation and culture; the quintessence of the Western science and philosophy were also fully grasped. In later years, we find the wonderful synthesis of the Western knowledge and the Eastern wisdom in his writings on the life of man or on the mystery of the universe—in his book *The Life Divine*, the new Veda of our age. All this is the outcome of his close contact with the Western culture and civilisation. Also, due to his comprehensive and multi-faceted scholarship it was possible for Sri Aurobindo to realise and make the people of the world understand the boundary of the knowledge of the Occident, its causes of failure and the wealth of the Oriental wisdom.

Another thing that merits attention is that despite his vast erudition, Sri Aurobindo was never anxious for a career or success in life. The proof of this is his profound scholarship by self-learning, the object of which was to analyse everything in depth and not merely to succeed in the examinations. If we review the whole of Sri Aurobindo’s life, we will find that he never did anything for his own sake—his sight was always riveted as though to some distant goal attaining which, “all would drink in perpetuity with deep joy from the fountain of nectar”.^{[12](#)}

Sri Aurobindo won a scholarship of £80 for his mastery over Latin and Greek languages and joined King’s College, Cambridge University, after a period of five years (1889). There he met Oscar Browning (O.B.), the worthy son of the well-known English poet Robert Browning. He was charmed by the intelligence and the reasoning power of Sri Aurobindo.

The entire University was fascinated by his exceptional talent as, within a year, he bagged all the prizes offered by King’s College for writing poems in Greek and Latin.



Sri Aurobindo, eleven years old, at St. Paul's.

Who can give a detailed account about Sri Aurobindo's student life? And he is ever so silent about himself. Whatever else may happen under the sun, it can be said with certitude that Sri Aurobindo would never write a memoir. *The Life Divine* written by him is his true biography. The facts of his life are not important in that biography, its rhythm is the unfolding of the consciousness. However, one or two events have been recorded which shed some

light on his life and achievements. One of the events was the letter that Krishnadhan wrote to Jogendranath, his brother-in-law. This letter indicates that the young Aurobindo had written about himself to give some joy to his father.

Krishnadhan writes to Jogendranath, citing a few lines from the letter written by Sri Aurobindo. "I am writing to you, what Oscar Browning told him (Aurobindo) when they were at Tea at some professor's residence."

Last night I was invited to coffee with one of the Dons and in his rooms I met the great O.B., who is the figure par excellence of King's College. He was extremely flattering, passing from the subject of cotillions to that of scholarships; finally he said to me, "I suppose you know you passed an extremely high level examination. I have examined papers at thirteen examinations and I have never during that time (seen) such excellent papers as yours (he was referring to the scholarship examination of classical literature)...As for your essay, it was wonderful."

(Sri Aurobindo cites the contents of the essay.)

In this essay (a comparison between Shakespeare and Milton), I indulged in my Oriental tastes to the top of their bent, it overflowed with rich and tropical imagery, it abounded in antithesis and epigrams and it expressed my real feelings without restraint or reservation. I thought to myself that it was the best thing I have ever done; however if I had written this while in school this would have been criticised as fraught with exaggeration of words...

The celebrated O. B. asked me afterwards where I was living. When I answered the question about my room, Oscar Browning exclaimed, "That wretched hole!" and turning to Mahaffy (maybe, the hostel superintendent), added, "How rude we are to our scholars! We get great minds to come down here and then shut them up in that box! I suppose it is to keep their pride down."

This brief letter by young Aurobindo provides us with interesting information. The father sent his son to England in order to make him

a *pucca sahib*. But the son was brimming with Oriental ideas and thoughts at that tender age and winning unstinted praise from a renowned Western pundit. On the other hand, the father too was delighted as his son had shown the characteristics of the Oriental bent of mind.

We have further realised that in spite of being educated exclusively through the Western system of education, in spite of being brought up in a Western atmosphere, Sri Aurobindo developed the Indian within himself at the age of only sixteen or seventeen. He had acquainted himself with the culture of the East acquired mainly through self-study away from the public eye. The result of this scholarship was seen in the next two or three years of his life.

Right after entering the University of Cambridge, Sri Aurobindo appeared for the Indian Civil Service (ICS) examination (1892) and passed it with distinction. He stood first in Greek and Latin examinations and a *sahib* called Beachcroft was ranked second. By a queer turn of fate, Sri Aurobindo was put to trial by this Englishman in the famous *Alipore Bomb* case. Sri Aurobindo underwent a period of probation too for the ICS (in order perhaps to assure his father) but he willingly abstained from appearing for the horse riding (equestrian) examination.

If we look at Sri Aurobindo's life from the outside, we may presume that his was a life organised according to circumstances, but its inaccuracy is borne out by the fact that he did not accept the job of ICS. He did not even finish his studies at the university. Had he already realised by then that his life would be devoted to a greater mission? He maintains his silence about this. In his later life, time and again he cut off the ties of his family life in this manner. But never did he say anything to anybody about this matter.

Having rejected the offer to join the ICS, he continued his self-studies beyond the curriculum of the university, and by dint of his own efforts he learnt Italian, German and Spanish. He had learnt French earlier and within two years, instead of three, he passed the Part I of the Classical Tripos examination of the university. He did not appear for the Part II of the examination; he might have got his degree too if only he had made an application for it but he did not

care to do it either. Later, like the ICS, he unhesitatingly gave up the degree offered by the university.

His father Krishnadhan and other relatives were certainly disappointed at his refusal to accept the job in the Indian Civil Service. Besides, at that time, the remittances from his father became very irregular. As a result, Sri Aurobindo had to live without two square meals a day. Yet, disregarding the pangs of hunger, he used to lose himself in reading books at the library. Through his own scholarship and the curtailment of expenses, he somehow lived his life abroad.

After his return to India, he had to start looking for means to earn his livelihood. With the help of James Cotton, son of Sir Henry Cotton¹³, Sri Aurobindo obtained an introduction to HH Sayajirao Gaekwad¹⁴, the Maharaja of Baroda, and was appointed in the Baroda State Service. In February 1893, Sri Aurobindo left England and sailed back to India.

TAPASYA FOR KNOWLEDGE IN BARODA

Sri Aurobindo experienced immense peace and tranquillity the moment he set his foot on the soil of the port (Apollo Bunder) in Bombay (6 February 1893). Perhaps, he realised the greatness of his motherland. His relatives rejoiced at his return, though his affectionate father was not alive to see the return of his son from abroad. The kinsfolk and the acquaintances were surprised to see that Sri Aurobindo had not changed into an Englishman. The poet, Suresh Chandra Chakraborty, has thus written¹⁵:

A fresh Indian youth

Passing fourteen years in a country called Britain

Returned to the lap of Saraswati, the Indian Goddess of learning,

Adored with fragrant Juthika, Mallika and Shefali flowers In the courtyard bedecked with white rice-powered paintings sketched by gracious hands,

Embalmed with the aroma of incense sticks kindled by auspicious hands—

Aurobindo, young and fresh—not in the garb of Grandiflora—

Came back to the lake-water of Bengal like a full-bloom lotus,

Aurobindo, the Mother's child, came back to the bosom of the Mother—

Springing forth a joy resplendent rouge

And of enrapturing and mellifluous raga Iman-Kalyan played on Shehnai.

Just as Lord Rama who lived fourteen years in the forests before returning to his own kingdom, Sri Aurobindo, after living fourteen years abroad, came back to his motherland, settled in the well-known state of Baroda in western India, and plunged himself in the pursuit of liberating his own country from the shackles of bondage of foreign rule. Baroda is one of the principal centres of Gujarati culture. One can experience a wonderful feeling of peace in this city despite the fact that it is situated so near the hustle and bustle of Ahmedabad and also Bombay. The wide open fields around the city, a solitary hillock nearby, a few decorated palaces of the Maharaja in the midst of the city and the grand public roads bordered with shady trees—all contribute to create here a dreamy atmosphere. Next to the railway station is the college where Sri Aurobindo taught for about twelve years. He lived, I suppose, in a place not very far from the college.¹⁶ The place is quite secluded.

A large memorial statue of the late Maharaja Sayajirao has been erected near this college. Around this are the sprawling lawns; everything looks so beautiful in the evening! The statue reminds us effectively of the great achievements of the successful king. The latter had profound love and respect for Sri Aurobindo. When Sri Aurobindo left Baroda and came to Bengal—towards his next field of activity—some emissaries of the Maharaja came to Calcutta and stayed tenaciously at his door for a few days with a view to persuading him to return to Baroda.

Sri Aurobindo continued his *tapasya* for knowledge, his literary works, and political planning in this pleasant ambience. Thanks to his sojourn of fourteen years in England, he collected priceless treasures from the ocean of knowledge of the West; in Baroda, he remained immersed for over a decade in the eternal and infinite ocean of Eastern knowledge. Yes, it was indeed a *tapasya* and his seeking here was as intense and untiring as pursued in England. Let us briefly discuss the characteristics of this pursuit of knowledge and the atmosphere of the age.

When Sri Aurobindo was studying in England, half of the Victorian age had already passed. The scattered wavelets of the French

Revolution had spread in various countries of Europe. The Industrial Revolution was bearing fruit, science was taking refuge in the materialistic ideology, philosophy was becoming proud of certitude and the general public was under the intoxicating spell of individual freedom and democracy. In literature, the impulse towards the unknown, the inspiration for new creation was evaporating, the romantic obsession of the literary creators with man and universe was gradually diminishing. As a consequence, the English poets of the age such as Tennyson, Browning, and others, were all moralists. Although there was at that time a certain amount of attachment towards the renowned poets like Shelley, Keats, and others of that era, yet in literature, the influence of novels was on the rise compared to that of poetry.

In spite of the fact that Sri Aurobindo lived for fourteen years in such an atmosphere, he did not accept the *zeitgeist* (the spirit of the age). His discerning intelligence analysing all these political, social, moral, and literary movements came to this conclusion that this was not the path of *shreyah* (the supreme good), the path of perfection, and completeness. It was nothing but a mode of manifestation of the changing age.

As Sri Aurobindo deeply realised this truth, he did not get enchanted by the illusory charm of the West; he turned towards eternal India and delved deep in Indian culture seeking reality and truth. It is therefore absolutely wrong on our part to think that he was studying so much just to acquire profound scholarship or that he got immersed in literature just to enjoy the *rasa* of it.

However, in our country too, the infatuation towards the Western culture began to wane at that time. A large section of our country's eminent personalities considered for a certain period of time this blind imitation of the West as the best means of attaining salvation. But against this demeaning mentality stood people like Raja Rammohan, Maharshi Debendranath, Rishi Rajnarayan and, above all, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda. A new age in literature was ushered in by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay, Nobinchandra Sen, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, and

Rabindranath Tagore. The essential fact is that during this era the spirit of revolution was incarnated, which, in later years, spread in all fields of life. In the field of politics, the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885, and political heavyweights like Surendra Nath Bannerjee, Dadabhai Naoroji, and Gopal Krishna Gokhale got engaged in awakening the masses.

Averse to self-publicity, Sri Aurobindo, then living in Baroda away from public view, continued observing with unswerving sincerity these developments unfurling over the entire country and at the same time searching for a path to attain the *shreyah* (the supreme good)—not for himself, not even for the country but for mankind as a whole. We see subsequently the results it brings forth in the next twelve or thirteen years.

In the State of Baroda, Sri Aurobindo was at first appointed as a probationer in the Settlement Department; thereafter, he worked for some time in the Stamp and Revenue Department and then again in the Secretary's Office. The Maharaja realised in no time that the best job for Sri Aurobindo was teaching; he was therefore appointed teacher of French in Baroda College. Later, he became Professor of English and finally because of his extraordinary competence he was promoted to the post of Vice-Principal. The Principal of the college was an Englishman. Everyone without exception had a profound respect for Sri Aurobindo's erudition and divine character. It has now been revealed after quite a long time what opinion this English principal had of Sri Aurobindo.

In 1949, C.R. Reddy, the then Vice-chancellor of the University of Andhra, paid rich tributes to Sri Aurobindo while conferring on him "Sir Kattamanchi Ramalinga National Award" on behalf of the University. In his address, while showering praise on Sri Aurobindo, he mentioned what the English Principal had said to him about Sri Aurobindo. The Principal A.B. Clarke told him,

"So you have seen Aurobindo Ghose. Did you observe his two eyes? They contain as though a mystic fire and a light. They are as if penetrating the higher domain far above this material world."¹⁷

He also added, “If Jeanne d’Arc could hear divine voices, Sri Aurobindo probably sees heavenly visions.”

The Maharaja too was a genuine admirer of Sri Aurobindo’s qualities and, apart from the royal service, there was a warm personal relationship between the two. To cite, once the Maharaja had asked Sri Aurobindo to explain to him some finer points of the English grammar. Dinendra Kumar Roy¹⁸ has written in his book *Aurobindo Prasanga* (About Aurobindo) that whenever the Maharaja needed to write something in good English, he would send for Sri Aurobindo. Sometimes the Maharaja would ask Sri Aurobindo to visit places outside the state in order to perform some important administrative work. Thus, Sri Aurobindo was once sent to Ootacamund, a hill station of the State of Madras (now Tamil Nadu). On another occasion, he was with the Maharaja at Nainital, the hill station of the United Provinces (now Uttarakhand). Further, he had accompanied the Maharaja as his private secretary at the time of the Kashmir tour. The Maharaja had a good understanding of the temperament of the independent-minded Sri Aurobindo. Therefore, he finally stopped calling him to his royal court and Sri Aurobindo remained absorbed in his studies and teaching.

In his book, Dinendra Kumar has painted a pleasant picture of Sri Aurobindo’s devoted love for knowledge. He has written:

I have never seen such wonderful devotion for studies... seldom did Sri Aurobindo receive his books through *Book Post*. They used to arrive in huge packing cases through Railway parcels; such parcels would come even more than once in a month. Sri Aurobindo would finish reading all those tomes in a week or ten days. Order for new books would again be placed.

Dinendra Kumar, citing various inconveniences faced by Sri Aurobindo in his house in Baroda, writes:

There was no hesitation or objection from Sri Aurobindo to live in such a dingy house. He lived for a long time unperturbed in that dilapidated house. Sri Aurobindo, ignoring the unbearable mosquito bites, sitting on a chair by his study table till one in the morning in the light of a jewel lamp, would pursue literary

studies. I would see him deeply absorbed in a book, sitting in the same place for hours—like a saint lost in his yoga meditation unaware of the external presence. Perhaps, he would not have become aware even if the room caught fire.

In Baroda, Sri Aurobindo studied more, particularly Indian literature, scriptures, yoga, and philosophy. He acquired great mastery in Sanskrit with his own efforts and he learnt quite well a few other Indian languages like Gujarati, Marathi, and Bengali. He learnt Bengali very well all by himself. He took a bit of a help from Dinendra Kumar who made him conversant in spoken Bengali. We get a taste of his brilliant mastery of the Bengali language in the pages of his books, namely, *Karakahini* (Tales of Prison life), *Jagannather Rath* (The Chariot of Jagannath) and of the weekly, *Dharma*. In later years, Sri Aurobindo did not write much in Bengali that is worthy of special mention; the need for his message to be heard by the world at large might be the motive. Out of all the languages, it is English that most of the people of the world understand. His well-versed and competent disciples have explained his yoga and philosophy in many other languages like Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, French, German, Italian, Russian, etc. Sri Aurobindo's deep love for Indian languages has been revealed in many of his writings. We come to know from an article written by Suresh Chandra Chakraborty that Sri Aurobindo was learning Tamil before he came to Pondicherry. Certain essays published in the *Arya* bear proof that Sri Aurobindo was familiar with Tamil literature, culture, and religious books.¹⁹

This intense *tapasya* for knowledge in Baroda resulted in awakening in the self of Sri Aurobindo the fount of integral knowledge. The crimson glow of this dawn of knowledge brightened up the firmament of Bengal, the *Swadeshi* era, and its radiance spread all over India. Today, this sun of knowledge is resplendent in the noon-day sky of the world like the midday *mantra* of *Gayatri*. The people of our country first got a glimpse of his wonderful knowledge in the newspaper *Bande Mataram*, in magazines like *Karmayogin*

and *Dharma*, and a greater splendour burst forth in the pages of *Arya*.

Baroda is also the seat of the greater literary pursuit of Sri Aurobindo, the pursuit that began with the dawning of his knowledge. We got some taste of the nectar of his literary creation in Baroda and in Bengal during the period of *Swadeshi* Movement, but the literary *elixir that can be drunk perpetually*²⁰ came to us after his migration to Pondicherry. We see in his works that the creation of poetry and lyrics came first and finally the culmination of an epic—*Savitri*. The initial composition of *Savitri*, the epic poem, had started in Baroda.

BARODA: AWAKENING OF THE MOTHERLAND

In November 1948, an excellent booklet²¹ on Sri Aurobindo and his ashram was published in Pondicherry. Some invaluable information hitherto unknown about Sri Aurobindo's early life in England and his life in Baroda can be found in this booklet. Sri Aurobindo was sent to England at the age of seven. Even before he was eleven years old, he had already received strongly the impression that there would be a great revolutionary upsurge in this world in the near future. An unprecedented change would take place, a change which could be termed as a world revolution and in this great change he would have to play an important role. Impelled by this ideal, he steered his educational pursuits.

Those who have a modicum of acquaintance with the articles published in the *Arya* from 1914 to 1921 would surely realise the vast and profound vision of Sri Aurobindo. Most of these articles have now been incorporated in books and hence they have now become easily available. Out of these writings, if one reads *The Life Divine* (or as the author calls it, the *Veda* of the New Age), one is bound to come across a vision so uncommon, a vision which is not just a splendour of knowledge but a direct vision of the *purusha puranam* (पुरुषःपुराणम्), the "inscrutable supreme person". There are instances of this unique angle of Sri Aurobindo's vision being present since his boyhood days.

It is for this vision that Sri Aurobindo dedicated his life to the service of his country without the knowledge of all and sundry, despite the fact that he did not get the touch of his motherland in his early age and was abroad for a long time. His father, Dr.

Krishnadhan Ghose, in spite of his anglomania, was not a sycophant of the British government in India. He used to send letters from time to time to his son criticising vehemently the machine-like process and the heartlessness of the British administration in India. At that time, the British used to ill-treat the Indians, and Krishnadhan used to send to his son clippings from Indian newspaper reports on the abuse. It is, therefore, no wonder that the son turned a patriot and a critic of the British rule at such a tender age and understood that a firm resolve coupled with untiring endeavour was necessary in order to drive the British away from India.

Because of his patriotism, Sri Aurobindo had to indirectly face the ire of the British with regard to competing for the Indian Civil Service (ICS) examination. Sri Aurobindo intentionally abstained from appearing for the last equestrian examination and he did not learn horse riding willingly. He was therefore not considered for the ICS. Sri Aurobindo's was perhaps the singular instance of a candidate not getting an ICS appointment for failing to appear for the equestrian test. In certain similar cases, the trainee candidate in ICS, in spite of failing to clear a particular examination in England, got another opportunity while in India for clearing the said examination. But in the case of Sri Aurobindo, the British heaved a sigh of relief, striking off his name on this trivial pretext. The reason was his patriotism. However, we have already said that Sri Aurobindo abandoned such a highly cherished job for serving his country.²²

Even while he was in England, Sri Aurobindo started giving some overt signs of helping the cause of his country's freedom. He was one of the members of the Indian Majlis founded at Cambridge and was its secretary for some time. He delivered a few speeches breathing revolutionary spirit as a member of the society. The authorities in England were not unaware of them.

Later, Sri Aurobindo came to know that the British Raj heaved a sigh of relief that he had been debarred from the prestigious circle of ICS. Apart from the speeches, Sri Aurobindo, with the help of his two brothers, organised a revolutionary *Sangh* (Association) of the Indian population living in England.

They opposed the moderate policies of veteran Dadabhai Naoroji, one of the leaders of the Indian National Congress. Naoroji then had substantial influence in England and was once elected Member of Parliament, just as in a later era, an extremist Parsi gentleman, Shapoorji Saklatwala, was elected to the British Parliament. Sometime before leaving England, Sri Aurobindo attended a secret meeting of Indians and there he founded a secret society called Lotus and Dagger. However, this society did not show much activity as there was only one meeting and that happened to be the last. However, all the members present at the foundation day took an oath that every one of them would take up a particular line of work causing a hindrance to the foreign rule in India. A few kept their promise and Sri Aurobindo was one of them. We will see, in the latter part of his life in Baroda, how he kept his promise.

The period that Sri Aurobindo sojourned in England represents a special political phase in the history of England. It was during this period that Gladstone²³ received accolades from the entire world thanks to his liberal policies. This period witnessed an increasing empowerment of the people in the governance of the state; a large percentage of people secured the right to vote. Thus, the power of the king dwindled significantly while the Parliament became supreme. The freedom movement of Ireland took a new form. The name of Parnell²⁴ spread far and wide. The government became conscious of the rights of the people. Efforts were on for uplifting the condition of the labourers. When Sri Aurobindo was in England, Karl Marx passed away. It was because of the Marxist movement that the condition of the labourers in almost all the countries in the West started changing.

On the other hand, the British felt that wars and conflicts were meaningless and that the wisest thing was to establish peace amongst nations. Some glimpses of the ideals of human unity and world peace are found in the poems of Alfred Tennyson, the royal poet. "War drums will no more be heard, the standard of battlefield will be hoisted on the parliament of humanity which will unite the nations of the world"²⁵—this was the dream of Tennyson. By the

term “the unity of the nations” the West meant the unity of Europe alone because America was then indifferent to the affairs of Europe. Besides, the best nation of Europe was considered to be England—as it was said, *the sun never set on the British Empire*. The principal aim of the European nations was to enjoy the best of the whole world within their respective boundaries and it was their firm belief that the white nations alone were the best among all the nations.

Sri Aurobindo would meticulously review, reflect, and realise the situation of England and that of the whole world; he would stretch his vision towards the future too. But enshrined in his heart’s core was his own country, India. His thoughts and feelings were solely focused on the condition of India against the backdrop of the world and shaping of the future of India. He had this belief ingrained in him that without the freedom of India there was no possibility of establishment of the Self of India and once India’s Self was established, the whole world would undergo a profound change. Only India could give the key to the mystery of the eternal foundation of the ideal of human unity. And that is the true spirituality of India.

It was for this reason that Sri Aurobindo, after his return to India, plunged himself into spiritual pursuits in the serene surroundings of Baroda. The aim of this endeavour was not self-liberation—his sole aim was to awaken the Motherland. But how would it materialise in the prevailing conditions?

India, at that time, was completely in the clutches of the British. The last attempt to drive away the foreigners was made about forty years earlier (The Sepoy Mutiny, 1857) and thereafter the entire country remained downcast and depressed. On the establishment of the Indian National Congress, the political torpor had been removed to some extent but its influence was limited to a very small section of the people of the country. The life of the nation was not awakened; the sole preoccupation of quiet, serene, and ascetic Sri Aurobindo was how to awaken the country. At first he looked for political means. Thereafter, he sought to acquire the skill in yoga. After all, yoga itself is the shrouded skill of action.

Right after coming to Baroda, Sri Aurobindo wrote a series of essays in the *Indu Prakash*, an English weekly published in

Bombay.²⁶ Some of them were political in nature while the others were critical analyses. The publication of these essays started on 7 August 1893 and continued till the March issue of the following year. The editor of this weekly was Mr. K.G. Deshpande, his friend from his Cambridge days.

These political essays reflect Sri Aurobindo's exemplary love for his country and the inner fire embedded in his tender heart—the fire that after a few years became manifest in the fiery articles published in the *Bande Mataram*. There he started denouncing the policies of the Congress Party. This is because the Congress was then an institution of a handful of people. It did not turn into a national institution; it failed to awaken the nation and as a consequence, it did not find a place in the heart of the nation. It is surprising that Sri Aurobindo who had just come back from England could not tolerate the anglomania of the Congress; he wanted to turn the party into a totally nationalistic institution. It is to be remembered that this happened in 1893; twelve years later, that is to say, much later, on the occasion of the partition of Bengal, came the national awakening. In such a distant past, what a scathing article was penned by a young man who was then merely twenty-one years old:

Our actual enemy is not any force exterior to ourselves, but our own crying weaknesses, our cowardice, our selfishness, our hypocrisy, our purblind sentimentalism. ... (Therefore) our appeal, which is the appeal of every noble spirited and self-respecting nation, ought not to be to the opinion of the Anglo-Indians, no, nor yet to the British sense of justice, but our appeal is to our reviving sense of manhood, to our own sincere fellow-feeling— and this sympathy and fellow-feeling are towards the silent and suffering people of India.

Just a few years later, he expressed this feeling beautifully in Bengali in one of his letters to his wife Mrinalini Devi²⁷:

I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race; not physical strength, I am not going to fight with a sword or a gun, but with the power of knowledge. The force of the *Kshatriya* is not the only force; there is also the *Brahman force*, which is founded on

the basis of knowledge. This is not a new feeling in me, not of recent origin, I was born with it, and it is in my very essence. God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission. At the age of fourteen the seed of it had begun to sprout and at eighteen it had been firmly rooted and become unshakeable.²⁸

As the country woke up after a lapse of twelve years, it woke up with this very ideal of self-fulfilment. Are we not feeling even today the need for manliness in our independent India? In another essay, criticising the policies of the Congress, Sri Aurobindo remarked that the Congress was not yet an institution of the masses, that the leaders of the party were worshipping fake political gods (created particularly by the British) and that the Indian patriots had more to learn from the French than from the British regarding the means of organising the nation. To put it in other words, Sri Aurobindo was hinting at the fact that we would become self-established should we channelise our national endeavour to awaken the masses and thereby, it would be possible to attain national fulfilment. Needless to say that in this very life we saw these means leading the country to independence.

These political essays of Sri Aurobindo were brought out under the caption *New Lamps for Old*. Apart from reviewing the then policies of the Congress, he dealt at length with the weaknesses of the national character and the decrepitude of the nation. It is really a wonder that he, at that tender age, had such an exemplary analytical power. While discussing the imperfections of the educated Bengali youth, he lambasted the existing educational system. He also made some caustic comments on the imperfections in the character and education of the administrators of the ICS cadres.

Amongst his critical essays, his analysis of the genius of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya is particularly special. Entering into the realm of Bengali literature, Sri Aurobindo was particularly drawn to the personality of Bankim. In later years, he hailed Bankim as a *rishi* (seer). His well-known essays in English on Bankim have really made the latter immortal. Is it that Sri Aurobindo knew even at that time that the *mantra* of “Bande Mataram” would awaken the country

within a few years or that at some auspicious moment, without the instruction of anyone in particular, the whole nation would accept this life-giving *mantra*? It was Sri Aurobindo and his followers who tried to give, in reality, a concrete shape to the *Ananda Math* by Bankim. An attempt was also made once to establish a *Bhabani Math* on the lines similar to *Ananda Math*. These political essays of Sri Aurobindo alarmed the moderate leaders of the Congress Party (how many people can tolerate true criticism?) and a certain leader of the party warned Mr. K.G. Deshpande, the editor of the *Indu Prakash*, that he would be in trouble if he continued to bring out articles of this genre. As a consequence, Sri Aurobindo discontinued writing for the *Indu Prakash*; he was thus prevented from developing his ideas in the weekly. In the book *Karakahini* (Tales of Prison life), it has been stated somewhere that Ranade, the high-minded, well-known leader of the Congress, and a social reformer, once met Sri Aurobindo and exhorted him to refrain from meddling in politics and instead write constructive essays on prison reforms etc.

Thus, Sri Aurobindo stopped publishing his articles for the public. Perhaps he felt that the appropriate moment had not come yet. Hence, on one hand he took a plunge into the study of Indian literature, philosophy etc., and on the other, launched the ground work for revolution, founding secret societies. However, the second activity commenced towards the end of his life in Baroda. He learnt Sanskrit all by himself and read the Vedas, the Upanishads, and other philosophical works; he perused deeply the poetical genius of ancient poets like Kalidas, etc. and he started writing poems as well.

At about the same time, he was slowly leaning towards yogic *sadhana* too. In the beginning of his stay in Baroda, Mr. Deshpande, his friend from Cambridge days, told him about the benefits of yoga, but Sri Aurobindo initially did not evince any particular interest in it. However, within a few years, as he finished reading books on Sri Ramakrishna, the works of Swami Vivekananda as well as the Upanishads and various other books on Indian culture, he started feeling an inspiration for spiritual *sadhana*. However, it may be mentioned that even while he was in England he used to have inner experiences and, returning to India, he found manifold increase of

his inner experiences. Having felt the inspiration for doing *sadhana*, for a certain period of time he looked for a competent guru, but to tell the truth, he did not really have a guru. He got a glimpse of Swami Brahmananda (who was the guru of Swami Balananda of Deogarh) at a place called Ranganath on the banks of the river Narmada and thereafter he learnt some yogic disciplines from a Maharashtrian yogi called Lele Maharaj. But all this was merely a pretext; he had begun to advance on the path of yoga through numerous difficulties towards the *Light of Brahman* burning in his heart.

While in Baroda, Sri Aurobindo married Mrinalini Devi, the daughter of Mr. Bhupal Chandra Bose. She was a worthy lifepartner²⁹ to Sri Aurobindo. How beautifully Sri Aurobindo called her to join the mission of his life: “Will you then try to become the mad wife to match the mad husband, like the queen of the blind king (in Mahabharata) covering her eyes with a piece of cloth and living as a blind person?” And he put forth to her this wonderful individuality of Mother India by saying, “Whereas others regard the country as an inert piece of matter and know it as the plains, the fields, the forests, the mountains, and the rivers, I know my country as the Mother, I worship her and adore her accordingly.”

FIRE OF REVOLUTION

We now embark on understanding an episode that represents a secret chapter of India's struggle for independence. Only Sri Aurobindo and a few of his devoted followers can enlighten us about it, but most of them are no more. There are a few people who have a little knowledge of this period while others have erroneous ideas. Even one of those who was accused along with Sri Aurobindo in the *Alipore Bomb* case had given a wrong or a distorted account of this period and the analysis he has made of Sri Aurobindo's political purpose is ludicrous.

It is gratifying to note that after India's independence the ashram in Pondicherry published an English booklet incorporating some precious materials on Sri Aurobindo. With this publication, that unknown chapter of the history of India's struggle for independence has come to light. The facts presented here about Sri Aurobindo's political beliefs are based on this booklet.

It is now as clear as daylight that Sri Aurobindo returned to India with no mission other than to liberate this country from the British yoke. The seven political essays published in the *Indu Prakash* are the first proof of it. A few years after this publication, Sri Aurobindo chalked out a plan of action for the freedom movement of the country and he himself plunged headlong in this movement. He thought of a three-pronged strategy for the struggle for freedom.

On one hand, revolutionary ideals have to spread through the establishment of secret societies; the nation has to be made valiant and prepared for an armed uprising. On the other hand, the entire nation has to be awakened through public propaganda, that is,

through writings in the newspapers and through public speeches. In those days, the vast majority of Indians regarded the ideal of complete independence as nothing more than sheer madness, a chimera.

The third approach was to organise people who would boldly carry on a public and united opposition to the government and undermine the very base of the foreign rule through noncooperation and passive resistance.

Although the earth trembled at that time at the might of the British Empire, Sri Aurobindo did not consider the violent revolutionary movement as insanity. While in England, he witnessed how a tiny Irish nation troubled the formidable British power. Even at that time, the mode of fighting was conventional, and with rifles and guerrilla warfare alone one could rattle a superpower.³⁰ Over and above this, if one could involve the Indian army in this revolutionary movement! The Sepoy Mutiny (1857) did take place once in this land of ours, the memories of which are ever fresh in the minds of the Indians!

The *Kshatriya spirit* (spirit of a warrior) was then abysmally dim amongst the young Bengalis. The educated and the dandy Bengali used to be tagged as “babu” and despite his/ her intellectual exploits in various fields, India almost forgot his/her physical power. The Bengalis had no place in the army thanks to the policy of the British. Colonel Suresh Biswas³¹ could show his valour only because he settled in the far off country of Brazil.

Sri Aurobindo arranged for the military training of a spirited young man, Jatindra Nath Banerjee, in the infantry division of the Baroda army with the help of his close friend Lt. Madhavrao Jadhav and thereafter dispatched him to Bengal in order to organise secret resistance groups.

Sri Aurobindo himself taught Jatindra Nath Banerjee the *modus operandi* that included conducting revolutionary propaganda through the establishment of numerous secret groups and associations, wooing the youth to join these groups and drawing support and sympathy from the wealthy people. The youth in particular were

encouraged to do physical exercises, participate in parades, and undergo martial training.

At that time in Bengal there was a great patriotic soul in Barrister P. Mitra. He took active interest in this movement. The groups organised by him acquired remarkable skills in wielding sticks (*lathi* play). Late Sarala Devi also was very enthusiastic in this regard. Much later, she introduced the *Veerashtami Vrata* (a religious vow) in Bengal. Thanks to her endeavour, the youth of Bengal embraced with zeal the spirit of warriors. The influence of Swami Vivekananda made the moral field of Bengal fertile, and now it was as though the seeds were sown upon this fertile land.³²

Around the same time, a secret society was established in the western part of India too. Sri Aurobindo contacted a member of this society who introduced him to its advisory committee. Sri Aurobindo became a member of this society just as, while in England, he had become a member of the Lotus and Dagger Society. Thereafter, he discussed this society with P. Mitra, the barrister in Bengal, and other leading revolutionaries. They too took oath in this society and agreed to work on the lines suggested by Sri Aurobindo. However, contrary to the ideals of Sri Aurobindo, these secret societies were not working in unison, but the indomitable zeal and the indefatigable assiduity of these societies infused a new life in this country. During his annual vacations, Sri Aurobindo used to stay in Calcutta for long durations and thus worked for awakening the soul of this nation. The centre of action, however, was still in Baroda. During this time, Barindra Kumar, the younger brother of Sri Aurobindo, visited Baroda (he had abandoned his studies) and took initiation from his elder brother in the noble mission of serving the motherland.

Meanwhile, a meeting took place between Lokmanya Tilak and Sri Aurobindo. Lokmanya previously had suffered imprisonment and became well-known in the country. Sri Aurobindo discovered in Lokmanya an extraordinary revolutionary leader. He discussed the situation of the country with Tilak at the Ahmedabad Congress. There, Tilak took him out of the *pandal* and talked to him for about an hour. He expressed his contempt for the Reformist Movement of

the Congress and explained his own line of action in Maharashtra. This was the beginning of a deep friendship³³ between these two great patriots³⁴ in the field of politics. It is for this reason that, during the *Swadeshi* Movement, Bengal and Maharashtra were fired up with the ideals of complete independence. A few years later, Lokmanya endured six years' rigorous imprisonment because of his writings on the Muzaffarpur bombing. When the trial proceedings were going on for Lokmanya, Sri Aurobindo too was in prison as an undertrial.

A significant juncture in the national life dawned before long. It was as if at the invocation of Sri Aurobindo that Mother India was awakened. The nation dreamt of a new vision. The hopes and aspirations of the nineteenth century were fulfilled at the very beginning of the twentieth century. The auspicious hour came through the Partition of Bengal Movement. Even in this movement Sri Aurobindo wanted to carry on his work from behind the scenes, but it was the government's action of prosecuting him as the editor of the *Bande Mataram* that forced him into public view and made him known to the entire country in a single day. Rabindranath Tagore, the national poet of Bengal, made an emotional invocation to him:

"Rabindranath, O Aurobindo, bows to thee!"

With the arrival of Sri Aurobindo in the political arena the revolutionary movement started flowing, along the three directions. The ideal of complete independence was getting propagated publicly, secret societies made this dormant nation buoyant with life longing for valour and vigour; the national movement aimed at awakening the nation against the tyranny of the British rule and establishing her position securely through nationalism. It is with these objectives in view that the Nationalist Party was created and it is this party that endeavoured to influence the National Congress in multifarious ways. In later years, the National Congress embraced the ideals of the Nationalist Party and led the freedom movement to success.

The role Sri Aurobindo played publicly in politics was brief, three or three and a half years at the most, one year of which he was

confined to prison. But during this brief period, he influenced this nation with his political and spiritual ideals in a manner such that a new life got infused into the body of the nation.

BANDE MATARAM

This chapter recounts an episode of our national history that can be referred to as the “golden age” of India. In course of time, an account will perhaps be written about this episode. Exactly fifty years after 1857 (the year marked as Mutiny or first wave of Freedom Movement) came the revolutionary juncture in 1907 and again, forty years after it, India became free in 1947. It may, however, be said that this phase began in 1905 because in that year Bengal was partitioned by a British decree and as a protest reaction to this, the national movement commenced. In the following year, i.e. in 1906, the *Swadeshi* Movement took a concrete shape, but the ideal of complete independence became manifest in the year that followed, that is, in 1907.

It seems that the glorious account of the hallowed martyrs who appeared in this era is getting obliterated these days from the national memory. It is hoped that one day a compatriot will write a befitting history of the noble deeds of these martyrs. Sri Aurobindo whose sanctified life is the subject matter of this book was in the forefront of these venerable people. Therefore, his achievements will indirectly proclaim theirs as well.

It has been stated in the previous chapter that Sri Aurobindo had special contacts with Bengal and Maharashtra even while he was living in Baroda. He became very active in organisational work in Bengal even before the partition of Bengal. Right after the start of the Partition Movement his activities intensified greatly. In 1906, he took a long leave without pay from his service in Baroda and completely dedicated himself to political work. The public became aware of his

mission when he took up the directorship (Principal) of the National Education Council, and it was then that he resigned openly from his Baroda service.

It is not possible to follow the course of the multifarious activities Sri Aurobindo undertook particularly during the period from 1904 to 1907 or to give an accurate account thereof. It may be said on the whole that even before entering the field of politics he not only formulated the fundamental principles of the Nationalist Party but also meticulously fixed its mode of action. Immediately after his arrival in Bengal, he started working with the leaders and the workers, who were inspired by its great ideals. Work was initiated for creating secret societies and also openly organising a political party and spreading the nationalist ideology. In order to orchestrate these activities, he travelled to various places in Bengal with Bipin Chandra Pal. For the spread of his ideals, he started writing in the newspaper *Bande Mataram* established by Bipin Chandra. Besides, when he accepted the post of Principal (of the National Education Council), he took the initiative to propagate the ideal of national education and to establish a national institution.

In the midst of the great turmoil that engulfed the entire nation because of the partition of Bengal, Sri Aurobindo, in that nationwide passion, engaged himself to prepare the ground for an armed revolution. Barindra Kumar Ghose, his younger brother, was particularly enthusiastic in this endeavour. It is on his request that Sri Aurobindo consented to launch *Jugantar*, a revolutionary daily of that fiery era. It is known to one and all that the ideals of this newspaper were to propagate publicly the ideals of revolution, to reject completely the British rule and to give some clue about the art of guerrilla warfare. Sri Aurobindo himself wrote a few articles at the beginning. Though its general direction was in his hands, Barindra Kumar and Upendra Nath Bandyopadhyay topped amongst its numerous fire-brand writers. When *Jugantar* was charged with seditious writings, it was on the advice of Sri Aurobindo that Bhupendra Nath Dutta, brother of Swami Vivekananda, refused to stand up for his own defence in the British court. *Sandhya*, a

newspaper edited by Brahmabandhav Upadhyay, later cooperated with the *Jugantar*.

It is necessary to mention here that terrorism was never the basic ideal of these secret societies established under the guidance of Sri Aurobindo, except to prepare for an armed uprising. Sri Aurobindo realised early on that without the support of the people the revolution would not succeed. It is for this reason that he wanted to turn the National Congress from a bourgeois or middle-class institution to an institution of the masses. In the articles published in the *Indu Prakash* in 1893–94, he propagated this very ideal. Later, however, the revolutionaries followed the path of terrorism as retaliation because the masses found the torturous repressive policy of the British just unbearable. The demolition of the oppressors becomes, in most cases, the highest faith of man—the history of mankind has vindicated this truth time and again.

On the other front, Sri Aurobindo, through his articles in the English daily *Bande Mataram*, used to propagate the ideals of nationalism, of complete independence, of national education and of national organisation. He used to write also on the course of action needed for the mass movement, for example, *swadeshi*, passive resistance etc. and criticise the British rule and the British character. In other words, Sri Aurobindo was developing a double-pronged weapon for the freedom of the motherland from foreign rule; on one hand, strength in one's arms, that is, armed revolution, and on the other, force of mass organisation.

In order to achieve the second objective, he felt an immediate need to transform the Congress Party into a national institution. It was his belief, right after his return from England, that the policy of solicitation followed by the Congress could not awaken the nation; the ideal of independence was needed for this. His purpose was on the one hand, propagating the ideal of independence through his writings and discourses, and also on the other, preparing the country for the struggle for independence equipped with the collective force. The Congress party, however, acquired at that time the fame of being a national institution. The great erudite personalities like Surendra Nath (Banerjee), and numerous orators and patriots of

renown were then its leaders. But the British had understood that the Congress would not be able to go far. A certain viceroy ridiculed the Congress saying that it was an institution of a handful of people.

