Sri Aurobindo

HIS LIFE UNIQUE

Rishabhchand

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Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Puducherry

First edition August 15, 1981
Third impression 2007

ISBN 978-81-7058-621-0

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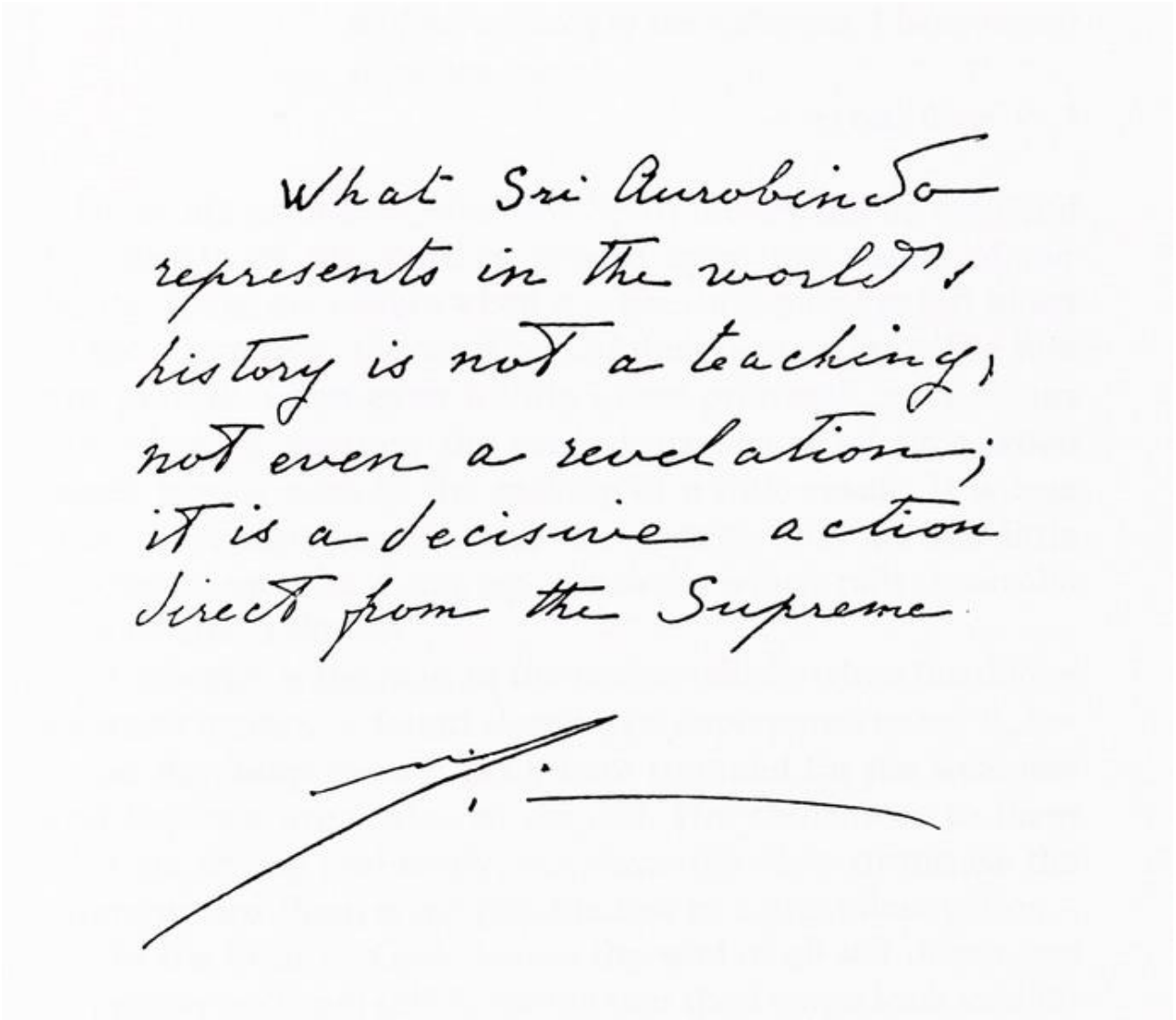
Published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department,
Puducherry - 605 002
Web: http://sabda.in
Printed at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Puducherry
PRINTED IN INDIA

Publisher's Note

Rishabhchand, the author of this book, has to his credit a number of other books, all of them shot through and through with the Light and Presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. One cannot fail to perceive in them an unusual harmony of the intellect's clear thinking, intuition's deep penetration and the spirit's permeating suffusion. They stand out impressively against the background of innate humility and colour gracefully the flow of his style and language. He wrote it indeed as one inspired by the Mother and the very fact of its serial publication in the "Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education" (from August 1960 to February 1971) carries in it Her seal and sanction. The author had a vaster plan in his mind but that was not probably in the plan of the Divine and so remained short of execution.


What Sri Aurobindo
represents in the world's
history is not a teaching,
not even a revelation;
it is a decisive action
direct from the Supreme.

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Introduction

> *"Whenever there is the fading of the Dharma and the uprising of the Adharma, I loose myself forth into birth."*
>
> — *The Gita*, Chapt. IV. 7

"There are moments when the Spirit moves among men and the breath of the Lord is abroad upon the waters of our being; there are others when it retires and men are left to act in the strength or the weakness of their own egoism. The first are periods when even a little effort produces great results and changes destiny; the second are spaces of time when much labour goes to the making of a little result. It is true that the latter may prepare the former, may be the little smoke of sacrifice going up to heaven which calls down the rain of God's bounty.

Unhappy is the man or the nation which, when the divine moment arrives, is found sleeping or unprepared to use it, because the lamp has not been kept trimmed for the welcome and the ears are sealed to the call. But thrice woe to them who are strong and ready, yet waste the force or misuse the moment; for them is irreparable loss or a great destruction.

In the hour of God cleanse thy soul of all self-deceit and hypocrisy and vain self-flattering that thou mayst look straight into thy spirit and hear that which summons it. All insincerity of nature, once thy defence against the eye of the Master and the light of the ideal, becomes now a gap in thy armour and invites the blow. Even if thou conquer for the moment, it is the worse for thee, for the blow shall come afterwards and cast thee down in the midst of thy triumph. But being pure cast aside all fear; for the hour is often terrible, a fire and a whirlwind and a tempest, a treading of the winepress of the wrath of God; but he who can stand up in it on the truth of his purpose is he who shall stand; even though he fall, he shall rise again; even though he seem to pass on the wings of the wind, he shall return. Nor let worldly prudence whisper too closely in thy ear; for it is the hour of the unexpected."

— Sri Aurobindo

Parentage, birth and early childhood

Sri Aurobindo was born on the 15th August, 1872. The world was then in the melting pot. Science had just begun losing its long-held ground. The Promised Land to which it had boasted of leading humanity was receding into the mist of the future, for Matter itself was ceasing to be real and concrete. The supremacy of human reason was being challenged by the development of psychology and the new philosophies of Kierkegaard, Bergson and others. It was an age of problems, paradoxes and growing perplexities, a welter of idea-forces never known before in the whole history of the human race. The ideals of unity, freedom and individualism had emerged into the active thought of mankind and were pressing for recognition and realisation. But a phenomenal advance of technology, geared to industrialism and commercial greed, was posing a menace to the higher values of human culture. Clouds were gathering in the sky foreboding a disruption of the very bases of materialistic civilisation. Deep down in the heart of suffering humanity, there was a prayer for a change, for the birth of a new age, a new world-order.

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta. His father's name was Krishna Dhan Ghosh, who came of noble parents belonging to the distinguished Ghosh family of Konnagar, a small village in the district of Hoogly, which had already produced remarkable leaders of religious and social movements. Krishna Dhan passed the Entrance Examination of the Calcutta University from the local school and was admitted into the Calcutta Medical College. When he was nineteen years old and still studying in the Medical College, he married Srimati Swamalata Devi, the eldest daughter of Rishi Rajnarayan Bose who, to quote the *Karmayogin*,[1] "represented the high water-mark of the composite culture of the country — Vedantic, Islamic and European." He was a saintly man of high attainments, synthesising in himself the cultures of both the East and the West, and widely known in Bengal as a leader of the Adi Brahmo Samaj and as "the

[1] *The Karmayogin* — 7th and a few subsequent issues of the paper.

grandfather of Indian nationalism".[2] The marriage was performed according to the rites of the Brahmo Samaj to which Krishna Dhan then belonged.

After taking his degree from the Medical College of the Calcutta University, Krishna Dhan proceeded to England for an advanced course of medical studies. He was one of the first Indians to go to England from Bengal, defying the ban of his orthodox society. His father-in-law, Rajnarayan Bose, strongly advised him to steer clear of the baneful influences of the sceptical and materialistic civilisation of the West. Krishna Dhan took his M.D. from the Aberdeen University and returned to India in 1871. But he returned a changed man. He was completely anglicised. His outlook and manners had undergone a sea-change. He loved everything English, and felt a great admiration for the culture and civilisation of the West — its material glamour, its vigorous, energetic life-force, and its sound, rational, practical utilitarianism. He had almost turned an atheist. On his return home, he encountered the opposition of his society, which threatened to outcaste him unless he performed the *prayaschitta* or expiatory ceremony. But Krishna Dhan was made of sterner stuff than his society thought. He would break rather than bend to an unjust authority. He refused to perform the *prayaschitta*, and, selling away his property at a nominal price, left his native village for good and all. He was posted as a Civil Surgeon successively at Bhagalpur, Rangpur and Khulna districts. Though a confirmed anglophile and an uncompromising non-conformist, his heart was full of the milk of human kindness. He was generous to a fault, and almost reckless in charity, for which even his own sons had to suffer in England, as we shall see later. Wherever he worked, he was not only respected and honoured, but loved; for he had the gift of identifying himself with the needs and aspirations of the people, and making their

[2] "Aurobindo's maternal grandfather, Rajnarayan Bose, formed once a secret society of which Tagore, then a very young man, became a member, and also set up an institution for national and revolutionary propaganda, but this finally came to nothing." — *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother.*

cause his own. Wherever he worked, he left the imprint of his benevolent personality, and the place the better for his having worked there — the tone of its civic life improved, its social relations sweetened, and its material amenities enriched. At Khulna where he passed the later portion of his life, his was a name to conjure with, thanks to his generous nature and unfailing public spirit.

Sri Aurobindo's mother, Swarnalata Devi, was an educated lady of parts. She could write stories and dramas. She was of a sweet and amiable nature, and, unlike her husband, orthodox in her religious leanings. On account of her personal charm and cultured bearing, she was known as the "rose of Rangpur". But, unfortunately, she fell a prey to her family disease, hysteria, which rendered her husband's life as well as her own rather unhappy.

Sri Aurobindo was the third son of his father. Benoy Bhusan and Manmohan were his elder brothers. Aurobindo means lotus. It was an uncommon name in those days, and that was why his father chose it for his third son, little suspecting that, in occult language, aurobindo signifies the Divine Consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo grew up in an English atmosphere at home, ignorant of his mother tongue, and surrounded by servants who spoke either broken English or Hindusthani. When he was five years old, he was sent, along with his two elder brothers, to the Loretto Convent School at Darjeeling, run by an Irish nun. There the three brothers had only European boys for friends and companions, for it was a school meant only for European children.

Sri Aurobindo (seated right) with his parents, brothers and sister at Manchester, 1879

Sri Aurobindo in England

Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghosh, who "was determined that his children should receive an entirely European upbringing", took his three sons[3] to England, and "placed them with an English clergyman and his wife (Mr. & Mrs. Drewett) with strict instructions that they should not be allowed to make the acquaintance of any Indian or undergo any Indian influence. These instructions were carried out to the letter" and Sri Aurobindo "grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, her religion and her culture."[4]

Sri Aurobindo's elder brothers, Benoy Bhusan and Manmohan, were sent to Manchester Grammar School, while Sri Aurobindo, being too young, was "educated privately by Mr. and Mrs. Drewett." "Drewett was an accomplished Latin scholar". He taught Sri Aurobindo Latin and English, while Mrs. Drewett taught him history, geography, arithmetic and French. Besides these subjects, Sri Aurobindo read himself the Bible, Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats, etc. Mr. Drewett grounded Sri Aurobindo so well in Latin that when Sri Aurobindo went to St. Paul's School in London, the headmaster of that school "took him up to ground him in Greek and then pushed him rapidly into the higher classes of the school."

When Sri Aurobindo was eleven years old, he had a sort of premonition that great revolutions were going to take place in the future and that he had a part to play in some of them. Not a mental idea, but a kind of inner feeling was growing within him that he had some great work to do, a mission to fulfil.

Sri Aurobindo "gave his attention to the classics at Manchester and at St. Paul's; but even at St. Paul's in the last three years he simply went through his school course and spent most of his spare time in general reading, especially English poetry, literature and fiction, French literature and the history of ancient, mediaeval and modern Europe. He spent some

[3] The whole family went to England — Dr. Ghosh, Mrs. Ghosh, and their three sons and daughter Sarojini. Barindra, the fourth son was born in England.

[4] Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are from *"Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*", published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

time also over learning Italian, some German and a little Spanish. He spent much time too in writing poetry. The school studies during this period engaged very little of his time; he was already at ease in them and did not think it necessary to labour over them any longer."

Sri Aurobindo mastered French and learnt enough of Italian and German to be able to read Dante and Goethe in the original. His studies in the Classics, English and French literatures, and the entire history of Europe was not only extensive, but extraordinarily deep, ample evidence of which is found in his later voluminous writings, literary, historical, philosophical, political, cultural and sociological. His writings abound in such subtle and penetrating allusions and references that, unless one is very deeply read in those subjects, it becomes difficult to grasp the full import and catch the significant implications of his statements. He was a scholar possessing a wonderful memory, a revealing insight into the fundamentals of every subject, and a rare capacity for taking a synthetic and total view of the different aspects and the divergent provinces of knowledge — an integrating and harmonising faculty, global in its sweep and unfailing in its action. But, first and foremost, he was a poet, and a passionate lover of poetry — a seer-poet in the making, whose full-orbed splendour dazzles our eyes and thrills and illumines our soul in his later poetic creations, and particularly in his monumental epic, *Savitri*.

Mrs. Drewett, Mr. Drewett's mother, wished to convert the three brothers to Christianity, but Mr. Drewett, who was a man of strong common sense, objected to it, and Mrs. Drewett had to give up her benevolent idea. In 1885 the Drewetts had left for Australia, and "the three brothers lived in London for some time with the mother of Mr. Drewett, but she left them after a quarrel between her and Manmohan about religion. The old Mrs. Drewett was fervently evangelical and she said she would not live with an atheist as the house might fall down on her."

Sri Aurobindo's name was registered at St. Paul's and at Cambridge as Aravinda Ackroyd Ghosh, because when he was born, one Miss Annette Ackroyd, who later married Henry Beveridge, the then Officiating District and Sessions Judge of Rangpur, happened to be present at the christening

ceremony, and was requested by Dr. K.D. Ghosh to give the child an English name. She gave her father's name as that of the godfather of the child. But Sri Aurobindo "dropped the 'Ackroyd' from his name before he left England and never used it again."

Regarding 'Ackroyd' having been tacked on to his name, which gave rise to a rumour that he had been converted into Christianity, and Mrs. Drewett's pious solicitude for saving his soul, Sri Aurobindo once said: "There was once a meeting of non-conformist ministers at Cumberland when we were in England. The old lady in whose house we dwelt, i.e. Mrs. Drewett, took me there. After the prayers were over, all nearly dispersed but devout people remained a little longer and it was at that time that conversions were made. I was feeling completely bored. Then a minister approached me and asked me some questions. I did not give any reply. Then they all shouted, 'He is saved, he is saved', and began to pray for me and offer thanks to God. I did not know what it was all about. Then the minister came to me and asked me to pray. I was not in the habit of praying. But somehow I did it in the manner in which children recite their prayers before going to sleep in order to keep up an appearance. That was the only thing that happened. I did not attend the Church regularly. I was about ten at that time".[5]

After his brother's quarrel with Mrs. Drewett, Sri Aurobindo and his eldest brother, Benoy Bhusan, "occupied a room in the South Kensington Liberal Club where Mr. J.S. Cotton, brother of Sir Henry Cotton, for some time Lt. Governor of Bengal, was the secretary, and Benoy assisted him in his work. Manmohan went into lodgings. This was the time of the greatest suffering and poverty." "During a whole year a slice or two of sandwich, bread and butter and a cup of tea in the morning, and in the evening a penny saveloy formed the only food". This hardship was due to his father's irregularity in sending them remittances from India. But Sri Aurobindo, neither in his youth nor ever afterwards, knew how to complain. Immersed in his studies, he took all privations and hardships in his stride with an

[5] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by Purani.

unruffled calm. Subsequently Sri Aurobindo also "went separately into lodgings until he took up residence at Cambridge".

Sri Aurobindo secured a senior classical scholarship of £.80 per annum when he joined the King's College, Cambridge. This lessened his hardship to a certain extent. At Cambridge, Sri Aurobindo attracted the attention of Oscar Browning, a well-known figure there. In regard to Browning's appreciation of his talent, Sri Aurobindo wrote to his father: "Last night I was invited to coffee with one of the dons and in his room I met the great O.B. otherwise Oscar Browning, who is the feature par excellence of King's. He was extremely flattering and passing from the subject of Cotillions to that of scholarship, he said to me: 'I suppose you know you passed an extraordinarily high examination. I have examined papers at thirteen examinations and I have never during that time seen such excellent papers as yours' (meaning my classical papers, at the scholarship examination). 'As for your essay, it was wonderful.' 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 antitheses and epigrams and it expressed my real feelings without restraint or reservation. I thought myself it was the best thing I have ever done, but at school it would have been condemned as extraordinarily Asiatic and bombastic. The great O.B. afterwards asked me where my rooms were and when I had answered he said: 'that wretched hole!' (and) then turning to Mahaffy: 'How rude we are to our scholars! We get great minds to come down here and then shut them up in that box. I suppose it is to keep their pride down.'"

Sri Aurobindo at St. Paul's School, London, 1884

Sri Aurobindo at King's College, Cambridge, 1890-92

Though Sri Aurobindo occupied himself mostly with extra-curricular studies, he was still able "to win all the prizes in King's College in one year for Greek and Latin verse, etc." Sri Aurobindo did not graduate at Cambridge. "He passed high in the First Part of the Tripos (first class); it is on passing this First Part that the degree of B. A. is usually given; but as he had only two years at his disposal, he had to pass it in his second year at Cambridge; and the First Part gives the degree only if it is taken in the

third year; if one takes it in the second year one has to appear for the Second Part of the Tripos in the fourth year to qualify for the degree. He might have got the degree if he had made an application for it, but he did not care to do so. A degree in English is valuable only if one wants to take up an academical career."

At this time Sri Aurobindo began to take interest in Indian politics. His father, though an anglophile, was at heart a patriot who smarted under the predatory and repressive rule of the British Government in India. He began "sending *The Bengali* newspaper with passages marked relating cases of maltreatment of Indians by Englishmen and he wrote in his letters denouncing the British Government in India as a heartless Government." The feeling that had been haunting Sri Aurobindo that he had a part to play in some great movement was now "canalised into the idea of the liberation of his own country. But the 'firm decision' took full shape only towards the end of another four years. It had already been made when he went to Cambridge, and as a member and for some time secretary of the Indian Majlis at Cambridge he delivered many revolutionary speeches."

Dr. Ghosh wished that Sri Aurobindo should go in for the Indian Civil Service. In deference to his father's wish, Sri Aurobindo got admitted as a candidate for the I.C.S. even while he was at St. Paul's. He took up the Classics and some other subjects, and prepared for the competitive examination without the help of a tutor. This simultaneous study of a double course, one at St. Paul's and, later, at Cambridge, and the other for the I.C.S., must have proved a strain on him; but though he was getting an allowance for the I.C.S. probationership, he could not afford to engage a tutor. From his scholarship and meagre probationership allowance he had often to help his brothers. He passed the I.C.S. examination with distinction, securing very high marks in the Classics, but his heart was not in the Service. It was simply to comply with his father's wish that he had studied for it. His growing nationalistic feelings made him averse to it. "...He neglected his lessons in riding and failed in the last riding test. He was, as is often done, given another chance to pass, but avoided presenting himself in time for the test. He was on this pretext disqualified for the

Service, although in similar cases successful probationers have been given a further chance to qualify themselves in India itself. He felt no call for the I.C.S. and was seeking some way to escape from that bondage. He thus deliberately disqualified himself without himself rejecting the Service, which his family would not have allowed him to do." The reason why the British Government did not give him another chance for passing in the riding test was, of course, the fact that his revolutionary speeches at the Indian Majlis "had their part in determining the authorities to exclude him from the Indian Civil Service...."

"Among the Indians in London he and his brothers formed a part of a small revolutionary group who rebelled habitually against the leadership of Dadabhai Naoroji and his moderate politics. During the last days of his stay in England he attended a private meeting of Indians in London at which there was formed a secret society with the romantic name of the 'Lotus and Dagger' in which all the members took the vow to adopt each some chosen part which would help in leading to the overthrow of foreign rule. But the society was stillborn and its members dispersed without meeting again...."[6] Sri Aurobindo, however, kept to his vow.

To renounce the rosy prospects of the Indian Civil Service must have been considered an uncommon sacrifice by many, but to Sri Aurobindo it was a great relief, even though he was hard put to it to make both ends meet. He now began looking for a job, so that he might return to India. His heart and soul panted for the breath of his motherland. It is said that when Vivekananda was returning to India after his triumphal tour of Europe and America, somebody asked him: "Well, Swami, you have been so long in the midst of the pomp and glory of Western civilisation, and come in close contact with the progressive thought and energetic life of the scientific age; how do you feel now when you are going back to your land of chronic poverty and squalor, of illiteracy and ignorance, famine and pestilence?" The Swami replied at once, his words burning with the fire of his soul: "India has always been my darling, my adored mother; but now that I return

[6] "*Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram*".

to her after a pretty long sojourn in foreign countries, I feel that her very dust is sacred to me." So might Sri Aurobindo say on the eve of his return to India. He had been in England for fourteen years — long years of budding life, devoted to intensive study and careful observation. He had drunk deep of the culture of the West. He had travelled in the wide realms of classical thought, and delighted in the epic grandeur of its poetry. He had enjoyed and admired the splendour and beauty of English poetry, the grace and charm of French literature, the sublimity of Dante's creation, and the giant sweep of Goethe's mind. He had studied the historical development of Western religion, thought and civilisation. He had been impressed by the intrepid spirit of adventure and inquiry which characterised the scientific research of his times. But the cruelty and oppression which he saw perpetrated in the name of civilisation and the heartless exploitation of man by man, filled him with a "strong hatred and disgust". He had formed no ties in England, and had not made England his adopted country, as Manmohan had done for a time. "If there was attachment to a European land as a second country, it was intellectually and emotionally to one not seen or lived in in this life, not England, but France." This attachment to France was very significant. Was it the literature and culture of France that attached him to that country? Or, was it the epoch-making watchword of the French Revolution that might have struck a responsive chord in his heart? But the roots of the attachment lay deeper, as we shall see when we come to the later developments of his life-story. He now prepared to leave England. He felt attracted to India. "There was no... regret in leaving England, no attachment to the past or misgivings for the future. Few friendships were made in England[7] and none very intimate; the mental atmosphere was not found congenial."

The Gaekwar of the State of Baroda happened to be in England at that time. He was one of the most enlightened rulers of the Indian States of that period. James Cotton, brother of Sir Henry Cotton, who was well-

[7] Among his Indian companions in England, mention may be made of K.G. Deshpande, Sir Harisingh Gaur and Chittaranjan Das.

acquainted with the Ghosh brothers, had been taking interest in them. He now negotiated with the Gaekwar in behalf of Sri Aurobindo. The result of the negotiation was that Sri Aurobindo "obtained an appointment in the Baroda Service...." The Gaekwar offered to pay him Rs.200/- per month, and, a shrewd man that he was, felt glad that he had been able to engage a brilliant young man of the I.C.S. calibre for such a paltry remuneration. But Sri Aurobindo was indifferent to money matters. He "knew nothing about life at that time."

Sri Aurobindo left England in the month of January, 1893. Though his father, Dr. Ghosh, had felt disappointed at Sri Aurobindo's failure to join the I.C.S., his spirits revived when he heard of his appointment in the Baroda State Service and his immediate return to India. Dr. Ghosh was particularly fond of Sri Aurobindo, and had high hopes of his "Auro"'s brilliant future. But a cruel fate lay in wait for him. He was informed by Messrs. Grindlay & Co. that the steamer by which Sri Aurobindo was sailing had sunk off the coast of Portugal. The information was wrong, but it struck his father a fatal blow, and he succumbed to it with his beloved son's name on his lips. Sri Aurobindo, however, reached India safe by another steamer, and landed in Bombay in February, 1893.

Sri Aurobindo in Baroda

> *"These are they who are conscious of the much falsehood in the world; they grow in the house of Truth, they are strong and invincible sons of Infinity."*
>
> — *Rigveda,* VII.60.5

1893 — a memorable year! It was in 1893 that Sri Aurobindo came back from England to fight for the freedom of India and release her imprisoned godhead, and Vivekananda sailed for America carrying with him the light of the Vedanta to the benighted humanity of the West. What was Sri Aurobindo thinking, what were his feelings as he came in sight of his beloved motherland? When he had left India, he was a mere child of seven, perhaps unaware of the heavenly fire smouldering beneath his sweet, angelic exterior. And when he returned, he was a young man of twenty-one, burning to realise his dreams and visions. These fourteen years, the most impressionable and formative part of his life, were spent in the West in the heyday of its scientific civilisation. We have already seen that Sri Aurobindo's mind was nourished and developed by the classical spirit in Western culture, and his poetic sensibilities were set aglow by the superb creations of the Western Muse. But his soul remained untouched, his heart's love flowed towards India, and his will flamed to fight and suffer for her freedom.[1] He did not then know much about India, but he felt a mysterious pull towards her, an irresistible attraction which his mind could hardly explain. "It was a natural attraction", he said later, "to Indian culture and ways of life, and a temperamental feeling and preference for all that was Indian." So, his thoughts and feelings converging on India, Sri Aurobindo approached the destination of his return voyage.

And how did India receive her beloved child? What gifts, what presents had she kept ready for him? She bestowed upon him, as an unsolicited

[1] Sri Aurobindo admired Mazzini and Joan of Arc, and wrote a short poem as a tribute to the Irish patriot, Parnell, in 1891. It is interesting to note that Annie Besant once called Sri Aurobindo the Mazzini of India.

grace, one of the brightest gems of her immemorial heritage — a high spiritual experience! In the midst of the confused hum and bustle of the strangers swarming up and down the gangways, “a vast calm descended upon him... this calm surrounded him and remained for long months afterwards”. In this connection, he once wrote to a disciple: “My own life and my Yoga have always been, since my coming to India, both this-worldly and other-worldly without any exclusiveness on either side. All human interests are, I suppose, this-worldly and most of them have entered into my mental field and some, like politics, into my life, but at the same time, since I set foot on the Indian soil on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, I began to have spiritual experiences, but these were not divorced from this world but had an inner and infinite bearing on it, such as a feeling of the Infinite pervading material space and the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies. At the same time I found myself entering supraphysical worlds and planes with influences and an effect from them upon the material plane, so I could make no sharp divorce or irreconcilable opposition between what I have called the two ends of existence and all that lies between them. For me all is Brahman and I find the Divine everywhere.”[2]

That was the characteristic way in which India greeted her son when he returned to her bosom after a long sojourn in a foreign land. This greeting was at once a symbol and a prophecy. It was an index to the glory of his life’s mission.

This sudden and unexpected spiritual experience that invaded and encompassed Sri Aurobindo recalls the somewhat similar — only it was less unexpected — instance of Sri Chaitanya’s conversion in the temple of Vishnu at Gaya. An arrogant young pundit of exceptional intellectual attainments and justifiably proud of his matchless erudition, Sri Chaitanya (he was then known as Nimai Pundit) stood in front of the image of Vishnu’s feet, in the shrine, gazing at the image, and rooted to the spot. A huge wave of devotion surged up within him. It swept his whole being. It

[2] *On Yoga* by Sri Aurobindo, Tome I, p.129.

overwhelmed him. His body was seized by a violent thrill and trembling, and tears of uncontrollable emotion streamed down his cheeks. It was an experience as sudden and strange in its onslaught as transforming in its result. Nimai Pundit died at that mysterious instant, and out of him rose a new man, a modest and humble lover of Vishnu, a God-drunk apostle of Bhakti.

In Sri Aurobindo's case, as has been said above, the experience was even more unexpected, for he had no knowledge of the Hindu Shastras. He had neither any desire for yogic experiences nor any knowledge of them. "I had many doubts before. I was brought up in England amongst foreign ideas and an atmosphere entirely foreign....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...."[3] Once, in a letter to a disciple,[4] he referred to a pre-yogic experience in London, but he did not describe its nature. The experience he had at the Apollo Bunder can, therefore, be taken as the first authentic yogic experience that came his way — unbidden but decisive — as a gift of Grace, a bounty of Mother India.

Sri Aurobindo returned alone from England, and his two elder brothers remained there for some time. Then, the eldest brother, Benoy Bhusan, came back to India and obtained an employment under the Maharaja of Coochbehar. He sent some money to Manmohan, and the latter also returned. Manmohan was at first appointed Professor of English at the Dacca College, and subsequently at the Presidency College of Calcutta, which was, at that time, the best college under the greatest University in India. A few words about the brothers and sister of Sri Aurobindo will not be out of place here.

Benoy Bhusan, the eldest, was of a practical but generous nature. In order to relieve the financial strain under which the three brothers had been labouring in England on account of the irregularity and subsequent stoppage of remittances from their father, he had taken a job as an assistant

[3] *Uttarpara Speech* by Sri Aurobindo.

[4] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

to James Cotton who was secretary of the South Kensington Liberal Club where the three brothers had been staying. Manmohan makes a rather amusingly sarcastic reference to his elder brother in one of his letters to Laurence Binyon: "At last to my joy my brother came to see me, who, as you know, is a very matter-of-fact person, with a commercial mind, a person who looks at everything from a business point of view. And he began comforting me with the reflection that everybody must die some day, remarking how conveniently near the cemetery I was...and hoping that undertakers did not charge very high, as he had come to the end of his last remittance."[5] The letter reveals the rich vein of wit and humour which ran in all the brothers. Regarding Benoy Bhusan Sri Aurobindo once remarked, "He is a very nice man, and one can easily get on with him. I got on very well with my eldest brother."

Manmohan was of a different type. He was anything but practical. He was a dreamer and a visionary. A classmate of Laurence Binyon and a friend of Oscar Wilde, he was himself a poet of considerable merit. He, Binyon, Phillips (Stephen Phillips) and Cripps...brought out a book (of poetry)[6] in conjunction, which was well spoken of. "I dare say, my brother stimulated me greatly to poetry."[7] "Manmohan used to play the poet in England. He had poetical illness and used to moan out his verses in deep tones. (Once) we were passing through Cumberland. We shouted to him but he paid no heed, and came afterwards leisurely at his own pace. His poet-playing dropped after he came to India."[8] He had decided to make England his home, but circumstances forced him to return. As a professor of English in the Presidency College, Calcutta, he earned a well-deserved reputation. His lectures on poetry used to be a treat. It is said that he created a poetical atmosphere, and that students from other colleges would some times steal into his class to breathe in that rarefied atmosphere of poetic enjoyment. One would often see him going up and down the stairs of the Presidency

[5] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

[6] *Prima Vera*.

[7] Nirodbaran's Notes.

[8] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

College, hat in hand, eyes downcast, and wearing an absorbed, unsmiling, and rather pensive look. He would not lift his eyes to see who passed by him. But once at his desk, he was a changed man. Warming up to his subject, he would weave exquisite patterns of romance and beauty, and fill the classroom with the vibrations of a naturally vocal sensibility. Nevinson writes of him in his *New Spirit in India*: "I found him there (in the Presidency College) teaching the grammar and occasional beauties of Tennyson's 'Princess' with extreme distaste for that sugary stuff." Some of his poems have been incorporated in a few anthologies of English verse, published in England, and George Sampson, writing about him in his book, *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature,* says: "Manmohan (1867-1924) is the most remarkable of Indian poets who write in English. He was educated at Oxford, where he was the contemporary and friend of Laurence Binyon, Stephen Phillips and others who became famous in English letters. So completely did he catch the note of his place and time that a reader of his Love Songs and Elegies and Songs of Love and Death would readily take them as the work of an English poet trained in the classical tradition."

Sarojini, the only sister, was much younger than Sri Aurobindo, and extremely devoted to him. We shall presently quote a letter from Sri Aurobindo to Sarojini, which shows how dearly he too loved her.

Barindra, the youngest brother, was born, as we have already seen, in England. But he came back with his mother and sister, when he was a mere child, and his boyhood days were passed at Deoghar where their maternal grandfather, Rishi Rajnarayan Bose, was living at that time. After their father's death, Barindra had to pass through various experiences of struggle and hardship. In fact, his whole life can be said to have been a series of storms and upheavals, for much of which it was his own nature that was responsible. He had ambition and a spirit of adventure, generosity and courage, but he was domineering, recklessly impulsive and emotionally unstable. He played a major role and blazed a trail in the revolutionary movement of Bengal, and has left a name in the history of the movement;

but he could never free himself from the tragic fate that dogged his steps up to the end of his days.

To take up the thread of the narrative. Sri Aurobindo visited Bengal in 1894 for the first time after his return from the West. He went to Rohini, which is about four miles from Deoghar. There he met his mother, his sister Sarojini, and Barindra. It was their first meeting after about fifteen years.

From Rohini, Sri Aurobindo went to Deoghar and met his maternal grandfather, Rajnarayan Bose, and other relatives, and stopped with them for a few days.

This high-souled patriarch, Rishi Rajnarayan Bose, a pioneer nationalist and religious and social reformer of Bengal, was then passing his old age in the peaceful retreat of Deoghar. Sri Aurobindo must have felt a great affinity with him. "Rajnarayan Bose", as Bepin Chandra Pal says, — and no views carry more weight than this political stalwart's who worked shoulder to shoulder with Sri Aurobindo for the country's freedom — "was one of the makers of modern Bengal. He started life as a social and religious reformer. In him it was not merely the spirit of Hinduism that rose up in arms against the onslaught of European Christianity, but the whole spirit of Indian culture and manhood stood up to defend and assert itself against every form of undue influence and alien domination. While Keshub[9] was seeking to reconstruct Indian and specially Hindu social life more or less after the modern European model, Rajnarayan's sturdy patriotism and national self-respect rebelled against the enormity, and came forward to establish the superiority of Hindu social economy to the Christian social institutions and ideals. He saw the onrush of European goods into Indian markets, and tried to stem the tide by quickening what we would now call the Swadeshi spirit, long before any one else had thought of it. It was under his inspiration that a Hindu Mela or National Exhibition was started a full quarter of a century before the Indian National Congress thought of an Indian Industrial Exhibition.... A strong conservatism, based upon a reasoned appreciation of the lofty spirituality of the ancient culture and

[9] Keshub Chandra Sen, one of the foremost leaders of the Brahmo Samaj.

civilisation of the country; a sensitive patriotism, born of a healthy and dignified pride of race; a deep piety expressing itself through all the varied practical relations of life — these were the characteristics of the life and thought of Rajnarayan Bose.... In his mind and life he was at once a Hindu Maharshi, a Moslem Sufi and a Christian theist of the Unitarian type... He...seemed to have worked out a synthesis in his own spiritual life between the three dominant world cultures that have come face to face in modern times... He was Aravinda's maternal grandfather; and Aravinda owed not only his rich spiritual nature but even his very superior literary capacity to his inherited endowments from his mother's line."[10]

When Sarojini was staying at Bankipore for her education, Sri Aurobindo used to help her with money from time to time. He also sent money to his mother. The following letter written by him to his sister from Baroda not only reveals his tender love for her and his lively humour, but his eager longing to get away from the cramping atmosphere of Baroda to Bengal, which he loved so dearly, and whose call he must have been hearing within him. Something of his love of Bengal is reflected in his poem on Bankim Chandra, from which we reproduce the following three lines:

> O plains, O hills, O rivers of sweet Bengal,
> O land of love and flowers, the spring-bird's call
> And southern wind are sweet among your trees.

"My dear Saro,

I got your letter the day before yesterday. I have been trying hard to write to you for the last three weeks, but have hitherto failed. Today I am making a huge effort and hope to put the letter in the post before nightfall. As I am invigorated by three days' leave, I almost think I shall succeed.

It will be, I fear, quite impossible to come to you again so early as the Puja, though if I only could, I should start tomorrow. Neither my affairs, nor my finances will admit of it. Indeed it was a great mistake to go at all,

[10] Rajnarayan Bose died in 1899. Sri Aurobindo wrote a sonnet on him: "Transiit, Non Periit".

for it has made Baroda quite intolerable to me. There is an old story about Judas Iscariot, which suits me down to the ground. Judas, after betraying Christ, hanged himself and went to Hell where he was honoured with the hottest oven in the whole establishment. Here he must burn for ever and ever; but in his life he had done one kind act and for this they permitted him by special mercy of God to cool himself for an hour every Christmas on an iceberg in the North Pole. Now this has always seemed to me not mercy, but a peculiar refinement of cruelty. For how could Hell fail to be ten times more Hell to the poor wretch after the delicious coolness of his iceberg? I do not know for what enormous crime I have been condemned to Baroda, but my case is just parallel. Since my pleasant sojourn with you at Baidyanath (Deoghar), Baroda seems a hundred times more Baroda...."[11]

Sarojini must have greatly enjoyed such an affectionate and entertaining letter from her brother. Describing her brother, she once said: "...a very delicate face, long hair cut in the English fashion, Sejda was a very shy person."

Sri Aurobindo used to pass many of his vacations at Baidyanath or Deoghar which, besides being an excellent health resort and a famous place of Hindu pilgrimage, is a lovely little town, half sleepy and half awake, with its delightful gardens, and its hills and rocks overlooking green fields and meadows. Pilgrims from all parts of India go there to worship the symbolic image of Shiva, carrying with them pots of pure Ganges water from long distances to pour upon the Deity.

Basanti Devi, daughter of Krishna Kumar Mitra and a cousin to Sri Aurobindo, says about him: "Auro Dada used to arrive with two or three trunks, and we always thought they must contain costly suits and other articles of luxury like scents etc. When he opened them, I would look into them and wonder. What is this? A few ordinary clothes and all the rest books and nothing but books. Does Auro Dada like to read all these? We all want to chat and enjoy ourselves in vacations; does he want to spend even this time in reading these books? But because he liked reading, it was

[11] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

not that he did not join us in our talks and chats and merry-making. His talk used to be full of wit and humour."[12] Sri Aurobindo wrote a poem on Basanti on one of her birthdays.

At Baroda Sri Aurobindo "was put first in the Settlement Department, not as an officer, but to learn the work, then in the Stamps and Revenue Departments; he was for some time put to work in the Secretariat for drawing up dispatches etc. Afterwards without joining the College and while doing other work, he was lecturer in French at the College, and finally at his request was appointed there as Professor of English. All through, the Maharaja used to call him whenever something had to be written which needed careful wording; he also employed him to prepare some of his public speeches and in other work of a literary or educational character." Afterwards Sri Aurobindo became Vice-Principal of the College and was for some time its acting Principal. "Most of the personal work for the Maharaja was done in an unofficial capacity.... There was no appointment as Private Secretary. He was usually invited to breakfast with the Maharaja at the Palace and stayed on to do this work."

Sri Aurobindo was loved and highly revered by his students[13] at Baroda College, not only for his profound knowledge of English literature and his brilliant and often original interpretations of English poetry, but for his saintly character and gentle and gracious manners. There was a magnetism in his personality, and an impalpable aura of a lofty ideal and a mighty purpose about him, which left a deep impression upon all who came in contact with him, particularly upon young hearts and unsophisticated minds. Calm and reserved, benign and benevolent, he easily became the

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[12] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

[13] Sri K.M. Munshi, ex-govemor of the Uttar Pradesh, who was one of the students of Sri Aurobindo at the Baroda College, writes: "My own contact with Sri Aurobindo dates back to 1902 when, after passing the Matriculation examination, I joined the Baroda College. Though previously I had, only on occasions, the privilege of being in personal contact with him, the Aurobindonian legend in the College filled me with reverence, and it was with awe that I hung upon his words whenever he came to College as Professor of English."

centre of respectful attention wherever he happened to be. To be close to him was to be quieted and quickened; to listen to him was to be fired and inspired. Indeed, his presence radiated something which was at once enlivening and exalting. His power sprang from his unshakable peace, and the secret of his hold on men lay in his utter self-effacement. His greatness was like the gentle breath of spring — invisible but irresistible, it touched all that was bare and bleak around him to a splendour of renewed life and creative energy.

In regard to his work at the Baroda College, he once remarked to some of his disciples: "He (Manmohan) was very painstaking. Most of the professors don't work so hard. I was not so conscientious as a professor. I never used to look at the notes, and sometimes my explanations did not agree with them at all.... What was surprising to me was that the students used to take down everything *verbatim* and mug it up. Such a thing would never have happened in England.... Once I was giving a lecture on Southey's *Life of Nelson.* My lecture was not in agreement with the notes. So the students remarked that it was not at all like what was found in the notes. I replied: 'I have not read the notes — in any case they are all rubbish!' I could never go to the minute details. I read and left my mind to do what it could. That is why I could never become a scholar."[14]

The testimony of one of his students, named R.N. Patkar,[15] will be found very interesting inasmuch as it throws some authentic light upon the way he lived at Baroda and did his teaching at the College:

"Sri Aurobindo was very simple in his mode of living. He was not at all fastidious in his tastes. He did not care much for food or dress, because he never attached any importance to them. He never visited the market for his clothes. At home, he dressed in plain white chaddar and dhoti, and outside invariably in white drill suits. He never slept on a soft cotton bed, as most of us do, but on a bed of coir — coconut fibres — on which was spread a Malabar grass mat which served as a bed sheet.

[14] Nirodbaran's Notes.

[15] R.N. Patkar, an advocate.

"Once I asked him why he used such a coarse and hard bed, to which he replied with his characteristic smile: 'Don't you know, my boy, that I am a Brahmachari? Our shastras enjoin that a Brahmachari should not use a soft bed.'[16]

"Another thing I observed about him was the total absence of love of money. He used to get the lump sum of three months' pay in a bag which he emptied in a tray lying on his table. He never bothered to keep money in a safe box under lock and key. He did not keep an account of what he spent. One day I casually asked him why he was keeping his money like that. He laughed and then replied: 'Well, it is a proof that we are living in the midst of honest and good people.' 'But you never keep an account which may testify to the honesty of the people around you?', I asked him. Then with a serene face he said: 'It is God who keeps account for me. He gives me as much as I want and keeps the rest to Himself. At any rate, He does not keep me in want, then why should I worry?'

"He used to be absorbed in reading to the extent that he was at times oblivious of the things around him. One evening the servant brought his meal and put the dishes on the table and informed him, 'Sab, khana rakha hai' — 'Master, the meal is served'. He simply said, 'Achchha' — 'All right', without even moving his head. After half an hour the servant returned to remove the dishes and found to his surprise the dishes untouched on the table! He dared not disturb his master, and so quietly came to me and told me about it. I had to go to his room and remind him of the waiting meal. He gave me a smile, went to the table and finished his meal in a short time and resumed his reading.

"I had the good fortune to be his student in the Intermediate class. His method of teaching was a novel one. In the beginning, he used to give a

[16] This simple, child-like faith in the injunctions of the Hindu Shastras, and a whole-hearted fidelity in following them was, indeed, characteristic of Sri Aurobindo in the Baroda period of his life, though the questing and questioning faculty of his mind was strong and alert, and his robust reason never abdicated its office. It was his intuition that guided him in such matters and satisfied his reason.

series of introductory lectures in order to initiate the students into the subject matter of the text. After that he used to read the text, stopping where necessary to explain the meaning of difficult words and sentences. He ended by giving general lectures bearing on the various aspects of the subject matter of the text.

"But more than his college lectures, it was a treat to hear him on the platform. He used to preside occasionally over the meetings of the College Debating Society. The large, central hall of the College used to be full when he was to speak. He was not an orator but was a speaker of a very high order, and was listened to with rapt attention. Without any gesture or movements of the limbs he stood, and language flowed like a stream from his lips with natural ease and melody that kept the audience spell-bound.... Though it is more than fifty years since I heard him, I still remember his figure and the metallic ring of his melodious voice."[17]

At Baroda, Sri Aurobindo stayed at first in a camp near the Bazar, and from there he moved to Khasirao Jadav's house. Khasirao, who was working as a magistrate under the Baroda State, was at that time living elsewhere with his family. His house was a beautiful, two-storeyed building, situated on a main road of the town. When Khasirao was transferred back to Baroda, Sri Aurobindo had to move to a house in another locality. After some time, when plague broke out there, he had to move again to another house, which was an old bungalow with a tiled roof. It was so old and in such bad repair that it used to be unbearably hot in summer, and, during the months of the monsoon, rain water leaked through its broken tiles. But, as Dinendra Kumar Roy[18] records in his Bengali book, *Aurobindo Prasanga*, it made no difference to Sri Aurobindo whether he lived in a palace or a hovel. Where he really dwelt, no tiles ever burned, nor did rain water leak. He was, to use an expression of the Gita, *aniketah*, one who had no separate dwelling of his own in the whole world. But it

[17] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

[18] We shall soon meet Dinendra Kumar Roy and enjoy his interesting pen-portrait of Sri Aurobindo.

was different with Dinendra Kumar. What with swarms of fleas by day and pitiless mosquitoes at night, burning tiles in summer and leaking roofs during the rains, the poor man was so disgusted that he damned the poky, ramshackle domicile as being worse than a rich man's stable.

Among Sri Aurobindo's friends at Baroda, mention may be made of Khasirao Jadav, Khasirao's younger brother, Lt. Madhavrao Jadav, who was very intimate with Sri Aurobindo and helped him in many ways in his political work, and Phadke, a young, orthodox Maratha Brahmin, who was a man of letters and had translated a few Bengali novels including Bankim Chandra's *Durgesh Nandini* into Marathi. Sri Aurobindo used to read Marathi with him from time to time. Phadke was of a genial temperament, cheerful and witty. Bapubhai Majumdar, a Gujarati Brahmin barrister, stayed with Sri Aurobindo for some time as his guest. He was a handsome man with an inexhaustible fund of comic stories. His laugh was contagious — it was hearty and hilarious. Sometimes his quips and jokes and droll yams would send Sri Aurobindo into bursts of laughter. He was afterwards appointed Chief Justice of a State in Gujarat.

Sri Aurobindo learnt both Marathi and Gujarati at Baroda. He also learnt a dialect of Marathi called Mori from a pundit. He had an aptitude for picking up languages with an amazing ease and rapidity. He learnt Bengali himself, and learnt it so well as to be able to read the poetry of Michael Madhusudan Dutt and the novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterji; and both of these authors are anything but easy. "Bengali was not a subject for the competitive examination for the I.C.S. It was after he had passed the competitive examination that Sri Aurobindo as a probationer who had chosen Bengal as his province began to learn Bengali. The course of study provided was a very poor one; his teacher, a retired English Judge from Bengal, was not very competent...." It is rather amusing to note that one day when Sri Aurobindo asked his teacher to explain to him a passage from Bankim Chandra Chatterji, he looked at the passage and remarked with the comic cocksureness of shallow knowledge: "But this is not Bengali!" Sri Aurobindo learnt Sanskrit himself without any help from anybody. He did not learn Sanskrit through Bengali, but direct in Sanskrit or through

English. But the marvel is that he mastered it as thoroughly and entered as deeply into its spirit and genius as he had done in the case of Greek and Latin. He "never studied Hindi, but his acquaintance with Sanskrit and other Indian languages made it easy for him to pick up Hindi without any regular study and to understand it when he read Hindi books or news-papers."

An exceptional mastery of Sanskrit at once opened to him the immense treasure-house of the Indian heritage. He read the Upanishads, the Gita, the Puranas, the two great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the poems of Bhartrihari, the dramas of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti etc., etc. Ancient India, the ageless India of spiritual culture and unwearied creative vitality, thus revealed herself to his wondering vision, and he discovered the secret of her unparalleled greatness. His soul caught fire. In discovering the greatness of India, he discovered himself — the greatness of his own soul, and the work it had come down to accomplish. It was a pregnant moment, when his soul burst out into a sudden blaze. It was a moment of reminiscence in the Platonic sense. It was a transforming revelation. Ancient India furnished him with the clue to the building of the greater India of the future.

Sri Aurobindo translated some portions of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, some dramas of Kalidasa, the Nitishataka of Bhartrihari, some poems of Vidyapati and Chandidas etc. into English. Once, when R. C. Dutt, the well-known civilian, came to Baroda at the invitation of the Maharaja, he somehow came to know about Sri Aurobindo's translations and expressed his desire to see them. Sri Aurobindo showed them to him (though not without reluctance, for he was by nature shy and reticent about himself), and Dutt was so much struck by their high quality that he said to Sri Aurobindo: "If I had seen your translations of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata before, I would not have published mine.[19] I can now very

[19] R. C. Dutt's translations of the two Epics were published in England and highly acclaimed.

well see that, by the side of your magnificent translations, mine appear as mere child's play."

Sri Aurobindo wrote many English poems during his stay at Baroda, and also began some which he finished later. The earliest draft of his great epic, *Savitri*, was begun there. His first book of poems, *Songs to Myrtilla and Other Poems*, was published there for private circulation. It contained many poems written in England in his teens, and five[20] written at Baroda. *Urvasi*, a long poem, was also written at Baroda and published for private circulation.[21] But we shall not go into any more details here about his poetical work at Baroda, for we propose to devote a whole separate chapter to his poetry, and study its growth and flowering. No biography of Sri Aurobindo can be said to be complete without an earnest attempt at a study of his poetical genius. For, as he has himself said, he was a poet first, and everything else afterwards. But he was a seer-poet, in the Vedic sense of the word, and a singer of the mystery and magnificence, the myriad worlds and wonders of creation — a mystic seer and a melodious singer of the divine Will, the divine Beauty and the divine Joy that flame and dance behind the fretful drift of our blind world.

[20] These five were: One on Madhusudan Dutt, one on Bankim Chandra Chatterji, a sonnet on his maternal grandfather, Rajnarayana Bose, and two English adaptations from Chandidas, the reputed Bengali mystic poet whom he read along with Vidyapati and others at Baroda.

[21] *Love and Death*, a long poem, and the drama, *Perseus the Deliverer*, belong also to Baroda period.

II

> *"He, who is an illimitable ocean of compassion, and as graceful as a cloud-bank charged with rain; in whom Lakshmi and Saraswati revel in endless felicity; whose Face is like an immaculate lotus in full bloom; who is adored by the kings and leaders of the gods; and whose Divine Nature has been hymned in the inspired words of the Vedas — may He, my Lord, the Master of the worlds, reveal Himself to my vision."*
>
> *"A Hymn to the Supreme Lord of the Universe"*
> *by Sri Chaitanya*

In the second year of his stay at Baroda, *i.e.* in 1894, Sri Aurobindo had another spiritual experience, which came in the same unexpected way as the first one he had at Apollo Bunder. One day, while he was going in a horse carriage, he suddenly found himself "in danger of an accident." But he had, at that very moment, "the vision of the Godhead surging up from within and averting the danger." "The Godhead surging up from within" was certainly a greater and more dynamic experience than the previous one of an encompassing calm, and must have left a powerful impression upon him. In 1939 he wrote a sonnet on this experience, which we quote below from his *Last Poems*.

THE GODHEAD

I sat behind the dance of Danger's hooves
In the shouting street that seemed a futurist's whim.
And suddenly felt, exceeding Nature's grooves,
In me, enveloping me the body of Him.

Above my head a mighty head was seen,
A face with the calm of immortality

And an omnipotent gaze that held the scene
In the vast circle of its sovereignty.

His hair was mingled with the sun and the breeze;
The world was in His heart and He was I:
I housed in me the Everlasting's peace,
The strength of One whose substance cannot die.

The moment passed and all was as before;
Only that deathless memory I bore.

In 1902 Sister Nivedita[22] visited Baroda. "I met Sister Nivedita at Baroda when she came to give some lectures there. I went to receive her at the station and take her to the house assigned to her; I also accompanied her to an interview she had sought with the Maharaja of Baroda. She had heard of me as one who believed in strength and was a worshipper of Kali, by which she meant she had heard of me as a revolutionary. I knew her already because I had read and admired her book, 'Kali the Mother'. It was in those days that we formed a friendship. After I had started my revolutionary work in Bengal through certain emissaries, I went there personally to see and arrange things myself. I found a number of small groups of revolutionaries that had recently sprung into existence but all scattered and acting without reference to each other. I tried to unite them under a single organisation with barrister P. Mitter as the leader of the revolution in Bengal and a council of five persons, one of them being Nivedita[23].

[22] Miss Margaret Elizabeth Noble, who was a disciple of Vivekananda and had made India her home. She was a great social and political worker known for her revolutionary ardour and outlook, and a powerful writer on religious, social and political problems.

[23] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

"I had no occasion to meet Nivedita after that until I settled in Bengal as Principal of the National College and the chief editorial writer of the *Bande Mataram*. By that time I had become one of the leaders of the public movement known first as extremism, then as nationalism, but this gave me no occasion to meet her except once or twice at the Congress, as my collaboration with her was solely in the secret revolutionary field. I was busy with my work and she with hers, and no occasion arose for consultation or decisions about the conduct of the revolutionary movement. Later on, I began to make time to go and see her occasionally at Baghbazar[24]".[25]

"Then, about my relations with Sister Nivedita, they were purely in the field of politics. Spirituality or spiritual matters did not enter into them, and I do not remember anything passing between us on these subjects when I was with her. Once or twice she showed the spiritual side of her, but she was then speaking to someone else who had come to see her while I was there.

"She was one of the revolutionary leaders. She went about visiting places to come in contact with the people. She was open and frank, and talked openly of her revolutionary plans to everybody. There was no concealment about her. Whenever she used to speak on revolution, it was her very soul, her true personality, that came out.... Yoga was Yoga, but it was that sort of work that was, as it were, intended for her. Her book, 'Kali the Mother' is very inspiring. She went about among the Thakurs of Rajputana trying to preach revolution to them.... Her eyes showed a power of concentration and revealed a capacity for going into trance. She had got something. She took up politics as a part of Vivekananda's work. Her book is one of the best on Vivekananda.... She was a solid worker."[26]

Sister Nivedita tried to rope in the Maharaja of Baroda into the revolutionary movement, but the response she received from the astute

[24] A northern locality in Calcutta.

[25] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother.*

[26] Nirodbaran's Notes.

ruler was rather cool and non-committal. He said he would send his reply through Sri Aurobindo, but "Sayajirao (the Maharaja) was much too cunning to plunge into such a dangerous business, and never spoke to me about it".[27]

In 1903 Sri Aurobindo took a month's leave and went to Bengal. His presence was required there to smooth out the differences that had arisen among some of the leading political workers. But he was soon called back by the Maharaja who wished that he should accompany him on his tour to Kashmir as his personal secretary.

In Kashmir, Sri Aurobindo had his third spiritual experience of a decisive character, as unexpected and unbidden as the first two, but of a capital importance from a certain standpoint. He says about it: "There was a realisation of the vacant Infinite[28] while walking on the ridge of the Takht-e-Suleiman in Kashmir". In 1939, he wrote the following sonnet on this experience:

ADWAITA

I walked on the high-wayed Seat of Solomon
    Where Shankaracharya's tiny temple stands
Facing Infinity from Time's edge, alone
    On the bare ridge ending earth's vain romance.

Around me was a formless solitude:
    All had become one strange Unnamable,
An unborn sole Reality world-nude,

[27] Nirodbaran's Notes.

[28] Vivekananda describes the beginning of a somewhat similar experience:

"But in the twinkling of an eye he (Ramakrishna) placed his right foot on my body. The touch at once gave rise to a novel experience within me. With my eyes open I saw that the walls, and everything in the room, whirled rapidly and vanished into naught, and the whole universe together with my individuality was about to merge in an all-encompassing mysterious Void".

Topless and fathomless, for ever still.

A Silence that was Being's only word,
The unknown beginning and the voiceless end
Abolishing all things moment-seen or heard,
On an incommunicable summit reigned,

A lonely Calm and void unchanging Peace
On the dumb crest of Nature's mysteries."[29]

The Kashmir tour with the Maharaja did not prove to be very happy. It was not in Sri Aurobindo's nature to admit encroachments upon his time of study and rest, and dance attendance on the Maharaja at all hours of the day or whenever he was summoned. The Maharaja respected and admired him for his noble character, his calm and penetrating intelligence, and his brilliance, quickness and efficiency, but was often put out by his habitual lack of punctuality and regularity; and it was this lack that caused "much friction between them during the tour."

Sri Aurobindo was Chairman of the Baroda College Union, and continued to preside over some of its debates until he left Baroda. His speeches used to be very inspiring, as we have already learnt from the record of advocate R.N. Patkar. He had also to deliver lectures at occasional functions at the palace. But so long as he was in State Service he studiously avoided introducing politics into his speeches. He used also to address the young students who had formed a Young Men's Union (Tarun Sangha) under his inspiration.

In 1901, Sri Aurobindo went to Bengal and married Srimati Mrinalini Bose, daughter of Bhupal Chandra Bose. Principal Girish Chandra Bose of the Bangabasi College, Calcutta, had acted as the go-between. Mrinalini Devi was fourteen years old at the time, and Sri Aurobindo twenty-nine. The marriage was celebrated according to Hindu rites, and the function was

[29] *Last Poems* by Sri Aurobindo.

attended by the great scientist, Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, Lord Sinha, barrister Byomkesh Chakravarty etc. As Sri Aurobindo had been to England, the question of expiation was raised by the orthodox section of the community, but Sri Aurobindo refused to do any expiation, even as his stout-hearted father had refused before him. At last a face-saving proposal came from the priests that Sri Aurobindo should shave his head. But Sri Aurobindo turned down this proposal also. Then "an obliging Brahmin priest satisfied all the requirements of the Shastra for a monetary consideration!"

After his marriage Sri Aurobindo went to Deoghar, and from there, he, his wife and his sister went to Nainital, a hill resort in the Himalayas. We get a reference to this place in his letter to one Bhuvan Chakravarty, who was probably a political worker in Bengal.

Dear Bhuvan Babu,

I have been here at Nainital with my wife and sister since the 29th of May. The place is a beautiful one, but not half so cold as I expected. In fact, in daytime it is only a shade less hot than Baroda except when it has been raining. The Maharaja will probably be leaving here on the 24th, — if there has been rain at Baroda, but as he will stop at Agra,[30] Mathura[31] and Mhow,[32] he will not reach Baroda before the beginning of July. I shall probably be going separately and may also reach on the first of July. If you like, you might go there a little before and put up with Despande. I have asked Madhavrao to get my new house furnished but I don't know what he is doing in that direction. Banerji is, I believe, in Calcutta. He came up to see me at Deoghar for a day.

Yours sincerely,
Aurobindo Ghose.[33]

[30] A town in the United Provinces, famous for the Tajmahal.

[31] A town in the United Provinces hallowed by memories of Sri Krishna.

[32] A small town in the United Provinces.

[33] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

Sri Aurobindo with his wife Mrinalini Devi at Nainital, 1901

Regarding his married life and relations with his wife, nothing can be more revealing than his letters to her, written in Bengali. These letters are, moreover, Sri Aurobindo's first confession of faith, the first verbal statement of the sleepless aspiration of his soul. Here we perceive his

inextinguishable thirst for God, his intense yearning to see Him,[34] and his unfaltering resolve to be a flawless instrument in His hands. We perceive that behind the surge and glow of his militant nationalism, there was the blazing fire of a spiritual aim. In the light of this secret communication to his wife, we seem to understand something of what he meant when, later, in his Uttarpara Speech, he said: "I came to Him long ago in Baroda, some years before the Swadeshi began and I was drawn into the public field"; and again when he said in the same Speech: "The Sanatana Dharma, that is Nationalism." His fervent patriotism was but a spark of his soul's spiritual fire. He loved Mother India with such a self-effacing ardour, because he saw the Divine Mother behind her; and love for the Divine Mother was inherent in him, suffusing and animating every fibre of his being. It was the overmastering passion of his soul. And it was this love for the Divine — in the beginning it was an imperceptible influence[35] — that made him a nationalist. Even when he found himself irresistibly drawn towards Mother India and the work of national freedom, he was secretly drawn towards God and led by His Will. His nationalism was much more than mere nationalism, it was much more than internationalism — it was spiritual universalism, if one can so put it. His Nationalism was Sanatana Dharma. It led him to toil all his life for the divine fulfilment of the whole human race, for God in man and man in God.

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[34] The most progressive Hindu mind is never satisfied with anything less than "seeing" God. When Swami Vivekananda met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time, he put the same question to him: "Have you seen God?". He had put the same question to Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore, father of Rabindra Nath Tagore. The question is typical of spiritual aspirants in India. And no less typical was the breath-taking reply Sri Ramakrishna gave to Vivekananda: "Yes, my boy, I have seen Him, I have talked with Him, and I can make you see Him." In ancient India, the Rishis who guided the society were such seers of God, living light houses for the sea-faring souls of men.

[35] "It was something from behind which got the idea accepted by the mind; mine was a side door entry into the spiritual life." *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

The goal which Sri Aurobindo held up before himself at that early age when he wrote these letters to his wife, was not escape, not Nirvana,[36] but God; not extinction of life, but its expansion and enrichment, its divine illumination, utilisation and fulfilment. Something in him intuitively revolted against the ascetic flight from life. "But I had thought that a Yoga which required me to give up the world was not for me," he observed once. His study of the spiritual culture of ancient India had left no doubt in his mind of its "stupendous vitality", its "inexhaustible power of life and joy of life", its "almost unimaginable prolific creativeness". Ancient Indian spirituality was not a despairing gospel of world-disgust and supine quiescence, whatever may have been the passing symptoms of its long period of decline. It was a virile affirmation of life, but of a life for God and in God; it was a perpetual call to divine self-expression in creative action. Sri Aurobindo's whole being responded to this ancient call. He was a born warrior whose spiritual nerves knew no shrinking from the assaults of the world-forces. He spurned all thought of escape, for, as he has expressed it in his epic poem, *Savitri*, "Escape brings not the victory and the crown." He resolved to discover the solution of the riddle of the world at the heart of the riddle itself. He laboured for God's victory on earth, for establishing God's Kingdom of Light in this dim vale of tears, for transforming suffering itself into the eternal bliss and blessedness of the Divine. Does not the Upanishad declare that, not sorrow and suffering, but Ananda or bliss is the eternal substratum, the sustaining sap and essence of existence? Sri Aurobindo resolved to fight for crowning the ascending spiral of evolution with the glory of the long-dreamt-of divine Manifestation.

His letters to his wife vibrate with this resolve, and contain the seed of the whole subsequent unfoldment of his life. There is another thing in them,

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[36] "To reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my own Yoga.... I lived in that Nirvana day and night before it began to admit other things into itself at all... Nirvana in my liberated consciousness turned out to be the beginning of my realisation, a first step towards the complete thing, not the sole, true attainment possible, or even a culminating finale." *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother.*

which at once arrests attention: it is his complete, unreserved, and joyous surrender to God. The whole secret of Sri Aurobindo's greatness lies in this integral surrender. But more of this when we come to study his spiritual life.

We offer below an English translation of some of the most important passages from Sri Aurobindo's letters to his wife:

My dearest Mrinalini,

I have received your letter of the 24th August. I am distressed to learn that your parents have again been stricken with the same kind of bereavement; but you have not mentioned which of their sons has passed away. Grief is all too natural, but what does it avail? One who goes in search of happiness in the world finds sorrow at the core of it: sorrow is ever bound up with happiness. And this law holds good not only in regard to one's desire for offspring, it is the inevitable result of all worldly desires. The only remedy is to offer all joy and grief with a calm mind to the Divine.

Now, let me tell you about the other matter. You must have realised by now that the person with whom your fate is linked is a very strange one. I don't have the same kind of mental outlook, the same aim in life, the same field of action as most men have in the modern time. *With me all is different, all is uncommon.*[37] You know what the common run of men think of extraordinary ideas, extraordinary endeavours, and extraordinarily high aspirations. They call all that madness. But if the mad man succeeds in his field of action, instead of calling him mad, they call him a great man of genius. But how many of such men succeed? Out of a thousand, only ten may be extraordinary, and out of those ten, only one may succeed. Far from having had any success in my field of action, I have not been able to enter it. So, you may consider me a mad man. It is very unfortunate, indeed, for a woman to have her lot cast in with a mad man; for, all the hopes and

[37] Italics are ours.

desires of women are confined to the joys and sorrows of the family. A mad man cannot make his wife happy, rather he causes her no end of trouble and suffering.

The founders of the Hindu religion were aware of it. They greatly cherished and valued extraordinary character, extraordinary endeavour, and extraordinary dreams. They had a high regard for all extraordinary men, whether great or insane. But what remedy is there for the pitiable misery of the wife in such a case? The Rishis prescribed the following remedy: They said to women: Your only mantram (a formula embodying the guiding principle of life) should be that the husband alone is the supreme Guru (spiritual master) of his wife. The wife is the partner of his spiritual life. The wife should help her husband with her counsel and encouragement in all that he accepts as his Dharma or religious duty. She should regard him as her god[38] and share his joys and sorrows. It is for the husband to choose his vocation, and for the wife to aid and encourage him in it.

Now the question is: Will you tread the path of Hinduism or follow the ways of modern civilisation? That you have been married to a mad man is a consequence of some evil deed committed by you in your past life. You had better make terms with your fate. But what sort of terms? Swayed by the opinion of others, will you just airily put him down as a mad man? The mad man cannot help pursuing his path of madness, and you cannot hold him back — his nature is stronger than you. Will you, then, sit in a corner and weep your heart out? Or run along with him on his chosen road, and try to be the mad wife of a mad husband, even as the wife of the blind king (Dhritarashtra)[39] bandaged her eyes in order to share her husband's blindness? Whatever training you may have had at a Brahmo school, you

[38] cf. Manu: "Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife. If a wife obeys her husband, she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven."

[39] The blind father of the Kauravas in the Mahabharata.

belong to a Hindu family, and the blood of our Hindu forefathers runs in your veins. I have no doubt that you will follow the latter course.

I have three manias, one might call them madness. The first is that I firmly believe that the qualities, talent, higher education and learning, and wealth God has given me, all belong to Him, and that I am entitled to use only so much of them as is necessary for the maintenance of the family, and whatever else is thought indispensable; and all that remains should be returned to God. If I used everything for myself, for my own pleasure and luxury, I should be a thief. According to the sacred books of the Hindus, he who does not render unto God what he has received from Him is a thief. Up till now, I have rendered only one-eighth to God and used for my personal pleasures the remaining seven-eighths. And, settling my accounts in this way, I have been passing my days in a state of infatuation with worldly pleasures. Half of my life has gone in vain. Even the animal is not without the gratification of feeding himself and his family.

It is clear to me now that so long I have been indulging my animal propensities, and leading the life of a thief. It has filled me with great remorse and self-contempt. No more of it. I give up this sin for good and all. To offer money to God is to spend it in sacred causes. I don't regret having helped Sarojini and Usha with money — to help others is a virtue; to protect those who have taken refuge with you is a great virtue, indeed. But all is not done by giving only to our brothers and sisters. The whole country, in its present plight, is at my door, seeking for shelter and help. There are three hundred millions of my brethren in this land, of whom many are dying of starvation, and most, afflicted with sorrow and suffering, drag on a wretched, precarious existence. It is our duty to do good to them.

Tell me, will you, as my wife, participate with me in this Dharma? I wish to live like an ordinary man and spend on food and clothing no more than what an ordinary man of average means spends on them, and to offer the rest to God. But my wish will be fulfilled only if you agree with me and are ready for the sacrifice. You were complaining of not having made any progress. This is a path of progress I am pointing to; will you follow it?

The second mania is a recent possession. It is that, by whatever means possible, I must see God face to face. Modern religion consists in glibly mouthing God's name at all hours, saying one's prayers when others are looking on, and showing off how devout one is! This is not the sort of religion I want to practise. If God exists, there must be some way or other of realising His existence and meeting Him. However hard and rugged the way, I am resolved to tread it. Hinduism declares that the way lies in one's body and mind; and it has laid down certain rules for following the way. I have begun to observe these rules, and a month's practice has led me to realise the truth of what Hinduism teaches. I am experiencing all the signs and symptoms it speaks of. I should like to take you with me along this path. It is true, you will not be able to walk abreast of me, for you lack the knowledge necessary for it; but there is nothing to prevent you from following me. All can attain to the goal by treading this path; but it depends upon one's will whether one should take to it or not. None can drag you along upon it. If you are willing, I shall write to you more on this subject later.

The third mania is this: Others look upon their country as a mass of matter, comprising a number of fields, plains, forests, mountains and rivers, and nothing more. I look upon it as my mother. I revere and adore it. What does a son do when he sees a demon sitting upon his mother's chest and about to drink her life-blood? Does he sit down to his meals with a quiet mind and enjoy himself in the company of his wife and children? Or, does he run to the rescue of his mother? *I know I have the power to redeem this fallen race*.[40] It is not physical power — *I am not going to fight with sword or gun — but the power of knowledge*.[41] The prowess of the Kshatriya (warrior) is not the only power; there is another power, the fire-power of the Brahmin, which is founded in knowledge. This is not a new idea or a new feeling, I have not imbibed it from modern culture — *I was born with it. It is in the marrow of my bones. It is to accomplish this mission*

[40] Italics are ours.