Sri Aurobindo had the conviction that if the Nationalist Party could take control of the Congress Party, then the latter would be turned into a real national institution and it would be able to lead the country in its struggle for freedom. He also had a more profound goal which was to gradually create a national state within the framework of the British rule (state within state) and to totally enfeeble the British rule through increasing non-cooperation with the British administration. Sri Aurobindo decided that if the Nationalist Party failed to seize the Congress Party, then a Central Revolutionary *Sangh* (Association) would be formed. [35](#)

In order to work in conformity with this revolutionary ideal, the youth of Bengal had already readied itself to a large extent. Another illustrious propounder of this ideal was Sakham Ganesh Deuskar. Sakham was a Maharashtrian by birth but a complete Bengali at heart. He could write very well in Bengali and he used to edit *Hitabadi*, a Bengali weekly. His book *Desher Katha* (The Story of the Country) galvanised the revolutionary idealism in Bengal. *Desher Katha* brought to light unsparingly the adverse effects of the British rule by publishing various factual data in very simple language. Needless to say, this book was proscribed in no time under the British law. It was Sakham Deuskar who first used the word *Swaraj* meaning complete independence. It touched the hearts of the countrymen and attracted the mind in such a manner that, in 1906, Dadabhai Naoroji, the president of the Calcutta Congress, publicly declared *Swaraj* as the ideal of India. However, Dadabhai took the word *Swaraj* in the sense of colonial *Swaraj*, just as in 1919, the Duke of Connaught used this word on the occasion of granting self-rule merely as a superficial gesture. The ideal of the moderates was colonial self-rule; that is why they were in seventh heaven having earned “British-style” *Swaraj* and revelled in a partial Indian representation.

Bengal felt the necessity of the ideals of *Swaraj* especially after reading Sakharam's book.³⁶ The spread of the *swadeshi* ideals and making the people aware of the need of freedom from foreign economic grip were also included in the agenda of Sri Aurobindo's political actions. As a matter of fact, he too awakened his countrymen comprehensively with the mantra of *swadeshi* through his writings in the *Bande Mataram*. On 7 August 1906, the *Swadeshi* Movement was launched in Bengal. The field had been prepared in such a manner that the whole of Bengal joined this movement as though by force of a *mantra*. As a result of this movement, various *swadeshi* industries were set up in different regions of India and the affluent community came forward to establish *swadeshi* factories.³⁷

Bande Mataram, the English daily, occupies a prominent place in the history of this era. This fact has not been forgotten completely by many people even today. This age can be termed as the era of *Bande Mataram*. In an auspicious moment, as though through some invisible one's inspiration, the whole nation accepted the *mantra* of "Bande Mataram"! How all of a sudden, thousands of voices started chanting "Bande Mataram" has been narrated by Surendra Nath in his autobiography. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya dreamt of this revolution in *Ananda Math* and the divine *mantra* he gave us reverberated as if miraculously through the voice of the nation. Shri Bipin Chandra Pal founded the *Bande Mataram*, a daily in English, as the principal organ of national awakening. Bipin Chandra's enthusiasm was inexhaustible but he lacked financial resources. He brought out the English daily with a capital of five hundred rupees only. When he asked for Sri Aurobindo's help in this venture, the latter joined him with great ardour, as Sri Aurobindo felt that the spread and propagation of the national ideal and revolutionary ideologies to the masses through the writings in the *Bande Mataram* would be widely effective. Of course, in awakening the nation, the contribution of the English dailies like the *Bengali*, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and the Bengali weeklies like *Bangabasi*, *Hitabadi*, and *Sanjibani* can hardly be forgotten; but none of them could become perhaps a full-fledged mouthpiece of the revolutionary ideals. It is for

this reason that Sri Aurobindo and other leaders of his party decided to launch a new paper (namely, the *Bande Mataram*).

It was at this time that Sri Aurobindo called upon the youth of the country to serve the nation. He then openly organised a new political party and started working in unison with the corresponding group in Maharashtra under the proclaimed leadership of Lokmanya Tilak. Later, this party was labelled as the “Extremist Party”. It was also at Sri Aurobindo’s counsel that the *Bande Mataram* was made the voice of the party. The Bande Mataram Company was formed. The total responsibility of directing the company was undertaken by none other than Sri Aurobindo himself, as Bipin Chandra was then on a tour to the districts of Bengal to propagate the purpose and the programmes of the new party.

Within a very short period, the *Bande Mataram* brought about a new age in the annals of the Indian newspapers. The articles published in this paper not only received unstinted appreciation of the countrymen but it was as though new blood started flowing in the veins of the nation. Bipin Chandra and Sri Aurobindo were not the only persons on its staff; amongst their ablest colleagues first and foremost was Shyam Sundar, the erudite *atma bhola* (self-oblivious) and scholar. Also among its group of writers were B.C. Chatterjee, the famous barrister, Hemendra Prasad Ghosh, the editor of great renown, and many others.

The articles in the *Bande Mataram* were not only full of vitality but they were also so articulate and deftly written that they could dodge the noose of the law. For this there was no end of heart-burn among the Anglo-Indian newspapers. Once, Sri Aurobindo was accused as the editor for an article published in this paper, but that he was the editor of the paper could not be proved as Bipin Chandra refused to testify against his friend. As a consequence, Bipin Chandra was sentenced to six months’ simple imprisonment while the printer of the paper, Apurva Krishna Basu, got six months rigorous imprisonment. In those days, it was not compulsory by law to print the name of the editor.

As a result of this case, the name of Sri Aurobindo spread all over the country at the same time that the people of the country started

reading and glorifying the *Bande Mataram*. Many had the notion that all the articles of the *Bande Mataram* used to be written by Sri Aurobindo. It was said that a few amongst the Bengalis were obsessed with English and used to say that they disliked reading English written by the Indians, but the same people felt ill at ease without going through the *Bande Mataram* in the morning! Unfortunately, by a strange turn of events, the connection between Bipin Chandra and the *Bande Mataram* was snapped as the former could not get along with other colleagues because of differences in political ideology. Sri Aurobindo was not in Calcutta then; he was convalescing in Deoghar (now in the state of Jharkhand) after a dangerous attack of malaria. Had he been in Calcutta, he would not have consented to the departure of Bipin Chandra. On one occasion his name was announced as editor of the *Bande Mataram* without his approval, but only for a day; he immediately put a stop to it since he was still officially in the Baroda State Service. In the following year when a great upheaval in Bengal was in full swing, Bipin Chandra was fortunately out of reach of the British authorities; otherwise God knows what would have happened to him.

Ideological conflict³⁸ existed between Bipin Chandra and his colleagues because the former was of the opinion that the aim of the new (Nationalist) party was complete self-government, free from British control. The moderates (the then Congress) had colonial self-government as their ideal. The revolutionary Party opined that the policy of Bipin Chandra, if analysed threadbare, would be tantamount to that of the moderates because in those days too the British colonies were by and large free from the control from England. The argument put forth by the Nationalist Party, and for that matter by the revolutionaries, was that unless the nation was enlivened to the ideal of complete independence, the true awakening would never come. It has been mentioned earlier that Dadabhai Naoroji considered *swaraj* as the national ideal but the Congress (or the leaders of the Congress) regarded it meaningless to think of *swaraj* as something more than colonial self-government. On the contrary, Sri Aurobindo regarded *swaraj* as the complete

independence and it was this ideal that he was propagating through the *Bande Mataram*. Not only was the country attracted by the novelty of the ideal, but it acted also as a divine *mantra*—as though the whole nation was rejuvenated. If the *Swadeshi* Movement was not inspired by such lofty ideal, it would have remained a simple movement. But this did not happen. The goal of the *Swadeshi* Movement was to annul the partition of Bengal. The goal was achieved, but the movement did not stop—it was transformed into freedom movement and the whole nation took up the *swadeshi mantra*. Even in later phases, the slogan was “*swadeshi* and *swaraj*”.

It must be said, however, that the Congress, for a long-time, even at the time of the Non-Cooperation Movement, did not consider *swaraj* as complete independence. The Congress thought that if the country could get colonial self-rule, it would be more than sufficient. In 1927, returning from a tour of Europe, Pandit Nehru said that if India did not accept the ideal of complete independence, she would not receive her due respect in the comity of nations. The following year, in the Calcutta Congress, a last-ditch effort for a compromise with the British was made, but it failed. As a consequence, the Congress adopted the ideal of complete independence at its session held on the banks of the River Iravati in Lahore on 31 December 1929, and in 1931, at the Karachi session, the ideal of complete independence was announced as its national objective.

In 1931 a radical change in the colonial rule took place. The colonies got total freedom. They remained with England as her equals only for the sake of unity. We shall discuss in later chapters about a prophecy Sri Aurobindo made in this regard in an article published in the *Arya* in 1917, in spite of the fact that he had no direct connection with politics at that time.

LEADER OF THE MASSES

Sri Aurobindo took a long leave of absence from his service in Baroda in order to engage himself in the task of awakening the country. So far he had not been participating openly in the *Swadeshi* Movement; the reason behind it was his absolute aversion to self-publicity. But he could not conceal himself any longer as he publicly accepted the directorship (Principal) of the Bengal National College after resigning from his service in Baroda. This was made possible thanks to his virtuous friend Raja Subodh Chandra Mullick. The fragrant fame of Subodh Chandra's munificence is present even today all over Bengal. He was as though the *Kuvera*³⁹ of the national movement. Subodh Chandra had donated one lakh (one hundred thousand) rupees to the National Education Council on condition that Sri Aurobindo should be given a post of professor in the college with a monthly salary of Rs. 150. Sri Aurobindo was then drawing a salary of Rs. 800 per month from his Baroda Service. It has been learnt that after his resignation from the National College, he used to take a sum of Rs. 50 as his salary from the *Bande Mataram* office.

Sri Aurobindo used to spend very little for his personal use or comfort. While he was in Baroda, a large chunk of his salary used to be spent in purchasing books. Dinendra Kumar has given a detailed account of the simple and unostentatious personal life of Sri Aurobindo in his book entitled *Aurobindo Prasanga* (About Aurobindo). He was a *Sanyasi*, enjoying nothing amid wealth, never sorrowing for want of wealth. He never nurtured any demand in his life, while no one except his own near and dear ones knew about his great sacrifice.

The reason for his taking up the professorship at the National Education Council was his conviction, which he developed due to his long association with teaching. He believed that the system of education introduced by the British did not help make a man of character; rather it created a hybrid class called the “Anglo-Indian”. Immediately after his return from England, he made straight and clear remarks regarding the state of national education in an essay published in the *Indu Prakash* while discussing the imperfections in the character of the Bengali youth. He clearly indicated that the national education was the foundation of the national movement. He wrote valuable essays on the subject, some of which have since been published as a book. The attempt to introduce national education was first made in the era of the *Swadeshi* Movement and also on the eve of the Non-Cooperation Movement, but the fact remains that we are yet to realise the paramount importance of national education. It is hoped that in independent India the educational institutions will be established in accordance with this lofty ideal.⁴⁰

Sri Aurobindo could not, however, work long at the National College as disagreement with the authorities cropped up over the students’ admissions. This was an epoch where the students used to be tormented without pity. In many places, they were driven out of the school or college if they even uttered the word “Bande Mataram”. Sri Aurobindo was in favour of admitting without exception these rusticated students at the National College. But the authorities were stubborn, insisting that an educational institution should not get involved in political matters. The National Education Council sought to do away with the imperfections of the government institutions by imparting a truly nationalistic education.⁴¹ On 22 August 1907, the students of the National College bid farewell to Sri Aurobindo. On the next day (23 August), Sri Aurobindo delivered a soul-stirring address which reflects, on one hand, his profound love for the country and on the other, the deep respect and veneration he received from his students. He said, “I take it that whatever respect you have shown to me today was shown not to me, not even to the Principal, but to your

country, to the Mother in me, because what little I have done has been done for her, and the slight suffering that I am going to endure will be endured for her sake.”⁴²

With this noble resolve, Sri Aurobindo himself volunteered openly in the field of action on the one hand and on the other, a group of young men, inspired by him, took the vow to dedicate their lives to the work of the country. And within a year, the countrymen were wonderstruck at the sight of their supreme sacrifice for the country; the entire country got inundated with a fresh flow of life-force.

Sri Aurobindo had been charged with sedition for writing in the *Bande Mataram* even before he left the National College (16 August 1907). It was thus impossible for him to conceal himself any longer. Thanks to this charge, his fame spread like the meridian sun throughout the length and breadth of the country. He came forward as the leader of the Nationalist Party in the ideological conflict and the political battle with the Moderate Party. The first direct clash took place in the session of the Bengal Provincial Convention held in Midnapore. Midnapore was the hub of secret associations; as a result, the influence of the Nationalist Party there was absolute.

In the Calcutta Congress held in 1906 under the presidency of Dadabhai Naoroji, the Moderate Party wanted to bring about only a few minor changes regarding the proposals on the partition of Bengal, boycotting of the British goods, boycotting the British court by settlement of disputes through popular arbitration and national education (The Nationalist Party was, however, not satisfied as they wanted the Congress to take the pledge of complete independence from the British rule). But Sri Aurobindo stood firm like a rock regarding those proposals.

Sometime earlier, a Calcutta weekly entitled the *Orient*, published, courtesy Hemendra Prasad Ghosh, a letter written by Surendra Nath (Banerjee) to Sri Aurobindo at the time of the Midnapore Conference. The letter was dated 7 December 1907. Surendra Nath, with a view to ironing out the differences between the “Moderates” and the “Extremists” (Nationalists), invited a few leaders of both the parties to deliberate together. But the accord was not reached; the

proposals of the Nationalist Party alone were adopted in the open conference.

Just a few days later a direct confrontation between the two parties at the Surat Congress took place. Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, the well-known leader of the Congress residing in Bombay, was whole-heartedly against the Nationalist Party. He wanted to crush it by all means. In this venture, Mr. Morley, the Secretary of India in the British Cabinet of Ministers, was indirectly in his favour as the British government took the policy of strengthening the Moderate Party, and it is this policy that they pursued till the ultimate victory of the Congress. Moreover, it is by taking advantage of the neutrality of the Moderate Party that the British government administered their unopposed and unhindered repressive policy.

A huge meeting was held at Beadon Park, Calcutta, immediately after the Midnapore conference (15 December). At this meeting, the ideals of the Nationalist Party were spelt out. Here for the first time Sri Aurobindo delivered a speech in front of a large group of people. He said that as he was sent to England in his childhood for education, he could not learn his mother tongue very well and was not familiar speaking in his mother tongue either. He therefore considered it best to remain silent rather than speaking in a foreign language. And because of this reason he had not addressed his countrymen for so long.

Subsequently, he delivered quite a few memorable speeches during the period he was in the field of politics. Later, a book containing his speeches was printed. Subsequent to his speech in Calcutta, Sri Aurobindo presided over a meeting of the Nationalist Party held immediately after the bedlam created at the Surat Congress in 1907. On his way back from Surat to Calcutta, he delivered inspiring lectures in some of the cities in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh on the ideals of nationalism. He also explained in those lectures the true nature of national reawakening.



During Surat Congress, 1907. *Front row:* Ganesh Srikrishna Khaparde, Aswini Kumar Dutt. *Middle row:* Sardar Ajit Singh, Sri Aurobindo, Lokmanya Tilak, Saiyad Haider Reza. *Back row:* Dr. Munje, Ramaswamy, Kuverji Desai.

Actually the Surat Congress was supposed to be held that year in Nagpur, but the Moderate Party found that they would not benefit much in that city because of the overwhelming influence of the Maharashtrian politics there. Therefore, the meeting was arranged in the port city of Surat. Never before was there any sort of political activity in Surat; as a consequence, the Moderate Party thought that they would be able to carry out their business peacefully. But that did not happen because of the presence of Lokmanya and his party workers as well as the presence of Sri Aurobindo and his followers. Sri Aurobindo arrived in Surat with his colleagues of the *Bande Mataram* office and some other followers.

The Congress session got under way amid apprehensions of an imminent political *Kurukshetra* (war). In those days, the provincial committees did not have the power to elect the President of the

Congress; the authorities used to select a leader beforehand as the would-be President who in the Congress session itself used to be nominated. Surendra Nath, on the part of the Moderate Party, proposed the name of Sir Rash Behari Ghosh, whereas from the side of the Nationalist Party, the name of Bal Gangadhar Tilak was proposed. This resulted in tumultuous altercations and soon pandemonium erupted. Shoes, chairs and other objects were hurled, a few leaders were hurt and the public started scurrying towards the platform where the leaders were seated. Surendra Nath, in his autobiography (*A Nation in Making*), has written:

As a past President of the Congress, it was my duty to propose Sir Rash Behari Ghosh as President. I had often before performed this duty with the general consensus and approval of the Congress. It was not to be this time. I remembered the incidents of the Midnapore Congress (I had stopped the disturbances there) and there were attempts to obstruct my speech repeatedly. For me this an unprecedented experience, because whenever I used to rise to the dais after the initial cheering reigned complete silence.

Surendra Nath continues after presenting an account of the Surat turmoil:

Even though the public rushed towards the dais I remained seated there. Some of my friends saved me. Later, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta and some other were taken at the rear of the tent and the police cleared out all the people from the pandal. In this way ended a memorable chapter of the Congress and another epoch commenced.

(Translated from the Bengali text in the book and not a verbatim reproduction of the original speech in English.)

At this new juncture, the Congress began to inch towards independence and gradually became so strong that it could last through innumerable trials and tribulations for its ultimate goal—a free India. The nation completely shunned the policy of supplication and the fame of the Congress spread all over the world. In due

course, the Congress turned out to be exclusively a peoples' party. But very few people of today would remember that this transformation of the Congress was set in motion through the actions of Sri Aurobindo and Tilak.

Be that as it may, Sri Aurobindo remained calm and collected in the midst of the chaos and commotion at Surat. Barindra Kumar has written that at a time when a section of the people attending the meeting started crying for blood, and shoes, sticks, chairs, etc., were brandished about viciously, Sri Aurobindo was seen seated with a serene and still face, not showing the least sign of being perturbed; he did not even care for his own protection. Eventually, as the police came and made the *pandal* free from the disorder, Sri Aurobindo along with a few of his colleagues came out in the open. A meeting of the Nationalist Party was convened immediately thereafter and Sri Aurobindo was invited to preside over it. Rash Behari Ghosh failed to get an opportunity to deliver his speech. His speech was later published in the *Bande Mataram* with the heading "Undelivered Masterpiece".

Apparently it would seem on the surface of it that the internal strife of the Congress Party undermined the cause of the country, but the subsequent events that took place in the next few years proved this strife actually resulted in providing the national movement a firm footing. It is true that after the Surat session, the Congress Party dimmed for a few years; this is because the Nationalist Party was in disarray on account of the repressive measures of the British government. But no sooner had Tilak returned from exile than the movement of *Swaraj* was set in motion and, with him, the Home Rule Movement by Annie Besant kept the country agog. Thereafter came Gandhiji and then started the Non-Cooperation Movement ending up with the freedom movement. Until 1916, the Congress Party was in the hands of the Moderates but in the Lucknow Congress held in the same year, the Congress was united after a temporary pause in "groupism". However, seven years before this union, when the political factionalism was at its height, Sri Aurobindo made a startling revelation, indicating this unity in an essay published in the *Dharma*. Such was his political foresight. However, realising that the heat of

politics was increasing to a degree, the Moderates could not any longer remain in the Congress Party. In 1917, on the occasion of the Calcutta Congress, factionalism started and in the very next year, the Moderate Party abandoned all contact with the Congress and founded a separate political party. But from then on, the influence of the Moderate Party started dwindling and at present [1939] there is no trace of it. After independence every one joined the bandwagon of the Congress Party.

After returning from Surat, Sri Aurobindo started propagating the ideals of the Nationalist Party with renewed ardour and intensity. He delivered a few touching speeches on the ideals of the Nationalist Party in Bombay and in some places in Madhya Pradesh explicating therein why the factionalism in the Congress Party was inevitable. About a month before he was arrested, on 10 April 1908, in an address delivered in Calcutta on the united Congress, Sri Aurobindo declared that it was by God's will that the Surat Congress ended in a fiasco and that if the Congress could reunite, then it would happen by His will. He threw light particularly on the fact that the Congress was not broken because of any personal reasons; the factionalism came to the fore because of a few obvious basic problems. Firstly, irregularity in the election of the President; secondly, efforts made by certain parties to negate the four proposals agreed upon in the Calcutta Congress the previous year (1906); thirdly, the attempt to change the fundamental ideal of the Congress by trampling the stronger (Nationalist) party by virtue of superior numbers of the local (Surat) party. In a situation like this, there was no other alternative but a direct confrontation. Tilak proposed that in order to constitute the Congress according to the rules, a separate committee had to be formed and it is this committee that would elect the President of the session. The other party, that is the Moderate Party, without giving an opportunity to Tilak to raise the proposal, suddenly declared that Rash Behari Ghosh had been unanimously elected President. When there were concrete differences of opinion in this respect, then how could it be said that the President was elected unanimously?

Thereafter, Sri Aurobindo observed that the Nationalist Party was ready to overlook all these irregularities on condition that the other

Party agreed to form a Joint Congress and accept the proposals adopted at the Calcutta Convention. If they declined, then they would be held fully responsible for creating an institution of a fragmented group breaking away from the Congress. He remarked, "Our policy is that we will work in our establishment as a separate party but we want a Joint Congress for the whole nation."

THE CALL OF *RUDRA*

Within a short span of sixteen months i.e. the whole of 1907 and four months of 1908, Sri Aurobindo became well-known all over the country by virtue of his dynamic political activities. During this period he continued writing for *Bande Mataram*, participated in various conferences, and delivered speeches in public meetings and associations. Going through the reports of these speeches, one may be inclined to think that Sri Aurobindo was leading a life of feverish external activity. But that is not entirely true. Even in the midst of the whirlwind of activities, he remained deeply absorbed in yoga.

On his way back to Calcutta after the Surat Congress fiasco, Sri Aurobindo delivered a few public speeches in Bombay and in a few other cities in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. These speeches were not only packed with energy and patriotic spirit but they also brought to light the real nature of the national movement. In a language supremely powerful and serious, Sri Aurobindo endeavoured to make his countrymen understand that the on-going national movement was not merely a political movement—it signalled the awakening from the age-long slumber into which the country had sunk, her resurgence destroying all obscurities and rising to her self-consciousness. The self-consciousness of India is her spiritual consciousness. He declared that it was God himself, who was at the root of this national awakening—He was also the invisible leader of this movement.

These speeches that he delivered seemed to gather inspiration from the power high above. Sri Aurobindo appeared to be deeply absorbed in yoga, yet he attended to all of his external activities.

From the reports published in the newspapers regarding his speech in Nagpur, it has been learnt that the general public of the city were simply moved by his calm yogic appearance. One of his colleagues had once written that when Sri Aurobindo was staying in Calcutta, he used to remain completely indifferent to his household affairs. It so happened that on some days he remained engrossed in meditation or writing and there used to be no provisions for his household expenses. His colleagues, therefore, had to take care of it.

Sometime after this episode, the wheel of fate of the country changed, the trumpet call was heard, and finally came the call of *Rudra*. "Mother India had put a blood-mark on the forehead of her sons." (This quote has been translated from *Anandamath*). A few of Sri Aurobindo's closest followers had to lay down their lives and a few others had to pass through relentless ordeal. The valour and fearlessness shown by the Bengali youth who led a comfortable life and were averse by nature to hardship and suffering, could be shown only by a handful of people devoted entirely to God. The majority of these young lads had a spiritual bent of mind. The *Gita* was their spiritual refuge and the *Anandamath* by Bankim Chandra used to instil in their minds the inspiration for patriotism and for attaining the noble ideals of the *Santan Sangha* (Association of sons). This was their slogan:

*What if we all have to depart
Chanting Bande Mataram in chorus!*

*Let the life pass
Chanting Bande Mataram en masse!*
(Rough translation from Bengali)

As the leader of this group of young people, Sri Aurobindo too had to submit to this ordeal, as it was to reassure them in the thick of their sorrows and sufferings. This is just one part of the memorable episode. On the other part of it, if we reflect deeply, we will find that it was Sri Krishna himself who pushed Sri Aurobindo in the solitude of a prison cell, taking him away from the field of external activities in

order to realise his supremely profound yoga. On the eve of the battle of *Kurukshetra*, Sri Krishna showed his “universal form” to Arjuna, his dearest disciple. Sri Aurobindo too witnessed the same *universal form* in a prison cell. Sri Aurobindo, however, did not see the universal form of the Divine in a divine embodiment called Sri Krishna, he saw it in the midst of the world, of the entire creation. He realised *Brahman*, he realised that the whole universe is pervaded by *Brahman*. This great realisation became in later years the foundation of his yoga. This was so sudden that Sri Aurobindo himself did not expect that he would be in dire straits soon. In *Karakahini* (Tales of Prison Life) he writes:

On Friday, 1 May 1908, I was sitting in the *Bande Mataram* office, when Shri Shyamsundar Chakravarty handed over a telegram from Muzaffarpur. On reading it I learnt of a bomb outrage in which two European women had been killed. In that day's issue of *Empire* I read another news item that the police commissioner had said that he knew the people involved in the murder and that they would soon be put under arrest. At that time I had no idea that I happened to be the main suspect and that according to the police I was the “main killer”, the instigator and secret leader of the young terrorists and revolutionaries. I was unaware that this day would mark the end of a chapter in my life, and that there laid before me was a year's imprisonment during which period all my human relations would cease; that for a whole year I would have to live beyond the human society, like an animal in a cage. And when I would re-enter the world of activities it would not be the old familiar Aurobindo Ghose. Rather, it would be a new being, a new character, intellect, life, mind, embarking upon a new course of action that would come out of the “ashram at Alipore”.⁴³

While working in politics, Sri Aurobindo came in contact with different cross sections of people; the most important amongst them was none other than the youth. It has been said earlier that Sri Aurobindo was the leader of the youth. It has been found in almost all countries in the modern era that it is the young who are in the

vanguard of national resurgence. This is because they do not have family responsibilities and their heart is resplendent with the radiance of the future. No other community can wake up so spontaneously with such an exuberance of vitality; hence, they have an immeasurable capacity to sacrifice. It is they who can embrace pain cheerfully; it is they who can renounce all the riches of life gleefully.

During the national upheaval, a section of the Bengali youth came to the conclusion that it would be easier to achieve freedom through armed revolution—at least the national demand would be fulfilled before long, if they could create an atmosphere of fear in the minds of the alien administrators. It has been said that the stimulation by Sri Aurobindo was instrumental in awakening this *Kshatriya* force. They would not perhaps have done anything horrible suddenly, but they had to take up the cudgels eventually in view of the dire condition prevailing in the country. One of the reasons for adopting extreme measures was that in those days the government used to resort to repressive measures indiscriminately and the Indians had to suffer at the hands of the whites, not only neglect and indifference but also harassment and insult, and in many cases, they could not even get proper justice in the court of law.

Most of the revolutionaries harbouring this line of thinking were the best workers of the Nationalist Party and, therefore, co-workers of Sri Aurobindo. It has been mentioned earlier that Barindra Kumar, the leader of this group, was the younger brother of Sri Aurobindo. Shri Upendra Nath Bandyopadhyay, one of the leaders, was the managing director of *Jugantar*⁴⁴, a Bengali daily, and also a colleague of Sri Aurobindo at the *Bande Mataram* office. As a consequence, the police suspected that Sri Aurobindo was as much the visible and obvious leader of the Nationalist Party as also the secret leader of the underground revolutionary groups. Mr. Norton, the public prosecutor, tried ridiculously, at the time of trial, to prove the charges against Sri Aurobindo with this argument. However, immediately after the assassination at Muzaffarpur, the bomb-making factory at Maniktala came to light; and soon Sri Aurobindo was arrested along with the members of the revolutionary groups

and was also charged with all of them on grounds of murder and mutinous conspiracies.

A few days before his arrest, Sri Aurobindo moved from his rented house in Scott's Lane to another house in Gray Street. He made arrangements for publishing in a new format a nationalist daily entitled *Nava Shakti*. The office was in his new house. One or two of his co-workers were also there with him, and they too were arrested.

Sri Aurobindo has given a fascinating account of his arrest and related incidents in *Karakahini*. In this context, the humorous description he has given of Cregan, the police superintendent, makes us laugh even at this cruel irony of his fate. The army of police like heroes, pistols in hand, charged up the stairs and crowded in front of the room where Sri Aurobindo was asleep. As he woke up, he witnessed this tumultuous scene. He says, "From Cregan's words it seemed as if he had entered into the lair of some ferocious animal, as if we were uneducated, wild, lawbreakers, and that it was unnecessary to speak or behave courteously towards us. But after the sharp exchange the *sahib* grew a little milder. Benod babu (a policeman) tried to explain something to him about me. After which Cregan asked me: 'It seems you are a B.A. Is it not a matter of shame for an educated person like you to be sleeping on the floor of an unfurnished room and in a house like this?' 'I am a poor man, and I live like one,' I said. 'Then have you worked up all this mischief with the idea of becoming a rich man?' Cregan countered in a loud voice. I did not make the attempt to answer considering how impossible it was to explain the love of motherland, sacrifice or the sublimity of a vow of poverty to this thick-skulled Briton."⁴⁵

After this incident, however, and even during his year-long incarceration, Sri Aurobindo was not mistreated by anyone; on the contrary, he received very cordial treatment from the prison authorities of which he has given a very interesting account. It provides great amusement to the reader. However, he would never get agitated even if someone misbehaved with him. In his book *Nirnbasiter Atmakatha* (Memoirs of a Revolutionary in Exile) Shri Upendra Nath Bandyopadhyay has written: "It was very painful for

everybody to see and at the same time remain patient when the guards of the prison would for 'official reasons' take him out of the court with his hands cuffed—but Sri Aurobindo remained totally unperturbed, not even for a moment was there ever a change in his attitude. At the time of the trial too, his followers were astonished to see his unruffled stance—he remained completely unconcerned, as though he was seated in a posture of yoga!”

The humorous tale of his trial as narrated by him in *Karakahini* is worth reading. The wonderful picture he has drawn of the magistrate of the lower court, Mr. Norton, the public prosecutor, and of other witnesses, brings to light clearly the farcical nature of the trial. Finally, after a long trial extending over a period of a year, he was acquitted as he had been declared completely innocent. He entered prison on 6 May 1908 and on the same date in 1909 he was let out. He had an insight beforehand that he would be released from prison.

The entire country was in a state of tumult at the arrest of Sri Aurobindo and his companions. What an incredible situation in this land of the “sick and unconscious”! What indomitable courage in the bosom of the emaciated Bengali youth! What a divine inspiration for self-sacrifice! What a “never seen before” determination for the sake of the country! In India and in England as well, the British sensed danger. On one hand, they continued to turn the tide with help of the Moderates, and on the other, they tried to trample the extremists through ruthless repression. Needless to say, the national movement received a serious jolt at this sudden stir. The efforts towards revolution were temporarily thwarted. Thus the *Jugantar* stated:

*The Rakshasas broke the sacred pitcher
Even before Thy invocation, O Mother!*

This is the beginning of the revolution in India. Later on, in spite of the draconian repressive measures unleashed by the British, efforts were on to bring about an armed revolution through the initiatives of Rash Behari Bose and Jatindranath Mukherjee (Bagha Jatin). But that is another story.

While the whole country stood stupefied at this arrest, arrangements for the trial of Sri Aurobindo and his comrades proceeded with great enthusiasm. Once the hearing of initial witnesses and evidences at the lower court was over, they were sent to the Session's Court at Alipore. The trial continued for days together.

During the trial, Sri Aurobindo got the help of a generous person who later gave away all of his wealth for the sake of the country and became a well-known figure not only in India but all over the world. He was Chittaranjan Das, the distinguished barrister, who was fondly called *Deshabandhu* (friend of the country) by his countrymen. It was Chittaranjan who, as though as an instrument of God, helped Sri Aurobindo in his acquittal. As soon as the news of Sri Aurobindo's arrest spread, a lot of money came in spontaneously to help him defend his case in the court of law. Sarojini, Sri Aurobindo's sister, made all arrangements for his defence at the trial; but within a short period of time, all the money so collected was spent. At that time, Chittaranjan came forward to help Sri Aurobindo. Chittaranjan was then on the path to earning fame as a barrister, yet for about a year, with almost no remuneration, so to say, the sacrifice he made for Sri Aurobindo was unparalleled. This magnanimity ushered him to his future greatness and every Indian remembers his sacrifice even today with reverence.

On the occasion of this trial, the public witnessed not only his stupendous sacrifice and greatness but was also captivated by his scholarly legal knowledge and splendid eloquence. The inspired speech that he delivered at the end of the trial before the judge and the assessors in order to prove Sri Aurobindo's innocence revealed so beautifully the latter's ideal of life that today it appears to be a marvellous prophecy—like the memorable poem "Salutation" of Rabindranath, one feels like reciting over and over again the words uttered by Chittaranjan: "Long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is

dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands.”⁴⁶

Even before this incident, Sri Aurobindo had been locked in a deep bond of friendship with Chittaranjan. In the field of politics, Chittaranjan was an adherent of the Nationalist Party founded by Sri Aurobindo, and he used to lend financial help to the English daily *Bande Mataram*. Such was the harmony in their thoughts that Sri Aurobindo himself in his own inimitable style translated into English verse *Sagar Sangeet* (The Song of the Sea), the famous Bengali poem by Chittaranjan. Sri Aurobindo had so much confidence in the political vision and activities of Chittaranjan that after the latter’s demise he declared that Chittaranjan alone, after the death of Tilak, had the power to establish *Swaraj* in India. Before he was elected President of the Gaya Congress in 1922, Chittaranjan, while he was on a tour to Madras to spread his own political ideals, met Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry and discussed at length politics and spiritual matters with him.

Everyone was enthralled by the cogency of his arguments and the depth of his legal knowledge which dismantled the web of witnesses that the government laid out for proving Sri Aurobindo’s connection with revolution and conspiracy. Mr. Norton, with little valid evidence, tried indirectly to prove that Sri Aurobindo was propagating the ideal of independence driven by his malice towards the British and was instigating the whole country towards revolution by forming the Nationalist Party. With this conclusion in view, Norton *sahib* read out many letters, essays and speeches of Sri Aurobindo. Notable amongst them was a postcard allegedly written by Barindra Kumar which stated that this was the right time for distributing “sweetmeats”. It is said that the police intercepted this card before it reached the destination and Norton wanted to prove that “sweetmeats” stood for “bombs”. Far from accepting this bizarre argument, the assessors decided, thanks to the explanation provided by Chittaranjan, that the said letter was totally fraudulent. Although the judge did not subscribe to the assessors’ decision, he opined that this kind of evidence was absolutely of no value.

Except the account of his political activities, there were no special personal witnesses against Sri Aurobindo. However, Naren Gossain, the approver, tried to entangle Sri Aurobindo by hobnobbing with him in prison. In the book *Karakahini*, we get an account of how he used to talk to Sri Aurobindo and all the others. But since Gossain was assassinated in prison, whatever he had said earlier was technically not acceptable in the court of law.

On the other hand, setting at naught the smoky mesh of arguments put forth by the public prosecutor, it was Chittaranjan who firmly declared that whatever Sri Aurobindo had done so far in the field of politics was in no way illegal. To propagate the ideal of independence is not an illegal act. Patriotism cannot, by any act whatsoever, be considered as an offence. In his final verdict, Beachcroft, the judge, consented to this very argument. Sri Aurobindo was declared completely innocent by the judgement of his classmate.^{[47](#)}

Note:

On 6 May 1949, an impressive commemoration ceremony was held in the same room of the Sessions Court, Alipore, where Sri Aurobindo and his companions were tried. Shri Rama Prasad Mukhopadhyay, the Honourable Judge of the Calcutta High Court, unveiled a portrait of Sri Aurobindo from the undertrial period. On this occasion, a few of Sri Aurobindo's colleagues, namely, Shri Upendra Nath Bandyopadhyay, Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya etc. were also present. Upendra Nath paid glowing tributes to Sri Aurobindo and said that the era of Sri Aurobindo was approaching. Mr Mukhopadhyay, the judge, remarked that the world was startled by an atom bomb but in Pondicherry perhaps something more powerful was being created. The whole country was delighted at this remarkable reception accorded to Sri Aurobindo by the Government of West Bengal in Independent India.

VISION OF GOD IN PRISON

Sri Aurobindo was in prison for only a year, during which a total transformation happened, and as result of which Aurobindo Ghose, the political leader and patriot, turned into Sri Aurobindo, the lover of God and a *Mahayogi* (great yogi). To some, this transformation may seem sudden and strange, but Sri Aurobindo himself has hinted that from his very childhood he was, as though, a yogi in disguise. Just as his love for the country, his desire to have the knowledge of God too, was kindled in his heart right from his boyhood days. He could not rest content with the common notion or the idea of God held by the people at large in those days, his foremost ideal of life was to establish an intimate contact with God and to realise Him even in the minute atoms of this universe. However, until now, he had not got the opportunity to attain this supreme realisation, but now, in the solitude of the prison cell, he got it to the fullest measure—in fact, he passed most of his time in prison in solitary confinement. It may be said that it was God who offered him this opportunity. Lord Sri Krishna, the divine incarnation, was born in a prison cell; in the prison cell itself Sri Aurobindo got the vision of Sri Krishna. Sri Aurobindo realised Him at heart and in his whole being integrally.⁴⁸

Sri Aurobindo felt within, an inkling of this supreme possibility and so, he entered the prison cell with a tranquil heart. He has mentioned this in his book *Karakahini* (Tales of Prison Life). He says,

I have spoken of a year's imprisonment. It would have been more appropriate to speak of a year's living in a forest, in an *ashram* or hermitage. For long I had made great efforts for a direct vision (साक्षाद्दर्शन) of the Lord in my heart, and had

harboured immense hope of knowing the Preserver of the world, the Supreme Person (पुरुषोत्तम) as friend and master. But due to the pull of thousand worldly desires, attachment towards numerous activities, and in the deep darkness of ignorance I did not succeed in that effort. At last the most merciful, all-good Lord (Sri Hari) destroyed these enemies all in one stroke and helped me in my path, pointed to the *Yogashram*, Himself staying as guru and friend in my little abode of retirement and spiritual discipline. That ashram was the British prison. I have also watched this strange contradiction in my life that however much good my well intentioned friends might do for me, the antagonists did more benefits—whom shall I call an enemy? Enemy, I have none. They who tried to harm me, helped me instead. The only result of the wrath of the British Government was that I found God.⁴⁹

This urge to see God had awakened in him long before. In Baroda, we have seen him as an austere seeker of knowledge, but even then he was following covertly the path of yoga. From the writings of Barindra Kumar we come to know that once he went to see a great yogi called Brahmananda who was living on the banks of River Narmada. It is rumoured that this yogi would never cast a glance at anyone; but when Sri Aurobindo stood before him, he opened his eyes and cast on him a smiling, fleeting look.

It is learnt that Sri Aurobindo, while in Baroda, got his initial guidance in the path of yoga from a Maharashtrian yogi called Lele Maharaj. He met Lele Maharaj when he was returning from the Surat Congress. It is at this time that we observe Sri Aurobindo's yogic state. The source of the speech he delivered in Bombay was from a higher plane. Swami Vivekananda had the same kind of experience when he was delivering a lecture at the Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago (1893). In the book *Nirbasiter Atmakatha* (Memoirs of a Revolutionary in Exile) written by Upendra Nath Bandyopadhyay, we find a few interesting facts about Lele Maharaj. When Lele Maharaj had come to Calcutta, Barindra Kumar showed him the bomb-making factory at Maniktala. Lele Maharaj advised

Barindra Kumar and his co-workers to desist from attempting an armed revolution and warned that this would cause them a world of troubles. But Barindra Kumar boldly disregarded this warning. A few days after Lele Maharaj's departure from Calcutta, the police raided the bomb-making factory. After this incident, Lele Maharaj and Sri Aurobindo never again met each other. A few years later, Lele Maharaj left his mortal body.

After returning to Calcutta, Sri Aurobindo remained absorbed in his *sadhana* even in the vortex of political activities. He regarded Sri Ramakrishna as the fountainhead of national awakening. On his way back from Surat he remarked in the aforesaid speech in Bombay that the true work for India's struggle for freedom started when masses of educated people from all corners of the country—East, West, North and South—prostrated at the feet of that illiterate *sanyasi*. Sri Aurobindo did not dwell on national progress alone; he made special mention also of the *sadhana* of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda while discussing spiritual matters. His wife, Mrinalini Devi, kept at home some sacred earth from Dakshineshwar temple. Sri Aurobindo has written in *Karakahini* about the following humorous account that took place with regard to this earth during the police search. He says, "Nothing remarkable transpired in the course of the search. But I recollect Mr. Clark looking long and suspiciously at the sacred earth from Dakshineshwar that had been kept in a small cardboard box; he suspected it might be some new and terribly powerful explosive. In a sense Mr. Clark's suspicions were not unfounded. In the end the decision was reached that it was a piece of earth and it was unnecessary to send it to the chemical analyst."⁵⁰

It has been said before that Sri Aurobindo had seen the manifestation of the divine power in the national awakening. Before he was imprisoned, he had been speaking about this with all sincerity in his speeches in various parts of India. His speech in Bombay (19 January 1908) as mentioned earlier, has woken up the unappreciated and weak Bengal because they believed his words: "Nationalism is not a political activity; nationalism is a divinely evolved religion. Nationalism can never be destroyed; it will survive

with the divine power— whatever weapon be employed against it. Nationalism is immortal because it is not a humanly thing. God is working in Bengal. God cannot be killed, God cannot be sent to the gaol.” Thus, he had realised the glory of God through various situations and got immersed completely in the divine consciousness during his prison life.