[41] Italics are ours.

that God has sent me to the earth.[42] The seed began to sprout when I was only fourteen, it took firm root when I was eighteen. My aunt has made you believe that some bad man has led your good-natured husband astray; but, in fact, it is your good-natured husband who has led that man and hundreds of others to the path, be it good or evil, and will yet lead thousands of others too. I don't presume to assert that fulfilment will come during my life time, but come it will.

Well, what, then, will be your decision in this matter? The wife is the Shakti (power) of the husband. Are you going to be a disciple of Usha and practise the cult of worship of the Europeans? Will you lessen the power of your husband, or double it by your sympathy and encouragement? You may say: "What can an ordinary girl like me do in such great matters? I lack mental strength, I lack intelligence; I am afraid even to think of these things." There is an easy solution. Take refuge in God, enter the path of God-realisation; He will soon make good the deficiencies you have. Fear gradually fades out of the person who has taken refuge in the Divine. Besides, if you put your trust in me, and listen to me instead of listening to others, I can give you out of my own power, which will increase rather than diminish by it. It is said that the wife is the Shakti (power) of the husband, which means that the husband's power is doubled when he sees his own image and hears the resonance of his own high aspiration in his wife....

You have a natural tendency towards unselfishness and doing good to others. The only thing you lack is strength of will. It will come by turning to God with love and adoration.

This is the secret thing I wanted to tell you. Don't breathe a word of it to anybody. Ponder over these things with a tranquil mind. There is nothing in it to be afraid of, but plenty to ponder over. In the beginning it will be enough for you to meditate on God for only half an hour every day, and to express your ardent will to Him in the form of a prayer. By and by, the mind will be prepared. Always pray to Him: "May I be of constant help to

[42] Italics are ours.

my husband in his life, his aim, and his endeavours for realising the Divine, and serve him as his instrument, and not stand in the way of his progress."

Your husband

23, Scott's Lane,
Calcutta,
February 17, 1907.

My dear Mrinalini,

...I was to have seen you on the 8th January, but could not, not because I was unwilling, but because God willed otherwise. I had to go where he led me. This time it was not for my own work that I went, it was for His. The state of my mind has undergone a change, but I shall not tell you anything about it in this letter. When you come here, I will tell you all I have to tell. For the moment I have to let you know only this that I am no longer my own master. *Where God leads me I have to go, what He makes me do I have to do, just like a puppet*.[43] It will be difficult for you to understand now what I mean, but it is necessary to inform you, otherwise my movements may give rise to grievances in you and make you suffer. Don't think that I am neglecting you in my preoccupation with my work. Up till now I have often sinned against you, and it was but natural that you were displeased with me. But I am no longer free. You have henceforth to understand that *all that I do depends not upon my will, but upon the command of God.*[44] When you come here, you will be able to grasp the sense of what I say. I hope God will show you the light of His boundless Grace, even as He has shown it to me; but it all depends upon His Will. If you wish, as my wife, to share with me a common spiritual life, try your utmost to exert your will, so that He may reveal to you also the path of Grace. Don't show this letter to anybody, because what I have communicated to

[43] Italics are ours.

[44] Italics are ours.

you is extremely confidential. I haven't spoken about it to anybody else; it is forbidden. No more today.[45]

Your husband

Mrinalini Devi "lived always with the family of Girish Bose, Principal of Bangabasi College". Once, when Sri Aurobindo was at Pondicherry, his brother-in-law wrote to him, urging him to return to Bengal and lead a householder's life. Sri Aurobindo wrote the following letter in reply.

"...You want me to live as an ordinary householder and, I suppose, practise some kind of meditation or sadhana in the time I can spare from my work and my family duties. This would have been possible if what I am called to do were an ordinary sadhana of occasional meditation which would leave the rest of my life untouched. But I wrote to you that I feel called to the spiritual life, and that means that my whole life becomes part of the sadhana. This can only be done in the proper conditions, and I do not see how it is possible in the ordinary life of the family and its surroundings. You all say that God will not bless my sadhana, and it will not succeed; but what I feel is that it is He who has called me; my whole reliance is on Him and it is solely on His Grace and Will that my success in the sadhana depends. The best way to deserve that Grace is to give myself entirely into His hands and to seek Him and Him alone. This is my feeling and my condition, and I hope you will see that this being so I cannot do what you ask for."

[45] These letters were not meant for the public — they were a secret communication to his wife. But during the searches that took place in 1908, they were seized by the British police and, later, produced in the Alipur court when Sri Aurobindo was being tried, after a year's detention in the Alipur jail, on a false charge of sedition. The letters thus came to see the light of day; and here they are, a priceless treasure for Sri Aurobindo's biographers. They mirror Sri Aurobindo's heart and soul as nothing else of that period does. His next self-revelation was in his famous Uttarpara Speech. But of that later.

Mrinalini Devi lived on in Calcutta till her death in 1918. She was fortunate enough to receive initiation from Sri Sarada Devi, the saintly wife of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Aurobindo once remarked in this connection: "I was given to understand that she was taken there (to Sri Sarada Devi) by Sudhira Bose, Debabrata's[46] sister. I heard of it a considerable time afterwards in Pondicherry. I was glad to know that she had found so great a spiritual refuge, but I had no hand in bringing it about."[47]

[46] A fellow-worker of Sri Aurobindo in the political field. He later joined the Ramakrishna Mission.

[47] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

III

> *"I know what is righteous, but I feel no urge towards it; I know what is unrighteous, but I do not feel inclined to desist from it. According as Thou, O Lord, seated in my heart, appointest me, so do I act."*[48]

Before we pass on to the next subject, it would be rewarding to look a little more carefully into a few statements made by Sri Aurobindo in his letters to his wife, for they not only show that he had a clear prevision of the mission of his life, but mirror the crucial stages of spiritual development through which he was sweeping during the latter part of his stay at Baroda and the beginning of his political life in Bengal. They are, as it were, a blue print of his whole life and, from that standpoint at least, most important.

First of all, he speaks of the three manias, which were the dynamic forces moulding his life and nature. The first, the will to consecrate all he was and all he had to God: "I firmly believe that the qualities, talent, higher education and learning, and money God has given me, all belong to Him." The second, a consuming passion for realising God: "I must see God face to face." The third, his resolve to raise India to her full divine stature for the redemption of mankind: "I look upon it (my country) as my mother. I revere and adore her."[49] Self-consecration, God-realisation, and the service

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[48] "Tell me of That which thou seest otherwhere than in virtue and otherwhere than in unrighteousness..." — *Kathopanishad.*

"One whose intelligence has attained to unity, casts away from him even here in this world of dualities both good doing and evil doing..." — *The Gita.*

"... He (the divine worker) has passed even beyond that distinction of sin and virtue which is so all-important to the human soul while it is struggling to minimise the hold of its egoism and lighten the heavy and violent yoke of its passion." — *Essays on the Gita,* Sri Aurobindo.

[49] In reply to Nirodbaran's question whether Sri Aurobindo looked upon India as the living Mother, he wrote: "My dear Sir, I am not a materialist. If I had seen India as only a geographical area with a number of more or less interesting people in it, I

of the country as the service of the divine Mother, these three passions of his soul were really three aspects of the single mission of his life, which was a dynamic and creative union with the Divine for fulfilling His purpose on earth. But the precise nature of his mission will become more and more clear to us, as we proceed, studying the succeeding phases of his outer life and what he has himself said about them and about his thoughts and ideas in his voluminous letters and other writings.

These three master passions dominated three principal stages of Sri Aurobindo's life. The cult of spiritual patriotism dominated the first stage; the will to total self-offering to God, the second; and divine realisation and manifestation, the third. But it must not be supposed that each of them worked by itself, during the period of its domination, to the exclusion of the others. Essentially they formed an organic unity, each helping the others, and all contributing to the accomplishment of his life's work.

The patriotism which fired his being since his boyhood was not a mere love of the country of his birth, and a yearning for its freedom and greatness. It was worship of India, as we have already seen, as the living embodiment of the highest spiritual knowledge, and the repository of the sublimest spiritual achievements of the human race. He had no narrow partisan patriotism that attaches a person to his own country and makes him regard it as the greatest and best. He loved and adored India, because he knew that in the present Chaturyuga (a cycle of four ages: Satya, Treta, Dwapara, and Kali) India was destined to be the custodian of the supreme knowledge, and the leader of the world in the ways of the Spirit[50] — a fact which is being more and more realised and acknowledged by the master minds of the present age. He looked upon India as the spiritual battlefield of the world where the final victory over the forces of the Ignorance and darkness would be achieved. The following lines from his *The Yoga and Its*

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would hardly have gone out of my way to do all that for the said area." — *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo* by Nirodbaran, Part I.

[50] "India must become dynamic and effect the conquest of the world through her spirituality." — Vivekananda

Objects throw a flood of light on this point and explain his spiritual nationalism:

"God always keeps for Himself a chosen country in which the higher knowledge is, through all chances and dangers, by the few or the many, continually preserved, and for the present, in this Chaturyuga at least, that country is India.... When there is the contracted movement of knowledge, the Yogins in India withdraw from the world and practise Yoga for their own liberation and delight or for the liberation of a few disciples; but when the movement of knowledge again expands and the soul of India expands with it, they come forth once more and work in the world and for the world.... It is only India that can discover the harmony, because it is only by a change — not a mere readjustment — of present nature that it can be developed, and such a change is not possible except by Yoga. The nature of man and of things is at present a discord, a harmony that has got out of tune. The whole heart and action and mind of man must be changed but from within and not from without, not by political and social institutions, not even by creeds and philosophies, but by realisation of God in ourselves and the world and a remoulding of life by that realisation."

In the light of these words we understand something of the fiery intensity of love and devotion and prophetic ardour with which Sri Aurobindo flung himself into the national movement and the privations and hardships it entailed. He did not consider it a sacrifice at all to throw away his brilliant prospects at Baroda in order to be able to serve his country as a politician, because he believed and knew that it was really God and His approaching manifestation that he was serving. If we do not take special note of this spiritual side of his nationalism, we shall miss all the significance of his political activities and create an unbridgeable gulf between the first part of his life and the last, as has been done by many of his countrymen. If Sri Aurobindo thirsted and strove for India's political freedom, it was because he wanted the ancient spirituality of India to triumph again, more extensively than ever before, in the world of Matter,

and weave a rich, many-coloured tapestry of organic perfection for man. He knew that India was nothing without her spirituality, for her spirituality pervades her whole being, and that spirituality is not of much value, so far as our earthly existence is concerned, without its message and ministrations to life. And he knew also that India is the land of the most virile and dynamic spirituality, the land where, in the hey-day of its culture, every action of life was sought to be done as a sacrament and a living sacrifice to the Supreme. Politics offered him the first means to rouse the ancient nation into a compelling sense of its inherent spiritual potentiality and a sustained endeavour to recover its rightful place in the world. Dwelling upon the aims and bearings of his politics, Sri Aurobindo says in his *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*:

"A nation is building in India today before the eyes of the world so swiftly, so palpably, that all can watch the process and those who have sympathy and intuition distinguish the forces at work, the materials in use, the lines of the divine architecture.... Formerly a congeries of kindred nations with a single life and a single culture, always by the excess of fecundity engendering fresh diversities and divisions, it has never yet been able to overcome permanently the most insuperable obstacles to the organisation of a continent. The time has now come when those obstacles can be overcome. The attempt which our race has been making throughout its long history, it will now make under entirely new circumstances. A keen observer would predict its success, because the only important obstacles have been or are in process of being removed. But we go further and believe that it is sure to succeed because *the freedom, unity and greatness of India have now become necessary to the world*....[51] We believe that God is with us and in that faith we shall conquer. *We believe that humanity needs us*[52] and it is the love and service of humanity, of our country, of the race, of

[51] Italics are ours.

[52] Italics are ours.

our religion that will purify our heart and inspire our action in the struggle."

That Sri Aurobindo's politics and militant nationalism were nothing but a seething focus of a world-transforming spirituality is amply attested even by his very early writings. In his *The Ideal of the Katmayogin* he says:

"There is a mighty law of life, a great principle of human evolution, a body of spiritual knowledge and experience of which India has always been destined to be guardian, exemplar and missionary. This is the Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion. Under the stress of alien impacts she has largely lost hold not of the structure of that dharma, but of its living reality. For the religion of India is nothing if it is not lived. It has to be applied not only to life, but to the whole of life; its spirit has to enter into and mould our society, our politics, our literature, our science, our individual character, affections and aspiration. To understand the heart of this dharma, to experience it as a truth, to feel the high emotions to which it rises and to express and execute it in life is what we understand by Karmayoga. We believe that it is to make Yoga the ideal of human life that India rises today; by the Yoga she will get the strength to realise her freedom, unity and greatness; by the Yoga she will keep the strength to preserve it. It is a spiritual revolution we foresee and the material is only its shadow and reflex."

In connection with the three master passions of his life, it is interesting to note that before Sri Aurobindo's arrival at Pondicherry, where he settled and lived after his retirement from active political life (from 1910 to 1950), a famous South Indian Yogi had made a prediction that "thirty years later (agreeing with the time of my arrival) a Yogi from the North would come as a fugitive to the South and practise there an integral Yoga (Poorna Yoga), and this would be one sign of the approaching liberty of India. He

gave three utterances as the mark by which this Yogi could be recognised and all these three were found in the letters to my wife....”[53]

In his first letter to his wife, written from Baroda and dated 30th August, 1905, Sri Aurobindo writes: “Hinduism declares that the way lies within one’s body and mind, and it has laid down certain rules which have to be observed for following the way. I have begun observing these rules, and a month’s practice has led me to realise the truth of what Hinduism teaches. I am already experiencing all the signs and symptoms it speaks of....” The observance of the rules laid down by Hinduism was done with such a superhuman intensity of the soul’s will and the heart’s devotion that in the course of a single month Sri Aurobindo achieved what, even in exceptional cases, takes long years of strenuous struggle to come to fruition. “I am experiencing all the signs and symptoms it speaks of....” It appears as if the floodgates of spiritual experience had been thrown open to him.

“I have the power to redeem this fallen race. It is not physical power — I am not going to fight with sword or gun — but the power of knowledge. The prowess of the Kshatriya is not the only power; there is another power, the fire-power of the Brahmin, which is founded in knowledge. This is not a new feeling, I have not imbibed it from modern culture — I was born with it. It is in the marrow of my bones. It is to accomplish this great mission that God has sent me to the earth.”

We know that Sri Aurobindo was temperamentally reserved. His answers to questions except when he was in the company of his close friends, used to be usually in the monosyllabic “yes” or “no”. His Bengali tutor, Dinendra Kumar Roy, relates that Sri Aurobindo once told him that the less one speaks about oneself the better. But in the paragraph, quoted above, he does not mince his words. We do not find in it the modesty and reticence characteristic of him in regard to personal matters.[54] Here he

[53] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

[54] “I do not care a button about having my name in any blessed place. I was never ardent about fame even in my political days: I preferred to remain behind the curtain,

evidently speaks from a super-personal consciousness. Here we find the unmistakable ring of the Divine Consciousness-Force (Chit-Tapas) uttering its Will. When God speaks through the chosen soul of man, He speaks in such accents of fire. It is undeniable that, apart from the spiritual experiences he had had, there must have awakened in him something or Someone that could speak in such a prophetic tone of sovereign power. For, many can have high spiritual experiences and enjoy some kind of union and communion with the Supreme Reality, but who can speak in this categoric strain of absolute certitude, unless God speaks directly through his voice: "I know (it was a knowledge with him, not a mere aspiration or resolve) I have the power to redeem this fallen race." He further asserts with disarming candour and forthrightness that he was born with this power, that it was bred in his bones, and that to accomplish this mission God had sent him to the earth.

"The seed began to sprout when I was only fourteen; it took firm root when I was eighteen." When he was fourteen years old, he was in England, knowing practically nothing of India, Indian culture, or the political and economic condition of India, let alone Indian spirituality. He knew next to nothing of Yoga. The seed that he speaks of must then have been a spontaneous inner awakening, a lightning flash of his soul's consciousness of its life-work. The seed took firm root and became stable and secure when he was eighteen. It can, therefore, be confidently stated that it was not, evidently, his practice of Yoga, which he began in 1904 (when he was about thirty-one years old), or his study of the sacred books of his country (which he began when he was twenty-two or twenty-three years old), that gave him the foreknowledge of his life's mission. It was something he had felt and perceived growing within himself in England.[55] And it is only in the light of this mystic prescience that we can explain the sudden, unsought-for,

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push people without their knowing it and get things done." — *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

[55] "...But this began in London..." *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo,* Part I, by Nirodbaran.

decisive experiences and realisations that descended upon him like an avalanche ever since he set foot on the soil of his motherland. Yoga did not make him conscious of his mission, it only led him along on the way to its accomplishment. Yoga did not awaken his soul, it was his soul that spontaneously blossomed through Yoga. And that he was not only conscious of his life's mission but of the precise nature and extent of it, is proved by his intuitive recoil from all forms of ascetic, world-shunning spirituality. When perceiving the decided bent of his mind, his Cambridge friend, K.G. Despande, advised him to practise Yoga, he flatly refused, saying that it would lure him away from the life of action. In his essays on Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the maker of modern Bengali prose and the inspired writer of the national anthem, Bandemataram, he wrote: "The clear serenity of the man showed itself in his refusal to admit asceticism among the essentials of religion." He knew pretty well that his work would embrace all life and its activities, and that it was to the creation of a vigorous, dynamic, practical spirituality, capable of flooding all earthly existence with the treasures of the Spirit that he was called. He must have heard the dumb appeal of Matter for a restitution of its innate divinity. For, Matter, too, is Brahman, *annam brahma*.

Another thing that stands out in his letters to his wife is the phenomenal rapidity of his spiritual progress just after he began the practice of Yoga. Not only the signs and symptoms we have referred to and which fortified his intuitive faith in Hinduism, but a more positive result, characteristic of his integral approach to spirituality, flows at once from his self-surrender to God. "For the moment I have to let you know only this that I am no longer my own master. Where God leads me I have to go, what he makes me do I have to do, just like a puppet.... You have henceforth to understand that nothing that I do depends upon my will, but upon the command of God...." This state of being completely possessed by the Divine and moved by Him even in one's physical action is, as Sri Aurobindo afterwards so often explained in his letters to his disciples and in his writings on Yoga, the inevitable result of an unreserved surrender of the whole being of man, including his body and all its movements, to God. But it can be achieved

only after a long practice of the Integral Yoga. But, in his case, it was achieved in the course of about a couple of years. He was being *led by God in all that he was doing*. It can, therefore, be easily concluded that his politics, almost from the beginning of its active phase, was shaped and guided by unseen directives. It was the politics of a Yogi. And it would be irrational, for those at least who believe in unseen directives, to judge his political utterances and activities, either by the canons of current political theories and rules of expediency, or by the puny standards of unrealistic mental ethics. He did what he was led to do, in the spirit of the verse we have quoted at the head of this essay, with a joyous confidence in the wisdom of God's guidance.

There is yet another thing that arrests attention in his letters to his wife. It is that he never thought that the final emancipation of India would come by the power of sword or gun. "It is not physical power — I am not going to fight with sword or gun —". He wanted the political freedom of India as a step and means to the freedom and fulfilment of her soul, to a spiritual reconstruction of her thought, life and society. That can be done only by Brahma-teja, the blazing power of spiritual knowledge. He perceived that the power was in himself, he felt that it was growing in him, and he knew that it would never fail him. His politics was a prelude to his greater and wider spiritual work of raising humanity to a higher level of consciousness, which is, he knew, the immediate urge of evolutionary nature; it was not inconsistent with his spirituality. Even when he left Bengal, he left only his political field of work, but not politics. "He kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action." His poetry and politics, his philosophy and Yoga were all of a piece — they composed a coherent, integrated, harmonious whole.

We shall now offer to the reader the intimate pen-picture of Sri Aurobindo by Dinendra Kumar Roy, which we have promised.[56] Dinendra

[56] "Dinendra Kumar Roy lived with Sri Aurobindo in Baroda as a companion and his work was rather to help him to correct and perfect his knowledge of the language and

Kumar was a distinguished man of letters in Bengal. He was sent by the maternal uncle of Sri Aurobindo to help him learn the Bengali language, particularly its colloquial form and pronunciation. Dinendra Kumar stayed with Sri Aurobindo in the same house for a little over two years from 1898, and had the opportunity of making a close study of his life and nature. His testimony, besides being authentic, affords glimpses of Sri Aurobindo's private life, which we get nowhere else. Here we see how he lived from day to day, what were his habits, his tastes, his characteristic reactions to men and things, his instinctive gestures and chance utterances, his views on some of his well-known contemporaries etc. — little details and sudden flashes which, according to Vivekananda, reveal the greatness of a great man more than his deliberate thoughts and public actions. We are giving below an English version of some portions of Dinendra Kumar's Bengali book, *Aurobindo Prasanga*.

"My beloved friend, late Suresh Chandra Samajpati,[57] once told me: 'When Aurobindo was at Baroda very few Bengalis knew him or recognised his worth. Nobody was aware of the treasure that lay hidden in the desert of Gujarat.... But during his long stay there, you were the only Bengali who was fortunate enough to have the opportunity of knowing him intimately and observing him at close quarters for some time.... Today new Bengal is eager to hear about him....' Today millions of Bengali readers are, indeed, very anxious to know something of the past life of Aurobindo. I hope the holy saga of the life of this dedicated servant of Mother India will not be disregarded by the youth of Bengal.

"What little I know of him is derived from my personal experience. When I was asked to coach Aurobindo in Bengali, I felt rather nervous. Aurobindo was a profound scholar. He had secured record marks in Latin and Greek in his I.C.S. examination. He had received heaps of books as

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to accustom him to conversation in Bengali than any regular teaching." — *Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram.*

[57] One of the leading journalists in contemporary Bengal.

prizes from the London University. Among those books, there was an exquisite illustrated edition of the Arabian Nights... in sixteen volumes, which I later saw in his study. I had never seen such a voluminous edition of that book — it dwarfed even the Mahabharata in bulk, looking, as it did, like sixteen volumes of the Webster's Dictionary. It had innumerable pictures in it....

"Before I met Aurobindo, I had formed an image of him somewhat like this: a stalwart figure, dressed from head to foot in immaculate European style, a stem gaze in his spectacled eyes, a distorted accent and a temper exceedingly rough, one who would not tolerate the slightest breach of form. It is needless to add that I was rather disappointed in my estimate when I saw him for the first time. Who could have thought that this darkish young man with soft dreamy eyes[58] and long, thin, wavy hair parted in the middle and reaching to the neck, clad in coarse Ahmedabad dhoti and close-fitting Indian jacket, his feet shod in old-fashioned Indian slippers with upturned toes, a face sparsely dotted with pock-marks — who could have thought that this man could be no other than Mr. Aurobindo Ghose, a living fountain of French, Latin... and Greek? I could not have received a bigger shock if someone had pointed to the hillocks about Deoghar and said: 'Look, there stand the Himalayas'.[59] However, I had hardly known him for a couple of days when I realised that there was nothing of the meanness and dross of the earth in Aurobindo's heart. His laughter was simple as a child's, and as liquid and soft. Though an inflexible will showed at the corners of his lips, there was not the slightest trace in his heart of any worldly ambition or the common human selfishness; there was only the longing, rare even among the gods, of sacrificing himself for the relief of human suffering.

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[58] Regarding his eyes, "the English Principal of the Baroda College said to C.R. Reddy (who was later Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra University): 'So you have met Aurobindo Ghose. Did you notice his eyes? There is a mystic fire and light in them. They penetrate into the beyond.' And he added: 'If Joan of Arc heard heavenly voices, Aurobindo probably sees heavenly visions.'" *The Liberator* by Sisir Kumar Mitra.

[59] This portion (14 lines) I have taken from Sanat Banerji's fine translation of some parts of Dinendra Kumar Roy's Bengali book. The translation was published in *Mother India*.

Aurobindo could not yet speak in Bengali, but how very eager he was to speak in his mother tongue! I lived with him day and night, and the more I came to be acquainted with his heart, the more I realised that he was not of this earth — he was a god fallen by some curse[60] from his heavenly abode. God alone can say why he had exiled him as a Bengali to this accursed land of India. He had gone to England as a mere boy, almost on the lap of his mother, and it was much after the first flush of his youth that he had returned to his motherland. But what struck me as most amazing was that his noble heart had suffered not the least contamination from the luxury and dissipation, the glitter and glamour, the diverse impressions and influences, and the strange spell of Western society.

"Aurobindo never cared for money. When I was at Baroda, he was getting a pretty fat salary. He was alone, he knew no luxury, nor the least extravagance. But at the end of every month he had not a shot in the locker....

"While talking, Aurobindo used to laugh heartily[61].... He was not in the habit of prinking himself up. I never saw him change his ordinary clothes even while going to the king's court. Expensive shoes, shirts, ties, collars, flannel, linen, different types of coats, hats and caps — he had none of these. I never saw him use a hat....

"Like his dress, his bed was also very ordinary and simple. The iron bedstead he used was such that even a petty clerk would have disdained to

[60] There was no curse. "It was to accomplish this great mission that God has sent me to the earth," as he has himself avouched in his letters to his wife. In the poem, *A God's Labour,* he gives the reason of his birth:

"He who would bring the heavens here
Must descend himself into clay
And the burden of earthly nature bear
And tread the dolorous way."

[61] His maternal grand-father, Rajnarayan Bose, was known for his hearty and roaring laughter.

sleep on it. He was not used to thick and soft bedding.[62] Baroda being near a desert, both summer and winter are severe there; but even in the cold of January, I never saw him use a quilt — a cheap, ordinary rug did duty for it. As long as I lived with him, he appeared to me as nothing but a self-denying sannyasi (recluse), austere in self-discipline and acutely sensitive to the suffering of others. Acquisition of knowledge seemed to be the sole mission of his life. And for the fulfilment of that mission, he practised rigorous self-culture even in the midst of the din and bustle of an active worldly life.

"I have never seen anybody with such a passionate love of reading. Because of his habit of keeping late hours for reading and writing poetry, Aurobindo used to rise slightly late in the morning. He wrote English poetry in various metres. He had an extraordinary command of the English language. His English poems were sweet and simple, his descriptions lucid and devoid of over-colouring. He possessed an uncommon felicity of expression, and never misused a single word. He wrote his poems on a piece of gray-granite paper, and seldom blotted out anything he wrote. A moment's thought just before the composition, and poetry would flow like a stream from his pen.... I never saw him lose his temper.[63] No passion was ever seen getting the better of him. It is not possible to have such a control of oneself and one's senses without considerable self-culture.

"He ranked Valmiki above Vyas. He regarded the former as the greatest epic poet in the world. He once said: 'I was captivated by the poetic genius of Dante, and immensely enjoyed Homer's Iliad — they are incomparable in European literature. But in the quality of his poetry, Valmiki stands supreme. There is no epic in the world that can compare with the Ramayana of Valmiki[64]....

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[62] On his travels in Gujrat he carried no bedding with him. He used to sleep on the bare bunk of the Railway carriage and use his arm as a pillow.

[63] "Anger has always been foreign to me." Nirodbaran's Notes.

[64] In his *Vyasa and Valmiki* Sri Aurobindo says: "The Ramayana is a work of the same essential kind as the Mahabharata; it differs only by a greater simplicity of plan, a

"Aurobindo read the newspapers during his lunch. Marathi food did not agree with my taste, but Aurobindo was accustomed to it.[65] Sometimes the cooking was so bad that I could hardly take a bite, but he ate quite naturally. I never saw him express any displeasure to his cook. He had a particular liking for Bengali food.... The quantity of food he took was very small; and it was because of his abstemious and temperate habits that he kept perfectly fit in spite of heavy mental labour. He took good care of his health.... For one hour every evening, he would pace up and down the verandah of his house with brisk steps.... He was fond of music, but did not know how to sing or play on any musical instrument....

"As he had little worldly knowledge, he was often cheated; but one who has no attachment to money has no regrets, either, for being cheated. At Baroda he was known to all ranks of people, and they had a great respect for him.... The educated community of Baroda held him in high esteem for his uncommon gifts. By the students of Baroda he was revered and adored as a god. They honoured and trusted this Bengali professor much more than the British Principal of their college. They were charmed by his manner of teaching....

"Sometimes, of an evening or an afternoon, a cavalryman would trot up from the Lakshmivilas Palace with a letter for Sri Aurobindo from the Private Secretary of the Maharaja. The Secretary wrote: 'The Maharaja would be very pleased if you would dine with him tonight', or sometimes he wrote: 'Would it be convenient to you to see the Maharaja at such and

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more delicate ideal temperament and a finer glow of poetic warmth and colour." We shall study his views on the two epics in one of the later chapters.

[65] Sri Aurobindo says about his first experience of Marathi food: "I hope your dinner at Dewas did not turn out like my first taste of Maratha cookery — when for some reason my dinner was *non est* and somebody went to my neighbour, a Maratha professor, for food. I took one mouthful and only one. O God! Sudden fire in the mouth could not have been more surprising. Enough to bring down the whole of London in one wild agonising swoop of flame! — *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani. Afterwards, of course, he got used to it. He liked the food he took at Tilak's place, and he characterised it as "Spartan" in its simplicity.

such an hour?' I have seen that, pressed for time, Aurobindo would sometimes even decline the Maharaja's invitation!... How many respectable men danced attendance on the Maharaja for months together in the hope of getting an interview with him, and here was a mere teacher who considered his duty much more valuable than the favour of a king!

"The Maharaja knew Aurobindo very well. He knew his worth and valued it. He was well aware that though there were many fat-bellied men in his large offices, who drew two to three thousand rupees a month, there was no second Aurobindo. I wonder if there is another Maharaja in India who is so appreciative of the merits of others. Aurobindo had a high opinion of him. Once he told me: 'The present Maharaja is capable of ruling over a large empire. As a politician, he has no peer in the whole of India.'...

"Aurobindo was always indifferent to pleasure and pain, prosperity and adversity, praise and blame.... He bore all hardships with an unruffled mind, always remembering the great gospel: 'As Thou, O Lord, seated in my heart, appointest me, so do I act', and absorbed in the contemplation of his adored Deity. The fire that would have consumed any other man to ashes has served only to burn out his I-ness and render him brighter than ever.

"Aurobindo would sit at his table and read in the light of an oil lamp till one in the morning, unmindful of the intolerable bite of mosquitoes. I saw him seated there in the same posture for hours on end, his eyes fixed on the book he read, like a Yogi plunged in divine contemplation and lost to all sense of what was going on outside. Even if the house had caught fire, it could not have broken his concentration.[66] Daily he would thus burn the

[66] Charu Chandra Dutt, an I.C.S. and a friend and fellow-worker of Sri Aurobindo in the political field, relates an incident which illustrates Sri Aurobindo's power of concentration.

"Once Sri Aurobindo came to Thana, a town in Gujarat, where I was posted. It was raining heavily on that day. As we could not stir out, we fell to target-shooting to beguile the time. My wife proposed that Sri Aurobindo should be given the rifle so that he might also have a try, but Sri Aurobindo refused, saying that he had never handled a rifle. But because we insisted, he agreed. We had only to show him how to hold the rifle and take aim. The target was the black, tiny head of a match stick, hung

midnight oil, poring over books in different languages of Europe — books of poetry, fiction, history, philosophy, etc., whose number one could hardly tell. In his study, there were heaps of books on various subjects in different languages — French, German, Russian, English, Greek, Latin etc., about which I knew nothing. The poetical works of all English poets from Chaucer to Swinburne were also there. Countless English novels were stacked in his book-cases, littered in the corners of his rooms, and stuffed in his steel trunks. The Iliad of Homer, the Divine Comedy of Dante, our Ramayana, Mahabharata, Kalidasa were also among those books. He was very fond of Russian literature...

"After learning Bengali fairly well, Aurobindo began to study Bengali classics, *Swarnalata, Annadamangal* by Bharat Chandra, *Sadhavar Ekadashi* by Deenabandhu etc.[67]

"Aurobindo read Bankim Chandra's novels by himself, and understood them quite well. He had an extraordinary regard for Bankim Chandra. He would say that Bankim Chandra was the golden bridge between our past and present. He wrote a beautiful English sonnet on Bankim Chandra as a tribute to his greatness. He highly enjoyed the Bengali writings of Vivekananda. He said to me that he felt the very warmth and pulse of life in his language, and that such a splendour of vibrant force and fire in thought and word alike was, indeed, something rare. He had also bought

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at a distance of ten or twelve feet. Aurobindo took aim, and, lo and behold! the very first shot flew the stick into the target, and the first hit was followed up by the second, and the second by the third! It took our breath away. I remarked to my friends: 'If such a man doesn't become a *siddha* (spiritually perfect), who would become — people like you and me?'" *Puranokatha-Upasanhara* by Charu Chandra Dutt.

[67] Recently, about 42 Bengali books, which had belonged to Sri Aurobindo have been sent to Sri Aurobindo Ashram from Baroda. They include the Complete Works of Ishwar Gupta, *Sekal O Ekal* by Rajnarayan Bose, *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, Chandidas, Jnanadas, the Dramatical Works of Amritalal Bose, the Poetical Works of Govindadas, a collection of poems by Dinabandhu Mitra, Bengali Sonnets by Michael Madhusudan Dutt, *Ananda Math* by Bankim Chandra, *Goray Galad* by Rabindranath Tagore, etc.

and read the poetical works of Rabindranath Tagore. He held this nightingale poet of Bengal in high esteem.

"I used to order many books from the Gurudas Library of Calcutta for Aurobindo. He also purchased many of the books published by the Basumati Press in Calcutta.... Two well-known booksellers of Bombay, Atmaram Radhabai Saggon and Thacker Spink & Co., were his regular suppliers of books. They sent him long lists of new publications every month, and sometimes every week. Aurobindo would make his selections from the lists and place his orders. As soon as he drew his salary, be would remit by M.O. Rs. 50 or 60, sometimes even more, to the booksellers. They used to supply his selected books on deposit account. He seldom received books by post; they came by Railway parcels, packed in huge cases. Sometimes small parcels came twice or thrice in the course of a month. He would finish all those books in eight or ten days and place fresh orders. I have never seen such a voracious reader.[68]

[68] "I have read comparatively little — (there are people in India who have read fifty times or a hundred times as much as I have), only I have made much out of that little..." — *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo* by Nirodbaran, Part I.

He had a very concentrated way of reading, which enabled him to go through the books with an almost miraculous rapidity. Charu Dutt refers in his book, *Puranokatha-Upasanhara,* to the following incident. Once after returning from College, Sri Aurobindo picked up a novel that was lying near where he sat and began to read it, while Charu Dutt and some of his friends were noisily engaged in a game of chess. After half an hour, he put down the book and took up a cup of tea. They had often noticed him doing like that before, and so were eagerly waiting for an opportunity to test whether he read the books from cover to cover or only glanced through some of the pages. They at once subjected him to a *viva voce* test. Chru Dutt opened the book at random and read out one line from it, asking Sri Aurobindo to repeat the sequel. Sri Aurobindo thought for a moment, and then repeated the contents of the page without a single mistake. If he could read a hundred pages in half an hour, is it any wonder that he went through parcels of books in an incredibly short time?

"Aurobindo had a profound faith in astrology.[69] He admitted the influence of the planets on human life. He had not the least doubt that one can know about the auspicious and inauspicious events of a man's life by studying his horoscope.... I got a horoscope of Aurobindo's life prepared by Sri Kalipada Bhattacharya, who was well versed in astrology. Once, when I met him afterwards, the astrologer told me: 'Your pupil is an extraordinary man. Although he stands high in the Maharaja's favour, there

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[69] "Narayan Jyotishi, a Calcutta astrologer, who predicted, not knowing then who I was, in the days before my name was politically known, my straggle with Mlechchha enemies and afterwards the three cases against me and my three acquittals, predicted also that though death was prefixed for me in my horoscope at the age of sixty-three, I would prolong my life by Yogic power for a very long period and arrive at a full old age." — *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother.*

"Khasirao Jadav's father died according to the exact date and moment found out by an astrologer." — Nirod's Notes.

"Astrology? Many astrological predictions come true, quite a mass of them, if one takes all together. But it does not follow that the stars rale our destiny; the stars merely record a destiny that has been formed, they are a hieroglyph, not a Force, — or if their action constitutes a force, it is a transmitting energy, not an originating Power. Someone is there who has determined or something is there which is Fate, let us say; the stars are only indications. The astrologers themselves say that there are two forces, *daiva* and *purusakara*, fate and individual energy, and the individual energy can modify and even frustrate fate. Moreover, the stars often indicate several fate-possibilities; for example that one may die in mid-age, but that if that determination can be overcome, one can live to a predictable old age. Finally, cases are seen in which the predictions of the horoscope fulfil themselves with great accuracy up to a certain age, then apply no more. This often happens when the subject turns away from the ordinary to the spiritual life. If the turn is very radical, the cessation of predictability may be immediate; otherwise certain results may still last on for some time, but there is no longer the same inevitability. This would seem to show that there is or can be a higher power or higher plane or higher source of spiritual destiny which can, if its hour has come, override the lower power, lower plane or lower source of vital and material fate of which the stars are indicators. I say vital because character can also be indicated from the horoscope much more completely and satisfactorily than the events of the life." — *On Yoga,* Book II. Tome II by Sri Aurobindo.

is a lot of hardship and suffering in store for him. He is not destined to enjoy much of worldly life.'

"When we were staying at the Camp house, Shashi Kumar Hesh, a rising artist, had returned from Europe, where he had been to study the art of painting. I had heard that his family surname was Ash, but as the English pronunciation and meaning of the word appeared to him rather disreputable, he changed his surname into Hesh.... He came to Baroda to see the Gaekwar with letters of recommendation from Sir George Birdwood and Dadabhai Naoroji.... He did not put up with us as a guest of Aurobindo, but accepted the hospitality of the Maharaja, and was lodged at the latter's Guest house, which was a large and handsome building, surrounded by a garden and furnished in the European style.... He used to come every day to our Camp house. At the very first meeting, we fell under his spell. A day's acquaintance was enough for him to make us his own. Aurobindo told me that Hesh looked like an Italian.... Impressed by Aurobindo's erudition, Hesh was all admiration for him. Once he made Aurobindo give him two or three sittings at the Guest house, and he painted an oil colour portrait of him. A stroke or two of the brush and the portrait at once beamed with life....

"Whoever has once lived even for ten days with Aurobindo will never be able to forget him. It was my great good fortune that I had the opportunity of living with him for over two years...."

During this period of his life at Baroda, Sri Aurobindo perused the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and the speeches and writings of Vivekananda. He had the highest regard and admiration for Sri Ramakrishna. What he has written about him has hardly been surpassed in the depth and ardour of its appreciation. He says: "And in a recent unique example, in the life of Ramakrishna Paramhansa, we see a colossal spiritual capacity, first driving straight to the divine realisation, taking, as it were, the kingdom of heaven by violence and then seizing upon one Yogic method after another and extracting the substance out of it with an incredible rapidity, always to return to the heart of the whole matter, the realisation

and possession of God by the power of love, by the extension of inborn spirituality into various experience and by the spontaneous play of an intuitive knowledge."

And on Vivekananda he says in his book, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*: "The going forth of Vivekananda, marked out by the Master as the heroic soul destined to take the world between his two hands and change it, was the first visible sign to the world that India was awake not only to survive but conquer." About his inner contact with Swami Vivekananda we shall quote Sri Aurobindo's own words later.

IV

BANDE MATARAM (Hymn to the Mother)

Translation in prose by Sri Aurobindo

I bow to thee, Mother, richly-watered, richly-fruited,
cool with the winds of the south, dark with the crops
of the harvests, the Mother!
Her nights rejoicing in the glory of the moonlight,
her lands clothed beautifully with her trees in
flowering bloom,
sweet of laughter, sweet of speech,
the Mother, giver of boons, giver of bliss!
Terrible with the clamorous shout of seventy million throats,
and the sharpness of swords raised in twice seventy million hands,
Who sayeth to thee, Mother, that thou art weak? Holder of multitudinous strength,
I bow to her who saves,
to her who drives from her the armies of her foemen, the Mother!
Thou art knowledge, thou art conduct, thou our heart, thou our soul, for thou art the life in our body.
In the arm thou art might, O Mother,
in the heart, O Mother, thou art love and faith,
it is thy image we raise in every temple.
For thou art Durga holding her ten weapons of war, Kamala at play in the lotuses And Speech, the goddess, giver of all lore, to thee I bow!

I bow to thee, goddess of wealth, pure and peerless, richly-watered, richly-fruited, the Mother!
I bow to thee, Mother,
dark-hued, candid,
sweetly smiling, jewelled and adorned,
the holder of wealth, the lady of plenty,
the Mother![70]

(Composed by Bankim Chandra Chatterji)

We have already gleaned some essential elements of the spiritual background of Sri Aurobindo's love of India. We have seen that behind his militant nationalism, there was the secret fire of an intense yearning for God and the fulfilment of His work on earth through a resurgence of Indian spirituality.[71] But when he first appears before his countrymen as a political thinker, it is only the love of his motherland that shines forth and inspires his writings, and the political liberation of his nation that seems to be the immediate, impelling objective. He had followed the Indian political movement even when he was in England, and his close study of it had revealed to him the fundamental weaknesses it was labouring under. Soon after his return to India, he set himself to expose those weaknesses with an

[70] Translator's note: "It is difficult to translate the National Anthem of Bengal into verse in another language owing to its unique union of sweetness, simple directness and high poetic force. All attempts in this direction have been failures. In order, therefore, to bring the reader unacquainted with Bengali nearer to the exact force of the original, I give the translation in prose line by line." There is also a translation in English verse by Sri Aurobindo.

[71] "Already the Vedanta and the Yoga have exceeded their Asiatic limit and are beginning to influence the life and practice of America and Europe; and they have long been filtering into Western thought by a hundred indirect channels. But these are small rivers and underground streams. The world waits for the rising of India to receive the divine flood in its fullness." — *The Ideal of the Karmayogin* by Sri Aurobindo.

incisive, relentless logic, pull down the fragile structure of the Indian National Congress, and build it anew on the solid foundation of a fervent nationalistic idealism and a profound political philosophy, drawing their sustenance from the very roots of Indian culture and true to the spirit of the nation. But before we begin a study of his political thought and life, it would be well to cast a glance at the religious, social, and political changes which had been taking place in India before Sri Aurobindo emerged, first as a political thinker, and then, as the most original and powerful exponent of spiritual nationalism. Rapid and revolutionary, indeed, were these changes which, originating in Bengal, spread to all parts of the country, and, in the course of a few decades, brought about a splendid outflowering of the national soul. A brief outline of India in the middle of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century will give the reader (and particularly the Western reader) the right perspective in which to view the origin, nature and growth of Indian nationalism and Sri Aurobindo's contribution to it.

The latter half of the eighteenth century saw the Indian nation almost prostrate in the dust — its spirituality smouldering under an inert mass of dead and deadening formalism, the mainspring of its life corroded by rust, its vitality at a low ebb, and its vision narrowed and clouded. It had ceased to think creatively. Its thinking mind and higher reason had ceased to mediate between its soul and its life. And this atrophy of the thinking mind spelled, on the one hand, a catalepsy of the spiritual aspiration, and, on the other hand, a withering and enervation of life and its constriction within the shells of a supine conformity. "The evening of decline... was prepared by three movements of retrogression. First, there is, comparatively, a sinking of that superabundant vital energy and a fading of the joy of life and the joy of creation... this energy for a very brief period sinks nearest to a complete torpor... the decadence was marked and progressive. Secondly, there is a rapid cessation of the old free intellectual activity, a slumber of the scientific and critical mind as well as the creative intuition; what remains becomes more and more a repetition of ill-understood fragments of past knowledge. There is a petrifaction of the mind and life

in the relics of the forms which a great intellectual past had created. Old authority and rule become rigidly despotic and, as always then happens, lose their real sense and spirit.... This diminution amounts to a certain failure of the great endeavour which is the whole meaning of Indian culture, a falling short in the progress towards the perfect spiritualisation of the mind and the life. The beginnings were superlative, the developments very great, but at a certain point where progress, adaptation, a new flowering should have come in, the old civilisation stopped short, partly drew back, partly lost its way. The essential no doubt remained and still remains in the heart of the race and not only in its habits and memories, but in its action it is covered up in a great smoke of confusion. The causes internal and external we need not discuss; but the fact is there. It was the fact of the momentary helplessness of the Indian mind in the face of new and unprecedented conditions.[72]

Socially, the Nation, starving for the sap of a living spirituality and losing its nerve in the face of alien forces of aggression, shrank into itself and stood hedged in by defensive taboos and inhibitions. It was a state of stagnation, marked by the rigour of rules, a rigidity of creeds and cults, and a progressive cultural sterility.

Politically, the country presented the spectacle of a welter of States or small kingdoms, engaged in intrigues and rivalries, and blindly struggling to satisfy their mean, parochial interests. It was a confusion, an “anarchy which gave European adventure its chance”. The rapid disintegration of the Moghal empire was accompanied by a more or less general torpor of the martial spirit and an easy proneness to any superior might.

Describing the then state of the country, Rabindranath says:

“...our country having lost its link with the inmost truths of its being struggled under a crushing load of unreason, in abject slavery to circumstance. In social usage, in politics, in the realms of religion and art,

[72] *The Renaissance in India* by Sri Aurobindo.

we had entered the zone of uncreative habit, of decadent tradition, and ceased to exercise our humanity."

"It was at this moment that the European wave swept over India. The first effect of this entry of a new and quite opposite civilisation was the destruction of much that had no longer the power to live, the deliquescence of much else, a tendency to the devitalisation of the rest. A new activity came in, but this was at first crudely and confusedly imitative of the foreign culture. It was a crucial moment and an ordeal of perilous severity; a less vigorous energy of life might well have foundered and perished under the double weight of the deadening of its old innate motives and a servile imitation of alien ideas and habits. History shows us how disastrous this situation can be to nations and civilisations. But fortunately the energy of life was there, sleeping only for a moment, not dead, and, given that energy, the evil carried within itself its own cure."[73]

The first result of the onslaught of the alien culture was, as Sri Aurobindo points out, a crude and confused imitation. Of all the provinces of India it was Bengal that was most affected by this servile tendency to aping European manners, European habits and European ways of life. Religious restraints, moral scruples and time-honoured social conventions were thrown to the winds. Those who received the new Western education and imbibed the materialistic and rationalistic spirit of the West, revelled in assaulting the outworn ramparts of Hindu orthodoxy, and abandoning themselves to a life of Bohemian self-indulgence. It was, indeed, a period of moral anarchy, reckless iconoclasm and a wanton denial and defiance of the higher values of life, which the nation had so long been cherishing and conserving with a religious zeal. Lala Lajpat Rai gives an amusing, though somewhat sombre picture of the educated Bengalis in his *Young India*: "He (the Bengali Babu) began to live as the Britisher lives; English life, English manners and customs, became his ideal. Gradually he became very fond of English literature and began to think as an Englishman thought. The Bengalees were the first to send their sons to England for their education

[73] *The Renaissance in India* by Sri Aurobindo.

and to compete for the I.C.S. (Indian Civil Service) and the I.M.S. (Indian Medical Service). They with the Parsees were the first to qualify for the English Bar. In England they lived in an atmosphere of freedom. With freedom in drinking and eating they also learned freedom of thought and expression. The first generation of the Bengalees was thus Anglicised through and through. They looked down upon their own religion; they thought poorly of Indian society.... Some of them became Christians...."

Fortunately, this period was a very short one, and the injury it inflicted upon the nation was restricted to the small community, educated on Western lines. The enormous mass of the people still lived on in the wintry twilight of a cultural decadence, jealously guarding the heritage of the past, but too languid and listless to build upon it a brighter future and a new, dynamic order of creative life. But this immobile conservatism, too, was not without its utility.[74]

"Whatever temporary rotting and destruction this crude impact of European life and culture has caused, it gave three needed impulses. It revived the dormant intellectual and critical impulse; it rehabilitated life and awakened the desire of new creation; it put the reviving Indian spirit face to face with novel conditions and ideals and the urgent necessity of understanding, assimilating and conquering them. The national mind turned a new eye on its past culture, reawoke to its sense and import, but also at the same time saw it in relation to modern knowledge and ideas."[75]

It was at this juncture that Raja Ram Mohan Roy was born. His birth in Bengal had an important significance, for Bengal was destined to be "the chief testing crucible or the first workshop of the Shakti of India; it is there that she has chosen to cast in the greatest vivacity of new influences and

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[74] "The resistance of the conservative element in Hinduism, tamasic, inert, ignorant, uncreative though if was, saved the country by preventing an even more rapid and thorough disintegration than actually took place and by giving respite and time for the persistent national self to emerge and find itself." — *The Ideal of the Karmayogin* by Sri Aurobindo.

[75] *The Renaissance in India* by Sri Aurobindo.

develop her initial forms and inspirations."[76] "The first impulse", born of the reception and assimilation of Western culture and coming in the wake of the crude movement of blind imitation, was "gigantic in its proportions and produced men of an almost gigantic originality." "Ram Mohan Roy arose with a new religion in his hand...." It is interesting to note here that unlike the Renaissance in Europe, the Renaissance in India derived its first inspiration from spirituality. It was not intellectual, artistic or political in its inception and essence, but unmistakably spiritual,[77] seeking sustenance

[76] *The Renaissance in India* by Sri Aurobindo.

[77] It is recorded that, during the Mutiny of 1857, behind most of the bands of the insurgents, there were Gurus or religious leaders as the source of inspiration and direction. What could Shivaji have achieved without his Guru, the Yogi Ramdas? There was spiritual power behind the creation and organisation of the Sikh militia.

In this connection, the following historical account makes interesting reading: In 1772, in Rangpur, a district in Bengal, there was a revolt of Sannyasis (ascetics) against the British rule. These Sannyasis belonged to North India. Bankim Chandra's famous novel, *Ananda Math,* was inspired by this revolt. He had composed the Bande Mataram seven or eight years before he wrote *Ananda Math*. Even as early as 1763, the insurgent Sannyasis were waging guerilla war against the British. In that year, they suddenly appeared in Dacca in East Bengal, then as suddenly flew to Coochbehar, and there worsted the British soldiers in a skirmish. In 1768, they engaged a contingent of British troops in an open fight in the district of Saran in Bihar. In 1770, they were found in Dinajpur, then in Dacca and Rajsahi. In 1772, they fought a regular battle with the British troops in Rangpur and defeated them. In most of these encounters, they used to carry the day. Everywhere the local people helped them in all possible ways, and, even when threatened by the Government, never let them down. In the battle in Rangpur, Capt. Tomes was killed. Capt. Edwards was killed in Dinajpur fight. Neither the threat of severe punishment nor the huge prices set on the heads of the Sannyasis could induce the local people to betray them. In 1773, Warren Hastings, who was then the Governor General of India, wrote about them: "These Sannyasis appear so suddenly in towns or villages that one would think they had dropped from the blue. They are strong, brave, and energetic beyond belief." Evidently, they had resolved to sacrifice their lives for the protection of Hindu religion and culture which, they thought, were in great danger. The Mutiny of 1857 was, in many respects a legitimate successor of the Sannyasi revolt, exploding in a

from the national culture of the past, but endeavouring to adapt it to the spirit and needs of the modern age. As Sri Aurobindo says: "All great movements of life in India have begun with a new spiritual thought and usually a new religious activity. What more striking and significant fact can there be than this that even the new European influence, which was an influence intellectual, rationalistic, so often anti-religious, and which drew so much of its idealism from the increasingly cosmopolitan, mundane and secularist thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, precipitated in India from the very first an attempt at religious reformation and led actually to the creation of new religions? The instinct of the Indian mind was that, if a reconstruction of ideas and of society was to be attempted, it must start from a spiritual basis and take from the first a religious motive and form. The Brahmo Samaj had in its inception a large cosmopolitan idea, it was even almost eclectic in the choice of the materials for the synthesis it attempted; it combined a Vedantic first inspiration, outward forms akin to those of English Unitarianism and something of its temper, a modicum of Christian influence, a strong dose of religious rationalism and intellectualism. It is noteworthy, however, that it started from an endeavour to restate the Vedanta, and it is curiously significant of the way in which even what might be well called a protestant movement follows the curve of the national tradition and temper, that the three stages of its growth, marked by the three churches or congregations into which it split, correspond to the three eternal motives of the Indian religious mind, Jnana, Bhakti and Karma, the contemplative and philosophical, the emotional and fervently devotional and the actively and practically dynamic spiritual mentality. The Arya Samaj in the Punjab founded itself on a fresh interpretation of the truth of the Veda and an attempt to apply old Vedic principles of life to modern conditions. The movement associated with the great names of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda has been a very wide synthesis of past religious motives and spiritual experience topped by a reaffirmation of the

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wider and more violent outburst. — Based on Dr. Jadugopal Mukhopadhyaya's *'Viplavi Jivaner Smrit'*, written in Bengali.

old asceticism and monasticism, but with new living strands in it and combined with a strong humanitarianism and zeal of missionary expansion…."[78]

In order to show that all movements of rebirth or renovation of the Indian nation have been invariably preceded and inspired by a spiritual or religious resurgence, we have reproduced the above passage from Sri Aurobindo in which he has given an illuminating survey of the origin and development of the present renaissance in India, and how it has been progressing on the time-old lines of the national genius. We have thus had to anticipate a little of what we shall consider slightly later.

The national ferment produced a long line of towering personalities in almost all walks of life. The very appearance of pioneering geniuses signalised the advent of a new dawn of the national life. It was, certainly, no accident — we speak here of Bengal only — that Ram Mohan Roy was followed by Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, Rishi Rajnarayan Bose, Pandit Shivnath Shastri, Akshaya Kumar Dutt, Keshav Chandra Sen, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, poet Madhusudan Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the inspired seer of the National Anthem, Bande Mataram, and the greatest novelist in Bengali literature, Dr. Rajendra Lai Mitra, Sri Ramkrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Yogi Vijay Krishna Goswami, the world-poet Rabindranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore, the gifted pioneer of the new school of Indian Art, Jagadish Chandra Bose, the greatest Indian scientist[79], etc. etc., — an unbroken line of outstanding personalities who enriched every sphere of Indian life. We have not mentioned the more recent names, some of which are equally illustrious in their respective fields of thought and activity. All this proves that the Shakti of the nation was well at work, the divine fiat had gone forth, and a great future of incalculable possibilities was preparing behind the lightning transitions of India's outer life.

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[78] *The Renaissance in India* by Sri Aurobindo.

[79] "The pride and glory of Bengal" — Vivekananda.

Ram Mohan Roy, who foreshadows — very naturally in the faint glimmer of the approaching light — some of the main elements of the grand synthesis which was going to be the chief gift of renaissant India to the world, has been called by Rabindranath Tagore "the inaugurator of the Modern Age in India" and "the path-maker of this century", and by Lajpat Rai "the first nation-builder of Modern India".[80] "Ram Mohan Roy, that great soul and puissant worker", as says Sri Aurobindo, "who laid his hand on Bengal and shook her — to what mighty issues — out of her long, indolent sleep by her rivers and rice fields", was, indeed, a genius of exceptional versatility, and a wide, enlightened and comprehensive vision. He embodied the new spiritual and cultural trends and the emergent socio-political consciousness which sprang into existence from the contact of the East and the West after the initial spell of fascinated imitation had passed. He was a herald of the coming dawn. A rapid review of some of the principal facets of this giant personality will give us a revealing insight into the creative forces and ideas that were surging up from the awakening soul of the nation for building the India of the future; for, according to Sri Aurobindo, "Ram Mohan Roy was a great man in the first rank of active genius" who "set flowing a stream of tendencies which have transformed our national life." Swami Vivekananda called him "the first man of new regenerate India".

A Tantric[81] by early initiation and a Vendantist by natural self-development, Ram Mohan Roy was essentially a spiritual personality. All that he attempted and achieved sprang from his intrinsic spiritual sense and outlook. He was an apostle of Universal Theism. Rabindranath calls him "a Universal Man". He was a religious humanist and a staunch rationalist who effected a reconciliation between reason and religious faith. He was the first translator into Bengali of the Brahma Sutra and the Upanishads. He

[80] Ram Mohan predicted that India would be free and take her rightful place as the Guru of Asia.

[81] Ram Mohan was initiated by a Tantric named Hariharananda Tirthaswamy, and practised Tantric Yoga on the lines of Mahanirvana Tantra, a Tantric scripture of great authority.

was the first social reformer in Bengal whose success in reforms was so great as to throw into the shade even his far greater achievements in other fields of work. He was one of the first advocates of a radical overhauling in education with English as the medium of instruction and scientific training as an indispensable part of the curriculum. He was one of the founders of the Hindu College, which became the nursery of many a shining genius of the time. He was the first Bengali to found and edit a journal in Bengali. He is called the Father of modern Bengali literary prose. He was also a poet whose Bengali hymns, which were sung in the Brahmo Samaj, founded by him, have a moving devotional quality and lyrical sweetness.

Ram Mohan was also the father of constitutional political agitation[82] in India. He was a passionate lover of freedom. William Adams, bearing witness to his love of freedom, says: "He would be free or not be at all.... Love of freedom was perhaps the strongest passion of his soul." He strove in his own way, and under the conditions obtaining at the time, for the political amelioration of his country. He took a lively interest in the political movements of all countries in the world which were struggling for freedom. In 1882, when the Reform Bill came up for discussion in England, he was so much exercised over it that he declared that in the event of the Bill being defeated, he would give up his residence in the dominions of England and settle in America. It is said that on his voyage to England, "when his boat touched the Cape of Good Hope, though seriously injured and made lame for several months by an accident, he insisted upon being carried to a French vessel where he saw the flag of liberty flying, so that he might be able to do homage to it. The sight of the glorious tri-colour kindled his enthusiasm and made him for the time being insensible to pain. The French received him warmly and he was conducted over the vessel beneath the revolutionary flag. When returning, he shouted, unmindful of his pain, 'Glory, glory, glory to France!'"[83] He once wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in France that all humanity is one family and that the

[82] "If religion is from God, is politics from the Devil?" — Ram Mohan Roy.

[83] *Ram Mohan — the Man and his Work*, edited by Amal Horne.

different nationalities are its branches.[84] He was a champion of the unity of mankind, and envisaged something like a League of Nations, long before any such idea had struck anybody. He espoused the cause of the peasants in India and fought valiantly for the freedom of the Press.

Max Müller calls Ram Mohan the father of Comparative Religion. Monier Williams says about him: “Ram Mohan is the first earnest investigator in the science of comparative theology which the world has produced.”

In Ram Mohan’s personality and his life-work we glimpse the wide, cosmopolitan, international, universal consciousness which was preparing to dawn upon the progressive mind of the Indian nation, accentuating the tendency to a synthesis of the past and the present, the East and the West, spirituality and life. It was a mere beginning, the first, pale streaks of the dawning glory; but all the same, it was a sure prognostic of the coming dawn. Ram Mohan was, indeed, in the words of Sir Brajendranath Seal, the eminent scholar and philosopher, “a precursive hint of the India that was rising” — the India, rising not for herself, but as Sri Aurobindo proclaims, for God and humanity. The times were big with a great future.

The new spirit of religious awakening brought in by Ram Mohan was “developed on original lines” by Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, father of Rabindranath Tagore, and by Sri Aurobindo’s maternal grandfather, Rishi Rajnarayan Bose. Debendranath went closer to the heart of the spirituality of the land, and Rajnarayan, discarding the eclecticism of Ram Mohan, upheld the cause of the pure essence of ancient Hinduism. Keshav Chandra Sen, upon whom had fallen the mantle of Debendranath, but who later broke with him and formed a new Brahmo Samaj, reverted to the eclecticism of Ram Mohan (in fact, Ram Mohan’s tentative attempt at a synthesis — in the external formulation of an inner realisation — between the Vedanta,

[84] When he went to France, he was welcomed and honoured by the King, Louis Philippe, who invited him to dinner and fêted him.

Christian Unitarianism and Moslem Sufism[85] had really resulted in a sort of eclecticism); but his preponderant bias for Christianity led him into a pot-pourri of diverse religious strains. Keshav's nature was genuinely religious and emotional, and was immensely widened and enlightened by his contact with Sri Ramakrishna; but his approach to Hinduism was through Christianity, and so, his preaching, in spite of its resounding success at the moment, failed to leave any lasting impression upon the national mind. However, the Brahmo Samaj was responsible for some socio-religious and educational reforms, and for weaning many a soul from the influence of Christian missionaries.

At this time, in another part of India, arose another man, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, who, according to Mrs. Besant, first proclaimed "India for Indians". He discovered in the Vedas the perennial source and support of Hindu society, and sought to draw upon its spiritual and cultural riches for the establishment of an ideal national society in India. Describing Dayananda's personality and work, Sri Aurobindo says: "Among the great company of remarkable figures that will appear to the eye of posterity at the head of the Indian Renaissance, one stands out by himself with peculiar and solitary distinctness, one unique in his type as he is unique in his work.... Here was one who did not infuse himself informally into the indeterminate soul of things, but stamped his figure indelibly as in bronze on men and things. Here was one whose formal works are the very children of his spiritual body, children fair and robust and full of vitality, the image of their creator. Here was one who knew definitely and clearly the work he was sent to do, chose his materials, determined his conditions with a sovereign clairvoyance of the spirit and executed his conception with the puissant mastery of the born worker. As I regard the figure of this formidable artisan in God's workshop, images crowd on me which are all of battle and work and conquest and triumphant

[85] Ram Mohan was a master of Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and English, and deeply read in the canonical books of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. He also knew Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

labour. Here, I say to myself, was a very soldier of Light, a warrior in God's world, a sculptor of men and institutions, a bold and rugged victor of the difficulties which matter presents to spirit. And the whole sums itself up to me in a powerful impression of spiritual practicality. The combination of these two words, usually so divorced from each other in our conception, seems to me the very definition of Dayananda.... He brings back an old Aryan element into the national character.... (He was) a man with God in his soul, vision in his eyes and power in his hands to hew out of life an image according to his vision.... What a master-glance of practical intuition was this to go back trenchantly to the very root of Indian life and culture, to derive from the flower of its birth the seed for a radical new birth! And what an act of grandiose intellectual courage to lay hold upon this scripture (the Veda) defaced by ignorant comment and oblivion of its spirit, degraded by misunderstanding to the level of an ancient document of barbarism, and to perceive in it its real worth as a scripture which conceals in itself the deep and energetic spirit of the forefathers who made this country and nation — a scripture of divine knowledge, divine worship, and divine action.... He seized justly on the Veda as India's Rock of Ages and had the daring conception to build on what his penetrating glance perceived in it a whole education of youth, a whole manhood and a whole nationhood.... Ram Mohan stopped short at the Upanishads. Dayananda looked beyond and perceived that our original seed was the Veda...."[86] A relentless crusade against priestly authority and paralysing superstitions, an uncompromising rejection of idol worship and a trenchant affirmation of the one, indivisible Brahman as at once constituting, pervading and transcending the whole universe, a repudiation of the caste system and untouchability, an advocacy of the democratic principle in religion and society, an insistence on the equality of the sexes and on equal education of them on purely national lines, and an aggressive, militant nationalism were some of the outstanding contributions of the Arya Samaj to renaissant India. It struck out an original

[86] *Bankim-Tilak-Dayananda* by Sri Aurobindo.

plan of converting even non-Hindus to Hinduism. The growing spirit of nationalism derived a great impetus from the Arya Samaj movement.

The Theosophical Movement, founded by Madame Blavatsky,[87] proclaimed the greatness of Indian wisdom and the superiority of Indian spiritual culture to all other cultures of the world. It thus helped, to a certain extent, restore the faith of the newly educated community of Indians in their spiritual and cultural inheritance, and turn their minds from a blind worship of the materialistic thought and civilisation of the West. It is interesting to note that it was Swami Dayananda who had invited Madame Blavatsky to come to India.

Contemporaneous with Swami Dayananda was Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, the embodiment of the highest synthesis of spiritual experience till then achieved. He was a living challenge to the materialistic rationalism of the times, a living refutation of the invading spirit of scepticism and atheism, and a living fount of the Light and Love, the Peace and Purity of the Divine whom he loved and adored as the Divine Mother. His greatest disciple, Swami Vivekananda, was in America in 1893, waiting for his apostolic triumph at the Parliament of Religions, which was to open a new chapter in the history of the impact of the East upon the West.[88] The

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[87] "She had some vision.... She was a remarkable woman" — Sri Aurobindo (Nirodbaran's Notes).

[88] Swami Vivekananda's phenomenal success in America raised India in the estimation of the whole world, and electrified the national sentiment in his motherland.

We may as well observe here that it is a fact, though not very widely known, that Swami Vivekananda had in him the makings of a revolutionary nationalist. Had not his Master's spiritual mission claimed him as its own, he would have become a firebrand political leader, and made no bones about declaring an armed revolt against the alien Government. Sister Nivedita, whom he moulded with his own hands, owed her revolutionary political fire to him. (Ref. *Swami Vivekananda — Patriot-Prophet* by Bhupendranath Datta.)

Vivekananda once told Jatin Mukherji (popularly known as Bagha Jatin, because he had killed a tiger with a mere knife) that the spiritual regeneration of India would not be possible till India was politically free. Jatin Mukherji, who was inspired by Vivekananda, and afterwards by Sri Aurobindo, was a redoubtable revolutionary who

example and influence of Sri Ramakrishna acted as a potent regenerative and formative force in the Renaissance of India, and set ablaze the awakening spirit of nationalism.

Like the Reformation, following on the heels of the Renaissance, in Europe, all these religious and reformist movements in India stimulated the spirit of nationalism and whetted the hunger for freedom. The chains of slavery began to bite into the flesh of the nation's body, the leaden yoke galled and oppressed.

In the field of literature, which is the medium of expression of a nation's soul, arose some remarkable men of original genius. "The two Dutts, Okhay Kumar and Michael Madhu Sudan, began a new prose and a new poetry." "...Madhusudan's first great poems Sharmistha and Tilottama had a complex effect, much of a piece with the sensation created by Marlowe's Tamburlaine in Elizabethan England or Hugo's Hernani in 19th century France. They took men's imagination by storm with their splendour, passion and mighty imagery; by creating the Bengali blank verse they freed poetry from the facilities and prettinesses of the old rhymed stanza; by their magnificences of style and emotion they brought new elements into Hindu literature, and they gave battle with their strange and fiery coloured music to the classic frigidity of the Sanskritists.... That marvellous epic, the Meghnad-badh, was the *coup de grâce*. When Vidyasagar praised the Meghnad-badh as a supreme poem, the day of the Sanskritists was over...."[89]

"The society by which Bankim was formed was the young Bengal of the fiftees, the most extraordinary perhaps that India has yet seen — a society electric with thought and loaded to the brim with passion. Bengal was at

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succeeded for long in defying the military might of the British Raj, and at last, betrayed and besieged, fell, fighting with his five trusted comrades against a whole troop of soldiers. Sri Aurobindo once remarked about him: "He was a man who would belong to the front rank of humanity anywhere. Such beauty and strength together I haven't seen..." (Nirodbaran's Notes).

[89] *Bankim Chandra Chatterji* by Sri Aurobindo.

that time the theatre of a great intellectual awakening. A sort of miniature Renascence was in process. An ardent and imaginative race, long bound in the fetters of a single tradition, had had suddenly put into its hand the key to a new world thronged with the beautiful or profound creations of Art and Learning. From this meeting of a foreign Art and civilisation with a temperament differing from the temperament which created them, there issued, as there usually does issue from such meetings, an original Art and an original civilisation. Originality does not lie in rejecting outside influences but in accepting them as a new mould into which our own individuality may run...."[90]

"Bankim came into that heritage of peace which Madhusudan had earned.... Both were equipped with enormous stores of reading, both were geniuses of a vast originality, both had creative power, a fine sense for beauty and a gift for emotion and pathos.... One was the king of prose, the other the king of poetry." "...Bankim, the greatest of novelists,[91] had the versatility developed to its highest expression. Scholar, poet, essayist, novelist, philosopher, lawyer, critic, official, philologian, and religious innovator, — the whole world seemed to be shut up in his single brain".[92]

"What is it for which we worship the name of Bankim today? What was his message to us or what the vision which he saw and has helped us to see? He was a great poet, a master of beautiful language and a creator of fair and gracious dream-figures in the world of imagination.... He gave us a means by which the soul of Bengal could express itself to itself. He had a positive vision of what was needed for the salvation of the country.... It

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[90] *Ibid.*

[91] Bankim still retains his claim to uncontested supremacy as an Indian novelist. No other novelist since has had the epic vastness of his canvas, the grandeur of his imaginative creation, and the stately dignity and magnificence of his diction. All Indian languages are indebted to him for inaugurating a new era in the world of fiction, even as they are indebted to Rabindranath Tagore for ushering in a new era in poetic creation. Bankim Chandra's novels have been translated into all the languages of India, and inspired and influenced a whole generation of novelists.