After he was imprisoned, Sri Aurobindo’s new *sadhana* commenced. His colleagues knew that Sri Aurobindo was by nature a very quiet person. He was unperturbed even in the face of great crisis. His patience became quite evident in the test of fire on this occasion. After three days in the police lock-up when he was brought to the court, he told one of his relatives, “Tell everyone at home, they should not fear, my innocence will be proved.” Hereafter he wrote: “Since then I had the firm belief that this would definitely happen. At first in the solitary confinement, the mind becomes a bit disturbed, but after three days of prayer and meditation the life was again filled with steady calm and unshakeable faith.”

Thus began his yogic *sadhana* in the prison cell. Though an undertrial prisoner, he was kept in solitary confinement like all others because in the eyes of the police, they were all dangerous people. We get a picture of his prison life from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and those of a few others. From the amusing account that he has given in *Karakahini* regarding his arrangements for stay, bathing, meals etc. in the prison, we can make out that in spite of the inhumane sufferings he endured in the prison, he never felt the least distressed. The reader may wonder how a person brought up in England’s free atmosphere could remain so unruffled even in the midst of the most abominable conditions of life prevailing in the prison cells of those days. We have already learnt that while he was in Baroda he used to lead his life like a *sanyasi*. When he came to Bengal, there was no change in his lifestyle. He used to earn a good amount of money in Baroda but here in Bengal he used to receive a paltry sum of money from the *Bande Mataram* office and he “survived on rice and spinach” so to say. He would say that in a country where half of the population lived without two square meals a day, one should eat only rice and spinach. At the time of his arrest,

Cregan (the police officer), realising his frugal ways of living, was surprised and wondered how an educated man like him could live in such miserable conditions.

The people of the modern era will perhaps be horrified to read the description of the inhuman prison conditions of those days that forced the prisoners to lead a life more painful than that of a caged animal. Nevertheless, Sri Aurobindo chose to be humorous even in his description of these harrowing experiences. He says, “Attached bathrooms are, I know, oftentimes a part of Western culture, but to have in a small cell a bedroom, dining room and toilet rolled into one—that is what is called too much of a good thing! We Indians are full of regrettable customs, thus, it is painful for us to be so highly civilised in such a way.”⁵¹

The arrangements for the prisoners’ bathing were nominal. He says, “According to the British, the love of God and physical well-being are almost equal and rare virtues, whether the prison regulations were made in order to prove the point of such a proverb or to prevent the unwilling austerity of the convicts spoilt by excessive bathing facilities, it is not easy to decide.”

A few days later, there was to some extent a redressal of the problem of drinking water. On this he writes: “Before this, in course of my long battle with thirst I had achieved a thirst-free state.” About the two blankets provided for sleeping, he writes: “When the heat became unbearable, I would roll on the ground and enjoy it. Then did I know the joy of the cool touch of Mother Earth. But the floor’s contact in the prison was not always pleasing, it prevented the coming of sleep and so I had to take recourse to the blanket.”⁵²

He continues: “This description of the Alipore Government hotel which I have given here, and will continue giving later, is not for the purpose of advertising my own hardship; it is only to show what strange arrangements are made for undertrial prisoners in the civilised British Raj to prolong agony for the innocent. The causes of the hardships that I have described were no doubt there, but since my faith in divine mercy was strong I had to suffer only for the first few days; thereafter—by what means I shall mention later—the mind

had transcended these sufferings and grown incapable of feeling any hardship. That is why when I recollect my prison life instead of anger or sorrow I feel like laughing. When first of all I had to go into my cage dressed in strange prison uniform, and notice the arrangements for our stay, this is what I felt. And I laughed within myself. Having studied the history of the English people and their recent doings I had already found out their strange and mysterious character. So I was not at all astonished or unhappy at their behaviour towards me.”⁵³

This is what is called the cycle of fate! He who would have sent many people into this prison cell had he accepted the civil service job, had to experience for a year its terrible condition. Mahadev Govind Ranade once told him to take up the work of prison reform. Indeed, if thousands of leaders and workers had not endured the pangs of prison life from the days of the *Swadeshi* Movement, who can say how many aeons it would have taken to rid the Indian prisons of their cruelty!

Sri Aurobindo has in places made caustic comments on the character of the British, but it was not prompted by any racial ill-feeling—he did it because it was the British, hailed throughout the world as civilised, who introduced these inhuman practices in Indian prisons. On the other hand, he has given a touching description of the kind behaviour he received from the authorities of the jail and from the general prisoners. The following story merits special mention.

Let me speak of an innocent person in Alipore. As an accused in a dacoity case he had been sentenced to ten years’ rigorous imprisonment. A cowherd by profession, uneducated, without anything to do with reading or writing, his only support was his faith in God and patience, worthy of an Aryan and other noble qualities he possessed. Faced with this old man’s attitude towards life, my pride of learning and forbearance was completely shattered. There was a serene and simple friendliness written in the old man’s eyes, his talk was always full of amiability and friendliness. At times, he would speak of his

sufferings, even though he was innocent of the charges, and speak of his wife and children; he even wondered when God would bring him release so that he could meet them, but never did I find him depressed or restless. Waiting for God's grace, he spent his days quietly doing his duties in the prison. All his efforts and thoughts were not concerned about himself, but about the well-being of others. His sense of kindness and sympathy for the distressed frequently came out in his talk. For him serving others was the law of his nature. The noble qualities were further revealed by his humility. Knowing that he had a heart thousand times nobler than mine I would feel ashamed at his humility; to accept the old man's services embarrassed me, but he would not be held back so easily. He was all the time anxious about my comfort.⁵⁴

Narrating this story, Sri Aurobindo writes: "Even in these days of decline one may find that among the Indian peasantry— whom we describe as illiterate, 'small people', *chhotolok*—such representatives of the Indian race are available. This is the pride of Hindu religion, the manifestation of Aryan education and the future hope of India. The educated youth and the unlettered peasantry, the future of India lies with these two classes. The future Aryan race will be a blend of the two."⁵⁵

In no time, Sri Aurobindo attained the ineffable experience of seeing the Divine in man. He writes about the inner change that took place immediately after entering the prison:

Here the walls of the room seemed to come closer, eager to embrace, like the all-pervading *Brahman* Alongside the courtyard wall, stood a tree, its green foliage a sight for sore eyes. The sentry that used to parade before the "six degree" rooms, his face and footsteps often appeared dear like the welcome steps of a friend. The prisoners in the neighbouring cowshed would take out the cow from the front of the room for grazing. Both cow and cowherd were daily delightful sights. The solitary confinement at Alipore was a unique lesson in love. Before coming here even in society my affections were confined

to a rather narrow circle, and the closed emotions would rarely include birds and animals. I remember a poem by Rabi babu (Rabindranath Tagore) in which is described beautifully a village boy's deep love for a buffalo. I did not at all understand it when I read it at first; I had felt a note of exaggeration and artificiality in that description. Had I read the poem now, I would have seen it with other eyes. At Alipore, I could feel how deep could be the love of man for all created things, how thrilled a man could be on seeing a cow, a bird, even an ant.⁵⁶

This experience of love is the harbinger of seeing the universal form of Vasudeva. He has himself described in an exemplary language how he got this wonderful experience. Lest a summarised significance should distort the beauty and the sweetness of this wonderful experience, we quote below the whole of it:

For a few days I had to be without books or any other aid to spend the period of forced isolation. Later on Mr. Emerson came and handed over to me the permission to get some clothes and reading material from home. After procuring from the prison authorities pen, ink, and their official stationery I wrote to my respected maternal uncle, the well-known editor of *Sanjibani*, to send my *dhoti* and *kurta*, and among books I asked for the *Gita* and the *Upanishads*. It took a couple of days for the books to reach me. Before that I had enough leisure to realise the enormity or the dangerous potentiality of solitary confinement. I could understand why even firm and well-developed intellects crack up in such a state of confinement and readily turn towards insanity. At the same time, I could realise God's infinite mercy and the rare advantage offered by these same conditions.

Before imprisonment I was in the habit of sitting down for meditation for an hour each in the morning and evening. In this solitary prison, not having anything else to do, I tried to meditate for a longer period. But for those unaccustomed it is not easy to control and steady the mind pulled in a thousand directions. Somehow I was able to concentrate for an hour and half or two; later the mind rebelled while the body was too fatigued.

At first the mind was full of thoughts of many kinds. Afterwards devoid of human conversation and an insufferable listlessness due to absence of any subject of thought the mind gradually grew devoid of the capacity to think. There was a condition when it seemed a thousand indistinct ideas were hovering round the doors of the mind but with gates closed; one or two that were able to get through were frightened by the silence of these mental states and quietly running away. In this uncertain dull state I suffered intense mental agony.⁵⁷

Thereafter he has described how he tried to concentrate on a few things but failed. "I again sat down to meditate. It was impossible. The intense baffled attempt made the mind only more tired, useless, and made it burn and boil." (ibid. p.289) He tried to stop the battle between the red and black ants and saved the unjustly treated red ants from the black killers. [In a letter written to Dilip Kumar Roy, Sri Aurobindo has described his wonderful experience about how he got a feeling different from pain when he noticed the big red ants killing the small black ones. This letter has been published in *Anami*, a collection of poems by Roy.] "Still there was no way to spend the long days ahead. I tried to argue with myself, did some deliberate reflection, but day after day the mind rebelled and felt increasingly desolate. It was as though time weighed heavy, an unbearable torture, broken by that pressure it did not have leisure even to breathe freely, it was like being throttled by an enemy in a dream and yet without the strength to move one's limbs. I was amazed at this condition!"⁵⁸

Before this confinement, how often he had passed time in solitary thinking but the solitude of a few days made him so restless! "According to the proverb, one who can stand solitude is either a god or a brute; it is a discipline quite beyond the power of men. Previously I was unable to believe in what the proverb meant, but now I could feel that even for one accustomed to the yogic life this discipline is not easy to acquire."⁵⁹

He describes thereafter how in this terrible situation he remained unshaken. He writes: "I remember the terrifying end of the Italian regicide, Breci. His cruel judges, instead of ordering him to be hanged, had given him seven years' solitary imprisonment. Within a year Breci had gone mad. But he had endured for some time! Was my mental strength so poor?"⁶⁰

"Then I did not know that God was playing a game with me, through which He was giving me a few necessary lessons. First, He showed me the state of mind in which prisoners condemned to solitary cells move towards insanity, and turned me wholly against the inhuman cruelty of Western prison administration, so that I might, to the best of my ability, turn my countrymen and the world from these barbarous ways to the path of a more humane prison organisation."⁶¹

In this context, Sri Aurobindo referred to Mahadev Govind Ranade who had told him long before to undertake the work of prison reform. He writes: "I also understood His second purpose: it was to reveal and expose before my mind its own weakness so that I might get rid of it forever. For one who seeks the yogic state, crowd and solitude should mean the same. Indeed, the weakness dropped off within a few days, and now it seems that the mental poise would not be disturbed even by ten years of solitude. In the dispensation of the All-Good (*mangalamaya*), even out of evil cometh good."

"The third purpose was to give me this lesson that my yoga practices would not be done by my personal effort, but that a spirit of reverence (श्रद्धा) and complete self-surrender (आत्मसमर्पण) were the road to attain perfection in yoga, and whatever power or realisation the Lord would give out of His benignity, to accept and utilise these should be the only aim of my yogic endeavour. The day from which the deep darkness of ignorance began to lessen, I started to see the true nature of the All-Good Lord's amazing infinite goodness as I watched the different events in the world."⁶²

At last he received the Grace of God. He writes thus:

Troubled by mental listlessness, I spent a few days in agony in this manner. One afternoon as I was thinking, streams of

thought began to flow endlessly and then suddenly these grew so uncontrolled and incoherent that I could feel that the mind's regulating power was about to cease. Afterwards when I came back to myself, I could recollect that though the power of mental control had ceased, the intelligence was not self-lost or did not deviate for a moment, but it was as if watching quietly this marvellous phenomenon. But at the time, shaking with the terror of being overcome by insanity, I had not been able to notice that. I called upon God with eagerness and intensity and prayed to him to prevent my loss of intelligence. That very moment there spread over my being such a gentle and cooling breeze, the heated brain became relaxed, easy and supremely blissful such as in all my life I had never known before. Just as a child sleeps, secure and fearless, on the lap of his mother, so I remained on the lap of the World-Mother. From that day all my troubles of prison life were over.[63](#)

Not only did he feel peace within himself, he realised very soon the all-pervading presence of God. At this time, Dr. Daly, the jail doctor, made an arrangement by which Sri Aurobindo was allowed to take a walk every day in the morning and evening in front of the decree. He would recite the deeply moving, immortal, powerful *mantras* of the *Upanishads* while walking to and fro and tried to realise the basic truths of the immanent Godhead, God in every form.

In the trees, the houses, the walls, in men, animals, birds, metals, the earth, with the help of the *mantra* "All indeed is *Brahman*" (सर्वम्खल्विदं ब्रह्म), I would try to fix or impose that realisation on all of these. As I continued doing this, the prison sometimes ceased to appear as a prison at all. The high wall, those iron bars, the white wall, the green-leaved tree shining in sunlight, it seemed as if these common-place objects were not unconscious at all, but they were vibrating with a universal consciousness, they love me and wish to embrace me or so I felt. Men, cows, ants, birds are moving, flying, singing, speaking,

yet all is Nature's game; behind all this is a great pure detached spirit rapt in a serene delight.

Once in a while it seemed as if God Himself was standing under the tree, to play upon his flute of delight; and with its sheer charm to draw my very soul out. Always it seemed as if someone was embracing me, holding me on one's lap. The manifestation of these emotions overpowered my whole body and mind, a pure and wide peace reigned everywhere, it is impossible to describe that. The hard cover of my life opened up and a spring of love for all creatures gushed from within. Along with this love such *satvik* emotions as charity, kindness, *ahimsa*, etc. overpowered my dominantly *rajasik* nature and found an abundant release. And the more these qualities developed, the greater the delight and deeper the sense of unclouded peace. The anxiety over the case had vanished from the beginning, now it was a contrary emotion that found room in my mind. God is All-Good, He had brought me into the prison cell for my good, my release and the quashing of charges was certain, I grew firm in this faith. After this for many days I did not have to suffer from any troubles in the prison.”⁶⁴

This is Sri Aurobindo's realisation of the Infinite, the Universal Soul, of *Sachchidananda*, the Supreme Spirit. In this way the Supreme Spirit flowered in his being. Before entering the prison cell, his being was filled with deep silence as he had already experienced the silent spirit. Now with this experience of *Sachchidananda* he felt a surge of integral *ananda*.

*“None can reach heaven,
who has not passed through hell.”*

(“Savitri”, Book 2, Canto VIII)

Having realised the *Virata*, the Infinite, Sri Aurobindo started to propagate, immediately after his release from the prison, the message of the *Gita*, the first instance of which is the publication of *Gitar Bhumika* (Introduction to the Gita) in the Bengali magazine

Dharma. The culminating point of this endeavour is his super commentary on the *Gita*—*The Essays on the Gita*—written in Pondicherry. In his Uttarpada speech (1909), he says,

Then He placed the *Gita* in my hands. His strength entered into me and I was able to do the *sadhana* of the *Gita*. I was not only to understand intellectually, but to realise what Sri Krishna demanded of Arjuna and what He demands of those who aspire to do His work, to be free from repulsion and desire, to do work for Him without the demand for fruit, to renounce self-will and become a passive and faithful instrument in His hands, to have an equal heart for high and low, friend and opponent, success and failure, yet not to do His work negligently.

When he was permitted to walk outside his prison cell, he describes his feelings in these words:

So it was arranged, and it was while I was walking that His strength again entered into me. I looked at the prison that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me his shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover.

Thus, he saw Vasudeva everywhere, in every being, the description of which we have already got in his book *Karakahini*. Further, he looked at the prisoners in the prison and found Narayana in those darkened souls and misused bodies. Once more he heard this message from God: “Behold the people among whom I have sent you to do a little of my work. This is the nature of the nation I am raising up and the reason why I raise them.”

In the court too, he saw Vasudeva, Narayana, and Sri Krishna in the person of the magistrate, the prosecuting counsel and the like.

Furthermore, when he found Chittaranjan as his defence lawyer, he felt in his appointment the definite direction of Narayana, the Divine. Again, in the solitary confinement he had this more profound realisation: "But now day after day I realised in the mind, I realised in the heart, I realised in the body the truths of Hindu religion. They became living experiences to me, and things were opened to me which no material science could explain."

In the Uttarpara speech, we get a clear idea of the course of Sri Aurobindo's *sadhana*. Says he,

When I first approached Him, it was not entirely in the spirit of the *Jnani*. I came to Him long ago in Baroda some years before the *Swadeshi* Movement began and I was drawn into the public field. When I approached God at that time, I hardly had living faith in Him. The agnostic was in me, the atheist was in me, the sceptic was in me and I was not absolutely sure that there was a God at all. I did not feel His presence. Yet something drew me to the truth of the *Vedas*, the truth of the *Gita*, the truth of the Hindu religion. I felt there must be a mighty truth somewhere in this Yoga, a mighty truth in this religion based on the Vedanta.

So when I turned to Yoga and resolved to practise it and find out if my idea was right, I did it in this spirit and with this prayer to Him, "If Thou art, then Thou knowest my heart. Thou knowest that I do not ask for *Mukti*, I do not ask for anything which others ask for. I ask only for strength to uplift this nation, I ask only to be allowed to live and work for this people whom I love and to whom I pray that I may devote my life."

I strove long for the realisation of Yoga and at last to some extent I had it, but in what I most desired I was not satisfied. Then in the seclusion of the prison, of the solitary cell I asked for it again. I said, "Give me Thy *adesh*. I do not know what work to do or how to do it. Give me a message."

Sri Aurobindo also says,

In the communion of Yoga two messages came. The first message said, "I have given you a work and it is to help uplift this nation. Before long the time will come when you will have to

leave prison.” The second message came and it said, “Something has been shown to you in this year of seclusion, something about which you had your doubts and it is the truth of the Hindu religion. It is this religion that I am raising up before the world; it is this that I have perfected and developed through the *rishis*, saints and *avatars*, and now it is going forth to do my work among the nations. I am raising this nation up to send forth my word. This is the *Sanatan Dharma*, this is the eternal religion which you did not really know before, but which I have now revealed to you. The agnostic and the sceptic in you have been answered, for I have given you proofs within and outside of you, physical and subjective, which have satisfied you. When you go forth, speak to your nation always this word that, it is for the *Sanatan Dharma* that they arise, it is for the world and not for themselves that they arise. I am giving them freedom for the service of the world...”

What an infallible, powerful message! When Sri Aurobindo received this message, none perhaps could think that India would attain freedom so soon. And today, many leaders are of the view that it is the freedom of India that will help bring about the transformation of the world.

It is this message, in fact, a command, that has controlled entirely the life of Sri Aurobindo. Following this divine command, he is pursuing his *sadhana* in Pondicherry for the last forty years. And out of this period he has passed twelve years living alone. Unless one has total faith in integral realisation and ideal, one cannot plunge himself in this profound *sadhana* by leaving aside all other work. He has himself said that this *sadhana* is not for his own liberation (मुक्ति) (*mukti*) it is for fulfilling the purpose of God. Years back, he embraced the path of yoga not for his salvation but for the awakening of India. His integral *sadhana* is in progress in order to transform this human life into life divine.

Sri Aurobindo had at one time the same mentality as that of the ultra-modern man of today. He was a sceptic like the modern intellectual, but he was not proud of his scepticism like the

intellectuals of today; he did not consider it as the highest point of knowledge. Deep was his intelligence, unbound was his heart—he was always ready to accept the truth. That is why he got the truth-realisation through his own *sadhana* and not by any unnatural means. It was God who in disguise, through the cycle of events, bestowed on him the highest knowledge. With the dawning of knowledge, his devotion became unwavering, and he came out of the prison to develop it in his work. But soon he took the path of integral yoga in order to develop the integral force. This is the reason of his going away from the external field of work. Indeed, it is not possible to do integral *sadhana* in the tumult of mechanical external activities.

*“I am the hope that looks towards my God, My God who
never came to me till now; His voice I hear that ever says
‘I come’: I know that one day he shall come at last.”*

(“Savitri”, B. VII, C. IV, P. 505)

LAST MONTHS IN BENGAL

Sri Aurobindo was involved in Bengal politics for about four years, of which a year was spent in prison. After his acquittal from the charges and subsequent release from prison in May 1909, he received a warm welcome from his countrymen, but he soon discovered that the earlier present political ardour and enthusiasm was missing. The entire nation was in consternation owing to the draconian repressive measures unleashed by the British government. Nine front-line leaders of Bengal, including Krishna Kumar Mitra and Ashwini Dutta, had been sent into exile. Tilak⁶⁵ was in prison, Bipin Chandra was in England and Lala Lajpat Rai was in self-imposed exile in America. Some other leaders were either in prison or had gone into hiding. A few diehard leaders like Dr. Munje, Motilal Ghosh, etc. clung on by some means to the ideals of the Nationalist Party. It was the Moderate Party that kept the then political platform busy. They organised a Congress *sans* the Nationalist Party in 1908 electing Rash Behari Ghosh as President. On the other hand, the revolutionary activities were proceeding covertly; the “bomb culture” kept the youth excited. Very few people were participating openly in the national movement.

Despite this depressing scenario, Sri Aurobindo got down to work with renewed enthusiasm. He reorganised as much as possible the scattered forces of the Nationalist Party. During his absence, *Bande Mataram*, the mouthpiece of the Nationalist Party, ceased to exist as the government had confiscated its press. Newspapers like *Jugantar*, *Sandhya*, *Nava Shakti*, etc. had disappeared. In this altered situation, Sri Aurobindo did not commence his political activities in

the same manner as before. The profound realisation attained by him in prison was the inspiration for his future course of action for the service of the nation. On one hand, he enthused Bengal to protect the national *dharma*, to do their duty by maintaining faith in both *Sanatana dharma* and God without desiring the fruit of action. On the other hand, he motivated his countrymen to earnestly get involved in the work of national revivification avoiding direct conflict with the government. With this end in view, he started publishing two weeklies, the *Karmayogin* in English and the *Dharma* in Bengali.

These two weeklies continued blowing the *Panchajanya* (पाञ्चजन्य) —the divine conch of Lord Krishna), for the revival of the nation, in the same way as *Bande Mataram*, which used to inspire the country previously. The cover picture of the *Karmayogin* depicted Sri Krishna exhorting Arjuna struck by illusion, to carry out his duty. Sri Aurobindo, too, with his writings wanted to inspire this disheartened and disoriented nation so that she did not get shrouded by *tamas* (inertia and ignorance). His main conviction was that the nation would never lose her goal despite hundreds of impediments, if she maintained faith in truth and kept an unshakeable aspiration. But the country was turbulent—like the terrible dance of *Rudra*—due to the trumpet of revolution on one hand, and on the other, the horror of the repressive policy of the government. Perhaps the nation was not in a state to pay heed to Sri Aurobindo's message. At the same time, he received the *Adesh* (a divine command) that he would have to go afar renouncing politics in order to pursue spiritual *sadhana* of a profound nature.

For long, many believed that Sri Aurobindo left Bengal as he could not withstand the storms and turmoil of politics. They forget how often he has courted pain willingly all through his life. They are oblivious to the fact that he smilingly endured the inhuman sufferings of prison life and completely mastered all kinds of sorrow. From the following editorial paragraph of the *Dharma*, it is clear that he was getting ready to face the wrath of the regime for reviving his political activities:

Our police friends have spread the information that soon a supreme weapon of exile will be hurled, not at nine, but at

twenty-four people who are to depart for various prisons in different provinces by motor vehicles, rail and guide ships at the government expenses. In this list, Aurobindo Ghose perhaps scored the premier position. We have failed to understand that exile is dangerous and that just a mention of it would make one shrink in fear, abandon duties, human qualities and service for the nation. Chidambaram⁶⁶ and other heroes have accepted smilingly this harsh punishment merely for propagating boycott. In comparison, this punishment is light and merely insufficient. I was working hard on the outside, trying to serve the nation but then, God sent Lord Minto and Morley as instruments and said, "Go, sit quietly and meditate, read and write books, earn knowledge and spread knowledge. You have been enjoying the ambience of the crowd now go enjoy solitude."

What is this dreadful word (exile) that strikes fear in your heart? When we travel to far off places like England, we cannot see the faces of our dear ones but people still go to England. We may fall ill due to the weather or due to the food. Even by staying at home, one may fall ill. Thus, no one can change one's destined life span. And for a Hindu, death is not dreaded. When the body dissolves, it is like changing a worn out cloth, the soul does not die. Thousands of times have I been born, thousands of times shall I be born again. I might not have established the independence of India but I shall come back to enjoy the freedom. Nobody can stop me. Why fear? I have got my name embedded effortlessly in the pages of history, the path to Heaven is wide open, but there is no agony, only a bit of pain in my body and that brings salvation (*mukti*). That is all. The nobility of the coolies of Transvaal⁶⁷ as against that the despicable failing of the educated classes is shameful.

The next paragraph reflects his unflinching belief in the inevitability of independence for India: "Whatever be it, whether they send to exile twenty-four or a hundred, whether they exile Aurobindo Ghose or Surendra Nath (Banerjee), the wheel of time is not going to stop."

Sri Aurobindo started the publication of *Dharma* from the 7th Bhadra 1316 (corresponds to August 1909). From its inception, he was named as the editor. However, a few issues published from the 23rd Falgun (corresponds to February 1909) of the same year did not carry his name. Perhaps, this was due to the fact that before his departure for Pondicherry, he was staying elsewhere and not in Calcutta. The above-mentioned comment was published in the *Dharma* on the 26th Paush (corresponds to December)—much before his departure from Calcutta. Even at that time the rumour was afloat that he would be deported.

It is absolutely impossible that the one who was so firmly determined in his purpose would voluntarily renounce action for a certain political expediency. He was then convinced that it was no longer necessary for him to work in the political field; with the passage of time, the country would be freed. But he would have to devote himself in a deeper *sadhana* with a view to restore the *dharma* of India. Had he nurtured egoistic longing for leadership, he would not have done this. In fact, he did not come to Bengal leaving his comfortable life in Baroda for the lure of leadership. He came to Bengal giving up everything he had in order to serve his motherland, to infuse the spirit of freedom in the minds of his countrymen. He was confident that even in his absence from the political arena the national movement would go through many obstacles and it would in no time gather momentum. As a matter of fact, this did happen.

Even after leaving for Pondicherry, the National Congress invited him time and again to take up the leadership of the country, elected him President and what is more, a few political leaders even came down to Pondicherry to request him to join politics again. During that period of time, the national movement became much more widespread and powerful; he could have easily taken his place in the vanguard of this movement if he had only wished it. But that was not the time and his *sadhana* had not been completed; hence, he could not accede to anyone's request. Had he been desirous of leadership, and covetous of name and fame, he had enough opportunity to

satisfy them. Rabindranath Tagore, the farseeing poet, wrote long before getting an inkling of his ideal of life:[68](#)

In watchfulness thy soul

Hast thou e'er held for bondless full perfection's birth



Sri Aurobindo: Student Leader (at National College, Calcutta)

During the few months he stayed in Bengal, he had set out to awaken the spiritual consciousness of the nation through his writings and speeches, but, he had to return to take up the leadership in the political field very soon. After the Surat Congress, the Nationalist Party shunned all contact with the Congress Party, and taking advantage of this, the Moderate Party captured various political institutions. Naturally, therefore, Sri Aurobindo engaged himself diligently in reorganising the Nationalist Party and he had to take up solely, so to say, the burden of leadership.

Just as in the Provincial Conference at Midnapore in 1907, where a test of strength between the Moderates and the Nationalist Party took place, the same test was staged again in its Hooghly Convention in 1909. The conference was slated to be held in

September. The first draft of the proposal, prepared by the local Moderate leaders forming the Invitation Committee was totally against the ideals of the Nationalist Party. As regards the selection of the representatives too, they made arrangements in a manner such that the youth, especially the students, could not be a part of the conference. Further, they left no stone unturned to ensure that even Sri Aurobindo could not get elected as a representative. Sri Aurobindo himself thus wrote a *propos* in the *Dharma*:

It is learnt that Sri Aurobindo Ghose might not become a representative of the Hooghly Conference and be nominated to any District Committee due to the efforts of some “great well-wishers”. It is distressing that such despicable attitude gets a place in our national politics. If Aurobindo babu has to be boycotted, by all means do it. There is no objection to it, he won’t be sad for that. He has never worked by being dependent on anyone; previously on many occasions he has proceeded in his own path alone, in the future too if he has to proceed alone, he would not be afraid. If this opinion is accepted for the welfare of the country or for accomplishing one’s own purpose, all contact with Aurobindo babu is to be avoided, why hesitate to propagate this opinion standing in the open before the country. What good will be achieved by this secret conspiracy is difficult to comprehend. In the meanwhile Aurobindo babu has been elected as a representative from Diamond Harbour. The secret policy is as much sullied as futile. Absence of deceitfulness is a noble quality in English politics; whatever has to be done they do it openly, in front of everyone—like an Aryan. We have to introduce this noble quality in Indian politics. This kind of Chanakya policy suits monarchy; in democracy it brings only fear and cowardice.

In a book written by Jyotish Chandra Ghose (an active participant in the conference), we come to know that Sri Aurobindo resolutely foiled this conspiracy hatched by the Moderates. He invited the students to join politics by printing representative election forms in his own press, disregarding the age bar of 21 years for

representatives and boldly disobeying the Risley Circular. Besides, he ignored the bar on the election of the student representatives in the Invitation Committee and advised the nationalist-minded professors to help in the election of the representatives at the conference by holding meetings in different places. Furthermore, he instructed the Nationalist Party workers at Hooghly to form volunteers' group from among the students (the Invitation Committee had prohibited this too). Finally, he reprinted the proposals of the Nationalist Party writing them against each proposal drafted and printed earlier by the Invitation Committee and handed out the copies to the representatives of the Nationalist Party. He thus turned up at the conference attended by his followers. The conference sparked off a lot of enthusiasm thanks to his determined efforts and alacrity. The Moderate Party tried to play tricks with the Nationalist Party but could not succeed as they were booed and hooted away by the public present. Peace was established through the efforts of Sri Aurobindo and finally, the proposals of the Nationalist Party alone were adopted.

Jyotish babu has demonstrated that because of these actions by Sri Aurobindo, the Moderate Party was not only forced to acknowledge the influence of the Nationalist Party but also no factionalism cropped up as it had happened in Midnapore. His rival party too had to finally accept his leadership. In an article entitled "*Hooghli Parinam*" (The Final Outcome at Hooghly) published in the *Dharma* on the 28th Bhadra 1316 (corresponds to August 1909), he wrote:

There is no doubt that in Bengal the nationalistic feeling is overflowing. Many had doubts that the Nationalist Party's weakness and smaller number will become evident. Instead, a year long suffering and torture (by the police), resulted in astonishing increase of strength and also the growth of deep nationalistic feelings and courage in the heart of the youth, which filled my heart with joy." Thereafter, he talks about the "discipline and obedience to the leaders" by the youth, and analysed the mentality of the Moderate group and effort of the

Nationalist Party to unite the Congress. He continues, “In this situation unity (between the two parties) is impossible, but whatever slim hope is present, the Nationalist party is holding on to that and even if the Moderates are majority, they will willingly concede on all aspects with the Moderates. This kind of sacrifice and self-control can be displayed only by a stronger side.

Thereafter, referring to the Moderates, he writes:

We cannot wait relying only on slim hope. There is no certainty when suddenly this unity in Bengal can be shattered. The Nationalist party of Maharashtra, Madras, Punjab and United Province are all eagerly looking up towards Bengal. Bengal is the leader of India; the courage, efficiency and steadfastness of Bengal will bring deliverance to the whole country, otherwise this is not possible. Hence, we are inviting the Nationalist Party to come forward to the field of action; it does not behove the dedicated souls to be affected by fear, idling and effortlessness. When the nationalistic feeling is awakened across the country, unless it is proved with befitting acts like a true Aryan, this grace from the Divine would not be lasting.

After the Surat Congress, Bengal was the sole place of hope for the Nationalist Party, because the Moderates had become almost aligned to the government. They were extremely eager to carry out the Morley-Minto administrative reforms. We come to know from the editorial comments published in the second issue of the *Dharma*, that the Moderate Party assembling at the Madras Convention, “... taking the name of ‘National Convention’ disgraced Bengal by discarding Boycott policy, the Moderates from Bengal silently accepting this insult has shown the climax of their forbearance.”

In another paragraph of the same issue, Sri Aurobindo writes: “In the shadow of administrative reforms, the tree of divisive policy that Lord Morley has sown is being watered and cared for by Mr. Gokhale. Another effort by Lord Morley is to divide the Hindu and Muslim communities. This is the second part of the divide and rule policy—the second poisonous fruit of administrative reforms.”

He continues: "There is no trace of faith from Bengal on these reforms. If a few rich people are tempted to join the administration, forgetting the welfare of the country, even then no harm would be caused to the country. But if a respectable leader like Surendra babu (Banerjee) nurtures this poisonous tree, this would be real misfortune for the country."

But, changing the attitude of the Moderate Party was next to impossible. Although leaders like Surendra Nath and Bhupendra Nath did not denounce, like Gokhale, the policy of boycott, yet, Mr. Baikuntha Nath Sen, President of the Hooghly Provincial Conference, did not hesitate to label the Nationalist Party as impatient and engaged in attaining impossible ideals.

"It is the secret wish of the leaders to turn this poisonous boycott to a loving *Swadeshi*. The President himself (Baikuntha Nath Sen) quoted Shakespeare and advised to boycott the word boycott, lest the 'Morley-Moderate unity temple' be reduced to ashes by the fire of opposition."

Thus, Sri Aurobindo penned against the dependence on government support and inertia of the Moderate Party and gave a rousing call to the Nationalist Party to perform its allotted duty. He writes: "In this situation those who are ready to sacrifice their lives for their motherland, those who have no contact with fear, do not care other than for God and 'Mother Bengal', if they do not come forward now, the future of Bengal will be in darkness forever."

Again, in the convention of the Barisal District Conference, at Jhalakathi, he tried to fire Bengal with enthusiasm but it seemed that the country had lost the former fervour to respond to his call. What could he do now alone?

On one hand, there was the opposition from the Moderates and on the other, the lack of leaders in the Nationalist Party. Even the newspapers were afraid of writing anything about the boycott movement. Referring to the absence of a daily newspaper of the Nationalist Party, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

"A *Swadeshi* meeting took place the other day at College Square, the substance of which was released to a well-established daily. But the owners of the daily did not agree to

publish it. Shri Aurobindo Ghose had presided and addressed the meeting. He repeatedly spoke about boycott. This might have frightened and disturbed the proprietor. The fear and annoyance is natural, for the more mentioning of boycott is ignored, better is the chance for personal benefits.

Not only that, there was a great deal of hullabaloo when, on the occasion of the *Swadeshi* festival on 7 August, a proposal was mooted to organise a procession from the College Square. "In the name of College Square the authorities were so frightened that the President of the meeting was roused to leave the meeting. As a result the procession was led from the ground of Panti."

Even on the eve of Raksha Bandhan the leaders dropped the idea of reading the Declaration of National Policies. Protesting this, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the editorial column of the *Dharma* (12 Paush, 1316—corresponds to 2 December 1909): "If we do not even have the courage to declare that we shall remedy the ill effects of the partition of Bengal, keep the unity of the nation and use our complete soul for this pious duty, then stop the proposed function and gathering of 7 August and 30 Ashwin (corresponding to 14 October). If there is not even this little courage and fervour then it is to be understood that all the endeavours of awakening the nation is a failure, their outward pomp is all false and futile."

But the country's fate was moving in another direction. "The Moderates have got their coveted reforms, but they are upset instead of being delighted." On the plea of suppressing the terrorists, the Government continues repressive measures and torture. In this political gloom Sri Aurobindo writes:

The people of Bengal for long have been asleep; all the awakening took place and all the novel developments which swung the whole of India—all that has become weak. It is like an extinguishing fire that is glowing timidly. It is in critical condition now; if you want to save this, discard all fear, the false cliques and self-protection, and unite again by looking at the face of the Divine Mother and serve together the country. The unity (between the Moderates and the Nationalists) for which

one hoped so long, has failed. The Moderates do not want to unify with Nationalist Party but want to gobble it up. If this would have benefitted the country then we would not have prevented it. Those who adhere to truth, are inspired by noble ideals, and consider God as their only support for working for the country would have stayed away and those who agree to take recourse to sullied politics could have joined the Moderates accepting the prominence of Mehta (Pheroza Shah) and dictats of Morley for the service of the country. But in this sullied politics, the country would not be rescued. India will arise on the power of the Divine, Truth and Courage. Those who are prepared to sacrifice all for the noble ideal of nationalism, those who are eager to present before humanity the Mother as supreme in the world, benevolent divine power, the giver of knowledge— they all come and unite, carry out the Divine Mother's work becoming powerful by the power of dharma and sacrifice. O child of the Mother! You have once strayed, return to the path of dharma. But avoid doing anything only with exuberance and enthusiasm; instead learn to work together with one vow, one approach and one method which is ethical, which will inevitably bring about the well-being of the country.

But in the name of containing terrorism, due to the repressive policy of the government there was no scope of the country to wake up to the call. The latter enacted and brought to effect such a law by which holding of any meeting or conference could be stopped. Ironically, this was "the first introduction of the new age of administrative reforms". The government was under the impression that by means of this reform the political murders and other offences could be curbed. But underlining the shortcomings of this measure, Sri Aurobindo wrote: "We too want to try to end this tendency of political murders from the country. But for that, the only way would be legitimate improvement of the political system leading to the independence of India and that has to be displayed through action. Only words would not convince the people. You alone can prevent

that sanctimonious work. But by following that, we will be destroyed, so also will you cause your own destruction.”

The political movement at that time was at very low ebb; yet why were there so many incidents of political impropriety?

Were not the meetings and conferences stopped? The meetings of the Nationalists have come to an end; the leaders of the Moderates, after their exile, have stopped attending the meetings. Sometimes the Swadeshi meetings take place at College Square but no well-known speakers take part in those, so also the audiences are negligible in number. Sri Aurobindo Ghose after his release from the prison addressed the meetings on a few occasions but he too has become quiet after the Hooghly Conference . . . Amidst this complete silence the incidents of dacoity and murder are increasing day by day. That is natural, if there is fire inside only a free exit path ensures its safe decay. When the exit path is closed the heat inside increases, as a result it comes out and destroys the obstacle to the exit path.

What should one do in such a situation? Sri Aurobindo writes:

Now it is to be considered what path the Nationalists should follow. We are trying to keep our political activities within the framework of law. If the limits under the law are so constricted that movement cannot be carried on openly, then, what is the course left for us? One way could be to wait quietly for the result of these confused policies. We know that the government recognises that the hope for independence has not extinguished from the mind of the Indians, the dissatisfaction has not turned into love by simply hitting the head by the sceptre of torture. The aspiration of the people and the discontent of the public are all confined within and are getting stirred up. So far the revolutionaries have not been able to draw the mind of the common man towards the path of violence and terror killing, but there is no certainty when they will be able to. Once that mischief is out of hand there will danger for the government and no limit to the miseries of the people. We were attempting to

make the Nationalist party disciplined and orderly due to this fear and in the hope of protecting the new life of the nation. We had thought if the faultless path for achieving freedom of the country is presented, the terrorist activities from the country will stop. Now it is understood that the British government will not allow that method to be followed.

These comments were published in the *Dharma* dated 4 Magh (corresponds to 20 December 1909). In an article entitled “*Amader Asha*” (Our Hope), published in that issue, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Thanks to the oppression of two years, the weakness and defeat, the Indians have learned to seek the source of strength within themselves. Not the excitement of oration, not the learning from the occidental *mlechha* (foreigners), the emotion-arousing power of meetings and societies, the fragile inspiration of newspapers, rather it will be that energy, deep, steady, unerring, pure, surpassing joy-and-sorrow, beyond good-and-evil, which is born within the self when in the soul’s immense silence God and the human person come together, that greatly-creative, greatly-destructive, greatly-conserving, knowledge-giving Mahasaraswati, wealth-bestowing Mahalakshmi, strength-giving Mahakali, all manifested in a powerful Chandi will manifest Herself to work for the welfare of India and the world. The independence of India is only a secondary aim, the main object is to reveal the power of Indian culture, its spread and victory throughout the world. Had we succeeded in gaining independence or autonomy through the use of Western civilised techniques, through meetings and organisations, lectures and the use of physical force, that main objective would not have been fulfilled. We have to achieve independence through the inherent strength of our own culture, through the strength of the spirit and the use of subtle as well as material means that the soul-force can create. That is why, by destroying our Western-oriented movement, God has turned the outward energy inward. That energy which Brahmapandhab Upadhyay had seen in his divine vision, and because of which he would repeatedly exhort

“Turn the energy inward”; but since the time was then not right no one could do that, he himself could not do that, but today God has brought that about. The energy, *Shakti*, of India has turned within. When once again it turns outward, that current will never cease flowing, and no one can stop it. Redeemer of the three worlds, that holy Ganges will flood India and by its immortal touch it will usher in an era of new youth to the world.⁶⁹

Herein lies the clue to Sri Aurobindo's renunciation of political life and his wholehearted acceptance of the life of yoga. This also is the goal of his integral *sadhana*. He was inspired to leave Baroda and come to Bengal in order to take up the burden of the political movement in India; driven by the same inspiration in her upward soar he is now absorbed in his *sadhana* in Pondicherry. With his *sadhana* progressing, he waits for having the divine realisation of Maheswari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati symbolising knowledge, force, beauty and divine perfection. He is also in wait for the unfolding of the Supreme Nature in this world. He is guiding man to realise the divine being seated above his material self and thereby showing him the way to transform completely this earthly life. While in Calcutta, he got an indication of this supreme possibility; that is why, his life was not governed by material goals, which, in fact, were not acceptable. It was at the behest of the Divine that he left for Pondicherry.