[92] *Bankim Chandra Chatterji* by Sri Aurobindo.

was the gospel of fearless strength and force which he preached under a veil and in images in *Ananda Math* and *Devi Choudhurani*. And he had an inspired unerring vision of the moral strength which must be at the back of the outer force. He perceived that the first element of the moral strength needed must be *tyāga*, complete self-sacrifice for the country and complete self-devotion to the work of liberation.... He perceived that the second element must be self-discipline and organisation. Lastly he perceived that the third element of the moral strength must be the infusion of religious feeling into patriotic work. The religion of patriotism — that is the master idea of Bankim's writings.... Of the new spirit which is leading the nation to resurgence and independence, he is the inspirer and political guru.... The supreme service of Bankim to his nation was that he gave us the vision of our Mother.... It is not till the Motherland reveals herself to the eye of the mind as something more than a stretch of earth or a mass of individuals, it is not till she takes shape as a great Divine and Maternal Power in a form of beauty that can dominate the mind and seize the heart that these petty fears and hopes vanish in an all-absorbing passion for the Mother and her service, and the patriotism that works miracles and saves a doomed nation is born.... It was thirty-two years ago that Bankim wrote his great song (Bande Mataram) and few listened; but in a sudden moment of awakening from long delusions the people of Bengal looked round for the truth and in a fated moment somebody sang Bande Mataram. The mantra had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to a religion of patriotism. The Mother had revealed herself. Once that vision has come to a people, there can be no rest, no peace, no further slumber till the temple has been made ready, the image installed and the sacrifice offered. A great nation which has had that vision can never bend its neck in subjection to the yoke of a conqueror."[93]

We have seen how the Indian Renaissance, originating in Bengal, permeated the whole country in waves of national stirrings, and roused the people into an intense urge for creative freedom and cultural self-assertion.

[93] *Bankim-Tilak-Dayananda* by Sri Aurobindo.

In all spheres of life, one felt more and more the surging tide of a fresh vitality, the glow of an unwonted animation, the throbbing buoyancy of youthful idealism. The soul of India, reacting to the Western influence, imbibing what was life-giving and wholesome in its modernism, discarding what threatened to disrupt the bases of its own culture or deflect it from the course of its natural advance, turned with a wistful eye upon the immense legacy of its past and sought in it the secret of building a future which will be neither a replica of the past nor a confused and haphazard self-adaptation to the fickle demands of the present.

The revival of the intellectual and critical faculty, the galvanising of the national life by its renewed contact with the living truths of the past, and the quickening of the creative impulse constituted some of the most fruitful factors of the Indian Renaissance. Western education had brought in its train the intellectual and scientific ferment of Europe. Rationalism, Positivism, Utilitarianism, Scientific Humanism, Individualism, and Materialistic Realism of the West coloured the mind of the English-educated men of India and, in a great measure, moulded its thought and outlook, though, with the passing of time, the cardinal tendencies of the national character asserted themselves and assimilated what was salutary in the Western influence to enrich their own cultural content. The magnificent watchword of the French Revolution, the inspiring teachings and thoughts of Mazzini, the examples of Ireland and America, Italy and Germany fired the nationalist sentiment and political idealism in India. Historical research, pioneered by Dr. Rajendralal Mitra and Romesh Chandra Dutt, the publication of the Sacred Books of the East by Max Muller, and the assiduous labours of Western Orientalists in unearthing and broadcasting the treasures of ancient Indian metaphysics, philosophy and literature contributed to the growth of a vivified sense of national pride and dignity. The aggressive proselytising zeal of Christian missionaries drove the Hindus to an intensive study of their own scriptures and philosophies, so that they might combat the missionary propaganda and save the society from conversion to an alien faith. This also helped nourish the spirit of patriotism and national consciousness.

The above are some of the principal factors which precipitated the birth and development of the spirit of nationalism in the country, apart from the intangible, but irresistible, forces of evolution working from behind a veil. But no less important and fruitful were the forces of resistance and opposition, the forces that served the national cause by striving to thwart it. Adversity proved, indeed, a blessing in disguise. The nation emerged stronger and brighter from the baptism of fire.

The enormous drain of India's wealth and material resources,[94] the ruthless exploitation and economic strangulation that went on almost unabated since the days of the East India Company, the deliberate destruction of Indian industries and handicrafts in the interests of the British industrialists and tradesmen, annexation of some of the Native States by fraud and force, the squeezing of the States and the moneyed classes under diverse pretexts, the grinding down of the peasantry by excessive taxes, and the brutal oppression of the Indigo cultivators[95] — all

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[94] "...Eminent writers, both Indian and English, have pointed out that the Industrial Revolution in England was itself 'a consequence of the plundered wealth of India'...during the first half of the nineteenth century, India lost the proud position of supremacy in the trade and industry of the world, which she had been occupying for well-nigh two thousand years, and was gradually transformed into a plantation for the production of raw materials and a dumping ground for the cheap manufactured goods from the West..." — *An Advanced History of India* by Majumdar, Ray-Chaudhury and Dutta.

"...the manufactures of India were once in a highly flourishing condition. The Moghul Courts encouraged large towns and urban enterprise. European traders were first attracted to India, not by its raw products, but its manufactured wares. It was the industrial 'wealth of Ormuz and Ind' that dazzled the eyes of Western nations and sent them in search of a passage to that land of fabulous prosperity. Large portions of the Indian population were engaged in various industries down to the close of the eighteenth century.... The Indian cities were populous and magnificent." — *New India* by Sir Henry Cotton.

[95] The brutal oppression of the Indigo cultivators by the British Indigo planters led to a mass upsurge of such magnitude and intensity that it was called "the first revolution in Bengal after the advent of the English".

these and many other causes created a deep discontent against the British rulers. A series of devastating famines and virulent pestilence swept over the country taking a toll of millions of lives and reducing the groaning masses to utter destitution and untold suffering. These visitations and the desolation and misery they caused were "largely due to the chronic poverty of the people". Chill penury, sapping what little vitality was left in the masses of the people, tended to drive them to desperation. Poverty[96] combined with repression and humiliation brought the country within measurable distance of a second revolutionary outbreak. The East India Company had been content with its plunder and pillage, and did not care

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[96] "Paralysing poverty is more eloquent than the professional demagogue. And starvation is a better teacher than manuals of political economy." *Bande Mataram* of March 2, 1907.

An eloquent testimony to the poverty of the Indian people is furnished by the following incident:

On the very day of his epoch-making triumph at the Parliament of Religions, Swami Vivekananda was invited by a rich and distinguished man to his home in a most fashionable part of the city. "Here he was entertained right royally; a princely room fitted with luxury beyond anything he could conceive was assigned to him. But instead of feeling happy in this splendid environment, he was miserable.... As he retired the first night and lay upon his bed, the terrible contrast between poverty-striken India and opulent America oppressed him. He could not sleep pondering over India's plight. The bed of down seemed to be a bed of thorns. The pillow was wet with his tears. He went to the window and gazed out into the darkness until he was well-nigh faint with sorrow. At length, overcome with emotion, he fell to the ground, crying out, 'O Mother, what do I care for name and fame when my motherland remains sunk in utmost poverty'. To what a sad pass have we poor Indians come when millions of us die for want of a handful of rice.... Who will raise the masses of India? Who will give them bread? Show me, O Mother, how I can help them'" — *Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern & Western Disciples.

This was in 1893. The poignant cry of anguish wrung out of Vivekananda's leonine heart, his passionate love of his motherland, and his ardent appeal to the Divine Mother to raise the masses of India triggered the movement of a Force which has been unsleeping in its action, and which will not rest till it raises India to her highest, divine stature.

much to interfere with the social and religious life of the people; but since the Mutiny of 1857, the attitude of the British Raj, which took over the administration of India from the East India Company, was characterised by racial arrogance, distrust, and disdainful hardness; and the increasing tempo of repressions and persecutions that followed served only to embitter and inflame more and more the feelings of the starving masses, and feed the fires of nationalism.

It is remarkably significant that the very first movement started to organise the intelligentsia for the growth and development of the national spirit, after the spade work done by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, was inspired and initiated by Sri Aurobindo's maternal grandfather, Rishi Rajnarayan Bose. Nowhere else in India had any such definite step been taken before it for the resuscitation of the national spirit.[97] "The first clarion call was sounded by Rajnarayan Bose in 1861 when he issued a prospectus for the establishment of a Society for the Promotion of National Feeling among the Educated Natives of Bengal. It was a heroic attempt to turn the thoughts of the anglicised English-educated Bengalis towards their own culture and customs. Those who had hitherto thought in English, talked in English, and even dreamed in English, were now asked to speak and write in Bengali, to wear dhoti and chadar instead of hats and coats, to give up the habit of taking European food and frequent European hotels, to adopt indigenous games and physical exercises, to promote the Hindu system of medicine, etc. etc. To a generation which was the ardent advocate of European or Christian ethics and rationalism, Rajnarayan Bose, himself a prominent product of the English education, boldly proclaimed the superiority of Hindu religion and culture over European and Christian theology and civilisation.... The most significant trait of this nationalism was an intense love of the motherland, based on a conception of its past greatness and

[97] Debendranath Tagore's Tattva-bodhini Sabha, founded in 1839, was a religious and literary organisation. Prarthana Samaj, founded in Maharashtra in 1867 was a reformist social movement.

future potentialities....”[98] It must be remembered that this movement was not started from any religious or political motive as such, though religion and politics were both implicit in it, but from a purely patriotic motive, from “an intense love of the motherland, based on the conception of its past greatness and future potentialities.” We find in this intrepid nationalist venture of Rajnarayan Bose the seed of the nationalism preached and practised by Sri Aurobindo about half a century later.

Another significantly interesting fact is that the next move, purely patriotic and nationalist, was also inspired by Rajnarayan Bose, though it was chiefly organised by Nabagopal Mitra. The object of the Hindu Mela[99], inaugurated by them was to encourage the use of indigenous products, and the revival of Indian industries and handicrafts, Indian methods of physical culture and the feeling of national self-respect and self-reliance. “It advocated the idea of pan-Indian nationality and urged the adoption of the cult of self-help as an instrument of national regeneration”.[100] “Though Rajnarayan Bose talked of ‘persistent constitutional agitation and other lawful means’, he had fully believed in the legitimacy of the use of force against the alien rulers of India, and in the necessity of forming secret societies for that purpose. Rabindranath Tagore has narrated in his *Memoirs* how he and his brother Jyotirindranath Tagore became members of the Secret Society established by Rajnarayan Bose where the members had to take oath that they would destroy by the use of force the enemies of the country.”[101]

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[98] R. C. Majumdar in *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, published by the National Council of Education, Bengal.

[99] Mela means a fair.

[100] *Growth of Nationalism in India* by Profs. Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee.

[101] Soumyendranath Tagore in Evolution of Swadeshi Thought (*Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*).

“...Your arts and industries, which won and are still winning the admiration of Europeans, are languishing. Your artisans, the products of whose hands win such admiration are starving from want of employment. The immense material resources as well as the money of your country are being carried away by foreigners while we

In 1885, the Indian National Congress was founded by A.C. Hume, a retired civilian, at the secret suggestion and under the veiled auspices of Lord Dufferin, the then Governor-General of India. It was Lord Dufferin's intention to use the Congress as a "safety-valve" for the seething discontent in the land. Thus inaugurated, the Indian National Congress launched upon its career of prayer, petition and protest. It was dominated by the English-educated higher middle and middle classes of the country, mostly wedded to Western ideas and guided by Western political and social theories. Some of these politicians were able and intelligent men, sincerely desirous of serving the country and promoting its political and social welfare; but they had little insight into the soul of the nation, its destiny, and its potential powers, and less knowledge of the real character of the British bureaucracy and the nature of its stranglehold on India. "The Congress", as says Sri Aurobindo, "wanted to make England's yoke easy and its burden light, but not to remove the yoke altogether." All that it hoped to achieve by its prudent policy of gradual and constitutional pressure, was a colonial form of government, expressing Britain's platonic sympathy for the political aspirations of the Indian nation, and evincing an imperial solicitude for its advancement under its perpetual tutelage. It lacked the vision, the faith, the courage, the impetuous drive and daring of the inspired rebel who would die rather than submit to bear the yoke of slavery.[102]

But disillusionment was not long in coming. Political agitation and bureaucratic repression gathered momentum from mutual conflict. Even the

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have to depend on England for even such a common article as lucifer match, nay, even for the very salt which seasons our rice.... The soil of India is getting impoverished year after year. Starvation is so much increasing in the country that one of the governing body himself admits that fifty millions of people are living on one meal a day..." Rajnarayan Bose (*Vide studies in the Bengal Renaissance*).

[102] "...the efforts they (the leaders of the Congress) have put forward have been puerile and paltry.... The movement lacked the essentials of a popular movement. The leaders were not in touch with the people.... A national movement, demanding only a few concessions and not speaking of the liberties of the nation and of its ideals, is never an effective movement..." — Lajpat Rai (*Young India*).

moderation of the Moderates was on the stretch. Forces of unrest and disaffection were brewing in ominous resentfulness. But beyond the fretful gloom, the dawning light was gilding the far rim of the eastern horizon. It was at this moment that Sri Aurobindo, soon after his return from England, entered the arena of Indian politics with his patriotic soul and powerful pen.

V

MOTHER INDIA

India, my India, where first human eyes awoke to
heavenly light,
All Asia's holy place of pilgrimage, great Motherland
of might!
World-mother, first giver to humankind of philosophy
and sacred lore,
Knowledge thou gav'st to man, God-love, works, art,
religion's opened door.[103]

Six months after Sri Aurobindo's arrival at Baroda, he started contributing a series of political articles under the general title, "*New Lamps for Old*" to *Induprakash,* a weekly paper edited in Bombay by his Cambridge friend, K.G. Deshpande. "They were begun at the instance of K.G. Deshpande,... but the first two articles made a sensation and frightened Ranade and other Congress leaders. Ranade warned the proprietor of the paper that, if this went on, he would surely be prosecuted for sedition. Accordingly the original plan of the series had to be dropped at the proprietor's instance. Deshpande requested Sri Aurobindo to continue in a modified tone and he reluctantly consented, but felt no farther interest and the articles were published at long intervals and finally dropped of themselves altogether."[104]

Regarding his interview with Mahadeo Govind Ranade, Sri Aurobindo says in his Bengali book, *Kara Kahini,* (The Story of my prison life): "I remember when, back home from England, fifteen years ago, I started writing in the *Induprakash* of Bombay, strongly protesting against the Congress policy of prayer and petition, the late Sri Mahadev Govind

[103] The first stanza of Dwijendralal Roy's Bengali song, translated by Sri Aurobindo.

[104] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, page 27.

Ranade, seeing how these articles were acting on the minds of the youth, exhorted me, from the moment I met him, for two quarters of an hour, to leave off such writing and take up some Congress work. He wished to entrust me with the work of jail reform. I was surprised and displeased at this request and refused it."[105] Questioned about the significance of the title of the series, Sri Aurobindo said: "This title did not refer to Indian civilisation but to Congress politics. It is not used in the sense of Aladdin story, but was intended to imply the offering of new lights to replace the old and faint reformist lights of the Congress."[106]

The editor of the *Induprakash* introduced *New Lamps for Old* with the following statement. The series was published anonymously.

"We promised our readers sometime back a series on our present political progress by an extremely able and keen observer of the present times. We are very much pleased to give our readers the first instalment of that series. The title under which these views appear is 'New Lamps for Old', which is suggestive, though a metaphorical one. The preface will take us over to the next issue. The views therein contained are not those that are commonly held by our politicians, and for this reason they are very important. We have been convinced that efforts in political progress are not sustained but are lacking in vigour. Hypocrisy has been the besetting sin of our political agitation. Oblique vision is the fashion. True, matter of fact, honest criticism is very badly needed. Our institutions have no foundation and are in hourly danger of falling down. Under these circumstances, it was idle, nay criminal, to remain silent while our whole energy in political progress was spent in a wrong direction. The questions at issue are momentous. It is the making or unmaking of the nation. We have, therefore, secured a gentleman of great literary talents, of liberal culture and of considerable experience, well versed in the art of writing, at great personal inconvenience and probable misrepresentation, to give out

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[105] *The Liberator* by Sisir Kumar Mitra, page 40. Sri Aurobindo met M. G. Ranade in Bombay some time in 1894 — *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A. B. Purani.

[106] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, page 27.

his views in no uncertain voice, and, we may be allowed to add, in a style and direction peculiarly his own. We beseech our readers' most careful and constant perusal on his behalf and assure them that they will find in these articles matter that will set them thinking and stir their patriotic souls."[107]

Thus did Sri Aurobindo's political thought launch out upon its breath-taking career. His first shots were aimed, not at the British bureaucracy who were fleecing India of all her resources and stamping out her political aspiration and initiative, but at the Indian National Congress, which had deluded itself and deluded the nation into thinking that it was India's potential deliverer. Sri Aurobindo, as we have already seen, had followed the activities of the Congress even when he was in England. At Baroda he studied them more closely for six months; and it was with an unerring intuition that he laid his finger on the basic defects and disabilities which were standing in the way of its success. He was, in fact, the first to subject the policies and methods of the Congress to a ruthless scrutiny and incisive logic, and expose them to the nation at large. "Sri Aurobindo stands out as the first exponent of the new revolutionary political thought and idealism which inspired national effort, struggle, and suffering through half a century and achieved for India her full political freedom in 1947. It was Sri Aurobindo's rare insight and inner vision that first detected the inherent defects of the traditional Congress method of political work which was so far based on what was rightly described as mendicant politics — the politics of small administrative reforms, passing pious Resolutions as appeals to the foreign rulers, and ignoring the fundamental need of the country, that of its total freedom from foreign rule itself."[108]

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[107] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

[108] Dr. R.K. Mukherji in *Sri Aurobindo's Political Thought* by Profs. Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee.

In this connection it would be interesting to know what Swami Vivekananda thought about the Congress. In 1898 — five years after Sri Aurobindo had attacked the Congress policy of protest, petition and prayer — Aswini Kumar Datta, the saintly leader of the district of Barisal in Bengal and a great educationist and social worker,

The Congress was started more with the object of saving the British Empire from danger than with that of winning political liberty for India. The interests of the British Empire were primary, and those of India only secondary; and no one can say that the Congress has not been true to that ideal. It might be said with justice and reason that the founders of the Indian National Congress considered the maintenance of the British rule in India of vital importance to India herself.[109] The movement (of the

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about whom we shall hear something from Sri Aurobindo himself later on, met Swami Vivekananda at Almora (in the Himalayas) and had the following talk with him:

ASWINI BABU: But have you no faith in what Congress is doing?

SWAMIJI: No, I have not. But, of course, something is better than nothing, and it is good to push the sleeping nation from all sides to wake it up. Can you tell me what the Congress is doing for the masses? Do you think merely passing a few resolutions will bring you freedom? I have no faith in that. The masses must be awakened first.... But the essence of my religion is strength. The religion that does not infuse strength into the heart is no religion to me, be it of the Upanishads, the Gita or the Bhagavatam. Strength is religion, and nothing is greater than strength. — *Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western Disciples, pp. 586-7.

The truth of the Swami's words can be best appreciated if we take them in their proper context of the then tamasic or inert state of the enormous mass of the Indian people. He felt the pulse of the nation, and with his characteristic boldness preached to it the paradoxical gospel of strength: "Your football will take you nearer to heaven than the Gita." He knew that the supine masses had to pass through the storm and tumult of the rajasic or crude and turbid energies before they could rise into the quieter and cleaner atmosphere of moral and spiritual aspirations, the sattwic intelligence and equipoise. He did not make the fatal mistake of asking them to repress the foaming surges of their released energies and convert themselves overnight into moral types. He had the psychological knowledge that such drastic mass repressions are inevitably followed by dreadful explosions and upheavals. The law of evolution does not work on the rigid lines of human ethics.

[109] "For better, for worse, our destinies are now linked with those of England, and the Congress freely recognises that whatever advances we seek must be within the Empire itself...." — Gokhale.

"I am an inveterate. I am a robust optimist like Mahadeo Govind Ranade. I believe in divine guidance through human agency.... My steadfast loyalty (to the Crown) is founded upon the rock of hope and patience.... I accept British rule... as a dispensation

Congress) did not appeal to the nation. The leaders lacked that faith which alone makes it possible to make great sacrifices for it.[110]

The first article of the series appeared on the 7th August, 1893.[111] Like many other English-educated Indians, Sri Aurobindo also, when he was in England, had hailed the Indian National Congress as a timely and efficient instrument of political salvation. "It is within the recollection of most of us", said he, "to what giddy an eminence this body was raised, on how prodigious a wave of enthusiasm, against how immense a weight of resisting winds. So sudden was it all that it must have been difficult, I may almost say impossible, even for a strong man to keep his head and not follow with the shouting crowd. How shall we find words vivid enough to describe the fervour of those morning hopes, the April splendour of that wonderful enthusiasm? The Congress was to us all that is most dear, most high and most sacred; a well of living water in deserts more than Saharan, a proud banner in the battle of Liberty, and a holy temple of concord where the races met and mingled..."[112]

But it did not take long for the first impression to wear off. A closer scrutiny revealed the canker in the apple. "...If the blind lead the blind, shall they not both fall into a ditch?" ... "I myself two years ago would not have admitted that it (this apophthegm of the Galilean Prophet) can be truthfully applied to the National Congress. Yet that it can be so applied, — nay, that no judicious mind can honestly pronounce any other verdict on its action, — is the first thing I must prove, if these articles are to have any

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so wonderful... that it would be folly not to accept it as a declaration of God's will." — Pherozeshah Mehta.

"I have never faltered in my faith in the British character. The British are justice-loving, fair-minded people. Go on with moderation, with loyalty to the British Rule and patriotism towards our country." — Dadabhai Naoroji (Presidential speech at Lahore Congress, 1893).

[110] *Young India* by Lajpat Rai.

[111] The last article appeared on 6th March, 1894. The total number of articles on *New Lamps for Old* was nine.

[112] *New Lamps for Old*, August 7, 1893.

raison d'être. I am quite aware that in doing this my motive and my prudence may be called into question. I am not ignorant that I am about to censure a body, which to many of my countrymen seems the mightiest outcome of our new national life; to some a precious urn in which are guarded our brightest and noblest hopes; to others a guiding star which will lead us through the encircling gloom to a far distant paradise: and if I were not fully confident that this fixed idea of ours is a snare and a delusion, likely to have the most pernicious effects, I should simply have suppressed my own doubts and remained silent. As it is, I am fully confident, and even hope to bring over one or two of my countrymen to my own way of thinking, or, if that be not possible, at any rate to induce them to think a little more deeply than they have done."[113] This was, then, the object of this frank and forthright criticism — to induce the English-educated men to think deeply on the political problems of the country and escape from the spell of an unthinking admiration of the Congress. To awaken and stimulate the thinking mind of a subject people is to set it firmly on the road to freedom.

"...I say of the Congress, then, this, — that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in which it proceeds towards their accomplishment is not a spirit of sincerity and whole-heartedness, and that the methods it has chosen are not the right methods, and the leaders in whom it trusts, not the right sort of men to be leaders; — in brief, that we are at present the blind led, if not by the blind, at any rate by the one-eyed."[114]

If Sri Aurobindo's indictment of the British Government is strong and sharp, his exposure and denunciation of the weaknesses of his own people is mercilessly scathing. His censure of the Congress is so ruthless, because he wishes the Congress well, and would like to see it mend its ways and become effectively national. "Our actual enemy is not any force exterior to ourselves, but our own crying weaknesses, our cowardice, our selfishness, our hypocrisy, our purblind sentimentalism. I cannot really see why we should rage so furiously against the Anglo-Indians and call them by all

[113] *New Lamps for Old*, August 7, 1893.

[114] *Ibid*, August 28, 1893.

manner of opprobrious epithets. I grant that they are rude and arrogant, that they govern badly, that they are devoid of any great or generous emotion, that their conduct is that of a small coterie of masters surrounded by a nation of helots. But to say all this is simply to say that they are very commonplace men put into a quite unique position. Certainly it would be very grand and noble, if they were to smother all thought of their own peculiar interests, and aim henceforth, not at their own promotion, not at their own enrichment, but at the sole good of the Indian people. But such conduct we have no right to expect save from men of the most exalted and chivalrous character; and the sort of people England sends out to us are not as a rule exalted and chivalrous, but are usually the very reverse of that. They are really very ordinary men, — and not only ordinary men, but ordinary Englishmen, — types of the middle class or Philistines, in the graphic English phrase, with the narrow hearts and commercial habit of mind peculiar to that sort of people. It is something like folly to quarrel with them for not transgressing the law of their own nature. If we were not dazzled by the artificial glare of English prestige, we should at once acknowledge that these men are really not worth being angry with: and if it is idle to be angry with them, it is still more unprofitable to rate their opinion of us at more than a straw's value. Our appeal, the appeal of every high-souled 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 to our own reviving sense of manhood, to our own sincere fellow-feeling — so far as it can be called sincere, — with the silent and suffering people of India. I am sure that eventually the nobler part of us will prevail, — that when we no longer obey the dictates of a veiled self-interest, but return to the profession of a large and genuine patriotism, when we cease to hanker after the soiled crumbs which England may cast to us from her table, then it will be to that sense of manhood, to that sincere fellow-feeling that we shall finally and forcibly appeal."[115]

[115] *New Lamps for Old*, August 21, 1893.

"Prompted by our English instruction we have deputed to a mere machine so arduous a business as the remoulding of our entire destinies, needing, as it does, patient and delicate manual adjustment and a constant supervising vigilance — and this to a machine not efficient and carefully pieced together but clumsy and made on a rude and cheap model. So long as this temper prevails, we shall never realise how utterly it is beyond the power of even an excellent machine to renovate an effete and impoverished national character and how palpably requisite to commence from within and not depend on any exterior agency."[116]

"To commence from within" was the central secret of the reconstruction of national character, which Sri Aurobindo taught as early as 1893, and continued to insist upon all through his life. To touch into life the well-springs of the national being, to make its latent or dormant forces stream forth in a steady current and flow through all its fibres, to raise it from the darkness and inertia of tamas into a whirl of creative energies, and thereby bring about a radical transmutation of its whole existence in accord with the essential urges of the present and the vision and prescience of its future destiny — this was the ideal and method Sri Aurobindo consistently followed so long as he was in politics, and, with a universal sweep and a more powerful dynamic and unfaltering drive, when he was in spiritual life. Politics was the gateway through which he entered into the surging tide of the national life. But he did not remain long at the gateway. He called upon his countrymen to rally under his banner and set about clearing the foreground of the weeds that had covered the passage. He gave the initial inspiration, held up the ideal and the prospectus, and left it to those who were meant for that work to pursue the national objective on the lines chalked out by him, and himself plunged into the flood and rode the waves, in order that he might the better prepare the spiritual and psychological climate and conditions in which, and in which alone, the great destiny of India could be fully and perfectly realised. As we have said before, his politics was a prelude to his much vaster work of a universal sweep, and

[116] *Ibid,* October 30, 1893.

not just a small fragment, severed from the main body and representing a false start and a mistaken excursion."[117]

To those who asserted that "in all ages and all countries it is the thinking classes who have led the unthinking, and in the present state of our society we are bound not only to think for ourselves, but also to think for those who are still too ignorant to exercise that important function", Sri Aurobindo retorted: "If we are bent upon adopting England as our exemplar, we shall certainly imitate the progress of the glacier rather than the progress of the torrent. From Runnymede to Hull riots is a far cry; yet these seven centuries have done less to change partially the political and social exterior of England than five short years to change entirely the political and social exterior of her immediate neighbour. But if Mr. Ghose's[118] dogmatic utterance is true of England, I imagine it does not apply with equal force to other climes and other eras. For example, is it at all true of France? Rather we know that the first step of that fortunate country towards progress was not through any decent and orderly expansion, but through a purification by blood and fire. It was not a convocation of respectable citizens, but the vast and ignorant proletariat that emerged from a prolonged and almost coeval apathy and blotted out in five terrible years the accumulated oppression of thirteen centuries.... Is it at all true that the initiators of Irish resistance to England were a body of successful lawyers, remarkable only for a power of shallow rhetoric, and deputed by the sort of men that are turned out at Trinity College, Dublin? At any rate that is not what History tells us.... Just as the main strength of that ancient strenuous protest resided in the Irish populace led by the princes of their class, so the principal force of the modern subtler protest

[117] "I entered into political action and continued it from 1905 to 1910 with one aim and one alone: to get into the mind of the people a settled will for freedom and the necessity of a struggle to achieve it, in place of the futile ambling Congress methods till then in vogue." — From Sri Aurobindo's letter to Barrister Joseph Baptista on January 5, 1920.

[118] Mr. Manmohan Ghose.

resides in the Irish peasantry led by the recognised chiefs of a united people. I might go on and cull instances from Italy and America..."[119]

We have already, in the first chapter, referred to Sri Aurobindo's love of France, which was the result of a natural attraction.[120] We have also seen how much Ram Mohan Roy admired France. And it is interesting to know that Swami Vivekananda had the same admiration for that most cultured country in Europe. In a passing comparison between England and France, Sri Aurobindo wrote: "But if we carry our glance across the English Channel, we shall witness a very different and more animating spectacle. Gifted with a lighter, subtler and clearer mind than their insular neighbours, the French people have moved irresistibly towards a social and not a political development. It is true that French orators and statesmen, incapacitated by their national character from originating fit political ideals, have adopted a set of institutions curiously blended from English and American manufactures; but the best blood, the highest thought, the real grandeur of the nation does not reside in the Senate or in the Chamber of Deputies; it resides in the artistic and municipal forces of Parisian life, in the firm settled executive, in the great vehement heart of the French populace — and that has ever beaten most highly in unison with the grand ideas of Equality and Fraternity, since they were first enounced on the banner of the great and terrible Republic.... They chose not the fierce, sharp air of English individualism, but the bright influence of art and letters, of happiness, a wide and liberal culture, and the firm consequent cohesion of their racial and social elements.... To put it in a concrete form, Paris may be said to revolve around the Theatre, the Municipal Council and the French Academy, London looks rather to the House of Commons, and New York to the Stock exchange."[121]

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[119] *New Lamps for Old,* September 18, 1893.

[120] We quote his words again: "If there was attachment to a European land as a second country, it was intellectually and emotionally to one not seen or lived in in this life, not England, but France." — *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother.*

[121] *Induprakash,* October 30, 1893.

"Our national effort must contract a social and popular tendency before it can hope to be great and fruitful.... The proletariat among us is sunk in ignorance and overwhelmed with distress. But with that distressed and ignorant proletariat — now that the middle class is proved deficient in sincerity, power and judgment — with that proletariat resides, whether we like it or not, our sole assurance of hope, our sole chance in the future. Yet he is set down as a vain theorist and a dreamy trifler who would raise it from its ignorance and distress. The one thing needful, we are to suppose, the one thing worthy of a great and statesman-like soul is to enlarge the Legislative Councils until they are big enough to hold Mr. Pherozeshah Mehta and other geniuses of an immoderate bulk. To play with baubles is our ambition, not to deal with grave questions in a spirit of serious energy. But while we are playing with baubles, with our Legislative Councils, our Simultaneous Examinations, our ingenious schemes for separating the judicial from the executive functions, — while we, I say, are finessing about trifles, the waters of the great deep are being stirred and that surging chaos of the primitive man over which our civilised societies are super-imposed on a thin crust of convention is being strangely and ominously agitated."[122]

Not only did Sri Aurobindo expose the deficiencies and errors of the Congress, but his political knowledge and insight led him to predict the dire consequences of its half-hearted and opportunist policies upon the teeming, sweating, and starving masses of the Indian people, driven to desperation by ravaging famines and the oppressive laws and levies of the Government. "Already a red danger-signal has shot up from Prabhas Pattan[123] and sped across the country, speaking with a rude eloquence of strange things beneath the fair surface of our renascent, enlightened India; yet no sooner was the signal seen than it was forgotten. Perhaps the

[122] *New Lamps for Old*, December 4, 1893.

[123] An ancient town in Sourashtra (Gujarat).

religious complexion of these occurrences has lulled our fears; but when turbulence has once become habitual in a people, it is folly that will reckon on its preserving the original complexion. A few more taxes, a few more rash interferences of the Government, a few more stages of starvation, and the turbulence that is now religious will become social.... I again assert as our first and holiest duty the elevation and enlightenment of the proletariat...."[124]

Sri Aurobindo heard the distant rumbling of the live volcano of the "ailing and tortured" Indian proletariat, and warned the Congress that the volcano might erupt any day in shooting columns of burning lava, if courageous sincerity and self-sacrificing zeal, integrity and political foresight were not immediately applied to the solution of the national problems. But neither the Congress nor the British Government were in a mood to listen. They merrily jogged along between blinkers. And what was the result? Within a few years of the warning, the pent-up indignation of the people burst up, shaking the country to its very foundations. Political tragedies are often the outcome of the rulers' obstinate blindness to the writing on the wall.

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[124] Sri Aurobindo was one of the, if not the, first in India to preach "the elevation and enlightenment of the proletariat" long before the idea was conceived and propagated, but only in terms of crude material and economic welfare, by the prophets of the Russian Revolution, and gained currency all over Europe. But his ideal was the elevation of the proletariat to the high status of spiritual aristocracy, to Brahminhood, and not the levelling down of all grades of society to the shabby ranks of the material-minded proletariat. His preaching of spiritual Nationalism, if viewed from this angle, reveals its real objective — the attainment of political freedom as the first, indispensable base for the spiritual reconstruction of the race. His heart ached to see the proletariat sunk in abject poverty and squalor, and dead to any sense of the slavery in which they lived. He wanted them to be elevated and englightened, so that they might manifest the potential power, the divine fire, that lay buried within them. And it explains also his insistence on suffering and self-sacrifice on the part of the workers for national freedom, for it is through suffering and self-sacrifice alone that man attains to his divine manhood. "Work that she (Mother India) may prosper. Suffer that she may rejoice." — *Speeches of Sri Aurobindo*.

The series, *New Lamps for Old*, ends[125] on the ringing note of the awakening and political education of the Indian masses, without which it were mere folly to hope to achieve anything substantial and stable. Sri Aurobindo forecast the line of action which the Congress had to adopt afterwards, but, then, it was not the Congress of the mendicant Moderates, but of those who, chafing at the fetters of slavery, resolved to sacrifice themselves, if need be, on the altar of national freedom. Freedom became for them a matter of life and death. As Sri Aurobindo expressed it later: "It is light and air that favour growth. Cooped and cabined, we only pine and die."[126]

"...The proletariat is, as I have striven to show, the real key of the situation. Torpid he is and immobile; he is nothing of an actual force, but he is a very great potential force, and whoever succeeds in understanding and eliciting his strength, becomes by the very fact master of the future. Our situation is indeed complex and difficult beyond any that has ever been imagined by the human intellect; but if there is one thing clear in it, it is that the right and fruitful policy for the burgess, the only policy that has any chance of eventual success, is to base his cause upon an adroit management of the proletariat. He must awaken and organise the entire power of the country and thus multiply infinitely his volume and significance, the better to attain the supremacy as much social as political. Thus and thus only will he attain to his legitimate station, not an egoist class living for itself, but the crown of the nation and its head."[127]

The gravamen of Sri Aurobindo's charge against the Congress is contained in this short passage, already quoted above: "I say of the Congress, then, this, — that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in which it proceeds towards their accomplishment is not a spirit of sincerity and wholeheartedness, and that the methods it has chosen are not the right

[125] It did not really end, it was discontinued.

[126] *Bande Mataram*, daily edition, 31.10.1906.

[127] *New Lamps for Old*, March 6, 1894.

methods, and the leaders in whom it trusts, not the right sort of men to be leaders....” The absence of the right aim, the right spirit, the right methods, and the right men argues the lack of a keen sense of bondage and a deep, burning desire for freedom. Until there is that sense of bondage, the galling, torturing, intolerable sense that the life of a slave is worse than death, there can be no longing for freedom. One who is consumed by a yearning for freedom,[128] cares not for dangers and difficulties, not even for death. It is this lack of a sense of bondage and a longing for freedom, *mumukṣutva*, on the part of the Indian National Congress to which Sri Aurobindo attributes its failure to achieve anything substantial. Writing on *mumukṣutva* in his paper, The *Bande Mataram*, in 1906, he says:

“Mumukshutva or the longing for emancipation... is the most important pre-condition of political emancipation.... This longing implies as its own pre-conditions, one, the existence of bondage, and two, a keen sense of it. And the most disheartening feature in the present political leadership... is an almost utter absence of this sense. Our leaders are not at all conscious of their own and their country’s present political bondage. They do not, notwithstanding all their ravings against the Government, really feel the utter degradation and misery of their present position in the constitution of their State. Their sense of the disabilities and disadvantages of British despotism is personal and self-regarding. They complain because they are not appointed to high offices in the administration, and the appointment of a Bengali as the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, or of a Madrasee as Advocate General in Madras, sends up a chorus of congratulations from the whole body of the Indian press, who have not as yet arisen to a perception of the elementary truth that such isolated instances of official advancement do not and can never compensate for the serious intellectual and moral wrong which the government of one people by another, an alien

[128] “Strike off thy fetters! Bonds that bind thee down,
Of shining gold, or darker, baser ore...
Know, slave is slave, caressed or whipped, not free.” — Vivekananda

people, always inflicts. The leader who today leads a most violent attack on the Government, is therefore found, the moment that Government admits him into its counsels or woos him with offers of honour and preferment, to support and defend it most enthusiastically. All this is due to the absence of that keen sense of bondage — of that mumukshuttva — which is an essential pre-condition of emancipation both of individuals and nations."[129]

It was this keen sense of bondage, and an intense longing for freedom which Sri Aurobindo endeavoured to instil into his countrymen by various means, idealistic and practical. These means were of a complex and apparently contradictory nature, which baffled even some of his most devoted fellow-workers in the political field, for they did not possess the intuitive vision and foresight of India's glorious destiny, the acute historical sense and political wisdom, and, above all, the illumined, resourceful suppleness with which he could deal with the complicated interplay of the psychological forces going on behind the stream of outer events.[130] His first contribution to Indian politics was, as we have already seen, a consuming thirst for the liberation of the country, a passion for complete and unqualified independence, which he infused into the Indian nation. And the sole driving force behind the application of the means he advocated, was the religion of patriotism, the worship of India as the Mother, for whose emancipation it must be a surpassing joy and rare privilege for her children to suffer and sacrifice themselves. This was his second contribution. His appeal was always to the religious or spiritual sense of the people, which is the only sense, as Swami Vivekananda knew and proclaimed, upon which is grounded the whole fabric of Indian life and culture. We shall learn much more and in greater elaboration about this gospel of spiritual Nationalism as we proceed.

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[129] *Bande Mataram*, daily edition, 31.10.1906.

[130] We shall enlarge upon this important point when we come to study Sri Aurobindo's political thought and work in all their bearings.

VI

> *"Swaraj as the fulfilment of the ancient life of India under modern conditions, the return of the Satyayuga of National greatness, the resumption by her (by India) of her great role of teacher and guide, self liberation of the people for the final fulfilment of the Vedantic ideal in politics, this is the true Swaraj for India.... She (India) cannot do it without taking the management of her own life into her own hands. She must live her own life and not the life of a part or subordinate in a foreign Empire."*[131]
>
> — *Sri Aurobindo*

When Sri Aurobindo dropped the unfinished political series, *New Lamps for Old*, he started in the same journal, *Indu Prakash*, a short sequence of critical appreciation of Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the renowned genius of Bengali letters and the author of the national anthem, Bande Mataram. After completing the series on Bankim Chandra, Sri Aurobindo stopped contributing to the *Indu Prakash*. At this time, both the political and spiritual sides of his nature were pressing forward for free self-expression and self-realisation. It was a simultaneous development, marked by an increasing effort of his intrinsic spirituality to prevail over his ardent spirit of nationalism. Even when he felt a strong urge for spiritual power, it was his politics that inspired the urge and sought to employ it to its own end. "...I came in contact with a Naga Sannyasi... I told him that I want to get power for revolutionary activities. He gave me a violent Stotra (Sanskrit hymn) of Kali with *jahi, jahi* (slay, slay) to repeat. I did so and, as I had expected, it came to nothing."[132] But it did not take his spirituality long to subdue his politics to its own will and initiate and direct all its operations.

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[131] 'Ideals Face to Face', *Bande Mataram* (May 3,1908).

[132] From Nirodbaran's notes. "...But all this was for political success in his mission and not for Yoga." (*Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother,* p. 36.)

There was, then, no more any discord or contrary pulls between the two movements. They became, in fact, one — a single current of soul-force fulfilling itself in life. But his spirituality was yet in its radiant childhood. It had not found its destined path. It had no definite vision of its ultimate fulfilment. It was compounded of God's secret direction, his soul's insistent urge, and his mind and heart's aspiration, prayer and preparation. A mighty spirituality was rising from within and pervading and mastering all parts of his being, and he gave himself up to it without reserve. This stage of his inner development is vividly portrayed in his poem, *The Vedantin's Prayer*.

THE VEDANTIN'S PRAYER

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

By clouds assailed?
    Why am I thus disfigured by desire,
Distracted, haled,

Scorched by the fire
    Of fitful passions, from Thy peace out-thrust
Into the gyre

Of every gust?
    Betrayed to grief, o'ertaken with dismay,
Surprised by lust?

Let not my grey

Blood-clotted past repel Thy sovereign ruth,
Nor even delay,

O lonely Truth!
Nor let the specious gods who ape Thee still
Deceive my youth.

These clamours still;
For I would hear the eternal voice and know
The eternal Will.

This brilliant show
Cumbering the threshold of eternity
Dispel, — bestow

The undimmed eye,
The heart grown young and clear. Rebuke, O Lord,
These hopes that cry

So deafeningly,
Remove my sullied centuries, restore
My purity.

O hidden door
Of Knowledge, open! Strength, fulfil thyself!
Love, outpour![133]

The poem is intensely moving. It is suffused with the aroma of the poet's deepest aspiration. It mirrors his soul and his heart in their most poignant

[133] This poem, unlike most poems of Sri Aurobindo which express his visions, experiences, and realisations, is one which embodies a burning aspiration, and has a haunting human appeal.

moment of God-seeking. But what distinguishes it from such other poems is the distinctive note it strikes in the following lines:

"I would hear the eternal voice and know
The eternal Will."

"O hidden door
Of Knowledge, open! Strength, fulfil thyself!
Love, outpour!"

Sri Aurobindo's unascetic, unorthodox, life-affirming spirituality breathes in the poem its characteristic aspiration: the eternal voice must be heard, the eternal Will (God's Will to Self-unfoldment in the world) must be known, and allowed to express and realise itself in the poet's whole life. And Strength (the Divine Power) must fulfil itself. Not in some remote and recondite Beyond, but here, in this earthly life, in this human bodily existence, in the very midst of our natural activities, the Divine Union must be realised and the Divine Manifestation take place. These lines strike the keynote of the dynamic spirituality that was developing in Sri Aurobindo, and the integral Yoga he was to practise and teach for the radical transformation of human nature and the birth of the supramental race on earth.

An outline of Sri Aurobindo's political views seems to be called for at this point. There has been a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding in the public mind in regard to the manifold and flexible nature of his politics, and people have formed and expressed misleading and often fantastic ideas of it. Some have taken him to be a pacifist, believing in non-violence; others have gone to the other extreme and dubbed him the arch-leader of the terrorist movement in Bengal. And some have taken the middle stand, interpreting his politics as a curious compound of a strong reactionary religious bias, Parnellism, Sinn Fein, and an intense, militant, revolutionary nationalism. The best thing for us would be to hear from himself what his politics really was, how it envisaged its ultimate goal and meant to attain it.

"There were three sides to Sri Aurobindo's political ideas and activities. First, there was the action with which he started, a secret revolutionary propaganda and organisation of which the central object was the preparation of an armed insurrection. Secondly, there was a public propaganda intended to convert the whole nation to the ideal of independence which was regarded, when he entered into politics, by the vast majority of Indians as unpractical and impossible, an almost insane chimera. It was thought that the British Empire was too powerful and India too weak, effectively disarmed and impotent even to dream of the success of such an endeavour. Thirdly, there was the organisation of the people to carry on a public and united opposition and *undermining the foreign rule through an increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance*.[134]

"At that time the military organisation of the great empires and their means of military action were not so overwhelming and apparently irresistible as they are now: the rifle was still the decisive weapon, air power had not yet been developed and the force of artillery was not so devastating as it afterwards became. India was disarmed, but Sri Aurobindo thought that with proper organisation and help from outside the difficulty might be overcome, and in so vast a country as India and with the smallness of the regular British armies, even a guerrilla warfare accompanied by general resistance and revolt might be effective. There was also the possibility of a general revolt in the Indian army. At the same time he had studied the temperament and characteristics of the British people and the turn of their political instincts, and he believed that although they would resist any attempt at self-liberation by the Indian people and would at the most only concede very slowly such reforms as would not weaken their imperial control, still they were not of the kind which would be ruthlessly adamantine to the end: if they found resistance and revolt becoming general and persistent they would in the end try to arrive at an accommodation to

[134] The italics are ours.

save what they could of their empire, or, in an extremity, prefer to grant independence rather than have it forcefully wrested from their hands."[135]

These were the three planks of Sri Aurobindo's political programme. We shall dwell upon them in greater detail when we come to study his active politics in Bengal. It will be our endeavour to show, on the basis of his political writings and speeches, that he had not only proclaimed complete independence free from foreign control as the only goal of the nationalist movement, but drawn up a programme with an exhaustive exposition of the philosophy inspiring and sustaining it, and the practical methods of its application to the developing situation in the country. All that he had said in the pages of the *Bande Mataram* in 1907-8 formed the staple of the subsequent political work in India, and the gospel given during those years of an immense political upheaval was followed almost verbatim till the attainment of independence, except for the creed of non-violence to which he never subscribed. Here again, on the question of non-violence, his views appear to hold water when we consider them in the revealing light of the dire but avoidable disaster the nation has had to pass through as the inevitable consequence of an imposition of non-violence on the heterogeneous mass of Indian people, irrespective of the differences of their individual nature.[136]

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[135] *Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram.* How his insight into the temperament and characteristics of the British people has proved true! "They would... in an extremity, prefer to grant independence rather than have it forcefully wrested from their hands" was almost a prophecy of the way independence came to India about forty years later.

[136] "Like every other moral principle, ahimsa has to spring from the depth of the mind, and it must not be forced upon man from outside appeal of urgent needs.... No doubt through a strong compulsion of desire for some external result, men are capable of repressing their habitual inclinations for a limited time, but when it concerns an immense multitude of men of different traditions and stages of culture, and when the object for which such repression is exercised needs a prolonged period of struggle, complex in character, I cannot think it possible of attainment...." (Rabindranath Tagore)

Regarding non-violence, Sri Aurobindo says: "In some quarters there is the idea that Sri Aurobindo's political standpoint was entirely pacifist, that he was opposed in principle and in practice to all violence and that he denounced terrorism, insurrection, etc. as entirely forbidden by the spirit and letter of the Hindu religion. It is even supposed that he was a forerunner of the gospel of Ahimsa. This is quite incorrect. Sri Aurobindo is neither an impotent moralist nor a weak pacifist.

"The rule of confining political action to passive resistance was adopted as the best policy for the National Movement at that stage and not as a part of a gospel of Nonviolence or pacific idealism. Peace is a part of the highest ideal, *but it must be spiritual or at the very least psychological in its basis; without a change in human nature it cannot come with any finality*.[137] If it is attempted on any other basis (moral principle or gospel of Ahimsa or any other), it will fail *and even may leave things worse than before.* He is in favour of an attempt to put down war by international agreement and international force, what is now contemplated in the 'New Order', if that proves possible, but that would not be Ahimsa, it would be putting down of anarchic force by legal force, and even then one cannot be sure that it would be permanent. Within nations this sort of peace has been secured but it does not prevent occasional civil wars and revolutions and political outbreaks and repressions, sometimes of a sanguinary character.[138] The same might happen to a similar world-peace. Sri Aurobindo has never concealed his opinion that a nation is entitled to attain its freedom by violence, if it can do so or if there is no other way; whether it should do so or not depends on what is the best policy, not on ethical considerations. Sri

[137] The italics are ours.

[138] How topical it reads today! "On June 1897, on the occasion of the Shivaji festival, Tilak delivered a speech expressing the views that 'great men are above the principles of common morality', and thus justifying the murder of Afzal Khan by Shivaji." — *The Indian Nationalist Movement* by Dr. S.C. Bartarya.

Aurobindo's practice in this matter was the same as Tilak's[139] and that of other nationalist leaders who were by no means Pacifists or worshippers of Ahimsa."

On the same question of non-violence versus violence, Sri Aurobindo says again: "If Sri Aurobindo had not believed in the efficacy of violent revolution or had disliked it, he would not have joined the secret society whose purpose was to prepare a national insurrection. His historical studies had not taught him the lesson indicated here. On the contrary, he had studied with interest the revolutions and rebellions which led to national

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[139] Sarala Devi Choudhurani, the well-known organiser of physical education and propagator of the cult of lathi-play in Bengal, writes: "My lathi-cult was in full swing in those days. I had succeeded in making the practice of fencing and boxing, of the stick and the sword, and all other arts of manly self-defence popular, and captured the heart of the Bengali youth. But to my dismay,... some of my lathial boys felt tempted to join those bands (of political dacoits and terrorists).... I was hard put to it to convince them that it would be unworthy of their manhood. For, against all my reasonings was brought in the personality of Tilak and his approval as the greatest argument in favour of the dacoities. So I... wended my way at once to Poona... to have a personal talk with Lokamanya Tilak and learn his views on the matter ... Tilak told me distinctly that he did not approve of the dacoities, much less authorise them, if for nothing else, simply on the score of their being practically useless for political purposes. But looking to differences in human nature and the varying processes of evolution, suited to different temperaments, he did not condemn them openly." — *Reminiscences about Lokamanya Tilak* By Bapat.

Here was the perspicacious exponent of the Gita's Karmayoga, and a political leader who knew human psychology and had the wisdom and patience not to confuse and imperil the natural evolution of the masses by insisting on the achievement of moral ideals which were far too high for them. To force the pace of the evolution of the masses is to expose them to the dangers of violent recoils. Tilak knew, as Sri Aurobindo did, that, given an intense love of the motherland, for an Indian youth, the transition from the tossing turbidity of *rajas* to the comparative quiet and balance of *sattwa* can never be long. The sacrifices that the Bengali youth made with incredible courage and smiling fortitude compelled the admiration even of the most callous bureaucrats, and wiped away the stigma with which Macaulay and Curzon had branded the Bengalis. These sacrifices have, indeed, never been equalled. They revolutionised the political atmosphere of the country and galvanised the whole nation.

liberation, the struggle against the English in mediaeval France and the revolts which liberated America and Italy. He took much of his inspiration from these movements and their leaders, especially, Jeanne d'Arc and Mazzini. In his public activity he took up non-cooperation and passive resistance as a means in the struggle for independence but not the sole means and as long as he was in Bengal he maintained a secret revolutionary activity as a preparation for open revolt, in case passive resistance proved insufficient for the purpose."[140]

What Sri Aurobindo wrote on Mazzini in the *Karma-yogin* of 21st August, 1909, is, to a certain extent, true of his own way of dealing with the various and conflicting problems of the political rebirth of India. His habit in action was "not to devise beforehand and plan but to keep a fixed purpose, watch events, prepare forces and act when he felt it to be the right moment."[141] This has been, as we all know, the case with all those who are led by the inner light — not to occupy the mind with devising and planning, reasoning and debating and calculating on the flimsy basis of ambiguous and precarious sense-data and inference, but to keep it silent and wait upon the intuition of each moment for guidance in thought and action. As Sri Aurobindo says in his *Thoughts and Aphorisms*: "When I speak, the reason says, 'This will I say'; but God takes the word out of my mouth and the lips say something else at which reason trembles." "I am not a Jnani, for I have no knowledge except what God gives me for His work. How am I to know whether what I see be reason or folly? Nay, it is neither; for the thing seen is simply true and neither folly nor reason." The spiritual light never fails one, if one has risen into it and can command its constant action. But to the dusky mind of man the Light is an illusion, and the action of a Yogi a baffling riddle.

"Of all the great actors who were in the forefront of the Italian Revolution, Mazzini and Cavour were the most essential to the Italian

[140] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, p. 33.

[141] *Ibid.*, pp. 34. 35.

Regeneration. Of the two, Mazzini was undoubtedly the greater. Cavour was the statesman and organiser, Mazzini the prophet and creator. Mazzini was busy with the great and eternal ideas which move masses of men in all countries and various ages, Cavour with the temporary needs and circumstances of modern Italy. The one was an acute brain, the other a mighty soul. Cavour belongs to Italy, Mazzini to all humanity.[142] Cavour was the man of the hour, Mazzini the citizen of Eternity.[143]... Mazzini summed up the soul of all humanity, the idea of its past and the inspiration of its future in Italian forms and gave life to the dead. At his breath the dead bones clothed themselves with flesh and the wilderness of poisonous brambles blossomed with rose. Mazzini found Italy corrupt, demoralised, treacherous, immoral, selfish, wholly divided and incapable of union; he gave her the impulse of a mighty hope, a lofty spirituality, an intellectual impulse which, despising sophistry and misleading detail, went straight to the core of things and fastened on the one or two necessities, an ideal to live and die for and the strength to live and die for it. This was all he did, but it was enough.... His eyes were always fixed on the mind and heart of the nation, very little on the external or internal circumstances of Italy. He was not a statesman, but he had a more than statesmanlike insight. His plan of a series of petty, local and necessarily abortive insurrections strikes the ordinary practical man as the very negation of commonsense and political wisdom. It seems almost as futile as the idea of some wild brains, if indeed the idea be really cherished, that by random assassinations the freedom of this country can be vindicated. There is, however, a radical difference. Mazzini knew well what he was about. His eyes were fixed on the heart of the nation, and as the physician of the Italian malady his business was not with the ultimate and perfect result but with the creation of conditions favourable to complete cure and resurgence. He knew final success was impossible without the creation of a force that could not be commanded for

[142] "Heralds of a new world, we must found a moral unity, the Catholicism of Humanity." — Mazzini

[143] "We come in the name of God and of Humanity." — Mazzini

some time to come. But he also knew that even force could not succeed without a great spiritual and moral strength behind its action and informing its aspirations. It was this strength he sought to create. The spiritual force he created by the promulgation of the mighty and uplifting ideas which pervade his writings and of which Young Italy was the organ.[144]

"But moral force cannot be confirmed merely by ideas, it can only be forged and tempered in the workshop of action. And it was the habit of action, the habit of strength, daring and initiative which Mazzini sought to recreate in the torpid heart and sluggish limbs of Italy. And with it he sought to establish the sublime Roman spirit of utter self-sacrifice and self-abnegation, contempt of difficulty and apparent impossibility and an iron insensibility to defeat. For his purpose the very hopelessness of the enterprises he set on foot were more favourable than more possible essays. And when others' and sometimes his own heart reproached him with flinging away so many young and promising lives into the bloody trench of his petty yet impossible endeavours, the faith and wisdom in him upheld him in the face of every discouragement. Because he had superhuman strength, he was permitted to uplift Italy. Had it been God's purpose that Italy should become swiftly one of the greater European powers, he would have been permitted to free her also. He would have done it in a different way from Cavour's — after a much longer lapse of time, with a much more terrible and bloody expense of human life, but without purchasing Italy's freedom in the French market by the bribe of Savoy and Nice, and with such a divine output of spiritual and moral force as would have sustained his country for centuries and fulfilled his grandiose dream of an Italy

[144] "Your Country is the token of the mission which God has given you to fulfil in Humanity. The faculties, the strength of all its sons should be united for the accomplishment of this mission... your Country should be your Temple. God at the summit, a People of equals at the base.... Be apostles of this faith, apostles of the brotherhood of nations, and of the unity of the human race.... Preach..., O Brothers, in the name of God. He who has an Italian heart will follow you." (Mazzini)

spiritually, intellectually and politically leading Europe."[145] (Sri Aurobindo: *The Need in Nationalism and Other Essays*).

We propose to undertake a comprehensive study of the rationale of Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary and insurrectionary politics in the next article, for, it is vital to a proper understanding of Sri Aurobindo's political thought and action, and the militant nationalism of which he was the prophet.

[145] "I thought to call up the soul of Italy, and I only see its corpse." — Mazzini.

VII

> *"Indian civilisation... made it its chief aim to minimise the incidence and disaster of war. For this purpose it limited the military obligation to the small class who by their birth, nature and traditions were marked out for this function and found in it their natural means of self-development through the flowering of the soul in the qualities of courage, disciplined force, strong helpfulness and chivalrous nobility for which the warrior's life pursued under the stress of a high ideal gives a field and opportunities.... Being subjected to high ethical ideals and every possible rule of humanity and chivalry the function of war was obliged to help in ennobling and elevating instead of brutalising those who performed it.... It is war of this kind and under these conditions that the Gita had in view, war considered as an inevitable part of human life, but so restricted and regulated as to serve like other activities the ethical and spiritual development which was then regarded as the whole real object of life..."*
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> *Essays on the Gita* by Sri Aurobindo — Ch.VI.

The question which has occurred to most patriots and nationalists in India — it occurred even to many of Sri Aurobindo's close and trusted colleagues — is this: Why did Sri Aurobindo engage in insurrectionary and revolutionary politics? He was one of the foremost leaders of the Nationalist or Extremist party, respected by his fellow-workers and followers as no other leader was respected. He exercised an unparalleled influence upon the youth of the country, who simply adored and idolised him. Even those who differed from him could not help paying homage to his flaming patriotism, his exalted spiritual idealism, his absolute sincerity of purpose, his far-seeing, intuitive intelligence, and above all, the

Olympic grandeur of his soul, which was a rare blend of a selfless, universal love, and indomitable will to conquer the freedom of India for the good of humanity, and an utter, self-effacing humility, which steered clear of all lime-light and was content only to dare and achieve.[146] The tributes that some of the greatest of his contemporaries paid him and the admiring esteem in which he was held even by some sensitive foreigners, testify to the fact that his personality was universally considered to be unique in its inner resources, and powerfully dynamic. If we cast a hurried glance at some of these tributes before taking up the study of the rationale of his revolutionary politics, we shall see that they prove, more than anything else, that his politics was no rash adventure or a desperate gamble of a thoughtless moment. It was a spontaneous response of Bengal to the challenge of the hour.

Bepin Chandra Pal, than whom there was no more eloquent preacher and exponent of Indian Nationalism in those days, and who worked with Sri Aurobindo on the editorial board of the *Bande Mataram*, writes from an intimate knowledge of him: "Youngest in age among those who stand in the forefront of the nationalist propaganda in India, but in endowment, education and character, perhaps superior to them all — Aravinda seems distinctly marked out by Providence to play in the future of this movement a part not given to any of his colleagues and contemporaries.... His only care is for his country... the Mother as he always calls her.... Nationalism... at its best, a concern of the intellect with some, at the lowest, a political cry and aspiration with others... is with Aravinda a supreme passion of his soul. Few, indeed, have grasped the force and meaning of the Nationalist ideal as Aravinda has done.... Blessed are they for whom this tragic antithesis between the ideal and the real has been cancelled; for whom to know the truth is to attain it; in whom there is no disparity, either in time

[146] "The will of Divine Wisdom is the sole law of revolutions, and we have no right to consider ourselves as anything but mere agents chosen by the Wisdom.... Do we serve the Mother for a reward or do God's work for hire? The patriot lives for his country because he must; he dies for her because she demands it. That is all." — Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, 9-2-1908.

or degree, between the idea and its realisation; in whom the vision of the ideal, by its own intrinsic strength, at once attunes every craving of the flesh, every movement of the mind, every motion of the heart and every impulse of the will to itself; who have to strive for its realisation, not within but without; who have to struggle not with their own self, but with the not-self; who have to fight and conquer not themselves but others, in order to establish the Kingdom of God, realised by them in the relations of their own inner life, in the actualities and appointments of the life of their own people or of humanity at large. They are, so to say, the chosen of God. They are born leaders of men. Commissioned to serve special ends affecting the life and happiness of large masses of men, they bear a charmed life. They may be hit, but cannot be hurt. They may be struck but are not stricken. Their towering optimism and the grace of God turn every evil into good, every opposition into help, every loss into gain. By the general verdict of his countrymen, Aravinda stands today among these favoured sons of God.[147]

"...politics meant to him much more than is ordinarily understood by the term. It was not a game of expediency, but a school for developing character. Aravinda is an apostle of modern education. Indeed, his ideal of modern education is even higher than what is understood by modern education ordinarily in Europe. It is a supremely spiritual ideal. Its aim is to actualise the highest and deepest God-consciousness... in the outer life and appointments of human society.... Had he been given a free hand in the new National College, that institution would have opened an altogether new Chapter not only in the history of modern education in India, but perhaps in the whole world. To work the realism of the spirit of modern culture into the idealism of ancient Indian philosophy would not only secure for India her lost position as the teacher of humanity, but would perchance even save modern civilisation from total collapse and destruction under the pressure of a gross and greedy industrialism."[148]

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[147] *Character Sketches* by Bepin Chandra Pal.

[148] *Character Sketches* by Bepin Chandra Pal.

"... Aravinda was the leading spirit, the central figure, in the new journal (the *Bande Mataram*). The opportunities that were denied him in the National College he found in the pages of the *Bande Mataram*, and from a tutor of a few hundred youths he thus became the teacher of a whole nation."[149]

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, one of the greatest Nationalist leaders, who knew Sri Aurobindo intimately and enjoyed his friendship and respectful confidence, wrote about him in some of his editorial comments in the *Keshari*.[150] We give here a free English rendering of some gleanings from them: "None is equal to Aravinda in self-sacrifice, knowledge and sincerity.... If one sees him, one won't think it was Aravinda... so weak of body and so simple in dress and bearing.... It is a dispensation of benign Providence that persons like Aravinda have been drawn to the national work.... His failure[151] in the Indian Civil Service examination was a blessing in disguise.... His erudition, *sattwic temperament*, *religious mind*, and self-sacrifice.... He writes from divine inspiration, sattwic intelligence, and unshakable determination...."

Lajpat Rai, who knew him, and met him in Calcutta, and also in some sessions of the Indian National Congress, speaks about him in his book, *Young India*: "...In intellectual acumen and in scholastic accomplishments, he is perhaps superior to Har Dayal, but above all, he is *deeply religious and spiritual*. He is a worshipper of Krishna and a high-souled Vedantist.... His notions of life and morality are pre-eminently Hindu and *he believes in the spiritual mission of his people*...."

Henry W. Nevinson, an English M.P., who travelled in India with his eyes wide open, and his mind sympathetically attuned to the pulse of the new life which he witnessed all over India, had a talk with Sri Aurobindo in Calcutta, and saw him again at Surat during the famous session of the Indian National Congress. He writes in his book, *The New Spirit in India*:

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[149] *Character Sketches* by Bepin Chandra Pal.

[150] A Marathi journal edited by B. G. Tilak.

[151] He did not appear for the riding test, and, so, was disqualified.

"He was a youngish man, I should think still under thirty. Intent dark eyes looked from his thin, clear-cut face with a gravity that seemed immovable, but the figure and bearing were those of an English graduate.... He regarded the Partition of Bengal as the greatest blessing that had ever happened to India. No other measure could have stirred national feeling so deeply or roused it so suddenly from the lethargy of previous years. 'Since 1830,' he said, 'each generation had reduced us more and more to the condition of sheep and fatted calves'. He lamented the long peace, leading to degeneracy and effeminate ways.... There is a *religious tone, a spiritual elevation* in such words, very characteristic of Aravinda Ghose himself.... Nationalism to him was far more than a political object or a means of material improvement. To him it was surrounded by a mist of glory.... Grave with intensity, careless of fate or opinion, and one of the silent men I have known, he was of the stuff that dreamers are made of, but dreamers who will act their dreams, indifferent to the means."

It is not necessary to multiply extracts like the above from the tributes showered upon Sri Aurobindo by all those great leaders of thought and action, who came in more or less close contact with him. It is quite evident from these that the one strain of his personality which had an immediate and universal appeal, the one common note in all the expressions of homage and respect, was the transparent spirituality of his nature, and his absolute, child-like reliance on God and His guidance. When such a person, spiritual, sincere, highly educated and intelligent, and irreproachably pure and steadfast in his feelings and will, embarks upon revolutionary politics, it would be stark folly to put it down to a reckless freak. There must have been sound reason behind, an imperative knowledge and inspiration, which it should be our endeavour to understand, as far as possible, with the help of his own statements. This will necessarily involve the question of violence *vs* non-violence, referred to above, which, in view of the latest developments in Indian politics, has assumed a surpassing importance. Unless this question is torn out of the ethico-religious nimbus with which it has been surrounded for over four decades, the confusion, which has crippled India's spiritual evolution and hindered her advance on the lines

of her self-nature to her true destiny, cannot be dissipated. It is the key question of the hour, and it should be faced squarely, and with forthright candour and courage.

The first impression that Sri Aurobindo had on his tours in Bengal during the closing years of the last century, when he was serving in the Baroda State, was of the "prevailing mood of apathy and despair". Except for the anglomaniacs who peacocked about in borrowed feathers and tinkered at social reform, and the Congress Moderates with their goodly begging bowls, Bengal was sunk in tamas. It lay supine under the heels of the British Raj. Sri Aurobindo wanted to rouse it into activity, to infuse a new spirit and a new life into its torpid limbs, even as Swami Vivekananda had sought to do in his own way before him. Tamas had to be churned, the immobility of inertia had to be lashed into the storm and turmoil of passionate drives. Sri Aurobindo was aware of the immense potential of his country, and felt that, if rajas could be quickened and energised, and a burning love of the motherland inspired in the hearts of the youths, the nation would rise to its feet and march forward, not only to the conquest of freedom, but to the fulfilment of its great destiny. But political freedom was the immediate objective, and Sri Aurobindo believed that an organised insurrection and guerilla war might go a long way to realise it. He started with Bengal. He supplied the spark, the kindling, upheaving and galvanising force, which convulsed the frozen timidity and lethargy of long years of political serfdom, and prepared the human soil for the approaching hour of action. He worked at first in secret from Baroda. But when the hour of action arrived, when the Partition of Bengal shook up the whole nation, he plunged into the fray and led the fight for freedom. Passive resistance (we shall dwell upon it later) and active, defensive resistance, he inspired and organised both, and though he was not committed to non-violence, in view of the prevailing circumstances in the country he leaned more upon the former. But he also gave a tremendous fillip to the revolutionary movement. Under his inspiration, young boys threw themselves into the revolutionary work, not only with careless self-abandon, but with the surging delight of a deliberate self-sacrifice for the liberation of their

motherland, the Mother of their passionate love and devotion. Gone was the chill darkness of stupefied slavery, and, in its place, came gleams of hope, ardours of enthusiasm, leaping flames of rebellious indignation, and the desperate courage that counts no cost too great to attempt and achieve. Indignation fed the fires of patriotism, and the newly roused insurrectionary spirit fretted at the chains of slavery.

If we could transport ourselves into the context of the Partition days of Bengal, we would see how sudden and surprising an awakening was achieved in the name of Nationalism! Without that awakening, that marvellous sowing of the seeds of patriotism, the subsequent political harvests in India would hardly have been possible.

Was the awakening and agitation confined to some patriotic intellectuals and the educated youths of the country? But that is inevitable in the beginning of every revolutionary movement. It is the thinking section of the nation that responds first to new ideas and inspirations.

Did the movement lack proper organisation and cohesive force, and suffer from internal discord? That, too, was inevitable in the trying circumstances of the hour. Brutal governmental repression,[152] persistent opposition from the vested interests in the country, inexperience and immaturity of the workers, crippling financial stringency, clash of emergent political ideas, and the general apathy of the mass mind — these were the heavy odds against which the infant insurrection had to struggle for survival. That it survived so long, in whatever form it may be, and achieved so much within so short a period witnesses to the immense vitality and vigour of the inspiration which had generated in it the first stirrings of life and given it the initial impulsion.

Did the revolutionary movement entail violence, bloodshed, imprisonment, suffering, and the sacrifice of some promising youthful lives? But Sri Aurobindo knew well enough that that was the price the

[152] "There is no surer method of goading a docile people into a state of dangerous despair than the kind of hectoring and repression he (Sir B. Fuller, the then Governor of Bengal) has been attempting." — G.K. Gokhale.

nation had to pay for wresting freedom from unwilling hands, for rekindling the Kshatriya spirit in itself, and for rising from the tamasic numbness into the swirl of rajasic passions on its way to the enlightened peace and mental poise of sattwa.[153] Sri Aurobindo did not grudge the price, even as Mazzini, the lover of God and humanity, had not, even as Rana Pratap and Joan of Arc had not grudged it in their times. He knew, that was the shortest and surest way to national awakening. He knew, besides, that the nation was not ready for completely eschewing violence. Rather, a drastic, cavalier repression of the all too natural feeling of violent indignation, he knew, would eventuate in explosive outbursts of the most disastrous kind. And so it did happen later. The savage orgies of reprisal — it matters little whether they were political or communal — were such outbursts, which drenched the country in blood[154] and left an ugly scar upon

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[153] (a) "...What is called the resisting of evil is but a step on the way towards the manifestation of this highest power, *viz*., nonresistance. Before reaching the highest ideal, man's duty is to resist evil; let him work, let him fight, let him strike straight from the shoulder. Then only, when he has gained the power to resist, will non-resistance be a virtue." — Vivekananda

(b) At Almora, Swami Vivekananda was asked by a rather gentle and meek person: "What should one do against the tyranny of a strong man?" Turning on him in surprised indignation, the Swami replied: "Why, thrash the strong, of course! You forget your own part in this karma. Yours is always the right to rebel." And Vivekananda was nothing if he was not, every inch of him, a spiritual man!

[154] The great leader, Gandhiji, at last disillusioned and distressed, admitted with his characteristic candour: "The attitude of violence, which we have secretly harboured, now recoils on us and makes us fly at each other's throats when the question of distribution of power arises.... Now that the burden of subjection is lifted, all the forces of evil have come to the surface."

To the stock argument that we have won our freedom by the power of nonviolence, Vinoba Bhave, retorts: "We say we attained independence through the way of peace, but it is only a partial truth. If it had been wholly true, then the whole nation would have experienced 'the power of peace'. There would have been faith in peace and our country would not have been reduced to the present miserable condition. We would not have presented the sorry spectacle of being divided into many groups, parties and communities, who do not trust one another.... The way of peace we followed for the

its fair name, and a paralysing legacy of fissured India and proliferating internal dissensions.

We cannot do better than quote a few passages from what Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1907 on this question:

"When tamas, inertia, torpor have benumbed a nation, the strongest forms of rajas are necessary to break the spell; there is no form of rajas so strong as hatred. Through rajas we rise to sattwa, and for the Indian temperament the transition does not take long. Already the element of hatred is giving place to the clear conception of love for the Mother as the spring of our political actions." — *The Morality of Boycott*, an unpublished writing of Sri Aurobindo, seized by the Police and made an exhibit in the Alipore Conspiracy Case (May, 1908).

"A certain class of mind shrinks from aggressiveness as if it were a sin. Their temperament forbids them to feel the delight of battle and they look on what they cannot understand as something monstrous and sinful. 'Heal hate by love', 'drive out injustice by justice', 'slay sin by righteousness' is their cry. Love is a sacred name, but it is easier to speak of love than to love. The love which drives out hate is a divine quality of which one man in a thousand is capable. A saint full of love for all mankind possesses it, a philanthropist consumed with a desire to heal the miseries of the race possesses it, but the mass of mankind does not and cannot rise to the height. Politics is concerned with masses of mankind and not with individuals.[155] To ask masses of mankind to act as saints, to rise to the height of divine love and practise it in relation to their adversaries or oppressors is to ignore human nature. It is to set a premimum on injustice and violence by

attainment of freedom was the peace of the helpless...." — Reproduced in Bhavan's Journal of Nov. 18, 1956.

[155] "Politics is a game of worldly people and not of Sadhus, and instead of the maxim *akkodhena jine kodham* (conquer anger by non-anger) as preached by Buddha, I prefer to rely on the maxim of Sri Krishna "*ye yathā māṁ prapadyante tāṁstathaiva bhajāmyaham*" (as they approach me so do I respond). — Tilak (written to the editor of the *Young India*).

paralysing the hand of the deliverer when raised to strike. The Gita is the best answer to those who shrink from battle as a sin, and aggression as a lowering of morality." — *The Morality of Boycott*, an unpublished writing of Sri Aurobindo seized by the Police and made an exhibit in the Alipore Conspiracy Case 1908.

"Hinduism recognises human nature and makes no such impossible demand. It sets one ideal for the saint, another for the man of action, a third for the trader, a fourth for the serf. To prescribe the same ideal for all is to bring about *varṇasaṅkara*, the confusion of duties.... Politics is the ideal of the Kshatriya, and the morality of the Kshatriya ought to govern our political actions. To impose in politics the Brahmanical duty of saintly sufferance is to preach *varṇasaṅkara*. (*ibid*.)

"The sword of the warrior is as necessary to the fulfilment of justice and righteousness as the holiness of the saint. Ramdas is not complete without Shivaji. To maintain justice and prevent the strong from despoiling and the weak from being oppressed is the function for which the Kshatriya was created.[156] 'Therefore', says Sri Krishna in the Mahabharata, 'God created battle and armour, the sword, the bow and the dagger.'" (*ibid*.)

Referring to the circumstances in which passive or nonviolent resistance fails, Sri Aurobindo says: "To shrink from bloodshed and violence under such circumstances is a weakness deserving as severe a rebuke as Sri Krishna addressed to Arjuna on the field of Kurukshetra. Liberty is the life-breath of a nation; and when the life is attacked, when it is sought to suppress all chance of breathing by violent pressure, any and every means of self-preservation becomes right and justifiable[157]... just as it is lawful

[156] "Even the greatest Rishis of old could not, when the Rakshasas were fierce and determined, keep up the sacrifice without calling in the bow of the Kshatriya." — Sri Aurobindo

[157] "Let it never be forgotten that as for God, so even for a Sadhu — a saintly man — the first religious duty is the overcoming of the wicked, if the salvation of the people

for a man who is being strangled to rid himself of the pressure on his throat by any means in his power. It is the nature of the pressure which determines the nature of the resistance.[158]

Enlarging upon the necessary evil of war and aggression,[159] so long as man in the mass is what he is, Sri Aurobindo writes in his *Essays on the Gita*:

"War and destruction are not only a universal principle of our life here in its purely material aspects, but also of our mental and moral existence. It is self-evident that in the actual life of man intellectual, social, political, moral, we can make no real step forward without a struggle, a battle between what exists and lives and what seeks to exist and live, and between all that stands behind either. It is impossible, at least as men and things are, to advance, to grow, to fulfil and still to observe really and utterly that principle of harmlessness which is yet placed before us as the highest and best law of conduct. We will use only soul-force and never destroy by war or any even defensive employment of physical violence? Good, though until soul-force is effective, the Asuric force in man and nations tramples down, breaks, slaughters, burns, pollutes, as we see it doing today, but then at its ease and unhindered, and you have perhaps caused as much destruction of life by your abstinence as others by resort to violence; still you have set up an ideal which may some day and at any rate ought to lead up to better things. But even soul-force, when it is effective, destroys. Only those who have used it with eyes open, know how much more terrible and

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requires it. For this overcoming, 'the reactional thrust' or 'responsive blow' is at times necessary." — Tilak

"You must hiss at wicked people. You must frighten them lest they should do you harm." — Sri Ramakrishna (from his story of the Brahman and the Snake)

[158] *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance* by Sri Aurobindo. — First published in the *Bande Mataram* in 1907.

[159] "Aggression is unjust only when unprovoked; violence, unrighteous when used wantonly or for unrighteous ends." — Sri Aurobindo

destructive it is than the sword and the cannon; and only those who do not limit their view to the act and its immediate results, can see how tremendous are its after-effects, how much is eventually destroyed and with that much all the life that depended on it and fed upon it. Evil cannot perish without the destruction of much that lives by the evil, and it is no less destruction even if we personally are saved the pain of a sensational act of violence.

"Moreover, every time we use soul-force we raise a great force of Karma against our adversary, the after-movements of which we have no power to control. Vasishtha uses soul-force against the military violence of Vishwamitra and armies of Huns and Shakas and Pallavas hurl themselves on the aggressor. The very quiescence and passivity of the spiritual man under violence and aggression awakens the tremendous forces of the world to a retributive action; and it may even be more merciful to stay in their path, though by force, those who represent evil than to allow them to trample on until they call down on themselves a worse destruction than we would ever think of inflicting. It is not enough that our own hands should remain clean and our souls unstained for the law of strife and destruction to die out of the world; that which is its root must first disappear out of humanity.... So far as the problem of the individual's action goes, his abstention from strife and its inevitable concomitant destruction in their more gross and physical form may help his own moral being, but it leaves the Slayer of creatures unabolished."[160]

"A day may come, must surely come, we will say, when humanity will be ready spiritually, morally, socially for the reign of universal peace; meanwhile the aspect of battle and the nature and function of man as a fighter have to be accepted and accounted for by any practical philosophy and religion."[161]

If we disabuse our minds of our shallow ethical prepossessions, and ponder deeply and dispassionately on the spiritual truth of the words quoted

[160] *Essays on the Gita* by Sri Aurobindo, Chapter V.

[161] *Essays on the Gita* by Sri Aurobindo, Chapter VI.

above, much of the confusion of our thoughts, particularly of our political thought, will vanish for ever, and we shall be able to march forward to our national destiny[162] with surer steps, and by the deathless light of our spiritual culture.

[162] "...the function of India is to supply the world with a perennial source of light and renovation. Whenever the first play of energy is exhausted and earth grows old and weary, full of materialism, racked with problems she cannot solve, the function of India is to restore the youth to mankind and assure it of immortality. She sends forth a light from her bosom which floods the earth and the heavens, and mankind bathes in it like St. George in the well of life, and recovers hope and vitality for its long pilgrimage. Such a time is now at hand. The world needs India..." — Sri Aurobindo: *Bande Mataram* Weekly, May 3, 1908.

"...One vision I see clear as life before me, that the ancient Mother has awakened once more." — Vivekananda

"All make tranquil, all make free.
Let my heart-beats measure the footsteps of God
As He comes from His timeless infinity
To build in their rapture His burning abode.

Weave from my life His poem of days,
His calm pure dawns and His noons of force.
My acts for the grooves of His chariot-race,
My thoughts for the tramp of His great steeds' course!"[163]

Love of Mother India and love of God now flamed up in Sri Aurobindo, the one intensifying the other, till they fused into one overmastering passion for the Divine and the fulfilment of His Will and Purpose in the material world.

But it is interesting to observe how the patriotic urge led him to spirituality. It is true that spiritual aspiration was already there, latent in him. His three outstanding spiritual experiences, which we have referred to, had come to him "unasked, unsought for",[164] bearing witness to the fact that spirituality was the key passion and central yearning of his soul. But it awoke and began to dominate and lead his nature only after he felt that his work for the freedom of India, which had other and vaster aspects than the merely political, could not succeed except by the aid of a power beyond that of the human mind. He had by then knowledge enough of the spiritually-oriented culture of India, and faith and wisdom enough to perceive the working of a universal Intelligence behind the stumbling will and paltry efforts of man. He longed to harness that power to his work,

[163] *Poems — Past and Present*, by Sri Aurobindo.

[164] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, p.155. About the experience of Nirvana, Sri Aurobindo writes: "It came unasked, unsought for, though quite welcome. I had no least idea about it before, no aspiration towards it, in fact my aspiration was towards just the opposite, spiritual power to help the world..."

which was slowly but steadily making him alive to its supernational, even its superhuman, magnitude and significance. It was assuming within him the dimensions of a world mission. But what actually happened was that the Power, which he sought to harness, tended, instead, to harness his whole being and nature and life to its own Will and Purpose, and began to lead him, through apparent success and failure, and through a criss-cross of various activities and experiences, towards the accomplishment of the real object of his life, his apostolic world-mission.

We shall endeavour to follow this intricate and intensely interesting course of his life in the light of his own statements, and where that light is not available, we shall stop short of forming definite conclusions rather than hazarding ingenious interpretations on the basis of ambiguous or misleading data, as some of his biographers (notably the overbold Girija Sankara Roy of Bengal) have done. For, as Sri Aurobindo has himself said, his life has not been lived on the surface; and those who presume to judge him by the so-called facts of his outer life, torn from the context of their spiritual and psychological motor forces, do nothing better than one who is naive enough to think that he has exhausted the glory and mystery of the sunrise when he has noted the glowing spectrum of the fugitive colours it casts up in the sky. To subject the actions of a spiritual personality to a mental and moral scrutiny is to risk tumbling into gross misrepresentations. It would be sheer pathetic fallacy, not from the standpoint of the canons of poetic criticism, but of those of prosaic, objective, rational judgment, to call in question Rama's spiritual greatness, because he wept for the missing Sita in the forest, or killed (unjustly, as the Puritan would say) Vali, brother of the ape-king Sugriva,[165] or Sri Krishna's divine character, because he made love (so it appeared outwardly) to Radha and any number of Gopis, and induced Yudhishthira to tell a camouflaged lie.[166] The mind of man

[165] Rama, who wanted the ape-king Sugriva to help him in his search for the missing Sita, killed Vali, who had dispossessed his brother, Sugriva, of his kingdom and wife. (Ref. the Ramayana)

[166] In order to save the Pandavas from annihilation at the hands of the redoubtable Dronacharya in the battle of Kurukshetra, Sri Krishna persuaded the righteous

should either declare that there is nothing super-rational or transcendental in spirituality, which is only a fine working of the reflective and analytic intellect, or learn the humility to recognise its own inherent limitations and not attempt to overshoot its mark. An overweening confidence in its own competence to judge all things under the sun is fatal to its own growth.

Sri Aurobindo used to go out with Deshpande and some others of his friends to the banks of the Narmada river in search of Yogis who could give him some power for his political work. On one such excursion, he visited a temple of Kali and had the realisation of the living Presence of the Mother in the image. We reproduce below the poem which he wrote later on this experience:

"In a town of gods, housed in a little shrine,
    From sculptured limbs the Godhead looked at me, —
A living Presence deathless and divine,
    A Form that harboured all infinity.

The great World-Mother and her mighty will
    Inhabited the earth's abysmal sleep,
Voiceless, omnipotent, inscrutable,
    Mute in the desert and the sky and deep.

Now veiled with mind she dwells and speaks no word,
    Voiceless, inscrutable, omniscient,
Hiding until our soul has seen, has heard
    The secret of her strange embodiment,

One in the worshipper and the immobile shape,

Yudhishthira, who never spoke a lie, to announce to Dronacharya the news of his son Aswatthama's death and to add in a very low voice, which was tactfully drowned in a sudden blare of trumpets, that it was Aswatthama, the elephant, who had died. The announcement had a paralysing effect on Dronacharya, the great Brahmin General, and the Pandavas were saved.

A beauty and mystery flesh or stone can drape."[167]

Sri Aurobindo paid two or three visits to a great Yogi, Brahmananda, who was living on the banks of the Narmada. He describes the Yogi in the following words: "There is no incontrovertible proof. Four hundred years is an exaggeration. It is known however that he lived on the banks of the Narmada for eighty years, and when he arrived there, he was already in appearance at the age when maturity turns towards over-ripeness. He was when I met him just before his death a man of magnificent physique — showing no signs of old age except his white beard and hair, extremely tall, robust, able to walk any number of miles a day and tiring out his younger disciples, walking too so swiftly that they tended to fall behind, a great head and magnificent face that seemed to belong to men of more ancient times. He never spoke of his age or of his past either except for an occasional almost accidental utterance. One of these was spoken to a disciple of his, well-known to me, a Baroda Sardar, Mazumdar (it was on the top storey of Mazumdar's house by the way that I sat with Lele in 1908 and had my decisive experience of liberation and Nirvana). Mazumdar learned that he (Swami Brahmananda) was suffering from a bad tooth and brought him a bottle of..., a toothwash then much in vogue. The Yogi refused, saying: 'I never use medicine. My one medicine is Narmada water. As for the tooth, I have suffered from it since the days of Bhao Gardi.' Bhao Gardi was the Maratha General, Sadasiva Rao Bhao, who disappeared in the battle of Panipat, and his body was never found. Many formed the conclusion that Brahmananda himself was Bhao Gardi, but this was an imagination. Nobody who knew Brahmananda would doubt any statement of his — he was a man of perfect simplicity and truthfulness and did not seek fame or to impose himself. When he died, he was still in full strength and his death came not by decay but by the accident of blood-poisoning through a rusty nail that had entered into his foot as he walked on the sands of the Narmada.... I may say that three at least of his disciples to my

[167] *Last Poems* by Sri Aurobindo.

knowledge kept an extraordinary aspect and energy of youth even to a comparatively late or quite advanced age — but this may not be uncommon among those who practise both Raja and Hatha Yoga together."[168]

Describing his visit to Swami Brahmananda, Sri Aurobindo says again: "He had the most remarkable eyes. Usually his eyes were either closed or half-shut. When I went to see him and took leave, he opened his eyes full and looked at me. It seemed as if he could penetrate and see everything within clearly."[169]

It was from a disciple of Brahmananda, Devdhar by name, who was an engineer at Baroda, that Sri Aurobindo took the first lessons in Yoga. "It (the Yoga) was confined at first to assiduous practice of pranayama (at one time for six hours or more a day). There was no conflict or wavering between Yoga and politics; when he started Yoga he carried on both without any idea of opposition between them. He wanted however to find a Guru. He met a Naga Sannyasi in the course of this search, but did not accept him as Guru, though he was confirmed by him in a belief in Yoga-power when he saw him cure Barin in almost a moment of a violent and clinging hill-fever by merely cutting through a glassful of water crosswise with a knife while he repeated a silent mantra. Barin drank and was cured...."[170] Thus, in God's inscrutable ways, Sri Aurobindo was led to practise the very Yoga which he had so long fought shy of as being life-negating and anti-pragmatic. But it was not yet the spiritual aspect of Yoga, but only the preparatory neurosomatic and psycho-physical discipline. "A Baroda engineer who was a disciple of Brahmananda showed me how to do it, and I started on my own. Some remarkable results came with it. First, I felt a sort of electricity all around me. Secondly, there were some visions of a minor kind. Thirdly, I began to have a very rapid flow of poetry.

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[168] From a letter written by Sri Aurobindo to Rajani Palit.

[169] From Nirodbaran's Notes. The Yogi must have felt something extraordinary in the presence of Sri Aurobindo, and made an exception in his favour by opening his eyes full and looking at him.

[170] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, p. 85.

Formerly I used to write with difficulty. For a time the flow would increase; then again it would dry up. Now it revived with astonishing vigour and I could write both prose and poetry at tremendous speed. This flow has never ceased up to now. If I have not written much afterwards, it was because I had something else to do. But the moment I want to write, it is there. Fourthly, it was at the time of the Pranayama-practice that I began to put on flesh. Earlier I was very thin. My skin also began to be smooth and fair and there was a peculiar new substance in the saliva, owing to which these changes were taking place. Another curious thing I noticed was that whenever I used to sit for Pranayama, not a single mosquito would bite me, though plenty of mosquitoes were humming around. I took more and more to Pranayama, but there were no further results. It was at this time that I adopted a vegetarian diet. That gave lightness and some purification."[171]

On the same subject he says again: "After four years of Pranayama and other practices of my own, with no other result than increased health and outflow of energy, some psycho-physical phenomena, a great outflow of poetic creation, a limited power of subtle sight (luminous patterns and figures etc.), mostly with the waking eye, I had a complete arrest."[172]

What Sri Aurobindo says regarding the subtle sight, referred to above, will be found interesting by the scientists who are materialistic in their thought and outlook, and deny the existence of the subtle worlds:

"I remember when I first began to see inwardly (and outwardly also with the open eye), a scientific friend of mine began to talk of after-images — 'these are only after-images'. I asked him whether after-images — 'remained before the eye for two minutes at a time — he said, 'no', to his knowledge only for few seconds; I also asked him whether one could get after-images of things not around one or even not existing upon this earth, since they had other shapes, another character, other hues, contours and a very different dynamism, life-movements and values — he could not reply

[171] Nirodbaran's Notes.

[172] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

in the affirmative. That is how these so-called scientific explanations break down as soon as you pull them out of their cloud-land of mental theory and face them with the actual phenomena they pretend to decipher."[173]

Thanks to the remarkable advances in physics, biology, psychology, and para-psychology, it has become difficult for the modern sceptic to remain smugly entrenched within his rigid materialist bias. The new realms of knowledge these progressive sciences are opening before his vision; the conquering force and fervour, the profound penetration, keen sensibility and scrupulous observation with which they are exploring many an unsuspected hinterland and lowland, and even sometimes some of the uplands, of human personality and the subtler configuration and dynamic of Nature, in order to arrive at the organic unity of universal existence, have thrown down the bastion of scientific rationalism. Particularly, modern psychology is advancing with such giant strides that, it appears, it will not be long before it veers round to the ancient Vedantic truth of the living, multiple unity of all existence — *sarvam khalvidam Brahma*. This drive towards unity — unity in the life of humanity as well as in the personality of man — characterises the best efforts of all sciences and arts today. There is also a growing attempt at an integration of all sciences into a composite corpus of knowledge. One can very well discern materialistic rationalism fading away like the spectre of a discredited superstition.

"The New Physics", says F.L. Kunz, "demonstrates the reality of super-sensory and non-material domains, styled Force-fields. Force-fields are aspects of that background of nature called the Continuum; they are today constantly employed in orbiting artificial satellites, exchanging signals with them, and dissolving matter into energy and residues.

"Thus we have two different and interconnected aspects of nature, namely, the discrete objects and creatures in the foreground, and the Continuum, which is to some extent revealed by the existence, the properties and the behaviour of sensed objects. In short, there is the

[173] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, pp. 141-2.

phenomenal sense world and the noumenal real world, precisely as the best of the Greeks and the Hindus realised."[174]

"There is no hypothesis capable of explaining the birth of life, the development of consciousness, without the intervention of factors that can be described as extra-scientific and supernatural," says Lecomte du Noüy.

Once questioned on the validity of supersensory experiences, Sri Aurobindo replied:

"I suppose I have had myself an even more completely European education than you, and I have had too my period of agnostic denial, but from the moment I looked at these things I could never take the attitude of doubt and disbelief which was for so long fashionable in Europe. Abnormal, otherwise super-physical experiences and powers, occult or Yogic, have always seemed to me something perfectly natural and credible. Consciousness in its very nature could not be limited by the ordinary physical human-animal consciousness, it must have the other ranges. Yogic or occult powers are no more supernatural or incredible than is supernatural or incredible the power to write a great poem or compose great music; few people can do it, as things are, — not even one in a million; for poetry and music come from the inner being and to write or to compose true and great things one has to have the passage clear between the outer mind and something in the inner being....

"You ask me whether you have to give up your predilection for testing before accepting and to accept everything in Yoga *a priori* — and by testing you mean testing by the ordinary reason. The only answer I can give to that is that the experiences of Yoga belong to an inner domain and go according to a law of their own, have their own method of perception, criteria and all the rest of it which are neither those of the domain of the physical senses

[174] From the journal, *Main Currents in Contemporary Thought*, March-April, 1961.

nor of the domain of rational or scientific enquiry.[175] Just as scientific enquiry passes beyond that of the physical senses and enters the domain of the infinite and infinitesimal about which the senses can say nothing and test nothing — for one cannot see and touch an electron or know by the evidence of the sense-mind whether it exists or not or decide by that evidence whether the earth really turns round the sun and not rather the sun round the earth as our senses and all our physical experience daily tell us — so the spiritual search passes beyond the domain of scientific or rational enquiry and it is impossible by the aid of the ordinary positive reason to test the data of spiritual experience and decide whether those things exist or not or what is their law and nature. As in Science, so here you have to accumulate experience on experience, following faithfully the methods laid down by the Guru or by the systems of the past, you have to develop an intuitive discrimination which compares the experiences, see what they mean, how far and in what field each is valid, what is the place of each in the whole, how it can be reconciled or related with others that at first might seem to contradict it, etc., etc., until you can move with a secure knowledge in the vast field of spiritual phenomena. That is the only way to test spiritual experience. I have myself tried the other method and I have found it absolutely incapable and inapplicable. On the other hand, if you are not prepared to go through all that yourself, — as few can do except those of extraordinary spiritual stature — you have to accept the leading of a Master, as in Science you accept a teacher instead of going through the whole field of Science and its experimentation all by yourself — at least until you have accumulated sufficient experience and knowledge. If that is accepting things *a priori,* well, you have to accept *a priori.* For I am unable to see by what valid tests you propose to make the ordinary reason the judge of what is beyond it."[176]

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[175] "It would be wrong to condemn the alleged knowledge of the unseen world because it is unable to follow the lines of deduction laid down by science as appropriate to the seen world..." A.S. Eddington, *Science and the Unseen World*.

[176] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, pp. 142-45.

The above quotation is an effective reply to those sceptics, scientific rationalists and materialists who impugn super-sensory and spiritual experiences. But it is a good augury that some of the greatest of modern scientists, men of high calibre and open minds, whose sole aim in their vocation is a disinterested search for truth, are fast outgrowing the limitations of their strait-jacket presuppositions, and advancing with firm steps towards wider horizons and a more unifying and harmonising knowledge of man and nature.

If the supersensory worlds exist — it would, indeed, be foolhardy to deny their existence in the teeth of overwhelming evidence from some of the researches of modern Science — we should inquire as to what they are; how they are situated, in what order or hierarchy; how they are related to our material world, and whether there are forces and influences from them penetrating and affecting our life and thought; what changes take place in us when we rise into them in consciousness, or receive their influences in us; what are the sources of subtle sight, subtle hearing, and other occult powers, which it is too late in the day to laugh away; above all, what are those domains of immortal light and bliss and blessedness of which the very greatest of our historical personalities speak in almost identical terms and with a singular ring and consensus of certitude, and whether they can be brought down to transfigure our mortal life and nature on earth into divine life and divine nature. These are some of the vital questions we have to attack and attempt to resolve, as we proceed with our study of Sri Aurobindo's many-faceted life and work. For, even his politics was not the politics of a mere patriotic politician — it was an organic part and an expressive medium of his Yoga, and shot through with spirituality. The well-springs of its motivation lay, not in his enlightened mind and cultured heart, but in the deeps of his soul, far deeper than our reason and practical sense can ever probe. It takes a Yogi to appraise the actions and achievements of a Yogi. As Swami Vivekananda once said: "If there were another Vivekananda, he could have understood what Vivekananda has done."

But we are always on firm ground. In the modern age of Science, Sri Aurobindo has proved by his experiences and example and teachings that spirituality is a perfectly scientific affair — a Super-Science, if you will, but not unscientific. He has blazed a trail for the modern scientists and the scientists of the future. He has pursued the spiritual life, the life of a dynamic Yogi, in the true scientific spirit, if by Science is meant an insatiable seeking for Truth, a consuming curiosity to discover the hidden secrets of man and Nature, and an unfaltering method of scrupulous observation, experimentation and experience. He was a great admirer of Science and its achievements. He acknowledged our indebtedness to Science for making us conscious of the immense potentialities of Matter and material life, and curbing the traditional religious tendency to the ascetic denial and escapism. Science has opened our eyes to the reality and sanctity, if not yet the divinity of Matter. It has helped to restore the ancient Vedic and Upanishadic gospel of the unity of all existence and the identity of Spirit and Matter. Sri Aurobindo had full faith in the final triumph of the true scientific spirit, unfettered and unperverted by passing, material interests, in revealing to man the infinite greatness that lies slumbering in him, and the transcendental glory of his destiny. His spirituality, which germinated in England,[177] and developed in India, was an ascent of his soul, *not through trance, or a suspension of the waking consciousness, but a fully conscious, exploratory, and heuristic ascent from level to level of experience, and from world to world of beings and forces, to the highest peaks of the transcendent Spirit*, and its subsequent descent, charged with

[177] It is generally held — and it is also true — that Sri Aurobindo's Yoga began at Baroda. But that its seed was in him and first germinated in England, is proved by the following: "At London, when I was reading Max Muller's translation of the Vedanta etc., I came upon the idea of the Self and thought that that was the true thing to be realised in life. Before that I was an atheist and agnostic." — From Nirodbaran's Notes.

It is to be noted that the germination took place in the mind and heart of one who was an atheist and agnostic, brought up from childhood in the midst of the triumphant materialism of the 19th century England!

the dynamic Light and Power of the Spirit, to transfigure by means of them our squalid earthly life of darkness, disorder and discontent. His life, as it unfolds before us, is a vivid demonstration of the invincible power of the spirit of man, rising above all bondage to ignorance and mortality, and vindicating its birthright to absolute, masterful freedom and infinite perfectibility, which is, precisely, the cardinal aim and aspiration of Science. Sri Aurobindo was the greatest scientist of his age, but a scientist not only of Matter and Energy, but of the infinite and eternal Reality, the One without a second, the integral, indivisible unity of transcendent and universal Existence. His Yoga had no mists and shades and twilights in it, or the decoying glimmers of a spurious occultism. He lived and worked, taught and wrote, in the true spirit of a scientist, who has advanced in the sunlight of a growing knowledge, tested and verified in the crucible of hard experience.

IX

> *"The hope of national regeneration must absorb our minds as the idea of salvation absorbs the mind of the mumukshu. Our tyaga must be as complete as the tyaga of the nameless ascetic. Our passion to see the face of our free and glorified Mother must be as devouring a madness as the passion of Chaitanya to see the face of Sri Krishna. Our sacrifice for the country must be as enthusiastic and complete as that of Jagai and Madhai who left the rule of a kingdom to follow the Sankirtan of Gauranga. Our offerings on the altar must be as wildly liberal, as remorselessly complete as that of Carthagenian parents who passed their children through the fire to Moloch..."*[178]
>
> — *Sri Aurobindo*

Barindra, Sri Aurobindo's youngest brother, first came to Baroda in 1901. After passing the Entrance Examination in 1900, he studied for six months in the First Year class at Patna College. But his mind was not in his studies. He went to Dacca, where his brother, Manmohan, was a professor, and was admitted to Dacca College, but could not continue there for long. The dream of doing agriculture possessed him, and, extorting a promise from Manmohan for financial help, he went to Calcutta. But the help did not come, and the dream faded away into thin air. His next romantic venture was a tea-shop at Patna, which proved a dismal failure. He had to shut up shop, because he was over head and ears in debt, having blundered away all the money he had wheedled out of his simple mother. Romantic imagination and cold commercial calculation seldom yoke together. He now thought of taking refuge with Sri Aurobindo. He arrived at Baroda one fine morning, and presented to his brother a rather unpresentable figure,

[178] "*The Demand of the Mother*" in the Bande Mataram of 12.4.1908.

unkempt and untidy, and clad in a dirty shirt. At that time Sri Aurobindo's sister, Sarojini, and his wife, Mrinalini, were staying with him at Baroda.

Comfortable and care-free in the family of his brother, Barindra now turned his romantic mind to Planchette and automatic writing. In those days these spiritualistic séances were almost a universal hobby. We know that the great poet, Yeats, took keen interest in them, and Rabindranath tells us in his autobiography that he tried these experiments for some time. Barrister Chittaranjan Das[179], we learn from a reliable source, received in one such experiment a message from the spirit of Brahmabandhava Upadhyaya[180], urging him to take up the defence of Sri Aurobindo in the famous Alipore Bomb Case. Chittaranjan was a budding barrister at that time, and, encumbered with the burden of his father's debts and the maintenance of a big family, he was unable to make up his mind as to whether he should take up Sri Aurobindo's case or not. For, being a very important and difficult case, it was sure to tax much of his time and energy, and, being a labour of love, it would bring him no returns. But the message from the spirit of Brahmabandhava helped him to decide.[181] He took up the case and conducted it with such remarkable brilliance and ability that, not only Bengal, but the whole country rang with his praise. He secured the acquittal of Sri Aurobindo in the teeth of the most stubborn opposition from the Police Raj. Sri Aurobindo's case was the turning point of Chittaranjan's life. He shot into the legal firmament as its brightest luminary, and, by his unstinted generosity and sacrifice in the cause of national freedom, became the idol of Bengal.

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[179] Better known as C.R. Das.

[180] Patriot, philosopher, theologian, mystic, politician and journalist, Brahmabandhava was held in high esteem and considered one of the outstanding personalities of his time. Through his Bengali paper, *Sandhya*, he roused Bengal to fight for freedom.

[181] His mother, to whom he was passionately devoted, confirmed him in his decision when she said to him: "Why do you worry? Take up Sri Aurobindo's defence as the Will of God. He will see you through it."

In view of the importance attached to the question of spirit-communication and general psychical research in the West, we reproduce a few words from Sri Aurobindo which, we hope, the readers will find enlightening:

"Sri Aurobindo totally denies that he used the automatic writing for any kind of moral or other edification of those around him; that would have meant that it was spurious and a sort of a trick, for no writing can be automatic if it is dictated or guided by the writer's conscious mind. The writing was done as an experiment as well as an amusement and nothing else. I may mention here the circumstances under which it was first taken up. Barin had done some very extraordinary automatic writing at Baroda in a very brilliant and beautiful English style and remarkable for certain predictions which came true... there was notably a symbolic anticipation of Lord Curzon's subsequent unexpected departure from India[182] and, again, of the first suppression of the national movement and the greatness of Tilak's attitude amidst the storm; this prediction was given in Tilak's own presence when he visited Sri Aurobindo at Baroda and happened to enter first when the writing was in progress. Sri Aurobindo was very much struck and interested and he decided to find out by practising this kind of writing what there was behind it[183].... But the results did not satisfy him and after a few further attempts at Pondicherry he dropped these experiments altogether.... His final conclusion was that though there are sometimes phenomena which point to the intervention of beings of another world, not always or often of a high order, the mass of such writings comes from a dramatising element in the subconscious mind; sometimes a brilliant vein in the subliminal is struck and then predictions of the future and statements

[182] Lord Curzon had a quarrel with Lord Kitchener, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in India, and had consequently to retire.

[183] This practice was done in Calcutta.

of things not known in the present and the past come up, but otherwise these writings have not a great value...."[184]

A few more words on the same subject and we have done with it. Nolini Kanta Gupta, Secretary of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, who had the rare fortune and privilege of living in close association with Sri Aurobindo and serving him, first as a political follower, and next as a disciple of his, relates the following in his reminiscences, published in the *Mother India*:

"All know what is automatic writing. Sri Aurobindo showed us, rather made us hear specimens not of automatic writing, but of automatic speech. At about eight in the evening, we used to sit around him in a room. The lights would be turned off. A sudden hush would fall, and all of us kept silence for a while. Then slowly a voice would come from Sri Aurobindo. Evidently it was not his own voice. There were many such voices, coming one after the other, and each of a different manner and tone. Each voice would declare its own identity. I distinctly remember a few voices. One day someone came and said many fine things — on education, on literature, and on our country etc. We got eager to know his name. After putting us off for a moment, he finally gave out that he was Bankim Chandra. The talks used to be in English.... Another day someone else appeared and announced in a strident, dreadful voice: 'I am Danton! Terror! Red Terror!', and harangued us on the necessity and justification of bloodshed in the French Revolution. Yet another day somebody came and introduced himself thus: "I am Theramenes.' Theramenes was a political leader in ancient Greece. In a quiet, mellow voice, he gave us a lecture on politics...."

It would interest the readers to learn that the book, Yogic Sadhana (now out of print), though an apparent product of Sri Aurobindo's pen, was supposed to have been written by Rammohan Roy, who, it seems, used Sri

[184] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, pp. 108-10.

Aurobindo's hand in a sort of automatic writing. For, when it was being written, Sri Aurobindo saw the spirit of Rammohan Roy in the room.

To return to our subject. During his visits to Bengal, Sri Aurobindo had inspired Barin with the spirit of patriotism, and the latter's stay at Baroda for sometime served only to kindle it to a blaze. The potential leader of the Bengal revolutionaries was preparing for his meteoric role.

After discontinuing his series of articles in the *Induprakash*, Sri Aurobindo, so long as he was in the Baroda service, kept studiously aloof from all public political activity. But he was secretly preparing the field for his work in Bengal, which, he knew, was soon to begin. He was sowing broadcast, both by his inner powers and private messages and instructions, the seeds of patriotic fervour and self-sacrificing revolutionary zeal. Without a burning love of the country, the Mother India, and the nation, no political movement, he said, was likely to be effective. He worked from behind the scenes and in silence for a "wide public movement which would create a universal patriotic fervour and popularise the idea of independence as the ideal and aim of Indian politics."[185] "He made his first political move when he sent a young Bengali soldier of the Baroda army, Jatin Banerji,[186] as his lieutenant to Bengal with a programme of preparation and action which he thought might occupy a period of 30 years before fruition could become possible. As a matter of fact it has taken 50 years for the movement of liberation to arrive at fruition and the beginning of complete success. The idea was to establish secretly or, as far as visible action could be taken, under various pretexts and covers, revolutionary propaganda and recruiting throughout Bengal. This was to be done among the youth of the country while sympathy and support and financial and other assistance were to be obtained from the older men who had advanced views or could be won over

[185] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, p. 31.

[186] Jatin Banerji, a Bengali youth possessing a very strong body, remarkable mental courage and patriotic ardour, had enlisted, "by the help of Sri Aurobindo's friends in the Baroda army, as trooper in the cavalry regiment". As the first emissary of Sri Aurobindo to Bengal, he began organising the first group of revolutionaries there.

to them. Centres were to be established in every town and eventually in every village. Societies of young men were to be established with various ostensible objects, cultural, intellectual or moral and those already existing were to be won over for revolutionary use. Young men were to be trained in activities which might be helpful for ultimate military action, such as riding, physical training, athletics of various kinds, drill and organised movement. As soon as the idea was sown it attained a rapid prosperity; already existing small groups and associations of young men who had not yet the clear idea or any settled programme of revolution began to turn in this direction and a few who had already the revolutionary aim were contracted and soon developed activity on organised lines; the few rapidly became many. Meanwhile Sri Aurobindo had met a member of the Secret Society[187] in Western India, and taken the oath of the Society and had been introduced to the Council in Bombay. His future action was not pursued under any directions by this Council, but he took up on his own responsibility the task of generalising support for its objects in Bengal... and they took the oath of the Society and agreed to carry out its objects on the lines suggested by Sri Aurobindo. The special cover used by Mitter's[188] group was association for lathi play which had already been popularised to some extent by Sarala Ghosal[189] in Bengal among the young men; but other groups used other ostensible covers. Sri Aurobindo's attempt at a close organisation of the whole movement did not succeed, but the movement itself did not suffer by that, for the general idea was taken up and activity

[187] The leader of this Society, who was "a noble of the Udaipur State with the title of Thakur Saheb, worked principally upon the Indian army of which he had already won over two or three regiments." Sri Aurobindo later became President of the Bombay Council of the Society.

[188] P.C. Mitter, a well-known barrister, who organised the Anusilan Samiti in Bengal in collaboration with Sarala Devi at the instance of Baron Okakura, a Japanese art-connoisseur. He had "a spiritual life and aspiration and a strong religious feeling."

[189] Sarala Devi Ghosal, a niece of Rabindranath Tagore. We have already referred to her as the foremost organiser of physical education in Bengal.

of many separate groups led to a greater and more widespread diffusion of the revolutionary drive and its action..."[190]

Sri Aurobindo was in contact with Tilak, who was the greatest dynamic nationalist, not only in Maharashtra, but in the whole country, though he was not at that time so well-known. His imprisonment on a false charge of instigation of murder[191] brought him into the limelight overnight. At the Ahmedabad Congress in 1902 "Tilak took him (Sri Aurobindo) out of the pandal and talked to him for an hour in the grounds expressing his contempt for the Reformist movement and explaining his own line of action in Maharashtra." (*Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*)

In 1902 Sri Aurobindo sent Barin to Bengal to help Jatin Banerji, who had been deputed there earlier, in organising the revolutionary group and rousing the youth of Bengal. But Jatin and Barin could not hit it off long together, and they separated, to the great detriment of the revolutionary cause. Sri Aurobindo went to Bengal to patch up their differences, but they did not consent to work together. The revolutionary movement suffered for a time on account of this quarrel[192], but the idea of revolutionary action continued to seep into the mind of young Bengal, and inspire it to a more organised and resolute effort. Barin came back to Baroda when the police launched upon a ruthless persecution of the revolutionaries.

Barin conceived the idea of building a temple somewhere in the solitude of the hills in Western India for training a band of political sannyasins who

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[190] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, p. 43.

[191] Tilak's articles in his Marathi paper, *Kesari*, containing trenchant criticism of the oppressive methods of the British, were construed as having instigated the Chopekar brothers to murder the two plague officers who were enforcing harsh and insulting measures upon the Marathi ladies at Poona in order to check the spread of the epidemic. The charge was not proved, but Tilak was sentenced to 18 months' rigorous imprisonment in 1897.

[192] Sri Aurobindo formed a Central Council of five persons including P.C. Mitter and Nivedita, and placed the revolutionary organisation under its charge. P.C. Mitter acted as the leader of the revolution in Bengal.

would dedicate themselves entirely to the service of Mother India. The idea was evidently derived from the book, Anandamath, by Bankim Chandra Chatterji. A pamphlet embodying the basic idea and the lines of its practical application was written by Sri Aurobindo. The Rowlatt Committee report mentions this book, and Lord Ronaldsay reproduces excerpts from it in his book, *The Heart of Aryavarta*. About the pamphlet, Sri Aurobindo says, "*Bhavani Mandir* was written by Sri Aurobindo but it was more Barin's ideal than his. It was not meant to train people for assassination but for revolutionary preparation of the country. The idea was soon dropped as far as Sri Aurobindo was concerned.... The selection of a site and a head of the monastery must have been simply an idea of Barin. He had travelled among the hills trying to find a suitable place but caught hill-fever and had to abandon his search and return to Baroda...."[193] C.C. Dutt of the Indian Civil Service relates in one of his Bengali books that he had been to the Ashram of one Keshavanandaji, a Hathayogi, who was conducting a training centre for young men. Something of the Bhavani Mandir scheme was sought to be realised there. But Sri Aurobindo did not pursue the idea further. It was always his way to inspire everybody, who came into active contact with him, on the line of his bent and aptitude, and not interfere with his individual evolution by imposing his thoughts and ideas upon him. He left everybody free to follow the self-law of his being and develop according to it. This was the chief characteristic of his leadership, and, understandably enough, a constant source of bewilderment to his associates and followers. For, his serene yogic detachment, his perfect unconcern in the midst of various action, and his different ways of dealing with and leading different natures baffled them. Try as they would, they failed to take his measure with their mental yardsticks. Prophet souls are eternal enigmas and paradoxes of history.

We give below a few extracts from the pamphlet, *Bhavani Mandir*:

[193] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, pp. 85-86.

“A Temple is to be erected and consecrated to Bhavani, the Mother, among the hills. To all the children of the Mother the call is sent forth to help in the sacred work.

“Who is Bhavani?

“In the unending revolutions of the world, as the wheel of the Eternal turns mightily in its courses, the Infinite Energy, which streams forth from the Eternal and sets the wheel to work, looms up in the vision of man in various aspects and infinite forms. Each aspect creates and marks an age. Sometimes She is Love, sometimes She is Knowledge, sometimes She is Renunciation, sometimes She is Pity. This Infinite Energy is Bhavani, She also is Durga, She is Kali, She is Radha the Beloved, She is Lakshmi, She is our Mother and the Creatress of us all.

“Bhavani is Shakti.

“In the present age the Mother is manifested as the Mother of Strength. She is pure Shakti.

“The whole world is growing full of the Mother as Shakti...

“We in India fail in all things for want of Shakti...

“Our knowledge is a dead thing for want of Shakti...

“Our Bhakti cannot live and work for want of Shakti...

“India therefore needs Shakti alone.

“The deeper we look, the more we shall be convinced that the one thing wanting, which we must strive to acquire before all others, is strength — strength physical, strength mental, strength moral, but above all strength spiritual which is the one inexhaustible and imperishable source of all the others. If we have strength everything else will be added to us easily and naturally...

“India, grown old and decrepit in will, has to be reborn.

“Our race has grown... such an old man with stores of knowledge, with ability to feel and desire, but paralysed by senile sluggishness, senile timidity, senile feebleness. If India is to survive, she must be made young again. Rushing and billowing streams of energy must be poured into her;

her soul must become, as it was in the old times, like the surges, vast, puissant, calm or turbulent at will, an ocean of action or of force.

"India must be reborn, because her rebirth is demanded by the future of the world..."

Thus Sri Aurobindo poured forth an unceasing stream of dynamic spiritual force to regenerate and transform, not only India, but the whole of mankind. His nationalism was more than internationalism — it was spiritual universalism, as we have already said before. And at the heart of this spiritual universalism was Mother India, the Divine Mother, Bhavani, the Supreme Shakti, diffusing Her strength, Her fire-Force of creation and destruction for the redemption of the world.[194]

In 1902 Sri Aurobindo went to Midnapur in Bengal during a vacation, Barin and Jatin Banerji accompanying him. The trip was for organising the projected six centres in Bengal. When he returned to Calcutta, he gave the oath of the revolutionary party to P. Mitter. He used to go to Bengal during the vacations for the revolutionary work. He thus visited Khulna, Dacca, Midnapur, etc. Lathi-play, boxing, cycling, riding, target-shooting, etc. were regularly taught in most of these centres. Lives of Mazzini, Garibaldi and other revolutionaries were read with great interest, along with histories of revolutions, and all this training was capped by and derived its creative dynamis from a study of the Gita which inculcates the spirit of selfless work and sacrifice. It must be noted that most of the front-rank leaders

[194] Dr. K.M. Munshi, Ex-Governor of the Uttar Pradesh, who was a student of Sri Aurobindo at Baroda College, once asked him how nationalism could be developed. Sri Aurobindo "pointed to a wall-map and said something to this effect: 'Look at that map. Learn to find in it the portrait of Bharatmata. The cities, mountains, rivers and forests are the materials which go to make up Her body. The people inhabiting the country are the cells which go to make up Her living tissues. Our literature is Her memory and speech. The spirit of our Culture is Her soul. The happiness and freedom of Her children is Her salvation. Behold Bharat as a living Mother, meditate upon Her and worship Her in the ninefold way of Bhakti.'" — From *Bhavan's Journal*, dated 22.7.62

were disciples of advanced Yogis, and led a spiritual life of purity and austerity. This spiritual leavening was the distinguising feature of the lives of the Bengal revolutionaries. Patriotism was with them a spiritual duty, a self-denying adoration of the Mother. And it was a common knowledge that the main inspiration and impetus behind this spiritualised patriotic orientation was Sri Aurobindo.[195]

In 1904 Sri Aurobindo met Charu Chandra Dutt I.C.S. who was District Judge at Thana in Bombay Presidency, and converted him to the Bhavani Mandir ideal. It was at Charu Chandra's house that he first met Subodh Mullick, Charu Chandra's brother-in-law, who was to become one of his most loyal friends and a great political and financial supporter. Subodh Mullick's contribution of a lakh of rupees (Rs. 1,00,000) helped the establishment of the Bengal National College at Calcutta. He had stipulated (at the time of the contribution) that Sri Aurobindo should be given a post of professor in the College with a salary of Rs.150 per month; and this gave Sri Aurobindo an opportunity to resign his position in the Baroda Service, go to Bengal, and join the College as its Principal. It was but a prelude to a plunge into the political movement, and a total self-dedication to it. Subodh Mullick also contributed munificently to the running of some of the Secret Societies.

"Sri Aurobindo included in the scope of his revolutionary work one kind of activity which afterwards became an important item in the public programme of the Nationalist Party. He encouraged the young men in the centres of work to propagate the Swadeshi idea which at that time was only in its infancy and hardly more than a fad of the few. One of the ablest men in these revolutionary groups was a Maharatta named Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar who was an able writer in Bengali and who had written a popular life of Shivaji in Bengali in which he first brought in the name of Swaraj,

[195] Our subsequent treatment of the subject will show more abundantly and clearly how the main stream of this inspiration, emanating from Sri Aurobindo, flowed out through Bengal to the rest of India.

afterwards adopted by the Nationlists as their word for independence..."[196] It is said that Sri Aurobindo sent Barin to Deuskar, requesting him to write an authentic book on the British exploitation of the economic resources of the country, and Deuskar readily acceded to the request. "He published a book entitled *Desher Katha* describing in exhaustive detail the British commercial and industrial exploitation of India. This book had an immense repercussion in Bengal, captured the mind of young Bengal and assisted more than anything else in the preparation of the Swadeshi movement. Sri Aurobindo himself had always considered the shaking off of this economic yoke and the development of Indian trade and industry as a necessary concomitant of the revolutionary endeavour."[197]

In 1904 Sri Aurobindo was appointed Vice-Principal of the Baroda College, and in 1905 he officiated as its Principal. Had he continued in the Baroda Service, he would have easily adorned the highest post there, educational or administrative. The Maharaja respected him, and had a high opinion of his intellectual brilliance and his many-sided abilities. In fact, he was not at all willing to leave him. The colleagues and students of Sri Aurobindo loved and adored him for his extraordinary intellectual attainments, his burning love for India and Indian culture, his saintly character, and his gentle, unassuming manners. The general public, even though they had very little chance to come in direct contact with him, simply revered him, and felt a thrill of emotion whenever they referred to him as "Ghose Saheb". But a greater call tore him away from this cosy atmosphere of quiet service and silent preparation, and plunged him headlong into the heart of an expanding vortex.

Sri Aurobindo attended the Ahmedabad National Congress in 1902, the Bombay Congress in 1904, and the Banaras (Varanasi) Congress in 1905. In all these sessions of the Congress, he tried to prevail upon the leaders to fight for full independence, free from British control, and submit to no compromise. He wrote a manifesto called "No Compromise" and had it

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[196] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, pp. 45-6.

[197] *Ibid.*

circulated in Bengal. In various ways, he inspired the progressive political mind of Bengal to oppose by all means at their command — boycott of all British goods and British institutions, non-cooperation and passive resistance, village reconstruction, founding of national schools and colleges etc. — the Partition of Bengal which Lord Curzon had decided to inflict upon Bengal in order to stifle its fast growing political consciousness and nationalist spirit. We shall dwell upon the Bengal Partition and study how Bengal reacted to it in the next chapter.

Sri Aurobindo as Professor, Baroda, 1904

It was just after the Partition that Sri Aurobindo's active political life began, though he had laid its foundation much earlier. He had foreseen the barbarous fury of bureaucratic repression and its vengeful cruelty, and the utter futility of the prayers and petitions of the Moderates; and he was

constantly at work inculcating the spirit of nationalism, the will to passive or active revolution, as the developing situation demanded, and the urge to complete freedom. But the days of the Partition were days of storm and stress, of the chaotic hurtle and blur of tangled forces through which the nation was forging its way to its political destiny. It is only if we go behind this surging mass of motley forces that we can discern the specific contribution of each of the supreme pilots of the national movement. And that is not an easy job. History records what is apparent and on the surface, and not what is real and decisive behind appearances. The swirling dust and litter of the foreground obscures our historical perspective and renders our assessments factually false. Our mortal eyes fail to perceive the subtle creative forces that generate revolutions.

A short while after his return from the Banaras Congress, Sri Aurobindo took leave and went to Bengal. He stayed there till June, 1906. From Calcutta he went to attend the Barisal Conference, where he witnessed the electrifying effect of the national cry of Bande Mataram, then resounding through the towns and villages of Bengal, and the callous inhumanity of the British Raj bent upon crushing the renascent spirit of patriotism. The brutal fact confirmed his foresight. It unsealed the fountain of his spiritual powers. The fire of his soul rained equally upon his country and the British bureaucracy, setting ablaze the sluggish heart and galvanising the torpid limbs of the former, and blasting the wits of the latter. His pen shot leaping tongues of flame. It roused and inspirited his countrymen as nothing else had done before, and their awakened ardour and enthusiasm fed and throve upon the desperate errors of the distraught and unnerved bureaucracy.

From Barisal Sri Aurobindo accompanied Bepin Pal on a tour of East Bengal to study the possibilities of his revolutionary plan and the general political situation of the province.

It was now felt that an organ was urgently needed to popularise the idea of violent revolt, and, so, *Yugantar*, a Bengali paper, was started. It was Barin's project, approved by Sri Aurobindo. It was "to preach open revolt and the absolute denial of the British rule and include such items as a series of articles containing instructions for guerrilla warfare. Sri Aurobindo

himself wrote some of the opening articles in the early numbers and he always exercised a general control.... It had as its chief writers and directors three of the ablest young writers in Bengal, and it at once acquired an immense influence throughout Bengal.... It may be noted that the Secret Society did not include terrorism in its programme, but this element grew up in Bengal as a result of the strong repression and a reaction to it in that Province."[198] In one of his talks Sri Aurobindo said later: "My idea was an armed revolution in the whole of India. What they did at the time was very childish, killing a magistrate and so on. Later it turned into terrorism and dacoities which were not at all my idea or intention. Bengal is too emotional, wants quick results and can't prepare through a long course of years."[199]

In June Sri Aurobindo came back to Baroda. His mind was made up. Bengal, he felt, had need of him. It was to be the field of his political work. His path lay clear before him — the path of the adoration of the Mother through suffering and sacrifice. The expected call came anon from Bengal. He was invited to take charge of the newly-founded Bengal National College in Calcutta. He took leave again, this time for an indefinite period, and left Baroda in July, 1906. The chapter of manifold intensive preparation closed, and a new chapter of profound, dynamic spiritual sadhana and inspired, creative political action opened. And this dual activity, inner and outer, wrought the mosaic of India's destiny.[200]

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[198] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, p. 44.

[199] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* — A.B. Purani.

[200] "...the greatest thing done in those years was the creation of a new spirit in the country. In the enthusiasm that swept surging everywhere with the cry of Bande Mataram ringing on all sides men felt it glorious to be alive and dare and act together and hope; the old apathy and timidity was broken and a force created which nothing could destroy and which rose again and again in wave after wave till it carried India to the beginning of a complete victory." — *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, p. 58.

Sri Aurobindo in Bengal

The Partition of Bengal

> *"...It is a strange idea, a foolish idea... to think that a nation which has once risen, once has been called up by the voice of God to rise, will be stopped by mere physical repression. It has never so happened in the history of a nation, nor will it so happen in the history of India. A storm has swept over us today. I saw it come,*[1] *I saw the striding of the storm-blast and the rush of the rain, and as I saw it an idea came to me. What is this storm that is so mighty and sweeps with such fury upon us? And I said in my heart, 'It is God who rides abroad on the wings of the hurricane, it is the might and force of the Lord that manifested itself and his almighty hands that seized and shook the roof so violently over our heads today.' A storm like this has swept also our national life... Repression is nothing but the hammer of God that is beating us into shape so that we may be moulded into a mighty nation and an instrument for his work in the world. We are iron upon his anvil and the blows are showering upon us not to destroy but to re-create. Without suffering there can be no growth..."*
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> — From Sri Aurobindo's *Speeches*, pp. 99-100

Since the Battle of Plassey in 1757, which put its seal upon the fate of India and gave her over to the possession of the British for about two hundred years, nothing had happened in the country, not even the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, of comparable political significance till the Partition of Bengal on the 16th of October, 1905. The Partition of Bengal was the reawakening

[1] It was this unfailing foresight and inner light that always guided Sri Aurobindo's steps throughout his political life and on which he wholly depended with the trusting confidence of a child.

and self-affirmation of a very ancient nation. The political tide turned. A long night of serfdom, oppression, cultural emasculation and economic strangulation, seemed to end for ever, and the first roseate glow of a new dawn of national liberation flushed the eastern horizon.

As many Indians, let alone foreigners, are not fully aware of the causes of the Partition of Bengal and the national forces that sprang up in reaction to it, we propose to pause upon it for a while before proceeding to take up the narrative of Sri Aurobindo's political activities in the post-Partition period of the history of Bengal and India. Besides, the full significance of the manifold political life of Sri Aurobindo cannot be properly grasped until we put it in its true context, and study it against the tossing background of the national resurgence, which the Partition quickened and intensified on a wider scale. Sri Aurobindo hailed the Partition as a blessing in disguise, for he saw in it the hammering blows of benign Providence beating the torpid nation into a new life, a new aspiration, and a new shape. As Henry W. Nevinson puts it in his book, *The New Spirit in India*: "He (Sri Aurobindo) regarded the Partition of Bengal as the greatest blessing that had ever happened to India. No other measure could have stirred national feeling so deeply or roused it so suddenly from the lethargy of previous years."

"We in India fell under the influence of the foreigner's Maya which completely possessed our souls. It was the Maya of the alien rule, the alien civilisation, the powers and capacities of the alien people who happen to rule over us. These were as if so many shackles that put our physical, intellectual and moral life into bondage. We went to school with the aliens, we allowed the aliens to teach us and draw our minds away from all that was great and good in us. We considered ourselves unfit for self-government and political life, we looked to England as our exemplar and took her as our saviour. And all this was Maya, and bondage.... We helped them to destroy what life there was in India. We were under the protection of their police and we know now what protection they have given us. Nay, we ourselves became the instruments of our bondage. We Bengalis entered

the services of foreigners. We brought in the foreigners and established their rule. Fallen as we were, we needed others to protect us, to teach us and even to feed us...

"It is only through repression and suffering that this Maya can be dispelled and the bitter fruit of the Partition of Bengal administered by Lord Curzon dispelled the illusion..."[2]

What was the Partition of Bengal?

In the nineteenth century, Bengal was the most populous province in India. In area also it was the largest, comprising, as it did, the whole of Bengal, Bihar, Chhota Nagpur, Orissa, and Assam. Later, it was found that such a huge territory was proving too much of a burden for a Governor to administer. So, in the interest of a more effective and efficient administration, Assam, constituting Sylhet, Cachar, and Goalpara — all the three Bengali-speaking areas — was separated from Bengal. But even after the separation of Assam, Bengal remained the largest, most populous, and important province with Calcutta as the capital of India. Its population was 78 millions. The Bengalis as a race, having received a better and more widely-spread education on Western lines than the people of any other province, occupied most of the high posts under the British Government, and naturally dominated the political as well as the educational and cultural scenes in the country.

After the severance of Assam, a few more attempts were made by the Government to further reduce the size of Bengal, but nothing was definitely decided upon and done till 1905. In 1903, H.H. Risley, Secretary to the Government of India, wrote to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal a letter, known as the Risley Letter, detailing the proposed further reduction of the area and population of Bengal by sundering the Chittagong Division and the districts of Dacca and Mymensingh from the mother province, and annexing them to Assam. Among the reasons advanced by the Government for the proposal, apart from the vastness of the original

[2] *Speeches* by Sri Aurobindo, pp. 44-45.

province, was the backwardness of the Muslims in education and the general standard of their life. It was thought that by separating East Bengal from the West and tacking it on to Assam, a greater attention could be devoted to the interests of the Muslims who formed the majority community there, and their condition bettered. But the very people of East Bengal for whom the change was proposed would have none of it. Sir Henry Cotton wrote in the *Manchester Guardian* of England on the 5th of April, 1904: "The idea of the severance of the oldest and most populous and wealthy portion of Bengal and the division of its people into two arbitrary sections has given such a shock to the Bengali race, and has roused such a feeling amongst them as was never known before. The idea of being severed from their own brethren, friends and relations and thrown in with a backward province like Assam, which in administrative, linguistic, social and ethnological features widely differs from Bengal, is so intolerable to the people of the affected tracts that public meetings have been held in almost every town and market-place in East Bengal, and the separation scheme has been universally and unanimously condemned."

The real reasons for the Partition were, however, quite different. They were, first, that the British Government had been for some time feeling more and more uneasy and alarmed at the steady growth of the nationalist spirit in Bengal, and the conversion of the National Congress from a close preserve of the Moderates, who excelled in the innocuous art of petition and prayer and protest, to a resounding forum and platform for the demand of the nation's birthright of full and unqualified independence. It was, as Lord Ronaldsay says in his *Life of Curzon,* "a subtle attack upon the growing solidarity of Bengali Nationalism". John Morley, speaking as Secretary of State for India in the House of Commons in 1906, said: "I am bound to say, nothing was ever worse done in disregard to the feeling and opinion of the majority of the people concerned." Henry W. Nevinson writes in his *The New Spirit in India*: "Such was the Partition of Bengal, prompted, as nearly all educated Indians believe, by Lord Curzon's

personal dislike[3] of the Bengali race, as shown also by his Convocation speech of the previous February, in which he brought against the whole people an indictment for mendacity." Sir Henry Cotton, who had already denounced the proposal of partition when it was in embryo, says in his *New India* that the partition was "...part and parcel of Lord Curzon's policy to enfeeble the growing power and destroy the political tendencies of a patriotic spirit."

Another reason why the Partition was hustled through in despotic defiance of the swelling chorus of protests from the people and the political leaders of India, and even her well-wishers and sympathisers in England, was the sinister motive of dividing the Bengali race by driving a wedge between the Hindus and the Muslims. Sir Bampfylde Fuller, who was appointed the first Lt. Governor of East Bengal and Assam, declared, according to Surendra Nath Banerji, "half in jest and half in seriousness, to the amazement of all sober-minded men that he had two wives, Hindu and Mohammedan, but that the Mohammedan was the favourite wife." Nevinson confirms Curzon's flirtations with the Muslims when he says: "Always impatient of criticism, Lord Curzon hastened through East Bengal, lecturing the Hindu leaders and trying to *win over the Moslems*."[4] Lord Curzon himself remarked, when he was on a tour of East Bengal, "that his object in partitioning was not only to relieve the Bengali administration, but to create a Mohammedan province, where Islam could be predominant and its followers in ascendency." We know now how the poisonous seed of Hindu-Moslem disunity was sown in Bengal, and under what benign auspices! History perhaps records no more brazen confession, which is a virtual self-indictment, of one who was sent by Great Britain to preside

[3] "... Bengal, where the agitation was most alive, was then rent in twain. The. Partition was not merely a blunder: it was an indictable offence. Lord Curzon's personal feelings entered into it in a most reprehensible way. He devised it, as the evidence shows most conclusively, to pay off scores —" Ramsay Macdonald.

Macdonald again characterised the Partition as "the hugest blunder committed since the battle of Plassey."

[4] Italics are ours.

over the destinies of over three hundred million people of a very ancient and cultured nation.

Soon after the publication of the Risley Letter, to which we have already referred, there arose a mounting volume of indignant protest all over Bengal, and East Bengal which, according to Curzon, was going to be particularly benefited by the scheme of Partition, was perhaps the loudest in its denunciation. "The people of Dacca, Mymensingh and Chittagong organised in course of the following two months (December 1903-January 1904) about 500 protest meetings to voice forth their strong disapproval of the proposed change."[5] The tempo of the agitation went on rising by leaps and bounds, and the Swadeshi idea filtered even to the most interior and remote parts of Bengal, and through Bengal to Gujarat and other parts of India. In the meantime, the proposal of the partition was undergoing various amendments and alterations, in strict secrecy, at the hands of the august arbiters of India's destiny, and the public was kept studiously in the dark. The air was tense with forebodings. The thundering protests of the people were falling on stone-deaf ears. It was confidently assumed by the bureaucracy that the protests were motivated by the vested interests of a handful of educated Bengalis and landlords, and would naturally die down if only met with cold indifference. But the autocrats had reckoned without their host. The studied indifference, which was nothing short of callousness, added fuel to the fire — the agitation began to take on dangerous proportions. At last, on September 1, 1905, the India Government Gazette came out with the portentous proclamation, couched in positive terms, and it triggered off a tremendous explosion of national fury. For, the people had been hoping against hope that their impassioned protests would at last touch a chord even in the cynical heart of the Government. But though a despotic monarch may be moved to relent, a despotic bureaucracy is impregnable to human appeal. According to the

[5] *India's Fight for Freedom* by Profs. Haridas Mukherji & Uma Mukherji, p. 17.

We are indebted to this admirable, pioneering, research work by the Mukherjis for some historical data of great importance.

Proclamation, "the districts of Dacca, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Backergunge, Tippera, Noakhali, Chittagong, the Hill tracts, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, Bogra, Pabna, and Malda which now form the Bengal division of the Presidency of Fort William will, along with the territories at present under the administration of the Chief Commissioner of Assam, form a separate province of Eastern Bengal and Assam." The new province, it was also declared, would be under a Lt. Governor, and function as a separate unit from the 16th October, 1905.

Thus, at one fell blow, the British Government wanted to kill the "seditious" patriotism of the Bengali race, and disrupt Hindu-Moslem unity. The partition of Bengal became "a settled fact". It threw down the glove to the nationalist spirit of Bengal. It was not, evidently, a solicitude for efficiency of administration that had prompted the Partition — that could have been as well compassed by the substitution of the Presidency Governorship like that of Bombay and Madras — but, as we have seen, it was the tyrant desire to cow down and crush the agitation for national freedom. And how did Bengal meet the Challenge? The whole province rose in indignant revolt to oppose the Partition, and continued to oppose it so long as it was not abrogated. And abrogated it was, though after a long and bitter struggle. The rebel spirit of freedom compelled the British bureaucracy to yield to its insistent demand and unsettle "the settled fact"!

On the 16th October, 1905, the fated partition came into force. "On that day", says Nevinson in his book, "...thousands and thousands of Indians rub dust or ashes on their foreheads; at dawn they bathe in silence as at a sacred fast; no meals are eaten; the shops in cities and the village bazaars are shut; women refuse to cook; they lay aside their ornaments; men bind each other's wrists with a yellow string as a sign that they will never forget the shame; and the whole day is passed in resentment, mourning, and the hunger of humiliation. In Calcutta vast meetings are held, and the errors of the Indian Government are exposed with eloquent patriotism. With each year the indignation of the protest has increased; the crowds have grown bigger, the ceremonial more widely spread, and the fast more rigorous." Valentine Chirol writes in his *The Indian Unrest*: "...The Partition was the

signal for an agitation such as India had not witnessed... monster demonstrations were organised in Calcutta and in the principal towns of the mofussils." Abanindra Nath Tagore, the great artist, in his Bengali book, *Gharoya*, describes, in his picturesque way, the unprecedented upheaval of national feeling in which they all participated under the leadership of his uncle, Rabindranath Tagore. Rabindranath sang out in rousing strains the agony of outraged nationalism. He took an active part in collecting funds for the Swadeshi work, and went about the city, and even entered into the mosques of the Muslims, binding the wrists of his compatriots with the sacred thread, rakhi, in token of brotherly love and unity. Extremists and Moderates, Hindus and Muslims, young men and old, the rich and the poor, married women and young girls, all rose, as if from a long sleep, to greet the dawn of national awakening. A new life flowed, full and fast, through the province, like a torrent of fire. The skies were rent with the cries of Bande Mataram, the inspired and inspiring national hymn. It was, indeed, a glorious awakening, a virile self-assertion of a people branded by Macaulay with the stigma of effeminacy and cowardice. "In a few months' time," writes Lala Lajpat Rai in his *Young India*, "the face and the spirit of Bengal was changed. The press, the pulpit, the platform, the writers of prose and poetry, composers of music and playwrights — all were filled with the spirit of nationalism.... Volunteer corps were organised, and Sabhas and Samities and Akharas leaped into existence by hundreds where Bengali young men began to take lessons in fencing and other games."

The first casualty in this vigorous onslaught of anti-Partition agitation was the British textile goods. Swadeshi, which Sri Aurobindo had been inculcating from even much before the partition, received a sudden creative impetus. "The movement achieved a great success, and became widely popular with the masses. Foreign cloth shops were picketed, foreign textiles were burnt in huge bonfires in market places and on crossings and roads. The family priests refused to perform marriage ceremonies if either of the couple was clad in cloth other than Swadeshi. Swadeshi pledges were taken at meetings," writes Dr. S.C. Bartarya in his book, *The Indian*

Nationalist Movement. He says further: "Swadeshi was an economic weapon to achieve India's industrial advance and economic regeneration. The Boycott[6] with a programme of boycott of British goods, renunciation of titles, resignation from Government services, and withdrawal from Government educational institutions, was a weapon forged to force the Government to stop repression and undo the Partition." Frightened and flustered, the *Englishman*, an influential Anglo-Indian paper in Calcutta, wrote: "It is absolutely true that Calcutta ware-houses are full of fabrics that cannot be sold.... Boycott must not be acquiesced in or it will more surely ruin British connection with India than an armed revolution. Lord Ronaldsay writes in his *The Heart of Arya-varta*: "The Swadeshi movement rushed headlong impetuously like some mighty flood, submerging them, sweeping them off their feet, but revitalising their lives."

Along with the British goods, foreign salt and sugar were also boycotted. The growth of national industries received an unforeseen stimulus. The Bengalis, who had been for long rather apathetic to commercial and industrial enterprises, suddenly seemed to develop a phenomenal aptitude for them, and achieved signal success in the course of a few years. Mill-made textiles, hand-loom products, medicines, chemicals for various purposes, toilet goods, woollen fabrics, hosiery, shoes etc. began to be manufactured and marketed on an ever-widening scale. The textile mills of Gujarat came forward with remarkable promptness and generosity to help Bengal in respect of textile goods, and it contributed to a substantial increase and expansion of their own business into the bargain. All this was the laudable fruit of Lord Curzon's malicious policy. Swadeshi, which had really had its birth in the days, and principally by the initiative, of Sri Aurobindo's maternal grand-father, Rishi Rajnarayan Bose, received an unprecedented fillip by the anti-Partition agitation, and became an abiding feature of the all-round national regeneration.

[6] Both Swadeshi and Boycott were accepted with certain reservations by the National Congress at its Banaras session in 1905 as legitimate means of redressing political wrongs.

The second casualty in the anti-Partition campaign was the education imparted on Western lines and calculated to turn out subservient clerks and scribes of the alien Government. The existing system of education was, according to Sri Aurobindo, intrinsically demoralising on account of its "calculated poverty and insufficiency, its antinational character, its subordination to Government and the use made of that subordination for the discouragement of patriotism and the inculcation of loyalty." Government schools and colleges were boycotted, and new ones started to impart national education free from Government control. The humanities and sciences were intended to be taught in them, keeping in view the building up of the character of the students and instilling in them love of Mother India, a knowledge and appreciation of her immemorial culture, and a devoted consecration to her service. The leading part taken by the students all over Bengal in the boycott and the picketing, and the stirring of patriotic feeling in the hearts of the people fluttered the Government, and the Pedlar and Carlyle Letters, which sought to repress the students' national activities and gag the singing of the national hymn, Bande Mataram, served, instead, to acerbate the already frayed temper of young Bengal and set ablaze the patriotic fire they strove to quench. The more the repression the greater the upsurge of the spirit of patriotism and dedication. It is blind authoritarianism that seeks to dragoon the rising spirit of a nation into perpetual submission.

The National College of Calcutta, of which Sri Aurobindo became the first Principal in June, 1905, owed its origin to this movement of the boycott of the Government schools and colleges. It was started by the initiative of Satish Chandra Mukherji, the reputed educationist of the time, who had also founded the Dawn Society, and was running the English organ, *Dawn*, in Calcutta. Almost all the men of light and leading in the city, including Rabindranath Tagore, Hiren Datta, Sir Gooroodas Banerji, Bepin Chandra Pal etc., were among the patrons and supporters of the college, and Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Radha Kumud Mookherji among its young professors. But the new movement for education lacked the basis of an inspired vision, a knowledge of the essential spirit of Indian culture, and

the true ideal of national education, and was, besides, still wedded to the current system of Western education in its thought and action. It could not, therefore, produce the high results it promised, and languished and waned in course of time. Though many schools and colleges were established all over Bengal, and, in some of them, a fair measure of success was, indeed, achieved, the education imparted could not be called national — it remained essentially the same Western education with certain important modifications.