DEPARTURE TO PONDICHERRY

Towards the end of 1316 (corresponds to February and March 1910), Sri Aurobindo stayed in Calcutta and then Chandernagore. On 30 March 1910, he set out for Pondicherry by sea. In Calcutta, he had four companions, namely Shri Nolini Kanto Gupta, Suresh Chandra Chakrabarti, Sourindra Nath Basu and Bijoy Kumar Nag. In Chandernagore, he lived incognito for a few weeks in the house of Shri Motilal Roy. With Sri Aurobindo living in his house, Moti babu's life underwent a transformation which he has recorded in his book *Jiban Sangini* (My Life Partner). Sri Aurobindo's appearance as a yogi has been depicted beautifully by Moti babu.

Sri Aurobindo had realised that despite his absence, the freedom movement of India would continue unabated and in due course of time, it would be crowned with success. He also realised quite well that the mighty power of the seed (of revolution) he had planted would certainly be transformed into a gigantic tree. But achieving the country's independence was not his only aim, he aspired as well for the growth of the divine force in the life of the nation—a radical change of human life and human nature—and set before man the Divine ideal. He did not only long for realising the Divine in his own self, or for his personal *yoga-siddhi*, (योग-सिद्धि: attaining perfection in yoga). Later, in a letter, he wrote that if he had fixed the goal of *moksha* (मोक्ष - salvation), he would have attained it long before treading the beaten track.

With the inspiration to pursue this unique *sadhana*, Sri Aurobindo on his own volition left Bengal and cut off his attachment to *samsara*, the family life. He never was a family man in the true sense—in his

family life too he was a yogi. Although he got married, he did not get the opportunity to live in the company of his wife for long. The family life was never his ideal. In the three letters addressed to his wife Mrinalini Devi, he expressed his sincere call to her to become a wayfarer on this extraordinary path. In the *Alipore Bomb* case, the police produced these three letters before the court in order to prove that Sri Aurobindo was deeply impelled by the ideals of revolution—as if revolution ran in his very veins! But the doctrine of armed revolution apart, these letters reveal another sublime ideal that he was striving to attain. He writes:

I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race; not the physical strength, I am not going to fight with a sword or a gun, but with the power of knowledge. The force of *kshatriya* is not the only force, there is also the “Brahmanic force” (force of Brahma) which is established through knowledge. This is not a new feeling in me, not of recent origin. I was born with it, it is in my very marrow. God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission. At the age of 14 the seed of it had begun to sprout and by the age of 18, it had been firmly rooted and become unshakeable.⁷⁰

In his own sweet language he expressed also to his wife the orientation of his life’s course. He says,

You have, perhaps, by now discovered that the one with whose your destiny is linked is a very strange kind of person. It is different from the mental outlook, aim of life and field of work that the people in this country hold at present. It is quite different in all respects; it is uncommon . . . swayed by the opinion of others, will you too dismiss him as a mad man? The mad man will, by all means, run on the path determined by his madness. You will not be able to hold him back; his nature is stronger than yours. Will you then just sit in a corner and weep and wail, or join him in his run and try to become the mad wife to match the mad husband, like the queen of the blind king who by covering her eyes with a piece of cloth lived as blind?⁷¹

I have three types of madness. Firstly, it is my firm faith that all the virtue, talent, higher education and knowledge, and wealth God has given me, belongs to Him. I have the right to spend only so much, as necessary for the maintenance of the family and on absolute necessities. Whatever remains should be returned to the Divine. If I spend all on myself, for personal comfort, for luxury, then I am a thief . . . In these hard days, the whole country is seeking refuge at my door, I have thirty crores of brothers and sisters in this country—many of them die of starvation, most of them weakened by suffering are somehow dragging on. They must be helped. What do you say? Will you be, in this regard the partner of my *dharma*?⁷²

Sri Aurobindo never spent a single paisa in luxury in spite of earning a lot of money in Baroda. He consecrated himself wholeheartedly to the service of the nation by giving up on everything of his own. Despite so many sacrifices, he was still not satisfied. And just like him his wife too endured without demur, privation and pain; never did she let her rich relatives know about their needs. Later, when Sri Aurobindo left for Pondicherry, he was penniless. In the writings of Moti babu and Barindra Kumar, we come to know a little of how he passed his initial days in Pondicherry experiencing financial hardship. Today, the prosperity in the ashram in Pondicherry is visible—materially and aesthetically—but in the midst of this prosperity, Sri Aurobindo remains completely uninvolved. He never had any demand, nor does he have any even today.

Even in those dire days, Sri Aurobindo always used pay attention to the minimum comfort and contentment of his companions. In the book *Karakahini*, we have got an idea of the generosity and magnanimity of his heart. He as a leader was worshipped by the whole country. When he was in prison, he was meek and humble, and never made his co-accused feel any different. Whenever an occasion presented itself, he would join all of them in cheery banter and chatter to keep them in good spirits. A prison companion of Sri Aurobindo recalling an incident, says, “Kanailal Dutta used to disturb

the sleep of others at night creating a lot of noise through pranks. Once, he was eating biscuits from a tin which he managed to collect secretly from someone. He was playing with the tin and making noise with great amusement. Sri Aurobindo woke up as a result of this noisy mischief. Seeing him awake, Kanailal swiftly passed on a few biscuits to his hands, and Sri Aurobindo too accepted them by swiftly wrapping them up in his *chador* (blanket)."

Many people feel sad wondering why he left all and went away so far. True, he got along well with everybody but leading an ordinary worldly life and to display merely a bit of human greatness, was not his life's goal. He had mentioned this to his wife long before the indication of the great inspiration and which led him to far-off Pondicherry. In the above letter, he states:

The second madness has recently taken hold of me—by any means, I must have the direct vision of God. The religion of today, that is, uttering the name of God repeatedly, praying to Him in everyone's presence, showing people how religious one is—I do not want that. If the Divine is there, then there must be a way of experiencing His existence, of meeting Him. However hard be the path, I have taken a firm resolution to tread it. Hindu *dharma* asserts that the "path" is within one's own body, in one's mind. It has also provided methods to be followed to tread the "path". I have begun observing them and in a month I have been able to ascertain that the words in Hindu Dharma are not false. I am experiencing all the signs that have been mentioned in it. Now, I would like to take you along that path...⁷³

He found the way to feel integrally the existence of God while he was in prison—God himself became his guide. But, he did not rest content with realising God within himself—he got absorbed in the *sadhana* of manifesting the divine life in this world. Even his patriotism—singularly glorious—could not confine him to the field of political activity. It would be unjust to call his patriotism worldly—it was in fact, a transformed state of "Divine Love". He wrote to his wife in this regard. He says, "The third madness is this—where others regard the country as an inert piece of matter and know it as the

plains, the fields, the forests, the mountains and the rivers; I know my country as the Mother, I worship her and adore her accordingly.”⁷⁴

The fact that he regarded his own country as an embodiment of God has also been discussed in an essay entitled “*Sadhanar Path*” (The Path of *Sadhana*) published in the *Dharma*. He writes: “Such age also dawns when even if the man does not want the Divine, the Divine wants the Man. Then, He expresses His supreme loving-form and spontaneously appears completely to man. Today that auspicious day has come—O small! O beaten! O reluctant! You may not want God, but today He has appeared at your doorstep as a beggar—He wants merely a service in His appearance as *swadesh* (my own country).”⁷⁵

Indeed, what a fiery *mantra* he has given to the nation! Even after his leaving Bengal, for decades, thousands of men and women sacrificed themselves, courted excruciating torture and torment and even braved death. India has seen the advent of hundreds of selfless leaders. Today, India, from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari, has awakened, awakened too is the *Ganadevata* (the divinity in the people) of India.

But he himself realised that the independence of India alone would not bring about her supreme fulfilment, the soul of India would blossom with more profound *sadhana*. This is why he made up his mind resolutely to complete his *sadhana* paying no attention to the repeated calls from the Indian leaders. In ancient India the supreme development of the human soul had taken place—in time to come, here in India, it would be possible for the human soul to unfold its divine qualities. This is the *sadhana* of Sri Aurobindo.

The person to whom Sri Aurobindo first spoke of this great ideal could not live with him in this worldly life for a long time. Eight years after Sri Aurobindo’s departure from Calcutta, on 2nd Paush 1325 (corresponds to 2 December 1918) Mrinalini Devi breathed her last in the house of the late Principal Girish Chandra Basu at Lower Circular Road, Calcutta.

THE POLITICAL LIFE OF SRI AUROBINDO

It appears that there was a transformation in the life of Sri Aurobindo after his departure to Pondicherry. However, from a deep insight one may find no cardinal change had occurred, the principal aim remained steady. The vast and profound experience he had, now made his life multifaceted—as though creating many streams from the original river. Due to this, we see him first as a meritorious student, his creative talent in poetry during his adulthood, a seeker of knowledge during his academic life, a leader during his political life and finally as a Guru in his spiritual life. However, it would be a mistake to think that there are breaks or discontinuity in the outward manifestation of these various traits. Even now, Sri Aurobindo in the yogic state professes and teaches his disciples. In a way he is a political leader too because on several occasions at the crucial juncture of time he had given the nation the correct direction (while the country had failed to understand the truth and had taken a wrong course). He is a world leader because during World War II he had supported the liberty of mankind.⁷⁶ On the other hand, he is a poet and litterateur; however, now he has become a seer poet and creator of spiritual literature. And he is not only the Guru (spiritual teacher) for his disciples but also the Guru for humanity. Everywhere he is the creator of the novel, a modern day Bhagirath bringing down upon the earth the celestial river Mandakini.

At present, the age of politics is not over, so it is necessary to discuss in detail the politics of Sri Aurobindo. In a way, the typical characteristics of a “politician” were absent in Sri Aurobindo. There was no party politics in his political philosophy. Of course, he was in

the forefront of forming a national group, but it was never the intention to create party feuds. He had realised that the Congress alone can bring freedom of the country that is why he had tried his best to make the Congress Party adapt the idealism for complete independence. When he realised that in course of time the Congress would accept this idealism, he stayed away from the front row of politics. It is only a modest, humble and truthful person who can renounce the desire for public fame, which is not usual even in the case of an intelligent individual. Sri Aurobindo was a youth leader. He made the youth of Bengal brave and adventurous; they had adapted from him the idealism of self-sacrifice and renunciation of earthly enjoyment. He not only made them glorious from the human point of view but also instilled in them the aspiration for the highest. That is why we find so many young men with exceptional character in the *Swadeshi* age. Others who came in contact with them all concluded that such great personalities are unusual to come across. On the other hand, the sacrifice of their self had not made them in the least undisciplined or defiant—in the later age unfortunately this unrestrained attitude got changed to notoriety and has upset the society. While these young men were supporters of Sri Aurobindo's Nationalist Party, they were at the same time getting ready for an armed struggle against the British. They did not rise to such commitments based only on courage and moral convictions but with a divine inspiration. The source of this inspiration was Sri Aurobindo.

With the detection of the explosives-making devices and facilities at Maniktala garden, the plan for an armed revolution was temporarily foiled, but a bigger plan had been schemed in 1915—during World War I. This was organised by the teaming up of the revolutionaries of Punjab and Bengal. It had been planned that the Punjabis residing in America and Canada would send arms and weapons in a German vessel which would land in Sundarbans, but unfortunately the shipment did not arrive. The bravest of the youth, Jatindranath Mukherjee (better known as “Bagha Jatin”) went to coastal Orissa to receive the weapons and sacrificed his life fighting the police force in a trench battle (Balasore, Odisha) along with a few revolutionary comrades. The revolutionary hero Rash Behari Bose,

after many acts of valour in India, went to Japan with the purpose of supplementing the armed revolution. And what a twist of fate! Later, this great revolutionary operation was led by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose with the Indian National Army (*Azad Hind Fauj*). This military campaign did not succeed due to some complex reasons, but it must be admitted that after the 1857 uprising in the rank and file of the armed forces for independence, such an elaborate military operation for the freedom of the country had not taken place. These are the instances of the contribution of the armed revolution to the freedom movement for about a century.

It is true that the wheel of politics in the country took a different direction due the freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi, yet the call for armed revolution could not be given up by a section of the youth in that era. There had been an element of terrorism in the revolutionary activities and for that, the oppressive policy of the British government and their lack of foresight can be held responsible. Sri Aurobindo did not feel the need for armed revolution after he shifted to Pondicherry; as a result—the great *Kali Dance* which started in Bengal after his arrival (from Baroda) gradually with passage of time was withdrawn by Goddess Kali herself. Sri Aurobindo had realised much earlier that the British will be compelled to affirm independence to India.⁷⁷

A comparable flavour of the wisdom and thoroughness shown by Sri Aurobindo in politics, was visible in Lokmanya Tilak and “Deshabandhu” Chittaranjan Das. Sri Aurobindo had never stepped back from facing any grave conflicts in politics, but never could one find in that any sign of injudiciousness. In the Bengal Provincial Congress sessions in Midnapore and Hooghly and in Surat Congress one can witness his skills, proficiency and political wisdom, and profundity. He was a great critic of the Moderates and the middle-path policy in Congress but he had never made even the slightest of personal attacks on anyone. Truly, due to the influence of Sri Aurobindo, both politics and journalism had reached a high standard in that age.

More than the astuteness is the uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo's marvellous political prudence. To give a glimpse of it perhaps one has to compile a complete book. His arena of politics is not only India but the whole world. Therefore, to know his views, ideals and far-sightedness it would be necessary to study the various articles published in the *Arya* over seven extensive years. To get a deeper understanding and knowledge on India we get help from the two books (*The Renaissance of India* and *The Indian Polity*⁷⁸), which were compiled from the *Arya*. An attempt is made here to give a brief idea.

Firstly, even though complete independence of India was the aim, Sri Aurobindo was in favour of taking a different course of action depending upon the prevailing situation. Keeping in mind the possible future requirement, Sri Aurobindo had proficiently inspired the people of the country for an armed revolution, and he had also chalked out deployment of the masses in the political movements.

Passive resistance and the effort for self-determination of the nation were the two principal precepts of the mass movement. According to this precept it was decided that people would stand firm against the unjustified policies of the government and offer passive resistance. Due to the practice of fierce suppression, however, it was not possible to pursue passive resistance in those days. However for the establishment of the national spirit, organisational work had commenced. *Swadeshi* was the main focus of this activity. In a way the *Swadeshi* Movement in Bengal had given the inspirational impetus for achieving industrial progress in India in the later period. Building institutions for national education, boycotting the court and settlement of disputes instead by mutual consent, carrying out organisational work in villages, etc. were the political activities introduced during the *Swadeshi* period. Later, after about a decade, the Non-Cooperation Movement led by Gandhiji adopted this procedure and was accepted extensively all over India.

Secondly, in the national movement of that period, not only was emphasis laid on organisational activities, the Nationalist party also had aims for the superintendence by nationalistic people in the

establishments set up by the British. The Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 made a launch of improvement in the administration, which Sri Aurobindo criticised severely as insufficient. But before withdrawing from the field of activities in his appeal to the people for building up the nation, he had hinted about spreading the influence of the Nationalist Party in the various councils set up as per the reforms. Although, the Nationalist Party could not work according to this suggestion because of the adverse situation, in the later period Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das followed this policy and showed the way to the Congress Party to enter the legislative councils. Of course, Deshabandhu had to win over lots of opposition from supporters and colleagues, but his policy had given the nation a valuable political experience—there were no two opinions about it. Lokmanya Tilak too had this view. As the leader of the “Extremist” party, although he was dissatisfied at the hollowness of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms (1919), even then he had counselled the Congress to get involved in the administration so as to learn the process of governance as much as possible by means of this reform. Had he been alive perhaps the national movement would have taken a different course. Thus, it can be seen that even though Sri Aurobindo himself had not been at the forefront of the political arena, whatever policies he had supported, in course of time, were vindicated and the nation achieved independence as a result of such collective policies—though the independence had come with a tint of bitterness amid the rejoicing because of the partitioning of India into two.

Sri Aurobindo had realised that the Indians did not have any particular experiences of modern political processes and yet they had to be prepared for the complete independence of the country. For this reason, in various ways he was motivating the country to acquire this great privilege. Independence must be won, whether by political processes, through armed revolution, or by employing the non-cooperation policy—this was the only aim. If it can be achieved quickly by mutual understanding and settlement then what’s wrong with it? In 1942, he surprised the nation by supporting the Cripps Mission for this reason alone. After thirty-two years of silence, Sri

Aurobindo made a statement on political matters. How surprising! He even tried to convince the Congress Party through personal channels to accept this new policy. But alas! The verdict of destiny did not allow this to fructify. The leadership and the nation could not recognise the significance of Sri Aurobindo's message and could not realise its deeper purpose. If at that time there was a settlement with the British (by accepting the Cripps Mission) then,

- 1.5 million people would not have perished in the infamous and tragic Bengal famine of 1943.
- The military power of India would have been enhanced to a great extent and the Congress Party would have gained this military strength.
- The 1942 movement could have been avoided and the consequential unnecessary destruction thereof.
- There would have been no partition.

But who could prevent the independence of India in spite of the confused national policy of that period? What Sri Aurobindo predicted in 1920 had now taken place. The Labour Party won the election in Britain in 1945 and formed the government and the very next year a three-member committee formed by the new government brought the proposal for independence of India. Sri Aurobindo knew from his younger days the character of the English people. He had denounced and severely criticised various acts of the British. Yet he knew that one day the British would understand the futility of their repressive measures and be disturbed by the dissatisfaction of the Indian masses and the new wave of internationalism, and agree to grant independence to India. Actually that is exactly what happened, but this was accompanied by a great catastrophe, which no one anticipated. India was partitioned— Mother India was broken up.

The terrible suffering that Sri Aurobindo had perceived long before, occurred, and the world was stupefied at this ghastly scourge. It was as though a monster in a single moment had churned out and destroyed the thousands of years of "spiritual India". Sri Aurobindo's feeling of national spirit is unique. His patriotism was not out of the yearning for the wellness of the country; from the dawn

of his adulthood he had realised the divine being amidst the nation. On this, he had written a nice letter to his wife.⁷⁹ He has seen India and the Universal Mother; out of all the powers of the Universal Mother, the main one is inherent in India. This is his yogic realisation. Hence, during the *Swadeshi* era he had stated that God, Himself, was the leader of the National Movement. Because of this deep insight and profound realisation everything in India is much treasured by Sri Aurobindo. He has analysed so judiciously the tradition and the genius of India, which touches our heart so deeply as though we are guided by a mystic light to help us know our land. On the other hand, he has never hesitated to show impartially whatever has been the cause for our national weaknesses; because his vision is not confined within the country or the epoch of time.

The word nation indicates the people of the land. Sri Aurobindo, from the dawn of his adulthood, has become one with the people of India. Right after his arrival in India he criticised the policy of the Congress because then the party was composed of rich aristocrats and a class proud of its Western education. In that era itself, he wanted to change the Congress to an organisation of the people. As long as he was in the political field, the awakening of people had begun; but it is also true that this new throb of life was confined mainly among the educated class. On the other hand, it is well-known that the people had risen during the *Swadeshi* Movement. What more can be expected at the prelude of a revolution?

In course of time, people's awakening had become intense with the spread of the revolution. We get a glimpse of how Sri Aurobindo succeeded in becoming one with the common people from his beautiful narration about a prison inmate—the milk man. He has not written anything about his comrades—the renowned patriots—neither has he written anything about his favourite person, Kanailal Dutta. He has written only about that nameless and illiterate milkman! And what wonderful praise he has showered on him! Today the yogi, Sri Aurobindo, is one with the soul of every individual—he is indeed a universal friend. He is adorable certainly, but for him there is no distinction between the high class or low class. The

Divinity in Sri Aurobindo is certainly “yoga-wealthy”, but he is not a god for any person, creed or race. The heart of the world is in his heart, the universal life is his life and the universal form is also his appearance. He is an individual, he is the nation, and he is also humanity. This noble vision, this great perception is not a poetic fancy, it is Supreme Truth.

Sri Aurobindo knows that heaven will come down to earth but he has no impatience or prejudice of a mortal. The progress of the entire humanity, at the individual and societal levels, is guided towards that goal. Sri Aurobindo hence views the human history differently. The topics or events, which we may pay no heed to, condemn outright or ignore, are viewed by Sri Aurobindo from a different angle, with deeper insight. For example, Sri Aurobindo has criticised the British quite a lot. The treatment meted to him by the British, the great animosity towards him could have made any other person a lifelong hater of the English. When he moved to Pondicherry, the spies of the British shadowed him and his disciples everywhere and established police outposts in front of their houses. He wrote in the *Arya* a beautiful article indicating the future course of the British Empire. During that time i.e. 1917, the English had not even anticipated the imminence of the Statute of Westminster (the Act of the British Parliament through which the Colonies of the Empire got independence). Sri Aurobindo had written many years before that the face of the British Empire would be totally changed. At that time, he had advised the British to settle (the Independence issue) with India and Ireland. In many cases, the conscience of the British happens to wake up late. The same happened in the case of India and Ireland; however, it has to be accepted that independent India got a special place in the Commonwealth (this also was an unthinkable change for the Empire); the past prophecy of Sri Aurobindo had become a reality. This is beneficial for both India and England and is supportive of human unity. If we view this with a narrow perspective, we shall miss its true significance.

The articles Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Arya* had also indicated the progress of humanity. Today we witness the actions and reactions happening before our eyes. He had indicated his views on socialism

in 1909 in the *Introduction to Gita*. In the article in the *Arya* titled “The Ideal of Human Unity”, he discusses in detail the face of politics and the political theory and has shown that any nation or society built solely on the political theory or dogma cannot bring in complete fulfilment or success in the life of man. At the end of World War I, he again hinted in a series of articles in the *Arya* that the time had not yet come for the end of war or true establishment of human unity.

The disorder and the degradation of the human character faced by the world today were indicated by him a couple of years ago (1930's). But he has not given us the message of gloom and despair—he has given assurance of the inevitability of manifestation of the Divine Light.

He has not observed passively as a witness or simply criticised the transformation of the world and that of India. He is ever connected with the world and he is certain of the transformation of the human nature. Hence, at the critical juncture of human history, he has employed mystical spiritual power. During the great hours of crisis in World War II alone, he unhesitatingly announced the inevitable total defeat of the fascist powers. At an important juncture of the war he openly took the side of the allied power. For this reason, some of his countrymen were displeased with him because at that time, there was a wave of anti-British feeling running across India and the folly of the common man was to believe that the enemy of Britain would be a friend to India. How many would actually analyse the character of that “friend”. Whatever be it, when England was totally helpless at that time he instilled a marvellous inspiration in the heart of the people of England, this supreme mystery the British could not realise and perhaps never would. This is a wonderful occurrence in the history of spirituality, also in the common man's view it is a noble example of rendering great help to a former enemy. But who is his enemy? In 1909, after his acquittal and coming out of imprisonment, he wrote:

“...Whom shall I call enemy? I have none anymore.”

LIFE IN PONDICHERRY: THE YOGA ASHRAM

Sri Aurobindo stepped on to the jetty at Pondicherry from a French liner “Dupleix” on 4 April 1910. Since he was hiding from the police (mainly in Chandernagore), he preferred undertaking this journey by ship and not by train. Bijoy Kumar Nag was with him in this journey. Shri Suresh Chandra Chakravarti had arrived earlier to arrange accommodation for Sri Aurobindo. After a few months Nolini Kanto Gupta arrived. Gradually some more young men from different regions and states of India joined him; they all left everything and came to his shelter due to some wonderful attraction.

With them, Sri Aurobindo began creating a new world. He used to teach them as disciples, at times he would also talk humorously with them while he himself was engrossed in his deep studies and *sadhana*. It is not correct to say that all his connections with the previous phase of life were cut off but no longer was he a part of active politics. He set the foundation of a new life—the divine life. The calm and quietness of Pondicherry was appropriate for his spiritual work. He got directions from the Omniscient to come here. Pondicherry, in those days, had an ethereal envelope. As the poet Suresh Chandra penned,

*Far—far—very far
Far from the madding crowd and of the world,
Far-very far—it's situated...
No din rises here, no commotion spread
The poison in the sky and air
The burning of the heart of longing and lust,
All the unchecked inner hankering and greed,*

As though at a Mantra, all gone to sleep.

In the quietness of Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo's silent *sadhana* had begun from the bustling and action-filled world to reach a total calm. This was not like the silence during his Baroda days of profound scholarship but far above the din of life, away from the strife and turbulence of the world, a deep acquaintance with the serene eternal universal spirit as though a stream enjoying the earth's beauty and variety, making it soft and tender, lost itself into the vastness of the great ocean. And the Yoga Ashram of Sri Aurobindo was founded at the very seashore of Pondicherry!

Lack of money or means, or severe austerity, or the vain remonstrations of the aggrieved regime—nothing could perturb Sri Aurobindo. Some of the leaders of southern India's Nationalist party had then been in self-exile in Pondicherry and were happy to have Sri Aurobindo there. They thought he would enliven the political movement from there—perhaps even plan a greater revolution. For a long time the nation too had cherished the same thought. But Sri Aurobindo has received a nobler call. It is greater than political activities and it is greater than achieving freedom for the country—that is the call of eternal India—summon of the Divine. So he could not respond to the call of the leaders.

Soon the invitation from nationalist groups of the Congress party started coming repeatedly. A number of leaders of the party travelled to Pondicherry and tried to convince him to return to the political arena and some conferred on him the highest honour by electing him President, but nothing could dislodge him from his supreme resolve. In course of time, the comrades of his revolutionary days were released from their prison term; they went to meet him with all earnest eagerness, but realised that his return to the earlier phase of life is not possible. Those who understood the inner meaning of his noble ideal stayed back and the rest returned.⁸⁰

The government was anxious and apprehensive about Sri Aurobindo too—perhaps expecting him to do something unthinkable like starting a new phase of revolution. Naturally, all around the ashram premises the spies of the police kept vigil—perhaps he might

commence something suddenly just as Lenin or de Valera engineered a political movement! How could the spies get any clue of his pursuit for a different revolution in the inner world, in the depth of man's heart! The government not only kept a sharp vigil on him but also tried to prove that for political purposes, he had taken refuge in the French territory of Pondicherry. After he left Bengal a case was filed against him accusing him of rebellion against the Raj (regime) through one of his articles in the *Karmayogin*; in his absence, the printer, Mano Mohan Ghose, was sentenced to six months in prison. However, in the appeal by Mano Mohan, in a fair trial, the High Court passed the verdict that the article was not seditious in nature. Mano Mohan was acquitted. Regarding this, Sri Aurobindo proved in an article in the *Madras Mail* that the Bengal government had no plan of filing such a case while he was in Bengal, but initiated this farce only because he had moved to Pondicherry.

Sri Aurobindo had not accepted this hardship of his own volition—it happened due to a reversal of situation. He and his companions had to pass days in a great financial crunch. He had never emphasised the unnecessary outward austerity, but despite having fallen in a dire situation due to his circumstances, the slightest worry did not touch him even for a moment. If not, how else could he remain quiet in heart during his imprisonment in the midst of severe affliction? On one hand, he was like the yogis unaffected by heat, cold and all the adversities of nature; on the other hand, he was never averse to the development of various aspects of life, even the beauty and the elegance of the physical body. Unless there is realisation of *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* (the Truth, the Eternal Consciousness, and Beauty) in every level of life, how will life develop harmoniously?

Before long, prosperity bloomed in Pondicherry. The financial crunch was eased although the ashram had not yet completely developed. Perhaps initially Sri Aurobindo's aim was not to establish an ashram—however, the ashram started growing as though with a divine inspiration. Spontaneously, a number of people came and sought to live in the ashram. (Sri Aurobindo had never appealed to anyone to come and live in the ashram; everyone had gone there of

their own will.) Even then, Sri Aurobindo was, to all his companions, an intimate friend, teacher and guru; he would mix with everyone and make their life beautiful. He also helped them in their pursuit of knowledge. His old friends used to visit him in Pondicherry and would go back satisfied, having received inspiration from him.

During this period, Sri Aurobindo opened his wonderful reservoir of knowledge to everyone. The launch of the journal *Arya* took place on 15 August 1914—the 42nd birthday of Sri Aurobindo. The time period then was a tumult of world affairs. In Europe World War I had begun. Just as at the prelude of the great *Kurukshetra* war, Lord Sri Krishna, on the pretext of passing his knowledge to his best friend Arjuna, spread the light of his wonderful knowledge (which has been adopted in the lives of Indians and carried ahead for the next several millennia) for the entire humanity, in the same way, Sri Aurobindo, at the start of this World War, has indicated in no uncertain way the future evolution of mankind. He announced in an unhesitating voice that humanity has to accept the ideal of a divine life or else its plunge into savagery would be inevitable. He did not indicate this message in a couple of sentences, but, in a language appropriate for the modern mind, he conveyed this through a series of articles (in the *Arya*) on religion, philosophy, politics, sociology, poetry and literature. Analysing the course of the history of mankind, he laid the foundation of the divine ideal. How wonderful are these essays. Not only are they a sign of vast scholarship but also evidence of deep insight—profound analysis of the human mind, human society and human race. So far, many of the educated people have been unable to properly appreciate these writings; but soon one day, there is no doubt that these pieces will be accepted with great reverence far and abroad and the venerable people will read them with great earnestness. Sri Aurobindo was never eager for publicity so after many years of their appearance (in the *Arya*) they had still not been published as books. Currently, most of Sri Aurobindo's writings are available as Complete Works, published as books and they have also been translated in many Indian and European languages.

For seven years, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Arya* regularly; he used to complete the pages of this journal mostly alone. He wrote many articles and essays on many topics such as the Secrets of Veda, explanations of the Upanishads, The Ideal of Divine Life, the Systems of Yoga, Introduction to Indian culture, the Ideal of Human Unity, the psychological analysis of human evolution and he also wrote many fascinating reviews on literature and philosophy.⁸¹ The *Arya* was not only a treatise on spiritual knowledge, or a bulletin for the mysteries of the yogic life, or even a religious discourse—it was, in one word, a great help to follow human history. Although the common political discussion did not find a place in the *Arya*, there is no parallel for the superb analysis of international problems that were published in it. The indications given nearly a century ago (more than half a century, as mentioned by the author when the last edition was published) appears as the reality of today. The most significant incident after Sri Aurobindo settled in Pondicherry was the arrival of the Mother, Mirra, and Monsieur Paul Richard. They were travelling the East in search of a person completely knowledgeable on spirituality. On reaching Pondicherry they were impressed and moved seeing Sri Aurobindo. Paul Richard himself was a scholar and great was his respect for Sri Aurobindo; we get a description of it in the writings of Dilip Kumar Roy. In Nice (France) in conversation with Dilip Kumar Roy, he mentioned Sri Aurobindo as the greatest man of the present age.⁸²



The Mother. "The one whom we adore as the Mother is the divine Conscious Force that dominates all existence." - Sri Aurobindo

Not many people other than the disciples of Sri Aurobindo know about the Mother. We could know about her Divine realisation from her prayer book (*Prière et Méditation*) originally written in French. She wrote it when she lived in Europe; it was later translated into

English as *Prayers and Meditation* and also in Bengali and several other Indian languages. The *sadhana* of the Mother, deep and marvellous, can only be described by her. It is known that from her childhood she has travelled in many countries of the Orient and Occident, thus acquiring various experiences. Only those who got an opportunity to come in contact with her could comprehend the sweetness and greatness of her personality. She never for a day sought self-publicity, has not socially mixed with the common man, so how shall the public outside know about her? Her writings reveal only a fraction of her spirituality and deep wisdom. Even though the Mother is the daughter of France, her writings in English are beautiful. It is difficult to identify her articles even in the *Arya*—she had kept herself self-effacing. She has become the living aspect of India—power by attaining realisation of the Indian *sadhana*— as though she is the living entity of Mother India.

After their arrival in Pondicherry, the Mother and Paul Richard started helping Sri Aurobindo in the editorial work of the *Arya*. In the first few issues of the *Arya*, it was stated: “Editor—Aurobindo Ghose, Paul and Mirra Richard”. In the turbulence of the war, they soon had to return to France and as was obligatory, Paul had to enlist in the army. While they were in Pondicherry, a French edition of the *Arya* was also launched; after they left for Paris this stopped. The entire workload of the *Arya* fell on Sri Aurobindo.

Two years after the end of World War I in April 1920, they returned again to Pondicherry and from then onward, the Mother remained (till her passing in 1974) in Pondicherry. Paul Richard also stayed for some time, but later left India. He had written some books on Oriental culture in English, which were well appreciated.



Sri Aurobindo Ashram, main gate.

The ashram started growing after the arrival of the Mother. From far and wide, national and international seekers (*sadhakas* and *sadhikas*) started coming in. It was not an easy affair to support the needs of daily life of so many persons who came to live in the ashram. The Mother alone took the responsibility of running everything. The Mother devoted herself to helping and guiding not only the external life of the *sadhakas and sadhikas*, but also their inner life. It is a wonderful story of *sadhana* in Pondicherry. For deeper *sadhana* Sri Aurobindo stopped the contact with the external world—only four days in a year he would give *darshan* (audience, appearance) to the seekers and all others who prayed for his *darshan*. But one gets the direct inspiration from the Mother—the heart is filled with bliss seeing her pleasant smile in the mornings

and evenings. With her one can immerse in deep meditation and her presence is deeply felt in the quietness of the night.

It can easily be understood that vast sums of money were required for the expansion and running of the ashram. (In 2010, the number of *sadhakas*, *sadhikas* and the students stands close to 2000.) However, neither Sri Aurobindo nor anyone else from the ashram had ever asked for monetary help from anyone. Strangely, during the growing period, help started coming unsolicited. Where once there was a severe financial problem and austerity, there came prosperity. Some came to the ashram willingly surrendering their all, while others came without any means. But in the *sadhana* (seeking) of the Divine there is no place for finance disparity—for in the external world, the need for money was taken care of impartially. Where the divine work has begun, manifestation of divine power in this kind of wellness might appear strange to the materialistic person, but those who have realised the meaning of the divine glory, understand this secret well.

THE IDEAL OF DIVINE LIFE

The booklet *Sri Aurobindo and his Ashram*⁸³ (available in English, Bengali, Hindi, and many other Indian Languages) states:

The teachings of Sri Aurobindo have their roots in the teachings of the ancient sages. It says, that beyond this apparent physical form of the universe there is a Truth—a Being, a Consciousness, the One and an Eternal Spirit in all things and beings. All beings are one with this Unique Spirit or Self but in physical, vital and mental they are separate entity because of the fragmentary consciousness, for the ignorance of their true self. With the help of an inner yoga *sadhana*, this divisive veil of consciousness can be cast aside; one can become conscious of the true Self, the God living in all of us.

This may not sound unfamiliar to many because some acquainted with this ancient knowledge thus spoke, “Everything is *Brahman*”, “He is One but divided in many”. But listening or having an idea in mind of those ancient sayings is one thing and to realise the Truth in them is another. If it is said to a wise man that “All is *Brahman*” then a picture of the familiar world will appear before his eyes. But in reality how much do we know of the Universe? Even a vastly read, much experienced person may not know much of the universe. Isaac Newton, understanding the infinity of the ocean of knowledge said, “I am only a child playing on the beach, while vast oceans of truth lie undiscovered before me.”

It is also strange that Charles Darwin had realised at the end that he had lost the inspiration to enjoy the beauty of nature while

analysing only the facts from the plants and animals and their fossils and skeletons.⁸⁴

In fact, the condition of the common man or even most of the intelligentsia is like a “frog in the well” (कूपमंडूक —one whose view of the world is narrow and confined to what he sees before him). We are only acquainted with the small patch of the sky above our “individual well”; how much do we know of the greater sky? Those who are philosophers can form an idea of the mysteries of the universe by their thought process and experience. Some may perhaps give us an idea with logic and reason, but realisation of Truth is not attained by reason or ideas. Just as by not seeing a mountain no true knowledge about it can be developed by mere detailed description, likewise unless we get a deep and intimate acquaintance with the soul of the Universal Being we will in no way be able to realise the riddle of this universal soul. At the most we may form an idea like pantheism (the belief that the universe and God are identical).

Due to this vague notion about the Universal Being, questions may arise: “Who is the Creator of this Universe?” “Where did we all come from?” “Who are we?” Some of us say God is inseparably merged with the Universe, everything is His manifestation—the way a spider weaves a web from the secretion of its own body, similarly, He created the “web of creation”. Again some say that He, after completing the process of creation, is hiding behind a screen, out of our sight, and the beings created, particularly the humans, are blindly floating in the ocean of life and by seeing all of this, He is enjoying— just as we enjoy a humorous drama. Again, some say God is benevolent—all good, He is both our father and mother, He does everything for our good. Thus, man has formed so many ideas about God, established so many types of relation, and worshipped Him in various ways. Again some have thought of Him as formless i.e. beyond words or thought (अबाड-मनसोगोचरम) and say that He is beyond nature and the world, away from this world of feelings, of tears and joy, but man can only know Him through a profound path.

Sri Aurobindo's poem titled "Who?" published in the *Karmayogin*, beautifully explains the above riddles. Sri Aurobindo has answered those eternal questions in this poem. A few lines:[85](#)

*All beauty the smile of His passionate bliss...
It is He in the sun who is ageless and deathless...
When darkness was blind and engulfed within darkness,
He was seated within it immense and alone...*

With intellect and belief, we can understand the all-pervasive infinity of *Brahman* but one has to realise Him in our heart. In our heart we know Him as the Eternal Lover. If we realise Him only in our heart, we can enjoy, like the *Vaishnavites*, the sweetness of Love but unless we can open the wisdom's eye how can we understand the riddles of the world, and participate in the universal divine play? Again, we may individually be engrossed in His love, and perhaps, with wisdom we can realise His sovereign presence but unless we are united with Him integrally, with a sincere heart and clear mind, how can we be His companion in the divine play of Creation? And how marvellous is His creation! How terrific is the assemblage of His sweetness! How incomprehensible is His mystery! One who is *Satyam* (Truth), *Shivam* (Consciousness or Godliness) and *Sundaram* (Supremely Benevolent), how could He express himself amidst malevolence? One who is blissful, why did He admit sorrows in creation? One who is supreme consciousness, why and how did He veil himself in the unconscious? Is it an illusion created by a magician? Why should a magician create an illusory world to trouble the lives created by Him? What does He gain by that? Of course, the yogis can acquire such consciousness, for them sorrow too is a joyful feeling—just as in prison Sri Aurobindo had experienced, instead of pain, a wonderful joy by the sting of red ants. But the common man cannot have such realisation.

Seeing such unmitigated suffering and divisive conflicts in the world, Shankaracharya and other *Vedantins* conclude the doctrine that, "The *Brahman* is the Truth and the world is false". Buddha had advised quenching *tanha* (thirst), for which he gave the ideal of

nirvana. True, in this way some of the individual problems can be mitigated but what about the problems of the greater world? May be if my own problems are solved, I may remain engrossed in meditation and remain in trance, I am relieved, and I get salvation; but what about the world continuing with the same tears and joy amidst conflicts and strife? It is not possible that the millions would cross this world in this manner. God is omniscient, all pervasive, the Lord of the universe, eternal and possessor of the Six Divine Riches (षडैश्वर्यशाली)—but what is the Truth—God created this world of falsehood regardless of the consequences? Is there any purpose behind this? With these riddles, the modern man is confused and concludes that there is no gain in stressing over these maxims. He says, enjoy the way you see the world— try to understand only what is necessary for this enjoyment. Some even assume that this universe is an automaton, created for some unknown cause and by an unknown process. The fundamental being is “matter” and consciousness is the manifestation of “matter”. Some are unsure about the existence of God; there is no direct contact with Him, but where is the need! Life will carry us through.

What is the sign of Life? Self-establishment and struggle for establishing power. The earth is enjoyed by heroes. The way the creatures of the lower strata of life establish their supremacy by fighting with each other, similarly human beings will also have to progress in life with struggles. But what is the result of this eternal struggle? Sri Aurobindo says in the language of the *Veda*, “the eater is being eaten”. Only struggles and conflicts, is that the religion of man? Are there no softer traits in man like compassion and love? Of course, the primitive man lived amidst clashes and fights. First it was the personal conflicts, then the powerful killing the weak, followed by the conflicts in groups and society; now all that has changed to national and international clashes.



Darshan: The Mother and Sri Aurobindo

But it is also quite clear that along with the expanse of the conflict the emergence of true love in humanity is also emerging. Even when one nation has to fight with another, the countrymen have to be united and are tied by the string of love. So it is seen that not only through strife but also through love that societies, nations, empires and religions have been going through ups and downs.

Is not the realisation of love the expression of mankind's evolution? In the history of mankind we see that in the midst of severe war and revolution a class of men emerged who have spread the message of love and friendship. They lived life with love—displaying the joyous life beyond this mere biological existence, the path for a new light by establishing the ideal of love. They even lost their lives because of primitive, ignorant and cruel ideas. These great men have shown the path of human unity through ages and ages—shown the possibility of the complete realisation of “ideal humanity” in this mortal world. Some of the great men, particularly Lord Buddha in India, have given humanity the ideals of complete non-violence and with this inspiration, many nations today have ennobled life. This has changed the mentality of people too. Therefore, it is seen that the nature of lower strata of life is not fully that of the true religion of mankind—man today is not completely under the control of the rules of the vital world (यन्तारुदानिमायया).