The Bengal Partition, as we have tried to show, roused the national spirit as nothing had roused it before, and gave a revolutionary turn to the resurgence of the whole country. What happened in Bengal had its mighty repercussions all over India, notably in Maharashtra, the Punjab, and Madras. The reign of terror, inaugurated in Bengal by the Government, and later extended to the three provinces just mentioned, galvanised the whole nation. The spark of an intense, inextinguishable patriotism, flying from Bengal, kindled a country-wide conflagration. The official report of the Banaras Indian National Congress[7], which was held in December, 1905, records as follows: “Never since the dark days of Lord Lytton’s Viceroyalty had India been so distracted, discontented, despondent; the victim of so many misfortunes, political and other; the target for so much scorn and calumny emanating from the highest quarters — its most moderate demands ridiculed and scouted, its most reasonable prayers greeted with a stiff negative, its noblest aspirations spurned and denounced as pure mischief or solemn nonsense, its most cherished ideals hurled down from their pedestal and trodden underfoot — never had the condition of India been more critical than it was during the second ill-starred administration of Lord Curzon. The Official Secrets Act was passed in the teeth of universal

[7] Sri Aurobindo went to Banaras to help the Extremist Party of Bengal to formulate its policy and press upon the Congress the adoption of its fourfold programme of Boycott. He guided, and actually influenced, the shaping of the new, important decisions, though perhaps he did not attend the open session. That was his usual way — getting things done by others, himself remaining in the background, averse to the limelight.

opposition... and the Gagging Act was passed. Education was crippled and mutilated; it was made expensive and it was officialised; and, so, that most effective instrument for the enslavement of our national interest, the Universities Act, was passed." Gokhale, the very paradigm of moderation, who was by no means unfriendly to the Government, had at last to vent his feelings rather boldly for the sake of truth: "To him (Lord Curzon) India was a country where the Englishman was to monopolise for all time all power, and talk all the while of duty. The Indian's only business was to be governed, and it was a sacrilege on his part to have any other aspiration.... A cruel wrong has been inflicted on our Bengali brethren, and the whole country has been stirred to its depths in sorrow and resentment, as had never been the case before.... The tremendous upheaval of popular feeling which has taken place in Bengal in consequence of the Partition, will constitute a landmark in the history of our national progress.... Bengal's heroic stand against the oppression of a harsh and uncontrolled bureaucracy has astonished and gratified all India.... The most astounding fact of the situation is that the public life of the country has received an accession of strength of great importance, and for this all India owes a deep debt of gratitude to Bengal." Lala Lajpat Rai expressed the same view when he said: "I think the people of Bengal ought to be congratulated on being leaders of that march (for freedom) in the van of progress.... And if the people of India will just learn that lesson from the people of Bengal, I think the struggle is not hopeless."

All progressive political leaders of India supported the fourfold programme of Boycott and stood solidly by Bengal on her hour of the gravest trial, for, they knew, the trial of Bengal was the travail of India's political salvation. Perhaps it was something more, which time alone will reveal. Mahatma Gandhi paid a perceptive tribute to the heroic struggle of Bengal in the following words: "The real awakening (of India) took place after the Partition of Bengal.... That day may be considered to be the day of the partition of the British Empire.... The demand for the abrogation of the partition is tantamount to a demand for Home Rule.... As time passes, the nation is being forged.... After the partition the people saw that they

must be capable of suffering. This new spirit must be considered to be the chief result of the partition."

The Partition was, in fact, the focal point and accelerating force of the renaissance in India, which had begun with Ram Mohan Roy as its foremost herald and pioneer. It gave a vision and a direction of the path, and a glimpse of the glorious destiny towards which the nation was marching. An outburst of the creative urge, clearly visible in many spheres of the national life, intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual, found now a unifying focus of self-expression. And when Sri Aurobindo identified nationalism with Sanatana Dharma — "I say that it is the Sanatana Dharma which for us is nationalism" — he recovered at one bound the highest values and widest ideals of the nation, leavened patriotism with spiritual realism, and swept it out of its narrow orbit into the vastness of a universal consummation. Nationalism became in his hands a liberating universalism, and the freedom of India a promise and precondition of the eventual freedom of the soul and body of the commonwealth of humanity. But, as a prophet and precursor, Sri Aurobindo was much in advance of his time. The spirituality which he infused into politics was, for a time, overlaid by inferior or extraneous elements, the dawn-blush covered up by the pall of an invading mist. Ethics then stepped in to do the necessary work of salvaging and sublimation, to give Indian politics a higher push, a purer content. But ethics is half-blind. However firm in faith and strong in self-sacrifice, it is arbitrary in its inhibitions and impositions, crude and cavalier in its repressions, rigid and exclusive in its insistences, and incapable of dealing with a wise and victorious flexibility with the complex forces of life. But the hour of its political domination has almost passed, and its cleansing but cramping spell is dissolving under the shocks of harsh realities, leaving the field clear for the influx of a dynamic, militant, conquering spirituality, the twin-force of Brahminhood and Kshatriyahood,[8] to lead India and the world

[8] Political freedom cannot be maintained without *kṣātra-vīrya*, the fire-force of the Kshatriya.

towards the integral self-fulfilment of Nara-Narayana, the Divine Being in man.

We shall now follow the subsequent political movement in the country, and study what constituted Sri Aurobindo's contribution to it.

II

"We do not affect to believe, therefore, that we can discover any solution of these great problems or any sure line of policy by which the tangled issues of so immense a movement can be kept free from the possibility of inextricable anarchy in the near future. Anarchy will come. *This peaceful and inert nation is going to be rudely awakened from a century of passivity and flung into a world-shaking turmoil out of which it will come transformed, strengthened and purified.*[9] There is a chaos which is the result of inertia and the prelude of death, and this was the state of India during the last century. The British peace of the last fifty years was like the quiet green grass and flowers covering the corruption of a sepulchre. There is another chaos which is the violent reassertion of life, and it is this chaos into which India is being hurried today. We cannot repine at the change, but are rather ready to welcome the pangs which help the storm which purifies, the destruction which renovates.

"One thing only we are sure of, and one thing we wear as a life-belt which will buoy us up on the waves of the chaos that is coming on the land. This is the fixed and unalterable faith in *an over-ruling Purpose which is raising India once more from the dead, the fixed and unalterable intention to fight for the renovation of her ancient life and glory.*[10] Swaraj is the life-belt. Swaraj the pilot, Swaraj the star of guidance. If a great social revolution is necessary, it is because the ideal of Swaraj cannot be accomplished by a nation bound to forms which are no longer expressive of the

[9] Italics are ours.

[10] Italics are ours.

ancient immutable Self of India. She must change the rags of the past so that her beauty may be readomed. She must alter her bodily appearance so that her soul may be newly expressed. We need not fear that any change will turn her into a secondhand Europe. Her individuality is too mighty for such a degradation, her soul too calm and self-sufficient for such a surrender... *She will create her own conditions, find out the secret of order which Socialism in vain struggles to find, and teach the peoples of the earth once more how to harmonise the world and the spirit*.[11]

"If we realise this truth, if we perceive in all that is happening a great and momentous transformation necessary not only for us but for the whole world, we shall fling ourselves without fear or misgivings into the times which are upon us. India is the Guru of the nations, the physician of the human soul in its profounder maladies; she is destined once more to new-mould the life of the world and restore the peace of the human spirit. But Swaraj is the necessary condition of her work, and before she can do the work, she must fulfil the condition."[12]

The above extract mirrors the vision, the faith, the hope, and the courage with which Sri Aurobindo flung himself into the turmoil of the Indian political movement in 1906. He did not take the plunge, impelled only by an intense patriotic ardour. His spiritual vision had foreseen the drift and significance of the many-sided renaissance[13] that was taking place in India, and of which the revolution in Bengal was but a political prelude. That was why he did not fear the chaos that appeared to be imminent. For, he knew that it was not the chaos of inertia, which leads to disintegration, but the

[11] Italics are ours.

[12] From *Bande Mataram* of 8.3.1908.

[13] Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda had prophesied it.

chaos of the resurgent forces of regeneration, the transitional chaos of the aggressive self-assertion of a rejuvenated national life. He welcomed, and helped with full knowledge, the revolution that was sweeping down upon the country, to chum a new dawn out of the heaving gloom of the moment. He saw with his Yogic vision God's purpose writ large upon the foaming waves of the national revolution,[14] and collaborated with it in its realisation. Unswayed by the ignorant human notions of good and evil, undismayed by the hurtling forces of destruction and confusion, undeterred by the misunderstandings of his colleagues and followers, firm in his steps and careless of fate and consequence, he followed the inner Gleam wherever it led him, with the utter self-abandon of a child. It was the self-abandon whose mighty potentialities Sri Ramakrishna had realised and illustrated so marvellously in his epoch-making life. Sri Aurobindo visualised the destiny of India, of which he speaks in the above extract, and became an instrument in God's hand for its moulding, at first, through politics, and later, through spirituality. He fought for the political freedom of India, but only as a step and means to the realisation of the spiritual mission of her soul — the regeneration of humanity, and its evolutionary ascent from the mind to the Supermind. His vision was never confined to the political and economic, the cultural and moral freedom and greatness of his motherland; it embraced the whole world. Seen in this perspective, his whole life appears to be of one piece, a gradual, though at times sudden, unfolding of a single aim and purpose — the steady pursuit and accomplishment of a single mission.

The official History of the Congress by Pattabhi Sitaramayya gives in figurative language a true estimate of Sri Aurobindo's political life in Bengal from 1906 to 1909. But it does not — because it could not — give any idea of the wider and deeper implications even of his political work, which was fraught with incalculable possibilities for the world.

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[14] Indian nationalism has been "much more than the agitation of political coteries. It is the revival of an historical tradition, the liberation of the soul of a people." — Ramsay MacDonald.

"Aurobindo shone for years as the brightest star on the Indian firmament. His association with the National Education movement at its inception lent dignity and charm to the cause.... Aurobindo's genius shot up like a meteor. He was on the high skies only for a time. He flooded the land from Cape to Mount with the effulgence of his light."

We have based our study of the political life of this "brightest star on the Indian firmament" on the fact, borne out by the unbroken tenor of his whole life and the essential unity of his vision, thought and action, that his politics was the politics of a Yogi, and not that of a mere politician. And we shall continue our study on the same line, in the confident hope, amply supported by the verdict of contemporary leaders, whom we shall presently quote, and sufficient circumstantial evidence, that it alone can lead us to a correct explanation of what has remained an unsolved riddle to the world, so far as Sri Aurobindo's political life is concerned. A polychrome personality, preaching at once passive resistance and armed insurrection, giving different counsels to different colleagues and followers, and equally encouraging even contradictory aims and inclinations in them, but infallibly inspiring them all with a fervent love of Mother India, and a passionate zeal for self-sacrifice in the cause of her freedom — such a calm, complex and masterful personality can be only that of a Yogi. It cannot be assumed or feigned. If it is a mystery and a paradox, or even a farrago of glaring inconsistencies to our rational mind, it is an undeniable truth and fact of spiritual experience. Vivekananda, if he had been alive at the time, would have easily appreciated it. The intuitive insight of Rabindranath Tagore, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, and Sister Nivedita clearly perceived it.

Human nature is too complex and diverse, the path of its evolution too mazy and meandering, and the world-forces too tangled and conflicting to permit of a single rigid line of thought and action to lead to any enduring result. Our mind sees only one clear-cut way, and pursues it between its blinkers with a dogmatic faith. But the Yogi commands a total view of the

flowing continuum, and has the plasticity to vary his thought and action with the varying trends of its complex operation. He moves in tune with the universal movement even when he concentrates on a limited objective, because he sees with the eye of the Infinite. Not mind-made laws, but the Will of the overruling Providence directs his steps. If he appears to act as an agent of destruction, like Parashurama, or Sri Krishna in Kurukshetra, it is only to clear the path to a renewal and reconstruction. If he appears to blink at bloodshed, it is only in the interest of the creation of a nobler strain of it, and for laying the foundations of a more free and fruitful peace. His apparent inconsistencies spring from his superhuman capacity for acting variously in varying circumstances, and meeting every contingency with the serenity of an inexhaustible resourcefulness. He acts not for transient success and flattering results, but for the fulfilment of the Divine Purpose, in which alone lies the ultimate harmony and happiness of the human race.

We have already quoted extensively from Bepin Chandra Pal who speaks of Sri Aurobindo as the "master", and as "marked out by Providence to play in the future of this (national) movement a part not given to any of his colleagues and contemporaries"; and of his nationalism as "the supreme passion of his soul". He further says, "Few, indeed, have grasped the full force and meaning of the Nationalist ideal as Aravinda has done.... By the verdict of his countrymen, Aravinda stands today among these favoured sons of God...." Tilak, as we have seen, paid a glowing tribute to him when he said that there was "none equal to Aravinda in self-sacrifice, knowledge and sincerity" and that "he writes from *divine inspiration*". Lajpat Rai speaks of Sri Aurobindo as a nationalist leader in the following words: "...a quiet unostentatious, young Hindu, who was till then obscure, holding his soul in patience and waiting for opportunities to *send currents of the greatest strength* into the nation's system. *He was gathering energy*...." All these are, indeed, remarkably perceptive appreciations of the nature of Sri Aurobindo's political leadership. But the highest appreciation and warmest homage came from the immortal poet Rabindranath Tagore, who later achieved world renown as a Nobel-Laureate, and from Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, the fiery champion of Hinduism and militant Nationalism in

Bengal, who had made a profound impression on Rabindranath and Bepin Pal, and helped the former in organising his Shantiniketan as an eductional institution, modelled on the ideals of ancient India. Rabindranath, who was much older, and more experienced in literary and political matters — in fact, all those mentioned above were older than Sri Aurobindo — wrote a poem on Sri Aurobindo hailing him as the "voice incarnate of India's soul":

"Rabindranath, O Aurobindo, bows to thee!
O friend, my country's friend, O voice incarnate, free,
Of India's soul! No soft renown doth crown thy lot,
Nor pelf or careless comfort is for thee; thou'st sought
No petty bounty, petty dole;...
In watchfulness thy soul
Hast thou ever held for boundless full perfection's birth
For which, all night and day, the god in man on earth
Doth strive and strain austerely...
The fiery messenger that with the lamp of God
Hath come — where is the king who can with chain or rod
Chastise him?...

Moved by the soul-stirring articles of Sri Aurobindo in the pages of the *Bande Mataram* and discerning in them the spiritual genius of the writer, Brahmabandhab wrote: "Have you ever seen Aurobindo, the lotus of immaculate whiteness — the hundred-petalled lotus in full bloom in India's Manasarovar?... Our Aurobindo is unique in the world. In him shines the divine glory of Sattwa in snow-white purity. Vast and great is he — vast in the amplitude of his heart, and great in the magnanimity of his Swadharma as a Hindu. You will not find his peer in the three worlds — such a whole and genuine man, fire-charged like the thunder, and yet as graceful and soft as a lotus-leaf, *rich in knowledge, and poised in meditation*.[15] In order to free his motherland of the chains of slavery, he has ripped away the meshes

[15] Italics are ours.

of the Maya of Western civilisation, renounced the desires and pleasures of this world, and as a true son of Mother India, devoted himself to editing the paper, *Bande Mataram*."

A strikingly sensitive evaluation of Sri Aurobindo's political work comes from an ex-professor of philosophy at the Baroda College, M.A. Buch, M.A., Ph.D., who writes in one of his books, *Rise and Growth of Indian Militant Nationalism*:

"The most typical representative of Bengal Nationalism, in its most intense metaphysical and religious form, was Aravindo Ghosh. Nationalism with him is not a political or economic cry; it is the innermost hunger of his whole soul for the rebirth in him and through men like him, in the whole of India, of the ancient culture of Hindusthan in its pristine purity and nobility. He was an intellectual thinker of the highest type, and an accomplished and versatile scholar; but his profound scholarship and his keen and penetrating logic were subordinated to the master passion of his soul, the mystic yearning to realise himself in his God, in his country....

"The extraordinary fervour — the zeal of a new nationalism — came upon Aravindo Ghosh like a divine frenzy.... This nationalism is not a trick of the intellect; it is an attitude of the heart, of the soul; it springs from the deepest part of our nature which intellect can never fathom.... The nationalism of Aravinda Ghosh was a burning religious emotion, *the voice of God in man*, the invincible demand on the part of the great Indian spiritual culture for expression through the reawakened soul to the world. The full meaning and force of this cry can never be perfectly intelligible, translatable into the language of common sense.... It is the unutterable shriek of the political mystic, *it is the call of the Beloved; it has simply to be obeyed*.[16] The supreme regeneration which India demands can only come from this supreme call of the Motherland — so deep, so religious, so passionate that it carries all before it...."

[16] Italics are ours.

Sri Aurobindo's spiritual genius and the mystical character of his patriotism are thus admitted on all hands. Almost all the great leaders of the time perceived something of the glowing spiritual fire and dynamis of his personality, and hailed him with one voice as "the brightest star on the political firmament of India", and the "voice incarnate, free, of India's soul." All felt in his presence, and recognised in his writings and utterances, the mystic spell of the born prophet of the spiritual rebirth of India. His soul's love for all men, equally embracing the high and the low, the virtuous and the sinner; his magnetic attraction; his habitual silence pulsing with his accumulating Yogic power, and infusing it into the soul of the nation; his tranquil vision scanning the distant horizons[17]; and his absolute surrender to the Divine Light that directed his steps[18], marked him out, even in those days of hectic agitation and menacing anarchy, as one destined to leave an indelible stamp upon the history of mankind. Youngest in age among the leaders, he was honoured and respected even by the oldest in wisdom. Shy of publicity, he was thrust upon the presidential chair even where political giants like Tilak, Bepin Pal, and Lajpat Rai strode the rostrum. His humility and self-effacement served as a crystalline channel for the Light and Force of the Divine to stream upon his travailing country.

[17] "She (India) is destined once more to new-mould the life of the world and restore the peace of the human spirit." — This has been the constant burden of his message right from the days of his Baroda life to the last day of his earthly existence.

[18] We have already quoted from his confidential letters to his wife in which he speaks of his being moved and guided by the Divine. His four outstanding experiences, which came to him unexpectedly, in Bombay, Baroda and Kashmir, also confirm our standpoint.

III

> "...There are times when a single personality gathers up the temperament of an epoch or a movement and by simply existing ensures its fulfilment.... Without the man the moment is a lost opportunity; without the moment the man is a force inoperative. The meeting of the two changes the destinies of nations and the poise of the world is altered by what seems to the superficial an accident. *Every great flood of action needs a human soul for its centre, an embodied point of the Universal Personality from which to surge out upon others*[19].... History lays much stress on events, a little on speech, but has never realised the importance of souls.... Only the eye of the seer can pick them out from the mass and trace to their source these immense vibrations...."
>
> — "*Historical Impressions*" by Sri Aurobindo

The four outstanding spiritual experiences which had come to Sri Aurobindo as prophetic gifts of God, his subsequent practice of Yoga and its guidance by the Divine Light, which gradually took charge of his whole being and moved it, as we learn from his confidential letters to his wife, brought to light by the police during his trial in the famous Alipore Case, and the spontaneous, perceptive homage of some of his greatest contemporaries, whom we have already quoted, — all these go to prove that here was one who was born to a historic mission, and who knew, more or less clearly, what he had been sent to attempt and accomplish. Our first point that Sri Aurobindo's politics was the politics of a Yogi, divinely directed and multiply oriented, preluding and preparing the rebirth of the soul of India for the regeneration of mankind, has thus been substantially confirmed.

[19] Italics are ours.

This leads us to another point, a collateral issue, which we have to tackle here, if we would understand the whole meaning and significance of the renaissance in India, of which Ram Mohan Roy was the first herald and initiating genius.[20] Every great revolution, spiritual, social, political, or scientific, is a release of the mighty ideative and dynamic forces of the Time-Spirit, which seeks to inaugurate a new order or a new era in a nation, society, or humanity. And the Time-Spirit incarnates itself in one or two individuals who are born to be its precursors or prophets, priests and realises. Both the forces, ideative and dynamic, of a revolution work at once in a sort of polar interaction between concentration and diffusion. There is a concentration of them in the pioneers and realisers, who are used as epitomes and vessels, sending forth the electric currents of creative inspiration[21], and a dilution and diffusion in the commonalty for the preparation of the field of their action in the appointed hour. This is the double aspect of every revolution, viewed from the stand-point of its birth, growth, and expansion; and history amply illustrates this truth. What is conscious and articulate in the prophets and torch-bearers, remains, in the beginning, subconscious in the people[22], and throws out stray sparks of its urge and intention in the minds of the elite. Mostly it is felt as an inchoate but persistent aspiration, a vague and indefinite yearning, an instinctive reaching out towards a delivering change. Some of the elite receive its thought-waves, and express them as best they can, each in his own way. But there is, more often than not, a distortion or diminution of them in the minds of the elite who cannot help mixing them with their own prejudices and preconceptions. It is only the prophets who embody and express the inspirations of the Time-Spirit in their purity, so long as they remain loyal

[20] But he heralded and initiated, not the whole of the renaissance, but only an important part of it — the religious, socio-political and educational reform.

[21] "Inspiration is real work. Let the truly inspiring word be uttered and it will breathe life into dry bones." — *Bande Mataram*, 23.2.1908

[22] "Every profound truth waits for the life that shall be all its voice, and when that is found, it comes within the reach of mutitudes to whom it would have remained inaccessible." — Sister Nivedita

to it in the depths of their being. Pythagoras and Plato, Zoroaster and Christ and Mohammed, Leonardo, Galileo and Newton, Mirabeau, Danton, Robespierre and Napoleon, Mazzini and Garibaldi, Marx and Lenin etc., in the West, and Rama, Sri Krishna, Mahavira and Buddha, Shankaracharya and Chaitanya, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda etc., in India, all have been, in their different spheres of work, such prophets and pioneers, or executors and realisers of the invincible Will of the Time-Spirit.

The working of the Will of the Time-Spirit progresses through a constant tug and tension between the forces of new creation and the forces of conservation, and both are indispensable for the shaping of the future. The forces of conservation make for continuity with the past and the transmission of all that was essential, live, and productive in it into the mould of the present, and it is out of the pregnant present, however desolate and chaotic it may appear on the surface, that the new forces surge out to construct the future. But the whole movement is a very complex process, baffling to the rational mind of man. The prophet or pioneer is one who incarnates both the forces of conservation and the forces of new creation. He is the child of the past and the parent of the future[23]. It is not always that he brings something brand-new to the nation or the country he represents. Nor is it at all necessary that he should be original in the idea or ideal he holds up for realisation. Buddha was fundamentally indebted to the Upanishads, Christ to Moses and the Old Testament, and Luther to Wycliff and Erasmus. There can be no creation in a void. No genius is a mushroom, or a freak of Nature. No culture that is rootless can revive after it has had its natural decay and death. What is distinctive in the mission of a prophet or a forerunner is a summing up in himself of both the fertile forces of conservation and those of new creation in a harmonious blend,

[23] "...Pioneers always depend on the help of those who have gone before them; the present stands on the past, as a house on its foundations." — Montessori

"If we have to be true to the genius of the race, if we have to appeal to the soul of the nation, we have to drink deep of the fountain of the past, and then proceed to build the future." — Vivekananda

and marshalled in a dynamic, revolutionary drive, powerful enough to cleave through the barrage of opposing forces, towards the building of the future. He has a vision which none else in the epoch possesses in equal measure, an intuitive perception of the course he has to follow, or at least gleams and flashes which lead him through it, and an uncanny suppleness, which often appears as an incomprehensible, unpredictable eccentricity, in his dealings with the interlocked complex of forces, contending for mastery.

So long as he remains loyal to the vision and intuition guiding him from within, he is invincible. He radiates a power which acts with the victorious might of the elemental forces of Nature. “A messenger he”, says Carlyle, “sent from the Infinite Unknown with tidings to us. Direct from the Inner Fact of things; — he lives, and has to live, in daily communion with that.... Really his utterances, are they not a kind of revelation?... It is from the heart of the world that he comes; he is a portion of the primal reality of things.... The ‘inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding’: we must listen before all to him.” He, “with his free force, direct out of God’s own hand, is the lightning.... All blazes round him now, when he has once struck on it, into fire like his own. In all epochs of the world’s history, we shall find the Great Man to have been the indispensable saviour of his epoch; — the lightning, without which the fuel never would have burnt.”[24] He may be hooted or persecuted, crucified or poisoned, but his mission can never fail to prosper, for it bears within it the breath and fiat of the Time-Spirit. There may be resistance, more or less vehement and persistent, of blind orthodoxy or entrenched convention; but nothing can stand for long in the way of his work. His creative ideas permeate the people, and evoke a response in them. His touch revives and kindles. He fashions heroes out of common clay. What was at first subconscious in the masses emerges, little by little, into the light of consciousness; what seemed fantastic or chimerical assumes the solidity and definiteness of reality; what was

[24] *Hero and Hero Worship* by Carlyle.

repellent begins to attract. The prophet is then hailed as a deliverer, and canonised.

But if, in a crucial moment of his work, when the tenacity of his faith and the stubbornness of his faithfulness to his vision and intuition would have sustained him, and sped him on, the pioneer falls back on his reasoning mind and suffers its inveterate doubts to cloud his consciousness, or allows himself to be led, not by the inner urge but by the amorphous opinions of the people he is leading, and lets his egoistic ambition get the better of his loyalty to the inner Light, he falls, as Luther fell, or is flung aside, as Napoleon was flung aside. The secret of his success lies in his absolute fidelity to the Light within him, even when it seems obscured for a moment by the swirling dust of Time's passage. In short, the central psychological factor in a revolution worth the name is the complex and comprehensive personality[25] of the pioneer geared to the Time-Spirit, and receptive and plastic to its inspirations. He is not so much an individual man, experimenting with Truth in the dim light of his faith and reason, and groping his way forward, but a focal point of universal forces, releasing into expression the elements that go to construct the future.

For an objective study of the origin and development of a revolution, it is, therefore, essential to discover the prophetic vision and pioneering inspiration which initiate it. It is in them that we can discern the entire seed and potentiality of it. Otherwise, we see only the ripples and waves it casts up on the surface, and ignore the deeper springs from which they emerge. The protagonist of a revolution is a living focus of its possibilities and a prism of its diverse colours. Not to know him in the inner truth of his being is to miss the real import of his mission and the purpose and significance of the revolution. What historian can hope to study fruitfully the Renaissance in the West without arriving at a proper assessment of the role Leonardo da Vinci played in it? or, the scientific revolution of the modern times without a correct estimate of the part played in it by Newton and Einstein?

[25] Aldous Huxley calls the Prophet a "National Person".

We have, therefore, set out to study the history of the renaissance (not the freedom movement only) in India by ascertaining, on the solid basis of historical data and contemporary evidence, as to who was the personality that can be called the prophet and pioneer of it.

The renaissance can, of course, be traced back to Raja Ram Mohan Roy, as we have already said above. Ram Mohan's contribution to religious, social and political reconstruction of India was immense and magnificent. Dayananda Saraswati sought to give a new orientation to the religious and social life of the nation by linking it to its ancient roots. But not until Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda brought down a tidal wave of creative spirituality and touched every aspect of Indian life into an unwonted glow of galvanised consciousness, did the lineaments of the renaissance shine out on the horizon with a radiant distinctness. We cannot measure the debt we owe to the lightning personality of Vivekananda. Sri Aurobindo says about him: "We perceive his influence still working gigantically, we know not well how, we know not well where, in something that is not yet formed, something leonine, grand, intuitive, upheaving that has entered the soul of India, and we say: 'Behold, Vivekananda still lives in the soul of his Mother and in the souls of her children.'" The first incipient outline of an unprecedented synthesis was thus traced, and the perennial founts of India's mighty spirituality were unsealed. Bankim, Rabindranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore, Jagadish Chandra Bose, and a few others evoked various powers of the soul of India and considerably helped the expansion and enrichment of her culture. In the field of politics and social reform, there came a glorious band of dynamic personalities, all impelled by the overmastering urge to serve the motherland and raise the nation to the manifold greatness of its destiny. And yet, when we scrutinise the aims and achievements of all these illustrious personalities, we are driven to conclude that there was not one among them who had a global vision of all the potentialities, spiritual, moral, intellectual, aesthetic, cultural, political and economic, of the renaissance that was taking place in India. Each of them had his gaze fixed upon one or a few aspects and potentialities, and considered their realisation as the sole object of their

endeavour, and perhaps the whole purpose of the national resurgence. That the resurgence meant the re-emergence of the immortal soul of India and its mission for the regeneration and reconstruction of humanity[26], escaped even the most perceptive of them. India waited for her chosen son, the "voice incarnate" of her soul, to touch her into the spring-tide splendour of her renewed life, and the world waited for India's Light to lead her out of the gloom of its moral and cultural collapse. God beckoned man to rise beyond his animal humanity.

As the individual has his soul, his deathless being, which seeks self-fulfilment in life, so the nation has a soul, its inmost being, which seeks to realise its destiny, "...the primal law and purpose of a society, community or nation is to seek its own self-fulfilment; it strives rightly to find itself, to become aware within itself of the law and power of its own being and to fulfil it as perfectly as possible, *to realise all its potentialities*[27], to live its own self-revealing life.... The nation or society, like the individual, has a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, a developing mind, and a soul behind all these signs and powers for the sake of which they exist. One may see even that, like the individual, it essentially is a soul rather than has one; it is a group-soul that, once having attained to a separate distinctness, must become more and more self-conscious and find itself more and more fully as it develops its corporate action and mentality and its organic self-expressive life."[28]

The leader who identifies himself with this nation-soul and feels in himself, not only all its many-branching powers and potentialities, but its urge and inspiration to realise them, is the true pioneer, commissioned to lead the nation to its ultimate destiny. "Nationalism is itself no creation of individuals and can have no respect for persons. It is a force which God has created, and from Him it has received only one command, to advance

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[26] "The world waits for the rising of India to receive the divine flood in its fullness." *The Ideal of the Karmayogin* by Sri Aurobindo.

[27] Italics are ours.

[28] *The Human Cycle* by Sri Aurobindo, Chapter IV.

and advance and ever advance until He bids it stop, because its appointed mission is done. It advances, inexorably, blindly, unknowing how it advances, in obedience to a Power which it cannot gainsay, and everything which stands in its way, man or institution, will be swept away or ground into powder beneath its weight. Ancient sanctity, supreme authority, bygone popularity, nothing, nothing will serve as a plea.

"It is not the fault of the avalanche if it sweeps away human life by its irresistible and unwilled advance; nor can it be imputed as moral obliquity to the thunderbolt that the oak of a thousand years stood precisely where its burning hand was laid. Not only the old leaders but any of the new men whom the tide has tossed up for a moment on the crest of its surges, must pay the penalty of imagining that he can control the ocean and impose on it his personal likes and desires. These are times of revolution when tomorrow casts aside the fame, popularity and pomp of today. The man whose carriage is today dragged through great cities by shouting thousands amid cries of 'Bande Mataram' and showers of garlands, will tomorrow be disregarded, perhaps hissed and forbidden to speak. So it has always been and none can prevent it.... Men who are now acclaimed as Extremists, leaders of the forward movement, preachers of Nationalism and embodiments of the popular feeling will tomorrow find themselves left behind, cast aside, a living monument of the vanity of personal ambition.... *Only the self-abnegation that effaces the idea of self altogether and follows the course of the revolution with a child-like belief that God is the leader and what He does is for the best, will be able to continue working for the country*.[29] Such men are not led by personal ambition and cannot, therefore, be deterred from following the Will of God by personal loss of any kind.

"Revolutions are incalculable in their goings and absolutely uncontrollable. The sea flows and who shall tell it how it is to flow? The wind blows and what human wisdom can regulate its motions? *The Will of Divine Wisdom is the sole law of revolutions and we have no right to*

[29] Italics are ours.

consider ourselves as anything but mere agents chosen by that Wisdom.[30] When our work is done, we should realise it and feel glad that we have been permitted to do so much. Is it not enough reward for the greatest services that we can do, if our names are recorded in history among those who helped by their work or their speech, or better, by the mute service of their sufferings to prepare the great and free India that will be? Nay, is it not enough if unnamed and unrecorded except in the Books of God, we go down to the grave with the consciousness that our finger too was laid on the great Car and may have helped, however imperceptibly, to push it forward? This talk of services is a poor thing after all. Do we serve the Mother for a reward or do God's work for hire? The patriot lives for his country because he must; he dies for her because she demands it. That is all."[31]

"The Will of the Divine Wisdom is the sole law of revolutions and we have no right to consider ourselves as anything but mere agents chosen by the Wisdom." — This is exactly the truth which Swami Vivekananda knew and preached, and Sri Aurobindo taught and practised all his long life. It was essentially a Yogic Knowledge and a Yogic way of life.

If we would have a total view, in the true perspective, of all the potentialities of the rebirth of India's soul and the ultimate fulfilment of the destiny of this ancient nation, the dawns of whose culture were luminous with the glory of God in man, we have to discover who among the greatest leaders of India, embodying in himself the powers and purpose of the renaissance, served the Will of God as enshrined and revealed in the nation-soul[32] from the beginning of his life to the very end of it, without

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[30] Italics are ours.

[31] "Revolution and Leadership" — *Bande Mataram*, 9.2.1908.

[32] "The movement of 1905 in Bengal pursued a quite new conception of the nation, not merely as a country, but a soul, a psychological, almost a spiritual being and even when acting from economical and political motives, it sought to dynamise them by this subjective conception and to make them instruments of self-expression rather than objects in themselves." — *The Human Cycle*, Chapter IV

being cast aside by the Time-Spirit before his mission was accomplished? We have to discover, not which of the leaders was the true mouth-piece of the will of the nation-soul only to political and economic freedom, or which of them worked for its moral, religious and spiritual greatness, but which of them was the prophet and realiser of its integral fulfilment. Who had the unified vision of all the facets of the national renovation, and the creative will to carve out the many-splendoured future of India? Who among them saw and knew, like Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda before him, and proclaimed by the power of his words and the complex pattern of his ceaseless activities, that India was rising, not for herself but for the world,[33] that the world would sink into a perpetual night of cultural darkness unless the light of the soul of India shone out once again to deliver it, and that the political freedom of India, which was the sole aim of the earnest endeavours of most of the leaders, was only an indispensable prelude to the integral freedom, perfection and fulfilment of humanity? Who, among them, remaining absolutely faithful to the directing Light of God, followed the ascending curve of the unfoldment of the nation-soul, phase by phase, stage by stage, flexibly adapting his steps to the rhythms of its progress, in order to lead it to its supreme end?

"God has set apart India as the eternal fountainhead of holy spirituality, and He will never suffer that fountain to run dry. Therefore Swaraj has been revealed to us. By our political freedom we shall once more recover our spiritual freedom. Once more in the land of the saints and sages will burn up the fire of the ancient Yoga and the hearts of her people will be lifted up into the neighbourhood of the Eternal."[34]

"Once more in the land of the saints and sages will burn up the fire of the ancient Yoga...." Here we have at once a prescience and a prophecy of the colossal work that was to rear its edifice on the secure foundation of

[33] "She (India) is rising to shed the eternal light entrusted to her over the world. India has always existed for humanity and not for herself and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must be great." — *Uttarpara Speech* by Sri Aurobindo.

[34] From the *Bande Mataram*, 23.2.1908.

political freedom[35]. The integral Yoga was to transform human nature into Divine Nature and human life into Divine Life[36].

[35] "The true aim of the nationalist movement is to restore the spiritual greatness of the nation by the essential preliminary of its political regeneration." From *Bande Mataram.* "Politics and Spirituality", 10.11.1907.

[36] "We believe that it is to make Yoga the ideal of human life that India rises today; by the Yoga she will get the strength to realise her freedom, unity and greatness, by the yoga she will keep the strength to preserve it. It is a spiritual revolution we foresee and the material is only its shadow and reflex." — Sri Aurobindo *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*

IV

> *"There are some men who are self-evidently super-human, great spirits who are only using the human body. Europe calls them supermen, we call them* vibhutis. *They are manifestations of Nature, of divine power presided over by a spirit commissioned for the purpose, and that spirit is an emanation from the Almighty, who accepts human strength and weakness but is not bound by them. They are above morality*[37] *and ordinarily without a conscience, acting according to their own nature. For they are not men developing upwards from the animal to the divine and struggling against their lower natures, but beings already fulfilled and satisfied with themselves. Even the holiest of them have a contempt for the ordinary law and custom and break them easily and without remorse, as Christ did on more than one occasion, drinking wine, breaking the sabbath, consorting with publicans and harlots; as Buddha did when he abandoned his self-accepted duties as a husband, a citizen and a father; as Shankar a did when he broke the holy law and trampled upon custom and* ācāra[38] *to satisfy his dead mother...."*
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> — "Historical Impressions" by Sri Aurobindo

Let us now pause for a moment upon an important point which crops up at this stage of our inquiry in regard to the prophet and high priest of the renaissance in India: Who can command a total vision of the evolutionary march of a nation and its destiny?

The nation, like the individual, has a triple body — the *sthūla* or gross, the *sūkṣma* or subtle, and the *kāraṇa* or causal. As the gross body of the

[37] "Great men are above the principles of common morality." — Tilak

[38] Social usage and observances.

individual is only the outer crust or coating of the inner being, so the physical body of the nation is only its mutable material covering. To see only its material covering or shell, its social and political configuration, and regard that alone as one's nation is to miss the truth of its inner and inmost existence. The acorn gives no hint of the oak, or the caterpillar of the butterfly. Saul keeps St. Paul cocooned in himself. We have to see — and how can we, unless we develop the inner sight and the intuitive vision? — also its *sūkṣma* or subtle body, and the *kāraṇa* or causal. It goes without saying that all of us do not possess this vision. It is only the intuitive vision, by inner identity, of the causal body that can reveal the truth of the soul of a nation and its mission and destiny. A mere ardently patriotic or economic, political or moral approach to its characteristic mores and behaviour patterns can yield nothing but a partial knowledge of its changing material form. Even history, as it is written, is a crippled explorer of its past, and a blind guide to its future.

Who, then, can see the causal body of a nation, and know its mission and destiny? The question can be answered by a counter-question: Who can see the causal body of an individual and know his destiny? It will be readily conceded by those who have even a rudimentary knowledge of the human soul and its spiritual and psychological constitution that it is only a Yogi who can do it, and none other. The Yogi's power of self-identification with every being and everything in the world enables him to know its essential reality and its evolving forms. Nothing can be hidden from that vision, as Yogis and mystics have testified in all ages and countries.[39] What is visualised in the causal body is the truth of the soul, whether of the individual or of the nation, and is irresistible in its self-expressive dynamic. But it may — and often does — take long to manifest on the physical plane, the length of the time depending on various spiritual and psycho-logical factors beyond the range of human vision, and also on the degree of the resistance of the physical nature itself. And it is this length

[39] At a mere glance, Sri Ramakrishna could see the soul of a man and predict his destiny.

of time taken for manifestation or materialisation that gives an apparent plausibility to the facile verdict of the sceptic and the materialist that the words of the prophet are but the rosy dreams of a romantic visionary or the airy castles of an exuberant Utopian. A deeper vision, to which the materialist is usually averse, would reveal the truth that what is in the causal or seminal state passes into the subtle or subliminal through a complex play of forces and, in the same way and in its own time, manifests in the material. The material self-projection of the causal Idea is what is known as the physical universe, to which materialism keeps its vision and action stubbornly confined. The inevitability of the materialisation of the causal truth remains beyond doubt, but its prediction in terms of the time of our reckoning is often a precarious affair.

It is an historical fact to which we can no longer turn a blind eye that among the most passionate lovers and devoted servants of Mother India in the modern times, there have been only two who were Yogis, possessing the Yogic vision and intuition — Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. Some of the others were disciples of Yogis — Tilak,[40] Bepin Pal, P.C. Mitter of the Anusilan Samity, and Aswini Kumar Datta of Barisal, to name only a few. But, though they were spiritually inclined, they never claimed to possess any intuitive vision or to have attained any such close contact with the Divine as to be able to receive His direct guidance in their active lives. There were many other Yogis, but they do not concern us here, because they were not avowed nationalists.

Love of India was an intense passion of Vivekananda's being — it was interwoven with his consuming love of God. Nivedita, who lived closer to him and knew him more intimately than anybody else, says that India was the queen of the adoration of the Swami's heart.[41] But the source of this profound love was more in his spiritual vision than in his blood and

[40] Tilak's Guru was a Yogi, Annasaheb Patvardhan by name.

[41] "Vivekananda himself had ideas about political work and had spells of revolutionary fervour." Talks with Sri Aurobindo by Nirodbaran (Published in *Mother India*, February 21, 1963).

upbringing. His spiritual vision penetrated into the prehistoric past of India and made him see her unparalleled glory, her perennial role as the giver of Light to the world, and her massive and varied contribution to the culture of humanity. It made him see, and with equal clarity, and without any biassed slurring over of unpalatable facts, the later decline of her spirituality, its defensive recoil from the commerce of life, which it branded as an illusion and a snare, and its degeneration into a soulless formalism, and the rigidity of a sterile, dogmatic orthodoxy. He was unsparing in his denunciation of the dry-rot from which the culture of the land was suffering, and the inert, unthinking conformism of the mass mind. It made him also see with marvellous lucidity the destiny of India, the final fulfilment of her past promise, and the meridian blaze of the future Light of which the first dawn was witnessed in the age of the Veda. "This is the land from whence, like the tidal waves, spirituality and philosophy have again and again rushed out and deluged the world. And this is the land from whence once more such tides must proceed in order to bring life and vigour into the decaying races of mankind," declared the Swami. "Before the effulgence of this new awakening in India the glory of all past revivals will pale like stars before the rising sun, and compared with the mighty manifestation of renewed strength, all the many past epochs of renaissance will be mere child's play." He was convinced that the mission of India was the regeneration of man and the spiritualisation of the human race.

In almost identical terms, because by an almost identical spiritual vision, has Sri Aurobindo spoken of the glory of India's past, and the still greater glory of her future. "India of the ages is not dead nor has she spoken her last creative word; she lives and has still something to do for herself and the human peoples... the ancient immemorable Shakti recovering her deepest self, lifting her head higher towards the supreme source of light and strength and turning to discover the complete meaning and a vaster form of her Dharma."[42] "We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the

[42] *The Foundations of Indian Culture* by Sri Aurobindo.

noons of the future."[43] "The sun of India's destiny would rise and fill all India with its light and overflow India and overflow Asia and overflow the world."[44]

It was this indispensable work, the work of helping the birth of "the noons of the future"; of creating the conditions for the Light of the Spirit to fill all India and "overflow India and overflow Asia and overflow the world"; the work of realising the destiny of India, so that she might fulfil the destiny of mankind; the inevitable evolutionary work of raising man to the sunlit peaks of his being from the dim valleys of his mental consciousness, and unveiling the divine glory in his nature and life, so dear to Vivekananda's heart, and so glowingly prophesied by him, for which God summoned Sri Aurobindo away from the field of politics to the infinitely vaster fields of supramental conquest. Sri Aurobindo was assured from within of the freedom of India. He knew that the fire he had breathed into the torpid veins of his countrymen, the love and the devotion for Mother India with which he had imbued them, the ardent spirit of service and sacrifice with which he had inspired them, and the programme of non-cooperation and passive resistance which he had chalked out so clearly and forcefully for them to follow, would lead them, in spite of all detours and setbacks, to the cherished goal of independence. As the leading Indian historian, Dr. R.C. Majumdar, says: "While Tilak popularised politics and gave it a force and vitality it had hitherto lacked, Aravinda spiritualised it and became the high-priest of nationalism as a religious creed. He revived the theoretical teachings of Bankim Chandra and Vivekananda, and introduced them in the field of practical politics.[45] Tilak had raised his voice against the policy of mendicancy followed by the Congress, but it

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[43] *Essays on the Gita* by Sri Aurobindo.

[44] *Speeches of Sri Aurobindo.*

[45] This statement brings out the practical side of Sri Aurobindo's nature, and proves him to be a realist no less than an idealist. He always deprecated and discouraged emotional impulses in his followers, and advised them to base their action on their intelligent will, quickened and impelled by a spirit of service and sacrifice for Mother India.

was reserved for Aravinda to hit upon a positive approach to the problem. He anticipated Mahatma Gandhi by preaching the cult of passive resistance and non-cooperation as far back as 1906."[46] "But however much opinions might differ on these points, one must recognise that apart from the general forces working for nationalism, the movement was especially or more directly inspired by the teachings of Bankim Chandra, Vivekananda and Aravinda, who placed the country on the altar of God and asked for suffering and self-immolation as the best offerings for His worship... these teachings... inspired the lives of many a martyr who hailed the scaffold with a smile on their lips or suffered torments worse than death without the least flinching...."[47]

Sister Nivedita, who had read Sri Aurobindo's fiery articles in the *Indu Prakash* and heard about him from various sources, saw him for the first time at Baroda, and was immensely impressed by his Yogic bearing, his rock-like calm, his serene poise, vibrating with superhuman power, and the steady gaze of his far-seeing eyes — eyes of "one who gazes at futurity", as Nevinson has expressed his observation. She promised him unreserved support in his political work, which was then being carried on in secret through Jatin Banerji, Barin, and others in Bengal; for, being in the State service, he was not publicly taking part in the politics. And when Sri Aurobindo left the State service and threw himself into politics, none was so intimate with him, none rendered him so devoted and persistent a help, none appreciated so well the significance of his work as Sister Nivedita, of whom Prof. Atindra Nath Bose says: "His (Vivekananda's) disciple, Nivedita, took the (revolutionary) fire (from her Master) and blew it among the young nationalists who were seeking a new path."[48]

A few extracts from Nivedita's biography, *The Dedicated*, by Lizelle Reymond, will show the inner affinity and understanding which existed between Sri Aurobindo and the spirited Irish lady, Nivedita, whom

[46] *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance.*

[47] *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance.*

[48] *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*.

Vivekananda had moulded with his own hands and charged with something of his own creative fire:

"...India, 'Mother India', had become her Ishta, the supreme object of her devotion, in which she perceived the aim of her life and the peace of her acceptance.

"And in Baroda she made the acquaintance of Aurobindo Ghosh.... He and Nivedita were already known to one another through their writing, as well as through their bond in their love of India[49] and of freedom. To Aurobindo Ghosh, Nivedita was the author of *Kali, the Mother*. To her, *he was the leader of the future*,[50] whose fiery articles in the *Indu Prakash*... had sounded opening guns in the coming struggle, four years before.

"What he (Sri Aurobindo) was doing was to impart an esoteric significance to the nationalist movement, and make it a confession of faith. In appearance a passive type, a quiet — even silent — figure, he was a man of iron will whose work, personality, possessions, earnings, belonged to God and to that India which he considered not as a geographical entity but as the Mother of every Hindu; and he seized hold on the people and created between them and the nation a profoundly mystic bond.... The nationalism he taught was thus a religion in itself, and it was so that he had become the teacher of the nation. He wanted every participant in the movement to feel himself an instrument in the hand of God, renouncing his own will and even his body and accepting this law as an act of obedience and inner submission.... This injunction to act, endure, and suffer without question — to let oneself be guided by the assurance that God gives strength to him who struggles — required sacrifices which became in turn a reservoir of power from which new fighters drew inspiration to go forward. The individual and the community were no longer separated.... Aurobindo

[49] According to Nevinson she was "drunk with India".

[50] Italics are ours.

Ghosh with his clear insight into the swadharma (law of action) of his own people was *suffusing it with a spiritual strength*[51] and making it live.

"Aurobindo Ghosh was now out of prison, and Nivedita had her school decorated... to celebrate his release. She found him completely transformed. His piercing eyes seemed to devour the tight-drawn skin-and-bones of his face. He possessed an irresistible power, derived from a spiritual revelation that had come to him in prison...

"With a mere handful of supporters — Nivedita among them — he launched an appeal and tried to rekindle the patriotic spark in the weakening society. His mission was now that of a *Yogin* sociologist.

"...He was already known as the 'seer' Sri Aurobindo, although still involved in political life, and as yet not manifested to his future disciples on the spiritual path. For Nivedita *he was the expression of life itself, the life of a new seed grown on the ancient soil of India, the logical and passionate development of all her Guru's teaching*.[52]

"Aurobindo's open and logical method of presenting his own spiritual experience, and revealing the divine message he had received in his solitary meditation, created the necessary unity between his past life of action and his future spiritual discipline. He said: "When I first approached God, I hardly had a living faith in Him.... Then in the seclusion of the jail I prayed, 'I do not know what work to do or how to do it. Give me a message.' Then words came: 'I have given you a work, and it is to help to uplift this nation.... I am raising up this nation to send forth My word.... It is Shakti that has gone forth and entered into the people. Long since, I have been preparing this uprising and now the time has come, and it is I who will lead it to its fulfilment!'

"Nivedita thought she could still hear the voice of Swami Vivekananda stirring up the masses: 'Arise, sons of India! Awake!' That had been the first phase of the struggle. Now this life-giving cry was repeated

[51] Italics are ours.

[52] Italics are ours.

differently, because the effort required in the changing circumstances was no longer identical; but the source of it was still the same! Now the new order was that every individual should become a *sadhaka* of the nation — a seeker — so that 'the One could find Himself and manifest Himself in every human being, in all humanity.' Aurobindo Ghosh was throwing out the first ideas of the integral yoga he was to teach, depicting man in his cosmic reality. At the same time in the Transvaal there was another young leader, named Gandhi, practising with thousands of Hindus the doctrine of passive resistance. Was Aurobindo Ghose to become the leader of another movement of collective consciousness? No, his mission was of a different nature. He was, as Nivedita understood him, the successor to the spiritual Masters of the past, offering the source of his inspiration for all to drink from in Yogic solitude. Since his imprisonment at Alipore, Aurobindo Ghose was no longer a fighter, but a Yogi."

The above long quotation, besides being vivid and authentic, focuses our attention on some important points: that Nivedita had the keen insight to discern the Yogic will and drive behind Sri Aurobindo's dedicated life and activities; that she clearly perceived the spiritual and national significance of the unparalleled sacrifices joyfully made by the youth of Bengal under the direct inspiration of Sri Aurobindo — "sacrifices which became in turn a reservoir of power from which new fighters drew inspiration to go forward" — in Bengal and elsewhere; that Sri Aurobindo "was the expression of life itself, the life of a new seed grown on the ancient soil of India", and not a world-shunning ascetic, spurning life's salutary activities and seeking personal salvation; that he was "the logical and passionate development of all her Guru's teaching"; and that "he was the successor to the spiritual Masters of the past, offering the source of his inspiration for all to drink from." The only thing which needs a little clarification is that the "Yogic solitude" Nivedita speaks of was an inner solitude, and not at all a severance of all relations with the outer world; for Sri Aurobindo, since the very beginning of his adult life, has regarded life as the only field for the integral realisation of the integral Divine, and His

manifestation in Matter. His union with the Divine included his union with the whole universe — with all humanity, and all beings, here and otherwhere.

Nivedita's close collaboration with Sri Aurobindo from 1902-3 to the beginning of 1910, when he retired from politics, is a matter of history. Realising the presence of her Guru in Sri Aurobindo, she had accepted him as the destined Guru and champion of the national movement, and spared no pains in giving him every help in her power, from contributing to his papers to enlisting support for and organising the revolutionary party. Being on intimate terms with most of the luminaries of contemporary India, Rabindranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore, Jagadish Chandra Bose, P.C. Roy, Bepin Chandra Pal, Brahmabandhava Upadhyaya, Ramananda Chatterji, R.C. Dutt, Okakura, the Japanese art connoisseur, Gokhale, Tilak etc., she exerted a great influence in various fields of the resurgent life of the nation. Jagadish Chandra Bose and P.C. Roy gave her a run of their laboratories, where, in the evening, she taught some young revolutionaries how to make bombs.[53] Her transparent sincerity, her intense love of India and her rare insight into the core of her culture, her flaming personality, and her brilliant mind and versatile genius endeared her to all. She had become, as Rabindranath puts it, "the mother of people". What she did for Jagadish Chandra Bose and Abanindranath Tagore has been warmly acknowledged by them.

Next to Nivedita, it was Rabindranath who had the insight to perceive, earlier than many others, the spiritual greatness of Sri Aurobindo, and the mission of his life. In a moved Bengali poem, written on Sri Aurobindo in 1907, he made his obeisance to him, as we have already seen, and called him "the voice incarnate of India's soul". It was a phrase, which captured

[53] Sri Aurobindo once said about Nivedita: "She was one of the revolutionary leaders.... She was open, frank and talked freely of her revolutionary plans to everybody.... Whenever she used to speak on revolution, it was her very soul, her true personality that came out.... She took up politics as a part of Vivekananda's work." — *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* by Nirodbaran.

with a singular precision and felicity the real purpose and significance of Sri Aurobindo's life. This insight of Rabindranath was a gift of his poetical genius. Prafulla Kumar Sarkar, in his Bengali book, Jatiya Andolane Rabindranath (Rabindranath in the National Movement), says "...This extraordinarily powerful man (Sri Aurobindo) created, as if by a magical spell a revolution in the political field of Bengal.... Sri Aurobindo, the leader of the New Party, was his (Rabindranath's) friend and fellow worker. In his poem, *Salutation to Sri Aurobindo*, he has left an imperishable testimony to the deep respect he had for him." Rabindranath had read some of Sri Aurobindo's writings, heard much about him from Dinendra Kumar Roy, a man of letters, who had lived with Sri Aurobindo for some time at Baroda, and followed his brilliant career with growing admiration. He was also acquainted with Sri Aurobindo's thoughts and ideas through his political deputies in Bengal, particularly Barin and Jatin. And when Sri Aurobindo left Baroda and went to Bengal as the first Principal of the newly-founded National College, of which Rabindranath was one of the chief organisers, they came into close touch with each other. Rabindranath saw Sri Aurobindo several times at his residence or his office, and exchanged views with him. Sri Aurobindo's editorials in the *Bande Mataram* fired his patriotic feelings, and thrilled his poetical sensibilities. These intimate contacts and communion of two great souls contributed much to the development of the national spirit and enriched the cultural heritage of Bengal. Rabindranath's admiration,[54] affection and respect deepened into wondering reverence, which he expressed again, later, in his generous tribute to Sri Aurobindo, whom he interviewed at Pondicherry in 1928. "At the very first sight I could realise that he had been seeking for the soul and had gained it, and through his long process of realisation had accumulated within him a silent power of inspiration. His face was radiant

[54] We are reliably informed that Rabindranath's saintly elder brother, Dwijendranath, was a great admirer of Sri Aurobindo. He was a regular reader of the *Arya*, a monthly journal, which Sri Aurobindo edited at Pondicherry from August 1914 to January 1921, and expressed his view that never, since the days of the Vedic Rishis, had such a spiritual message been delivered to mankind.

with an inner light.... I felt that *the utterance of the ancient Hindu Rishi spoke from him*[55] of that equanimity which gives the human soul its freedom of entrance into the All. I said to him: "You have the Word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through your voice: 'hearken to me.'" This homage, perhaps, the highest Rabindranath ever paid to any of his contemporaries, was, in essence, the same as rendered by Nivedita in her heart to Sri Aurobindo, and expressed in her unstinted collaboration with him during his political life. Both of them hailed him as the prophet and high priest of the renaissance of India, and seemed to divine the secret purpose of his retirement from active political life.

There were three more leaders of all-India fame — Lal-Bal-Pal — whose contribution to the Indian renaissance we shall now try to estimate, and incidentally refer to the appreciation of the creative spirituality of Sri Aurobindo's life and nature by Tilak, Tilak's Guru, Annasaheb Patvardhan, C. R. Das and Subhas Chandra Bose.

[55] Italics are ours.

"…Then a thing happened suddenly and in a moment I was hurried away to the seclusion of a solitary cell. What happened to me during that period I am not impelled to say, but only this that day after day, He showed me His wonders and made me realise the utter truth of the Hindu religion... 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 communion of Yoga two messages came. The first message said, "I have given you a work and it is to help to uplift this nation. *Before long the time will come when you will have to go out of jail; for it is not my will that this time either you should be convicted or that you should pass the time, as others have to do,* in suffering for their country. *I have called you to work, and that is the Adesh for which you have asked. I give you the Adesh to go forth and do my work.... 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, and 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 up this nation to send forth my word. This is the Sanatana 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 without you, physical and subjective, which have satisfied you. When you go forth, speak to your nation always this word, that it is for the Sanatana 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...”*

— Uttarpara Speech

No contemporary evidence, not even the most ardent and discerning homage of Sri Aurobindo’s friends and fellow-workers, discloses, so forcibly and lucidly, as does the above extract, the true nature of the work assigned to him by God as the mission of his life. His work for India was a means to his wider work for the world. Politics was but a prerequisite and preliminary to his real mission. The heightening of consciousness and the flood of illumination he had received as a Divine Gift in the Alipore jail pointed to a “religious and spiritual awakening as the next necessity and the next inevitable development” of the national being. The policy and programme of work, formulated and given to the nation, — a programme, which finally led the nation to independence despite its rejection, part rejection and final acceptance at the hands of the political leaders at various stages of the freedom fight — a change of the field of work became imperative. The foundation laid, firm and secure, the architect was called upon to concern himself with the raising of the building. God’s Will must be fulfilled, even if the world knows it not, nor understands.

There are five things in the above extract from the Uttarpara Speech, which deserve careful consideration:

(1) God says to Sri Aurobindo that the work given to him was “to help to uplift this nation”. It was not merely to free the nation from foreign control, but “to uplift it”.

(2) It was not God’s Will that “this time” Sri Aurobindo “should pass the time, as others have to do, in suffering for their country”. No freedom of choice was given to him to share in the suffering of his fellow-workers, no latitude to his personal human sympathies and sense of fellow-feeling. He was led away from suffering to serve His design.

(3) God was raising up Hindu religion — it is the Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion without any racial or national definition and denomination,

that is meant — and He declared that it was now "going forth to do my work among the nations". Its ultimate objective was not national but international regeneration or, as Vivekananda had prophesied, the regeneration and spiritualisation of mankind.

(4) The exceptional spiritual experiences which had been flooding Sri Aurobindo's being did not grow in the soft soil of religious faith and certitude, but they took the agnostic and the sceptic in him by storm and unsealing their inner vision, revealed to them the infinite glories of the Spirit.

(5) God commissioned him to go forth and speak to the nation "this word" that it was "for the Sanatana Dharma that they arise", it was "for the world and not for themselves that they arise". Here we have, in clear outline, the meaning and mission of the life of Sri Aurobindo, who happened to be for the moment the storm-centre of the political movement of the country.

We have proposed to ourselves a brief and rapid estimate of the aims, ideals and achievements of the three of the greatest political leaders of contemporary India, who worked with Sri Aurobindo — Lal-Bal-Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bepin Chandra Pal.

Lokamanya Tilak

That Bal Gangadhar Tilak or Lokamanya Tilak, as he was later called, was the most towering of the three leaders admits of no denying "...He is the very type and incarnation of the Maratha character, the Maratha qualities, the Maratha spirit, but with the unified solidity in the character, the touch of genius in the qualities, the vital force in the spirit which make a great personality readily the representative man of his people.... He has that closeness of spirit to the mass of men, that unpretentious openness of intercourse with them, that faculty of plain and direct speech which interprets their feelings and shows them how to think out what they feel, which are pre-eminently the democratic qualities. For this reason he has always been able to unite all classes of men behind him.... It is... a mistake

to think of Mr. Tilak as by nature a revolutionary leader; that is not his character or his political temperament... with a large mind open to progressive ideas he unites a conservative temperament strongly in touch with the sense of his people...."[56]

"...Though he has ideals, he is not an idealist by character. Once the ideal fixed, all the rest is for him practical work, the facing of hard facts, though also the overcoming of them when they stand in the way of the goal, the use of strong and effective means with the utmost care and prudence.... Though he can be obstinate and iron-willed when his mind is made up as to the necessity of a course of action or the indispensable recognition of a principle, he is always ready for a compromise which will allow of getting real work done.... Not revolutionary methods or revolutionary idealism, but the clean sight and the direct propaganda and action of the patriotic political leader insisting on the one thing needful and the straight way to drive at it, have been the sense of Mr. Tilak's political career... the inflexible will of the patriot and man of sincere heart and thorough action which has been the very grain of his character,... the readiness to sacrifice and face suffering... with a firm courage when it comes...."[57]

In the short obituary tribute to Lokamanya Tilak, which Sri Aurobindo wired from Pondicherry to Bepin Chandra Pal, the editor of the *Independent*, in response to his request for it, he said: "A great mind, a great will, a great preeminent leader of men has passed away from the field of his achievement and labour. To the mind of his country Lokamanya Tilak was much more, for he had become to it a considerable part of itself, the embodiment of its past efforts and the head of its present struggle for a free and greater life. His achievement and personality have put him amidst the first rank of historic and significant figures. He was one who built much rapidly out of little beginnings, a creator of great things out of an unworked material. The creations he left behind him were a new and strong and self-reliant national spirit, the reawakened political mind and life of a people,

[56] *Bankim-Tilak-Dayananda* by Sri Aurobindo.

[57] *Bankim-Tilak-Dayananda* by Sri Aurobindo.

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

"Two things India demands, a farther future, the freedom of soul, life and action needed for *the work she has to do for mankind*;[58] and the understanding by her children of that work and of her own true spirit that the future of India may be indeed India. The first seems still the main sense and need of the present moment, but the second is also involved in them — a yet greater issue. On the spirit of our decisions now and in the next few years depends the truth, vitality and greatness of our future national existence. It is the beginning of a great *Self-Determination not only in the external but in the spiritual*.[59] These two things should govern our action. Only so can the work done by Lokamanya Tilak find its true continuation and issue."

Here again, as usual, Sri Aurobindo speaks of the great Self-Determination in the spiritual, and not only of the continuation of the work begun and achieved by Tilak but of its "issue", "a greater issue", the work which India "has to do for mankind". The crown of his life's mission was always in the forefront of his thought and vision.

Sri Aurobindo's slashing criticism of the mendicant policy of the Congress must have impressed Tilak, as it had done many others, by its

[58] Italics are ours.

[59] Italics are ours.

originality and brilliance. When Sri Aurobindo went to Western India to study the revolutionary work carried on there, "he contacted Tilak whom he regarded as the one possible leader for a revolutionary party and met him at the Ahmedabad Congress; there Tilak took him out of the pandal and talked to him for an hour in the grounds expressing his contempt for the Reformist movement and explaining his own line of action in Maharashtra."[60] Tilak had seen Sri Aurobindo at Baroda in 1901, as we have already stated. From about this time on, a sort of mutual regard began to grow in these two outstanding leaders. Tilak consulted Sri Aurobindo on almost every important political question. At Varanasi, during the Congress session, there was constant consultation between the two, and they stood together as the bulwark and guide of the Nationalist Party at Surat which saw the splitting up of the Congress. The National Conference that held its sittings there to discuss the split and the subsequent line of action, was presided over by Sri Aurobindo. According to Tilak's biographers, G.P. Pradhan and A.K. Bhagawat, in their book *Lokamanya Tilak*, "Tilak and Aurobindo were master minds and when they came together each had his impact on the other. Though Tilak did not approve of Aurobindo's attitude of welcoming repression, he realised the greatness of the 'prophet of nationalism' and for the time at least came under the spell of his magnetic personality. Tilak knew that Aurobindo symbolised a new force in Indian politics and he was aware that Aurobindo could and did rouse in hundreds of young men a desire to sacrifice everything for the sake of the motherland." "To him (Sri Aurobindo) India's fight for freedom was really an effort for the realisation of her soul. Under Aurobindo's leadership the New movement transcended the limitations of politics and embraced life.... The association of Tilak and Aurobindo was a happy coincidence... Aurobindo was a visionary and had a mystic touch about him. Tilak was a realist and relied on intellect rather than on intuition.[61] Tilak always

[60] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, p. 45.

[61] Nevinson speaks of Tilak's shrewd political judgment and Sri Aurobindo's spiritual elevation.

advocated the need for manifold means — *sādhanānāmanekatā* — for getting Swaraj. To him the constitutional methods of the moderates, the direct action particularly the boycott and Swadeshi by the nationalists and the insurrectionary methods of revolutionaries — all these appeared to be necessary in fighting the British." Tilak gave Sri Aurobindo full and active

Sri Aurobindo with Tilak and other Nationalists at Surat, 1907

support in his effort to pass the boycott and Swadeshi resolutions in the Calcutta Congress of 1906. Though a realist and constitutionalist by nature, patient and prudent enough to accept half a loaf rather than no bread at all, he never pitched his ideal one inch lower than complete Swaraj, and never ceased fighting for the full loaf. He had come under the spell of Sri Aurobindo's magnetic personality, as his biographers rightly observe, and imbibed something of his spiritual force and drive, and, though there were differences of vision and views between them, his sturdy realism, directed

by his sharp and prodigious intellect, seldom failed to yield precedence to Sri Aurobindo's intuitive perception and inspired action.[62] The mystic vein of Sri Aurobindo's nature was so patently and powerfully impressive that no sensitive nationalist could escape its influence. Tilak was fully aware of it, as the following incident recorded by Bapat in his Marathi book, *Reminiscences of Tilak*, clearly shows:

"In 1917 Ranade (one of the eminent philosophers of his time) saw Tilak who had been released from the Mandalay jail. Tilak had expressed his wish to some of Ranade's friends about Ranade's entry into politics, and when the latter saw him, Tilak expressed the same wish to him. But Ranade felt that he had no call for politics. He said: 'I have already become an active member of the Deccan Education Society and there seems to be no need for my giving it up in favour of politics. Temperamentally I am more inclined towards spirituality (than towards anything else). Besides, according to your view, in order to be an able politician, one should first attain to the state of a *sthitaprajña* (one who is firmly poised in spiritual wisdom).[63] Before entering the arena of politics, one should be sure of this state in oneslf.' Tilak remarked with a smile: 'Aravinda Babu is (also?) a mystic.'" Writing on Tilak's confidence in Sri Aurobindo's state of a *sthitaprajña*, his biographers, Pradhan and Bhagwat, observe: "Tilak knew very well that strategically it was desirable to keep the two planks of civil revolt and revolutionary activity away from each other.... As a leader, however, it was his responsibility to see that all efforts for achieving freedom were carried on in the correct manner, and he therefore gave advice to the leaders of the revolutionary wing. He did not want the decision of the opportune moment to be entrusted to a less mature person

[62] *Lokamanya Tilak*, by G.P. Pradhan and A.K. Bhagwat.

[63] Tilak's Guru, Anna Saheb Patwardhan, who was a Yogi, presided over the meeting held at Gaekwarwada (Tilak's residence) at Poona in which Sri Aurobindo was the principal speaker. It is said that Patwardhan predicted the yogic greatness of Sri Aurobindo and considered him to be the greatest of all contemporary leaders. He had a private interview with Sri Aurobindo just after the said meeting, but what they talked about in that interview remained a secret.

who would be swayed by sentiments and affected by some passing phases in politics. He thought that only Aurobindo and himself could take such a momentous decision. He knew that a revolutionary action was too serious a matter to be decided by anyone except those who had attained a philosophic calm of the mind....” This is, indeed, a clear recognition on the part of Tilak of the spiritual realism of Sri Aurobindo’s nature, and a striking tribute to his imperturbable philosophic calm or the radiant placidity of a *sthitaprajña*.

In spite of the one being led by his reason and intellect, and the other by his intuition and inspiration, Tilak and Sri Aurobindo were the twin most creative forces in contemporary Indian politics — Tilak’s perspicacious realism, his lynx-eyed, resourceful diplomacy, his readiness to drive a compromise[64] to its utmost verge and strike a hard bargain, his pliant, discriminating conservatism, and his unequalled hold on the hearts and minds of his people, paved the way for the achievement of political freedom, and rendered immense help to Sri Aurobindo’s radical endeavours to inculcate the true spirit of Swadeshi, inspire an imperious urge for absolute independence,[65] and rouse the dynamic spirituality of the nation. Tilak’s aim was, not only the conquest of political Swaraj, but the revival of the ancient Dharma of the land-Lajpat Rai’s characterisation of Tilak as “an orthodox revivalist” was not quite just — and the building up of a great nation, rooted in the past and drawing its sap from the ancient heritage, but marching in the vanguard of modern civilisation. He never laid any claim to an illumined foreknowledge of the divine destiny of India and her

[64] “I know full well that in politics it is no fault to compromise at times without leaving one’s principles. I shall not stretch till the breaking point. The moment I think the breaking point is reached, I shall loosen my hold and effect a compromise. In politics I am all for compromise.” — *Lokamanya Tilak* by Praddhan & Bhagwat, p. 255 (Jaico).

[65] “Sri Aurobindo was the first to use its (of the word Swaraj) English equivalent ‘independence’ and reiterate it constantly in the *Bande Mataram* as the one and immediate aim of national politics.” — *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, p. 30.

mission of the spiritual regeneration of the human race. Sri Aurobindo's aim was, not only preservative, but creative, spiritually creative, the building up of an India greater than she had ever been before, for the fulfilment of the evolutionary destiny of mankind. In this respect, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo stand out as the two seers and sculptors of the India that is to be. What Vivekananda intuited and initiated, Sri Aurobindo developed, expanded, and carried to its crowning accomplishment. India of the ageless Light, freed in the body and freed in the soul, shall fulfil the Will of God in the world, and lead humanity to the harmony and perfection of a new, a divine order of existence: this was the message and mission of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo.