Then there is the question: Is *Brahman* not there in the animate world? Is this world of matter not the space for *Brahman*'s manifestation? Has the lower nature not emerged from *Brahman*? Some ancient religious crusaders and moralists were audacious about this; far from considering the lower living beings (in the animate world), they would not even accept that a woman has a soul.

But the modern man is not satisfied with this kind of blatant stance. This is the result of the scientific mind. Science is not satisfied with any illogical empty words. Science does not accept something without testing it on the touchstone of intellect and without proving it completely. So science has thrown light on the deeper layers of matter and the animate world and revealed the mysteries of atom and molecules. But science is based on physical perception, which does not normally want to recognise anything apart from the visible and perceptible world. Recently though, science has become interested in consciousness. Science has thoroughly analysed all that is perceptible in the physical world, but seeks the “how” rather than the “why”. Perhaps the “why” has no value in the practical world, but it is important beyond the materialistic world. However,

today science is inquiring into the domain beyond the material world. But depending solely on intellect and descending in the deep gorge of matter, science has lost the intuitive intellect. Having analysed the inanimate world in depth, science has reached a state of “what thereafter?” (leleëefkeÀce). There is no rational answer to this question. This may be described in the words of Sri Aurobindo as “the illusion of matter; the play of the ‘doer of the improbable’.”

In this material world, bestowed with comfort and enjoyment, why would the common man seek Truth? It is enough to stay with the useful strata of creation, what Sri Aurobindo calls “utilisable crust”.⁸⁶ Therefore, man can choose to indulge in sensory pleasures, or work for the welfare of society or nation, establish a new empire or destroy one to build a great nation, or spread the message of universal love. If nothing like this is possible then demonstrate once again the destructive power of scientific advance towards annihilation. This is the situation of the modern world. And how does the human heart feel? There is no end to mental agony, there is no happiness, no peace, there is no way that we can enjoy permanent comfort, and there is no security. In fact, in the age of reason and intellect, hatred and conflict are poisoning the world. Reason alone is unable to save humanity from a destructive intellect. Two catastrophic wars have already taken place—humanity lives in fear of another destructive war.

Where is the illusionary mirage of hope of science? That heaven will come down on earth, that the civilisation born out of science will change earth to heaven, free from disease and decrepitude, that man would lead his life in the light of science, educated scientifically, man will enjoy the state of prosperity (*Rajyam Samriddham* of the *Gita*), that there will be no need for God, that free from superstitions man will be guided by science and lead life in knowledge. Science does not care for empty words like personality; people will be created on a die-cast by science. Of course, that will not be a man of science—half-human and half mechanical, he could again end up with a demonic nature.

But the hope of creating the human race by this scientific method can be said to be in the distant future. The reason is the nature of human intelligence. The people enlightened by science still possess those eternal ancient impulses—awakened sharply in modern times—as though dragging mankind to a great dissolution. The man who prides himself on being civilised by education and culture, the same man today seems as though about to surpass the primitives in cruelty and barbarism. Also, with the help of science the face of barbarism is growing extensively, mechanically, and is frightful. The ethics, law and order and similar conventions of civilisation are about to perish.

This is the moment for the human race to seek *Brahman* (*athāto brahma jijñāsā*). At the beginning of World War I in 1914, Sri Aurobindo started the quest for *Brahman* and attained realisation.⁸⁷ He gave a clear indication to the human race for the divine life—either man has to seek this divine life or else there will be no more evolutionary progress. May be after that there will be a great *nirvana*! However, if man wants to move forward with the supreme inspiration of creation, if the theory of progressive evolution does not become futile, then he will have to attain a divine life.

On this quest for *Brahman*, Sri Aurobindo, like a scientist, analysed repetitively the evolution of creation and, revealing its deeper meanings, indicated the necessity of knowledge of *Brahman*. So we see in the essays in *Life Divine* that he did not start with the eternal question, “What is *Brahman*?”. He started with “What is this physical world?”. He addresses this world of matter like a scientist. He exposes the secrets behind it and opens before us the silent consciousness of matter.

It was the great age of materialism when Sri Aurobindo was in England, hence he had profound familiarity with the philosophy of materialism and he developed conviction of its incompleteness—for this, in later years he did a unique balanced rendering of *Brahmanism* with materialism, which no one had done before. This harmonisation is not a mental or philosophical blending—this is

evidence for realising matter in the true form of *Brahman* and divine transformation of matter involved in the *Brahman*.

Before coming to Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo had realised completely the knowledge of *Brahman* (*Brahman Jnana*). The articles written in that period in the *Karmayogin* and the *Dharma* show the fully developed spiritual knowledge in him. The wonderful articles written in English and Bengali on the *Upanishads*, *Gita*, *Puranas*, etc. display his profound spirituality. The spiritual experience he had in the prison was the realisation of the *Brahman*. But he did not remain content with this realisation alone; this realisation became the pursuit for the divine transformation of man, the foundation of Integral Yoga. He remained devoted to manifestation of the soul of “Supreme Knowledge”, “Supreme Love” and “Supreme Peace” on the human base and his resolve was to illumine and transform human life with the light of the Divine Spirit and with the help of the Divine Power. His aim was to fulfil the great vision of man through the ages to Truth. This is the inner meaning of his solitary *sadhana* in Pondicherry.

THE RIDDLES OF EVOLUTION

Our first acquaintance after birth is with the Mother Earth. Our first shelter and support is matter. On the foundation of matter, our life continues to develop. Our first task is to serve this material body. At first, we are unaware of the life force that is at the base of the matter and which drives our life. We do not know its nature. As we grow up, with age, development of mental faculties also take place, but we are not told how the mind works; with the development of intelligence we observe the activities of the mind.

If we focus on creation, we can understand the wonderful play of matter, life and mind. The earth is the symbol of the creation of matter. The variety of earth is the play of matter's power. But a still more wondrous participation of this play is in the manifestation of the life force. In the world of matter, life first manifested in plants which was "life" in matter in different forms; then appeared the animals with a physical body and complete in life force. How many millions of years the earth must have remained merely as matter! And who can say how many ages it took for life to appear? The charming appearance of the earth started blooming with the development of the life force. At various levels, creation crafted so much variation and beauty which charms the eyes of the beholders and fulfils the heart of man! Much mystery exists in the body of the earth and more profound mystery exists in the sky, where there are other planets belonging to the earth's family. What we call inanimate, that too is so beautiful and adorned with grandeur. It has caught the eye of the poets and many mysteries have come to light through scientific analysis.

Isn't this play of life force in matter marvellous? How wonderful is this life force and the countless varieties, their structure, beauty, forms of expression and nature! One gets amazed analysing the history of evolution from an amoeba to a man. How many types of creatures wander on the surface of the earth and survive at the bottom of the sea? How many billions of years did their evolution take? How many thousands of them are extinct now? A reflection on this amazing history is fascinating.

So many scientists have spent their lives in research of the infinite wonder of the countless species in the kingdom of the animate and matter. It is they who have given the clue to this world of matter and life. Previously, a scientist in America defined the life cycle of the ants and insects in such amazing details—in each of these species there is a wonderful story of their life's play, so many types of movements in creation, even their deep relationship, good and bad, with the flow of life of the human! Again, the scientists have researched geology, oceanography, cosmology etc. One can spend his whole life in the study of just one of them.

In whose consciousness was this play of nature first manifested? And who traced this great mystery, perceived the fine beauty and delight? The simple answer is man. Perhaps nature herself was engrossed in her creations before creating man with a mind—she saw herself reflected in the mirror of man's mind. As a result of the formation of mental consciousness there emerged the capacity in nature to savour her own creation. Before the development of the mind, nature was like a machine—in man she became conscious. That is why Sri Aurobindo has called man a “mental being”. This being is not only conscious and the doer, but is also the enjoyer and even the observer. The mental power has control over life force and the force of matter. Man got to a greater extent the capability to control and enjoy nature. As if the Spirit, having received some amount of self-authority established itself and also power in the form of ego, to enjoy and bring in the wonders of creation.

In the continuous evolution of creation one more thing is apparent: In the higher nature—even though evolved from the lower nature—grew an authority of control over the lower nature. The life evolved

from matter but the life force got some control over the matter—the life force made matter divinely come alive. That is why one can witness the variations in the harmonious development at various stages of evolution according to its upward movement. Thus one may see nature of life at the lower levels resemble inert matter. At the first stage of life's appearance, the nature of both life and matter are inseparably wound up. In the living world too according to the differences of the evolutionary stages variation of power takes place. The creatures of higher levels of evolution exert control over those from the earlier stages. Darwin termed this as the “survival of the fittest”. It is a conflicting world in the sphere of matter and life. In matter the power is blindly controlled, in life it is manifested, but it is still directed by blind instincts.

We too perceive this blind instinct of the life force in our human lives. We are amazed by volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, avalanches, or the storm in the ocean. But, isn't the blind instinct of the life force of a person or nation terrifying? Isn't the death dance by Timur or Genghis Khan or Nero more terrible than a natural calamity? The volcanic eruptions are terrible no doubt but is the frenzy and the massacre on the battlefield any less terrible? The rumbling of the clouds is startling no doubt, but is the laughter of the demon any less startling?

We also marvel, observing the play of the life force in the domain of the lower levels of life. To enjoy the wonders of nature, man makes an expedition to the summit of Everest or dives in the deepest ocean. Similarly, he explores the deepest forest in Africa to enjoy the beauty of the great life force in play among the living creatures. In the living world one more thing arouses our wonder: the development of the mind. Man takes pride in possessing mental power and intellect, but the sign of intelligence that we observe in the animal world is no less amazing. In fact, in some circumstances the instinctive powers of the animal are superior to that of a human. On this, long ago Sri Aurobindo had written in *Dharma* an article with the title “*Prakamya*” (प्रकाम्य). He writes: “...the senses in the gross body remain particularly limited as long as the human remains confined by the power of the body. Till that time he is superior to the animal

because of the development of intelligence, otherwise by the sharpness of the senses and unmistakable action of mind—*prakamya siddhi*—the animal is superior to man. What the scientists call instinct is *prakamya*.”

The man is called a mental being not merely for his mental activities. Apart from the mind, man has certain types of nature and because of the variations of these there are differences among men. In the cited article, Sri Aurobindo says, “There has been slight development of intelligence in animals but if one has to live in this world one requires an ‘instinct’ to guide him whether to perform or avoid an activity. The mind of the animal does this. The mind of the man decides nothing; his intellect is self-decisive. The intellect alone decides; the mind is only an instrument for creating preferences and prejudices.”

Therefore, it can be understood that from the vital power, the force of mind is developed and these forces having developed fully in man, the higher aspects of the mind like the psyche, intelligence, reason and so on have also developed. In many animals some development of intelligence is observed; even signs of psyche, memory, and emotions are seen. Yet the animal is said to only belong to the vital world. In the history of mankind, the primitive man particularly was of vital nature. He acted mostly on the impulse of the life force; in him there was no notion of just or unjust. For this reason and also from the similarity of bodily shapes Darwin and other scientists concluded that the evolution of species of the apes brought forth man. This theory has not yet been completely proved and even now evidence is being collected. [This book was written in 1939 when the debate on this subject was on-going.] It is not easy to determine how, in the play of nature, man has evolved. But it is clear that in many aspects the nature of man is similar to the animal. The animal nature of man has in course of time got refined. This is a result of civilisation.

But can we still say that the human race has been completely transformed? It is true that stupendous development of the intellectual faculty has taken place, but our mind to a great extent is material and vital in nature. This we can understand by a little self-

analysis. When the primitive senses in us flare up at some passion, then we witness the awakening of the animal nature in us. Man boasts of being civilised, but when some individual or group or nation rants and raves with the blind force of life, then he can respond with beastly cruelty. This situation is not rare even today—we are seeing this in many of the so-called civilised countries. In an animal the level of intelligence is not as advanced as in man, and man with the help of his intelligence has got science to fulfil the life's blind force and has invented many startling devices whose horrors we have already perceived in the twentieth century itself.

Even now, though the human race is churned up every now and then by the surge of the life force, the transformation of earthly life is taking place by the advancement of the mind— in the marvellous development in man, the sense of beauty and creativity, even in his dream of attaining divinity. This very man has imagined establishing heaven on this very earth. Several millennia ago, in the meditative eyes of the Vedic sages, appeared the images of the gods. So many ages back, the creators of *Upanishads* realised the greatness of the Soul! Until now, in the various countries of the world came so many of God's messengers and lovers of humanity, religious preachers, philosophers, poets and artists. Over the ages, the result of so many persons' pursuit of meditative thoughts, seeking the spirit, cultivation of knowledge and other work has caused today's outstanding progress in knowledge, science, philosophy, art, literature, politics, sociology, and economics, thus enriching the human civilisation. For the progress of the nation and for welfare of humanity, so many men and women over the ages have sacrificed their lives for their idealism, accepting all the hardships and sorrows. This creative power and the religion of sacrifice has made man. Mastering the physical nature is not the main achievement of man—the selfrealisation and manifestation of the power of the spirit is the main accomplishment.

Man has not become satisfied knowing only the outer appearance of the external world; he has turned his views towards the inner world. If he was not a seeker of the profound, he would have remained content with the ordinary life; no marvel in his life would

have taken place. The creation would have remained colourless and mechanical. One could get the signs of life, the skill of intelligence but not the joy of the spirit—the heart of man would have remained dry and parched. But man has found felicity (रसोवैस) by turning towards the inner domains and is savouring its delights. This ecstasy is more profound than the exuberance of the life force, or pleasure of the senses or the satisfactions of the mind's fixations. Man has realised that the worldly joy is the manifestation of a higher delight and that delight is the source of all other bliss. The consciousness of man realising the profound and the heights has found the origin of the delight.

This capability of enjoying the bliss and delight has transformed the life of man. That is why man does not want to remain satisfied merely with materialistic mental power. Even those who solely depend on the practical senses and do not want to look at any other side of life, for them too come such moments when they respond to the call of the Unknown. Their mind yearns to seek some Unknown—no longer enjoying themselves, they remain unsatisfied, and want to immerse in some deep profundity. Then arises in man's mind the need to seek and meditate and his heart hums with prayers. Man understands that the physical, vital and intellectual are not everything—their purpose cannot be fully realised till that Unknown source of delight opens up.

Then in the sight of the man, there blossoms beyond the physical nature a subtle nature. Man realises that beyond the physical matter there exists a "subtle physical" and the physical matter is only the transformation of the subtle physical. The cause of the physical matter is the subtle physical; the outward manifestation of the subtle physical is the material physical. Because of this insight, the Vedic sages had seen that behind nature's forces there are the forces of the gods; in their meditative eyes had risen the beautiful forms of the gods. They had perceived in the sun, moon, sky, ocean, earth—over everything, the play of the divine forces. They had realised that man is the playmate of the gods. This is not merely the thought in India but more or less the imagination of all the ancient races.

The scientists would dismiss this as mere fantasy but there are very few who do not rely on imagination. Even today in this scientific age is there any less love for the merchant of imagination—the poet? Even today is the philosopher, the seeker of basic truth, unadorned? Man certainly desires to fill his life with facilities and comfort with the help of science, but in leisure, in the inner solitude can the practical mind fulfil his heart and soul? If man were only engrossed in the practical senses then he could not have progressed from the level of cave dwelling or living in the wild to the marvellous developed life. Nature did not allow him to remain in that stratum of primitiveness but instead nature has awakened in his heart the inspiration for higher evolution.

Life arose out of matter due to nature's inspiration and bloomed with the evolution of the mind. Similarly, a stimulus has come from the higher mind and a rapture has descended.

If this influence had not descended then perhaps man would have improved only slightly over the animal level, and human life would have become an improved version of the animal life. But would it have been possible for man to taste the charm of the world, could he have the capacity to acquire the universal knowledge without this evolution? Would man have searched for Supreme Felicity? By expanding his Self, would he have found the Great Soul? Could he have developed the elements of softer human nature such as kindness, affection and love? Was it possible to find in the history of mankind the signs of valour, bravery and self-sacrifice? Without these, man would have remained a slave to the lower nature—a creature content with the minimal—and human life would have been merely a puppet of the dark nature.

The development of the mental force brought forth in man the remarkable power to control nature. The life force does not have the capacity to completely control nature. Life is the manifestation of the dormant consciousness of matter. The mind has the full capacity to control the physical and the vital. For this reason in the life's play there is supremacy of the mind; the "mental being" is the paragon in the living world. Even then the power of the mind is not complete—the mind on many occasions turns into a blind force due to the

emotive force of the vital, losing the judicious senses; it can lose the independence again in the attraction of matter. That is why, it is often seen that in spite of an astounding development of the faculties, the mind wanders aimlessly due to vital movements. Humanity, society, politics, and economy, all grown with judicious rationality, can be swayed with a vital surge. Is not the history of mankind a conflict of civilisation and barbarism? When the barbaric force rises, the customs and rules developed by man are all blown away. In this ultra-civilised age, is it not astonishing that in the last few years, the signs of barbarism have revisited some countries that boast of scientific attainments?

Hence, in the incompleteness of the mental power, one has to take refuge and help of what Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind or Supramental. The seeking of Supramental is not new in the history of mankind. Those who have personally explored the Supramental, it is they who have shown the human race a new light and hinted about the future evolution. However, just the way man is today taking recourse to mental power to control life, the entire humanity has to take support of the Supramental. The Supramental alone can take away the imperfection of the mind and help the quest for integral joy, transform the imperfect might to enlightened power, and achieve the true transformation of human life.

A yogi is the seeker of the Supramental. He is not only a poet or visionary; he is in possession of the wonderful power of controlling life profoundly. Unlike the common man, the vision of a yogi does not extend merely to the exterior, he is not content only enjoying the beauty of the world or nature externally, his vision is for the higher, for the inner, towards the fountainhead of life. Unlike the common man, he is not confined in the gross; his movements are subtle in the causal world. For that reason, the deep mysteries of the world are in his control. The yogi knows the secrets of the world-play. He also knows what inspires, controls and transforms the movements of the play. A yogi is the guide to the future of mankind. He is the forerunner to the creation of the superman on earth. A yogi is not the puppet of ignorant and blind forces, but instead he is the instrument of the supra-nature—the base for the development of the supra-

power on earth. For this the Lord has said in the *Gita* that of all devotees, the yogi is my favourite.

संतुष्टःसततयोगीयतात्मादृढनिश्चयः
मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिर्योमद्भक्तःसमेप्रिय
(*Bhagvad Gita*, ch. 12, shloka 14)

SOME ETERNAL QUESTIONS

How wonderfully Sri Aurobindo has analysed the evolution of creation! In the journal *Arya*, he wrote for month after month, and year after year, a series of articles on divine life; any truth-seeking man gets absorbed in reading them as a new domain of knowledge opens up in the inner vision of the reader, as though all the mysteries of creation open up. No other philosopher has analysed in such a detailed and beautiful way the riddles of creation. One is amazed at his deep vision, infinite scholarship and, also, his wonderful intellect.

He has analysed the complex philosophical hypotheses that are at once so lucid and so appropriate for the modern time. One is wonderstruck at his clear reasoning and interpretations. He has specially analysed materialism, because in the modern age the appeal of materialism can be said to be worldwide. Like an idealistic philosopher he has not tried to dismiss materialism; he has identified its self. He has explained that matter is another manifestation of *Brahman*, that is, in matter the *Brahman* consciousness exists hidden and veiled. He has revealed with irrefutable reasoning that there would be no solution to the world's problems simply by rejecting this world as a dream and illusion (*maya*). The way the world appears before our eyes is also encompassed in the *Brahman* consciousness; what we see of the world in our consciousness may be incomplete or fragmented but not illusory or false. Accepting the all-encompassing and omnipresent *Brahman*, there is no way but to identify His true relations with the visible world, even from the philosophical viewpoint.

The materialistic scientists too have realised that what we call matter is actually a state of energy. But the scientist's outlook is normally confined to material power and force. He is enthusiastic to ascertain the nature of its movement. He is not curious to identify the relation of this power with that of the life force and the force of mind. For this reason, the scientist's world is isolated as he is eager to divide the world into many parts and analyse each of them; not many scientists are eager to identify the mutual relationship amongst each of these parts. His aim is to acquire knowledge by this analysis. The world of philosophers of *Mayavad*⁸⁸ (illusionary theory) is also isolated and unreal, for they do not want to give any importance to the visible world; for them the only truth is *Brahman*—the indefinable (अबाङ्गनसोगोचरम्ब्रह्म).

With the development of knowledge it is gradually becoming evident that the material power is not the only power. Of course, what we call material power is not something to be ignored; it does not originate as the simple caprice of Nature. Science has the proof that there is blossoming of consciousness in matter. Slowly, level after level, this consciousness had its upward movement and its transformations. The great scientist Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose has revealed that what we call inert metal too has sensitive vibrations, feels heat and cold, the power of attraction and repulsion. This is so refined that this can only be observed through very sensitive instruments. Jagadish Chandra has also shown that this consciousness of matter has manifested more in plants as awareness. With the help of his wonderful instrument, the Crescograph, Jagadish Chandra has also observed rhythmic play among plants, and there is even an indication of blossoming of the mental faculty. When the discovery of Jagadish Chandra was first published, Sri Aurobindo discussed it in a beautifully written article in the *Arya*. He has mentioned this discovery in his magnum opus *Life Divine* specifically to explain the evolution of consciousness.

This consciousness has gradually developed amidst living beings as life force, by surpassing the torpor of matter manifesting itself in myriad forms in life. Gradually, it has become conscious as mental

power. In man, the consciousness is awake, and possesses self-knowledge. In man, the soul and the personality have blossomed. In the living world man alone is self-conscious whereas life in the lower strata is the plaything of nature. But is he completely conscious of the Self, master of his desires, and a God-lover? Is he not in some way a plaything of nature? So long as man does not develop the consciousness of Self, it cannot be claimed that he is not a slave of nature. The movement of man's life is controlled by some of the traits that nature has given him and the condition in which nature has created him. For this reason the *Gita* says, प्रकृतियान्तिभूतानिनिग्रहःकिंकरिष्यति (All living entities are controlled by their own nature. What can repression accomplish?) Yet, there have been people who have reached that level of consciousness where ignorance, incompleteness or defilement of nature exist no more. At that level, it is total knowledge, complete power and total illumination. Through the evolution of consciousness man can attain this level and power that renders this evolution as the power of yoga. The same power that is ignorance at the lower consciousness is completely self-established at the higher—it is called *Paraprakrit* (the Supreme Nature). This duality of nature has been mentioned by Lord Krishna in *Gita* (द्वैमेप्रकिति).

Apparently, in the practical life we cannot realise the fragmented or partial soul; in the same way we cannot understand the variety of play of the conscious force. We forget about the continuous play of the conscious force in the various forms of creation. If we attain the knowledge of the higher plane, then we feel the knowledge of the lower is without substance and is illusory. We do not want to admit that the power in the higher plane, which is fully conscious and active, has, in its outward manifestation in the lower strata, taken the form of ignorance and is finally inactive. This is the descent of the *Sachchidananda* (in simple terms: Truth, Consciousness and Beauty). His wonderful way of selfrealisation may not be easy to realise. If we have the wisdom to comprehend the riddles of the universe, we may realise that the Supreme Consciousness has lost itself in the ignorance, only to be manifested through multifarious forms of beauty and wonder play. However, in each atom of the

universe profoundly present is the same *Sachchidananda*—He who cannot become self-oblivious. Even though He is all pervasive, there is no estrangement of Self. Thus, we can experience the omnipresence behind the incompleteness, the play of the infinite in the finite—which poet Tagore has expressed through a beautiful song, which says, “... amidst the finite, thou art infinite”. When the yogis, saints and the seekers attain this *anandalok* (the blissful world), they realise that all is creation of *ananda*; everything is the vibration of this Divine delight. The yogi perceives not merely *ananda*, he realises an infinite and universal consciousness, which is sometimes veiled, partially developed or at times integrally manifested.

Man commonly observes everything with a partial view that creates conflicts. If man takes matter as the basis, then other than material power he has no interest or concern towards any other power. On the other hand, if he aspires for the attainment of total consciousness, he wants to disregard matter altogether. Is not man's life itself proof of a harmony of various forces? The marvel and beauty of matter, life and mind are manifested in man—it may be said that life is manifested upon matter and the mind is developed on the bosom of matter! The *adhara* (base) of the matter is not destroyed when the life is developed on it; the mind desires a completion upon the matter so that it can enjoy the *rasa* of matter and life in total. For this reason the manifestation of the Supramental is possible on the body of the matter.

Sri Aurobindo has beautifully explained that life and mind are veiled in matter and even the Supramental exists. The glimpse of Supramental is present in every atom. *Brahman* has not only taken the wrap of matter; in that wrap itself, the consciousness and the *ananda* (delight) of *Brahman* exist in concealment. This is the marvel of manifestation of *Brahman*. But while taking this garb of concealment there is no distortion of His Being. If that was so, then evolution would not have been possible. Man would have remained forever a partial being and could not have even imagined the “integral”. Because of this partial outlook, we think only of the outward form and appearance as total and true. Being materialistic,

we fail to recognise the intelligence behind nature's creation. Did the materialistic philosophers not earlier say that the thought process comes out of the brain just as the bile is secreted from the liver?

The higher consciousness has got veiled in the lower consciousness; become to some extent also into self-forgetfulness, but has not lost itself completely. That is why the wonders of play also take the upward course. As Sri Aurobindo says, from the level of life, the life force evolved and manifested in matter; from the plane of mind the force of mind evolved and manifested in life as mind. In this way, in the course of creation, from the plane of Supramental, the Supramental force will evolve and be created in the mind of man. This is the riddle of authority of *Brahman*. If *Brahman* did not have this authority, then He would have been effaced in this world and there would have been no trace of His Supreme Consciousness or the Transcendental Being. The world would have been merely mechanical without His Being and Consciousness. Without this *Brahman* authority, He might not have freed Himself from the darkness of ignorance. Before the creation, He was, as described by Sri Aurobindo in the poem "Who":[89](#)

*When darkness was blind and engulfed within darkness,
He was seated within it immense and alone.*

(the last lines of the poem)

He would have remained like that, dissolved either in matter or in nothingness; the marvel of world-variety would not have been created, the play of life would not have been seen, the "mindful-man" would not be there, man's imaginative world would not have been created, and man would not be dreaming of completeness. God has not only expressed His Self in the creation, not only did He support the creation, He is expressing a thousandfold the riches in it, and showing the "Divine Play".

However, the totality of knowledge is incomplete unless the realisation of the Supreme Soul, which is above all creation and beyond all perception, is attained. He who will exist when nothing is there, for Him Sri Aurobindo has written in his poem, "The Vedantin's Prayer":[90](#)

*Spirit Supreme
Who musest in the silence of the heart,
Eternal gleam,
Thou only Art!
Ah, wherefore with this darkness am I veiled
My sunlit part.*

True, once that supreme abode is reached the human soul does not want to return to this divisive world of commotion and conflict. For this reason the yogi in the euphoric state stays away from society as he is engrossed in his own soul's delight. God's all-pervading power is such that in whatsoever manner man yearns for Him with his partial self, he gets Him in the same mode. As we read in the epic, with the blessings of Lord Mahadeva, Ravana, the king of *Rakshasas*, became so powerful! In the scripture, in reference to demon Vritrasura, Lord Brahma told the distressed gods,

बिष्वक्षोहापिसम्बर्ध्यस्वच्छेदत्तुमसाम्प्रतम (Even if a poisonous tree nurtured (by me) personally, to cut it off (is) unbefitting). Again man can become through his *sadhana* one with the indestructible *Brahman* and even to become absorbed in the great void is not altogether strange. This state of being so absorbed can be expressed through the words of Swami Vivekananda's composition. He says, "...not the sun, not the light, nor the beautiful moon...". It is a state where there is no sun, no moon; one only gets absorbed in the void, the *nihil*.

A *Mayavadi* (a philosopher of doctrine of *maya*) realising the glory and exaltedness of this euphoric state, proclaimed loud the unreality (illusionary nature) of the universe. When a man has a deep and profound experience then he does not want to value the previous innate sacred knowledge. A radical transformation of his nature takes place. Mr. Smythe, who partook in the Everest expedition,⁹¹ became so overwhelmed at the sight of the snow-clad Himalaya's grandeur and great silence that he decided not to live in society after his return to his country. He lived self-absorbed in solitude on the Island of Hebrides in the west of Scotland.

But the lover of humanity, Sri Aurobindo, by no means wanted to separate himself from the world. He could not agree that this world is only a mirage. The foundation of his *sadhana* and knowledge is the realisation of the saints of *Upanishad*, i.e. “*Brahman* is Absolute” (सर्वम् खल्विदम्). That is why he meticulously, for over seven years, analysed in the *Arya* the riddles of creation and the mysteries of mankind. He took the incomprehensible *Sachchidananda* as the foundation and showed that the entire creation is not only embraced in Him, He is in the very atom and molecule of it. Over the aeons, He (*Sachchidananda*) is untiringly, through limitless evolution, manifesting in man, His complete Self. In this evolution the ego of the man is merely a plane, a level, a prelude to authority, a precondition for realisation of complete self, complete consciousness, profoundly the partial-soul (*Mamaivansha*). When developing himself in creation, man receives the protection of the Total, the Absolute, and the Integral; only then does he realise the Divine. At the inception of the Supreme Consciousness the transformation of the part (the partial-self) takes place not only in the inner but also in the exterior, because then the exterior becomes the complete manifestation of the inner-self. As long as the man remains confined within the mental prejudices he cannot realise the Integral. If he attains a higher state but if the knowledge of the Absolute does not grow in him, even then he cannot realise the riddles of creation. The course of evolution mystifies him. For this reason, Sri Aurobindo says, “The incomplete pride of man’s mind makes a sharp distinction and wants to call all else untruth and leap at once to the highest truth whatever it may be—but that is an ambitious and arrogant error.”⁹²

For this reason many saints and *sanyasins* criticise family life and consequently the family man thinks that he is a poor soul, very trivial, a being in hell—how would he get deliverance? So he prays, “O Lord Madhusudana (another name of Narayana), pray give me shelter at Thy Feet” and other similar appeals. And there is no dearth of persons posing as the deliverer! To dispel this mentality of our country, Swami Vivekananda had given the mantra “*Soham, Soham*”

(I am He, I am He) and said, “Let the Lion of Vedanta roar”, so that every individual can perceive that he is one-soul with the Divine.

In the course of transformation of the human society, two movements are observed, that is, the *craving* and *ascetic refrain*. In every nation, the development of these two movements has taken place. But unless there is a synthesis of these two there is no harmony in life. If man singularly takes recourse to desire then life's movement is downward. Again if the man or the society takes refuge wholly in asceticism, it becomes averse to reality. It creates incompleteness in the mind of man and that man becomes disinclined to fulfil the worldly life. As a result, the personal life becomes disharmonious; howsoever much he may achieve the taste of liberation he is deprived of the taste of the nectar of creation. Even he might think that this creation of the universe is a great mistake of God. On the other hand, if man can envision everything as *Brahman* then the wisdom of the universal soul arises in him. He may then be able to realise the transcendent soul of *Brahman* and also the all-pervasiveness of *Brahman* in the course of creation. He realises that an integral consciousness is in “playful delight” from higher to lower level of creation. The power of the higher is not only reflected in the lower, it is latently active, thus helpful in the transformation of the lower.

Even then questions arise in the mind of man as to why there is so much sorrow, pain, ignorance and evil in this world. Man can forget the present in the radiance of idealism, he can dream and remain absorbed dreaming of heaven but how can he avoid the harsh reality? Man can, with patience or bitterness or taking recourse to indifference, put up with the cruelty of the world, still his mind cannot be satisfied unless there is an understanding of a solution to this problem. He asks why and how *Sachchidananda* adapted in this ignorance, misery and impermanence. How in the infinite, the finite has come; why in the integral whole, the incomplete partial has come? Sri Aurobindo himself in the *Life Divine* has raised these questions and presented their answers with marvellous reasoning. Later, a scholar disciple of his asked him these eternal questions. The solution that Sri Aurobindo offered is now available as a book

titled *The Riddle of this World*.⁹³ Any inquisitive mind will be amazed reading this book.

Sri Aurobindo says the reason for the manifestation of *Brahman* in this world is the inspiration to gain experience—an experience for the evolution of the Unknown. The One, who is self-created, eternal, complete, immutable, and infinite, is He who has descended into the ignorance to savour the mutable.

Unless He descends, how could the Infinite be perceived as finite; how could the space, time and person be evolved? But this manifestation is not a single phase, it is created over various levels of consciousness and the transformation of consciousness takes place. The absolute consciousness is transformed into partial consciousness, space and time. Thus, gradually, whatever was subtle is transformed into gross—the outward manifestation of *Brahman*.

Thus, the Supreme Consciousness remained absorbed in savouring its manifestation into the partial consciousness. But if the manifestation of this descent has begun where would it end and who would determine its completion? Who would say, thus far and no farther? *Brahman* is Infinite; His manifestation is also infinite and eternal. The Absolute Consciousness transformed into partial consciousness, into the unconscious, and finally into nescient ignorance. However, in the unconscious, the Consciousness is veiled and asleep. In the investigation of the atom, modern science has found a peculiar state whose position and properties follow no standard rule [the author might have had in mind the Quantum Theory and Principle of Uncertainty], as if the particles (atoms) are in perpetual dance. This shows that the infiniteness, the endless movements, numerous creation of forms, and immeasurable power in matter can bring about total destruction as we have seen in nuclear explosions. The *Brahman* too has no beginning or end beyond this universe as also in His manifestation in the matter's world.

Again we have seen how this dormant and veiled consciousness in its higher evolution develops itself into vital and mental

consciousness. Even today the mystery of this transformation has not been revealed completely; it is still in the realm of scientific research. Nevertheless, how from matter, the blossoming of life takes place has been observed by the scientists. Even in this transition of transformation what a marvel of beauty there is! It is still more a wonderful spectacle how in the inert matter the vibration of life springs up, how in the play of life the mind casts its light. And finally the complete manifestation of intellect dawns over matter, the light of knowledge blooms in matter's world and the human soul is manifested.

Man is the symbol of this expedition of *Brahman* for the Unknown. On one hand, man follows the natural course of life i.e. building family, society, and nation, and on the other hand, he ignores the normal life in search of the unknown, the knowledge, and the *Rasa* (the refined enjoyment of life). If the earthly comfort and pleasure were the only yearning of man, then for the thirst of knowledge he would not have rushed to seek the experience of the unknown mystery of the impassable mountains. One wonders, where is the limit of this seeking? On one hand so many scholars, so many scientists have devoted their lives in revealing the mysteries of the outward expressions of matter and life; on the other hand, in seeking the Divine, the human consciousness, the human soul, and the Universal Soul, so many saints, yogis, *sanyasins*, philosophers and scholars have ignored their worldly lives. To know the mysteries of life what an earnest eagerness in man! In this practical age of science so many scientists have devoted their lives to analysing what is the consciousness, in knowing the subconscious, and the unconscious. There is no satisfaction in man's thirst for knowledge, no end to the search for the mysteries of the unknown.

This seeking mind is the sign of human civilisation. Because, with this intelligence, man has mastered the deep mysteries of nature, made life prosperous and powerful, which could render wonders in life. But man has not remained satisfied with this much—without controlling the mysteries of the universe how would his knowledge be completed? That is why from the dawn of civilisation, man has searched for the higher, sought to find the source of power, peace,

bliss and completeness. He has got the indication of the Supreme Consciousness and the signs of the Supreme Soul. He has found the means for the union with this consciousness as in his heart, he has awakened the love for the Divine and the *Bhakti*. This has given man the knowledge of the subtle, of reasoning, and the intelligence beyond the senses i.e. not only the consciousness in the awakened state but also in the dream state and in slumber. This has given the partial life the concept of the Complete, in the finite the signs of the Infinite. It has given the incomplete the ability to become Total, and shown man the path to reach the Divine.

In this way, the Complete Consciousness which had unfolded itself amidst unconsciousness and ignorance, has also found the source for self-liberation through various strata. Sri Aurobindo calls this “the double ladder of consciousness” i.e., the Consciousness descending and ascending. The Supreme expressing Himself and savouring the finite, incomplete, creating the variety of divine play in them, gaining experience and again awakening in the incomplete (that is the *adhara* of man) the glory of the Complete, Infinite and Eternal. To transform the lower nature and to cast the light of the higher over the lower is the earthly glory of the Supreme.

Just as the tree lies dormant inside the seed, similarly, the Eternal Soul lies hidden within the universal creation. As the tree develops at the appropriate time and place, similarly the manifestation of the Soul takes place through various stages of universal creation. Man is the centre of this higher evolution. For this reason Lord Sri Krishna has said, “ममैवांशः”. In man itself, there is possibility of harmonising the higher and the lower. The symbol of the evolution of the lower nature is man. However, in his intelligence and heart blossoms the higher nature, the Supreme Consciousness. For this reason the worldly situation cannot overwhelm man as he can, amidst the difficulties of life, sing the glory of the Spirit.

A WORLD CREATED BY TAPAS⁹⁴

In the previous chapter, we have discussed the aspiration for manifestation of Self in the creation of *Brahman*. In the book entitled *The Riddles of the World*, Sri Aurobindo has answered philosophically all the questions posed by his disciples on this issue. But long before the publication of this book, the elaborate analysis that he made on the subject in *The Life Divine* bears testimony to his profound knowledge and realisation. The inquisitive reader will be amazed to read the relevant chapter in *The Life Divine*.

Sri Aurobindo has dealt with the Self of *Brahman* and the manifestation of His glory in the creation. He has resolved the problematic question: How could ignorance come in knowledge? He has shown the causes of ignorance and even its usefulness. In a few words, it can be presented thus: In the *Sachchidananda* state, *Brahman* is Existence, Consciousness and Bliss—the three are inextricably linked with one another; there is no discrimination or separation in this state. In Him, are uniformly held this creation and the state transcending this creation. *Brahman* is omnipresent, and *virata* (infinite). He is imminent in every atom of this universe. In His Consciousness, exists at once unity and multiplicity. In spite of being many, he does not lose the consciousness of being the One. But in the consciousness of unity there cannot be any play of diversity. That is why, in this multidimensional evolution there originates different possibilities, varieties and relations in the oneness. In *Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo says,

“But wherever there is anything of the nature of cosmic existence, there must be a play of relations and some principle of determination

of relation.”

Sri Aurobindo says that the Supramental Consciousness of the Divine, that is, the Supermind, determines this relation. It is by the force of the Supramental that the unity manifests itself in many but does not lose the consciousness of unity. Profoundly speaking, the Supramental is the creator, but the creation of the Supramental is not a dream.

Sri Aurobindo writes:

“It is not an unsubstantial phantasmagoric idea creating mere appearances; it is creating real terms of being.”

In the hierarchical order of creation, different fragmented consciousness—mind, life and matter—originate from the integral consciousness. In reality, they are not fragmented, it is the same consciousness that takes different forms at different levels. At the Supramental level, these differences do not appear at all; what is experienced is the varied play of the One. But at every stage, in order to attain perfection in development, the idea of oneness and of infinitude almost disappears. This results in the emergence of fragmented consciousness and fragmented knowledge, and finally, in this fragmented state emerges discriminating intelligence. Even so, without this fragmentation, mind, life and matter would not have existed; their individual domains would not have been created. We could not have realised the mental world or the material world; on top of that, we too would not have been created as individuals. It is for forging relations amongst the many within the One that different worlds have been created. That is why Sri Aurobindo has observed that, *“It is on the play of these potentialities that the mental, vital and material worlds are founded.”*

This kind of “one-pointedness”, which is a mode of the Supreme consciousness to gain a particular experience, is the reason behind the creation of fragmented consciousness. When the all-pervasive consciousness manifests in a special mode of awareness then the specific worlds of consciousness are created. This is the result of the *tapas* of *Brahman*. *Tapas* represents the “one-pointedness” of the consciousness. It is through *tapas* or the creative power of *Brahman* that this universe and various other worlds have been created. Sri

Aurobindo writes: “By what power then is this (unity) ignored in our phenomenal consciousness? It is by the development of a power in the conscious being, its power of dwelling in its idea of being, its act of being: this is its creative power—*Tapas*.”

There is a philosophical basis of the tales on *tapasya* done by Brahma and other gods as narrated in the *Puranas*; these are not mere imagination. When man too does *tapasya*, his whole consciousness and being seek to achieve a particular goal. Even we are familiar with many a story narrating that the power of the *asuras* too increases through *tapasya*.

Through *tapas*, that is, through the creative power of *Brahman*, innumerable worlds surface in his vast indivisible consciousness. Therefore, every world symbolises a particular mode of manifestation of an integral consciousness; and each world takes a particular form and a particular nature. But then this particular mode of manifestation no longer stands indivisible, it becomes divided because of its characteristics. The light of integral consciousness then no longer remains explicitly manifested; a shadow of the shroud of ignorance falls upon it. That is why we find in this creation the play of opposites, i.e. light and darkness, memory and oblivion, and the conflict of knowledge and ignorance.

Embodied beings as we are, our consciousness remains attached to the body because of this fragmented knowledge, of this ignorance. Again, when we get inundated by exuberance of a vital outburst, we lose momentarily the consciousness of the body; as for example, in the battlefield, a soldier caught up with a violent excitement makes light of his bodily danger, he does not care for the blows he receives. Similarly, in certain states of mental absorption, we can forget this worldly life, we can also create imaginary worlds; it is through *tapas* that we can have the knowledge of different worlds.