Lala Lajpat Rai

Lala Lajpat Rai, the lion of the Punjab as he was aptly called, was a fearless fighter in the cause of freedom. It was he, more than anybody else, who kindled the patriotic fire in the hearts of the valiant Punjabis, and moulded by his example and influence some of the most intrepid soldiers of militant nationalism. He was in sympathy with the revolutionaries. In one of his speeches, he said: "Young men, your blood is hot. The tree of the nation calls for the blood. It is watered with blood."[66] As an Arya Samajist, he had an ethico-religious nostalgia which he incorporated into his revolutionary, extremist politics. Like Tilak, he too, came under the spell of Sri Aurobindo's "magnetic personality" and imported something of his spiritual fervour into his own creed of nationalism, as Dr. R.C. Mazumdar shows: "He (Sri Aurobindo) regarded patriotism as a form of devotion and expressly said that 'to the new generations, the redemption of their motherland should be regarded as the true religion, the only means of salvation.' How this idea permeated the leaders of the new school may be judged from the following extract from an article of Lajpat Rai: 'In my

[66] Quoted by R.C. Majumdar in his *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. I, p. 475.

opinion, the problem before us is in the main a religious problem — religious not in the sense of doctrines and dogmas but religious in so far as to evoke the highest devotion and the greatest sacrifice from us.'"[67] But he too had no pretensions to spiritual vision of the mission and destiny of India and her historic role of bringing the divine Light to the benighted world. He was, however, great as a political leader and commanded the respect of the whole nation by his sincerity and self-sacrifice.

Bepin Chandra Pal

Bepin Chandra Pal was a versatile scholar, an eloquent speaker, a deep and subtle thinker[68], and a consummate theoretician and propagandist. But as an organiser and leader of a national movement, which went on enlarging in magnitude and sweep since 1905, he failed to come up to the mark on account of some intrinsic defects of his nature and temperament. His political life furnishes an interesting study of a sudden rise on to the crest of a tidal wave of national movement, and an equally sudden and tragic fall into the weedy stagnancy of its backwater. In 1901-2, he was a Moderate, avowing his loyalty to the British Imperialism. "Even on his return from the Western world in 1901, he still continued to cherish the old-time belief in the justice and generosity of the British and regard the English rule in India as a sort of a Divine Dispensation.... This deep-rooted conviction of the old guards of the Congress in the moral basis and foundation of British rule in India was still shared by Bepin Chandra during 1901-2...."[69] In 1902, on the occasion of the Shivaji Festival celebrated in Calcutta, he said among other things: "...And we are loyal, because we believe in the workings of the Divine Providence in our national history, both ancient and

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[67] The Genesis of Extremism by Dr. R.C. Majumdar in *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*. Even Tilak once wrote: "God and our country are not different. In short, our country is one form of God."

[68] "...the most powerful brain at work in Bengal." — Sri Aurobindo

[69] *Bepin Chandra Pal and India's struggle for Swaraj* by Prof. Haridas Mukherjee and Prof. Uma Mukherjee.

modern; because we believe that God himself has led the British to this country, to help it in the working out its salvation."[70] "The radical attitude that Aurobindo Ghose had adopted to the Congress movement even as early as 1893-94 in his writings in the *Indu Prakash* was still conspicuous by its absence in Bepin Chandra. Even in 1903 the latter could not shake off the spell of traditional Congress politics."[71]

But a sudden change took place in him, which we can, on the basis of the historical data available, ascribe to three things: (1) his close contact and association with Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, (2) his closer association with Sri Aurobindo whose "magnetic personality" exerted a powerful influence upon him, and made him overnight a flaming "prophet of nationalism", and (3) the mighty political agitation which the Partition of Bengal had unleashed. His speeches became full of the fire of militant nationalism, and were buttressed by an impressive display of philosophical knowledge. He soon became, not only a foremost political preacher in Bengal, but thrilled and captured the heart of Madras, and sent sparks of his impassioned nationalism flying all over the country. He was, according to Dr. R.C. Majumdar, a popular preacher of the spiritual nationalism of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. He was a disciple of Yogi Bijoykrishna Goswami, and the spiritual experience, which he had in jail, effected a great change in him, and gave a fiery accent of inspiration to his utterances.[72]

But he was aware of an innate inconstancy in his nature, a lack of firmness and tenacity in the face of difficulties, and it is this that proved his undoing. As soon as Sri Aurobindo was put into prison as an undertrial seditionist and revolutionary, and his contact was broken, Bepin Pal lapsed into his old moderatism and reiterated his avowal of loyalty to the British crown in his paper, *Svaraj*, which he published in England, and grew as

[70] *Ibid.*

[71] *Ibid.*

[72] "...The issues of this struggle involve the emancipation of India and the salvation of Humanity." — Bepin Chandra Pal

much eloquent in praise of the blessings of the British rule as he had been in its denunciation. “During 1906-08 he had been a most powerful exponent of Indian Swaraj outside the British Empire, but the major trend of his speeches in England during 1908-11 was his attempted reconciliation of the highest National aspirations of Indians with the Imperial system of Great Britain.”[73] It was a rather regrettable climb-down in a leader of his stature and calibre, and it ended in a total collapse, when he opposed the non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi at Barisal in 1921. The most eloquent exponent of Sri Aurobindo’s programme of Non-cooperation and Passive Resistance became now a bitter critic of Gandhiji’s Non-Cooperation, and “...eleven years later, in 1932, he passed away, amidst grinding poverty, almost unwept, unhonoured and unsung.”[74]

It would be interesting to recall in this context that the goal Sri Aurobindo had put before the country even in 1906 was complete independence outside the British Empire, and the means he had advocated for its attainment was Non-Cooperation and Passive Resistance. The armed insurrection organised on a country-wide scale, which he had preached and attempted at first, fell into the background, as the country did not seem to him to be quite ready for it, and he advocated the former programme of Non-Cooperation and Passive Resistance as being effective enough for the realisation of the goal.

Since the beginning of 1910, when Sri Aurobindo retired from the field of politics to Pondicherry for the working out and realisation of the next higher objective of the national renaissance, the country passed through various phases of the political movement, adopting various programmes from Cooperation and Responsive Cooperation back again to Non-Cooperation, and the goal was pitched higher and higher from Colonial Self-Government and the Irish type of Home Rule to complete

[73] *Bepin Chandra Pal and India's Struggle for Swaraj* by Prof. Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee.

[74] *Bepin Chandra Pal and India's Struggle for Swaraj* by Prof. Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee.

Independence free from British control. It is interesting to remember in this connection that Mahatma Gandhi, as a disciple of Gokhale, was at first a whole-hearted cooperator. But little by little events and circumstances opened his eyes to the grim reality of the political situation, and forced him to turn an uncompromising non-cooperator. He showed the same flexibility as Tilak had done on his return from the Mandalay prison.[75] The great political issue of 1920 was whether the Congress leaders should seek election to the Legislative Councils according to the provisions of the 1919 reforms. Gandhiji was willing to advise the Congress to contest the elections, but in the meantime the Jallianwala Bag massacre and the Khilafat wrong gave him a rude shock and disillusioned him. He lost all his faith in British justice, and decided to non-cooperate with the Government. He succeeded in enlisting the support of many Congressmen for his non-cooperation movement, and presented a resolution, embodying his programme, in the special Calcutta session of the Congress in 1920. "He intended the movement to be based on the moral issues arising out of the British injustice concerning the Khilafat question and the Punjab issue. It must be remembered that Gandhiji's experience as a popular leader had not until this time been primarily political. Rather his efforts in South Africa and his early work in India were basically humanitarian. This may account for the rather amazing fact that he did not originally include Swaraj as a reason, let alone the reason, for the initiation of national non-cooperation. Gandhiji advocated his programme because he believed that the Khilafat and Punjab issues were moral issues upon which the nation should take action. He did not initially accept the idea that British colonial rule in India was itself *the greatest moral issue* of the day. It was left for one of Tilak's colleagues, Vijayaraghavachari, to remind the young leader that for over twenty years the Nationalists had worked for one great all-encompassing goal — Swaraj. He reminded Gandhiji that *Swaraj was the*

[75] Tilak started the All-India Home Rule League, joined forces with Annie Besant, and preached Responsive Cooperation. In view of the changed circumstances and the accommodating attitude of both the people and the Government, Sri Aurobindo approved of Tilak's new tactical move.

great moral issue before India, and urged that Swaraj be incorporated as both the goal of and the motivating reason for the non-cooperation movement. Gandhiji readily agreed to this."[76] Referring to this incident, Gandhiji writes in his autobiography, *The Story of my Experiments with Truth*, "In my resolution non-cooperation was postulated only with a view to obtaining redress of the Punjab and the Khilafat wrongs. That, however, did not appeal to Sj. Vijayaraghavachari. 'If non-cooperation was to be declared, why should it be with reference to particular wrongs? The absence of Swaraj was the biggest wrong that the country was labouring under; it should be directed,' he argued. Pandit Motilalji also wanted the demand for Swaraj to be included in the resolution. I readily accepted the suggestion, and incorporated the demand for Swaraj in my resolution."[77]

Thus Non-cooperation and Passive Resistance came to be finally accepted as the policy and programme par excellence, and the "Quit India" movement of a later date (1942) clinched the goal as absolute independence free from British control.

A question naturally arises here: How did Sri Aurobindo give such a full-fledged plan, and fix what appeared even to the greatest of contemporary political leaders as rather an impracticable goal, so early as 1906, when the freedom fight had but just begun? There should be nothing astounding in it, if we remember that the Yogi can command a prevision of the future happenings, which even to the developed rational intelligence remain only a matter of vague surmise or imaginative dream. The poet or artist sometimes receives this kind of intuitive vision or immediate inner apprehension. It flashes across his consciousness in a moment of inspiration. But in an advanced Yogi these sporadic flashes resolve themselves into a steady current of lustre.

Such an inspired moment the poet-patriot C.R. Das had, when in 1909 he prophesied before the judge who was trying Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Case on the trumped-up charge of sedition and revolutionary action: "The

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[76] *The Legacy of the Lokamanya* by Theodore L. Shay.

[77] Quoted by T.L. Shay in his book, *The Legacy of Lokamanya*.

able and prophetic advocacy of Chittaranjan (C.R. Das) raised the trial almost to an epic level. His famous appeal to the court still rings in the ears because it has proved to be true to the letter. He said to Mr. Beachcroft, who was the judge in the case, 'My appeal to you is this, that long after the controversy will be hushed in silence, long after this turmoil and the agitation will have ceased, 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.[78] 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... "[79]

The above quotation is not only a string of words, issuing like flakes of fire from a burning moment of inspiration, it suggests the deep impression Sri Aurobindo's personality had made upon the sensitive mind of C.R. Das. What was there in Sri Aurobindo in 1908-9 on the basis of which one could predict that "his words would be echoed and re-echoed not only in India but across distant seas and lands"?

Subhash Chandra Bose, the chief lieutenant of C.R. Das, — C.R. Das became later in 1918 the foremost pilot of Bengal politics and one of the greatest leaders of the Indian National Congress — writes in his book, *An Indian Pilgrim*: "In my undergraduate days Arabindo Ghosh was easily the

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[78] "...patriotism is good, excellent, divine, only when it furthers the end of universal humanity. Nationality divorced from humanity is a source of weakness and evil, and not of strength and good." — *Bande Mataram*

ef. "Your first duties, first not in point of time but of importance — because without understanding these you can only imperfectly fulfil the rest — are to Humanity."

"Love Humanity. Ask yourselves whenever you do an action in the sphere of your Country, or your family, *If what I am doing were done by all and for all, would it advantage or injure Humanity*? and if your conscience answers, it would injure Humanity, desist; desist, even if it seems to you that an immediate advantage for your Country or your family would ensue from your action. Be apostles of this faith, apostles of the brotherhood of nations, and of the unity of the human race..." — Mazzini (*Duties of Man*)

[79] *Mahayogi* R.R. Diwakar, 2nd Edition (Bhavan's Book University).

most popular leader in Bengal, despite his voluntary exile and absence from 1909. His was a name to conjure with.... On the Congress platform he had stood up as a champion of left-wing thought and a fearless advocate of independence at a time when most of the leaders, with their tongues in their cheeks, would talk only of colonial self-government. A mixture of spirituality and politics had given him a halo of mysticism.... When I came to Calcutta, Arabindo was already a legendary figure. Rarely have I seen people speak of a leader with such rapturous enthusiasm.... All that was needed in my eyes to make Arabindo an ideal *guru for mankind*[80] was his return to active life."

[80] Italics are ours.

VI

> *"…the supreme service of Bankim to his nation was that he gave us the vision of our Mother. The bare intellectual idea of the Motherland is not in itself a great driving force; the mere recognition of the desirability of freedom is not an inspiring motive.... It is not till the Motherland reveals herself to the eye of the mind as something more than a stretch of earth or a mass of individuals, it is not till she takes shape as a great Divine and Maternal Power in a form of beauty that can dominate the mind and seize the heart that these petty fears and hopes vanish in the all-absorbing passion for the Mother and her service, and the patriotism that works miracles and saves a doomed nation is born. To some men it is given to have that vision and reveal it to others. It was thirty-two years ago that Bankim wrote his great song and few listened; but in a sudden moment of awakening from long delusions the people of Bengal looked round for the truth and in a fated moment somebody sang Bande Mataram. The mantra had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism. The Mother had revealed herself. Once that vision has come to a people, there can be no rest, no peace, no further slumber till the temple has been made ready, the image installed and the sacrifice offered. A great nation which has had that vision can never again bend its neck in subjection to the yoke of a conqueror."*[81]

It was July, 1906. Sri Aurobindo had taken indefinite leave without pay, and left Baroda. He was now in Bengal. The peaceful life of self-preparation at Baroda had dosed, and a new chapter of action, of storm and

[81] *Bankim-Tilak-Dayananda* by Sri Aurobindo.

stress, had begun. The Partition of Bengal had roused the whole nation. Nationalism was no longer a pious sentiment or an intellectual aspiration, but had become an irrepressible urge of the soul of the people, as if it prayed to Heaven: "O thou lord of life, send my roots rain."[82] Sri Aurobindo cast a spell on the whole of Bengal. He was as fascinated and encouraged by the human raw material that flocked to him in response to his call as the latter was magnetised and galvanised by his spiritual influence. This was the material out of which he had to shape the destiny of the nation.

According to one biographer[83], Sri Aurobindo at first put up at the *Yugantar* Office at Kanaidhar Lane in Calcutta, but Subodh Mullick, "one of Sri Aurobindo's collaborators in his secret action and afterwards also in Congress politics", and about whose munificent gift for the foundation of the Bengal National College we have already spoken, sent his brother-in-law, the Civilian C.C. Dutt, to Sri Aurobindo, inviting him to stay at his house so that he could be properly looked after. Sri Aurobindo accepted the invitation and moved to the palatial building of Subodh Mullick at 12, Wellington Street.

The Bengal National College was started in August, 1906. It was probably on his birthday, the 15th August, that Sri Aurobindo joined the College as its first Principal. Satish Chandra Mukherjee, the well-known educationist, became its Superintendent. Most of the local men of light and leading were among its organisers and active supporters. All felt the urgent need for an overhauling of the whole educational system, and liberating it from the cramping and perverting control of the British bureaucracy.

Lala Lajpat Rai says in his book, *Young India*: "Never before in the history of the human race was it so well realised as now that the school is the nursery of the man and the citizen. Lord Curzon realised it in full and it was his aim to curtail, or, if possible, crush the nationalist influences in the schools and colleges managed and conducted by Indian agencies. It was

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[82] Gerard Hopkins.

[83] Upendra Chandra Bhattacharya, author of the Bengali book *Bharat Purush Sri Aurobindo*.

his desire to introduce the English element in all these institutions and put them under British control. He had invited European missionaries to the Secret Educational Conference at Simla, but not a single Indian, Hindu or Mohammedan. He could not trust them (i.e. the Indians) with his ideas. Hence the need of secrecy. The National Council of Education was supposed to be working against the spirit of his policy. He was gone, but the bureaucracy, who were identified with his wishes, views and schemes, were there. It was impossible that they would let the Bengalees, whoever they might be, build up a system of education and a net-work of educational institutions, that not only would owe nothing to the Government but were also to be quite free of official or English control and of English influence."

But the authorities of the National Council of Education had neither a very clear conception of what constitued national education, nor the courage of their conviction. They tried their best to steer the College and the Schools clear of politics. Many of them were conservative and timid. Though financially independent, the College and the Schools followed, more or less, the current English system of education with certain minor modifications.

The Declaration of the paper, *Bande Mataram*, was filed by Bepin Chandra Pal on 6th August, 1906. He was to be the editor. As Sri Aurobindo says: "Bepin Pal started the *Bande Mataram* with Rs. 500/- in his pocket donated by Haridas Haldar. He called in my help as assistant editor and I gave it; I called a private meeting of the Nationalist leaders in Calcutta and they agreed to take up the *Bande Mataram* as their party paper."[84] Later on Bande Mataram Company was started to finance the paper, "whose direction Sri Aurobindo undertook during the absence of Bepin Pal who was sent on a tour in the districts to proclaim the purpose and programme of the new party. The new party was at once successful and the *Bande Mataram* paper began to circulate throughout India. On its staff were not only Bepin Chandra and Sri Aurobindo but some other very able writers, Shyam Sundar Chakravarty, Hemendra Prasad Ghose and Bejoy Chatterjee.

[84] *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

Shyam Sundar caught up something like Sri Aurobindo's way of writing and later on many took his articles for Sri Aurobindo's."[85]

Soon after the launching of the daily *Bande Mataram,* Bepin Chandra Pal left for Sylhet and the other districts, and the whole charge of the paper was taken up by Sri Aurobindo. But he did not allow his name to be announced as the editor, because he had not yet given up the Baroda Service. At first, for about two months, it was published from the office of the *Sandhya*, the vernacular paper edited by Brahmabandhava Upadhyaya, and afterwards on the 8th October its office was shifted to No.200, Cornwallis Street. Its office was again shifted on November l[86] to 2/1 Creek Row, from where it was published in an enlarged form.

Bande Mataram generated a sense of urgency in the political consciousness of the country, an irrepressible hunger for the blessings of freedom, and an intense yearning for self-discovery and self-fulfilment in every sphere of national life. Never before had nationalism been preached in such prophetic, spiritual accents. Never before had Indians been told that they were destined to be the architects of a culture and civilisation which would lead humanity to a new dawn of creative glory. Never before, in the history of the world, had nationalism been lifted to the sublime heights of such a spiritual passion, and invested with such mystic significance! As an all-India paper, *Bande Mataram* stood head and shoulders above all its rivals, and inculcated a message of the most vital importance to the nation. Bepin Chandra Pal writes in his *Character Sketches*: "The hand of the Master was in it from the beginning.... Morning after morning, not only Calcutta but the educated community in every part of the country eagerly awaited its vigorous pronouncements on the stirring questions of the day. It even forced itself upon the callous and self-centred British Press. Extracts from it commenced to be reproduced week after week even in the columns of the *Times* in London.... And Aravinda was the leading spirit, the central figure, in the new journal." Dr. R.C. Majumdar writes in his

[85] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

[86] According to another version, the shifting was done on 18th October.

History of the Freedom Movement in India, Vol. II: "With the growth of the Extremist Party, initiative of the new spirit generated by the Swadeshi movement and neo-nationalism gradually passed from the hands of the old leaders like Surendranath into those of Aravinda and Bepin Chandra who were always in touch with Tilak and Lajpat Rai. These four were the great leaders of the new movement, but Aravinda soon gained the position of supremacy...." Again he says: "...the Extremist Party had an accession of immense strength when it was joined by Aravinda Ghose, who proved to be a host in himself. Indeed the entry of this new personality in the Congress arena may be regarded as a major event in Indian politics. Aravinda's articles in the *Bande Mataram* put the Extremist Party on a high pedestal all over India. He expounded the high philosophy and national spirit which animated the Party, and also laid down its programme of action. But far more valuable to the Extremist Party than even his discourses, was his striking personality. Fired with religious fervour he preached nationalism as a religion,... and he, the prophet of this new religion, infused by his precept and example, courage and strength into everyone that came in touch with him. His emergence in Indian politics was as sudden as it was unexpected. Of him it may be truly said that he awoke one morning and found himself famous, or that he came, he saw, and he conquered. He rose like a meteor and vanished like it, — from the political atmosphere. But unlike the meteor the dazzling light he shed on Indian politics did not vanish with him. The torch which he lighted continued to illumine Indian politics till it passed into the hands of worthy successors who led it to its destined goal". It is a particularly remarkable estimate of Sri Aurobindo's political career — remarkable in its compact precision and unimpeachable in the truth of its perspective. Prof. J.L.Banerji says: "Whoever the actual contributor to the *Bande Mataram* might be — the soul, the genius of the paper was Aravinda. The pen might be that of Shyam Sundar or who not — the world did not care about it; but the voice was the voice of Aravinda Ghose: his clear clarion notes calling men to heroic and strenuous self-sacrifice; his unswerving, unfaltering faith in the high destinies of the race; his passionate resolve to devote life, fame, fortune all to the service of the

Mother." Profs. Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee write in their book, *India's Fight for Freedom*: "With his appearance on the scene, Aurobindo was at once recognised as a God-ordained leader of the New Party.... The *Bande Mataram*, under Aurobindo's leadership, opened a new chapter in the history of Indian Nationalism." "Bengal was the main scene of operation of a mighty revolution more than fifty years ago. The hero of that revolution was Sri Aurobindo with his group of revolutionary youths whom he had been training up in the extreme forms of self-sacrifice in the service of the country and in achieving for it Purna Swaraj or complete freedom. The revolution aimed at was more vital and fundamental than what is generally conceived. Its primary objective was to accomplish a moral and intellectual revolution in the mind of the country, to kindle in the people a burning desire for national freedom. Indeed, he introduced into Indian politics at the very dawn of Freedom's battle what would be called the New Thought or the New Spirit. ...*In him was incarnated the very soul of awakened India in its innate individuality and inherent spirit of integration*...."[87] The same authors write in the *Modern Review* of August, 1963, — and their words carry the weight of scrupulous research scholarship — "During the brief period of its (*Bande Mataram's*) existence it effected a profound revolution in Indian politics, in the thoughts and feelings of his countrymen.... Sri Aurobindo was, in the strictest sense of the term, a true prophet, path-finder and pioneer of India's Freedom Movement. Of all the statesmen modern India has produced, he had the clearest vision of Indian Swaraj in its fulness as well as of the practical means to attain it by strenuous and sustained struggle. In the political arena he exhibited two distinct but inwardly allied personalities — as a Passive Resister and as a Revolutionary, — and in both the capacities he cast a powerful influence over the whole course of India's Freedom Movement which had its culmination in the transfer of power in 1947. His spirit of passive resistance found a veritable incarnation in Mahatma Gandhi while that of revolution a living embodiment in Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose."

[87] Italics are ours.

These few discerning estimates of Sri Aurobindo's role in inspiring his countrymen with an urgent spirit of nationalism and a new sense of the spiritual destiny of India indicate, to a certain extent, how profound, how radical and abiding was the political work he did in the short span of only three or four years. The prophet or pioneer preaches his gospel, prepares the ground, scatters broadcast the seeds of his new idea or new thought in the world. The world takes little account of this ploughing and sowing, but the seeds germinate and grow and produce a harvest which other men come forward to reap. The world acclaims the reapers, but knows little about the silent sowing of the prophet. The greatest revolutions are hatched in silence by an inscrutable working of the Time-Spirit. The work of the prophet is more powerful, more creative than his words. Sometimes the world cherishes his words and proclaims and propagates them, but the spirit and force of his work eludes its grasp. And it is this intangible spirit with its irresistible force that moulds the destinies of mankind.

THE NEW SPIRIT

"…This new spirit showed itself in the unprecedented agitation against the proposed Partition of Bengal. It expressed itself in the spontaneous outburst of indignation at the partition of the Province being perpetrated against the wishes of the people, and it seized that weapon of the weak, the boycott, which has now and then been so successfully wielded both in the West and the East. It manifested itself in the Swadeshi movement which is but another name for self-help, inasmuch as it wants the people to substitute preference on their part for protection on the part of the Government, and suffer, if necessary, for a time for the good that is sure to follow.

"It was this pew spirit which demonstrated at the Congress meeting held at the British Indian Association rooms that an influential section of the educated community would no longer tolerate autocracy in any shape, in any form.

"The working of this new spirit is apparent in the strikes, which prove a wonderful capacity for combination in people, who have never taken part in political agitations.

"This filtering down of the new spirit to the people is a significant sign of the times; and makes us exult, for the "Promised Land" is within sight now. Whatever the old leaders may do with their exploded notions of politics, they will be powerless against the rush of the new spirit, when it permeates the people, the source of energy in a nation. The new spirit demands new methods of agitation — the old order must change yielding place to new. And it behoves all

well-wishers of the nation to foster the new spirit of nationalism, for in it alone there is salvation."

Bande Mataram, 25th August 1906

The *Bande Mataram*, as we have already seen, achieved unprecedented success as the supreme voice of the awakened soul of the country. It unveiled boundless horizons, instilled an urgent spirit of courage and self-sacrifice, created an inextinguishable thirst for freedom, and roused the youth of the nation to the imperative cult of Mother-worship. "But after a time dissensions arose between Bepin Pal on one side and the other contributors and the directors of the Company because of temperamental incompatibility and differences of political view especially with regard to the secret revolutionary action with which others sympathised but to which Bepin Pal was opposed. This ended soon in Bepin Pal's separation from the journal. Sri Aurobindo would not have consented to this departure, for he regarded the qualities of Pal as a great asset to the *Bande Mataram*, since Pal, though not a man of action or capable of political leadership, was perhaps the best and most original political thinker in the country, an excellent writer and a magnificent orator: but the separation was effected behind Sri Aurobindo's back when he was convalescing from a dangerous attack of fever.... Sri Aurobindo's first preoccupation was to declare openly for complete and absolute independence[88] as the aim of political action in India and to insist on this persistently in the pages of the journal; and he was immediately successful."[89] *Bande Mataram* at once leapt into country-wide popularity and set the tone of progressive political thought in the country. Bepin Pal's departure from its editorial board made little difference to its growing power and influence.

Sri Aurobindo was now saddled with a double responsibility — the editorship and general control of the *Bande Mataram*, and his work as the Principal of the National College. Both of these works entailed hard labour

[88] Gokhale characterised the demand for independence as stark madness.

[89] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother.*

and drew heavily upon the reserve of his energies. But in both he achieved unexampled success. He endeared himself to his students at the National College, who loved and adored him with the same intensity of devotion as he had received from his students at the Baroda College. When he would lecture in the class, they would hang upon his lips — it is said even many professors came in to listen — and they found in his informal, unacademic way of teaching something which gripped their hearts, illumined their intelligence, and fired their imagination. He taught most by appearing to teach the least. His presence was an irresistible inspiration, and his soft, warm words, shot with flashes of intuition and insight, were evocative and quickening. Balai Dev Sharma, a noted Bengali writer, who was then one of his students at the National College, records his impressions in the following manner. It is his first experience in the class that he describes. "When I reached there, I saw in the middle hall a young man of placid appearance. He was clad in a shirt and a chaddar (upper cloth). If I remember right my impression of about forty years ago, I seem to recall his eyes, which were withdrawn from the outer world and concentrated on the inner spaces of his consciousness. On that day Sri Aurobindo addressed both the teachers and the students together. But the subject of his talk was not an educational one. He spoke of a sad accident that had happened. A student of the Calcutta University had fallen from the verandah of the first floor of a University Building and lost his consciousness. A crowd immediately collected there, but all it could do was to look on helplessly and wring their hands. None thought of rendering any active help. Just at that time, an Englishman was driving by. He noticed the boy, lying unconscious, picked him up in his car, and took him straight to the Campbell Medical College for first aid. Relating the accident, Sri Aurobindo compared the character of the Indians with that of the Europeans and observed that it was their devotion to duty which had made the Europeans masters of the world. When that titanic power of practical work

would be united with the spirituality of India, our national character would evolve such a type as would be incomparable in the world."[90]

Referring to the *Bande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo writes: "The journal declared and developed a new political programme for the country as the programme of the Nationalist Party, non-cooperation, passive resistance, Swadeshi, Boycott, national education, settlement of disputes in law by popular arbitration and other items of Sri Aurobindo's plan. Sri Aurobindo published in the paper a series of articles on passive resistance, another developing a political philosophy of revolution and wrote many leaders aimed at destroying the shibboleths and superstitions of the Moderate Party, such as the belief in British justice and benefits bestowed by foreign government in India, faith in British law courts and in the adequacy of the education given in schools and universities in India and stressed more strongly and persistently than had been done the emasculation, stagnation or slow progress, poverty, economic dependence, absence of a rich industrial activity and all other evil results of a foreign government; he insisted especially that even if an alien rule were benevolent and beneficent, that could not be a substitute for a free and healthy national life.... The *Bande Mataram* was almost unique in journalistic history in the influence it exerted in converting the mind of a people and preparing it for revolution.... Sri Aurobindo had always taken care to give no handle in the editorial articles of the *Bande Mataram* either for a prosecution for sedition or any other drastic action fatal to its existence; an editor of the *Statesman* complained that the paper reeked with sedition patently visible between every line, but it was so skilfully written that no legal action could be taken...."[91] S.K. Ratcliffe, editor of the *Statesman* of Calcutta, wrote the following letter to the *Manchester Guardian*: "We know Aurobindo Ghose only as a revolutionary nationalist and editor of a flaming newspaper which struck a ringing note in Indian daily nationalism.... (It) was full of leading

[90] Freely rendered into English from the author's Bengali article in the *Galpa Bharati*, a journal, of Paus 1357.

[91] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself* and on The Mother.

and special articles written in English with brilliance and pungency not hitherto attained in the Indian press. It was the most effective voice of what we then called nationalist extremism."[92]

Sri Aurobindo suffered from a dangerous attack of fever from October to the beginning of December, 1906. He stayed with his father-in-law, Bhupal Chandra Bose, at Serpentine Lane, during his illness. He recovered partially at the end of November, but had a relapse in December. In about the middle of December (11th December) he went to Deoghar, where his maternal grand-father, Rajnarayan Bose, was living, for a change of air, but could not stay there long. He had to hurry down to Calcutta to attend the Calcutta Session of the Indian National Congress, which promised to be a crucial one for his Nationalist Party. He had to go to Deoghar again a few times till March, 1907, for recruiting his health.

The Calcutta National Congress

The Calcutta Congress (26th to 29th December, 1906) marked a definite step in advance towards the ideal of the Nationalist Party. Fearing that the choice of the President would fall upon Tilak, who was the acknowledged leader of the Nationalist Party, the Moderates wired an urgent invitation to Dadabhai Naoroji, who was then in England, to preside over the twenty-second Session of the Congress. There was every possibility of a decisive tug-of-war between the two wings of the Congress, for the Moderates were as much bent on maintaining their authority as the Nationalists on squashing it. The latter were in no mood to put up any longer with the spineless political dalliance of the Moderates, which was damming the free flow of the new spirit of nationalism. Impassioned patriotism and self-sacrificing zeal threatened to engulf cautious and calculating political prudence. Sri Aurobindo, as the champion of the new spirit, wanted the

[92] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

Nationalist resolutions on Boycott[93], Swadeshi, National Education and Independence to be passed in the Congress, and his Party stood in solid support behind him. But the resolutions could not be passed in their original forms. Both the Parties had respect for Dadabhai Naoroji, and, besides, they did not want to take the extreme step of an open cleavage. After some tussle, all the resolutions proposed by the Nationalists were accepted with some minor clippings. Madan Mohan Malaviya, opposing Bepin Pal's eloquent advocacy of the Boycott of all British goods to be adopted on an all-India basis, exhorted the Congress to keep it confined to Bengal only. The spirit of Swadeshi, which was growing more and more urgent and constructive in Bengal, and spreading to other parts of the country, was given a definite encouragement and stimulus. But the main importance of the Calcutta Congress lay in its declaration of Swaraj as the goal of the political movement in the country. Dadabhai Naoroji, the Grand Old Man of Indian politics, saved the face of the Moderates as well as appeased the Nationalist Party by declaring for the first time in the history of the Congress "Swaraj" as the goal. It is true that he meant by the word nothing more than Colonial Self-Government, but the word rang out with a compelling charm and seemed to satisfy both the Parties. It had been used in Bengal by Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar in his stirring book, *Desher Katha* (in Bengali) and also by Tilak.[94] To the Nationalist it meant nothing short of complete autonomy, free from foreign control. But the compromise arrived at in the Calcutta Congress could only put off and not obviate the menace of an open rupture between the two wings.

It is interesting to note here that not only was the programme of Passive Resistance and Non-Cooperation preached in Bengal for attaining the goal of Swaraj or Independence, but even the use of the Charkha was advocated as a subsidiary cottage industry to supplement the supply of mill-made

[93] "...We have repeatedly said that boycott is not a gospel of hatred, it is simply our assertion of independence, our national separateness." — *Bande Mataram*, 7th August, 1907.

[94] "Swaraj is my birth-right". — Tilak

cloth and give an added impetus to the Boycott of British cloth. The *Bande Mataram* of the 30th December 1906, published the following: "The Charkha: Hironmoyee Devi advocated Charkha in the industrial Conference.[95] She said: 'If we could not utilise the leisure of our women, which is now uselessly frittered away, in some small industries, assuming that Charkha cannot compete with machinery, it will yet give food to millions of starving women and find some useful work for those who have, for want thereof, to fritter away their leisure hours' '...then again bear in mind that Manchester is trying to kill our mill industry, and of this we are daily getting more and more tangible proof.'" Charkha was thus advocated as a double remedy, at once economic and political, — as providing work for the unemployed, and aiding the Boycott of foreign cloth — which was perhaps envisaging it in the right perspective, and not crediting it with illimitable potentialities. The machine has come to stay, and Charkha cannot presume to oust it.

A question crops up here, which seems to be quite pertinent to the context. How did the idea of Boycott, which later on came to be expanded and elaborated into the policy of Non-cooperation and Passive Resistance by Sri Aurobindo, originate? It is a complicated question, and no answer is likely to be authentic and conclusive. Basing their observations on the I.B. Records, Government of West Bengal, Profs. Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee write in their book, *India's Fight for Freedom*, pp. 189-190: "Even as early as 1874 Boycott was advocated as a step to revive Indian industries which had been ruined by British commercial policy in this country. The idea of Boycott of Manchester cloth was preached during 1875-76 and again in 1878 on account of Manchester hostility to the newly started Indian mills in Bombay. Again, during 1883-84 when popular feelings ran very high as a sequel to the Anti-Ilbert Bill agitation by the Anglo-Indians and the imprisonment of Surendra Nath Banerjea, the Boycott of British goods was strongly advocated by a section of the Indian

[95] Held in Calcutta in December, 1906, during the Calcutta Session of the Indian National Congress.

community. Again, in 1891 as a sequel to popular indignation against the Consent Bill, the Boycott of British goods was not only preached, but also practised to some extent.

"From the same official source we learn that the real originator of the idea of boycotting foreign goods, particularly British,... was Tahal Ram Ganga Ram (an inhabitant of North Western India and belonging to the Arya Samaj) who visited Calcutta during February-March, 1905, delivering inflammatory speeches every evening before the students in the College Square, and asking them to go in for Boycott of British goods in favour of indigenous products... in the days of heated Anti-Partition agitation, it acquired a new force and vitality on account of its close political associations. In this mental climate Krishna Kumar Mitra's[96] call for Boycott through his weekly organ, the *Sanjivani* (July 13, 1905) found a ready response in the country. The *Sanjivani's* call for Boycott was soon followed by a similar call given out by the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* which published on July 17, 1905, a letter over the initial 'G', in which the Boycott of English goods was strongly advocated. 'G' was first believed to be the name of Lai Mohan Ghose, but afterwards it was known that the writer was either Aurobindo Ghose or Barindra Kumar Ghose, as revealed in the I.B. Records, L. No. 47, West Bengal. *All Government reports and records of that time attached very great importance to this letter of July 17, and even called it the 'first' manifesto of Boycott....*"[97] We may leave it to history to trace the origination of the idea of the Boycott, but we can quite legitimately ask: "Who revived, expanded and developed the idea into a stable base for a vigorous policy and programme of political action for the attainment of national independence?[98] Who reduced the theory to a

[96] Krishna Kumar Mitra, Sri Aurobindo's maternal uncle, was in close touch with Sri Aurobindo, even when the latter was in Baroda, and it is quite possible that he shared many of Sri Aurobindo's political views.

[97] Italics are ours.

[98] Rabindranath Tagore advocated Boycott in his essay on "Swadeshi Samaj", which he read in a meeting on 22nd July, 1904.

consistent and persistent practice? Who forged it into the most deadly weapon in the armoury of militant nationalism? Who breathed the fire into it, which blazed up in subsequent years into a country-wide conflagration?”

VIII

"…The Bengal boycott is not the outcome of mere economic necessity but it is rightly read by the politically awakened peoples as the first act of those who have come under the inspiring ideal of freedom. It marks a new epoch in our history. In fact, it inaugurates our history once more. The Indian history during the last few centuries was something like a blank and important events have just begun to fill in that emptiness. The history of free America began with the boycott. The spirit of freedom had everywhere its earliest manifestation in this act of passive resistance, and if events are divine, if the purpose of a higher power is distinctly written on their face, then the Bengal boycott should also be understood to herald the bright future of our country. Individual acts of self-sacrifice for faith and for conscience are also being reported from various places. The moral renascence has begun with the desire for self-rule. The tendency to dare and suffer is everywhere manifest. Patriotism is gaining strength the more it is sought to be cowed down. The juvenile community are facing the bureaucratic wrath with an indifference to consequence which is simply surprising. They are availing themselves of every opportunity to foster and spread the spirit of nationalism in the land. Their enthusiasm, their daring is ever on the increase, their noble contagion is extending to other quarters. In short, the spirit that gives rise to epoch-making events is once more in our midst, and let nobody despair of the future."

Bande Mataram, September 15, 1907

The two papers, *Yugantara* in Bengali and *Bande Mataram* in English, continued with a mounting intensity of patriotic passion their call upon the

nation to shake off the chains of slavery and regain freedom. Freedom is the life-breath of a nation. If freedom is lost, the nation decays and dies in spite of the utmost care and solicitude of its masters to keep it alive. Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya's paper, *Sandhya*, also lent its virile voice to the rousing of the nation to an urgent sense of freedom. But *Yugantara* soon fell a victim to the wrath of the Government. Its manager, Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya, and its printer, Bhupendra Nath Datta, youngest brother of Swami Vivekananda, were arrested. On Sri Aurobindo's advice, Bhupendra Nath refused to defend himself in an alien court, and courted rigorous imprisonment for one year. Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya was acquitted, as no definite evidence could be found against him.

At about this time Upendra Nath Bandopadhyaya came down to Calcutta and joined the staff of the *Yugantara*. He had written a letter to Sri Aurobindo from Chandernagore, where he was a teacher, offering his services in the cause of national freedom. Sri Aurobindo discerned in the writer of the letter the fiery stuff he was made of, and advised Shyam Sundar Chakravarty to communicate his permission to him. Upendra Nath did not take long to make his mark. He proved to be a talented writer and a dauntless, resourceful political fighter. Nolini Kanta Gupta writes about him in his *Reminiscences*: "Upenda was like a leader and teacher to us. It was he who taught us the Gita in the Maniktala Gardens. Living in his company in the jail I learnt many things and received considerable enthusiasm, stimulus and wholesome advice from him. I am grateful to him for it.... Upenda also showed me certain methods of doing meditation, and this too helped me pass my time in the jail." Upendra Nath was imprisoned in the Alipore jail along with Sri Aurobindo, Nolini Kanta and others, and his intimate pen-picture of Sri Aurobindo, which we shall partly quote from his Bengali book, *Nirvasiter Atmakatha* (Autobiography of an Exile), is a vivid and authentic record of Sri Aurobindo's life as a prisoner. Sri Aurobindo's Uttarpara Speech gives us a glimpse of his inner life, the sudden flood of spiritual experiences he had in the jail; but Upendra Nath's book admits us to the physical presence of the Master and a close view of his outer life and nature. Sri Aurobindo's *Kara Kahini* in Bengali (now out

of print), in which he deals with his jail life is another authentic source of our knowledge of the way he reacted to the great hardships and indignities to which he was subjected there, and which, instead of creating any bitterness or acute sense of discomfort in him, became a matter of amused observation and welcome experience. He seems not to have suffered from them at all. On the contrary, the book bubbles over with such kindly humour, and the narrative trips along with such sparkling buoyancy that the reader is left with the impression that the writer had distilled a positive enjoyment out of those sickening experiences.

Rabindranath Tagore once invited Sri Aurobindo to dinner at his Calcutta residence, where Sri Aurobindo met Okakura, the famous artist and art-connoisseur of Japan and the great scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose of international repute. Tagore used to see Sri Aurobindo from time to time at the *Sanjivani* Office.

Sri Aurobindo wrote a series of articles on passive resistance in the *Bande Mataram* from 9th to 23rd April, 1907. A few lines from these articles[99] will suffice to prove how clear was his perception of the potentialities of the movement of passive resistance, and how cogent and exhaustive his treatment of it. They bear out our contention that his politics was at once idealistic and practical — a rare blend of high spiritual flight and a quiet, vigilant, flexible dealing with the tangled forces of life. Those who think that spiritual or Yogic life is a life of visionary idealism, too unpractical, withdrawn, and passive or resigned to be able to grapple with brute material facts and the cross-currents of politico-economic factors, will be cured of their delusion if they read his articles on boycott and passive resistance. Dynamic Yoga is a Yoga of perfection in works, *Yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam.*

"The primary requisite for national progress, national reform, is the free habit of free and healthy national thought and action which is impossible

[99] Put together and published in book form in 1948 under the title, *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*.

in a state of servitude. The second is the organisation of the national will in a strong central authority... we have to establish a popular authority which will exist side by side and in rivalry with a despotic foreign bureaucracy — no ordinary rough-riding despotism, but quiet, pervasive and subtle, — one that has fastened its grip on every detail of our national life and will not easily be persuaded to let go, even in the least degree, its octopus-like hold. This popular authority will have to dispute every part of our national life and activity, one by one, step by step, with the intruding force to the extreme point of entire emancipation from alien control. This and no less than this is the task before us.... It is only by organised national resistance, passive or aggressive, that we can make our self-development effectual.... *The present circumstances in India seem to point to passive resistance as our most natural and suitable weapon*....

"Under certain circumstances a civil struggle becomes in reality a battle and the morality of the war is different from the morality of peace.... To shrink from bloodshed and violence under such circumstances is a weakness deserving as severe a rebuke as Sri Krishna addressed to Arjuna when he shrank from the colossal slaughter on the field of Kurukshetra.... Where the need for immediate liberty is urgent and it is a present question of national life or death on the instant, revolt is the only course. But where the oppression is legal and subtle in its methods and respects life, liberty and property and there is still breathing time, the circumstances demand that we should make the experiment of a method of a resolute but peaceful resistance which, while less bold and aggressive than other methods, calls for perhaps more heroism of a kind and certainly more universal endurance and suffering.... The peaceful character of passive resistance is one reason why it has found favour with the thinkers of the New Party.

"The passive method is especially suitable to countries where the Government depends mainly for the continuance of its administration on the voluntary help and acquiescence of the subject. The first principle of passive resistance... which the new school have placed in the forefront of their programme, is to make administration under present conditions impossible by the organised refusal to do anything which shall help either

British commerce in the exploitation of the country or British officialdom in the administration of it, — unless and until the conditions are changed in the manner and in the extent demanded by the people.... This attitude is summed up in the one word, Boycott....

"It is at once clear that self-development and such a scheme of passive resistance are supplementary and necessary to each other. If we refuse to supply our needs from foreign sources, we must obviously supply them ourselves; we cannot have the industrial boycott without Swadeshi and the expansion of indigenous industries. If we decline to enter the alien courts of justice, we must have arbitration courts of our own to settle our disputes and differences. If we do not send our boys to schools owned or controlled by the Government, we must have schools of our own in which they may receive a thorough and national education. If we do not go for protection to the executive, we must have a system of self-protection of our own....

"The refusal to pay taxes is a natural and logical result of the attitude of passive resistance.... The refusal to pay taxes would... inevitably bring about the last desperate struggle between the forces of national aspiration and alien repression. It will be in the nature of an ultimatum from the people to the Government.... An ultimatum should never be presented unless one is prepared to follow it up to its last consequences.... In a vast country like India, any such general conflict with the dominant authority as is involved in a no-tax policy needs for its success a close organisation linking province to province and district to district and a powerful central authority representing the single will of the whole nation which could alone fight on equal terms the final struggle of defensive resistance with bureaucratic repression. Such an organisation and authority have not yet been developed. The new politics, therefore, confines itself for the time to the policy of lawful abstention from any kind of cooperation with the Government — the policy of boycott which is capable of gradual extension, leaving to the bureaucracy the onus of forcing on a more direct, sudden and dangerous struggle. Its principle at present is not 'no representation, no taxation', but 'no control, no assistance'."

The above extracts forcibly recall the manifestos of Mahatma Gandhi in 1920-21 and 1930-32 — so lucid, so convincing, so objective and practical they are! "No control, no assistance" is nothing but a firm and definite policy of noncooperation, preached almost in the very beginning of the national agitation. One of the manifestos of Mahatma Gandhi issued in 1930 reads as follows: "...We recognise that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence. We will therefore prepare ourselves by withdrawing, so far as we can, all voluntary association from the British Government, and will prepare for civil disobedience, including non-payment of taxes. We are convinced that if we can but withdraw our voluntary help and stop payment of taxes without doing violence even under provocation, the end of this inhuman rule is assured. We therefore hereby solemnly resolve to carry out the Congress instructions issued from time to time for the purpose of establishing Purna Swaraj." The utterances of the two leaders, one preaching in 1906-7 and the other in 1920-21 and 1930-32, have the same firm and confident ring. The only difference, but a very important one, is that Sri Aurobindo did not believe in absolute non-violence imposed as a rigid principle in politics. He knew that politics being the business of the Kshatriya and concerned not with saints but with erring, mortal men, subject to the natural reactions of their common human nature, could not and should not bind itself to any inflexible ethical rule of conduct when faced with the destructive forces of an autocratic Government. As Dr. Radhakrishnan says[100]:

"The Hindu view does not sternly uphold a distant ideal, while condemning all compromises with it....[101] While ascetics and hermits who have retired from the world, and so are not directly concerned with the welfare of organised societies, may not use arms in defence of individuals

[100] *Religion and Society* by Dr. Radhakrishnan.

[101] Hinduism admits relative standards, a wisdom too hard for the European intelligence. Non-injury is the highest of its laws, *ahiṁsā paramo dharmaḥ*; still it does not lay it down as a physical rule for the warrior... and so escapes the unpracticality of a too absolutist rule for all life." — Sri Aurobindo, *The Foundations of Indian Culture.*

or groups, citizens are under an obligation to resist aggression by arms, if necessary and possible.... Non-violence belongs to the last two stages of life, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa. Arjuna, as a Kshatriya householder, cannot pursue the ideal of a sannyasin.... Love is not mere sentimentality. It can use force to restrain the evil and protect the good. Non-violence as a mental state is different from non-resistance.... Sometimes the spirit of love actually demands resistance to evil.... We cannot say that violence is evil in itself.... In the present conditions, the use of force is necessary to check the turbulent, protect the helpless, and keep order between man and man and group and group. But such a use of force is not by intention destructive. It works for the ultimate good of those to whom it is applied. This legitimate police action is necessary if we are to be saved from anarchy." Sri Aurobindo accepted non-violent passive resistance as a policy, and not as a cramping and crippling principle. Violence can be employed in self-defence or for the protection of the oppressed; and if it is to be employed by a nation against its oppressors, it must be organised on a sound martial basis and fully equipped to meet their armed might. But the political developments in the country led him to pin his faith on boycott and passive resistance as the most effective means of regaining freedom.

On 9th May, 1907, the news of Lala Lajpat Rai's deportation was flashed to Bengal almost at the dead of night. Sri Aurobindo was then asleep. One of the co-editors of the *Bande Mataram* woke him up and gave the news. He sat up on his bed and dashed the following lines, which created a country-wide stir next morning: "Lala Lajpat Rai has been deported out of British India. The fact is its own comment. The telegram goes on to say that indignation meetings have been forbidden for four days. Indignation meetings? The hour of speeches and fine writings is past. The bureaucracy has thrown down the gauntlet. We take it up. Men of the Punjab! Race of the Lion! Show these men who would stamp you into the dust that for one Lajpat they have taken away, a hundred Lajpats will arise in his place. Let them hear a hundred times louder your war-cry: 'Jai Hindusthan'!" — *Bande Mataram*, 10th May, 1907.

IX

> *"… The force of a great stream of aspiration must be poured over the country, which will sweep away as in a flood the hesitations, the selfishnesses, the fears, the self-distrust, the want of fervour and the want of faith which stand in the way of the spread of the great national awakening of 1905. A mighty fountain of the spirit must be prepared from which this stream of aspiration can be poured to fertilise the heart of the nation. When this is done, the aspiration towards liberty will become universal and India be ready for the great effort."*
>
> *The Need of the Moment*
> — *Bande Mataram*, March 22, 1908

On June 2, 1907, the weekly edition of the *Bande Mataram* was started. In its second issue, dated 9th June, Sri Aurobindo's patriotic poem, Vidula, began to be published in a serial form. We shall deal with this poem when, in due course, we take up the study of Sri Aurobindo's poetry. Here we quote only a few lines from the introductory paragraph. Both the poem and its introduction breathe the patriotic fervour, spirit of freedom and impatience of servitude, which were inspiring Sri Aurobindo's thoughts, writings and activities in Bengal at that time.

"There are few more interesting passages in the Mahabharata than the conversation of Vidula with her son. It comes into the main poem as an exhortation from Kunti to Yudhisthir to give up the weak spirit of submission, moderation, prudence, and fight like a true warrior and Kshatriya for right and justice and his own. But the poem bears internal evidence of having been written by a patriotic poet to stir his countrymen to revolt against the yoke of the foreigner.... The poet seeks to fire the spirit of the conquered and subject people and impel them to throw off the hated subjection. He personifies in Vidula the spirit of the motherland

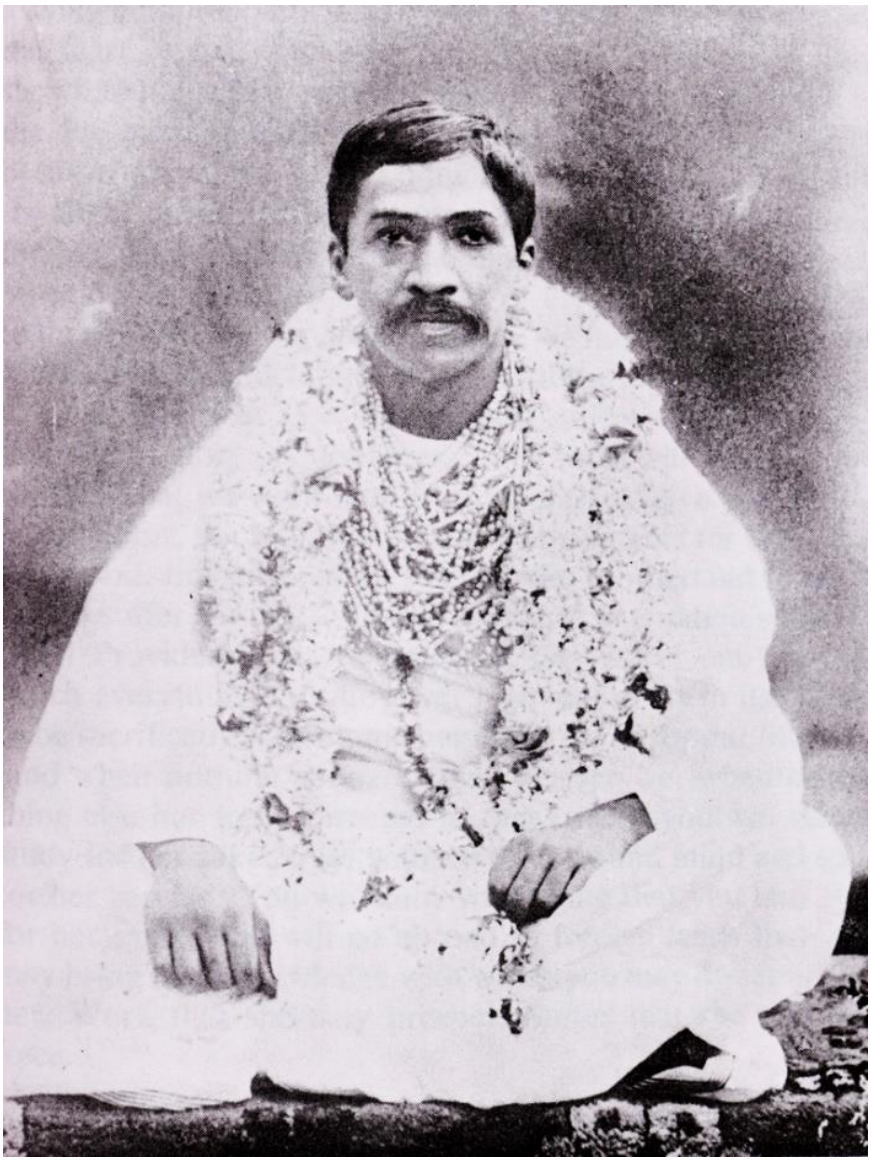
speaking to her degenerate son and striving to wake in him the inherited Aryan manhood and the Kshatriya's preference of death to servitude."

We may note here that in the 30th June issue of the weekly *Bande Mataram* appeared the first instalment of Sri Aurobindo's drama, *Perseus the Deliverer*. In it, not the spirit of patriotism and revolt against political subjection and slavery, but the gigantic clash between the forces of Light and the forces of darkness, is portrayed in the guise of a romantic Greek myth. We shall study it also in our section on Sri Aurobindo's poetry.

Both the popular papers, *Yugantar* and *Bande Mataram* were gall and wormwood to the British bureaucracy, which were watching for an opportunity to swoop down upon them and smother them to death. And an opportunity always comes handy to an autocrat. On the 7th June, 1907, the Bengal Government issued a warning to the *Yugantar* that police action would be taken against it if it persisted in publishing inflammatory, seditious articles. On the 8th June, 1907, a similar warning was given to the *Bande Mataram*. On the 3rd July, *Yugantar* office was searched. Bhupendra Nath Datta, youngest brother of Swami Vivekananda, declared that he was the editor of the paper and courted arrest.[102] He was sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment, as we have already stated. His statement to the Court was a model of fearless defiance of the British Law and stark refusal to defend his case. On the 30th July, 1907, the *Bande Mataram* office was searched. On the 16th August a warrant was issued against Sri Aurobindo, who was charged with sedition for having published in the *Bande Mataram*, of which he was alleged to be the editor, English translations of some articles originally published in the *Yugantar*. On receiving the warrant, Sri Aurobindo went to the police court and offered himself for arrest. But, as there was no proof available of his being the editor of the *Bande Mataram*, he was soon acquitted. Bepin Chandra Pal,

[102] He refused to defend himself under Sri Aurobindo's instructions, "...the *Yugantar* under Sri Aurobindo's orders adopted the policy of refusing to defend itself in a British Court..." — *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*

who was called as a witness, refused point-blank to give evidence or take any part in the prosecution, and was sentenced to six months' simple imprisonment on a charge of contempt of court. Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, editor of the *Sandhya*, was arrested on the 31st August, but, as he had predicted, he escaped the penalty of the British Law by departing from this life after a short illness. Thus the British Government strove to gag all public expression of nationalist feeling and yearning for freedom.



Sri Aurobindo at Calcutta, 1907

But the suppression of the human spirit is a vain endeavour — it serves only to feed the spirit's flame and stimulate its will to achieve its end. It was during Sri Aurobindo's arrest that Rabindranath composed his famous

poem as his tribute to Sri Aurobindo's greatness. Later, he saw Sri Aurobindo at 12, Wellington Street and congratulated him on his acquittal.

The *Bande Mataram* case brought Sri Aurobindo at once into the full blaze of publicity, which he had studiously avoided so long. He became overnight, not only the undisputed leader of the Nationalist Party in Bengal, but one of the foremost leaders of the Nationalists in India. Writing on this subject, he says: "Sri Aurobindo had confined himself to writing and leadership behind the scenes, not caring to advertise himself or put forward his personality, but the imprisonment and exile of other leaders and the publicity given to his name by the case compelled him to come forward and take the lead on the public platform."[103]

On the 2nd August, 1907, Sri Aurobindo resigned his post at the National College. About his resignation he writes: "At an early period he left the organisation of the College to the educationist Satish Mukherjee and plunged fully into politics. When the *Bande Mataram* case was brought against him he resigned his post in order not to embarrass the College authorities but resumed it again on his acquittal. During the Alipore case he resigned finally at the request of the College authorities."[104] On the 22nd August Sri Aurobindo spoke to the students of the National College who had called a meeting to express their profound regret at his resignation of the post of the principalship of the College. We quote below only a few sentences from that speech:

"In the meeting you held yesterday I see that you expressed sympathy with me in what you call my present troubles. I don't know whether I should call them troubles at all, for the experience that I am going to undergo was long *foreseen as inevitable in the discharge of the mission that I have taken up from my childhood*,[105] and I am approaching it without regret. What I want to be assured of is not so much that you feel sympathy for me in my

[103] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

[104] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

[105] Italics are ours.

troubles but that you have sympathy for the cause, in serving which I have to undergo what you call my troubles. If I know that the rising generation has taken up this cause, that wherever I go, I go leaving behind others to carry on my work, I shall go without the least regret. I take it that whatever respect you have shown to me today was shown not to me, not merely even to the Principal, but to the country, to *the Mother in me*,[106] 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.... When we established this college and left other occupations, other chances of life, to devote our lives to this institution, we did so because we hoped to see in it the foundation, the nucleus of a nation, of the new India which is to begin its career after this night of sorrow and trouble, on that day of glory and greatness when India will work for the world. What we want here is not merely to give you a little information, not merely to open to you careers for earning a livelihood, but to build up sons for the Motherland to work and to suffer for her.... There are times in a nation's history when Providence places before it one work, one aim, to which everything else, however high and noble in itself, has to be sacrificed. Such a time has now arrived for our Motherland when nothing is dearer than her service, when everything else has to be directed to that end. If you will study, study for her sake; train yourselves body and mind and soul for her service. You will earn your living that you may live for her sake. You will go abroad to foreign lands that you may bring back knowledge with which you may do service to her. Work that she may prosper. Suffer that she may rejoice..."[107]

This lofty, ardent, inspiring tone characterised all that Sri Aurobindo spoke and wrote in his political days in Bengal. But there are three things in the above extract which attract our special attention: First, "the experience that I am going to undergo was long foreseen as inevitable in the discharge of the mission that I have taken up from my childhood..."

[106] Italics are ours.

[107] *Speeches of Sri Aurobindo.*

Second, “whatever respect you have shown to me today was shown not to me, not merely even to the Principal, but to your country, to the Mother in me…” Third, “that day of glory and greatness when India will work for the world.”

The first point brings home to us again the fact that Sri Aurobindo had a more or less definite conception — it was, indeed, a foreknowledge[108] — even in his childhood, of the mission of his life. This foreknowledge is not something very rare; it has been a usual, if rather extraordinary, phenomenon in the lives of the supreme prophets, poets and pioneers. Goethe had it, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda had it. The second point indicates his Yogic identification with Mother India in whom he had realised the Divine Mother. He was well advanced in Yoga at the time when he spoke these words, as his letters to his wife attest. No other leader, even in his most inspired flights, would have presumed to speak of “the Mother in me”! The utter effacement of his personal self in the Divine Mother had resulted in this identification. The third point is a reiteration of what he always knew and preached, whenever he spoke of the future greatness of India, that “India will work for the world.” His nationalism, as we have already said before, was supernational, it was universal. India is rising, not for herself, but for the world, for all humanity.

The Midnapore Provincial Conference took place from 7th to 9th November, 1907. Dr. R.C. Majumdar says in his monumental (three-volume) *History of the Freedom Movement in India* that it was as the leader of the Nationalists that Sri Aurobindo took part in this Conference, “a conference made memorable by the first open rupture between the Moderates and the Extremists of our province.” About the same conference Sri Aurobindo writes: “He (Sri Aurobindo) led the party at the session of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Midnapore where there was a vehement clash between the two parties (the Nationalists or Extremists and the Moderates). He now for the first time became a speaker on the public

[108] He uses the word “foreseen”.

platform..."[109] Surendra Nath Banerjee, Shyam Sundar Chakravarty and many other leaders of both the parties had gone to Midnapore. The Moderates were led by Surendra Nath and the President-elect was K.B. Datta. But after the rift, the Nationalists held a separate Conference under the leadership of Sri Aurobindo, and also elected him their President. The Midnapore clash and rupture were only a prelude to what was going to take place at the Surat Congress.

Writing on the Midnapore Conference, Dr. R.C. Majumdar says: "...Towards the end of the year (1907), the same fear (that the Moderates would make an attempt to omit the resolutions already passed on Self-government, Swadeshi, Boycott, and National Education at the Calcutta session of the Congress in 1906) was further enhanced by the incidents at the District Congress Conference, held at Midnapore (Bengal). Surendra Nath tried his best to convince Aravinda that the Moderate policy would not only bring about the re-union of Bengal but even a great measure of self-government within a short period. Aravinda, however, did not yield. Rowdyism broke out on account of differences between the two parties, particularly on the refusal of the Chairman to discuss Swaraj, and the police had to be called in to restore order."[110]

The twenty-third Indian National Congress commenced its proceedings at Surat on 26th December, 1907. We have from Sri Aurobindo himself a pretty long description of what happened at this Congress: "...The session of the Congress had first been arranged at Nagpur, but Nagpur was a predominantly Mahratta city and violently extremist. Gujerat was at that time predominantly Moderate, there were very few Nationalists and Surat was a stronghold of Moderatism though afterwards Gujerat became, especially after Gandhi took the lead, one of the most revolutionary of the provinces. So the Moderate leaders decided to hold the Congress at Surat. The Nationalists however came there in strength from all parts, they held public conference with Sri Aurobindo as President and for some time it was

[109] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

[110] *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. II.

doubtful which side would have the majority.... It was known that the Moderate leaders had prepared a new constitution for the Congress which would make it practically impossible for the extreme party to command a majority at any annual session for many years to come. The younger Nationalists, especially those from Maharashtra, were determined to prevent this by any means and it was decided by them to break the Congress if they could not swamp it; this decision was unknown to Tilak and the older leaders. But it was known to Sri Aurobindo.[111] At the session Tilak went on to the platform to propose a resolution regarding the presidentship of the Congress; the President appointed by the Moderates refused to him the permission to speak, but Tilak insisted on his right and began to read his resolution and speak. There was a tremendous uproar, the young Gujerati volunteers lifted up chairs over the head of Tilak to beat him. At that the Mahrattas became furious, a Mahratta shoe came hurtling across the pavilion aimed at the President, Dr. Rash Behari Ghose, and hit Surendra Nath Banerjee on the shoulder. The young Mahrattas in a body charged up to the platform, the Moderate leaders fled; after a short fight on the platform with chairs, the session broke up not to be resumed."[112]

Nevinson in his book, *The New Spirit in India*, has given a graphic description of this tumult and uproar at the Surat Congress where he was present. K.M. Munshi, an ex-Governor of the U.P. has also given a detailed description of the same fray in the Bhavan's Journal of November 27, 1960.

[111] "Very few people knew that it was I (without consulting Tilak) who gave the order that led to the breaking of the Congress and was responsible for the refusal to join the new-fangled Moderate Convention..." *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

[112] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

X

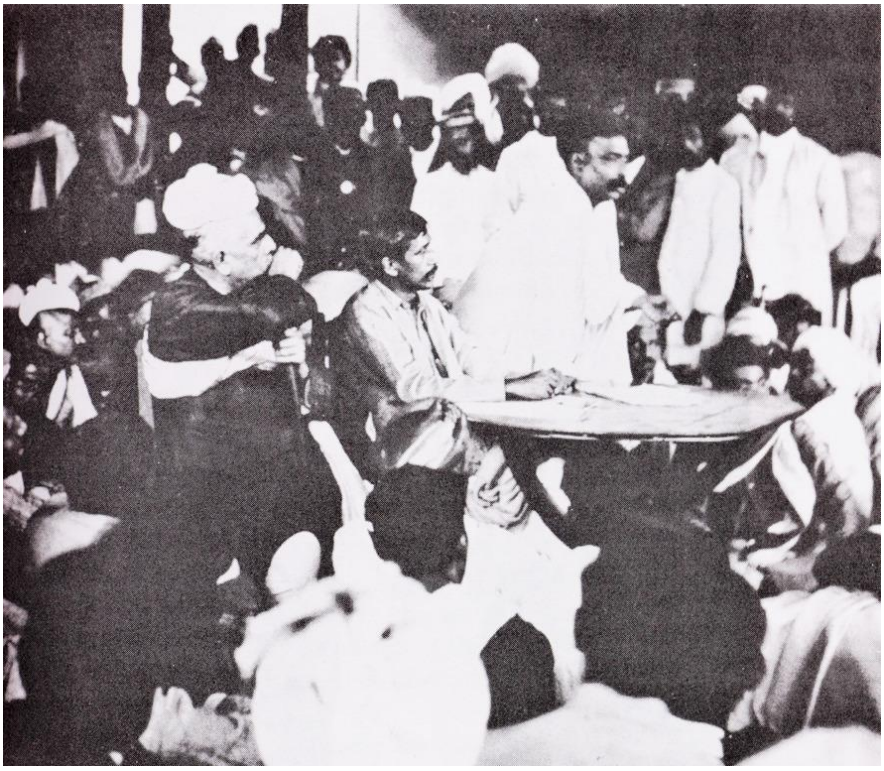
> *"Grave and silent — I think without saying a single word — Mr. Aravinda Ghose took the chair, and sat unmoved, with far-off eyes, as one who gazes at futurity. In clear, short sentences, without eloquence or passion, Mr. Tilak spoke till the stars shone out and some one kindled a lantern at his side..."*
>
> — Mr. Nevinson (The New Spirit in India)

The above remark from a perceptive foreigner gives a vivid description of Sri Aurobindo in his characteristic pose and poise at the nationalist Conference at Surat, "...sat unmoved, with far-off eyes, as one who gazes at futurity" — a description which whosoever saw Sri Aurobindo anywhere at close quarters would readily bear out. Surat Congress was broken, the Nationalists and the Moderates had drifted apart, and the dim hopes of a united. Congress were extinguished for many a long year to come. But the fracas and turmoil, and the momentous sequel to the disruption of the Congress failed to shake the Yogic poise, the Yogic equality, samattwa, of Sri Aurobindo. He did not live from moment to moment, and attached not himself to the passing events, but looked unmoved through them to the great future he was commissioned to shape. Beyond the dust and din of the present, and undeterred by them, he pursued the inner light to which he had surrendered himself. There is no fear or failure for the eye that sees, and no disappointment for the heart that knows and reposes in the Divine Will. Dwelling in the Eternal, the Yogi shares the Eternal's delight in Its unfolding play in the flux of time.

Describing the Yogic samattwa in his book, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo writes: "We shall have the... equality of mind and soul towards all happenings, painful or pleasurable, defeat and success, honour and disgrace, good repute and ill-repute, good fortune and evil fortune. For in all happenings we shall see the will of the Master of all works and results and a step in the evolving expression of the Divine."

A mighty step had been taken, "...a new spirit, a different and difficult spirit, had arisen in the country," says Nevinson. History was being made. The National Congress, after the Surat session, became the close preserve of the Moderates, who served the country as best they could, consistently with their avowed loyalty to the British crown and their implicit faith in British justice. But they did not represent the intense yearning for freedom and the burning love for the motherland, which had been generated since 1905. They could not — they did not much bother to — carry the people with them. Their ranks began to thin, and their annual sessions were attended only by a dwindling number of men. The Nationalists, on the other hand, were dispersed in several groups, indignant and disorganised, and most of them, at least those who were ardent and daring, took to secret revolutionary activities, and some to terrorism as the only means of winning freedom. The blind fury of vindictive repression made its desperate bid to stamp out the spirit of freedom, stone-blind to the historic fact that the spirit of freedom, once kindled, can never be stamped out. Lajpat Rai and Bepin Pal were away from India; Sri Aurobindo was soon clapped into Alipore jail as an under-trial prisoner, and Tilak was in deportation in Mandalay. Absence of the topmost leaders and an intensification of the repressive measures by the Government forced the nationalist fire to sink. But the fire did not die out; it smouldered on, and the secret revolutionary activities grew apace, sporadic but violent, till 1914, when Tilak returned from Mandalay and joined hands with Annie Beasant, and gave a fresh impetus and a new direction to the national urge for freedom.

Sri Aurobindo had been feeling at this time the need of a guidance and a new direction in his Yoga. Though, as we learn from his confidential letters to his wife, he was being led by the Divine within, he had arrived at a stage when a crucial experience alone could clear the way for further advance. It was almost like Sri Ramakrishna's acceptance of the spiritual help of the Naga Yogi, Totapuri, or of the Tantric Yogini, Bhairavi. Sri Aurobindo expressed his wish to consult a Yogi to Barin, his younger



Sri Aurobindo presiding over a meeting of the Nationalists at Surat, 1907

Sri Aurobindo at Baroda, 1908

brother. Barin procured the address of Yogi Vishnu Bhaskar Lele[113] and wired to him at Gwalior to come to Baroda and see Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo came to Baroda from Surat. Barin says in his autobiography that the Principal of the Baroda College had asked the students not to meet Sri Aurobindo or go to listen to his lectures, as he was then a nationalist politician. But the students, who were devoted to Sri Aurobindo and had been so much inspired by his noble character and intense patriotism, could not obey the ban and ran out of their classes to meet him on his arrival. They unyoked the horses of his carriage and drew the carriage themselves. Sri Aurobindo delivered three lectures there on the political situation. Sardar Majumdar presented him with a Pashmina shawl as it was severe winter and he was only in cotton dhoti and shirt and had no wrapper to cover his body. He kept no bedding with him, and, while travelling by train, he slept on the bare, wooden bunk of a third class compartment and used his arm for a pillow.[114]

Sri Aurobindo met Lele on one of the closing days of December, 1907[115] at the residence of Khasirao Jadav, where he and Barin were put up. Lele advised him to give up politics, but as it was not possible, he asked him to suspend it for a few days and stay with him. Accordingly, they closeted themselves in a room in Sardar Majumdar's house for three days. Let us now hear from Sri Aurobindo himself about his experiences during those three days: "'Sit down', I was told, 'look and you will see that your thoughts come into you from outside. Before they enter, fling them back.' I sat down and looked and saw to my astonishment that it was so; I saw and felt concretely the thought approaching as if to enter through or above the head and was able to push it back concretely before it came inside. In three days — really in one — my mind became full of an eternal silence — it is

[113] Vishnu Bhaskar Lele was a fire-brand nationalist in his youth, but his contacts with a few spiritual persons converted him to the life of a Yogi.