Our life seems more often than not joyless because of this fragmented knowledge. When we are in deep sorrow, we feel bereft of everything in spite of our having everything. Devoid of mental strength, one may behave like inert matter, in spite of being alive. Indeed, the human consciousness possesses such a rich repertoire of so many forms, such variegated feelings and varied

developments! Modern psychology has begun to show tremendous interest in these areas.

The indivisible and the integral consciousness, developing itself in various ways at different levels of this creation in its multifaceted “one-pointedness”, finally disappears as though in the “inconscience”⁹⁵—the Soul as though becomes self-oblivious. This self-oblivion is the nature of matter. But self-oblivion is not the final word. If it were final or the original, then the world would have remained only a gross matter, there could not have existed any trace of the play of life.

The underlying mystery is this: at the highest level, all the steps of descent exist in a concentrated manner. That is to say, in matter lie hidden, life, mind and even the Supermind. Through the force of evolution they start gradually unfolding themselves. That is why we find that, after the creation of the world, consciousness started manifesting slowly. At the same time, different forms and bases (*adhara*) were created. Once the “adventure of consciousness” was completed from the higher to lower, its upward movement commenced. Evolution of the world began; gradually, in this material world developed the vital and mental worlds. And finally the human soul dreamt of higher worlds, of the supreme soul, and of the integral consciousness. The consciousness force, which plunged itself in inconscience, started moving upwards. In human consciousness, it took the form of aspiration for still higher worlds. In the stillness and static state of the matter developed *sat* (existence); *chit*, the consciousness, remained locked in slumber—*sat* again manifested itself through its force of consciousness in the vital world, in life and in mind. In the creation broke the faint sign of *ananda* i.e. in the heart of man manifested the blissful Being—as the *rishis* of the *Upanishads* experienced: “All is created in *ananda*, all is held in *ananda* and all is moving towards *ananda*.”

All without exception is *ananda*, but how will man remain satisfied with partial *ananda*? Man, therefore, dreams of perfect and undying *ananda*; he wants to taste integral *ananda* and unite with the blissful Being. The *ananda* in matter is hidden, it is not conscious. The

ananda in the vital is manifested but not completely conscious. The *ananda* in the mental is conscious but restless. But what is the reason for this restlessness? Is it not for enjoying uninterrupted *ananda*? Whatever man does is for having *ananda*. Even the hidden cause behind his embracing sorrow disregarding *ananda* is the inspiration for a deeper *ananda*. Only when man helplessly bears sorrow and loses self-control he feels sad because of his failure or broken hopes.

Hundreds of, nay, thousands of desires and longings of man are running after this *ananda*. In the vital plane, desire represents the manifestation of this blissful Being. However, the mind is the source of desire; that is why, in the sub-human level, the desire of any living being is not clearly manifest. But it is also a fact that all the desires of man do not get fulfilled; in most cases they confuse man and make him aware of the fact that they cannot provide perfect *ananda*. The desires are always running and running blindly, they do not have the capacity to reach the ultimate. The senses are restless and they cannot offer uninterrupted *ananda*. That is why, in order to hold this *ananda*, what is needed is an evolution of consciousness; if we cherish continuous stay in *ananda*, we have to take refuge in the All-Blissful, because rooted as we are in ignorance, we can only enjoy partial joy provided by the senses.

Again, the incapacity of man makes him aware of the fact that his will and power are limited. On one hand, man is powerful, and with his physical, vital and above all mental and intellectual power, he has become the most powerful amongst all created beings but still he cannot act according to his own will. His power is limited. His body is helpless before the natural forces. Innumerable are the doors leading to his death. He is helpless before disease and decay. However, thanks to his mental power, he has acquired, to a great extent, mastery over nature. But he may be killed in a moment by the microbes invisible to the naked eye. And again, so many new and newer diseases are being discovered every day! Yet, man is desirous of acquiring power. With power, he can perform miracles too! This will-power of man represents the consciousness force of *Brahman*. Infinite is the force of the consciousness of *Brahman*. This

world has been created through the *tapas* of his consciousness force. In man, this force plays in a limited manner. But through asceticism and through *tapasya*, man can phenomenally develop his power of consciousness and he can acquire immeasurable strength too.

Man has even brought about some variety in the material creation through his *tapas*, through his concentrated *sadhana*. His knowledge is turning out to be vast i.e. not only spiritual knowledge but knowledge of power behind matter as well.

The consciousness force of *Brahman* is indivisible and since it is inseparably linked with existence and bliss it is integral, self-perfect and capable of effecting miracles. It is divided in the creation and in man, but it is limited. That is why man is so earnest in his quest for perfection and so eager in developing power. The human squabbles and conflicts are the primary means for the development of power. As the “Perfect Being” has become a divided being in evolutionary creation and finally transformed himself in atom, similarly, the force too in a fragmented *adhara* creates clashes and conflicts. The object of these conflicts is to attain self-mastery, which is why in the lower planes of creation, a living being grows bigger by devouring another living being.

In the upward movement of creation, these clashes and conflicts occur not only for eking out one’s existence, but for other reasons as well, such as desire for one’s own comfort and enjoyment, desire for self-establishment and so on. It is for this reason that man from the days of yore has fought so many battles and shed so much blood. Even when man attains mental excellence, he cannot get rid of violence; however, at this higher level, conflicts take place for idealistic reasons. Man has shed no less blood for the sake of idealism and is still shedding! In order to popularise a particular religion among the masses, man has caused so many wars—he has shown the pinnacle of barbarism in order to establish the so-called kingdom of God. This chapter of man’s history is yet to be completed. In the past, in many countries, so many wars were fought for the sake of religion; in this century, two world wars have taken place for political and economic reasons. One of these wars was by

and large due to idealistic reasons. Who is to say that there will not be another war again on idealistic grounds?

The conflict between the *devas* and the *asuras* is perhaps the ultimate conflict needed for the upward evolution of this creation. The *asuras* are strong despite the fact that their power is limited; they want to enhance their power. Their knowledge is fragmented; they want to extend it over the whole world. They are not satisfied with enjoyment alone; instead, they intend to appropriate the whole world as their field of enjoyment.

In the *Puranas*, it is found that the *asuras* or the *rakshasas* were not satisfied with acquiring “prosperous kingdoms” alone through *tapasya*; they wanted to devour the whole world as well. They even succeeded in dethroning the *devas*, though temporarily. Their objective was to lord over this creation. Even after getting the knowledge of the divine *shakti*, they wanted her for enjoyment. That is why, we find in the *Puranas* that Mahishasura, seeing the wonderful form of Chandi, longed to possess her as his consort. Then Chandi had to take the form of Kali and kill him for his salvation.

Without getting confused by the conflicts of the lower worlds, if man takes refuge in the Supreme Consciousness, in the Supreme Force—which is not self-oblivious in the division and fragmentation of the creation—then he develops true knowledge and perfect power and he is established in immortality, in *Brahman*, in the Eternal. Death makes man aware of the ephemeral nature of this material and finite being. The embodied man knows very well how dreadful death is, what an unknown fear it keeps in store! And he feels utter helplessness while facing death. Isn't this feeling indicative of the underlying aspiration of man to conquer death? It is death which makes us think of the possibility of immortality. But as a physical being we long first to have physical immortality so that we can continue to possess the capacity to enjoy physical pleasures with all our vital and mental desires. But if we think a little deeply we will understand that our deep aspiration is to gain immortality of consciousness. But again, if the consciousness is tied to a partial *adhara*, how will it get an inkling of integrality without having a new

adhara? It is death which gives us an opportunity to bring variety in experiences by transforming our physical vessel. Can any durable partial experience satisfy man? Yet he wants to get an idea of an eternal being so that he can realise that he is ever old even in the midst of the new, otherwise he will always live in the fear of losing himself. It is not only a fear, it is rather the pangs of getting separated from near and dear ones.

The spectre of death chills man as long as he swings helplessly in the rock-cradle of life and death because of his limited consciousness. But when he discovers the undying consciousness of the eternal Self, when he becomes aware of the source from where he has come, of the reason of his existence and growth, when he comprehends the mysteries of this creation, when he takes refuge in the Supreme Soul, in Integral Consciousness, then he perceives the phenomenon of life and death as one of the manifestation varieties of *Brahman*. When he arrives at *brahmi sthiti* (firm standing in the *Brahman*), he attains immortality. *Brahman* is immortal and so is the soul. In a profound sense, the human being represents this soul. It is for this reason that Sri Krishna has termed the human soul as “a portion of Myself”.

From time immemorial, man has got confused so many times in addressing the problems posed by death, incapacity and desire; he has tried to find out means to overcome them but has failed to comprehend the mysteries behind these problems in the creation of *Brahman*. We marvel to read what Sri Aurobindo has written on death, desire and incapacity in *The Life Divine*; how beautifully he has presented his reasoning to solve these problems! He has not considered these problems as human experiences alone; he has determined their causes as well and proved the inevitability of their existence in this creation. He has finally shown that if man unites himself with *Brahman*, he comes closer to Him and starts living in his Light. These are, in fact, the ultimate objectives of man and if the human consciousness gets transformed through the constant touch of the *Brahman* consciousness, then he can attain not only immortality but also integral knowledge, force and *ananda*.

THE BASIS OF INTEGRAL YOGA

Sri Aurobindo has taken *Gita* as the basis of Integral Yoga. His scholarship and knowledge of Indian philosophy is well-known to all. He has explained *Isha*, *Keno* and other *Upanishads*; he has revealed the deep mysteries of *Veda*. Even the idols described in the *Veda* as symbols of different consciousness were realised by him in his *sadhana*. On this topic, he has written in the *Arya*, in the introduction to “The Secret of the Veda” that earlier he had assumed the *Upanishads* as the only source of knowledge and wisdom of India, and before he read the *Veda* he accepted the interpretation of the European scholars. However, while crossing various levels of *sadhana* he suddenly arrived at the ancient path followed by our ancients, which at present has gone almost into oblivion. During this time there arose in his mind some symbolic names related to his yogic experiences; among them were three female powers—Ila, Saraswati and Sarama. He says, “... At this time there began to arise in my mind an arrangement of symbolic names attached to certain psychological experiences which had begun to regularise themselves; among them there came the figures of three female energies, Ila, Saraswati, and Sarama, representing individually three out of four faculties of the intuitive reason—revelation, inspiration and intuition.”⁹⁶

This shows that he did not only read the world-renowned books of our country to acquire knowledge but used them as a guide for his *sadhana*. The truth revealed in them was completely realised by him and in the light of that knowledge the search for a new path for *sadhana* was also made. In the introduction to *Essays on the Gita* he

said that the eternal Truth revealed in the *Gita* is beyond space, time and subject. For that, it cannot be said that our focus would be towards the dawn of knowledge. The modern man has to acquire the transformation under the rays of knowledge of the mid-day sun.

Inspired by this, he has taken the *Gita* as the base for Integral Yoga. It is the *Gita* that has become for him the main help for manifestation of God realisation. While in Bengal he had written *Gitar Bhumika* (Introduction to *Gita*) in Bengali; but after arriving in Pondicherry, he started the supreme discourse on the *Gita* which was published in two volumes.^{[97](#)}

The *Gita* being helpful in expanding knowledge, Sri Aurobindo took *Gita* as the support for his *sadhana*. Before going to Pondicherry he had a wonderful experience on the difficult topic of *Gita*, i.e. the “Universal Vision” of Arjuna and in that matter we get a glimpse of it in his own words from the following paragraph which appeared in *Dharma*^{[98](#)}:

...The Universal Vision is an essential and important part in Gita. The doubts and hesitation that arose in the mind of Arjuna were dispelled by Lord Krishna with logic and citation of deepest knowledge. However, the knowledge acquired through logic and advice has infirmity; whereas the knowledge which has been realised, is the knowledge established firmly. Hence Arjuna, through an inspiration of his inner Self, expressed the wish for the Universal Vision. On having a view of the Universal Vision all doubts and hesitation moved away from Arjuna’s mind forever. Intellect purified and sacred, he became worthy of realising the secret of secrets of the Gita. The discourse of the knowledge that appears in Gita before the Universal Vision is like a prelude for the *Sadhakas* (Seekers); the discourse following the Universal Vision, is knowledge of profound Truth, supreme mystery and eternal teachings. If this Universal Vision is called a poetic fancy, the seriousness, profundity and Truth of Gita is tarnished; thereby the deepest Teachings of Yoga get reduced to a collection of a few philosophical thoughts and poetic imaginations. The Universal Vision is verily Truth—not

imagination, nor a fancy; not over-natural Truth—because the Universe is within Nature; the Universal Vision cannot be extra natural. The Universal Vision is also the Truth of the causal world, the forms of the world of reason is clearer before the Divine eyes. Arjuna, blessed with divine eyes, saw the Divine View of the world of reasons.

Sri Aurobindo writes further: “One who is the worshipper of *Shakti* (energy/power), *Karmayogi* (work or action as means of Yoga), and commanded to do the divine act by becoming the tool in the hand of the Master, for him the Universal Vision is essential. He can receive such command before attaining the Universal Vision but that command then is not ratified till he has the *darshan* of the Universal Vision; it has been issued but not passed. Till that time it is the phase of training and being prepared for it. After attaining the Universal Vision starts the Action.”⁹⁹

Sri Aurobindo had not completed the discourse on the *Gita*; whatever he had written in *Dharma* has been published under the title *Gitar Bhumika* (Introduction to Gita). However, in those few chapters not only did he explain the yogic significance of *Gita* but also analysed the inherent political aspects. He has mentioned in a subtle way why Lord Krishna had triggered the great war of Kurukshetra and what benefit it had for India. For example, what he wrote on the necessities for annihilation of the families can be mentioned here:

It is true that in the battle of Kurukshetra the dynasties and progenies had perished. In this battle the mighty house of Kurus was in a way obliterated. However, if by perishing of the Kurus, entire India were saved then it was not a loss but gain for the Kurus as well . . . it may so happen that for the welfare of the race and the world the dispute within the family, the killing of the cousins in the battle becomes the only course left. In this way, if there is fear of total destruction of the dynasty, then even that cannot be stopped for the good of the world and the human race. In this age, the Nation is the foundation for righteousness (Dharma) and religion. Protection of the nation and the human

race is the principal religion of this age, genocide is an unpardonable sin. But if there comes such an age when a bigger human society can be established then the wise and the men of action would fight for saving the race (the way Bhishma, Drona and others fought for the protection of the house of Kurus). On the other hand, Lord Krishna becoming a revolutionary would start a new Kurukshetra for the good of the world.[100](#)

Way back in 1909, for the establishment of “internationalism” Sri Aurobindo had given hints of a possible war. Truly, after World War I, that became the call of the whole world; after World War II a similar effort was made, though unsuccessful. On the other hand, some are speaking about establishment of One World. But before the forming of internationalism, every time nationalism boastfully puts its head up. The narrowness and conceit of nationalism has faded away, the end of colonialism has taken place but internationalism has not been established. For the evolution of man, Sri Aurobindo has talked about the inevitability of a war against sham idealism but he, like Nietzsche or Hitler, did not glorify war. Rather, he has emphasised the supreme idealism of equality, friendship and freedom of man. At the same time he has reminded us that to establish this supreme idealism on an unshakeable foundation, transformation of the inner self is necessary. Howsoever noble the idealism, as long as man does not realise it, till that time it becomes the cause of deceit or conflict externally. However, man becomes purified by burning in this conflict. The reason of usefulness of the conflict is the evolution of man.

Sri Aurobindo has called Sri Krishna a supreme politician of that age. But he has not glorified Krishna the politician in his discourses on the *Gita*—he has glorified Krishna the *avatar*. If Lord Krishna had been only the politician then his advice to Arjuna would have been only to do his duty and the *Gita* would have become a moral book for adhering to duties. At first, he tried to inspire Arjuna by telling him his duties. But then Arjuna’s heart was in turmoil due to the imminent turbulence, how could he be satisfied by mere words on morals?

Therefore, God had to impart to Arjuna the greatest of knowledge; he had to explain the supreme mystery, explain riddles of creation—and finally He had to manifest His Self.

After the Supreme Realisation, with a mastery of yoga, Arjuna came down on the battlefield. Then he was not only the hero with *Gandiva* (the devastating weaponry of Arjuna), he was a fully knowledgeable warrior of God—who fought to fulfil God's will with full energy and enthusiasm. God also showed that this was not merely a political battle, this was an inevitable conflict in the evolutionary progress between the inner self and the external. In that age, the *Kshatriyas* of India were as much fierce fighters as they were egocentric. Because of their undaunted ego, their moral sense and righteousness had almost perished. Only the conventions and practices were religiously followed, spiritual nobility was hardly honoured. For this reason, a great personality like Bhishma, knowing the “ins and outs” of their conduct, did not leave the side of Duryodhana in the battle. Duryodhana, in his ego, became so insensitive that he even moved to capture Lord Krishna when he tried to negotiate for the establishment of peace.

When man strives to excel at human qualities then he becomes competent in worldly knowledge, scholarship and other finer qualities, but the achievement by physical force may lead to the oblivion of the Self. Then his consciousness is employed for enjoyment and he does not respond to the call of his inner self. He remains busy in fulfilling the petty selfish needs; noble inspiration does not touch the heart. This way he cannot recognise God; likewise he does not care to know whose manifestation this creation is or who the Creator is. By taking shelter under the finite, he cannot realise the Infinite. He clings to the instant, does not look for the Eternal.

Finally, the fragmented and divisive intelligence becomes the cause of his destruction. Again when he encounters inevitable destruction, all the hesitations come to obey the call of duty. He finds that the entire familiar and regular world is going to be lost under the waves of time. He feels helpless. He cannot realise that after the

deluge there arises the new creation. Even he might think that if he does not participate in this change perhaps this can be avoided.

Just before the start of the great war of Kurukshetra, Arjuna had this psychological condition. His mind and body were fatigued, as though his grip on the main weapon, *Gandiva*, slackened. In this moment of grief, his friend and charioteer (Sri Krishna) inspired him, encouraged him, and reminded him to fulfil his duties. Even then the doubts and hesitation in the mind of Arjuna did not go away. Then Sri Krishna explained to him that this battle, this partial devastation, was inevitable, i.e., this could not be prevented even if Arjuna did not participate. Arjuna is merely an “actor” in the divine play of time.

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE DIVINE POWER

Bhakti or Devotion is the bridge to join man with God. When man is attracted towards God, devotion arises in his heart. On the rise of the devotion, human love joins with God. *Bhakti* is the compassion of God i.e. the manifestation of God's joyous appearance in the human heart. At the pinnacle of devotion, the human soul comprehends the eternal connection with the Supreme Soul. How lucidly has Sri Aurobindo explained in a chapter in the *Synthesis of Yoga* the sweetness of *bhakti* (devotion)! If the devotee worships God offering whatever he has i.e. a flower, a leaf or a little water, God is happy with just that. When the source of *bhakti* rises from inside the heart of man, God sprinkles that with love.

The search for God started ever since the knowledge in man has developed. Man has worshipped God in so many forms and ideas and with so much faith. Man has realised God as human too and worshipped so many *avatars* (re-incarnations), religious heads, wise men and yogi-gurus. And yet the question arises in his heart, "Where is God?" Many a times, man has created God according to his imagination; due to that, men with partial knowledge and addicted to divisive motives had no small number of conflicts and clashes. Have the conflicts ended? Even today man is not at all retreating from bloodshed to prove the superiority of religious dogma.

It is the nature of man to prove his beliefs to others. Holding such beliefs, the man is earnest in wanting to groom individuals and society. There is so much of enthusiasm to propagate the customs, doctrines, etc. derived from such beliefs. As a result of this mentality, man forgets the sovereignty of the Almighty, he forgets that God is

all, everything is His creation. The wonders in the creation are also His. From the beginning of human history there are conflicts and clashes, intolerance of the religious dogma, the vitiated form in religions, and sections of people who are hostile towards religion itself. Seeing the perversion of religion due to the selfish motives of a few, and the rise of a confused viewpoint, they consider religion as the root cause of malevolence. For this reason we find these days, certain political groups do not hesitate to say that religion is like opium to numb the intellect of the populace.

The assertion is not totally false, because, when due to selfish motives of man something is distorted then everyone has to suffer the ill-effect of that. Then, the mind of man becomes rebellious. Due to this mental attitude, some develop the notion that it is enough if systems exist for providing leisure, comfort and opportunity to lead a good family life. Whatever needs to be done to achieve that system is considered selfless *karma* by them. So what is the need to establish God?

In reality many of us carry on like this. We do not care for humanity, but only for the self and perhaps for a few others; if we can organise leisure and comfort we feel our lives are successful. Even if we have faith in any religion, it remains in one corner of the mind. As per need we may ostentatiously express that and in trouble we may take recourse to that. To observe the rituals of that faith is considered as Supreme fulfilment. But we never care to build our individual lives (certainly never on a national level) according to the ideal behind that religion.

But can we at all avoid God from our lives? When a severe blow comes in the usual flow of life, then clueless and disoriented, we look up and then comes the yearning—is there none in this world to whom we can express our mental agony and pain? Perhaps we may not receive responses where our ego sense gets satisfied according to our culture or faith, but by listening in the silence from the depth of our heart, of course, one can get a response!

Why only through woe and pain? Do we not get the call of the Infinity in the midst of abundance and joy, through beauty and marvel? On this Sri Aurobindo had written to one of his disciples:

Perhaps you are on a solitary bank of a river observing a beautiful temple; perhaps your mind is absorbed appreciating the beauty of the Idol or the ornamentation on the walls! Suddenly you may feel that the loving gaze of the Divine Mother is cast on you—as if suddenly you see the bliss of Her face! Or else perhaps, you have climbed up the crest of a mountain, below a dream-like natural scenic beauty—the infinite sky is above, the sky is embracing the earth. At that time perhaps in your heart flashes the faint presence of Infinity, you feel a universal soul in which everything is captured. In this rapture you forget your littleness.^{[101](#)}

Truly when we are moved at the natural beauty (also the terrible beauty—the author Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay has expressed this feeling marvellously while describing the fury of a cyclone on the sea) then unknown to us, the source of *Bhakti* from our heart flows towards the Creator. But the external nature alone does not inspire the heart towards the divine. Some good book, some beautiful poem, some philosophical reality or some scientific discovery can give us the glimpses of the glory of God. If we keep the door of our heart open, if we remain in expectation, if our mind is ardent then we can realise the innumerable paths that exist to get the feel of the Divine, the Supreme Being.

The attraction for the infinite vastness of God is the first stage of the evolution of our consciousness. If this consciousness is not transient, then gradually, in our heart the noble thoughts rise. *Bhakti* gradually expands the domain of knowledge; we seek the Being beyond the ego-senses. As a result of seeking we gradually feel the presence of God's Omnipresence and Eternal Soul. Our heart and mind develops equanimity. This equanimity is the basis of knowledge, action and *Bhakti*. For this reason, Sri Aurobindo has specially mentioned equanimity in the *Essays on the Gita* and other writings.

What is this equanimity? Is it the indifference from life and the world; only to remain engrossed in one's own mood? But yogic equanimity is not indifference. The yogi, apparently, is indifferent to

everything; in him there is no sign of outward restlessness; as if he is unmoved in the joy or sorrows of man. It appears as though he has nothing called heart. Actually a yogi's vision is not focused on the apparent events, he realises the manifestation of things in the flow of Time, and they are controlled beyond the view of man for their goal. He, of course, understands the joy and sorrows of the common man, but does not get perturbed because he understands the inevitability due to cause-effect phenomenon. His emotions are not transient like the ordinary man's, they are deep. His heart feels the vibration of the world; he is absorbed in the meditation for the well-being, peace, *ananda* (supreme joy) and fulfilment of the world. He is indeed the lover of the world. Nothing of external nature and sense-derived matter can perturb him. He realises the calm eternal soul behind the external restiveness. He also experiences the aspiration of the lower nature for contact with the higher nature, for the transformation. This aspiration is the cause of the disturbances and impatience in the lower nature. He realises the movement of the nature towards the divine life. Likewise, the divine life is also awaiting the transformation of the nature's life. The yogi experiences the divine power that can make this transformation possible and takes its shelter and surrenders to him his nature-being. He takes on his own spiritual base the universal spirit—macrocosm in microcosm. His own spirit is merged with the universal spirit; for the world's well-being, and for the divine transformation of the man He works tirelessly uninterrupted. In this seeking, the personality that blooms is not his ego or the split-personality but it is the supreme personality i.e. the manifestation of the Supreme Being.

His work may not be like that of Buddha merely "Yoga of Knowledge" (*Jnana Yoga*), or like that of Jesus or Chaitanya Mahaprabhu¹⁰² but simply "Love and Devotional Yoga" (*Prem-Bhakti Yoga*). Sometimes the yogi can be devoted to profound activities like the way Lord Krishna initiated Arjuna in the great battle of Kurukshetra. Sri Aurobindo says,

"He declared war on earth for a diviner world."¹⁰³

In the war even though showing uncaring indifference at the natural pain, pangs and screams of the divine warrior, his vision is for the supreme well-being. He does not declare war as highest ideal of life and nation like Nietzsche or Hitler. Again, he does not also remain like the extreme pacifists dreaming in the imaginary world for permanent peace without endeavour. He realises that for destroying man's individual or collective ego, for removal of the fractional intellect, there is necessity for war in the world of matter, life and mind. This does not mean that man has to fight eternally. When man will be fatigued in war, sincerely desirous of peace, when man would join his spirit with the universal spirit, feel himself one amongst many, and accept many in his own self, it is then that his consciousness would rise above the common beliefs. Then war would become the sign of uncivilised barbarism. But as long as man does not get the urge to search for that supreme light, until that time he has to gain experience through duality, such as joy and sorrow, violence and non-violence, war and peace etc. On completion of the knowledge these doubts will go away. Then man will get the direction of the world of supreme delight (*Anandalok*) and the divine life will illumine the earth.

The yogi established in equanimity, constantly joined with the divine consciousness, realises *Brahman* is in every atom and every atom is created in the *Brahman*. That is why, just as he may not hesitate to participate in the outside human frivolities and may perform ordinary tasks, likewise he can always be prepared for bigger work on divine inspiration. Again, on the same inspiration, he can be totally still and be absorbed and immobile in the euphoric *samadhi* state.¹⁰⁴ Did Swami Vivekananda not say that through the *sadhana* of a yogi whatever revolutions that are possible in the thinking world cannot be worked out by hundred thousand people? Buddha had taught *nirvana* but after his passing the unique development that came over in religion, politics, and social sciences and also in the art world, and the wonderful creativity that expressed in India, are they not due to Buddha's creation in the thinking world? Buddha sowed the seed of new creation not only in India but in many

other nations as well. The sphere of work of the yogi and the great men is not only in the outside world but also in the inner domain. For him there is no difference in work, he is equanimous in respect of all work. (कृत्स्नकर्मकृत्)

The basis of Integral Yoga is liberal views and equanimity. On the path of yoga, Sri Aurobindo has indicated and particularly emphasised that the *sadhaka* has to establish himself firmly in inner equanimity and patience. Unless there is calmness we cannot be aware of the higher consciousness. This consciousness is connected with the Divine Consciousness. Our mind is generally restless, materialistic and eager for sense-satisfaction. That is why first of all we need calmness in mind. When the mind is quiet, the emotions are not restive, the senses are free of disturbances and bonded to equanimity, only then does our steady intellect bloom and our being get prepared, then our soul opens; the soul which is eternal, unchangeable even with the change of external nature, which is our true personality, which Lord Krishna calls, “ममैवांशः”.

When the restlessness of mind is removed, the heart quietens. Unless our emotions are in harmony with the natural feelings, we cannot be neutral to worldly doubts and disputes, our weaknesses do not go away. Unless the weaknesses are removed one does not get the knowledge of Truth, the heart also does not become clear. When the heart is free from blemish then only blooms the Divine Love, the craving for the Divine—this Sri Aurobindo has called “aspiration”. This aspiration initially makes us divine-oriented, then awakens the psychic being in us. This psychic being is present unseen, behind the mental being, vital being and the physical being. But we are busy in meeting the demands of various desires and needs, and do not keep track of this psychic being. That is why we get baffled if our mind, life and body are perturbed. When we are conscious of the psychic being then we get the power to control our mind, the life force and the body. In the book *The Lights on Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo has explained in detail the different strata of our being. If we want to transform our lives then we shall have to search for the mystery, have to find the true character of our being. Just as medical science gives us the picture of our body so also the science of yoga

acquaints us with our true being and the higher being. Unless we get this introduction, we cannot make our being as the base for the divine power. We can only get a vague idea about God and his power.

These two books, *The Lights of Yoga* and *Bases of Yoga* are quite helpful in one's search for the divine life. Sri Aurobindo wrote *Synthesis of Yoga* in the form of articles in the *Arya* (now published in a single volume), but the speciality of the two books cited here is that they are compilations of the answers to the personal questions of the devotees. In the path of yoga Sri Aurobindo has thrown light on the personal experiences gained by the devotees and the difficulties faced, and shown the process of evolution of man's consciousness to a Higher Consciousness.

The system of Sri Aurobindo's teaching is that he has not enunciated some fixed formulae and charted rules for spirituality with severe restrictions making the life rigid and crippling the mind. He has helped to address the experience gained in their *sadhana* or answered the questions that have arisen in their minds. The aim of Integral Yoga is to surpass the lower nature and establish the nature of the higher and not to deny any part of life but to refine and enrich life's variety. But then, the controlling body is not the ego; instead it is knowledge, peace, the joy of giving divine power. The purpose of life then is not to make a complete whole of the fractional ego, but to establish the total, to take His nature and, with His will and power, make a success of the purpose of the divine play. That is why there is no place for dictatorship in the spiritual world. God is not a tyrant king or an all-powerful lord that built life only in one pattern. To bring variety in the world is His work.

There is need for self-restraint in life. But in the spiritual life that restraint will be spontaneous. Lord Krishna has said, प्रकृतियान्तिभूतानिनिग्रहःकिमकरिष्यति i.e the exterior nature cannot be brought under control only with external restraint. What is needed is inner inspiration and change in the outlook. That is why Sri Aurobindo does not advocate self-restraint. He indicates the need to surrender for all individuals; he asks to surrender to the divine power.

As long as we cannot master the senses and mental desires in our normal state, they would churn our being; we are helpless before these disturbances. The more our mind is elevated, the more we want to control these impulses, by intellect and in some cases through mental and bodily torture. Many a time, though we are successful, suddenly the protective barrier collapses and our mind and intellect loses control. The physical and vital beings have different natures and the mind and intellect get overwhelmed by them. That is why we find great scholars, wise philosophers or a poet or artist of higher calibre suddenly getting swept away by the exuberance of the vital current. It is called, “Blunders of an ascetic” (मुनिनाञ्चमतिभ्रमः).

In the history of mankind, we find that in every age man has tried to protect the society by means of many rules, morals and customs. However, all were broken by the madness of the vital nature resulting in the upheaval of the society by the dance of the devils. That does not mean that ethics are meaningless. Because of the development of the ethical senses, man's passage over the animal state has arrived at the light of civilisation. Because of that, in every religion, morals and ethics have found a place; in fact, many of the religious books may be called as books of morals.

Even though the progress of civilisation has come so far, man has still not reached a state where he is almost about to be swept away due to the ignorance of morals. The psychologists say this is the flare-up of the unconscious. The human civilisation was developing like a nice city, but who knew beneath this was an active volcano?

Now man has the conviction that it is not possible to organise the life and society in a stable way only by means of the mental nature and intellect. One has to seek the Supramental consciousness existing above the mental consciousness and by its development man's control will grow not only in mind but in the vital and physical also. It is not possible to control the flood of the vital only by means of mastery of mind or by organising the vital control of the body. When the heart of the man opens up, the psychic being wakes up. Then man has self-knowledge and in the light of that knowledge man acquires the power to control the mind, vital, and body. Not only can

he control them, he can even transform them. There is no problem felt with the mind, vital, and the body; perhaps they are the base for the manifestation of the Soul and in their wonderful manifestation is the vibration of the play of the universal consciousness.

When our consciousness joins with the world of knowledge, bliss, and power that exists at a higher level and in the interior of the visible world, the blemish and the fragmentation of our consciousness go away. When the fragmentation of the consciousness goes away then everything appears as different layers of a supreme consciousness. Then the cravings of our nature in their own area exude complete knowledge, power, and bliss. Our mind joins with infinity and our heart with the universal soul. Every vibration of the universe brings harmonious vibration in our heart. Our mind becomes quiet and serene; our intelligence becomes steady and unmoved; in our heart develops not only love for humanity but also love for the living beings or universal love. And the total Being of God, which is beyond the universe, eternal and conscious and is charming in the divine play.

We are mostly not conscious of the different levels of our being. How our body, life and mind work, we mostly do not observe. Though our mind is the controller, it is mainly busy in meeting the demands of the body and of life. We can understand the influence of the mind by exercising the mental power. This power in many cases appears amazing. We find examples where the yogi can display astonishing power on many occasions by disciplining the mind.

Through the processes of *Rechak Kumbhadi* great development of vital power can be achieved. Many yogis can surprise men through strange processes. The feats of *Pranayam* are considered a special process in spiritual *sadhana*. A *Hatha* yogi can display what an extraordinary control can be gained over the body. Sri Aurobindo, in several chapters in the *Arya*, has discussed in detail the yoga system of *Raja Yoga*, *Gyan Yoga*, *Hatha Yoga*, etc. He has said these could also be means in Integral Yoga, but a better and certain way is to take refuge of the *Yoga-Shakti* (the power of Yoga). When the heart opens up inside us, the psychic being blossoms. It is then only that the *Yoga-Shakti*, the higher nature becomes active. By total

surrender of the self we can join ourselves with this *Shakti* (power), and the more the various levels of our being and the cravings of our nature consciously and joyfully take refuge in this *Shakti*, more the consciousness of the higher world develops in us, and gradually our being becomes the *adhara* (base) for the power of this higher consciousness. For a particular *adhara* (base; every *adhara* according to the inherent belief is born with a special nature that is why we see many persons with peculiar characteristics) the evolution beyond human and transformation is only possible by the help of this Higher Consciousness. If the transformation takes place it does not appear as our own consciousness separated, free from ego but instead one feels the whole consciousness constantly in *tapasya* (तपस्या) (seeking/meditation) of *Brahman* in different poses and creating unique harmony. The universe is created at the *tapasya* of *Brahman*. When the *tapasya* blossoms in man, then the consciousness of *Brahman* is joined with the human consciousness. Then, a wonderful harmony is felt not only in the human nature but also in the world. The human consciousness then feels not only the *ananda* (bliss/ delight), it feels the vastness, the infinity. Man feels that his body is joined with the vast matter-world—his body is a part of the matter-world; the life is joined with the life-world and the mind is joined with the world of mind. Science is a witness to this truth but the explanation of science can merely give us an idea. In order to feel the vastness and the wholeness of every level of creation one has to join with Him by special consciousness and, once joined, the Truth, knowledge is born. Sri Aurobindo has called this “knowledge by identity”. Because of this sovereignty of matter, life and mind, we realise all the human bodies are built in the same way, in life we feel the joy and sorrows of others and feel the mind of others through ours. Because of this sovereignty nature’s rule and characteristics have been possible; science has been facilitated in understanding the cause and effect.

When man progresses on the path of yoga, he feels that these various levels are each a different world i.e. the matter’s world, the life’s world and the world of mind. Of course not altogether separated, rather overlapped and joined; but each one’s area is

different, natures are different and each one has the marvel of manifestation. The level at which man's consciousness and intellect takes shelter, the being of man takes the nature of that level. For this reason the material-minded man gets the nature of matter i.e. *Tamasik*; one who rests on the life force becomes *Rajasik*; and he who takes resort to the mental power in him develops the *Sattva Guna*. Of course, in most cases the man's nature is a combination of all of them, that is, the "three-natured". When man can understand according to the situation the worth or incompleteness of these *Gunas* only then can he rise surpassing the nature, which is called a state beyond the three *Gunas*.

When man realises the impermanence of the three *Gunas* he takes the shelter of the transcendent nature where there is no conflict or fractional identity, from where there is no faltering. Before this supreme transformation, man realises that he is not body nor life nor mind—these are merely his means for knowing the external world and expression for the Self. He realises that the controller of this is the *Jeevatma* (the Spirit of the living). This *Jeevatma* takes different bases in order to gain experiences, and depending upon the need the great Nature makes his body, vital, and mind. Man being capable through *sadhana* to acquire this knowledge by disciplining the mind, receives such perception that his soul is firmly steady, unperturbed and the thoughts are moving close to him, yet unable to enter his head. Sri Aurobindo has said about this state in his book *Lights on Yoga*. In the prison he had experienced this state, which he has narrated in *Karakahini*.

In a quiet heart the man can realise that all the desires are born out of the currents of the exterior world. In most of the occasions, man literally plunges helplessly in the current of the desires. However, only taking a view of aloofness one can comprehend that his being can remain unperturbed even amidst the drag of the current of desire. Remaining still more unconcerned, he realises that he is unmoved and steady but the desires are like bubbles rising and disappearing. Then he is not a slave to the desires but the master, the power to control the desires grows in him. Of course, adhering to the opposite of disturbances too, gradually this steadiness comes,

but that is the path of suffering. Trying to crush and kill the desire by suppression pacifies it temporarily; but its seed and source are not removed. For this reason the wise man, by not torturing the natural tendencies, adheres to equanimity, steadiness and patience, and, transforming the nature, takes shelter under the higher influences of conscience. This unfailing method does not blindly agitate the desires and the being, but works in a definite way by the higher inspiration. Examples are aplenty of how man can win over the sorrows and joys of life. How the wise men, ignoring the bodily ailment, apply the mental power that is available in the life story of many noble persons. Again, at the inspiration of the vital, man can ignore not only personal risk but death itself. The soldier at the battlefield belittles death; the patriot becoming enthused for the welfare and love of the country does not hesitate to welcome death. There are numerous examples of how man can ignore the mundane life for the faith or inspiration at the influence of a higher call.

However, all persons cannot adhere to this inspiration forever. The inspiration comes like a lighting flash and fades away again. That is why for true transformation man has to take refuge in Nature of the Higher, cling to Truth and develop love for Truth. With this alone one cannot exist in Truth; this is only the preliminary means. For establishing in Truth one requires truth-knowledge, understanding of the subtler levels of the universal consciousness. One gets a glimpse of this understanding through *tapasya*, meditation and prayers. As a result one develops firm convictions, unshakeable faith and unflinching focus on the goal. Then manifests the Divine Consciousness. First it manifests in the heart, then in the mind, gradually in the vital and at last in the body, even at the innermost level of consciousness, just as the first rays of the sun fall on the tree-tops and thereafter the light spreads all over nature.

When our being fills up with the light, power and *ananda* (joy) of the conscience then the man perceives that he is no more the death-bound, ego-driven small man. Instead he is one of the principals of the countless centres of infinite knowledge, power and *ananda* (delight). The human race appears as the exterior of the limitless Conscious Being; the divine power carries amidst the human the

“gracious play”. Man’s actions then no longer centre around the ego; they are transformed into universal offerings. This is what *Ishavasya Upanishad* says,

“By that, renounced, thou shouldst enjoy.”(तेन त्यक्तेन भूजीथाः)

In this mortal world floating on the sea of dark ignorance who could be our guide? The eternal guide is God living in our heart, who is controlling everything, is unseen and in-dwelling. But in our outwardly life we need an exterior support. This support is a guru; not a guru of public domain but the yoga-guru. Seeing in him the manifestation of the ideal we worship him in our heart. The modern man expresses great objection to this trend for a guru.

But even in the common worldly matters, without a guru we cannot acquire knowledge. Other than an egoist everyone admits that in spiritual *sadhana*, in Integral Yoga, the guru alone is the guide. Integral Yoga is no cult or doctrine; there is no place in this yoga for force or compulsion, rules and regulations, asceticism, attempt for forming cults, etc. This is invocation from the human soul to the universal soul, the relentless adventure of consciousness, the search of the human consciousness for union with the supreme consciousness, the means in our fragmented life for attaining the Integral. If there is no guide how should we cross this “sharp-edged” path? We need a guide who has complete experience of the path, who has mastered the mysteries of the path and has placed the victory flag at the goal.

THE DIVINE PLAY OF THE WORLD MOTHER

When the *sadhaka* attains self-realisation exploring his own Self, discovers light from the darkness of ignorance, when the closed door of his heart opens up, when his mind yearns for Truth-knowledge as he breaks away from his *samskaras* (stock notions) and transcends the limits of discrimination and intelligence, when his whole being desires the touch of the Eternal and gets ready for transformation by that Touch, then he finds himself transported to a marvellous world where the Supreme Consciousness is fully active, where the Divine play of the World-Mother goes on uninterrupted, where everything without exception is the self of her Self, the waves of her Consciousness. Sri Aurobindo's infallible advice to those willing to tread the path of yoga is to take refuge in the supreme knowledge, supreme force and supreme play of the World-Mother.

Towards the end of his book *The Mother*,¹⁰⁵ Sri Aurobindo has written: "The Mother's power and not any human endeavour and *tapasya* can alone rend the lid and tear the covering and shape the vessel and bring down into this world of obscurity and falsehood and death and suffering Truth and Light and *Life Divine* and the immortal's *ananda*."

When a constant and earnest call for the Divine rises from the world, from the human heart and when the Divine in turn responds to that call, then the force that acts in the human *adhara* (instrument), in this semi-obscure world is called the Divine *Shakti* (Force), the Supreme *Prakriti* or the World-Mother.

Then, why is human *tapasya* incapable of bringing about a total transformation of the human being? Generally, the force with which

man acts, in spite of him being a part of the universal force, is limited, due to the limited nature of his *adhara*. Whenever he wants to transcend the limits, he has to take refuge in a higher boundless force of which we get only a veiled inkling in this world of senses. If the *tapasya* (meditative seeking) of man is not integral, then as he descends from the transcendental plane, he reverts to material consciousness. It may seem at this stage that the higher consciousness is separated from the lower consciousness. This happens because of the imperfect and incomplete knowledge and mentality of human beings.

It is for this reason that Sri Aurobindo has insisted on our taking shelter in the Supramental. Once man finds Supramental refuge, several divine faculties start manifesting in him— the faculties that illumine his heart and offer him unerring knowledge-perception; he need not have to rely on the sensual intelligence or dry ratiocination for acquiring knowledge. Gradually, he realises that he is not a mere creature of the lower world, rather he lives in the lap of a Supreme Being endowed with immeasurable knowledge, spontaneous and unbounded force and infinite bliss. This Being is omnipresent but active in man's heart. When man grows in consciousness, he feels that he is not only surrounded by this Being, knowledge, power and bliss but he is made up of these qualities. When this realisation becomes profound, his life becomes harmonious—a manifestation of a marvellous rhythm. His actions become unhindered; he does not consider his work as his own but as the outer waves of the Supreme Power, as the divine play of the World-Mother. He feels that he himself is one of the instruments of the manifestation of this Divine Power.

Sri Aurobindo says that in order to attain this great realisation, the *sadhaka* has to surrender integrally and in all parts of the being to this supreme *Shakti*. The very word surrender conjures up the relationship between the victor and the vanquished; but in divine surrender there is not an iota of this idea present. What is more is that, this is not even a worldly sacrifice. It is the surrender of the part to the whole, the courting of the Infinite by the finite and the call of the ego to the soul. What is our ego? It is nothing but the

consciousness that harbours a set of habitual movements (*samskaras*) that believes in its own partial power, that is avid for a little and passing joy and that tries to wander in the mental world created by it. When this consciousness thirsts for the contact of the world at large, not remaining satisfied with the little it possesses; when the wide firmament outside gives up the frog-in-the-well attitude; then it has to take refuge in, be united with and surrender to the integral consciousness, to the integral knowledge—it has to aspire to the realm of bliss. And then man, possessing fragmentary consciousness, has to turn inwards i.e. he will have to refrain from remaining dependent on his externalised practical intelligence. He will have to seek the fountainhead of consciousness and observe the different modes of the play of consciousness not only in this visible world but in the higher worlds where the play of consciousness goes on eternally, where the consciousness is the master of itself and of all. It is a world from where all the other worlds have been created—a world defined by the philosophers as the causal world.

In his book *Lights on Yoga* Sri Aurobindo has given us directions on how a man can experience the integral light and *ananda* of this Supreme Consciousness, of this highest Force. In the path of yoga, the *sadhaka* not only experiences infinite peace, silence and vastness; he can also realise a stupendous Force which holds all other forces, which is the source of all forces, an ineffable Light which manifests Supreme Knowledge and an immeasurable *ananda* which is the fountainhead of all the sweetness in this world.

When the *sadhaka*, free of outward disturbances, establishes profound peace, then this divine Force becomes active in his *adhara*. At first it descends on his head and awakens the inner centres of his mind; then it descends in his heart and liberates his psychic and emotional being. When it descends at the navel and other life-centres, the hidden life force moves freely and finally when it descends at what is called in yoga the *Muladhara*, the physical being gets the touch of Supreme Light. Sri Aurobindo has said that this Force seizes the whole of the *sadhaka's* nature—not completely at once but by taking one part after another. Thereafter, it rejects what needs to be rejected, transforms what needs to be transformed and

creates what needs to be created anew. It harmonises the whole being of man and adds a new rhythm to his nature. If the *sadhaka* aspires for still higher states, then this Force itself can develop in his *adhara* a still higher force and higher nature—and even the Supramental force and being.

When the consciousness of the *sadhaka* undergoes a transformation by the grace of this Force, he succeeds in knowing the highest Force. Who is this Supreme *Shakti* (Force), what are her ways of manifestation? In his book *The Mother*, Sri Aurobindo has presented a heart-captivating description in this regard, a perusal of which fills us with wonderful feelings and fires up as though the whole of our being becomes resplendent. Every *sadhaka* of the Mother attains supreme perfection taking refuge in the lap of the World-Mother.

The Divine is behind all the happenings that take place in this world; all unfolds through his *Shakti*. The Divine veils himself by his *Yoga Maya* and works in the lower nature through the ego of the *Jiva*. In yoga too, it is the Divine who is the *sadhaka* and the *sadhana*. It is His *Shakti* with light, power, knowledge, consciousness and *ananda* that manifests upon the *adhara* when the latter becomes eager to accept them. (This aspiration signifies evolution of the nature from the lower to the higher Consciousness). The *sadhana* becomes successful because of the play of these divine forces. The being of the *sadhaka* is transformed; he no longer remains a “play thing” of the lower nature, he becomes the *adhara*, the manifest form of the higher nature.

Sri Aurobindo has also indicated how the *Jiva* can attain the unity, proximity and the capability to live in the light of the supreme Force. When our outward sensuous intelligence decides to manifest in the higher force, it surrenders to the Supreme *Shakti* (Force). At first the individual starts working with this idea that he has been created for rendering service to the Supreme Force, his soul and body have been created for this purpose alone. He does not do anything driven by his egoistic intelligence, he considers himself as an instrument of the Divine. Even if he thinks that he is the doer, he does not desire any fruit from his work. His only reward is the progressive growth

towards the divine consciousness, peace, strength, and bliss. For the selfless worker, is it not enough recompense to have joy in service and joy of inner growth through his work?

Finally, the *sadhaka* realises that he has no separate self, he is created and held by the Divine *Shakti*; he is not a worker but a manifesting instrument of the Divine Mother. Afterwards he realises that he is not doing the work of the Divine Mother but it is the Divine Mother who carries out her work making him as her instrument. All his powers are hers—his mind, life and body are the instruments for the divine play of the Divine Mother. The Mother manifests herself in the world with the help of these instruments. If by the grace of the Divine Mother the *sadhaka* attains this consciousness, then no sorrow, no fear can touch him, his heart overflows with Her infinite grace and his being becomes peaceful and joyous. He then realises that he is not only an instrument of her divine play but truly a child and eternal portion of her consciousness and force. He feels that the Mother is in him and he is in her. It becomes his constant experience that his vision, thought, action, and even his very breathing or physical movements come from Her and are Hers. Further, he feels that he is a person and power formed by Her out of herself and put out from her for Her divine play. Even in this obscure world, he is not separated from Her, he is the being of her being, consciousness of her consciousness, force of Her force and *ananda* of Her *ananda*.

When the *sadhaka* lives constantly in this consciousness, when his consciousness does not lose its integrality by any means, when he is not separated from this consciousness by oblivion, when his egoistic intelligence, fragmentary intelligence and fragmentary consciousness in no way create deformation, then the Mother manifests her Supramental Force which is transcendent and which imparts Truth-Knowledge. This Force holds the rhythm of the whole creation; it is the fountainhead of all *ananda*. The Mother then carries the being of the *sadhaka* to such a realm where her divine play goes on perpetually—this is the Mother's own realm where the Supreme Being is present as *Sachchidananda*. This realm is the meeting place of the earth and the heaven. The earth takes on the garb of heaven when the *sadhaka* attains this realm.

The description that Sri Aurobindo has presented about the universal play of the World-Mother is marvellous, supremely mysterious and beyond the comprehension of common intelligence. The *sadhaka*, pursuing the path of yoga, can realise it by the grace of the Mother, of the guru. The World-Mother is an undivided Consciousness force but so many-sided are the modes of Her manifestation that it is impossible to follow Her movements even by the most vast intelligence. The Supreme Self with the help of the Force of the Divine Mother, manifests herself as *Ishwara-Shakti*, *Purusha-Prakriti* in innumerable worlds and as gods and divine powers in innumerable levels of creation. All the worlds known or unknown to us are a divine play of the Supreme *Purusha* with the Divine Mother. It is the Divine Mother who is bringing out the mystery of the eternal Being. The Mother acts with the consent of the Supreme Being—all the movements of this creation are determined by the blissful force of the Mother.

We know this world of ours as a three-fold development of mind, life, and matter but there are worlds above it and to know them we have to take recourse to the supreme *Shakti*. However, it is the Mother herself who holds this world separated from the transcendent consciousness and it is she who is guiding it towards some inscrutable goal. But if we aspire for the heights, we will have to surrender to the Mother. It is the Mother who has given us the opportunity to surrender because she herself has manifested in this world in four forms i.e. Maheswari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati. Maheswari represents the Mother's personality of calm wideness and comprehending wisdom; Mahakali represents power of splendid strength and world-shaking force; Mahalakshmi represents beauty, harmony and captivating grace; and Mahasaraswati represents power of flawless work and her spirit of perfection and order. When the *sadhaka* takes refuge in the Mother, his *adhara* manifests wisdom, strength, harmony, and perfection.

The Hindus are very much familiar with these forms but more often than not we do not try to understand their significance in our external worldly worship of them. For this reason, our modern mind generally pooh-poohs their worship and *sadhana* as idolatry. In ancient times,

the *sadhakas* of this land had in their meditation varied visions of the Divine Being and gave them a form in images; all of these images are not merely a figment of their imagination. Do we despise art as imagination or accept it as a mental form?

In deep meditation one can see the causal forms of all things. In the external life of man, this causal aspect is not of much importance, but every artist, poet or litterateur knows very well how valuable it is for the human mind. Creation takes place first at the causal plane which is also the plane for the commencement of transformation. Later on, it manifests in action and in form. This is the general experience. It is for this reason that one has to look for the idea behind the form; one has to determine the cause and purpose of action.

While dealing with the tenth chapter of the *Gita*, Sri Aurobindo has shown that in the active state, that is to say, at a time when the creation manifested, there existed four aspects of the Divine Being: knowledge, power, harmony and work. In the human race too, we find people having these four aspects. There is a category of people who are possessors of knowledge, who lead their life in the pursuit of knowledge (in India they are called *Brahmins*); there is another section of people who believe in power (in India there are the *Kshatriyas* who protect the society); there is yet another category of people who fulfil and embellish their outward life (the *Vaishyas* in India); the fourth category is represented by the workers who render service to the society and on whom all other categories of people depend for their livelihood (the *Shudras* in India—the word has now acquired a pejorative sense in actual usage). The modern caste system is hereditary and artificial; but the one just described above was based on the differences in nature and, thus, was natural.^{[106](#)}

Whatever be the social system, do these four aspects not exist in every man? Man wants knowledge and power (not for torturing others, but for self-establishment); in his life he longs to see beauty and harmony and to express them in his action—in other words, he wants to express them in his life doing his work perfectly and to manifest his great inner inspirations in outward creation. With the

combination of knowledge, power, beauty and action, the life of man attains fulfilment; his work too becomes perfect. Without knowledge, power and the sense of beauty, the work becomes mechanical—it is as good as a deception.

The manhood of man and the civilisation of man are the results of the development of these four powers. As man cannot take refuge in each of these powers completely, his life is full of unfortunate setbacks, ignorance and sorrow; his life is bereft of any harmony. It is for this reason that Sri Aurobindo has exhorted us to surrender to these four aspects of the World-Mother and to develop in our being these four natures of the supreme *Shakti*. He has pointed out that as long as these four natures are not developed and given free play in our being, the higher nature of the World-Mother and other forms of the being of the Mother will not be manifest in the heart of the *sadhaka*.^{[107](#)} This surrender is not facile for man is characterised by an externalised mind, restless heart and material body. One has to do *sadhana* for aeons on each of the forms of the Mother; but the grace of the Mother can transform an aeon into a moment.

Sri Aurobindo has categorically said that it is futile to understand the being of the Mother with our fragmentary intelligence, narrow mind, emotion-driven heart and habitual corporal nature. If we long to transform our whole nature and life, if even the very cells of our body yearn to get the touch of peace, force and blissful consciousness of the Mother, then, and only then, will the Mother unfold her power and transform the consciousness, even the *adhara*, of the *sadhaka*. On the contrary, if we do not aspire for the Mother integrally, but instead we beg for some grains of Her grace, then we will have in our consciousness momentary glimpses of Her higher nature. She will appear for a moment only to disappear at the next. If we foolishly rely on our proud egoistic intelligence, then the Mother will not prevent us from our doing so, but we will tread on the path of destruction.^{[108](#)}

The Mother is universal, but she has no attachment towards her creation. That is why, on one hand, she gives shelter and supreme security to the needy and on the other, if she feels the necessity, she

does not flinch from destroying the creation in order to fulfil the divine purpose. When we become wicked, when our heart, mind and body become polluted, then the sight of the sabre of the Mother brings shivers to our inner soul; but she destroys evil mercilessly only for the creation of good.

The Mother not only governs the whole creation from above, she herself has been helping, in a veiled manner, the evolution of this creation, wearing the garb of ignorance. The devotee sometimes asks with impatience that if the Mother is behind everything then why is she not bringing good to this creation by destroying all evil in an instant. The human mind is always in a hurry in all matters; it expects to see magic from the divine. But the action of the divine consciousness is not a spiritual hocuspocus (what Sri Aurobindo has termed as spiritual fire-works in his *Essays on the Gita*). Its purpose is to develop knowledge and to transform ignorance into knowledge. That is why, the Mother's force is partially veiled in ignorance (partly she veils and partly she unveils her knowledge and power). And more often than not, she responds to the human mind's movement, life's emotion and body's demands, and craftily brings about their transformation.¹⁰⁹ It is for this reason that she is called the "doer of miracles".

What deep compassion has impelled the Mother to descend on this grey earth for the evolution of this creation and for carrying the people and their life to her realm of light and *ananda*, liberating them from ignorance! If the Mother had not descended, the *Jiva* or the individual could never attain peace, *ananda*, perfection and liberation; he would have remained helpless, mechanical, like the animal world under the yoke of the lower nature and he could not even dream of higher realms. In sublime language, Sri Aurobindo has written about this great sacrifice of the Divine Mother:

In her deep and great love for her children she has consented to put on herself the cloak of this obscurity, condescended to bear the attacks and torturing influences of the powers of the Darkness and the Falsehood, borne to pass through the portals of the birth that is a death, taken upon herself the pangs and

sorrows and sufferings of the creation, since it seemed that thus alone could it be lifted to the Light and Joy and Truth and Eternal Life. This is the great sacrifice called sometimes the sacrifice of the Purusha, but much more deeply the holocaust of Prakriti, the sacrifice of the Divine Mother.[110](#)

THE COURSE OF EVOLUTION OF CIVILISATION

The aspiration of human evolution is for attaining completeness in totality—in knowledge, in action and in the creation of beauty. We too get the same inspiration from the evolution of civilisation. In the early stages, the primary aim of the human was to satisfy the hunger of the body. Thereafter he proceeded according to the driving force of life; and finally his progress became controlled by the ideal of mind. Man has not remained satisfied merely by the organisation of his personal contentment and comfort; he has built the society, nation, created religion and got the inspiration for cooperation and friendship. This aspiration has elevated man from an easy natural life to a higher life. The yoga of the Nature is to awaken through the human the aspiration for the higher; the lower nature is going through the process of evolution to a higher nature. When this aspiration for the higher is conscious in man then his outlook on life changes; he is no longer content by satisfying merely hunger and thirst and other propensities of nature but he wants to transform his entire life to a higher ideal. He is not satisfied savouring these natures in gross, he wants to enjoy the subtle traits in them. Due to this viewpoint he is not content transforming his own self, instead he wants to transform the society, nation and entire mankind with this noble ideal—for the welfare of the many, he devotes his self for the service of mankind ignoring personal interest and sacrificing his own peace. Then the love for self is transformed to love for humanity.

There is a story about Buddha (which Sri Aurobindo has mentioned). When Buddha arrived at the gate of *Nirvana* (heaven) he cast a look on earth. Seeing the sorrows of man his heart melted

and he did not enter heaven; for the service of mankind he remained on earth. Because such lovers of humanity have taken birth in various countries, man has attained true human virtues, has realised love, got inspiration for self-sacrifice and learnt to work for the collective many. Thus, the lover of society has served the society for its welfare and progress; the lover of the country has served the country and the nation, making it prosperous and proud; above all the lover of humanity, by spreading the mission of friendship and amity among the human race, has created a human religion, which is inspiring the human race to transform into a nobler race.

Even then, it cannot be claimed that the progress of humanity had been without break or rupture. On one hand, we have the appearance on earth of the lovers of humanity— Buddha, Chaitanya, Confucius, Lao Tzu, Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohamed and others; on the other hand, in various countries in various ages haters of humanity, cruel, crude and formidable persons have also been born, who flooded the earth with human blood. Apart from the horror of the war there is no count of how many great massacres have taken place without rhyme or reason in the twentieth century with the aid of science and technology that has become more extensive and terrible. Before World War II, pained at the return of the fascist barbarism, the famous English priest, Dean Inge¹¹¹, discussed the activities of three haters of humanity in history—they were King Nero of Rome, Genghis Khan and the mad emperor of Russia, Ivan the terrible. Truly, reading the frightening tales of the senseless massacres one feels these were demons, monsters! The horrors of the mythological *asuras* and *rakshasas* have paled in comparison. But more severe was the extermination of the Jews by the hand of the Nazis through scientific and unscientific ways. In India too, the pre-Independence holocaust i.e. the killing of Hindus and Muslims, painted an indelible blemish on Indian civilisation.

Dean Inge, seeing the condition of the world before World War II, felt that it would not be surprising if there were appearances of persons with such terrible nature. He had also discussed how their terror can be made futile. His reasoning was that if the people are

properly educated then they would be flourishing with noble qualities of kindness, love and tolerance. Hence, even if there is an appearance of a person with a terrible nature, the humanity collectively shall be able to prevent the macabre game. The ghastly game of the demonic countries, though not prevented, was crushed on the collective power of some nations.

But is this cruelty only due to individual nature? So many instances of national and religious cruelty are found in history; in India too, did they not occur? We have seen before us the devastation and destruction and we have become impersonal; we have seen racial and religious cruelty, crudeness and barbarism and its large scale of horror. Genghis Khan or Nero could not have killed as many innocent people as were killed due to aerial bombing and the atom bomb. In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in a moment millions of lives were lost. Everyone says that progress of civilisation brought in the development of knowledge and scientific research which resulted in the enhancement of devastating power in the hand of man. Many in the West were anxious before World War II about the future of civilisation; now, as a consequence of nuclear weapons, all are frightened and confused about the destiny of mankind. The history of human civilisation is the story of creation and destruction. Some time ago it was hoped that with the development of science and technology man would be able to create a new world. But now perhaps that hope is nearly lost; now everyone is afraid—after this, what would be the condition of the human race?

This book [the first edition, 1939] had been written just before World War II. At that time, it appeared that the condition of the human race was precarious. After the end of the war, the impression was that there had been no fundamental change in the condition. On one hand, man has developed novel power. He has amazing control over nature! How many varieties of strange means have been discovered to enjoy real life? Not only for enjoyment, in the sphere of knowledge too, man has gained wonderful riches! Today the countries of the world are not separated by distances any more, they are not unknown to each other—as if the world has shrunk; there is so much mixing and interaction among the nations, so much

familiarity among men and women! Today, sitting in the city we get the news of the world by wireless means, one gets to know the way of life of every other nation. In the near future with the help of television from one country direct viewing of a scene of events in a faraway country will be possible.¹¹² In those olden days, the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang spent so many years travelling to learn more about India, and today it does not take even a week to travel around the world.

Seeing these wonderful changes in the life of man, the modern scientists and intellectuals had the hope that there would be no delay in transforming earth to heaven. Science would give man so much of happiness and comfort that man's life would be that of a luxurious happy dream. The whole human race would become civilised by education, all the superstitions would disappear, so there would be no need for religion; reason and analysis would be the beacon of light before man. The established religions were not only disturbed in various nations, there were rebellious announcements against God. God was dragged down from His altar! Poor God! Who knows where He hid!

God was banished but the Demon woke up—absolutely suddenly—where did the intellect, reason, righteousness, justice, law and order vanish? In place of reason came opportunism, in place of righteousness came corruption, in place of justice came injustice, tyranny and allowance for corruption. Instead of the union of nations there came the conflict of nations. Instead of international cooperation came rabid nationalism. Instead of personal liberty came a new type of impersonal slavery, the slavery of the individual under the state. In the place of democracy, dictatorship came to be established. It is as though the old books on all the rules and regulations of sociology, politics, economics might have been burnt down and a new layout for them may now as well be made; and absurd things like “the history of new barbarism”, “the art of dictatorship”, “achievements of injustice”, “union for hatred of nations”, “Mughal policy”, etc., might as well be composed.

In the darkness of despair of the present day, in this helpless situation, it is not possible to comprehend the future of the human race. But unless the cause due to which this situation has evolved is ascertained, the quest for Light will not come to fruition. Man progresses even after mistakes; the civilisation too evolves amidst errors and illusions. Whatever man has done so far is certainly not all false; there is no doubt that man has advanced on the path of progress. The human race is progressing towards the ideal of unity as a result of expansion of industry, trade and commerce, and effectiveness of science and technology. The need of colonialism as a means to establish contacts between different countries is over, imperialism has changed its form and the inevitability of internationalism is being realised.

Whatever be the present condition of the United Nations (League of Nations in 1919 which in 1949 became UNO), it is a fact that both the League of Nations and the United Nations were established on the ideals of internationalism. The backing of the first i.e. the League of Nations, was the noble inspiration of Woodrow Wilson, the former President of the USA.¹¹³ And the second, the United Nations, had the inspiration of President Roosevelt. The World War I (1914-1918), was fought in Europe; America had not joined the war and Woodrow Wilson had not till then expressed his ideals. At that time, Sri Aurobindo was writing in the *Arya* on “Ideal of Human Unity”. In one of the articles he indicated that after the war, the structure and form of old imperialism would change¹¹⁴ and the nations will form a union to resolve international disputes. Sri Aurobindo had called it the “Parliament of Man”.

After the end of World War I, when the Treaty of Versailles was signed, even then Sri Aurobindo had indicated why this newly formed League of Nations would fail. After this, the sham document in the League of Nations was exposed—with a broken heart Woodrow Wilson returned and America itself did not join the League. Pained at the failure of his ideals Wilson did not live long after this. Within ten years, there were cracks in the foundation of the League. We have seen with our own eyes what happened to the League and

now we are witnessing the condition of the second union, the United Nation Organisation. What Sri Aurobindo wrote thirty years ago has happened exactly as stated word by word and is still taking place.¹¹⁵ His writing on these topics was published in the book *War and Self-Determination* in 1920. Much before the formation of the League of Nations, on 15 April 1916, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Arya*: *“Meanwhile that he (the Man) should struggle even by illusions towards that end, is an excellent sign; for it shows the truth behind the illusions pressing towards the hour when it may become manifest as reality.”*

Sri Aurobindo has the unshakeable faith that Truth shall certainly manifest, progressing through wonderful experiences; one day man shall accept the ideal with due reverence and free of confusion and illusions and he shall be installed with equality, friendship and liberty. For this reason, he is unperturbed in all types of political or social turmoil. He does not analyse any item or event externally, he observes its inner truth. He knows for which goals and for what attractions, over the ages man is attaining evolutionary progress and why he needs the variety of experiences. He has realised that the movements of man’s life force and the mental nature make him indulge in certain activities and civilisation goes through various phases. When man aspires for the higher he creates a new age but when he descends to the lower he falls into a whirlpool of trouble—his conduct becomes misconduct, moral becomes immoral, and order becomes disorder.

What is this drag from the lower? If the lower nature in man rears its head then his mental ideals cannot stop that deluge.¹¹⁶ When man in his inner self cannot accept the ideals with sincerity and earnestness, then those things happen; the selfish mind perverts his own mind and creates such anarchy, whose consequence he has to bear. So in 1916, Sri Aurobindo wrote: “If the heart of the man remains as it is now then there will be end of Peace, the establishment of peace will be shattered by the uncontrollable impulses. Perhaps there is no need for war according to the nature of life but there is a psychological necessity, whatever is inside us

will have to come out.” He further says, “Only when man has developed not merely a fellow-feeling with all men but a dominant sense of unity and commonality, only when he is aware of them not merely as brothers—that is a fragile bond—but as a part of himself, only when he has learned to live not in his separate personal and communal ego-sense, but in a larger universal consciousness, can the phenomenon of war, with whatever weapon, pass out of his life without possibility of return.” (*Arya*, 15 April 1916)

Sri Aurobindo has shown by analysing the history of the civilisation of mankind that two outlooks of man have caused this transformation. Firstly, man has built the civilisation on the inspiration of this natural instinct. The ego-sense in man has motivated him to work, in which his principal aim became establishing the self. What was the purpose of this self-establishment? It was for self-development and self-enjoyment. The primitive man led his life driven by this instinct. At first he fulfilled hunger then he tried as far as possible, to gain some body-comfort. He destroyed whosoever became an obstacle on this path and he himself got destroyed if he was weaker. Secondly, due to the sexual urges, the number of his kin increased. At the initial stages perhaps he had no family, but later he had the family bond; he has become the master and provider of the family. After creating the family, it developed in him the acumen of collectivity; he did not remain satisfied establishing the individual base, he understood the necessity of forming collectiveness. Thus, he formed the family, clan, society and gradually, the society evolved to race and nation. Man understood that life cannot go on only with fights, there is need for cooperation too. Without the collective cooperation, the family, society or the nation cannot be organised. The collectiveness is the base for individuality; with this inspiration, man learned to forgo the selfishness for greater well-being and he was not hesitant even to self-sacrifice. The most energetic society or nation is one with the most earnest cooperation.

In the *Arya*, Sri Aurobindo wrote articles on “Psychology of Social Development”. In these articles, he has explained specifically the necessity of this vital nature. When the vitality of the nation withers and wanes, the nation becomes weak and gradually leads to the

path of ruin. The basis of the European civilisation is this life force or the vital. After the prominence of the Teutonic ideal in Western Europe, consumerism has become the European ideal. The European civilisation is based on this practical intelligence. At the root of Europe's creativity and culture is this intellect. The people of Europe, as Sri Aurobindo has said are "vitalistic in the very marrow of their thought and being". In the modern age, because of this attitude, the Christian virtues of kindness, love, charity and similar traditions, even the ancient idealism of the Latin and Greek civilisation, are getting lost due to the pressure of present day political and economic values. The main aim of all the knowledge, science, moral, sense of beauty, religion of the occident is to build a life, make it beautiful and to remove the negativity and fatigue from life. That there could be other aims of life, the occidental mind does not want to admit.

In ancient times, the outlook was quite different. People were not indifferent to outward life, but they had not thought the outward life as the only aim. They believed that life is the field for realisation of important ideals. The ideal of ancient Greece and Rome was development of the intellect, to build an ethical and organised life and to realise beauty. Ancient Asia was more liberal in its outlook. Asia had not ignored the affairs of indispensable necessities of life but the ideal was religion. The pride of Greece and Rome was art, poetry and philosophy; in political affairs too they have shown outstanding dexterity. Asia had all that too; her social organisations were more advanced but the real pride of Asia was in her founders of religions, the saints, men of spiritual knowledge, the holy men, the *sanyasins* and the seekers.

The modern world's ideal has become giving prominence to the materialistic inspiration of man. That is why he has shown extraordinary achievement in the economic and political affairs, also in the cultivation of science. The aim of science is not merely pursuit for knowledge but to transform practical life. Man wants to have total control over material nature and he wants to employ nature for his own service. Sri Aurobindo has shown that the ancient Greek mind was philosophical, adorer of beauty and political idealist. The

tendency of the modern mind is for the practical side of science and economy. The ancient ideals were of magnificence and completeness to build human life beautifully. The modern ideal is not the adoration of beauty, it is practical agility and fulfilment of the exterior life, which becomes useful in life and not wasted in the imaginative dream.

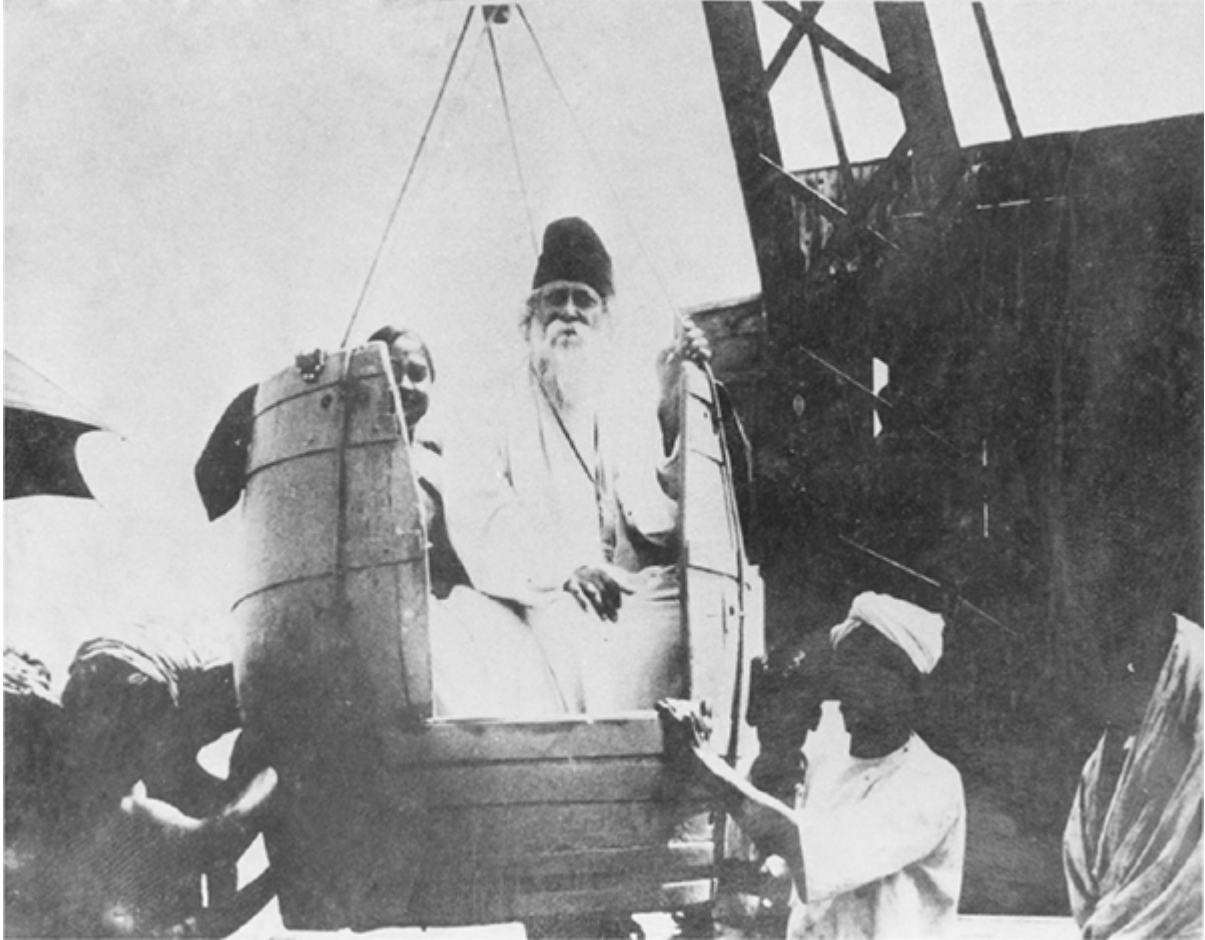
We can see how the exterior world is changing as a result of following this ideal. Man has understood that it is not enough to avail of only the personal comfort and easy life; the collective life ought to be specifically moulded. The same egoistic mind that caused the establishment of the individual has today spread into collectivity. Even the worldwide ideal for the transformation of collectivity is flourishing. It has not resulted in reality because of the terrible nationalistic ego. For this nationalistic ego the individual, family and the society had to be sacrificed at the altar of the state.¹¹⁷

Long ago, Sri Aurobindo had indicated that due to the ideal of the state's prominence the emergence of the rule of collectivity such as socialism and communism will take place. At the time of World War I, he wrote that due to the transformation of German thinking, the establishment of socialism is inevitable in that country. Truly, due to the rise of Hitler the ideal of full state control became a reality in Germany. During the rule of Nazi Germany, the control of life of every individual from cradle to grave was taken by the state. Individual freedom was a far cry, not even financial independence existed. The entire nation was converted into a giant machine. The state socialism in Russia was initially a bit liberal but after World War II, as a result of the inevitable change, the state has converted the nation into a vast machine, totally destroying personal liberty. Germany had the talent of casting life to perfection, a flawless regimentation, and Hitler converted the whole nation to this. At present, Russia is following the path of Germany. That is why, after the death of Hitler, Stalin rose like a meteor. Germany had become the symbol of nationalistic ego; today the ego of Russia has taken the likeness of an all-devouring monster. Hitler cast the German people to an ideal with scientific thoroughness. Stalin also did the

same. Germany showed in the two World Wars the marvellous skill of scientific applications! But at the end of World War II the extreme skills could not save it from destruction. Today, Soviet Russia has taken the position of Germany. [This was the geo-political situation when the author revised the book in 1949.] Then, Germany was alone, but the idealism of Russia is spread out and deluding humanity. That is why, we see among the followers of the Russian doctrine, many wise and learned persons from various countries. Perhaps for this reason, to save humanity from the attraction and enslavement of materialism, we shall need wisdom and spiritual knowledge.

THE GREAT MAN OF THE AGE

The *sadhana* (the seeking, the yoga) of Sri Aurobindo is aimed at the descent of the Supramental resulting in the divine transformation of man and creation of a divine race. This is not the endeavour of Vishwamitra's new creation¹¹⁸; this is like the invoking and bringing down of the holy River Ganga from the heaven above by Bhagirath.¹¹⁹ Bhagirath brought down River Ganga to this earth; Sri Aurobindo wants the Divine Power to *play* on earth. In the profound, it is the *sadhana* of the entire human race; that is why, calling Sri Aurobindo the representative of the entire humanity is not an exaggeration.



The poet, Rabindranath Tagore, disembarking at Pondicherry in May 1928 with the help of a make-shift contrivance in the absence of a proper port facility.

In India and the West, all the persons who have felt the essence of Sri Aurobindo have realised the novelty of the *sadhana* of Sri Aurobindo. Amongst them one may specially cite Rabindranath Tagore. It appears he not only realised the uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo's character, he also found the light in his inner world, way back in the past when the yogi Sri Aurobindo had not even emerged. Thus, in the *Swadeshi* days in reverence to Sri Aurobindo he wrote a well-known poem, "Salutation":

*...See thyself rings in my ear
The song of the unbounded soul,
The supreme Pilgrim's, the eternal life
The joy of Hope, the sombre fearless message
The deathless unbounded free...*

In the later years, on 29 May 1928, Tagore visited Pondicherry and met Sri Aurobindo. He was deeply satisfied. He wrote:

At the very first sight I could realise that he had been seeking for the soul and had gained it, and through this long process of realisation has accumulated within him a silent power of inspiration. His face was radiant with an inner light and his serene presence made it evident to me that his soul was not crippled and cramped to the measure of some tyrannical doctrine, which takes delight in inflicting wounds upon life. He, I am sure, never had his lessons from the Christian monks of the ascetic Europe, revelling in the pride of that self-immolation which is a twin sister of self-aggrandisement joined back to back facing opposite directions. I felt that the utterance of the ancient Hindu *Rishi* spoke from him of that equanimity which gives the human soul its freedom of entrance into the All. And I said to Him: “You have the Word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through your voice to the world: ‘Hearken to me!’” (*Shrinvantu vishve amritasya putrah—Shvetashvatar Upanishad*).^{[120](#)}

In her earlier forest home, Shakuntala^{[121](#)} had her awakening of life in the restlessness of her youth. In the later hermitage she attained the fulfilment of her life. Years ago I saw Aurobindo in the atmosphere of his earlier heroic youth and I sang to him, “Aurobindo, accept the salutation from Rabindranath.” Today I saw him in a deeper atmosphere of a reticent richness of wisdom and again sang to him in silence, “Aurobindo, accept the salutation from Rabindranath.”^{[122](#)}

The vision of Tagore was unerring and had no confusion. Today India and the world are waiting to listen to the message of Sri Aurobindo. Some strange attraction has induced hundreds of men and women, boys and girls from far and near to take shelter in Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, leaving the attachment of their daily lives in search of a divine life. Sri Aurobindo has not appealed to any of them to come, he has after all not formed any union!

Even then, we wonder if Sri Aurobindo's own countrymen are not eager for his ideals. His message is reaching the West in no slower pace. But this is irrelevant because the main aim is the evolution of the human race. For on one hand it calls for the aspiration of man, on the other it is answer of the divine power. The proof of the awakening of man's ardency for the divine is perceptible in the people who experienced a strange pull towards the ashram in Pondicherry. It would merely be presumptuous to say something about the divine power; the witness of that is the soul of every man.

Whether the integral transformation of the entire human race would be possible or not has been discussed by Sri Aurobindo in detail at the end of his book *The Life Divine*. To seek God single-mindedly is not possible, but help should be taken of an appropriate guru or ashram. That is why from the ancient times, this practice has been followed in all civilised countries. We are familiar with the Three Jewels of Buddha:

Buddham Sharanam Gachhami

Dharmam Sharanam Gacchami

Sangham Sharanam Gacchami.

(I take refuge in the Buddha

I take refuge in the *Dharma*

I take refuge in the *Sangha*).

But, one of the results of this principle is *Sangha* (or the community). Is the *Sangha* not separated from the worldly life? As a result, the *Sangha* becomes an isolated holy place and the world proceeds with its own movement, that is, in ignorance or with half-knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo, even though established in Yoga, has not detached himself from worldly life. But the meaning of "detached" does not imply joining the mundane life. It means to exist with yogic connection along with the evolution of the world. Is the world not constantly undergoing yogic evolution? If not, how else does the transformation of the human civilisation take place? If there was no evolution, the creation would have been stagnant. Observing this evolution, it is understood that as the nature, on the base of life,

created the human-being, likewise, on the base of mankind, creating a superior being transcending man is the supreme aspiration of Sri Aurobindo.

In this evolution, a moment comes when part of creation is in need of the divine touch. Sri Aurobindo is waiting for this moment and for this divine transformation single-mindedly, and is engaged in *sadhana* for over forty years.¹²³ Due to his *sadhana* there is an earnest aspiration for the divine among men and women. This is the reason why men and women of various countries are getting fascinated by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. There is no problem here of nationality, religion or colour—because this is above human characteristics, behaviour or speciality. This is the call of the great message of *Gita in* chapter 18, shloka 66:

“*Leaving everything take refuge in me.*”
(सर्वधर्मान्परित्यज्यममेकशरणव्रज)

But the evolution is not a single cast; its movement is not curved. This is a “*difficult path of rise and fall*”.¹²⁴ Before life was created, it was the exclusive reign of the dumb inert matter for ages! After that, for ages, the reign of the living creatures continued. At the end of this reign was the appearance of man. Again, since many millions of years the evolution of man is continuing. The history of our civilisation is on the time scale of only a few thousand years. Therefore, the possibility that the divine transformation of man will take place in a flip of the coin is mere imagination.

Observing the evolution of mankind, the things Sri Aurobindo wrote during World War I have come to pass in the last thirty years. But it does not appear that the man as an individual or at the collective level has learnt the appropriate lesson even after adverse conditions. Even now, man is not free from the influence of the ego and has not been able to come out of the limitations of half-light and half-darkness. That is why man has lost the power of wisdom, lost the knowledge for *Shreyah* (श्रेयः) (the Supreme Good) and considering only the knowledge through the senses as the Supreme Knowledge (hence this materialism). The progress of technology has increased the power of the sense-based knowledge and sensual

enjoyment; even when the world has shrunk, the Soul has gone into hiding as if from the cave of the heart to a deeper cave. This is what the ultra-modern civilisation of the technological age has done. When the soul is exiled, the sense-based knowledge becomes the guide to the intellect, so in course of time morality has been sacrificed and abandoned. After all, ethics and morality are the creation of the human mind, and so it has been confirmed from the analysis by the modern mind: *practicality and opportunism do not wait for ethical rules*. Perhaps nature is trying to show us how far man can reach—what the limit of the reign of the ego is! That is why today his condition is such that either he is insolvent amidst the wealth science has created or he is a cog in the wheel of science or a nonentity in the slave-group of the machine-god.

The inevitable consequence of this condition is the clash between the conflicting groups. We have seen two types of hostile collision in the two world wars. Whether there will be one more is the gravest anxiety. Having discovered the critical power of matter, apart from the benevolent power, there is a colossal destructive power—the *Rudra*; now the problem is whether with this *Rudra* power a new world would be created by destroying the old world or would man be worthy to view the “*positive face of the Rudra*”, for which our forefathers, the wise sages of the ancient world, meditated on *Rudra*.