[114] *Life of Sri Aurobindo*, A.B. Purani.

[115] *Ibid.*

still there".[116] About Lele he said once that he was "a Bhakta with a limited mind but with some experience and evocative power".[117] Referring to the same experience, he says in Yoga II, Tome II: "From that moment, in principle, the mental being in me became a free intelligence, a universal Mind, not limited to the narrow circle of personal thought as a labourer in a thought factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and free to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire." Again in Tome I, On Yoga II, he says: "...A calm and silence that is what I had. The proof is that out of an absolute silence of the mind I edited the Bande Mataram for 4 months and wrote 6 volumes of the Arya, not to speak of all the letters and messages etc., etc. I have written since." Dwelling on the implications of the realisation, he says, "...we sat together and I followed with absolute fidelity what he instructed me to do, not myself in the least understanding where he was leading me or where I was myself going. The first result was a series of tremendously powerful experiences and radical changes of consciousness which he had never intended — for they were Adwaitic and Vedantic and he was against Adwaita Vedanta — and *which were quite contrary to my own ideas*[118], for they made me see with a stupendous intensity the world as a cinematographic play of vacant forms in the impersonal universality of the Absolute Brahman.[119]"

Evidently, it was an experience of what the Gita calls Brahma-Nirvana. The Akshara Brahman alone existed, all-pervasive, silent, passive and immutable, and the world appeared as "a cinematographic play of vacant forms in the impersonal universality of the Absolute Brahman." It was this authentic, indubitable experience upon which the great Shankaracharya stood in his appraisement of the world, and in his interpretation of the scriptures. The world did appear to him as a cinematographic play, *viśvaṁ darpaṇadṛśyamānanagarītulyam*, a Maya, real and yet unreal. He could not

[116] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

[117] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*

[118] Italics are ours.

[119] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

deny his own concrete spiritual experience of the impersonal universal immutability of the Brahman, and against it of the world as a procession of phantom forms, appearing and disappearing in the silent stillness of the sole reality of the Brahman. He could deny neither. He, therefore, conceded only a phenomenal, practical reality, *vyāvahārika satya*, to the world, but not eternal or *pāramārthika* (spiritual). Renunciation of the world and the speedy adoption of the ascetic life of the recluse for a total self-extinction in the Brahman were the inevitable corollary of this dual experience — *māyāmayam idaṁ nikhilaṁ hitvā*. But if he had gone beyond this experience of the immutable impersonality of the Akshara Brahman, he could have seen and realised the spiritual reality of the world too. He could have said in the unambiguous words of the Upanishads: *ātmata eva idaṁ sarvam*, from the self and from nothing but the Self (ewa) is this (world); *ātmā abhūt sarvabhūtāni*, the Self has become all these creatures and things.[120] He could have realised in the Purushottama, as the Gita makes abundantly clear and conclusive, or in the Purusha of the Veda and the Upanishads, the eternal oneness of Matter and Spirit, *annaṁ Brahma*, of the Self and the universe, of unity and multiplicity, *vidyā* and *avidyā*. That would have been, indeed, the true, the perfect Adwaita without the bewildering, inexplicable shadow of Maya hanging about it. But that was not to be. That was not the Will of the Divine and the Decree of the Time-Spirit. He had been commissioned to salvage the absolute reality of the Brahman out of the nebulous uncertainty and studied imprecision in which Buddhism had sunk it. He did a great service to Hinduism, and the greatness must not be impugned even if we find, as we certainly do in the light of the later developments of Hinduism, that his exclusive affirmation had to be supplemented and made all-embracing in order to reach the integral concept of the Purusha or the Purushottama. Each great soul comes to give to the world just what is needed at the moment, and nothing more. We shall treat

[120] *Akṣarāt saṁbhavati viśvaṁ* — The universe is born of the Akshara, the Immutable Absolute.

of Shankara's philosophy of Brahman and Maya elaborately in a subsequent chapter.

However, that was the experience Sri Aurobindo had when he sat with Lele for three days. He himself tells us that it was contrary to his own ideas, and, we can say, contrary to his natural inclinations too. For he was always, from the beginning, against life-negating or world-shunning Yoga. Later, as it is known to all, he travelled far beyond this initial, trenchant experience to the all-reconciling truth of the Supreme Person, *Vāsudevaḥ sarvam, puruṣāt na paraṁ kiñcit*. Writing again on the same experience, he says: "There was an entire silence of thought and feeling and all the ordinary movements of consciousness except the perception and recognition of things around without any accompanying concept or other reaction. The sense of ego disappeared and the movements of the ordinary life as well as speech and action were carried on by some habitual activity of Prakriti alone which was not felt as belonging to oneself. But the perception which remained saw all things as utterly unreal; this sense of unreality was overwhelming and universal. Only some undefinable Reality was perceived as true which was beyond space and time and unconnected with any cosmic activity, but yet was met wherever one turned. The condition remained unimpaired for several months and even when the sense of unreality disappeared and there was a return to participation in the world-consciousness, the inner peace and freedom which resulted from this realisation remained permanently behind all surface movements and the essence of the realisation was not lost. At the same time," here Sri Aurobindo comments on his later and fuller experiences, "an experience intervened: something else other than himself (Sri Aurobindo) took up this dynamic activity and spoke and acted through him but without any personal thought or initiation. What this was remained unknown until Sri Aurobindo came to realise the dynamic side of the Brahman, the Ishwara, and felt himself moved by that in all his sadhana and action. These realisations and others which followed upon them, such as that of the Self in all and all in the Self and all as the Self, the Divine in all and all in the Divine, are the heights... to which we can always rise; for they presented to him no long

or obstinate difficulty."[121] But even this was not the end. There were other heights to scale, other victories to win. But we shall study these things when we come to study his spiritual life as a whole. We shall only quote here a short poem which he wrote much later on this initial experience of Nirvanic calm and silence:

NIRVANA

All is abolished but the mute Alone.
The mind from thought released, the heart from grief
Grow inexistent now beyond belief;
There is no I, no Nature, known-unknown.
The city,[122] a shadow picture without tone,
Floats, quivers unreal; forms without relief
Flow, a cinema's vacant shapes; like a reef
Foundering in shoreless gulfs the world is done.

Only the illimitable Permanent
Is here. A Peace stupendous, featureless, still,
Replaces all, — what once was I, in It
A silent unnamed emptiness content
Either to fade in the Unknowable
Or thrill with the luminous seas of the Infinite.[123]

We have allowed ourselves this digression and this long excursion into spiritual matters in order to understand the precise nature of the first decisive experience which Sri Aurobindo had with Lele — an initial but

[121] *On Yog*a II, Tome II.

[122] He has the picture of the city of Bombay before him. We shall write about it in our next article.

[123] *Collected Poems* of Sri Aurobindo.

very powerful experience which became the granite base of his subsequent much wider and integrative realisations.

XI

"I have spoken to you about many things, about Swadeshi, Boycott, National Education, Arbitration and other subjects. But there was one truth that I have always tried, and those who have worked with me have also tried, to lay down as the foundation-stone of all that we preached. It is not by any political programme, not by National Education alone, not by Boycott alone, that this country can be saved. Swadeshi by itself may merely lead to a little more material prosperity, and when it does, you might lose sight of the real thing you sought to do in the glamour of wealth, in the attraction of wealth and in the desire to keep it safe.... Under the Roman Empire there was material development,[124] *there was industrial progress, but industrial progress and material development did not bring life to the Nation. When the hour of trial came, it was found that these nations which had been developing industrially, which had been developing materially, were not alive. No, they were dead, and at a touch from outside they crumbled to pieces.... What is the one thing needful? ... the idea that there is a great Power at work to help India, and that we are doing what it bids us.... God is there, and it is His mission, and He has something for us to do. He has a work for His great and ancient nation.... You have been called upon to do God's work."*

— Sri Aurobindo's speech in Bombay

[124] "when under the Emperors, the old Romans asked for nothing but bread and amusements, they became the most abject race conceivable, and... basely fell into slavery to the invading Barbarians." — Mazzini, *The Duties of Man*.

From Baroda Sri Aurobindo went to Poona.[125] Lele accompanied him at his request. When invited to deliver a speech, he asked Lele what he should do, since he was 'in that silent condition — without any thought in the mind'. "Lele told him to make Namaskar[126] to the audience and wait and speech would come to him from some other source than the mind. So, in fact, the speech came, and ever since all speech, writing, thought and outward activity have so come to him from the same source above the brain-mind."[127]

At Poona Sri Aurobindo delivered two lectures — the first on the 12th January on Ramamurty, then known as the Sandow of India, and in that connection, he spoke on the development of the will-power for national work, and the second on the 13th on National Movement in Bengal, which he characterised as God-inspired. Even the leaders, he said, could not believe that the movement would assume such huge proportions and be so mighty in its action and effect. Weak Bengalis had been filled with strength. The students showed such heroic courage and readiness for sacrificing themselves on the altar of the Motherland that they became the real leaders and the old leaders their followers. At the end of the meeting, Tilak summed up the speech and thanked the speaker.[128]

From Poona Sri Aurobindo went to Bombay. There, at Girgaum, he spoke on National Education on the 15th January, 1908. We reproduce below a few words from a report of the speech, published in Tilak's Marathy paper, *Kesari*: "The meaning of national education is now well understood in Bengal, but the case seems to be quite otherwise in this part

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[125] During his stay at Poona, he visited the Parvati hills where he had an experience in the form of a contact with the Infinite, similar to what he had before in Kashmir when he visited the Sankaracharya hills there. He had also a private interview with Tilak's Guru, Anna Saheb Patwardhan and with some of the young revolutionaries at Poona.

[126] Obeisance or salutation.

[127] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother.*

[128] Taken from authentic Marathi sources.

of the country. Even the Hon. Mr. Gokhale showed his ignorance of the matter by tampering at Surat with the wording of the resolution on national education passed at the Calcutta Congress. Some of these people appear to think that there can be no 'national' education for India, where, according to them, the existence of various conflicting creeds and races makes the growth of a feeling of nationality an impossibility. This view is utterly wrong. The very geographical position of the country, isolating it from other parts of the world, argues its separate national existence. Italy, which is isolated like India, achieved national independence within a space of thirty years. Shivaji, Akbar, Ashoka as well as the Rishis of old are amongst the component parts of the Indian nation. Let us learn from Japan how to awaken the national spirit among the people by a contemplation of the heroic deeds of our ancestors. Let us bear in mind that we have a debt to discharge not only towards our ancestors, but also to our posterity. If such a noble ideal is steadily kept before our mental vision, we shall see that our nation gives birth to great philosophers, statesmen, generals. This ideal has been kept in view in guiding the movement for national education in Bengal. In teaching geography, we impress upon the minds of our students that India is their motherland, and that Maharashtra produced Shivaji, that the Punjab was once ruled by Ranjit Singh, and that the Himalayas gave shelter to our ancient Rishis. History and philosophy, too, are taught in a similar manner with a view to awaken the spirit of nationality amongst the pupils. Nothing that is useful or important is neglected in the scheme, and instruction is, as far as possible, imparted in the vernacular.... In profiting by our contact with Western civilisation, we should be careful not to cut ourselves adrift from our original moorings, but should at the same time imitate the Japanese in taking the fullest advantage of modern scientific discoveries.[129] In political matters we have much to learn from the Western nations, and we shall also turn to them for lessons in popular Government. In our scheme of national education we teach students how to take an active

[129] Sri Aurobindo welcomed what was quickening and healthy in Western civilisation, and was in favour of harnessing modern scientific inventions to the welfare of man.

part in politics, as we believe that without such training their education will not be complete. As we teach them some handicrafts, they find it easy to obtain moderately remunerative employment on leaving our schools, which is not the case with pupils attending Government institutions. Our seventh standard equals the intermediate course of the Indian Universities. Self-reliance forms the guiding principle of our scheme of education. We do not look to Government for help, as we think that State assistance will destroy our national stamina...."[130] He made it perfectly clear that national education should be through the mother tongue, but that English should be retained as a secondary language. On the 19th January, Sri Aurobindo was asked to address a meeting held under the auspices of the Bombay National Union at Mahajanwadi. The subject of the speech was 'The Present Situation'. We have already quoted a few words from this speech at the head of this article, and we shall quote a few of the concluding words of it again. "...He is revealing Himself in you not that you may be like other nations, not that you may rise merely by human strength to trample under foot the weaker peoples, but because something must come out from you which is to save the whole world. That something is what the ancient Rishis knew and revealed, and that is to be known and revealed again today; it has to be revealed to the whole world, and in order that He may reveal Himself, you must first realise Him in yourselves, you must shape your lives, you must shape the lives of this great nation, so that it may be fit to reveal Him, and then your task will be done, and you will realise that what you are doing today is no mere political uprising, no mere political change, but that you have been called upon to do God's work."[131]

Tilak's paper, *Kesari*, published a report of the above speech from which we reproduce a few sentences: "Though the hand-bills announcing the lecture were published only four hours before the time fixed for the lecture, over three thousand people gathered to hear Babu Arvind Ghose. He...

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[130] *Source-Material of a History of the Freedom Movement in India* (Collected from Bombay Government Records, Vol. II, pp. 952-53).

[131] *Speeches* of Sri Aurobindo.

remarked that the secret of the new awakening in Bengal lay in a firm belief in the justice of the national cause and an abiding faith in God[132]... the national movement in Bengal was based on the fact that what seemed impossible to ordinary minds was easy to those who had unshakable faith in God. It is feelings like these that enabled the Bengalis to disregard harassments, floggings and incarceration...."[133]

In the last instalment of the Life of Sri Aurobindo, we promised our readers some explanation of the 'City', referred to in the poem, Nirvana, reproduced there. Let us now hear about it from Sri Aurobindo himself: "When I was in Bombay, from the balcony of the friend's house I saw the whole busy movement of Bombay as a picture in a cinema show, all unreal and shadowy. Ever since I have maintained that poise of mind — never lost it even in the midst of difficulties. All the speeches I delivered on my way to Calcutta were of the same nature — with some mixture of mental work in some parts."[134]

Sri Aurobindo left Bombay for Nasik. Before parting from Lele, he says, "I asked for his instructions. In the meantime I told him of a Mantra that had arisen in my heart. Suddenly, while giving instructions, he stopped and asked me if I could rely absolutely on Him who gave me the Mantra. I replied that I could always do that. Then Lele said that there was no need of further instructions."[135]

Regarding this state of the silent mind, Sri Aurobindo said later in one of his evening talks: "All that I wrote in the *Bande Mataram* and the *Karmayogin* was from this Yogic state. It used to run down to my pen while

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[132] "Faith in God burns with an immortal light through all the lies and corruption with which men have darkened His name." — Mazzini, *The Duties of Man*.

[133] *Source Material for a History of the Freedom Movement in India* (Collected from Bombay Government Records, Vol. II, pp. 952-53)

[134] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

[135] *Ibid*.

I sat down to write. I always trusted the inner Guide even when it seemed to be leading me astray....”[136]

At Nasik he delivered a lecture on 24th January on Swaraj. He said that Swaraj is life, Swaraj is amrita, Swaraj is mukti. Swaraj cannot be granted by any outside agency. Man is born free. If he has lost his freedom, he must regain it. Fitness for Swaraj can be acquired only in Swaraj. Among the means of winning Swaraj, he said, the first and greatest was faith in God. For, God[137] commands and inspires us to conquer our freedom. Tukaram and Ramdas spread the gospel of freedom, and Shivaji conquered it. God’s will was working through the youth of the country. He delivered another lecture there, but we have not been able to get any authentic record of it.

From Nasik Sri Aurobindo went to Dhulia and addressed there a meeting on the 25th on the subject of Swadeshi and Boycott. From Dhulia he went to Amraoti (Berar), where he spoke at the Grand Square of the National School on 29th. The meeting commenced with the singing of the Bande Mataram. He said that Bande Mataram was not only a national anthem to be looked on as the European nations look upon their own, but one charged with mighty power, being a sacred mantra, and revealed to us by the author of *Anandamath* (Bankim Chandra), who might be called an inspired Rishi. He criticised the so-called patriots of the time who might be well-wishers of India, but not men who loved her. He who loved his mother never looked to her defects, never disregarded her as an ignorant, superstitious, degraded and decrepit woman. He then touched upon the subject of the three koshas or sheaths of the nation. It was a subject of incalculable significance, one which revealed in a flash of light the esoteric knowledge which made him often speak of the soul of the nation and its age-old world-mission, and of God being the Guide of its destiny. As every man or creature has three sheaths or bodies, according to the Yogic knowledge of the ancients —

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[136] *Ibid.*

[137] “Do not abandon the banner which God has given you.” — Mazzini (*The Duties of Man*) “Your Country is the token of the mission which God has given you to fulfil in Humanity.” — *Ibid.*

sthūla or the gross body, *sūkṣma* or the subtle, and *kāraṇa* or the causal, so has a nation.[138] He who sees only the outer shell or body of the Indian nation, knows nothing of the essential and evolutionary truth of its soul. His patriotism may be intense, and his martyrdom noble-hearted and sincere, but it is a narrow and half-blind patriotism, a martyrdom, inspiring but ignorant, not instinct with knowledge. As it takes a Yogi — a Buddha, a Christ, or a Ramakrishna — to see the soul of a man lodged within his body, so it takes a Yogi to see the soul of a nation behind its geographical and cultural configurations. The very introduction of this truth must have gone home to his audience with a blaze of revelation.

A summary of the above speech is included in the *Speeches* of Sri Aurobindo. A brief report of it concludes with the following words: "The manner he treated of love and devotion was exceedingly touching, and the audience sat before him like dumb statues, not knowing where they were or whether they were listening to a prophet revealing to them the higher mysteries of life...."[139]

From Amraoti Sri Aurobindo went to Nagpur, and delivered three lectures there. The subject of the first lecture, delivered on the 30th January, was Policy of the Nationalist Party. The subject of the second on the 31st was 'The Work' before us.

In the second lecture he impressed upon his audience the truth of his constant experience that behind the political movement there was the divine Power, and that it was not the leaders but God Himself who was leading it. It was, indeed, a spiritual revolution preluded and prepared by a political revolution. If they wanted to re-create or reconstruct the nation, they must prepare themselves for the utmost sacrifice. On the 1st February he delivered his third lecture — 'Commercial Swaraj' and 'Educational

[138] He deals with this subject in his book, *The Human Cycle* and we have already referred to it before.

[139] *Speeches* of Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo at Amraoti, 1908

Swaraj'.[140] It pained him to see, he said, that some of the mill-owners in Bombay and Calcutta were opposing the growth of the Swadeshi industry. He appealed to the rich to come forward to help Swadeshi even at a sacrifice. He asserted that if the nation had commercial and educational Swaraj, political Swaraj would follow as a natural consequence.

[140] According to the report published in the *Bande Mataram* of the 9th February, 1908, the subject of this lecture was Swadeshi and Boycott. But an authentic Marathy source differs.

In these lectures, most of which are not available in the original English form,[141] Sri Aurobindo spoke, or, to be more exact, was made to speak, of God being the leader of the manifold renaissance in India and her mission of giving the spiritual light to humanity. His politics had become one with his Yoga. He was a unique phenomenon in Indian politics — a Yogi-politician, who was at once a God-directed prophet and preacher of spiritual nationalism and an inscrutable but consummate political strategist.

Concluding his political tour[142] of Maharashtra, which is said to have been undertaken at the instance of Tilak, Sri Aurobindo returned from Nagpur to Calcutta.

[141] That is why we have devoted so much of our limited space to a reproduction of some parts of them here. If nothing else, they have a considerable historical and biographical value.

[142] It was not a regular tour with a pre-arranged plan and programme. As Sri Aurobindo says: "There was no tour. Sri Aurobindo went to Poona with Lele and after his return to Bombay went to Calcutta. All the speeches he made were at this time (except those at Bombay and at Baroda) at places on his way wherever he stopped for a day or two." — *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

"The long ages of discipline which India underwent are now drawing to an end. A great light is dawning on the East, a light whose first heralding glimpses are already seen on the horizon; a new day is about to break, so glorious that even the last of the Avatars cannot be sufficient to explain it, although without him it would not have come. The perfect expression of Hindu spirituality was the signal for the resurgence of the East. Mankind has long been experimenting with various kinds of thought, different principles of ethics, strange dreams of a perfection to be gained by material means, impossible millenniums and humanitarian hopes. Nowhere has it succeeded in realising the ultimate secret of life. Nowhere has it found satisfaction. No scheme of society or politics has helped it to escape from the necessity of sorrow, poverty, strife, dissatisfaction, from which it strives for an outlet; for whoever is trying to find one by material means must inevitably fail. The East alone has some knowledge of the truth, the East alone can teach the West, the East alone can save mankind. Through all these ages Asia has been seeking for a light within, and whenever she has been blessed with a glimpse of what she seeks, a great religion has been born, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Mahomedanism, with all their countless sects. But the grand workshop of spiritual experiment, the laboratory of the soul has been India, where thousands of great spirits have been born in every generation, who were content to work quietly in their own souls, perfect their knowledge, hand down the results of the experiments to a few disciples and leave the rest to others to complete. They did not hasten to proselytise, were in no way eager to proclaim themselves, but merely added

their quota of experiencee and returned to the source from which they had come. The immense reservoir of spiritual energy stored up by their self-repression was the condition of the birth of Avatars, of men so full of God that they could not be satisfied with their silent bliss, but poured it out on the world,... because they wished to communicate their own ecstasy of realisation to others who were fit to receive it either by previous tapasya or by the purity of their desires. What Christianity failed to do, what Mahomedanism strove to accomplish for a brief period and among a limited number of men, Hinduism as summed up in the life of Sri Ramakrishna has to attempt for all the world. This is the reason of India's resurgence, this is why God has breathed life into her once more, why great souls are at work to bring about her salvation, why a sudden change is coming over the hearts of her sons. The movement of which the first outbreak was political will end in a spiritual consummation."

Spirituality and Nationalism — Bande Mataram,
28.3.1908

If we read the speeches and writings of the post-Surat period of Sri Aurobindo's life between the lines, we cannot fail to notice in them a more emphatic, a more insistent and prophetic expression of the spiritual destiny of India and the real work to be done not only for her political emancipation, but for the fulfilment of that destiny. Not that this note was absent from his previous utterances, but it now acquired a greater volume, a greater momentum, and a more piquant urgency. The seed he wanted to sow had been sown, the spirit he wanted to kindle in the nation had been kindled, and though brutal repression strove to snuff it out, it succeeded only in driving it under the ashes for a while. The Moderates, as we have already said, remained in apparent possession of the National Congress,

but their lily-white loyalty to the Government was constantly under severe strain, for the gilt had gone off the ginger-bread of British justice.

After Sri Aurobindo's return to Bengal, Barin wrote to Lele, inviting him to come to Calcutta. Lele came, probably in the first week of February, and was put up for some time at Seal's Lodge.[143] Barin's idea in inviting Lele was that he might prove the right person to give some spiritual instructions and spiritual force to the youth of the revolutionary party. For, it was thought that spiritual instruction and force imparted by a Yogi would create in them a spirit of self-sacrifice for a noble cause and defiance of suffering and death. It had, indeed, been an almost invariable practice with the ardent nationalists of Bengal to derive inspiration for their work from the scriptures. The Gita, as we have already seen, was the most favourite of their books. Its popularity was to a great extent due to the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. It played a great part in firing the soul of modern India and rousing the nation to a renewed sense of the greatness of active life. Its gospel of selfless, disinterested work, done as an offering to the Divine without any desire for its fruit, can be said to be the most powerful factor in the renaissance of the nation and in the shaping of the progressive mind in modern India. And it is the one gospel that has linked India to the West, and inaugurated a new age of dynamic spirituality, pregnant with incalculable possibilities.

When Lele saw the nature of the work the young men of the revolutionary party were engaged in — making of bombs and preparing for terroristic activity and armed revolt, — he tried his best to dissuade them from it. He said that those dangerous activities would land them in great danger, and not lead to the liberation of the country. Liberation, he prophesied, would come in a different way, in a way not conceived by them. But they were in no mood to listen to his sage advice. High ran their enthusiasm, and their thirst for freedom was driving them to desperate action.

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[143] *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A. B. Purani.

Lele met Sri Aurobindo at his residence at 23, Scott's Lane by appointment. He asked Sri Aurobindo whether he was doing meditation regularly every morning and evening, but when he was told that it was not done in that routine way, "he was alarmed, tried to undo what he had done and told me that it was not the Divine but the devil that had got hold of me."[144] Sri Aurobindo had, indeed, gone beyond Lele's depth. It was the direct and constant guidance of the Divine to which he was fully surrendered, and his meditation or concentration continued automatically night and day. "I had received the command from within that a human Guru was not necessary for me."[145] However, Sri Aurobindo always cherished a respectful sense of gratitude for Lele, but their spiritual relation was now broken. Lele went back.

On the 23rd February, 1908, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Bande Mataram*: "Swaraj is the direct revelation of God to this people — not mere political freedom but a freedom vast and entire, freedom of the individual, freedom of the community, freedom of the nation, spiritual freedom, social freedom, political freedom. Spiritual freedom the ancient Rishis had already declared to us; social freedom was part of the message of Buddha, Chaitanya, Nanak and Kabir and the saints of Maharashtra; political freedom is the last word of the triune gospel. Without political freedom the soul of man is crippled. Only a few mighty spirits can rise above their surroundings, but the ordinary man is a slave of his surroundings, and if these be mean, servile and degraded, he himself will be mean, servile and degraded. Social freedom can only be born where the soul of man is large, free and generous, not enslaved to petty aims and thoughts. Social freedom is not the result of social machinery but of the freedom of the human intellect and the nobility of the human soul.... So too spiritual freedom can never be the lot of many in a land of slaves. A few may follow the path of the Yogin and rise above their surroundings, but the mass of men cannot even take the first step towards spiritual salvation. We do not believe that

[144] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

[145] *Evening Talks* Part II — by A.B. Purani.

the path of salvation lies in selfishness. If the mass of men around us is miserable, fallen, degraded, how can the seeker after God be indifferent to the condition of his brothers? Compassion to all creatures is the condition of sainthood, and the perfect Yogin is he who is *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ*, whose mind is full of the will to do good to all creatures.... God is not only in Himself but in all these millions.... God has set apart India as the eternal fountain-head of holy spirituality, and He will never suffer that fountain to run dry. Therefore Swaraj has been revealed to us. By our political freedom we shall once more recover our spiritual freedom. Once more in the land of the saints and sages will burn up the fire of the ancient Yoga and the hearts of her people will be lifted up into the neighbourhood of the Eternal."

Nothing reflects so well the inmost thoughts of Sri Aurobindo as the words like these quoted above. They were written just after his return from Surat. They presage the great change that was coming upon him, necessitating a corresponding change in his life and work. The horizons were already flushing with the dawning glory of a greater fight and a vaster, mightier conquest. We learn from these words that Sri Aurobindo disparaged the goal of personal salvation, just as Sri Ramakrishna had done before him. He held to the ancient ideal of realising God in His immanence as well as in His transcendence, in the Many as well as in the One. To experience God and be united with Him in all beings and becomings in the universe as well as in His inconceivable Absoluteness has always been the great goal he pursued in his whole life. We learn also from the above words that by freedom Sri Aurobindo meant not only political and economic freedom, not only social freedom, but the integral freedom — spiritual, social, political and economic — and, not only the freedom of the nation, but of each community comprising the nation, and each individual in each community. It was to this ideal of integral freedom — and freedom not only of one nation but of all nations, integral freedom of all humanity — that he had dedicated his life. That was God's intention in him and his soul's mission. But how could this integral freedom of all humanity be won if he stuck on to the political field and refused God's call upon him? He had now

to work on other planes of existence and channel their light and power into the earth atmosphere. He had to prepare a rainbow bridge between earth and Heaven.

A question is likely to occur in the reader's mind at this stage, and we had better dispose of it before we proceed farther. If Lele's prediction of India's regaining independence by peaceful means and not by revolutionary methods was true, as subsequent history has demonstrated, why did Sri Aurobindo work on for some time more in the same political sphere, pursuing the same militant policies? As a Yogi, did he not foresee that the revolutionary methods would avail nothing and that much of what he was doing would not only lead him into unmerited suffering, but itself be broken up and almost wiped out by the repressive measures of the Government and the unorganised, sporadic activities of the valiant but reckless youth? Why did he not retire to the spiritual field of his work earlier than he did? And, above all, how to account for his continuing in politics even after his release from a year's detention in the Alipore jail where he had undergone a great transformation of consciousness in consequence of the flooding spiritual experiences he had there?

Sri Aurobindo was a Yogi-politician, as we have already said, and not a retired Yogi like Lele. He not only foresaw the future, but had to work in the present in order to prepare the future. He could not sit back and hold his hand, lapsing into the attitude of an indifferent onlooker. He could not let the present slither and reel into a shipwreck of its possibilities of progress. Nor could he retire to his spiritual work before he received God's direction towards it. The Yogi knows that in a divinely directed course failures carry the seed of success, and even a huge destruction, if it is inevitable in the inscrutable dispensation of Providence, prepares the world for a great new creation. Sri Krishna had to play on his central but veiled part in the battle of Kurukshetra, though its disastrous end was not hidden from his knowledge and vision. The greatest leaders of mankind combine in themselves the knowledge of the Brahmin and the Power of the Kshatriya in order that chaos may be converted into order and harmony and darkness be laundered into light. The evolutionary march of man cannot stop short

of its destined goal. Humanity has to be led forward, though often it may stumble and fall. Sri Aurobindo left the political field only when he was called, being assured from within that the freedom's struggle, which he had worked for with so much devotion and sacrifice, would continue, with whatever ups and downs, till India became free. And we know that his retirement was not into the cell of a recluse, but into the boundless domains of spiritual new-creation.

"The aspiration towards freedom has for some time been working in some hearts, but they relied on their own strength for the creation of the necessary conditions and they failed, and of those who worked, some gave up the work, others persisted, a few resorted to tapasyā, the effort to awake in themselves a higher Power to which they might call for help. The tapasyā of those last had its effect unknown to themselves, for they were pouring out a selfless aspiration into the world and the necessary conditions began to be created. When these conditions were far advanced, the second class who worked on began to think that it was the result of their efforts, but the secret springs were hidden from them. They were merely the instruments through which the purer aspiration of their old friends fulfilled itself.

If the conditions of success are to be yet more rapidly brought about, it must be by yet more of the lovers of freedom withdrawing themselves from the effort to work through the lower self. The aspiration of these strong souls purified from self will create fresh workers in the field, infuse the great desire for freedom in the heart of the nation and hasten the growth of the necessary material strength.

What is needed now is a band of spiritual workers whose tapasyā will be devoted to the liberation of India for the service of humanity.... We need an institution in which under the guidance of highly spiritual men workers will be trained for every field, workers for self-defence, workers for arbitration, for sanitation, for famine relief, for every species of work which is needed to bring about the necessary conditions for the organisation of Swaraj. If the country is to be free, it must first organise itself so as to be

> *able to maintain its freedom. The winning of freedom is an easy task, the keeping of it is less easy. The first needs only one tremendous effort in which all the energies of the country must be concentrated; the second requires a united, organised and settled strength. If these two conditions are satisfied, nothing more is needed, for all else is detail and will inevitably follow. For the first condition the requisite is a mighty selfless faith and aspiration filling the hearts of men as in the day of Mazzini. For the second, India, which has no Piedmont to work out her salvation, requires to organise her scattered strengths into a single and irresistible whole....”*
>
> — “The Need of the Moment”, *Bande Mataram*

The above extract from the *Bande Mataram*, like those we have already quoted before, spotlights the essential nature of the politics of which Sri Aurobindo was the pioneer in Bengal, “...lovers of freedom withdrawing themselves from the effort to work through the lower self.” He called upon the national workers to lay a spiritual foundation in their nature and make of their work for Mother India a consecrated service of the Divine and an obedient following of His Will when it revealed itself in them. “A band of spiritual workers whose *tapasyā* will be devoted to the liberation of India for the service of humanity.” It is again the same recurring burden of the song of Sri Aurobindo’s soul — India rising for humanity. As each individual worker must rise above his lower normal self in order to qualify for the service of Mother India, so the nation must rise from its lower collective self so as to be able to serve a supra-national entity, humanity. And, as in the case of the individual, so in the case of the nation, service of humanity is the only true service in the present age, not for the sake of humanity itself as such, but because spiritual liberation of humanity is the Will of God. God is raising India for the purpose of fulfilling this epochal aim.

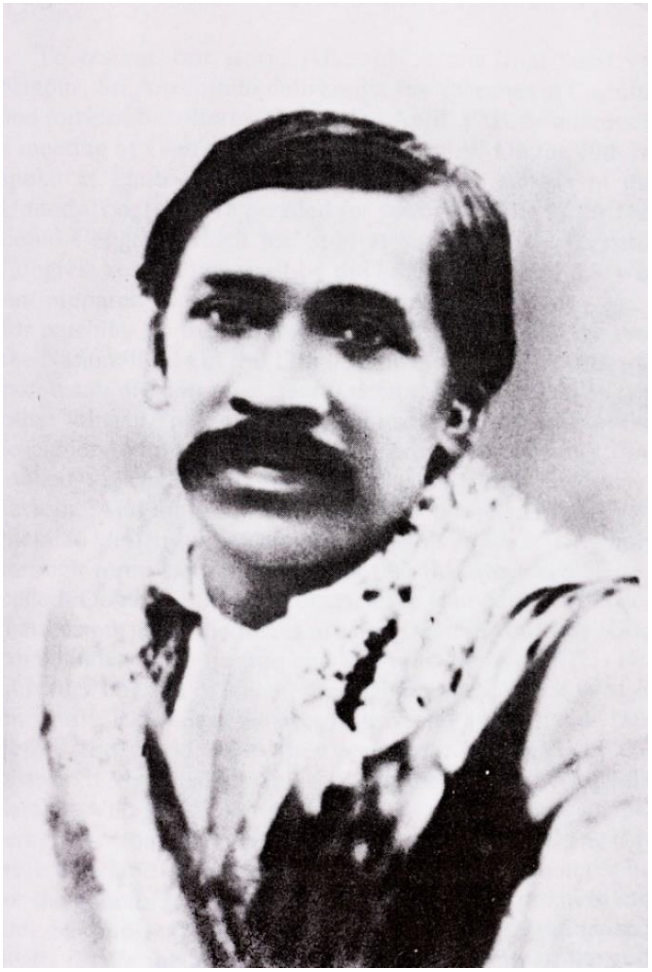
Before we take up the thread of our narrative, let us give a gist of what Swami Pratyagatmananda (his pre-sannyasa name was Sri Pramathanath Mukhopadhyaya) has been kind enough to send in the form of his reminiscences of Sri Aurobindo during his contact with him in the National College where they were colleagues.[146]

"The beginning of the present century was a period of epochal transitions. Not only in Maharashtra and Bengal, which were the leaders of the revolutionary political thought in India, but in all provinces of India, there was the stirring of a new life and an awakening to the imperative need of an all-round development of man, not confined to one or a few, but spreading to all spheres of national existences. And it was not only in India. There was the same ferment, the same mighty awakening in the mass, whose natural rhythm was revolution all over the world. Man yearned for freedom, for an unhampered growth of his whole personality, for progress towards an integrated and harmonious life, individual and collective. Synthesis, integrality, harmony, and unity were the goal towards which humanity aspired and advanced. In the poet's dream it figured as the emergence of the universal man, in the mind of the spiritual seeker it meant the attainment of Swarajya, and in the vision of the Rishi it was the Integral Yoga destined to transform half-animal man into a dynamic divinity.

"In Indian politics there were three men embodying in various degrees this urge and yearning — Tilak, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, and Sri Aurobindo. Of these, Tilak died before he could realise his dream, and the sun of fiery Brahmabandhab's life set before he had completed his worship of the Mother. Only Sri Aurobindo lived to realise his vision of Purna Swaraj, of the integral freedom and perfection of man on earth. We get a

[146] The Swamiji is an acknowledged authority on Indian philosophies, and particularly on Tantra. He collaborated with Sir John Woodroffe in his masterly exposition of the basic principles and practices of Tantric sadhana. He is equally at home in philosophy and science, and shows a true insight into the fundamental truths of both the branches of knowledge.

view of his integral vision in his *Essays on the Gita, The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Life Divine*.



Sri Aurobindo at Calcutta, 1908

"In the beginning I sought to recognise in Sri Aurobindo the Vedic Agni in its dual aspect — the blazing force of Rudra and the serene force of the Brahmic consciousness, radiant with supernal knowledge. When he started his work in the heaving politics of Bengal, it was the blazing, fiery aspect of Rudra that stood out in front. But those who associated with him in the National College saw his serene figure, glowing with a mellow lustre. These two aspects were fused into one in Sri Aurobindo as in the third eye of Shiva.

"From among the days when I came into close contact with Sri Aurobindo, I can single out two in my memory: One day there was a meeting of the teachers of the National College. Sri Aurobindo was in the

chair, his body framed in august silence. We always knew him to be reticent and reserved in speech. The subject discussed in the meeting was: which should be the days of national festival? Somebody proposed that Bankim Day should be one of them, and all of us gave it an enthusiastic support. But the support which came from Sri Aurobindo had the benign vibrant blare of the trumpet of Shiva.

"Another day. It was the day of Saraswati Puja. We were all squatting in the courtyard. Sri Aurobindo sat next to me, his heavenly body almost touching mine. The Vaishnavic music of Kirtan was playing. It moved me so profoundly that I could not restrain my tears — they flowed in an incessant stream of ecstasy. But Sri Aurobindo sat, silent and immobile, like Shiva in trance. Even now when I shut my eyes, his gracious, tranquil, luminous face swims up into my vision. I, had known him as a Jnana Yogi and a Karma Yogi. But on that day, as if in a flash of intuition, I beheld him as a Purna Yogi, lapped in the Yogic sleep of deep meditation. And, all of a sudden, an appeal of vibrant poignancy swept out of the deepest chord of my soul: 'Tell me, when wilt thou reveal thyself as the living, transcendent embodiment of the Purna (integral) Yoga and the integral liberation? Come, manifest thyself, India, bent and humbled, calls for thy advent.' To the image of that resplendent divinity my heart chanted forth a hymn: 'I bow to thee, Sri Aurobindo, I salute thee.'"

To resume our story. After his return from Surat via Nagpur, Sri Aurobindo delivered a few speeches in Calcutta and some of its suburbs. On the 8th April, 1908, he addressed a meeting at Chetla near Chandernagore.[147] On the 10th he spoke at Panti's Math in Calcutta on the subject of the United Congress. He pleaded for restoring unity to the National Congress which had split at Surat. But the Calcutta Congress resolutions must be the basis of the unity. He was not prepared to sacrifice the Calcutta resolutions as a price for patching up the differences between the Moderates and the Nationalists. On the 12th he delivered a speech at

[147] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

Baruipur, a sub-division town near Calcutta, where he said among other things: "...We in India fell under the influence of the foreigners' Maya which completely possessed our souls... we looked to England as our exemplar and took her as our saviour. And all this was Maya and bondage.... We helped them to destroy what life there was in India.... It is only through repression and suffering that this Maya can be dispelled. Do not be afraid of obstacles in your path, it does not matter how great the forces are that stand in your way, God commands you to be free and you must be free.... It is not our work but that of something mightier that compels us to go on until all bondage is swept away and India stands free before the world." He then went to Kishoreganj in the district of Mymensingh and spoke at the Conference of Palli Samity (Village Worker's Association). We can quote a few sentences from that speech which reads so topical, as if it were delivered only yesterday: "...foreign rule can never be for the good of a nation, never work for its true progress and life, but must always work towards its disintegration and death.... We in India had our own instruments of life and growth; we had the self-dependent village; we had the Zamindar as the link between the village units and the central governing body, and the central governing body itself was one in which the heart of the nation beat... If we are to survive as a nation we must restore the centres of strength which are natural and necessary to our growth, and the first of these, the basis of all the rest, the old foundation of Indian life and secret of Indian vitality was the self-dependent and self-sufficient village organism. If we are to organise Swaraj we must base it on the village. But we must at the same time take care to avoid the mistake which did much in the past to retard our national growth[148]. The village must not in our new national life be isolated as well as self-sufficient, but must feel itself bound-up with the life of its neighbouring units, living with them in a common group for common

[148] Though Sri Aurobindo's yogic vision embraced both the past and the future, it was as unerring in the detection of the defects and deficiencies of the past as in the perception of the potentialities of the future.

purposes; each group again must feel itself part of the life of the district, living in the district unity, so each district must not be engrossed in its own separate existence but feel itself a subordinate part of the single life of the province, and the province in its turn of the single life of the country. Such is the plan of reconstruction we have taken in hand, but to make it a healthy growth and not an artificial construction, we must begin at the bottom and work up to the apex. The village is the cell of the national body and the cell-life must be healthy and developed. *Swaraj begins from the village*.... There may have been a time in history when it was enough that a few classes... should be awake. But the organisation of the modern nation depends on the awakening of the political sense in the mass. This is the age of the people, the million, the democracy.... The work of the village Samity will be to make the masses feel Swaraj in the village, Swaraj in the group of villages, Swaraj in the district, Swaraj in the nation. They cannot immediately rise to the conception of Swaraj in the nation, they must be trained to it through the perception of Swaraj in the village. The political education of the masses is impossible unless you organise the village Samity." He says that "Unless we organise the united life of the village we cannot bridge over the gulf between the educated and the masses." How much enlightened and inspired we all felt when these very words written by Sri Aurobindo in 1908 echoed on the lips of Mahatma Gandhi in 1918 onwards!

Dark clouds began now to gather on the political horizon. Violent, remorseless repression of the freedom-workers was just biding its time for an organised sweep. Sri Aurobindo knew what was brewing in the atmosphere and heard the rumble of the approaching storm.[149] He decided

[149] "The times are thickening already with the shadow of a great darkness.... The fair hopes of an orderly and peaceful evolution of self-government, which the first energies of the new movement had fostered, are gone for ever. Revolution, bare and grim, is preparing her battlefield, mowing down the centres of order which were evolving a new cosmos and building up the materials of a gigantic downfall and a mighty new creation. We could have wished it otherwise, but God's will be done." — 29th April, 1908.

to move from 23 Scott's Lane to another house. All of a sudden an opportunity offered itself. Monoranjan Guha Thakurta, a leading journalist and nationalist worker, had been finding himself hard put to it to run his Bengali paper, *Navashakti*. When Sri Aurobindo came to know of it, he at once advised Monoranjan to entrust the charge of *Navashakti* to Abinash Chandra Battacharya, who had been the manager of the *Yugantar*, and Sri Aurobindo's trusted follower and house keeper. Abinash transferred the charge of the *Yugantara* to another man, and Sri Aurobindo and himself lost no time in moving to the house where Navashakti had its office, i.e. 48 Grey Street. This was a providential move, for it turned the whole course of the Alipore Bomb Case and saved Sri Aurobindo from the trap so tactfully laid for him by the British bureaucracy.

On the 30th April, two young men of the revolutionary party, Khudiram and Prafulla Chaki, were detailed to Mazaffarpur to throw a bomb at Mr. Kingsford, the District Magistrate, against whom the whole country had a bitter resentment for his drastic persecution of the nationalist press and the brutal flogging of a very young boy in the previous year when he was the Chief Presidency Magistrate in Calcutta. "In attempting to kill Mr. Kingsford, Mrs. and Miss Kennedy were murdered by a bomb thrown at their carriage, while they were coming out of their club, by a boy named Khudiram Bose."[150] The opportune moment, eagerly-awaited by the Government, had at last arrived. The storm of repression Sri Aurobindo had foreseen burst upon the national workers. And Sri Aurobindo had to bear the brunt of it. He was considered the arch-culprit, the one leader whose personal magnetism, fiery writings, and extraordinary intelligence and organisational genius were alone responsible for the reckless daring and spirit of sacrifice exhibited by the young revolutionaries. "Acting on more definite information the police obtained search warrants and on the early morning of 2nd May 1908, simultaneously searched several places in and

[150] *The Alipore Bomb Trial* by Bejoy Krishna Bose (1922).

about Calcutta."[151] We shall hear from Sri Aurobindo himself a very interesting account of the search of his house and his arrest.

[151] *The Alipore Bomb Trial* by Bejoy Krishna Bose (1922).

XIV

LIFE IN ALIPORE JAIL

"The Indians, as the discerning Mahratta leader (Tilak) rightly observes, possess many good and amiable traits of character but the manly side of it has of late been not much in evidence. It is no doubt a little curious how contrary to all our traditions we have been carrying into practice the doctrine of turning the left cheek while smitten on the right, while those who are to accept it as the only one rule of their conduct have become most pushing, aggressive and militant. It is an irony of fate that we have been violating the teachings of our own sacred books and going contrary to the dictates of our sages while other races seem to have fully realised their importance and made them their guiding principle in life. The most practical teaching of the Gita and one for which it is of abiding interest and value to the men of the world with whom life is a series of struggles is not to give way to any morbid sentimentality when duty demands sternness and boldness to face terrible things. ...In asking our people to cultivate national virtues, Tilak only wants them to be animated by a strong and overmastering feeling for their own flesh and blood, kith and kin who are fast deteriorating and will soon be extinct as a nation if the present selfish and peace-at-any-price tendencies are not at once stopped."

Bande Mataram — 29-9-1907[152]

[152] "This non-violence, therefore, seems to me to be due mainly to our helplessness. It almost appears as if we are nursing in our bosoms the desire to take revenge the first time we get the opportunity. Can true, voluntary non-violence come out of this seeming, forced non-violence of the weak? Is it not a futile experiment I am conducting? What if, when the fury burst, not a man, woman or child is safe and every

"On the 1st May, 1908, while I was sitting in the office of the *Bande Mataram*, Sj. Shyamsundar Chakravarty handed me a wire from Muzaffarpore. I read in it that a bomb had exploded at Muzaffarpore and two European ladies had been killed. On that very day, I read further in the *Empire* that the Police Commissioner had said that we knew who were in this murder plot and that they would soon be arrested. I did not know then that I was the main target of their suspicion, I the arch-murderer, according to the police, and the guide and secret leader of the young revolutionary nationalists. I did not know that that day was the last page of a chapter of my life, that there lay before me the prospect of a year's imprisonment, that for that period all my connection with the world would be cut off, and that I had to live like a caged beast for one whole year outside the pale of human society. When I should return to my field of work, it would not be the same old, familiar Aurobindo Ghose, but a new man, coming out of the Alipore Ashram, with a new character, a new intellect, a new heart, and a new mind, and with the burden of a new work upon him. I have said, it was a year-long imprisonment, I should have said, it was a year-long life in a forest, a year-long life in an Ashram. I had endeavoured hard and long for a direct vision and realisation of Narayana, who dwells in my heart, and cherished an intense hope of winning Purushottama, the Creator of the universe, as my Friend and Master. But I could not succeed on account of the pull of a thousand worldly desires, attachments to various activities, and the dense obscurity of ignorance. At last Sri Hari, who is infinitely kind and gracious, slew those enemies at a stroke and cleared my path, pointed to an abode of Yoga, and Himself stayed there with me as my Guru (spiritual Guide) and intimate Comrade. That Ashram or hermitage was a British prison.... The only fruit of the scowl of the British Government was that I realised God...

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man's hand is raised against his neighbour?" — Mahatma Gandhi (quoted in "*A Bend in the Ganges*" by Manohar Malgonkar)

“On Friday night I was sleeping a reposeful sleep when at about five in the morning, my sister rushed into my room in a terror and called me up by my name. I awoke. In a moment the small room was filled with armed policemen. It was a motley crowd including Superintendent Craegan, Mr. Clark of the Twenty-four Parganas, the graceful and delightful figure of the well-known Sri Binode Kumar Gupta, some Inspectors, and a number of policemen, detectives and witnesses to the search. Pistols in hand, they dashed forward in a gesture of heroic challenge, as if they had come to storm a well-guarded fortress. I sat up, still half asleep, when Mr. Craegan asked me: ‘Where is Aravinda Ghose, is it you?’ ‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘I am Aravinda Ghose.’ At once he ordered a policeman to arrest me. Then a very uncivil expression used by Mr. Craegan led to a short passage-at-arms between us. I asked him to produce the search warrant, which I read and signed. I understood from the mention of bombs in the warrant that the appearance of the police army was in connection with the Muzaffarpore murder.... Immediately, at Craegan’s order I was handcuffed and a cord of rope was tied round my waist, and a Hindu constable stood behind me holding the rope.... Craegan asked me: ‘You are a graduate, aren’t you? Isn’t it shameful for an educated man like you to sleep on the floor of such a bare room in such a poky house?’ ‘I am poor, and I live like a poor man’, I answered. Sharp banged the riposte of the Englishman: ‘Was it then for becoming rich that you have staged this ghastly tragedy?’ Thinking that it was hardly possible to make this thick-headed Englishman understand the greatness of patriotism, self-sacrifice, or the discipline of self-inflicted poverty, I desisted from the effort.

“It (the search) began at five in the morning and ended at about eleven-thirty.... At about eleven-thirty we set out from home.... Benode Babu was commissioned to take us to the police station.... Taking our bath and meal, we started for Lalbazar. After making us wait there for several hours, they took us to Royd Street, and we passed the time at that auspicious place till the evening. At Royd Street I first came to know and strike up a friendship with the reputed detective, Moulvi Shams-Ul-Alam. The reverend Moulvi treated me to a very delicious lecture on religion. ‘Hinduism and Islam

have the same cardinal doctrines, the three letters, A U M of the Hindus (Aum), and the first three letters of the Koran, A La Am are the same, for, according to philological rules, U is used instead of La. So, Hinduism and Islam have the same basic creed.... To be truthful in speech is also a principal part of religion. It is a matter of great sorrow and shame for India that English officials allege that Aravinda Ghose is the leader of a gang of murderers. But if one can stick to truth, the situation can yet be saved.' The Moulvi confessed to his conviction that high-minded men like Bepin Pal and Aravinda Ghose were sure to make a clean breast of whatever they have done.... I was amazed and pleased at his erudition, intelligence and keen religious sense. Thinking that it would be sheer presumption on my part to talk much, I docilely listened to his invaluable precept and stamped it carefully upon my heart.... But drunk with such a strong religious fervour as he was, he never gave up his post of a detective....

"We (Sailen and I) were kept together in a first floor big room at Lalbazar police station. A slight refection did duty for a meal. Presently two Englishmen entered the room, one of whom, as I learnt later, was the Police Commissioner, Mr. Haliday himself. On seeing us both together, Mr. Haliday flew out at the Sergeant and, referring to me, warned him that nobody should be allowed to stay or speak with me. Instantly, Sailen was whisked away into another room and shut in. And when all had left, Mr. Haliday asked me: 'Don't you feel ashamed to have been involved in this dastardly misdeed?' 'What right have you to assume that I was involved?' Haliday replied: 'I did not assume, I know everything.' 'You know best what you know or don't know. I totally deny having had anything to do with this murder', I said. Haliday held his peace.

"From Mr. Thornhill's Court, we were driven to Alipore.... We had to wait there in the Magistrate's Court, but we were not produced before the Magistrate, only his written order was brought from inside the Court.... We were then removed from the Court and handed over to the officers of the jail. We were given a bath before we entered the jail and dressed in jail

uniforms, and our underwears, shirts and dhutis[153] were taken away for a wash. To have a bath after four days was, indeed, a heavenly delight. The bath over, they escorted everybody to the room assigned to him, and I, too, entered my lonely cell. The grating of the cell closed. My prison-life began on 5th May. I was released the next year on 6th May....

"My solitary cell was nine feet by five. It had no windows, only there was a big iron grating in front. This was the cage assigned to me.

"Having favoured us with such lodgings, our kind-hearted authorities, in their solicitude for the entertainment of their guests, left nothing to be desired in the matter of its furniture. The courtyard was adorned with a dish and a bowl. If polished well, this dish and this bowl, my sole possession, would put on such a silvery sheen that my heart felt gladdened and refreshed. But the only trouble was that the very sight of my joy would send the dish into such transports of rapture that at a slight pressure of my finger, it would start pirouetting like the whirling Dervish of Arabia. I had, then, no go but to hold the dish with one hand and eat with the other. Otherwise, in its giddy whirligig, it would scuttle with the handful of incomparable food supplied in the jail. The bowl was even dearer and more useful than the dish. It was, as it were, a Civilian among the material objects. As the Civilian has a natural aptitude and skill for all jobs — he has only to be asked and he can at once become a judge, an administrator, a policeman, the head of the Revenue department, the mayor of a municipality, a teacher, a religious preceptor, and what not — and as it is very easy for him to combine in himself in a friendly alliance in a single body and at the same time the roles of an investigator, complainant, police judge, and even sometimes a barrister for the plaintiff, so was it for my bowl. It had no caste, no scruples. I performed my ablutions, washed my mouth and took my bath from it, and afterwards, at meal-time, soup of pulses and curry were served in it. I drank water and rinsed my mouth and washed my hands from it. It was possible only in a British jail to have such a precious factotum of an article. Besides ministering to my worldly needs,

[153] A long piece of cloth worn round the loins by males.

the bowl came to be a means of my Yoga or spiritual discipline. Where could I have found such a helper and instructor in my efforts to get rid of hatred?... I know that in some parts of Europe it is considered a component of civilised custom to have the water-closet adjacent to one's bedroom, but to have in a small cell, bedroom, dining room and water-closet all together — well, this is called too much of a good thing. We, superstitious Indians, find it very difficult to attain to such a high level of civilisation.

"...As a result of my long and desperate struggles with thirst, I succeeded in achieving freedom from it. In this furnace of a cell, I had two jail-made coarse rugs as an apology for a bedding.... When heat would be unbearable, I would roll on the ground to cool my body, and felt relieved. I realised, then, how very pleasant is the touch of the mother earth. But in a jail even this touch was not very soft.... Whenever there was a thunderstorm, my cage would be flooded after the bacchanal of high winds laden with swirling dirt, dry leaves and straw. I could not, then, help escaping into a corner with my damp rugs and take shelter there for the night....

"...It is true that the causes of hardship, which I have pointed out, were there, but thanks to the kindly grace of the Divine, it was not for long that I suffered from them.... For, after a short while, I got beyond the sense of hardship and discomfort and became immune to suffering. That is why when the memory of my jail-life recurs to my mind, it occasions a smile rather than anger or grief....

"...I learnt the remarkable lesson of love in my solitary imprisonment at Alipore. Before I had gone there, my personal love even for men was confined within a very narrow circle, and the dammed up tide of my love for birds and beasts had hardly ever had a chance to flow out freely. I remember that in a poem written by Rabindranath the profound love of a village boy for buffalo is very beautifully depicted. At the first reading, I could not at all appreciate it; I found in it faults of exaggeration and unnaturalness in the portrayal of the feeling. If I read it again now, I should regard it with different eyes. At Alipore I realised what a deep love for all

creatures might dwell in a human heart and how, at the sight of cows, birds, and even ants, it might thrill with a sudden burst of keen delight!...

"...For some days in this solitary imprisonment I had to go without books or such other things which are the usual means of beguiling one's time. Afterwards, Mr. Emerson came and gave me permission to obtain my clothes and books from home.... I requested my respected maternal uncle, the famous editor of the *Sanjivani*, to send my clothes and some books including the Gita and' the Upanishad. I received the two books (the Gita and the Upanishad) in three or four days. Meanwhile I had ample opportunity to realise the crucial significance of solitary confinement. I realised why even a sound and well-poised intelligence soon goes to pieces and tumbles into lunacy in such an imprisonment, and I realised, too, how, in this very condition one finds a rare opportunity for experiencing God's infinite grace and attaining union with Him.... God, who is All-Good, turns even evil into supreme good. The third purpose[154] (for which he took me to Alipore jail) was to teach me that my personal efforts would avail nothing in my Yoga, that faith and total self-surrender alone were the means of attaining spiritual perfection, and that the only object of my aspiration for union (Yoga) was to use for His work whatever power, perfection or divine bliss (Ananda) He would vouchsafe to me in His grace. From that day onward the thick darkness of ignorance began to thin, and from that day on I have been realising the infinite goodness of the All-Good God in all my observation of the happenings of the world. Nothing happens — whether it is something momentous or the most insignificant — but contributes to some good. Often He serves several purposes through a single act. Many a time we see the play of a blind force in the world and, denying God's omniscience, find fault with His divine Intelligence on the assumption that waste is the rule of Nature. But that is a groundless complaint. The Divine Force never works blindly, and there cannot be one jot or tittle of waste in

[154] He has also written about the first two purposes; but we omit them for want of space.

Her dispensation; rather, it passes human understanding with what supreme control and little expenditure She produces plentiful results....”[155]

[155] A free English rendering of some sentences culled almost at random from Sri Aurobindo's Bengali book, *Kara Kahini* (The Story of My Prison-Life), which has long been out of print.

XV

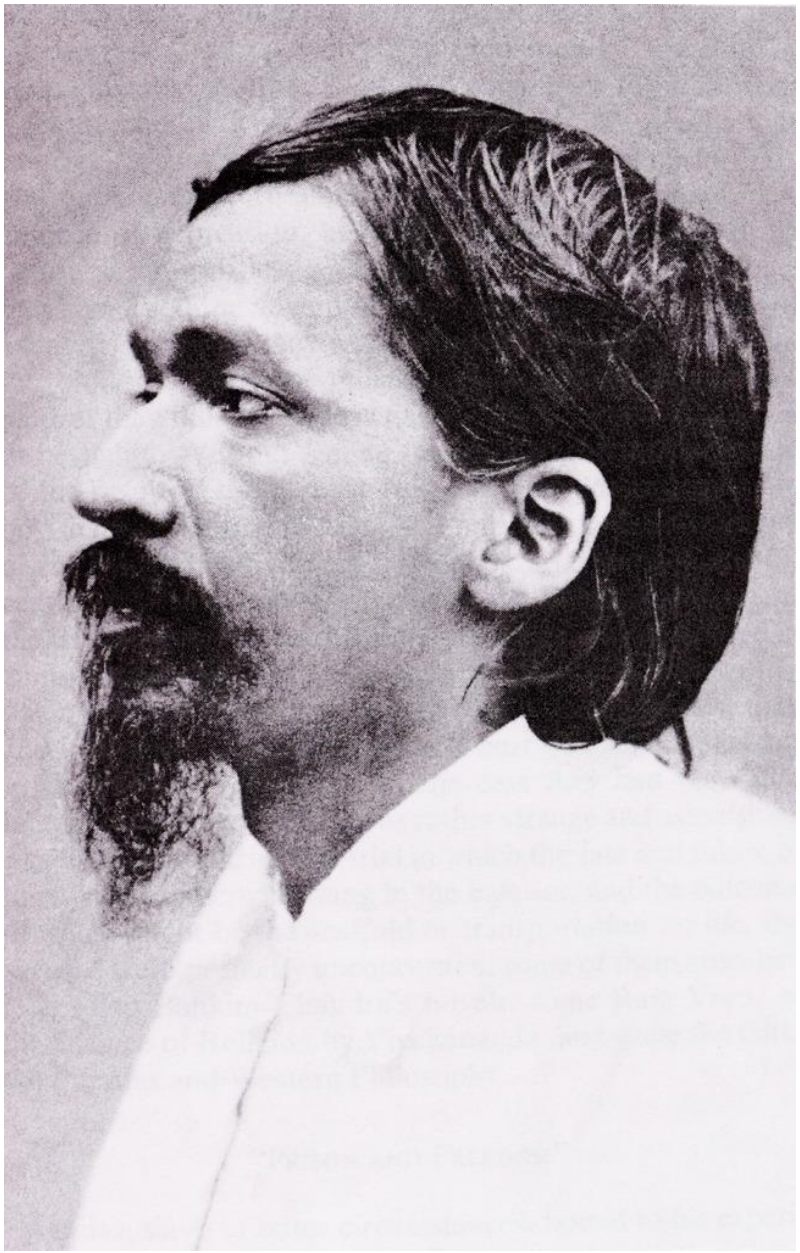
"Her (India's) mission is to point back humanity to the true source of human liberty, human equality, human brotherhood. When man is free in spirit, all other freedom is at his command; for the Free is the Lord who cannot be bound. When he is liberated from delusion, he perceives the divine equality of the world which fulfils itself through love and justice, and this perception transfuses itself into the law of government and society. When he has perceived this divine equality, he is brother to the whole world, and in whatever position he is placed he serves all men as his brothers by the law of love, by the law of justice. When this perception becomes the basis of religion, of philosophy, of social speculation and political aspiration, then will liberty, equality and fraternity take their place in the structure of society and the Satya Yuga return. This is the Asiatic reading of democracy which India must rediscover for herself before she can give it to the world.... It has been said that Democracy is based on the rights of man; it has been replied that it should rather take its stand on the duties of man; but both rights and duties are European ideas. Dharma is the Indian conception in which rights and duties lose the artificial antagonism created by a view of the world which makes selfishness the root of action, and regain their deep and eternal unity. Dharma is the basis of Democracy which Asia must recognise, for in this lies the distinction between the soul of Asia and the soul of Europe. Through Dharma the Asiatic evolution fulfils itself; this is her secret.

Bande Mataram — 22-3-1908.

"...During my solitary imprisonment, Dr. Dally and the Deputy Superintendent, who was also an Englishman, used to visit me almost daily and spend sometime in a friendly chat. I do not know why, from the very beginning, I was able to get their favour and sympathy. I hardly ever spoke much with them, I only replied to their questions. Either I listened silently to the topic raised by them or stopped after saying a word or two. Yet they never ceased visiting me. One day Dr. Dally told me: 'I have succeeded in securing the consent of the Superintendent through the Deputy Superintendent, so that you can walk every morning and afternoon in front of the Degree. I don't like that you should remain cooped up in a small room throughout the day; it is unhealthy both for the mind and the body.' From that day I used to walk morning and evening in the open space in front of the Degree.... I had a good time then. On one side there was the jail factory, and, on the other, the cowshed — these were the two boundaries of my free territory. While strolling from the factory to the cowshed and from the cowshed to the factory, I would either recite the profoundly evocative mantras of the Upanishads, which fill one with inexhaustible strength, or, observing the movements and the goings and comings of the prisoners, try to realise the fundamental truth that Narayana is in the heart of every creature and thing. Mentally repeating the mantra that all this (universal existence) — trees, houses, walls, men, animals, birds, metals, earth etc. — is verily the Brahman, I would project that realisation upon every thing and creature. This would induce such a state that the prison ceased to be a prison. The high enclosure, the iron grating, the white walls, the sunlit tree decked in green leaves, the common material things no more appeared as inanimate; I felt as if they had become alive with an all-pervading consciousness, as if they loved me and were eager to enfold me in their embrace. Men, cows, ants, birds were moving about, flying, singing, talking, but they all appeared to be a play of Nature, and within me a great, pure, detached Self was felt as immersed in a peaceful bliss. Sometimes I felt that God Himself stood at the foot of that tree for playing a mellifluous tune on His flute and drawing my heart out by that sweet music. Always I felt as if someone was embracing me, someone was

cradling me on his lap. I cannot describe what transcendent peace possessed my mind and heart at the development of this inner state. The hard crust of my heart burst open and a love for all creatures flowed forth in a steady stream. Along with love, sattwic feelings like kindness, compassion, non-injury (ahimsa) etc. overpowered my rajas-ridden (active and impassioned) nature and began to grow apace. And the more they developed, the more increased my inner joy and deeper became the sense of a pure tranquillity. Worries about the police case had already disappeared, and a contrary feeling came to settle in my mind. I became firmly convinced that God being All-Good, he had brought me to the prison for nothing but my good, and that my release and acquittal were certain. After this for many a long day I did not feel the hardships of the prison-life — I had become immune to them...

"...Let me say something about the adolescent accused who were my companions in that adversity. By observing their conduct in the Court, I came to realise that a new age had dawned on Bengal and a new generation of children had begun to live on the Mother's (motherland's) lap.... The Bengalees had intelligence and talent, but lacked in strength and manlinesss. But at the very sight of these boys I felt that the large-hearted, powerful, spirited men of some other ages, educated in other ways, had come back to India. That fearless, candid look, that virile manner of speech, that carefree, joyous laughter, and, even in that dire misfortune, that undimmed spiritedness, that serenity of the mind, that absence of depression, anxiety or grief were foreign to the nature of the spiritless, spineless Indians of that generation — they signalised the advent of a new race and a new current of energetic action. If they were murderers, it must be said that the bloody shadow of murder had not fallen upon their nature; they did not know what were cruelty, rabid wildness or bestiality. Without feeling the least anxiety for the future or the result of the case, they spent their time in the jail in boyish merrymaking and laughter and play, or in reading and discussions. They had very soon made friends with the officers of the jail, sepoys, prisoners, the European sergeant, the detectives, and the officers of the Court, and indulged in amusements, chitchat and pleasantry



Sri Aurobindo in Alipore Jail, 1908

with all of them without making any distinction between friends and foes, high and low. The session-time of the Court was very unpleasant to them, for; in the farce of the case they had very little interest.... What struck one as rather strange and astonishing was that, even during the trial in which the fate and future of thirty or forty persons hung in the balance, and the outcome of which might be the scaffold or transportation for life, the accused were perfectly unconcerned, some of them absorbed in reading Bankim Chandra's novels, some Raja Yoga, or the Science of Religion by Vivekananda, and some the Gita, the Puranas and Western Philosophy...."

“Prison and Freedom”

“Man is a slave to outer circumstances, bound to his experiences of the physical world. All his mental operations proceed on the basis of those outer experiences, and even his intelligence cannot get beyond the narrow limits of the gross. His feelings of pleasure and pain are but the echoes of outer happenings. This slavery is due to the overmastering sway of the body.... However much we may accuse the West of materialism, in point of fact, all men are materialists. The body is only a means of fulfilling the inherent, spiritual law of our nature, our chariot drawn by many horses, the chariot we ride in order to drive through the world. But we submit to the illegitimate dominance of the body and give so much indulgence to our sense of the body being our soul that we become prisoners of the outer act and its apparent good and evil. The fruit of this ignorance is lifelong slavery.... The body is the prison....

“This captivity is the perpetual state of the human race. On the other hand, we see on every page of literature and history evidences of the irrepressible ardour and endeavour of humanity to regain its freedom. As in the sphere of politics or society, so in individual life, this effort continues from age to age. Self-control, self-repression, renunciation of pleasure and pain, Stoicism, Epicureanism, asceticism, Vedanta, Buddhism, Monism, Mayavada, Rajayoga, Hatha-yoga, the Gita, the paths of knowledge, devotion and work — these are different ways to the same goal. The aim is the conquest of the body, the shaking off of the dominance of the gross, the freedom of the inner life.... The real difference between an animal and a man is this, that the animal state is a complete submission to the slavery of the body, and the evolution of manhood consists in the endeavour to conquer the body and regain freedom. This freedom is the principal object of religion, it is this that is called mukti or liberation....

“In the modern age we stand at the crossing of the old and the new. Man is ever advancing towards his goal. Sometimes he has to leave the plains and climb to the heights, and during these times of ascent, revolutions in

politics, society, religion, and knowledge take place. In the present time, there is a great effort to climb from the gross to the subtle. Thanks to the minute investigation of the material world and the determination of its laws by the Western scientists, the plains surrounding the path of the ascent have been cleared. The savants of the West are taking the first step into the immense kingdom of the subtle world, and many of them are allured by the hope of the conquest of that kingdom. Besides, there are other signs discernible like the spread of theosophy within a short space of time, the appreciation of the Vedanta in America, the indirect and incipient dominance of India on the philosophy and thought of the West etc. But the supreme sign is the sudden resurgence of India, which has surpassed all expectation. Indians are rising to conquer their place of the Guru of the world and inaugurate a new age....

"How true is all this I realised first in the Alipore jail.... I, too, (like Bepin Chandra Pal) understood in the Alipore jail this essential truth of Hinduism, and for the first time realised Narayana, the Supreme Divine, in the human bodies of thieves, robbers and murderers...."[156]

Upendranath Bandyopadhyaya, a co-accused in the Alipore Bomb Case, has given a graphic pen-picture in his Bengali book, *Nirvasiter Atmakatha*[157] of how Sri Aurobindo lived in the Alipore Jail. We give below a free English rendering of some lines from it.

"...In the midst of this noise and wrangles, Aurobindo Babu sat absolutely silent and immobile.... We were not supplied with hair oil, but we noticed that Aurobindo Babu's hair looked glossy. One day I made bold to ask him: 'Do you use hair oil in your bath?' It took my breath away when he told me that he did not take his bath. 'Then how does your hair shine so much?', I enquired. 'Along with my progress in sadhana (yogic practice),

[156] A free rendering from Sri Aurobindo's Bengali book, *Kara Kahini* — The Story of My Prison-Life.