The human mind is usually oriented towards the exterior and its aim is usefulness, easiness, etc. Due to the ultra-sophistication of this mind, a portion of the human race has become deeply dependent upon materialism. But that has slighted humanity, slackened the foundation of ethics and morality. As a result, warfare has become terrible and even after the wars the creative power is not attaining a peaceful movement. Everywhere there is uncertainty and restlessness; as if the man's heart is trembling with an unknown fear. On one side, a materialistic power wants to inspire man with one single ideal, cast the man into one single pattern; on the other, another power wants to protect freedom, the different types and trends among individuals, collectivity, society and an ideal unity established on these varieties of characteristics. Due to this ideal, after the two world wars, two Unions of Nations were established.

But the failure of the first union, namely the League of Nations was due to the selfish motives of the states.

Of course, at the end of Imperialism, these selfish motives have largely been removed and the ideal of One World has been manifested. However, to realise this we need the quest for human unity, which in fact is the quest for the Divine: for the Brahmic power is *Jeevatma*.

It has been discussed earlier that the fructification of the infallible indications Sri Aurobindo gave during World War I on evolution is seen by the human race today, although only a few at that time had the power to realise this deep theory. It is doubtful if there were a handful of people to follow Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future. For example, what Sri Aurobindo wrote in the article on "The Ideal of Human Unity" in 1917 on the outcome of the British Empire saw its factual form in 1931 in the Statute of Westminster and a stranger outcome we witnessed in 1949 was the transformation of the Empire to Commonwealth nations which did not have the qualifier "British" (unlike the earlier British Commonwealth).

A question may arise, that although it is rare to find someone like Sri Aurobindo, with a sharp-minded intellect, what is the relation between his Integral Yoga and the evolution of the world's political scene? The evolution of the world's politics is merely the exterior form of the evolution for which Sri Aurobindo is waiting. Actually, it is undeniable that the human consciousness is undergoing a vast evolution. One World is the symbol of this ideal. Sri Aurobindo had spoken of this "One World" at the time of World War I. But an ideal cannot be realised in a single day. In the arena of mankind, the inevitability of the ideal is manifested amidst conflicts. Maybe that is why as the hour of the great human unity is imminent, so also is the appearance of the approaching critical conflicts.

This conflict is similar to the fight of the *Devas* and the *Asuras* in Hindu scriptures. It is the question of this age, whether it would be the victory of light and knowledge or there would be vast spread of darkness, ignorance, gross and fragmented knowledge. At this juncture, the yoga power of Sri Aurobindo becomes effective. Some people did get an indication that it was effective during World War II.

The yogi does not employ his power by beating of the drums; this power is adept in creating miraculous happenings. Our inner self can perceive a glimpse of this.

For the great human unity, for the divine transformation of man, the critical victory of light is required. This light can give us the Divine knowledge. We know the message of the *Veda*, “सर्वम्खल्विदं ब्रह्म” (Everything indeed is Brahman); but to know, even to believe is one thing and to realise is quite another. Consider Arjuna’s vision of Vasudeva in the battlefield of Kurukshetra; until we are able to view like Arjuna, the Infinite Vasudeva, we shall not have the integral knowledge— outwardly we may howsoever chant the *Gita* with devotion.

Similar is the ideal of One World. Until we are able to realise the ideal of One World in every corpuscle of our blood, it will remain a matter of belief, it would not be effective. For this reason, Sri Aurobindo stated in 1919 before the establishment of the League of Nations, why it would fail; it was because the nature of man had not become competent to implement such a noble ideal. If there is no bond between the ideal and the heart, gradually it turns to deception. That is why, the relationships between the nations have so much deception.

What is the true form of the One World? It is like the pronouncement of *Veda*, (“एकंसवहुधाबदन्ति”), that One Soul is manifested as many. He is not merely an impersonal being; He is also the Supreme Person, also the Supreme Nature because He is *Sachchidananda*. There, the One World can be made to bloom only by one powerful man i.e. he who has reached that Supreme Being. Sri Aurobindo’s quest for this integral whole is not for any personal purpose because on one hand he is an individual, on the other he is impersonal; and because he is impersonal, he is selfless and sincerely self-sacrificing; this yoga of Sri Aurobindo is for the whole world. He, being the representative of the human race, is deeply in the Yoga of the Supreme Nature.

Therefore, is it not inappropriate to assume, unless the *Brahman-Power* radically transforms the human nature, that the endeavour to establish the One World is merely, as Sri Aurobindo would have

called it, a “half-way house”? But Sri Aurobindo has not termed this human endeavour as futile, because man has to seek knowledge through ignorance and the truth through falsehood. But one day we must come out of this labyrinth of truth-falsehood, otherwise how else would the clue to the Truth-world be found?

After this a personal question comes up—all this is fine, but what would be achieved at the personal level of the man? For that too, the eternal answer is Self-Realisation; the realisation that each person is a wavelet of infinity. Just as the sea and the sea-waves are indivisible or the fire and the spark are inseparable so also the Supreme Soul and the human soul are one and the same. In the Divine play is the emergence of the *Jeevatma* (human soul) and the movement of the soul nurturing through the lower nature, rising to the higher, and reaching the *Brahman* Nature. By reaching the *Brahman* Nature the human nature is transformed into Divine Nature, as a result of which the knowledge of the indestructible Total is acquired. At that time, not only does the knowledge becomes imperishable but the action too becomes Complete, the *ananda* too is unseparated. This is the world of *Sachchidananda* in the Supreme Nature.

The quest for reaching the higher is an Undivided Yoga, Integral Yoga, Divine Yoga or Supreme Yoga. Whatever definition we may use, the supreme guide to this yoga is the supremely wise, supreme yogi Sri Aurobindo, and the collaborator in this yoga is the Mother—living in the heart of everyone. To address them as Yoga Guru is not exaggeration or conservatism; because without a guru no knowledge can be acquired—let alone Supreme Knowledge.

There is no other aim of this yoga other than realisation of *Brahman*, but in the meaning of *Brahman* is not only sublime *Brahman*, this *Brahman* is “सर्वमखल्विदं ब्रह्म” (Everything indeed is *Brahman*—the Supreme). Being established in *Brahman*, in the *Brahman*-world, remaining in the Will of Brahman active or inactive—that is human life; but then it is no longer the human life, that is Divine Life. The Ideal of this Divine Life is from India. The German philosopher Nietzsche got the idea of “superman”, but that was a

demoniac form of man's bloated ego. The ideal of India's Divine Life is reaching the "*Brahmanful*" Life—the vision of the Supreme Being.

Is it not a wonder that India, the "pilgrimage destination of Asia"¹²⁵, gave humanity the supreme Ideal at some instant in the eternity? That is why, the life and yoga of Sri Aurobindo is based on India. Indian blood flows in the veins of the Mother, though born a French citizen. Maybe, therefore, she too for some inexplicable reason has become a follower of India's yoga. Unless India attains her own Self, the transformation of the world would not take place. That is why Sri Aurobindo in his early youth took the vow for the freedom of India. In his youth, he regarded Mother India as a living entity. Taking Rishi Bankim's *mantra*, he gave the victory call *Bande Mataram*. In the service of the Mother he invoked *Rudra*; for some inexplicable mystery *Rudra* showed him *the Right Face*. In the prison, Sri Aurobindo had the vision of Lord Vasudeva, who is the Supreme Personality of India. Mother India was established, the yoga-*shakti* of the Mother became active. Sri Aurobindo pursued the path of Integral Yoga. The aim of the divine power of Mother India is to establish the supreme spirit in all Indians (whether in one life or many lives), develop the supreme soul, and to transform as a base of the divine power. Sri Aurobindo has achieved complete realisation in this *sadhana*. Hence, so many inspired men and women from all over the world have voluntarily devoted themselves to the *sadhana* of Integral Yoga in Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry.

India not only attained political independence on 15 August 1947, Mother India has summoned her children to attain realisation in the divine *sadhana*. At one point, Sri Aurobindo was the leader of India's political *sadhana*, today he is the leader of Independent India's victorious expedition.

Salutations to Him!

EPILOGUE

THE PASSING OF SRI AUROBINDO

[The second revision of *Jeebon O Jog* was dated 1949. However, due to inordinate delay, the book was printed in December 1952 and the author could include the Epilogue.]

The fifth of December 1950 was a gloomy day. Early in the morning, the whole of India heard in silence as All India Radio announced that on the previous night, Sri Aurobindo had withdrawn from his mortal body. People were stunned as they did not think the pioneer of Integral Yoga, the invoker of the Supramental, would so suddenly leave his body. They had hoped that in course of time, they would witness the transformation of the physical form of Sri Aurobindo into a body of light. The fact that their hope was not utterly unfounded was astonishingly proved—but the illuminated form of the Supramental manifested in his divine body after his passing. However, initially the people in general could not understand this supernatural phenomenon; over the radio broadcast they learnt that a great man had passed away and irrespective of race, religion or caste, they felt the pang of sadness on his departure. The community expressed its bereavement in condolences; all the respect due to a great man was shown to him. Still the suddenness of the event did not go away from the minds of the people.

It was not only the common people, but also most of the ashramites who were stunned at the heartbreaking news in the early hours of 5 December, because only a handful of the ashramites had any knowledge of Sri Aurobindo's ailments. Earlier on 24 November, the *Darshan* Day, it was known a little by indication that Sri Aurobindo's health was not all right. The annual day programme of

the Ashram School on the 1 and 2 December and other associated events were completed smoothly and on 5 December, early in the morning, the unthinkable happened! In the morning all the ashramites, men, women and children, all without exception had the *darshan* (view) of the divine body lying in repose. All were overwhelmed in grief; yet viewing the serene body, they felt composed. Gradually, the arrangements for *samadhi* began. At this time, the Mother announced that the body of Sri Aurobindo has lighted up with Supramental light; as long as the radiance was present no one should touch the body.

This news spread through the newspapers all over India, and then started a magnificent sight. Hundreds of men and women, his devotees or visitors rushed to view the wonderful event, that is, to view directly the Divine form. The Mother, on the other hand, opened the main gate of the ashram for the public. As a result, thousands entered Sri Aurobindo's chamber and had *darshan* of the golden figure lying in eternal state. In that body, there was no shadow of death as though the conqueror of death having acquired command over Death was absorbed in yoga.

From 5 to 9 December, Pondicherry remained in turmoil. Everyone, whether rich or poor, refined or crude, learned or illiterate, healthy or handicapped, had the *darshan* of the Brahman idol. Sri Aurobindo is for all. So without exception, all classes of people could have his *darshan* in the Eternal repose. It was not possible for the ashramites to control this crowd. They were observing their duties like robots. The traffic on all the roads around the ashram and also distant roads was controlled by the army and police.

In the afternoon of 9 December there was a faint shadow over the radiant body. The Mother then asked for the arrangement for *samadhi*.

Before this, the doctors from the French government^{[126](#)} had examined the body; according to their rules, nobody could be kept more than forty-eight hours without funeral. Even after forty-eight hours the doctors found there was no sign of death-decomposition in the body. On 9 December, that sign was sighted. On the instruction

of the Mother, before the evening of 9 December, the ashramites laid the divine body in the courtyard of the ashram for *Maha Samadhi*. Earlier, that spot used to be bustling in the morning and evening with the visitors and ashramites—from now on this has become an absolute yoga site.

In the normal course, the passing of Sri Aurobindo is nothing unusual. He had completed seventy-eight years of age. People had convincingly thought that he would not suddenly leave the body. After a few months, he would have completed eighty years of age and for that occasion there were plans for celebration all over India. On the other hand, Sri Aurobindo was, as if busy, in completing his tasks at hand.¹²⁷ His companions could not understand the mystery of this extreme haste. He started putting special effort into completing the epic, *Savitri*. Even then, one of the cantos was not composed. Perhaps willingly he did not complete this canto because in that the riddle of death was planned to be revealed.

There is a belief in our country that the yogi's death is self-willed. Although Sri Aurobindo did not say this directly, he himself has written that due to yogic power, his life-span had extended beyond the destined. On this topic, in his letter to one of his devotees (dated 8 December 1949, a year before his passing), published from Bombay in *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 6th edition, he writes that before he became famous, and having no knowledge of who he was, an astrologer from Calcutta had said that against him there will be three court cases and in all three of them he would be proved innocent. And at the age of sixty-three, he would have died but due to yogic power his life would be extended to a ripe old age. Sri Aurobindo also said that in his body, some ailments had permanently settled but through yogic power he had expelled them. The prediction of the astrologer has come true.

This shows that during his critical ailment, for some reason, Sri Aurobindo, far from applying his yogic power, did not even want to take medicines. On this, his long-time companion and personal aid, Dr. Nirodbaran, has given a clear statement, which has been published in the two books cited earlier. Now naturally a question

arises—why did he not apply his yogic power to cure his ailments? Who has the answers? Dr. Nirodbaran had asked Sri Aurobindo, why he would not apply his yogic power. Sri Aurobindo had said, “You would not understand this matter.” So it is evident that his passing was enveloped in riddles and it is believed that human intelligence would not be able to solve this riddle. Even then an answer has been obtained from the senior disciple of Sri Aurobindo, the venerable Nolini Kanto Gupta, and that appears especially appropriate. He says,

In yogic power the spiritual transformation takes place even in the body. At first, the subtle body becomes illumined; the radiant particles of the divine consciousness of the psychic being blooms. After this, it is the turn for the transformation of the exterior cells of the body. The cells of the body are filled up by the radiant substance of the supreme spiritual consciousness. In this transformation the divine soul converts to individual body. When all chapters of Transformation are completed, then only the individual body-soul gets immortality.

For the divination of the body and reaching the immortality there could be need for Death or similar processes. The divinised being then is not helplessly in the grip of death, he employs it (Death) for special purposes.

For the divine transformation of man two actions are required: exclusion (or rejection, sacrifice) and inclusion. The sacrifice of those substances which are of lower nature, which cannot be accepted in the higher state of being; the inclusion of those of the lower nature which can be acceptable and used by the higher state of being. These two streams of Being are active in all strata. In certain states of transformation in the rejection system there could be need for such an exchange phenomenon, which from outside might seem as Death; but after this, or immediately, occurs inevitably new creation or inclusion process.

At the end Sri Nolini Kanto comments: “Perhaps, the supreme and dangerous gesture only the Master can make—as pioneer and

pathfinder—and he has made it.”^{[128](#)}

The common man is unable to say anything on this as he has no knowledge of this. He can try to assimilate the message of the wise and according to Indian tradition say that the yogi is deathless. After the passing of Sri Aurobindo, the Mother cautioned the bereaved ones and said, “To grieve for Sri Aurobindo means to insult him; He is here with us living and awake.”

The Mother gave some messages on the passing of Sri Aurobindo, between 7 December and 28 December. The message on 8 December was: “For the outcome of Sri Aurobindo’s body, largely responsible is the lack of ability of earth and the man to accept. But one thing is without doubt— whatever has happened would not touch the truth of his teaching; whatever he has said is all truth and shall remain truth. Time and the course of the events would fully prove this.”

This message is very important. The *sadhana* of Sri Aurobindo has reached such a state in the world that matter also has attained full consciousness—that has been seen on His body. Whose is this Consciousness? Certainly, the Self of Brahman, on one side as Sri Aurobindo through his Yogic power, like Bhagirath, brought down the Supramental, but could the world and human race accept that? This was a critical juncture in the history of the world. This was the golden opportunity for the evolution in the higher world and the ascent of man. But enveloped in the egoistic intelligence and crippled in the customary habits, man could not prepare himself for the Brahman evolution.

As the life-long *sadhana* of Sri Aurobindo was for the Supramental, similarly through his tireless writings he tried to create the field, that is, preparation of the mind of Man. In so many ways he had attracted the mind of man towards the higher and he has also given so many meaningful hints. He gave the critical appeal to the human race to prevent war (included in the Post Script of *Ideal of Human Unity*). This Post Script was written by him (April 1950) a few months before his passing.

But it is seen that human nature does not easily want to change radically; due to ignorance, it wants to cling to whatever it is used to doing. For the Supramental, radical change in human nature is needed but man currently does not want to change with reasoning and intelligence. He perverts himself with blind emotion or tardy inertia. Even with experience his wisdom eye does not open. Due to the past devastating experience man may not now be war-mongering, but on the other hand due to instinct and selfish motives he is not prepared to give up the path of conflict.

There is no change in man as an individual or as a member of society. Really, in this vast world after so much turmoil of religion, how many are prepared for the renunciation of their religion and take refuge in God? Some perhaps, praise God only in words, perhaps some in trouble want to take His shelter, again some according to our own particular religion and culture remain confined to one of His special forms and are always prepared to clash with the followers of other religions on trivial causes. In spite of our education and experience this mentality is still unabated. Its cause is that we are followers of ignorance. Sri Aurobindo in his numerous writings in simple language indicates how to scale this ignorance and reach the Knowledge. But the nature of the Man is in head—without special grace of the Mother can this nature be suddenly changed? But change is inevitable in course of time.

The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo is for God, but also takes the world with him, because in this world God is also existent. He has never wanted the realisation of his *sadhana* for himself, but the Will of God in this world has to succeed—that is the work destined. In his *sadhana* of so many years, Sri Aurobindo had reached a level where the consciousness has to manifest in a new way, the evolution of the world shall not go on with the past modalities. He found that achieving success will not be following the easy way and for this it may even be necessary to leave the body. This is apparently the Death of the *Mahayogi* i.e. the supreme Man offers his body for the noble cause. That is why on the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo, the following words of the Mother are inscribed:

9 December 1950

“To Thee who hast been the material envelope of our Master, to Thee our infinite gratitude. Before Thee who hast done so much for us, who hast worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured so much, before Thee who hast willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before Thee we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to Thee.”

~The Mother

And great meaning is there in the Message of the Mother given on 26 December 1950:

“The Lord has completely sacrificed his soul . . . He did not leave the body by compulsion—left his body of his own volition for the causes which are so great that the mind of man cannot grasp them...”

“If there is no knowledge to understand that then only duty would be to keep respectfully silent.”

After the passing of Sri Aurobindo, the thought has come to the mind of persons outside, what will be the future of the ashram? It is true that the ashram's focus is Sri Aurobindo, but long before, Sri Aurobindo had given the Mother complete responsibility of the ashram. Naturally, the direct contact of the ashramites is always with the Mother. Secondly, there is no difference between the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and that of the Mother. Therefore the *sadhakas* and the *sadhikas* are connected with the Mother in their inner *sadhana*. That was also the directive of Sri Aurobindo.

This is the relation of the guru and the disciples. Apart from this, considering the aim of the ashram, it can be answered that in the eyes of the people though Sri Aurobindo has passed away, none would fall from their ideals because his ideal is eternal! On this the Mother has clearly said,

“Sri Aurobindo is present in our midst, and with all the power of his creative genius he presides over the formation of the University Centre which for years he considered as one of the best means of preparing the future humanity to receive the supramental light that will transform the elite of today into a new race manifesting upon

earth the new light and force and life.” (*Inaugural message for the Sri Aurobindo Memorial Convention, 24 April 1951.*)

Therefore, the *sadhana* for Integral Yoga is unhindered and this yoga is controlled by the Mother. She, like before, with great love is inspiring the *sadhakas* and the *sadhikas* for this noble work. With her presence, none can feel the absence of Sri Aurobindo. A person from outside, who had visited the ashram earlier and now visits again, would find at the centre of the Divine Mother’s zone of yoga is situated the *samadhi* of Sri Aurobindo, where the great yogi is in *Maha Samadhi* and at the forefront of the ashram life is the Mother. As before there are no slip-ups or mistakes. The sacred fire of yoga is eternal and inextinguishable. Its mystery is that it does not belong to an ordinary human affair; the purpose of this great yoga is beyond ordinary humanity.

As per the plan of the Mother and according to the ideals of Sri Aurobindo the time has come to call the people of the world. For this purpose, it has been resolved to establish an International University around the ashram. In the session in Pondicherry on 24 April 1951 a resolution was accepted for this. Inaugurating the session in the speech of the Mother, she expressed in detail this purpose. It was this:

Sri Aurobindo is here present among us, He is conducting the enterprise of building this International Centre of Education with his genius of creating . . . For a long time He had been thinking that in this way the future of the human race can be built in the best possible way so that it becomes possible for him [man] to accept the Supramental Light . . . This Light will turn the best individuals of the present to a new race, through whom will manifest on earth new Light, new Power and new Life.

Today’s Session has been assembled to build in practice a very favourite ideal of Sri Aurobindo. In His name, I inaugurate this session.

This Session was chaired by Dr. Shyama Prosad Mukherjee.



Samadhi

NOTES

[1](#)When the author wrote this book in 1939, *Life Divine* in its complete form was not published.—Trans.

[2](#)Dilip Kumar Roy had the audience of Sri Aurobindo before he settled down permanently in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. Dilip Kumar Roy was the son of the great author, patriot and composer D.L. Roy. Dilip was a Tripos in Mathematics from University of Cambridge where Subhas Chandra Bose (Netaji) was his friend. He was received by Sri Aurobindo and had personal audience with the Master.—Trans.

[3](#)A Maharashtrian Yogi. Sri Aurobindo came in contact with him in Baroda. Sri Aurobindo never had formal initiation from Lele Maharaj, he only took some basic lessons on yoga from Lele Maharaj.

[4](#)When the author penned this work, Sri Aurobindo had been living in Pondicherry for 30 years.—Trans.

[5](#)Available as *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 15.—Trans.

[6](#)World War II broke out while the author was writing this book.—Trans.

[7](#)This letter had been collected by the eminent journalist Shri Amal Home and was published in the illustrated English weekly, *The Orient*.

[8](#)Sri Aurobindo was then a student at Cambridge University.

[9](#)According to Hindu mythology, Bhagirath is the one who invoked the holy River Ganga to come down from Heaven and flow into the lives of the human on earth.—Trans.

[10](#)*My Reminiscences*, Rabindranath Tagore, "Patriotism", Macmillan & Co. Ltd. London 1971, pp. 147–149.—Trans.

[11](#) *Collected Poems, Complete Works*, Centenary Edition, 1972, Vol. 5, p. 123.

[12](#) A translated line of a famous Bengali poetry *Meghnad Vadh Kavya* by Michael Madhusudan Dutta. —Trans.

[13](#) An Englishman, he was a leader of the Indian National Congress and he had a very close connection with Rajnarayan Bose, the maternal grandfather of Sri Aurobindo; later on, he became the President of the Bengal Legislative Council. —Trans.

[14](#) He breathed his last on 6 February 1939. The State of Baroda was merged with the Indian Union on 1 May 1949.

[15](#) This is the translator's attempt to render this poem in English. Originally written in Bengali by Suresh Chandra Chakraborty in *Sri Aurobindo Jeevan Gatha*, 1951.

[16](#) A large and beautiful house where Sri Aurobindo lived is today a Centre for Studies on Sri Aurobindo, which has also a gallery of photographs of that era, a mediation hall and a library. This house has a sprawling compound where the spotless *samadhi* shrine is also maintained.—Trans.

[17](#) Vice Chancellor Mr. Reddy commented, “Mr. Clarke was a perfect materialist. I cannot understand how that practical but wonderful man guessed the glimpses of Truth which till then had not manifested in Sri Aurobindo.”

[18](#) He was in Baroda for a certain period of time helping Sri Aurobindo learn Bengali.

[19](#) Sri Aurobindo was from his early age was much above the one sided view of the world. He was not only familiar with the Indian yoga system but also familiar with the Islamic spiritual system, as we discover in his book *The Riddle of this World*. Of course, there is no doubt about his deep knowledge on Christian spirituality.

[20](#) A famous line from the Bengali poem *Meghnad Vadh Kavya* by Michael Madhusudan Dutta.—Trans.

[21](#) *Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram*, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1948.

[22](#)In 1921, Subhash Chandra Bose passed with distinction the I. C. S examination but he did not accept the job after announcing openly his decision in this regard. Sri Aurobindo did not abandon the royal service by making a similar public declaration for two reasons: Firstly, in those days it would have been grossly imprudent for anyone to stand alone in an open manner like Subhas Chandra Bose. Secondly, Sri Aurobindo was reluctant to propagate anything pertaining to himself. Besides, had he given a public declaration as to the real reason of his abandonment, it would have surely been unacceptable to his relatives.

[23](#)William Ewart Gladstone was a British Liberal politician. He was prime minister of the United Kingdom four times.—Trans.

[24](#)One of the poems written by Sri Aurobindo during his adolescence is in the praise of Parnell. (Charles Stewart Parnell was an Irish nationalist political leader and the founder and leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party. He was one of the most important figures of 19th century Great Britain and Ireland, and was described by Prime Minister William Gladstone as the most remarkable person he had ever met.) Poems on Charles Parnell, in *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Centenary Edition, vol. 3, p. 15.

[25](#)“Locksley Hall” is a poem written by Alfred Tennyson. Though one of his masterworks, it is less well-known than his other literature. It narrates the emotions of a weary soldier come to his childhood home, the fictional Locksley Hall.

[26](#)These writings were for long unknown to the public. They were recovered just after the publication of the First edition of this book *Jiban O Jog*. That is why; there is no mention of these writings in its First edition.—Trans.

[27](#)Sri Aurobindo married Mrinalini Basu in 1901.

[28](#)*Bengali Writings, Letters to Mrinalini: Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Centenary edition, Vol. 4, pp. 353.

[29](#)In 1918, when Sri Aurobindo was in Pondicherry, Mrinalini Devi breathed her last at the residence of Mr. Girish Chandra

Bose, a well-known name of his time, the founder of the Bangabasi College, Calcutta.

[30](#)It is surprising that during World War II a few countries forcibly occupied by the enemies showed especially, the utility of guerrilla warfare. In our country, Jatindranath Mukhopadhyay (Bagha Jatin), the valiant, and a small group of youth displayed extraordinary skill in guerrilla warfare on the sea-shore of Orissa in 1915.

[31](#)Suresh Biswas born in 1861 in Nadia, Bengal migrated to Brazil (probably one of the first Indians to do so), and fought valiantly in the Brazilian army (late 19th century). He was made a Lieutenant in the army (and a Colonel too, later). He showed remarkable courage during the upsurge of rebellion. [Ref: Wikipedia] Colonel Biswas however settled down in Brazil as he was enchanted by the natural beauty of the country. He died there in 1905.—Trans.

[32](#)Swamiji left the mortal coil in 1902, three years before the commencement of the National movement.

[33](#)During the *Swadeshi* era, Nevinson, the renowned English journalist, once came on a tour to India. He has drawn a nice picture of the then India in one of his books. There he has made special mention of Sri Aurobindo and Lokmanya Tilak. That he got the touch of Sri Aurobindo's spirit is all too evident from what he has written. The magnanimity and the generosity of Lokmanya have also been depicted admirably by him.

[34](#)A few years back, the author visited the publication office of the magazine *Keshari*, a place of pilgrimage hallowed by sacred memories of Tilak, in Pune. There he met Mr Ketkar, the grandson of Tilak. Mr Ketkar presented to the author a few booklets containing tributes to Tilak published after the demise of Lokmanya. Mr Ketkar remarked that amongst the articles published on Tilak, the article written by Sri Aurobindo was by far the best. The author, however, had made no mention of Sri Aurobindo.

[35](#)On the occasion of the partition of Bengal, the noncooperation movement did not take its full form. In 1920,

under the leadership of Gandhiji, the Congress adopted the policy of non-cooperation. Three years before this, the moderates had deserted the Congress. In 1907, during the Surat Congress, there was a fierce conflict between the moderates and the Nationalist Party. However, due to the absence of Sri Aurobindo, the Nationalist Party practically broke up. But within 10 years, the situation took such a turn that the moderates had to dissociate themselves from the Congress Party. What Sri Aurobindo had wanted, happened in due course.

[36](#)*Desher Katha* was written by Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar (1869-1912). Deuskar was a close associate of Sri Aurobindo. This book was banned during Swadeshi Movement.—Trans.

[37](#)Sri Aurobindo personally started using as far as possible *swadeshi* (country-made articles) immediately after his return from England. Undoubtedly, very few people of the country had then heard of *khadi* but even at that time Dinendra Kumar saw Sri Aurobindo wearing coarse *khadi* made from Ahmedabad mill.

[38](#)Even in the later phase of the national struggle, Bipin Chandra had serious differences of opinion with his friend Chittaranjan Das, or for that matter, with the Congress Party. In 1921, at the Barisal Convention of the Bengal Provincial Conference, Bipin Chandra wanted to know the true nature of *Swaraj*. He was thoroughly against the non-cooperation movement and he used to say: “I want logic, not magic.”

[39](#)Kuvera: the God of wealth in Indian Mythology.—Trans.

[40](#)The author wrote this piece long before our Independence, in 1939.—Trans

[41](#)The efforts towards imparting national education were thwarted in two phases of the national movement and the institutions that were established for this purpose did not survive long. Only the technical school founded by the Bengal Education Council has been transformed into the present-day The College of Technology and Engineering in Jadavpur known today all over the country and bearing testimony of the achievement of the *swadeshi* era. Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee of

the Calcutta University fulfilled partially the lack of national education through educational reforms.

[42](#)*Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Centenary Edition, Vol.1, pp. 515.—Trans.

[43](#)*Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 4, p. 261 (Bengali).—Trans.

[44](#)Sri Aurobindo and his brother Barin were associated with this movement, whose ideal and activities were aimed at total revolution. A book *Aurobindo and Jugantar* authored by Shri Arun Chandra Guha gives an account of this.— Trans.

[45](#)*Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 4, p. 263.—Trans.

[46](#)The complete speech of Chittaranjan is available in the book *Life-Work of Sri Aurobindo* written by Prof. Jyotish Chandra Ghosh. A résumé of the trial too is given there.

[47](#)Sri Aurobindo stood first in the ICS examination, while the Judge Beechcroft was placed second. (Also refer: Chapter 2)

[48](#)Even in those days certain individuals would not refrain from cutting jokes or making taunting remarks with regard to the vision of God in the prison. The English weekly *Social Reformer* edited by Natarajan (now deceased), the famous social reformer of Bombay and the *Bengali* edited by Surendra Nath used to publish from time to time sarcastic comments about it. The befitting repost that Sri Aurobindo would give in his columns in the *Karmayogin* and the *Dharma* was particularly interesting. In this context Sri Aurobindo mentioned that “Bipin Chandra Pal in the Buxar Prison and Sri Krishna Kumar Mitra in exile had the God-vision as they have expressed. Are these hallucinatory effect on both of them?” Bipin Chandra was imprisoned before the imprisonment of Sri Aurobindo.

[49](#)*Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 4, pp. 261-62 (Bengali).—Trans.

[50](#)*ibid.*, 264.—Trans.

[51](#)*ibid.*, 274.—Trans.

[52](#)*ibid.*, 275.—Trans.

[53](#)*ibid.*, 276.—Trans.

[54](#)*ibid.*, 326.—Trans.

[55](#) *ibid.*, 32.—Trans.

[56](#) *ibid.*, 278-79.—Trans.

[57](#) *ibid.*, 289.—Trans.

[58](#) *ibid.*, 290.—Trans.

[59](#) *ibid.*—Trans.

[60](#) *ibid.*, 291.—Trans.

[61](#) *ibid.*,—Trans.

[62](#) *ibid.*, 292.—Trans.

[63](#) *ibid.*, 292-93.—Trans.

[64](#) *ibid.*, 294-95.—Trans.

[65](#) Lokmanya Tilak was sentenced to six years' imprisonment for writing in his mouthpiece *Keshari* an article relating to the bomb blast in Muzaffarpur. He was kept in the prison of Mandalay, in Burma.

[66](#) Chidambaram Pillai was an eminent national leader from Madras. He was sentenced to seven years' rigorous imprisonment in 1907 for propagating the need for boycott movement. In the prison he was maltreated like a contemptible criminal. He breathed his last in 1937.

[67](#) At that time in South Africa, Mahatma Gandhi was spearheading a peaceful resistance movement to acquire equal rights for the Indians living there.

[68](#) "*Rabindranath, O Aurobindo, bows to thee!*" written by Rabindranath Tagore in salutation to Sri Aurobindo.

[69](#) *Dharma* dated 20 December 1909 and included in the *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (Bengali), Centenary Edition, Vol. 4. pp. 251-52.

[70](#) *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 4, pp. 353 (Bengali).—Trans.

[71](#) *ibid.*, 351-52.—Trans.

[72](#) *ibid.*—Trans.

[73](#) *ibid.*, 352.—Trans.

[74](#) *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 4, pp. 352-53 (Bengali).—Trans.

[75](#) *Dharma*, Complete Works, Centenary edition, vol. 4, p. 82.—Trans.

[76](#) Sri Aurobindo openly supported the war efforts of England and America which was for the liberty from the diabolic powers which threatened to overpower the world. —Trans.

[77](#) On 6 May, 1949 while unveiling the statue of Sri Aurobindo at the Judges Court, Alipore (where he was tried for his role in the Alipore Bomb Case), Shri Upendra Nath Bandyopadhyay (a co-accused in the Alipore Bomb Case and was deported to Andaman) had openly said that Sri Aurobindo had told him this when Upendra Nath had visited him in 1920 after his release from Andaman.

[78](#) These two books are now included in the *Complete Works Sri Aurobindo*, Centenary Edition, (1972), Vol. 14, pp. 345-433.—Trans.

[79](#) Bengali Writings of Sri Aurobindo in Complete Works Centenary Edition vol. 4.—Trans.

[80](#) Those who tried to bring him back to politics among them, Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das was in the forefront. Before the 1922 Congress session in Gaya, Deshabandhu himself travelled to Pondicherry and requested Sri Aurobindo to join politics again. The reply Sri Aurobindo gave him has been mentioned in the book *Anami* by Dilip Kumar Roy.

[81](#) These writings were published as books, and are now available in the *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Centenary Edition. Vol. 10-13 and Vol. 18-19.—Trans.

[82](#) This was published in 1936 edition of the Bengali journal *Bharatvarsha* and later got space in the book *Edeshe O Deshe* (Our Land, The Other Land).

[83](#) *Sri Aurobindo and his Ashram*, Ashram Publication, 1939.

[84](#) “Selected Letters of Charles Darwin”.—Trans.

[85](#) *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Centenary Edition, Vol.5, p. 40 (the Bengali translation has been rendered by Dilip Kumar Roy in *Anami*). Also available in *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 20-21.—Trans.

[86](#) The expression “Utilisable Crust” does not appear in Sri Aurobindo’s writings in this short form. The author might have taken this expression from the *The Riddles of This World*

(1933): “And this is evidently because Science has missed something essential; it has seen and scrutinised what has happened and in a way how it has happened, but it has shut its eyes to something that made this impossible possible,... for you remain embedded in a huge surface crust of manageable and utilisable appearance.”—Trans.

[87](#)First published in the *Arya* in 1914 before the start of World War I. In 1939, before the beginning of World War II, the greatest gift to humanity, *The Life Divine* was published. Again in another juncture in 1948, it was published in the book *The Synthesis of Yoga* which is the steps towards realisation of *Brahman*.

[88](#)*Mayavada* is the philosophical doctrine of Shankaracharya.—Trans.

[89](#)“Who”, a poem by Sri Aurobindo, Complete Works, Centenary Edition, Vol-5, 40.—Trans.

[90](#)“The Vedantin’s Prayer” poem by Sri Aurobindo, *ibid.*, 49.—Trans.

[91](#)Mr. Smythe (Frank Smythe), a British mountaineer, author, photographer and botanist.

[92](#)*Lights on Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo Complete Works, Centenary Edition, vol. 24.

[93](#)*The Riddles of This World* (1933) included in *Letters on Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo Complete Works, Centenary Edition, Vol. 22.

[94](#)*Tapas* may be interpreted as “asceticism”—worshiping God with severe self-discipline.—Trans.

[95](#)This word has been explained by Sri Aurobindo in *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 18, p. 550 and Vol. 22, p. 9. “The Inconscience is an inverse reproduction of the supreme superconscience: it has the same absoluteness of being and automatic action, but in a vast involved trance; it is being lost in itself, plunged in its own abyss of infinity. Instead of a luminous absorption in self- existence there is a tenebrous involution in it, the darkness veiled within darkness of the Rig Veda...” — Trans.

[96](#) *The Secret of the Veda*, Sri Aurobindo Complete Works, Centenary Edition, vol. 10.

[97](#) Now available in a single volume in Sri Aurobindo Complete Works, Centenary Edition, vol. 13.—Trans.

[98](#) The Bengali magazine *Dharma* was a weekly magazine started by Sri Aurobindo. It is now included in Complete Works, Centenary Edition, vol. 4.—Trans.

[99](#) *Dharma*, Issue 23, included in Complete Works, Centenary Edition, vol. 4.—Trans.

[100](#) *Essays on Gita*, Sri Aurobindo Complete Works, Centenary Edition, vol. 13.—Trans.

[101](#) *The Riddles of this World*, “Letters on Yoga” in Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Centenary Edition. Vol. 22, p. 24.—Trans.

[102](#) Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was a saint of the fifteenth century and the initiator of *Bhakti* Movement.—Trans.

[103](#) *Essays on the Gita*, vol. 13.—Trans.

[104](#) It is a state in yoga-meditation when the *yogi* enters into a meditative state of immobile trance.—Trans.

[105](#) *The Mother*, Sri Aurobindo Complete Works, Centenary Edition, vol. 25, p. 26. The One whom we adore as the Mother is the divine Conscious-Force that dominates all existence, one and yet so many-sided that to follow her movement is impossible even for the quickest mind and for the most free and most vast intelligence.

[106](#) The scholars presume that before the expansion of the Aryan civilisation, each and every individual was of fourfold nature. Even in the present age, it is being perceived that in order to become a complete man, one has to be of four-fold nature. The racial discrimination and the caste system are gradually disappearing because of the pressure of circumstances. [This comment was provided by the author in the Bengali edition as a note.]

[107](#) *Ibid.*, 54. Only when the Four have founded their harmony and freedom of movement in the transformed mind and life and body, can those other rarer Powers manifest in the earth

movement and the Supramental action become possible.—Trans.

[108](#)Ibid., 39. In each man she answers and handles the different elements of his nature according to their need and their urge and the return they call for, puts on them the required pressure or leaves them to their cherished liberty to prosper in the ways of the Ignorance or to perish.—Trans.

[109](#)Ibid., 59. The Mother is dealing with ignorance in the fields of the Ignorance; she has descended there to handle it.—Trans.

[110](#)*The Mother*, Sri Aurobindo Complete Works, Centenary Edition, vol. 25, p. 35.—Trans.

[111](#)William Inge was an English author, Anglican priest, professor of divinity at Cambridge, and Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, which provided the appellation by which he was widely known, "Dean Inge."—Trans.

[112](#)When the author wrote this book, Television was merely a promise.—Trans.

[113](#)It is strange that the daughter of Woodrow Wilson, self-motivated and spontaneously came far from America to live in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, and died in Pondicherry. The author had the good fortune of a meeting with her.

[114](#)In fact that has exactly happened so. The main imperialist the British has left India and Burma. The British Empire is transformed to Commonwealth countries.

[115](#)The author had probably included these sentences in the second edition of the book. Although the revision date is 1949, it was printed in 1952 due to delay.—Trans.

[116](#)For this reason, even though India chanting the *mantra* of non-violence since 1920 had to observe helplessly the bloodshed in 1947.

[117](#)The ideal of the Russian Revolution 1917 was internationalism. Now it is explicitly Nationalism and as a result of that it is morphed to Imperialism. The Soviet Government at present is engaged in the publicity of Russian achievements, national uniqueness, and superiority- all full of ego. (*This*

footnote was added by the author in the 1949 revision of the book.)

[118](#)According to Indian mythology, Saint Vishwamitra (creator of *Gayatri Mantra*) created a world for *Trishanku*, whom he sent with his mortal body to heaven but he could not be admitted for the jealousy of the cosmic gods.—Trans.

[119](#)According to Indian mythology, King Bhagirath invoked the descent of the holy River Ganga from the heaven above to the earth.—Trans.

[120](#)A quote from the *Upanishads*.—Trans.

[121](#)The heroine of Kalidasa's Sanskrit play *Abhigyanam Shakunatalam*.—Trans.

[122](#)Rabindranath Tagore had written this piece onboard the liner *Chantilly* when he was on his trip to Europe on 29 May 1928; this was published in the Bengali magazine *Probashi* in the same year.—Trans.

[123](#)The author wrote this in the revised edition of the book in 1949.—Trans.

[124](#)A line from Indian National Anthem *Jana Gana Mana* composed by Rabindranath Tagore.—Trans.

[125](#)This a well-known line from a patriotic Bengali song of Dwijendra Lal Roy (D.L. Roy) titled "Mother India". Dilip Kumar Roy, who has been mentioned at several places in this book, is his son.—Trans.

[126](#)Pondicherry was under French rule till 1956.—Trans.

[127](#)Dr. Nirodbaran : (i) *Sri Aurobindo I am here, I am here* (ii) *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* In these two books Dr. Nirodbaran has given a heart-rending description of this time.—Trans.

[128](#)Published in *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, vol. 7, Bombay.—Trans.

ABOUT THE BOOK

SRI AUROBINDO was a scholar, a literary critic, a philosopher, a revolutionary, a poet and a yogi. He became a leader of India's fight for independence and later a well-known spiritual guru. The original version of this book was written at a time when any writing on Sri Aurobindo was frowned upon by the British government. It is not only a biography of the spiritual leader but also an analysis of the Congress party during the Independence movement, the split in the Surat Congress, as well as the spiritual practice developed by Sri Aurobindo, known as Spiritual Yoga.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Promode Kumar Sen (1899-1952) was a patriot and a journalist. He wrote columns in well-known newspapers of his time—the *Liberty*, the *Advance*, the *Hindustan Standard* and the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*. This book has been translated by his son Prasenjit Sen.

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