[157] Autobiography of an Exile.

certain changes are taking place in my body. My hair draws fat from my body.'... Sitting in the dock, I observed that Aurobindo Babu's eyes had a fixed stare, as if they were eyes of glass. They were unwinking, unmoving. I had read somewhere that this was a sign of a stilled mind. I pointed it out to one or two persons, but none dared ask Aurobindo Babu about it. At last, Sachin went slowly up to him and asked: 'What have you obtained by sadhana?' Aurobindo Babu laid his hand on the boy's head and said with a smile: 'I have found what I have been seeking for.'

"This made us bolder, and we surrounded him. I cannot say that we understood all that he said about the wonderful happenings in the inner world, but we were quite convinced of one thing, that a new chapter had opened in the life of this extraordinary man. We heard something of the Tantric Yoga he practised in the jail after the Vedantic Yoga. We had never heard him discuss the Tantric Yoga either outside the jail or in it before. On our enquiring as to where he had learnt these secret Yogic practices, he said that a Maha-purusha (a great spiritual personality) had visited him in his subtle body and taught him those things. When we asked him about the result of the police case against him, he said: 'I shall be acquitted.'"

Sri Aurobindo himself has given us a brief but illuminating description of his spiritual experiences in the jail. "When I was arrested and hurried to the Lai Bazar hajat (prison), I was shaken in my faith for a while, for I could not look into the heart of His intention. Therefore, I faltered for a moment and cried out in my heart to him: 'What is this that has happened to me? I believed that I had a mission to work for the people of my country and until that work was done, I should have Thy protection. Why then am I here and on such a charge?' A day passed and a second day and a third, when a voice came to me from within, 'Wait and see.' Then I grew calm and waited. I was taken from Lai Bazar to Alipore and was placed for one month in a solitary cell apart from men. There I waited day and night for the voice of God within me, to know what He had to say to me, to learn what I had to do. In this seclusion the earliest realisation, the first lesson, came to me. I remembered then that a month or more before my arrest, a

call had come to me to put aside all activity, to go into seclusion and to look into myself, so that I might enter into a closer union with Him. I was weak and could not accept the call. My work was very dear to me and in the pride of my heart I thought that unless I was there, it would suffer or even fail and cease; therefore I would not leave it.... He spoke to me again and said, 'the bonds you had not the strength to break, I have broken for you, because it is not my will nor was it ever my intention that that should continue. I have had another thing for you to do and it is for that I have brought you here, to teach you what you could not learn for you self and to train you for my work.'... His strength entered again into me.... I looked at the jail 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 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. Or 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. This was the first use of the deeper vision He gave me. I looked at the prisoners in the jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies...."[158]

It was in this mysterious way that Sri Aurobindo was led by God to His Kingdom of Truth and eternal Beatitude. He had gripped his heart and soul at first at Baroda long before the Swadeshi movement began, and led him from experience to experience in order to prepare him for the great mission he had to accomplish. But it was in the Alipore jail that He initiated him into the secrets of a long-lost Yoga and lighted the virgin way for his advance towards the supreme realisation of the dynamic, integral Union with Him, which is the eventual destiny of earthly evolution, and of which He had destined Sri Aurobindo to be the prophet and pioneer.

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[158] *Uttarpara Speech* by Sri Aurobindo.

XVI

Let us have a passing glimpse of the famous Alipore Bomb trial. We quote from an authentic book. *The Alipore Bomb Trial*, by Bejoy Krishna Bose, who was one of the pleaders for the accused, and also from the Foreword to this book by Eardley Norton, one of the counsels for the Crown.

"All the accused were produced before the Commissioner of Police and on the next day Mr. L. Birley, the District Magistrate of Alipore (24 Parganas District) by a written order took up the case himself...

"Several of the accused persons made detailed confessions and statements which were recorded by Mr. Birley. Mr. Birley inquired into the case and examined 222 witnesses and committed the accused to the Court of Sessions at Alipore on 19th August 1908.

"In the meantime a second batch was being formed by the subsequent arrests that took place and they were committed to the Court of Sessions on 14th September, to take their trial along with those previously committed....

"Sanction has been given to me by the Government of Bengal... to prosecute certain persons under Sections 121A, 122, 123,124 I.P.C.

"I now complain against

1. Barendra Kumar Ghosh [Barindra Kumar Ghose]
2. Indu Bhusan Rai
3. Ullaskar Dutt
4. Upendra Nath Banerji
5. Sishir Kumar Ghose
6. Nolini Kumar Gupta [Nolini Kanta Gupta]
7. Sachindra Kumar Sen
8. Poresh Chandra Maullik
9. Kunja Lai Saha
10. Bijoy Kumar Nag
11. Narendra Nath Buxi

12. Purna Chandra Sen
13. Hemendra Nath Ghose
14. Bibhuti Bhushan Sarkar
15. Nirapad Rai
16. Kanai Lal Dutt
17. Hem Chandra Das
18. Arabinda Ghose
19. Abinash Chandra Bhattacharji
20. Sailendra Nath Bose
21. Dindayal Bose
22. Narendra Nath Gossain
23. Sudhir Kumar Sarkar
24. Krista Jiban Sanyal
25. Hrishikesh Kanjilal
26. Birendra Nath Ghose
27. Dharani Nath Gupta
28. Nogendra Nath Gupta
29. Ashoke Chandra Nandi
30. Moti Lai Ghose
31. Bijoy Ratan Sen Gupta
32. Sushil Kumar Sen
33. Khudiram Bose.[159]

"These people are all accused of organising a gang for the purpose of waging war against the Government by means of criminal force.

(Sd.) L. Birley,.
19.5.08"

"The trial of both the batches commenced before Mr. C.P. Beachcroft, I.C.S., Additional Sessions Judge, Alipur, on 19th October, 1908. Various objections were taken to the form of the charges, the joint trial,

[159] In the second batch there were nine persons. The total number was, then, forty-two.

admissibility of evidence and other matters. Charu Chandra Roy, who was a French subject brought from Chandernagore on an extradition warrant, was ordered to be discharged on 5th November as the Government withdrew from his prosecution. Kanai Lal Dutt was in the meantime sentenced to be hanged before this trial began for murdering the approver Narendra Nath Gossain in the Alipur Jail compound on 31st August 1908.

"Altogether 206 witnesses were examined and cross-examined at length and then both sides argued the case at great length. The court was thus engaged till the 13th April 1909. On the 14th April the opinions of the Assessors were taken and judgment was delivered on the 6th May 1909.

"Accused Barindra Kumar Ghose and Ullaskar Dutt were sentenced to be hanged under sections 121, 121 A, and 122 I.P.C... The properties of all these accused were also forfeited to Government.... The rest of the accused, viz., Nalini K. Gupta[160], Sachindra K. Sen, Kunjo Lal Shah, Bejoy Kumar Nag, Narendra Nath Bukshi, Purna Chandra Sen, Hemendra Nath Ghose, Aravinda Ghose, Dindayal Bose, Birendra Nath Ghose, Dharani Nath Gupta, Nagendra Nath Gupta, Hem Chandra Sen, Debabrata Bose, Nikhileswar Roy Moulik, Bijoy Chandra Bhattacharya and Pravas Chandra Dev were acquitted.

"Thus the enquiry before Mr. Birley occupied 76 days and the trial in the Court of Sessions took 131 days. It will be seen hereafter that the appeal in the High Court was heard during 47 days and the reference by a Third Judge for 20 days. The mass of documents filed, if counted individually, were over four thousand and the material articles exhibited, i.e, bombs, tools, revolvers etc. were between three to four hundred."

We give below short extracts from the Foreword to the above book by Mr. Eardley Norton Bar-at-Law, who was the principal Counsel for the Crown and whose forensic skill and sharp, perplexing cross-examination were a veritable terror to the witnesses. This Foreword was written long after the Trial.

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[160] Nolini Kanta Gupta has given a vivid account of the jail life of the accused in his Bengali book, *Smṛtir Pātā*.

"...I chanced to lead for the Crown in the trial related in this volume in all three Courts — Magistrate's, the Session Judge's and the High Court — ...

"The ringleader was a young man of unusual qualities. No lawyer can defend his action; no statesman applaud it. None the less Barendra Kumar Ghose was sincere and in a great measure chivalrous. Obsessed by conceptions of the injustice of the policy which severed his motherland, he believed that the only influence which could force recognition of views which appeared to him patriotic was recourse to violence. Himself imbued with the passionate fervour of the genuine military reformer, Barendra infected a large following of youthful adherents with his own unhappy enthusiasm. The gospel of the revolver and the bomb spread with alarming, if secret, success: a huge organisation developed throughout the country: inflammatory articles were openly disseminated by an able if disaffected press and the peace of the country was assuredly in peril. The Government had for long permitted revolutionary literature to pass unnoticed: the ferment grew under a misplaced sense of security till overt measures forced the authorities into action. Their intervention was swift and certain. Simultaneous raids on the 2nd May 1908 secured a large number who were the flower of the movement... among them were the two brothers Aravindo and Barendra Kumar Ghose....

"In the Sessions Court the accused were placed behind a net work of wire, police with fixed bayonets stood on guard throughout the room, and I had a five-chambered loaded revolver lying on my brief throughout the trial....

"Aravindo Ghose had been a brilliant scholar in England. He had been head of St. Paul's and won a scholarship at King's College, Cambridge. There he was a contemporary of Mr. Beachcroft I.C.S. who tried him at Alipore and who had been head of Rugby and had also won a scholarship at Cambridge. Both won honours at the University, and at the final examination for The Indian Civil Service Arabindo, the prisoner, beat Beachcroft the Judge in Greek!...

"...to me it appeared a matter for regret that a man of Aravindo's calibre should have been ejected from the Civil Service on the ground he could not, or would not, ride a horse. Capacity such as his would have been a valuable asset to the State. Had room been found for him in the Educational Service of India I believe he would have gone far not merely in personal advancement but in welding more firmly the links which bind his countrymen to ours...."

This is a tribute from one who had employed all his forensic powers, intellectual ingenuity and professional tricks to prove that Sri Aurobindo was the source of inspiration and the directing brain and resourceful organiser of the whole movement of the armed revolution in Bengal.

Besides God's infallible Will and, in fact, as an instrument of it, stood C.R. Das, Bar-at-Law, stirred by patriotic fervour and armed with an iron resolution to defend the accused.[161] He was a rising barrister, who laid aside all other practice in order to devote all his time and energies to this case which had made a sensation in the whole country. And fortune favoured his devoted services to the national cause. He proved up to the hilt the utter hollowness of the evidence so laboriously piled and craftily cooked up by the Prosecution. The fiery shafts of Mr. Norton were shattered by his incisive logic, and the imposing array of the prosecution arguments relentlessly torn to shreds. Norton had at last met more than a match in C.R. Das.

In the beginning of the case, Sri Aurobindo gave certain instructions to his Counsel, but he was asked by his unfailing guide, the Divine, to leave the entire charge and responsibility to C.R. Das, who conducted the case with an inspired zeal and ability. C.R. Das's peroration was and has since remained a classic of intuitive prophecy, couched in a garb of glittering eloquence. We have already quoted some of the last lines of it, and need not repeat them here. In his Uttarpara Speech, Sri Aurobindo says in this

[161] His mother, to whom he was passionately devoted, had urged him to take up Sri Aurobindo's defence even at the cost of all his practice.

connection: “Afterwards when the trial opened in the Sessions Court, I began to write many instructions for my Counsel as to what was false in the evidence against me and on what points the witnesses might be cross-examined. Then something happened which I had not expected. The arrangements which had been made for my defence were suddenly changed and another Counsel stood there to defend me. He came unexpectedly — a friend of mine, but I did not know that he was coming. You have all heard the name of the man who put away from him all other thoughts and abandoned all his practice, who sat up half the night day after day for months and broke his health to save me — Srijut Chittaranjan Das. When I saw him I was satisfied; but I still thought it necessary to write instructions. Then all that was put from me and I had the message from within: ‘This is the man who will save you from the snares put around your feet. Put aside those papers. It is not you who will instruct him. I will instruct him.... From that time I did not of myself speak a word to my Counsel about the case or give a single instruction, and if ever I was asked a question, I always found that my answer did not help the case. I had left it to him and he took it entirely into his hands with what results you know.”

The results which Sri Aurobindo speaks of were his acquittal along with that of a few others, and the sudden shooting up into the judicial firmament of Chittaranjan Das as the brightest luminary in the Calcutta Bar. Everywhere he was now in demand, and his practice increased by leaps and bounds. But his munificence was as great as his income — his unstinted generosity became a legend. His heart overflowed with kindness and sympathy for the needy and the distressed. Later, he became the undisputed leader of Bengal nationalism and one of the foremost leaders in the Indian National Congress. He worked as a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, and afterwards of Motilal Nehru in the Council Entry movement, and fought for his country till the last breath of his life. He once came to Pondicherry and saw Sri Aurobindo by a special appointment. But of this we shall speak in its proper context.

Some of the co-accused of Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Bomb Case appealed to the High Court and, in consequence, a few sentences were

reduced and few rescinded. Barindra, Ullaskar, Upendra etc., were sentenced to transportation for life instead of being hanged.

It is interesting to note that all the young accused, whose ages varied from sixteen to twenty, divided themselves into several groups in the iron cage in which they were locked, and engaged in animated discussions on political, literary, philosophical and religious subjects. They took no notice of the fateful trial — indeed, they treated it as a prodigious farce — which was going on before them in the Court, and on which depended their life and death. Sri Aurobindo sat, silent and serene, rapt in meditation.

A few remarks made by Sri Aurobindo much later in answer to questions and in correction of certain mis-statements about his life in the Alipore jail are given below:

"Ferrar who had been my class-mate could not come and meet me in the Court when the trial (Alipur) was going on and we were put in a cage lest we should jump out and murder the judge. He was a barrister practising at Sumatra or Singapore. He just saw me in the cage and was much concerned and did not know how to get me out. It was he who had given me the clue to the Hexameter in English. He read out a line from Clough which he thought was the best line and that gave me the swing of the metre."[162]

"This reminds me of a compliment given to my eyes by Sir Edward Baker, Governor of Bengal. He visited us in Alipur Jail and told Charu Chandra Dutt, 'Have you seen Aurobindo Ghose's eyes? He has the eyes of a mad man!' Charu Chandra Dutt I.C.S. took great pains to convince him that I was not at all mad but a Karma-Yogi."[163]

"I knew something about sculpture, but I was blind to painting. Suddenly one day in the Alipore Jail while meditating I saw some pictures on the walls of the cell and lo and behold! the artistic eye in me opened and I knew all about painting except of course the more material side of the technique. I don't always know how to express though, because I lack

[162] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* — A.B. Purani.

[163] ibid.

the knowledge of the proper technique but that does not stand in the way of a keen and understanding appreciation....”[164]

About levitation, he says, “That was once in jail. I was then having a very intense sadhana on the vital plane and I was concentrated. And I had a questioning mind: ‘Are such Siddhis as *Utthānapāda* (levitation) possible?’ I then suddenly found myself raised up in such a way that I could not have done it myself with muscular exertion. Only one part of the body was slightly in contact with the ground and the rest was raised up against the wall. I could not have held my body like that normally even if I had wanted to and I found that the body remained suspended like that without any exertion on my part.... In the jail there were many such extraordinary, and one may say, abnormal experiences. As I was doing sadhana intensely on the vital plane I think these might have come from there. All these experiences passed away and did not repeat themselves.”[165]

It was during his jail life that Sri Aurobindo resorted to fasting to see how far spiritual results could be attained by it. In Alipore jail though he fasted for eleven days and lost ten pounds in weight during that period, he felt none the worse for it.

Acknowledging Swami Vivekananda’s help in his spiritual life, he says in *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*, “...It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail in my solitary meditation and felt his presence.... The voice spoke only on a special and limited very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it had finished saying all that it had to say on that subject.”

In a casual reference to the power of prediction, Sri Aurobindo once remarked in his evening talks, “When I was arrested, my maternal grand aunt asked Vishuddhananda[166] ‘what will happen to our Aurobindo’? He

[164] ibid.

[165] ibid.

[166] A well-known Yogi at Varanasi who died only a few years ago.

replied, ‘The Divine Mother has taken him in Her arms. Nothing will happen to him. But he is not your Aurobindo, He is world’s Aurobindo, and the world will be filled with his perfume.’”

"…day after day, He showed me His wonders and made me realise the utter truth of the Hindu religion....

"…In the communion of Yoga two messages came. The first message said, 'I have given you a work and it is to help to uplift this nation. Before long the time will come when you will have to go out of jail, for it is not my will that this time either you should be convicted or that you should pass the time, as others have to do, in suffering for their country. I have called you to work, and that is the Adesha for which you have asked. I give you the Adesha to go forth and do my work.' 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 up this nation to send forth my word. This is the Sanatana Dharma, this is the eternal religion which you did not really know before, but which I have now revealed to you.... When therefore it is said that India shall rise, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall rise. When it is said that India shall be great, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall be great. When it is said that India shall expand and extend herself, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall expand and extend itself over the world. It is for the Dharma and by the Dharma that India exists. To magnify the religion means to magnify the country. I have shown you that I am

Sri Aurobindo in Alipore Jail, 1908

everywhere and in all men and in all things, that I am in this movement, and I am not only working in those who are striving for the country but I am working also in those who oppose them and stand in their path. I am working in everybody and whatever men may think or do they can do nothing but help in my purpose. They are also doing my work, they are not my enemies but my instruments. In all your actions you are moving forward without knowing which way you move. You mean to do one thing and you do another. You aim at a result and your efforts subserve one

that is different or contrary. It is Shakti that has gone forth and entered into the people. Since long ago I have been preparing this uprising and now the time has come and it is I who will lead it to its fulfilment.'"

"...But what is the Hindu religion? What is this religion which we call Sanatana, eternal? It is the Hindu religion only because the Hindu nation has kept it, because in this Peninsula it grew up in the seclusion of the sea and the Himalayas, because in this sacred and ancient land it was given as a charge to the Aryan race to preserve through the ages. But it is not circumscribed by the confines of a single country, it does not belong peculiarly and for ever to a bounded part of the world. That which we call the Hindu religion is really the eternal religion, because it is the universal religion which embraces all others. If a religion is not universal, it cannot be eternal. A narrow religion, a sectarian religion, an exclusive religion can live only for a limited time and a limited purpose. This is the one religion that can triumph over materialism by including and anticipating the discoveries of science and the speculations of philosophy. It is the one religion which impresses on mankind the closeness of God to us and embraces in its compass all the possible means by which man can approach God. It is the one religion which insists every moment on the truth which all religions acknowledge that He is in all men and all things and that in Him we move and have our being. It is the one religion which enables us not only to understand and believe this truth but to realise it with every part of our being. It is the one religion which shows the world what the world is, that it is the Lila of Vasudeva. It is the one religion which shows us how we can best play our part in that Lila, its subtlest laws and its noblest rules. It is the one religion which does not separate life in any

smallest detail from religion, which knows what immortality is and has utterly removed from us the reality of death."

Uttarpara Speech by Sri Aurobindo

On 6th May, 1909, the Alipore Sessions judge, Mr. Beachcroft, who was Sri Aurobindo's classfellow at Cambridge, acquitted Sri Aurobindo of all charges and released him. The release was foreknown to Sri Aurobindo, because it had been promised and predicted by God to him. God had destined a much vaster role for him than that of a mere political leader. Outwardly, his release was a signal triumph of the devoted, self-sacrificing services of C.R. Das. Along with Sri Aurobindo, Devavrata Bose, Narendra Bakshi, Nolini Gupta, Bejoy Nag, Purna Sen etc. were also released. C.R. Das appealed to the High Court on behalf of the other accused, some of whom had been sentenced to death. Barin and Ullaskar had their death sentences commuted into transportation for life.

After his release, Sri Aurobindo put up at the office of Sanjivani, the organ edited by his uncle, Krishna Kumar Mitra, who was at that time in Agra jail. The political atmosphere of the country was bleak and forlorn. Most of the leaders were either in jail or away from India. There was discontent seething underground, but the surface was deceptively calm. Bureaucratic repression had only intensified national indignation which bided its time for an explosion. And Sri Aurobindo stood alone to revive the patriotic fire and direct it through effective channels.

He was invited to Uttarpara, a small town some miles from Calcutta, to speak at the annual meeting of the Dharma Rakshini Sabha. He delivered there his famous Uttarpara Speech, from which we have quoted some lines above, which was a revelation of some of the spiritual experiences he had in the jail and of his changed outlook on life and its divine potentials and destiny. Amarendra Chatterji, who had gone from Uttarpara to fetch Sri Aurobindo for speaking to the Sanatana Dharma Rakshini Sabha, writes, "I went to the *Sanjivani* office to fetch Sri Aurobindo. I saw him there

absolutely quiet, as if he was in meditation. So I did not talk long with him. We went by train to Uttarpara. Many of the audience also came there by the same train. The train arrived at 3 o'clock. The time for the meeting was 5.30 p.m. The jamindar of Uttarpara, Raja Pyari Mohan, and his son Michhri Babu had come to the station to receive Sri Aurobindo. After taking a little rest and tea at the house of Surendranath Chattopadhyaya a regular procession was organised. The meeting was fixed at the open courtyard of the Library on the eastern side, on the west bank of the Ganges. Sri Aurobindo was the only speaker. There were about ten thousand men in the audience. His voice was not voluminous and so the audience kept pin-drop silence in order to be able to hear him.

"He was heard in pin-drop silence. The reception he got was extraordinary...."[167]

On the 19th June Sri Aurobindo launched a weekly paper — *Karmayogin* in English, devoted to nationalism, religion, literature, science, philosophy etc. It was to be the mouthpiece of his new visions and aspirations, and his global envisaging of the future of India and the world. It was widely acclaimed, and had not therefore, to struggle against financial difficulties, as its predecessor, *Bande Mataram*, had to do. In the very first editorial of the first issue, under the caption, *Ourselves*, Sri Aurobindo wrote: "The *Karmayogin* comes into the field to fulfil a function which an increasing tendency in the country demands. The life of the nation which once flowed in a broad and single stream has long been severed into a number of separate meagre and shallow channels. The two main floods have followed the paths of religion and politics, but they have flowed separately. Our political activity has crept in a channel cut for European or Europeanised minds; it tended always to a separate wideness, but was deficient in depth and volume. The national genius, originality, individuality poured itself into religion, while our politics were imitative and unreal. Yet without a

[167] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* — A.B. Purani.

living political activity national life cannot, under modern circumstances, survive. So also there has been a stream of social life, more and more muddied and disturbed, seeking to get clearness, depth, largeness, freedom, and always failing and increasing in weakness or distraction. There was a stream too of industrial life, faint and thin, the poor survival of the old vigorous Indian artistic and industrial capacity murdered by unjust laws and an unscrupulous trade policy. All these ran in disconnected channels, sluggish, scattered and ineffectual. The tendency is now for these streams to unite again into one mighty, invincible and grandiose flood. To assist that tendency, to give voice and definiteness to the deeper aspirations now forming obscurely within the national consciousness is the chosen work of the *Karmayogin*.

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"There is no national life perfect or sound without the *caturvarṇya.* The life of the nation must contain within itself the life of the Brahmin, — spirituality, knowledge, learning, high and pure ethical aspiration and endeavour; the life of the Kshatriya, — manhood and strength, moral and physical, the love of battle, the thirst for glory, the sense of honour, chivalry, self-devotion, generosity, grandeur of soul; the life of the Vaishya, — trade, industry, thrift, prosperity, benevolence, philanthropy; the life of the Shudra, — honesty, simplicity, labour, religious and quiet service to the nation even in the humblest position and the most insignificant kind of work. The cause of India's decline was the practical disappearance of the Kshatriya and the dwindling of the Vaishya. The whole political history of India since the tyranny of the Nandas has been an attempt to resuscitate or replace the Kshatriya. But the attempt was only partially successful. The Vaishya held his own for a long time, indeed, until the British advent by which he has almost been extinguished. When the *caturvarṇya* disappears, there comes *vamasaṅkara,* utter confusion of the great types which keep a nation vigorous and sound. The Kshatriya

dwindled, the Vaishya dwindled, the Brahmin and Shudra were left. The inevitable tendency was for the Brahmin type to disappear and the first sign of his disappearance was utter degeneracy, the tendency to lose himself and while keeping some outward signs of the Brahmin to gravitate towards Shudrahood. In the *Kaliyuga* the Shudra is powerful and attracts into himself the less vigorous Brahmin, as the earth attracts purer but smaller bodies, and the *brahmatej*, the spiritual force of the latter, already diminished, dwindles to nothingness. For the Satyayuga to return, we must get back the *brahmatej* and make it general. For the *brahmatej* is the basis of all the rest and in the Satyayuga all men have it more or less and by it the nation lives and is great.

"All this is, let us say, a parable. It is more than a parable, it is a great truth. But our educated class have become so unfamiliar with the deeper knowledge of their forefathers that it has to be translated into modern European terms before they can understand it. For it is the European ideas alone that are real to them and the great truths of Indian thought seem to them mere metaphors, allegories and mystic parables. So well has British education done its fatal denationalising work in India.

"...And the two highest castes are the least easy to be spared. If they survive in full strength, they can provide themselves with the two others, but if either the Kshatriya or the Brahmin goes, if either the political force or the spiritual force of a nation is lost, that nation is doomed unless it can revive or replace the missing strength. And of the two the Brahmin is the most important. He can always create the Kshatriya; spiritual force can always raise up material force to defend it. But if the Brahmin becomes the Shudra, then the lower instinct of the serf and the labourer becomes all in all, the instinct to serve and seek a living as one supreme object of life, the instinct to accept safety as a compensation for lost greatness and inglorious ease and dependence in place of the ardours of high aspiration for the nation and the individual. When spirituality is lost all is lost. This is the fate from which we have narrowly escaped by the resurgence of the soul of India in Nationalism.

“But that resurgence is not yet complete. There is the sentiment of Indianism, there is not yet the knowledge. There is a vague idea, there is no definite conception or deep insight. We have yet to know ourselves, what we were, are and may be; what we did in the past and what we are capable of doing in the future; our history and our mission. This is the first and most important work which the *Karmayogin* sets for itself, to popularise this knowledge. And the second thing is how to use these assets so as to swell the sum of national life and produce the future. It is easy to appraise their relations to the past; it is more difficult to give them their place in the future. The third thing is to know the outside world and its relation to us and how to deal with it. That is the problem which we find at present the most difficult and insistent, but its solution depends on the solution of the others.

“We have said that *brahmatej* is the thing we need most of all and first of all... what the Europeans mean by religion is not *brahmatej*; which is rather spirituality, the force and energy of thought and action arising from communion with or self-surrender to that within us which rules the world.... This force and energy can be directed to any purpose God desires for us; it is sufficient to knowledge, love or service; it is good for the liberation of an individual soul, the building of a nation or the turning of a tool. It works from within, it works in the power of God, it works with superhuman energy. The reawakening of that force in three hundred millions of men by the means which our past has placed in our hands, that is our object.”

XVIII

"The knowledge of the Yogin is not the knowledge of the average desire-driven mind. Neither is it the knowledge of the scientific or of the worldly-wise reason which anchors itself on surface facts and leans upon experience and probability. The Yogin knows God's way of working and is aware that the improbable often happens, that facts mislead. He rises above reason to that direct and illuminated Knowledge which we call Vijnanam..."

The Karmayogin dated 19th February, 1910

After his release from the Alipore jail, Sri Aurobindo addressed a few meetings in Calcutta. At a meeting at the Beadon Square held on the 13th June, 1909, under the presidency of Ramananda Chatterji, Sri Aurobindo said among other things, "...and what after all was the repression? Some people sent to prison, some deported, a number of house-searches, a few repressive enactments, limiting the liberty of the press and the platform. This was nothing compared with the price other nations have paid for their liberty. They also would have to suffer much more than this before they could make an appreciable advance towards their goal. This was God's law; it was not the rulers who demanded the price, it was God who demanded it. It was His law that a fallen nation should not be allowed to rise without infinite suffering and mighty effort.... The sun of India's destiny would rise and fill all India with its light and overflow India and overflow Asia and overflow the world. Every hour, every moment could only bring them nearer to the brightness of the day that God has decreed."

On the 23rd June he went to Barisal and delivered a speech at the Jhalakati Conference, "...it is a strange idea, a foolish idea which men have, indeed, always cherished under such circumstances, but which has been disproved over and over again in history, — to think that a nation which has once risen, once has been called up by the voice of God to rise, will be stopped by mere physical repression. It has never so happened in the history

of a nation nor will it so happen in the history of India.... Repression is nothing but the hammer of God that is beating us into shape so that we may be moulded into a mighty nation and an instrument for His work in the world. We are iron upon His anvil and the blows are showering upon us not to destroy but to re-create. Without suffering there can be no growth...

"...we are no ordinary race. We are a people ancient as our hills and rivers and we have behind us a history of manifold greatness not surpassed by any other race, we are the descendants of those who performed Tapasya and underwent unheard-of austerities for the sake of spiritual gain and of their own will submitted to all the sufferings of which humanity is capable. We are the children of those mothers who ascended with a smile the funeral pyre that they might follow their husbands to another world. We are a people to whom suffering is welcome and who have a spiritual strength within them, greater than any physical force, we are a people in whom God has chosen to manifest Himself more than any other at many great moments of our history. It is because God has chosen to manifest Himself and has entered into the hearts of His people that we are rising again as a nation..."

The reader will have observed in the passages quoted above — as, indeed, one observes in all Sri Aurobindo's political speeches and writings — that if there is one thing which recurs oftener than anything else, one thing upon which he insists with his usual force and eloquence, one thing with which he wants to inspire his readers and audiences, one thing which is the burden of his political as well as spiritual songs, it is God, surrender to God's will, and God's service. Nobody before him or after ever came to the political field so much drunk with God, so much irradiated by His light, and led so unmistakably by God's will. His political life was foreshadowed in his life in England and at Baroda, and his spiritual life was foreshadowed in his political life. The student life in England, the scholarly life in Baroda, the political life in Bengal, these superficial divisions are made by those only who cannot view his life as a whole. In fact, as we have already remarked, there was no break in his life at all. It was a natural, continuous

evolution, a natural out-flowering. The morning showed the day. The germinating acorn suggested the giant oak.

By the middle of July, 1909, Sister Nivedita returned from Europe with Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose and lady Bose under the assumed name of Mrs. Margaret. We reproduce below some passages from an authentic biography of Sister Nivedita by Lizelle Reymond.[168]

"Aurobindo Ghose was now out of prison, and Nivedita had her school decorated as for the most auspicious festival days to celebrate his release. She found him completely transformed. His piercing eyes seemed to devour the tight-drawn skin-and-bones of his face. He possessed an irresistible power, derived from a spiritual revelation that had come to him in prison. During the entire ordeal he had seen before him nothing but the Lord Krishna: Krishna the adored and the adorable, the essence of Brahman, the Absolute in the sphere of relativity: Lord Krishna had become at the same time prisoner, jailor and judge...

"Now, released from prison Aurobindo Ghose found his party discouraged and downcast. With a mere handful of supporters — Nivedita among them — he launched an appeal and tried to rekindle the patriotic spark in a weakening society. His mission was now that of a Yogin sociologist. The two newspapers which he founded — the *Karmayogin* in English and the *Dharma* in Bengali, both violent in tone — preached his lofty aim...

"...he was already known as the 'seer' Sri Aurobindo, although still involved in political life, and as yet not manifested to his future disciples on the spiritual path. For Nivedita he was the expression of life itself, the life of a new seed grown on the ancient soil of India, the logical and passionate development of all her Guru's teachings...

"Aurobindo's open and logical method of presenting his own spiritual experience, and revealing the divine message he had received in his solitary

[168] *The Dedicated* by Lizelle Reymond.

meditation, created the necessary unity between his past life of action and his future spiritual discipline...

"Nivedita thought she could still hear the voice of Swami Vivekananda stirring up the masses: 'Arise, Sons of India! Awake!' That had been the first phase of the struggle. Now this life-giving cry was repeated differently, because the effort required in the changing circumstances was no longer identical; but the source of it was still the same! Now the new order was that every individual should become a sadhak of the nation — a seeker — so that 'the One could find Himself and manifest Himself in every human being, in all humanity.' Aurobindo Ghose was throwing out the first ideas of the integral yoga he was to teach, depicting man in his cosmic reality.... He was, as Nivedita understood him, the successor to the spiritual Masters of the past, offering the source of his inspiration for all to drink from in yogic solitude. Since his imprisonment at Alipore, Aurobindo Ghose was no longer a fighter but a Yogi."

Nivedita was undoubtedly the most influential, resourceful, and fearlessly loyal helper of Sri Aurobindo in his militant nationalism. This brave lady never spared herself in her Guru-given work for the freedom of India. She was the one disciple of Swami Vivekananda's whom he moulded to perfection according to the truth of her own nature. She had an equal access to many of the offices of the British bureaucracy, the homes of the leading aristocratic personalities of Calcutta, and the hearts of the young nationalists. She was loved and esteemed by almost all who knew her. Since her contact with Sri Aurobindo at Baroda she never ceased helping him in his political work. A remarkable lady with a remarkable record of service for the cause of Indian freedom! But much of this service remains shrouded in a fog, and is not, therefore, adequately recognised. A more detailed and better documented biography of Sister Nivedita, dealing with all aspects — spiritual, political, artistic, and literary — of her life in India, will meet a keenly-felt want.

Asked about Sister Nivedita, Sri Aurobindo said the following in one of his evening talks:

"What do you mean by 'some sort'? She was one of the revolutionary leaders. She went about visiting various places to come into contact with the people. She was open, frank and talked freely over revolutionary plans to everybody. There was no concealment about her. Whenever she could speak on revolution, it was her very soul, her true personality that came out. Her whole mind and life expressed itself thus. Yoga was Yoga but revolutionary work it was that seemed intended for her. That is fire! Her book, *Kali, the Mother*, is very inspiring but revolutionary and not at all non-violent.

"She went about the Thakurs of Rajputana, trying to preach to them revolution. At that time everybody wanted some kind of revolution. I myself met several Rajput Thakurs who, unsuspected by the Government, had revolutionary ideas and tendencies..."

Referring to Gandhi's remark that Nivedita was volatile and mercurial and the subsequent violent protest made by the *Modern Review*, Sri Aurobindo said, "Nivedita volatile? What nonsense! She was a solid worker.

"Once she came to the Gaekwar and told him to join the revolution, and said, 'If you have anything more to ask, you can ask Mr. Ghose' but the Gaekwar never talked politics with me.

"The first time she came to me she said, 'I hear, Mr. Ghose, you are a worshipper of Shakti, Force'. There was no non-violence about her. She had an artistic side too. Khashirao Jadav and I went to receive her at the station. Seeing the Dharmasala near the station she exclaimed, 'How beautiful!' While looking at the college building she cried, 'How horrible!' Khashirao said later, 'She must be a little mad'.... The Ramakrishna Mission was a little afraid of Nivedita's political activities and asked her to keep them separate from its work."

Asked about Nivedita's Yogic achievements Sri Aurobindo said, "I don't know. Whenever we met we spoke about politics and revolution. But

her eyes showed a power of concentration and revealed a capacity for going into trance." When it was pointed out to Sri Aurobindo that Nivedita had come to India with the idea of doing Yoga, Sri Aurobindo said, "Yes, but she took up politics as a part of Vivekananda's work. Her book is one of the best on Vivekananda. Vivekananda himself had ideas about political work and had spells of revolutionary fervour. Once he had a vision which corresponded to something like the Manicktola gardens."[169]

At the Howrah People's Association Sri Aurobindo delivered a speech on the Right of Association which was published in the *Karmayogin* on the 17th July, 1909. We reproduce below a few lines from this speech:

"...according to our philosophy it is the idea which is building up the world. It is the idea which expresses itself in matter and takes to itself bodies. This is true also in the life of humanity, it is true in politics, in the progress and life of a nation. It is the idea which shapes material institutions. It is the idea which builds up and destroys administrations and Governments. Therefore the idea is a mighty force, even when it has no physical power behind it, even when it is not equipped with means, even when it has not organised itself in institutions and associations. Even then the idea moves freely abroad through the minds of thousands of men and becomes a mighty force. It is a power which by the very fact of being impalpable assumes all the greater potency and produces all the more stupendous results. Therefore the right of free speech is cherished because it gives the idea free movement, it gives the nation that power which ensures its future development, which ensures success in any struggle for national life, however stripped it may be of means and instruments. It is enough that the idea is there and that the idea lives and circulates. Then the idea materialises itself, finds means and instruments, conquers all obstacles and goes on developing until it is expressed and established in permanent and victorious forms...

[169] *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* by Nirodbaran.

"...Association is the mightiest thing in humanity; it is the instrument by which humanity moves, it is the means by which it grows, it is the power by which it progresses towards its final development. There are three ideas which are of supreme moment to human life and have become the watchwords of humanity. Three words have the power of remoulding nations and Governments, liberty, equality and fraternity. These words cast forth into being from the great stir and movement of the eighteenth century continue to act on men because they point to the ultimate goal towards which human evolution ever moves. This liberty to which we progress is liberation out of a state of bondage. We move from a state of bondage to an original liberty. This is what our own religion teaches. This is what our own philosophy suggests as the goal towards which we move, mukti or moksha. We are bound in the beginning by a lapse from pre-existent freedom, we strive to shake off the bonds, we move forward and forward until we have achieved the ultimate emancipation, that utter freedom of the soul, of the body or the whole man, that utter freedom from all bondage towards which humanity is always aspiring. We in India have found a mighty freedom within ourselves, our brother-men in Europe have worked towards freedom without. We have been moving on parallel lines towards the same end. They have found out the way to external freedom. We have found out the way to internal freedom. We meet and give to each other what we have gained. We have learnt from them to aspire after external as they will learn from us to aspire after internal freedom.

"Equality is the second term in the triple gospel. It is a thing which mankind has never accomplished. From inequality and through inequality we move, but it is to equality. Our religion, our philosophy set equality forward as the essential condition of emancipation. All religions send us this message in a different form but it is one message. Christianity says we are all brothers, children of one God. Mohammedanism says we are the subjects and servants of one Allah, we are all equal in the sight of God. Hinduism says there is One without a second. In the high and the low, in the Brahmin and the Shudra, in the saint and the sinner, there is one Narayana, one God and He is the soul of all men. Not until you have

realised Him, known Narayana in all, and the Brahmin and the Shudra, the high and the low, the saint and the sinner are equal in your eyes, then and not until then you have knowledge, you have freedom, until then you are bound and ignorant. The equality which Europe has got is external political equality. She is now trying to achieve social equality. Now-a-days their hard-earned political liberty is beginning to pall a little upon the people of Europe, because they have found it does not give perfect well-being or happiness and it is barren of the sweetness of brotherhood. There is no fraternity in this liberty. It is merely a political liberty. They have not either the liberty within or the full equality or the fraternity. So they are turning a little from what they have and they say increasingly, 'Let us have equality, let us have the second term of the gospel towards which we strive'. Therefore socialism is growing in Europe. Europe is now trying to achieve external equality as the second term of the gospel of mankind, the universal ideal. I have said that equality is an ideal even with us but we have not tried to achieve it without. Still we have learnt from them to strive after political equality and in return for what they have given us we shall lead them to the secret of the equality within.

"Again there is fraternity. It is the last term of the gospel. It is the most difficult to achieve, still it is a thing towards which all religions call and human aspirations rise. There is discord in life, but mankind yearns for peace and love. This is the reason why the gospels which preach brotherhood spread quickly and excite passionate attachment. This was the reason of the rapid spread of Christianity. This was the reason of Buddhism's rapid spread in this country and throughout Asia. This is the essence of humanitarianism, the modern gospel of love for mankind. None of us have achieved our ideals, but human society has always attempted an imperfect and limited fulfilment of it. It is the nature, the *dharma* of humanity that it should be unwilling to stand alone. Every man seeks the brotherhood of his fellows and we can only live by fraternity with others. Through all its differences and discords humanity is striving to become one.

"'...There is one place in which we all meet and that is your common Mother. That is not merely the soil. That is not merely a division of land but it is a living thing. It is the Mother in whom you move and have your being. Realise God in the nation, realise God in your brother, realise God in a wide human association.' This is the ideal by which humanity is moved all over the world, the ideal which is the *dharma* of the Kali Yuga.... For the fiat of God has gone out to the Indian nation, 'Unite, be free, be one, be great'."

We make no apology for having quoted rather long extracts from Sri Aurobindo's speech at the Howrah People's Association. What with the light he throws upon the concept of the word *idea,* the clarification he gives of the meaning of "association", the exalted spiritual sense he attaches to the Motherland worshipped as the Mother, the interpretation he gives of the triple gospel of the French Revolution — Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity — and explains how it is being progressively realised in mankind, and the distinction he draws between the parallel lines of advance of the East and the West towards liberty, the whole speech is, indeed, revealing, and will repay repeated readings.

On the 18th July, 1909 Sri Aurobindo delivered a speech at a meeting at College Square over which he presided. At this meeting Sri Aurobindo pointed to the dangerous consequences that the British policy of repression would inevitably entail. He warned the Government that if it tried to smother the peaceful movement of passive resistance, it would drive the young ardent nationalists into sporadic or organised violence. He criticised Mr. Gokhale for saying that Swaraj or autonomy or Colonial Self-Government could not be achieved by peaceful means. He preached again the necessity and potential power of suffering. "We have not said to our young men, 'When you are repressed, retaliate,' we have said, 'suffer'."

XIX

As we have already seen, the Nationalist party had split into small groups which worked without any proper organisation or plan. Their patriotism was as intense as ever, but bereft of any capable leadership, they acted sporadically and with imprudent recklessness. Some of them which had taken to acts of terrorism and struck terror into the heart of the mighty British Raj compromised, without being aware of it, the very cause they were sacrificing themselves to serve.

Terrorism and such other means adopted by some ardent young Nationalists were the inevitable result of the policy of repression relentlessly pursued by the Government. Arrests and deportations became the order of the day, providing a great impetus to the nationalist spirit. The air was thick with rumours of Sri Aurobindo's deportation. "Meanwhile the Government were determined to get rid of Sri Aurobindo as the only considerable obstacle left to the success of their repressive policy. As they could not send him to the Andamans they decided to deport him. This came to the knowledge of Sister Nivedita and she informed Sri Aurobindo and asked him to leave British India and work from outside so that his work would not be stopped or totally interrupted. Sri Aurobindo contented himself with publishing in the *Karmayogin* a signed article in which he spoke of the project of deportation and left the country what he called his last will and testament; he felt sure that this would kill the idea of deportation and it so turned out."[170]

The "Open Letter" is a very important document, as it contains almost all the essentials of Sri Aurobindo's political thought and action, and we give below long extracts from it.

"The position of a public man who does his duty in India today is too precarious to permit of his being sure of the morrow. I have recently come out of a year's seclusion from work for my country on a charge which there

[170] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

was not a scrap of reliable evidence to support, but my acquittal is no security either against the trumping up of a fresh accusation or the arbitrary law of deportation which dispenses with the inconvenient formality of a charge and the still more inconvenient necessity of producing evidence...

"Rumour is strong that a case for my deportation has been submitted to the Government by the Calcutta Police and neither the tranquillity of the country nor the scrupulous legality of our procedure is a guarantee against the contingency of the all-powerful fiat of the Government watch-dogs silencing scruples on the part of those who advise at Simla. Under such circumstances I have thought it well to address this letter to my countrymen, and especially to those who profess the principles of the Nationalist Party, on the needs of the present and the policy of the future. In case of my deportation it may help to guide some who would be uncertain of their course of action, and, if I do not return from it, it may stand as my last political will and testament to my countrymen.

"The situation of the Nationalist party is difficult but not impossible. The idea of some that the party is extinct because its leaders are sentenced or deported, is an error which comes of looking only at the surface. The Party is there not less powerful and pervading than before, but in want of a policy and a leader. The first it may find, the second only God can give it. All great movements wait for their Godsent leader, the willing channel of His force, and only when he comes, move forward triumphantly to their fulfilment. The men who have led hitherto have been strong men of high gifts and commanding genius, great enough to be the protagonists of any other movement, but even they were not sufficient to fulfil one which is the chief current of a worldwide revolution. Therefore the Nationalist party, custodians of the future, must wait for the man who is to come, calm in the midst of calamity, hopeful under defeat, sure of eventual emergence and triumph and always mindful of the responsibility which they owe not only to their Indian posterity but to the world.

"Meanwhile the difficulties of our situation ask for bold yet wary walking. The strength of our position is moral, not material.... The whole of the moral strength of the country is with us, justice is with us, Nature is

with us. The law of God which is higher than any human, justifies our action, youth is for us, the future is ours. On that moral strength we must rely for our survival and eventual success. We must not be tempted by any rash impatience into abandoning the ground on which we are strong and venturing on the ground on which we are weak. Our ideal is an ideal which no law can condemn: our chosen methods are such that no modern Government can expressly declare them illegal without forfeiting its claim to be considered a civilised administration. To that ideal and to those methods we must firmly adhere and rely on them alone for our eventual success. A respect for the law is a necessary quality for endurance as a nation and it has always been a marked characteristic of the Indian people. We must therefore scrupulously observe the law while taking every advantage both of the protection it gives and the latitude it still leaves for pushing forward our cause and our propaganda. With the stray assassinations which have troubled the country we have no concern, and, having once clearly and firmly dissociated ourselves from them, we need notice them no farther. They are the rank and noxious fruit of a rank and noxious policy and until the authors of that policy turn from their errors, no human power can prevent the poison-tree from bearing according to its kind. We who have no voice either in determining the laws or their administration are helpless in the matter. To deportation and proclamation, the favourite instruments of men incapable of a wise and strong rule, we can only oppose a steady and fearless adherence to the propagandism and practice of a lawful policy and a noble ideal.

"Our ideal is that of Swaraj or absolute autonomy free from foreign control. We claim the right of every nation to live its own life by its own energies according to its own nature and ideals. We reject the claim of aliens to force upon us a civilisation inferior to our own or to keep us out of our inheritance on the untenable ground of a superior fitness. While admitting the stains and defects which long subjection has induced upon our native capacity and energy, we are conscious of that capacity and energy reviving in us. We point to the unexampled national vigour which has preserved the people of this country through centuries of calamity and

defeat, to the great actions of our forefathers continued even to the other day, to the many men of intellect and character such as no other nation in a subject condition has been able to produce, and we say that a people capable of such unheard-of vitality is not one which can be put down as a nation of children and incapables. We are in no way inferior to our forefathers. We have brains, we have courage, we have an infinite and various national capacity. All we need is a field and an opportunity. That held and opportunity can only be provided by a national government, a free society and a great Indian culture. So long as these are not conceded to us, we can have no other use for our brains, courage and capacity than to struggle unceasingly to achieve them.

"Our ideal of Swaraj involves no hatred of any other nation nor of the administration which is now established by law in this country. We find a bureaucratic administration, we wish to make it democratic; we find an alien government, we wish to make it indigenous; we find a foreign control, we wish to render it Indian. They lie who say that this aspiration necessitates hatred and violence. Our ideal of patriotism proceeds on the basis of love and brotherhood and it looks beyond the unity of the nation and envisages the ultimate unity of mankind. But it is a unity of brothers, equals and freemen that we seek, not the unity of master and serf, of devourer and devoured. We demand the realisation of our corporate existence as a distinct race and nation because that is the only way in which the ultimate brotherhood of humanity can be achieved, not by blotting out individual peoples and effacing outward distinctions, but by removing the internal obstacles to unity, the causes of hatred, malice and misunderstanding. A struggle for our rights does not involve hatred of those who mistakenly deny them. It only involves a determination to suffer and strive, to speak the truth boldly and without respect of persons, to use every lawful means of pressure and every source of moral strength in order to establish ourselves and dis-establish that which denies the law of progress.

"Our methods are those of self-help and passive resistance. To unite and organise ourselves in order to show our efficiency by the way in which we can develop our industries, settle our individual disputes, keep order and

peace on public occasions, attend to questions of sanitation, help the sick and suffering, relieve the famine-stricken, work out our intellectual, technical and physical education, evolve a Government of our own for our own internal affairs so far as that could be done without disobeying the law or questioning the legal authority of the bureaucratic administration, this was the policy publicly and frankly adopted by the Nationalist party.... Courage and sane statesmanship in our leaders is all that is wanted to restore the courage and the confidence of the people and evolve new methods of organisation which will not come into conflict even with the repressive laws.

"The policy of passive resistance was evolved partly as the necessary complement of self-help, partly as a means of putting pressure on the Government. The essence of this policy is the refusal of co-operation so long as we are not admitted to a substantial share and an effective control in legislation, finance and administration. Just as "No representation, no taxation" was the watchword of American constitutional agitation in the eighteenth century, so "No control, no co-operation" should be the watchword of our lawful agitation — for constitution we have none, — in the twentieth. We sum up this refusal of co-operation in the convenient word "Boycott", refusal of co-operation in the industrial exploitation of our country, in education, in government, in judicial administration, in the details of official intercourse. Necessarily, we have not made that refusal of co-operation complete and uncompromising, but we hold it as a method to be enlarged and pushed farther according as the necessity for moral pressure becomes greater and more urgent. This is one aspect of the policy. Another is the necessity of boycott to help our own nascent energies in the field of self-help. Boycott of foreign goods is a necessary condition for the encouragement of Swadeshi industries, boycott of Government schools is a necessary condition for the growth of national education, boycott of British courts is a necessary condition for the spread of arbitration. The only question is the extent and conditions of the boycott and that must be determined by the circumstances of the particular problem in each case.

The general spirit of passive resistance has first to be raised, afterwards it can be organised, regulated and, where necessary, limited....”[171]

[171] *Speeches* of Sri Aurobindo — Appendix.

XX

In the first week of August, 1909, Sri Aurobindo delivered a speech at Kumartuli, a district of Calcutta. He said that he was not very enthusiastic about saying the same things again and again like the stump orators. What he spoke was only in the hope that some of the things he said might go to the hearts of his countrymen and that he might see some effect of his speeches in their action....

"...On their fidelity to Swadeshi, to Boycott, to passive resistance rested the hope of a peaceful and spiritual salvation. On that it depended whether India would give the example, unprecedented in history, of a revolution worked out by moral force and peaceful pressure."

On the 7th August, there was a festival celebrated in Calcutta, and presided over by Sj. Bhupendranath Bose. Writing on this celebration in the *Karmayogin* of the 14th August, Sri Aurobindo said, "...Even in these few years the Ganapati and Shivaji festivals, instituted by the far-seeing human sympathy and democratic instinct of Mr. Tilak have done much to reawaken and solidify the national feeling of Maharashtra and we can all feel what a stimulus to the growth and permanence of the movement we have found in the celebrations of the 7th August and the 16th October[172]. They are to us what sacred days are to the ordinary religions. The individual religious man can do without them, collective religion cannot. These are the sacred days in the religion of Nationalism, the worship of God the Mother."

Sri Aurobindo started a new weekly paper in Bengali, *Dharma,* on the 23rd August, 1909. Its editorials were headed by the famous verse of the Gita: "Whensoever there is the fading of the Dharma and the uprising of unrighteousness, then I loose myself forth into birth." The naming of the English paper as *Karmayogin* and the Bengali paper as *Dharma*, the picture of Sri Krishna, the charioteer of Arjuna, driving him to the battle of

[172] 7th August was the birth anniversary of the Boycott and 16th October that of the Partition.

Kurukshetra, printed on the cover of the *Karmayogin*, and the quotation from the Gita in the *Dharma* promising the descent of the Divine for the uplifting of the world from unrighteousness — all these are clear pointers to the direction in which Sri Aurobindo's thought and life were then vigorously turning. Not that he was thinking of eschewing politics, or withdrawing from the welter of political forces in Bengal, but he was feeling more and more the imperative need of rising to the planes of the Truth and infinite Knowledge and bringing down their dynamism to the earth, not only for the transformation of the political life of India, or the revival and resurgence of the culture of India, but the transmutation of the very stuff of human consciousness and the texture of earthly existence. His vision had opened to wider horizons and unbounded vistas of collective perfection and divine fulfilment. After the decisive experiences he had had in Alipore jail, it would have been futile for any person or any circumstances to seek to pen him up within the framework of his past thoughts. He had already given himself fully to the Divine, and now that the Divine directed him to other spheres of work and experience, it was not for him to say No. God's will comes first to a man of God, and family, country, even humanity come after. The soul of man comes from God to do His Will in the world, and once that Will is known, nothing in the world can prevent it from fulfilling it.

In the first issue of the *Dharma*, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the editorial "...The object of this paper, *Dharma*, is to preach and propagate the Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion, the practice of the duties attached to each race, and the pursuit of the spirit of the times, the Zeitgeist. We are Indians, descendants of the Aryans, inheritors of the Aryan teachings and Aryan codes of conduct. This Aryan spirit is the religion of our race and society. Wisdom, devotion, love, courage, strength, and humility are the hall-mark of the Aryan character. To impart knowledge to humanity, to place before the world flawless examples of exalted, high-souled character, to protect the weak, to punish the powerful oppressor, these are the objects of the life of the Aryan race, and in the realisation of these objects lies its religious fulfilment. Today, we have fallen from our faith, fallen from our

aim, fallen into a confusion of values and the sombre spell of delusive tamas, and lost the Aryan teaching and Aryan morality. The first object of this journal, *Dharma,* is to provide the whole nation, and the youth in particular, with the right education, the lofty ideals and the way of work conducive to the growth of the Aryan spirit, so that the future generations of our beloved motherland may become wise, devoted to truth, full of love for all men, inspired with brotherly feeling, courageous, strong and humble."[173]

These words also show which way the wind was blowing.

The Hoogly Conference took place on the 6th and 7th September under the presidentship of Sri Baikunthanath Sen, a moderate leader. Sri Aurobindo himself writes on this Conference in his book, *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother* as follows: "He (Sri Aurobindo) led the party again at the session of the Provincial Conference at Hoogly. There it became evident for the first time that Nationalism was gaining the ascendant, for it commanded a majority among the delegates and in the Subjects Committee Sri Aurobindo was able to defeat the Moderates' resolution welcoming the Reforms and pass his own resolution stigmatising them as utterly inadequate and unreal and rejecting them. But the Moderate leaders threatened to secede if this was maintained and to avoid a scission he consented to allow the Moderate resolution to pass, but spoke at the public session explaining his decision and asking the Nationalists to acquiesce in it in spite of their victory so as to keep some unity in the political forces of Bengal. The Nationalist delegates, at first triumphant and clamorous, accepted the decision and left the hall quietly at Sri Aurobindo's order so that they might not have to vote either for or against the Moderate resolution. This caused much amazement and discomfiture in the minds of the Moderate leaders who complained that the people had refused to listen to their old and tried leaders and clamoured against them, but at the bidding of a young man new to politics they had obeyed in disciplined silence as if a single body."

[173] Free rendering from the original Bengali.

In the *Karmayogin* of the 14th September, there appeared an assessment of the Hoogly Conference in which, in course of a review, it was stated: "...If the Nationalists pressed their points the Conference would be broken up by the secession of the Moderate leaders. In all... disputed matters,... the Nationalists gave way and adhered only to their main point of securing some definite step in relation to the holding of an united Congress.... In his speech on the Boycott resolution, Srijut Aurobindo Ghose purposely refrained from stating more than the bare fact in order that nothing he might say should lead to excitement or anything which could be an excuse for friction. It is not that the Nationalist party is not willing or able to stand by itself if that proves inevitable and seems the best course in the interests of Nationalism and the future of the country. But it has always been the ideal of the nationalists to make of the Congress a great and living body deliberative in the manner of free assemblies which consider from various points of view what is best for the country and decide by majority or, whenever possible, unanimously, the parties holding together not by identity of views but by one common aim and interest and the combined freedom and restraint of a constitution which provides for the free expression of opinion under fair and impartial rules. They seek also a centre for the country's strength which can give authority to a network of organisation systematising the work of the nation..."

The president of the Hoogly Conference dubbed Sri Aurobindo an "impatient idealist", because, as the *Karmayogin* commented, "The reproach of idealism has always been brought against those who work with their eye on the future by the politicians who look only to the present. The reproach of impatience is levelled with equal ease and readiness against those who in great and critical times have the strength and skill to build with rapidity the foundations or the structure of the future." No great man who has ever achieved something for his nation, country or humanity has been known to be without idealism. His intuition or imagination has pictured the future before his vision, and his creative or constructive genius has carved and moulded it out of the heterogeneous elements and amorphous potentials of the present. All greatness is avowedly idealistic.

But impatience? Had Sri Aurobindo been impatient, he would not have ordered his followers to concede the demands of the Moderates for the sake of the unity of the Congress. A large majority of the political workers in Bengal were nationalists, and they would have easily carried the day at the Conference had they only insisted on the acceptance of their resolutions, but as a practical politician Sri Aurobindo sacrificed the victory of his party to the unity of the Congress. Times and circumstances having been different, he had broken the Congress at Surat rather than submit to the demands of the Moderates, but now, after his release from the Alipore jail, when he saw that "the political aspect of the country had altered, most of the Nationalist leaders were in jail or in self-imposed exile and that there was a general discouragement and depression, though the feeling in the country had not ceased but was only suppressed and was growing by its suppression," he decided that the unity of the Congress was the one thing important to be preserved, and, so, he did not hesitate to make substantial concessions to the Moderates. Sri Aurobindo, as we have seen so often, made no fetish of consistency. He said and did what the Light within him prompted him to say or do. His dealings with men and circumstances were, therefore, always marked by a percipient, if baffling, flexibility. In fact, he dealt not so much with men or circumstances as with the subtle forces driving them. He was concerned with what had to be done from moment to moment, and not with what ought to have been done according to human reason. Divine direction or the direction of the inner Light has always been a paradox and a puzzle to men who cannot act except on the basis of their sense data, or who run only in the harness of fixed mental ideas.

A few days after the Hoogly Conference, Sri Aurobindo went to attend the Provincial Conference in Sylhet.

"Out on tour, Sri Aurobindo used to address meetings, meet people when he was free and give them instructions and advice. Most of those who came to his meetings did not understand English, they were common village folk. But they came in crowds all the same, men, women and children, just to hear him speak and have his *darshan*. When he stood up to address a

gathering, pin-drop silence prevailed. His audience must surely have felt a vibration of something behind the spoken word. It is not that he confined himself to political matters alone. There were many who knew that he was a Yogi and spiritual guide and they sought his help in these matters too. I have myself seen as I spent whole nights with him in the same room, at Jalsuko, how he would sit up practically the whole night and go to bed only for a short while in the early hours of the morning...."

"We toured the country for about ten or twelve days and then we came back."[174]

In his Bengali weekly, *Dharma*, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

"We had seen in Hoogly how the spirit of Nationalism had expanded and grown beyond expectation, but it was in Sylhet that we witnessed its highest development. In this distant part of East Bengal, the very name of the Moderates had faded away; it is Nationalism alone that remains, unimpaired and vigorous. The people of Sylhet... have held a Conference in the very birth-place of the policy of repression and have not been afraid to proclaim Swaraj as the goal of their struggle. They have rejected the policy of prayer and petition of the Moderates and have framed their resolutions on the basis of moral force and passive resistance. It has been declared in the Sylhet district Conference that Swaraj is morally the birth-right of every nation, and the people of the country have been called upon to adopt all lawful means for achieving it...."

Sri Aurobindo wrote a number of articles in the *Dharma* on religion, philosophy, art and politics. Some of his essays on political subjects were couched in telling allegories, edged with sharp irony. His essays like "Our religion", "Maya", "Sannyas and Tyaga", "National Resurgence and National Hatred", "Egoism", "The Problems of the Past and a glimpse of the Future", "Motherland and Nationalism", "The Upanishads", "The Puranas", "The Eight Siddhis" etc., and a long sequence of essays on the

[174] *Smritir Pātā* (in Bengali) by Nolini Kanta Gupta.

Gita reveal an original approach to the ancient spiritual wisdom and philosophical thought. Some of these essays have been published in book form, but an English translation of them will enable non-Bengali readers to see what glittering nuggets of gold they are. An unerring insight into the eternal core of Hinduism, the part it played in the evolution of Indian culture, and its mission in the creation of the future in which the East and the West shall meet to build a new world of unity and harmony, shines out in all his utterances of this period. And his spiritual experiences in the jail invest his words with an accent of radiant authority which convinces and conquers even the heart of a sceptic. His post-Alipore writings stand in a class apart. Though he never addressed a single meeting in his mother tongue, Bengali, he wielded a facile and powerful pen in it, and his diction perfectly reflected the depth and splendour of his thought.

XXI

Under the caption, The Past and the Future, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Karmayogin* of 25th September, 1909: "The debasement of our mind, character and tastes by a grossly commercial, materialistic and insufficient European education is a fact on which young Nationalism has always insisted. The practical destruction of our artistic perception and the plastic skill and fineness of eyes and hand which once gave our productions pre-eminence, distinction and mastery of the European markets, is also a thing accomplished. Most vital of all, the spiritual and intellectual divorce from the past which the present schools and universities has effected, has beggared the nation of the originality, high aspiration and forceful energy which can alone make a nation free and great. To reverse the process and recover what we have lost, is undoubtedly the first object to which we ought to devote ourselves. And as the loss of originality, aspiration and energy was the most vital of all these losses, so their recovery should be our first and most important objective. The primary aim of the prophets of Nationalism was to rid the nation of the idea that because temporary causes had brought us low and made us weak, low therefore must be our aims and weak our methods. They pointed the mind of the people to a great and splendid destiny, not in some distant millennium but in the comparatively near future, and fired the hearts of the young men with a burning desire to realise the apocalyptic vision.... To raise the mind, character and tastes of the people, to recover the ancient nobility of temper, the strong Aryan character and the high Aryan outlook, the perceptions which made earthly life beautiful and wonderful, and the magnificent spiritual experiences, realisations and aspirations which made us the deepest-hearted, deepest-thoughted and most delicately profound in life of all the peoples of the earth, is the task next in importance and urgency.

"...We have to recover the Aryan spirit and ideal and keep it intact but enshrined in new forms and more expansive institutions. We have to treasure jealously everything in our social structure, manners, institutions,

which is of permanent value, essential to our spirit or helpful to the future; but we must not cabin the expanding and aggressive spirit of India in temporary forms which are the creation of the last few hundred years. That would be a vain and disastrous endeavour. The mould is broken; we must remould in larger outlines and with a richer content.... Our half-aristocratic, half-theocratic feudalism had to be broken in order that the democratic spirit of the Vedanta might be released and by absorbing all that is needed of the aristocratic and theocratic culture, create for the Indian race a new and powerful political and social organisation. We have to learn and use the democratic principle and methods of Europe in order that hereafter we may build up something more suited to our past and to the future of humanity. We have to throw away the individualism and materialism and keep the democracy. We have to solve for the human race the problem of harmonising and spiritualising its imlpulses towards liberty, equality and fraternity.... Aesthetic arts and crafts cannot live against the onrush of cheap and vulgar manufactures under the conditions of the modern social structure. Industry can only become again beautiful if poverty and the struggle for life are eliminated from society and the co-operative State and commune organised as the fruit of a great moral and spiritual uplifting of humanity. We hold such an uplifting and reorganisation as part of India's mission.... The men who would lead India must be catholic and many-sided. When the Avatar comes, we like to believe that he will be not only the religious guide, but the political leader, the great educationist, the regenerator of society, the captain of co-operative industry, with the soul of the poet, scholar and artist. He will be in short the summary and grand type of the future Indian nation which is rising to reshape and lead the world."

India has won political independence, but she has yet to regain her soul. She has yet to realise that she has a great destiny, a marvellous future, more glorious than her past, and an unprecedented mission to accomplish for the world. Only dimly has she descried this mission, and in her ignorance she has given it an ethical and moral pigmentation. She has not yet recovered

the spiritual treasures of her ageless past and learned to draw her sap from it for the creation of her future. Many of her children do not even believe that she has a soul and a world-mission. They do not even care to know whether they have their roots in the past.

Sri Aurobindo speaks of these ever-green roots. He exhorts us to steep ourselves in the aroma of the past and march forward to the greater glories of the future. As he says elsewhere, “We do not belong to the dawns of the past, but to the noons of the future.” A blind attachment to the past spells sterility and stagnation. But a stark disowning of it spells spiritual and cultural death. A rootless, denationalised India can create no great future for herself. An infatuated aping of the West can only lead her to the abyss on the brink of which the West itself is tottering today. India has to create her future and forge her culture, her literature, her arts and sciences, her educational system, her politics, and her commerce and industry in the fire of her specific spiritual genius. Her dynamic, realistic spirituality will renovate the world.

Sri Aurobindo serialised his “Brain of India” in the *Karmayogin* of October 9, 1909. His poem, “Invitation”, was published in the same paper on the 6th November, and another poem “Who” on the 13th. Another sequence on “The National Value of Art” was started on the 20th November. His poem, “Image”, was also published on the same date. His drama, “The Birth of Sin” was begun on the 11th December and a poem, “Epiphany”, was published on the 18th December. Sri Aurobindo’s yoga, politics, poetry, drama, philosophical essays and dissertations on art, all went together. Or, it was rather out of his yoga that flowed a ceaseless stream of energy expressing itself in these forms of activity. His yoga was, indeed, a multi-expressive integration of dynamic spiritual potentials. We quote below a few lines from each of his three poems, “Invitation”, “Who”, and “Epiphany”, for they reveal something of his creative yoga.

INVITATION

I sport with solitude here in my regions,

Of misadventure have made me a friend.
Who would live largely? Who would live freely?
Here to the wind-swept uplands ascend.

WHO

The Master of man and his infinite Lover,
He is close to our hearts, had we vision to see;
We are blind with our pride and the pomp of our passions,
We are bound in our thoughts where we hold ourselves free.

EPIPHANY

The God of Wrath, the God of Love are one,
Nor least He loves when most He smites. Alone
Who rises above fear and plays with grief,
Defeat and death, inherits full relief
From blindness and beholds the single Form,
Love masking Terror, Peace supporting storm.

At this time rumour spread again of arrests and deportations. Sri Aurobindo's writings were causing a great deal of alarm to the mighty British Raj, but it found itself at its wits' end as to how to take action against one who gave it no plausible grounds for framing a charge. We know that Sri Aurobindo had scotched the first rumour in July by publishing his "An Open Letter to my Countrymen". This time, too, he published an article entitled "To my Countrymen" in the *Karmayogin* of December 25, and it produced the same result. In this article he wrote among other things:

"The period of waiting is over. We have two things made clear to us, first, that the future of the nation is in our hands, and, secondly, that from the Moderate party we can expect no cordial co-operation in building it. Whatever we do, we must do ourselves, in our own strength and courage.

Let us then take up the work God has given us, like courageous, steadfast and patriotic men willing to sacrifice greatly and venture greatly because the mission also is great. If there are any unnerved by the fear of repression, let them stand aside. If there are any who think that by flattering Anglo-India or coquetting with English Liberalism they can dispense with the need of effort and the inevitability of peril, let them stand aside. If there are any who are ready to be satisfied with mean gains or unsubstantial concessions, let them stand aside. But all who deserve the name of Nationalists, must now come forward and take up their burden.

"The fear of the law is for those who break the law. Our aims are great and honourable, free from stain or reproach, our methods are peaceful, though resolute and strenuous. We shall not break the law and, therefore, we need not fear the law. But if a corrupt police, unscrupulous officials or a partial judiciary make use of the honourable publicity of our political methods to harass the men who stand in front by illegal ukases, suborned and perjured evidence or unjust decisions, shall we shrink from the toll that we have to pay on our march to freedom? Shall we cower behind a petty secrecy or a dishonourable inactivity? We must have our associations, our organisations, our means of propaganda, and if these are suppressed by arbitrary proclamations, we shall have done our duty by our motherland and not on us will rest any responsibility for the madness which crushes down open and lawful political activity in order to give a desperate and sullen nation into the hands of those fiercely enthusiastic and unscrupulous forces that have arisen among us inside and outside India. So long as any loophole is left for peaceful effort, we will not renounce the struggle. If the conditions are made difficult and almost impossible, can they be worse than those our countrymen have to contend against in the Transvaal? Or shall we, the flower of Indian culture and education, show less capacity and self-devotion than the coolies and shopkeepers who are there rejoicing to suffer for the honour of their nation and the welfare of their community?

"What is it for which we strive? The perfect self-fulfilment of India and the independence which is the condition of self-fulfilment are our ultimate goal. In the meanwhile such imperfect self-development and such

incomplete self-government as are possible in less favourable circumstances, must be attained as a preliminary to the more distant realisation. What we seek is to evolve self-government either through our own institutions or through those provided for us by the law of the land. No such evolution is possible by the latter means without some measure of administrative control. We demand, therefore, not the monstrous and misbegotten scheme which has just been brought into being, but a measure of reform based upon those democratic principles which are ignored in Lord Morley's Reforms, — a literate electorate without distinction of creed, nationality or caste, freedom of election unhampered by exclusory clauses, an effective voice in legislation and finance and some check upon an arbitrary executive. We demand also the gradual devolution of executive government out of the hands of the bureaucracy into those of the people. Until these demands are granted, we shall use the pressure of that refusal of co-operation which is termed passive resistance..."

In the last paragraph of the article Sri Aurobindo calls upon his countrymen to organise the national strength. National education must be made truly national, the movement of arbitration must be taken up again and the Swadeshi movement must be galvanised and fired with a forceful purpose. He strongly counsels the organisation of the Nationalist party, and the establishment of a Nationalist Council and Nationalist Associations throughout the country.

The rumour of deportation ceased for the moment. To deport or not to deport Sri Aurobindo was the problem that plagued the bureaucracy. They did not know that the Light which led him was not of his sharp political intelligence, and the shield that protected him was not of his own making. Had not the Divine told him in Alipore jail, "...it is not my will that this time either you should be convicted or that you should pass the time, as others have to do, in suffering for their country... I give you the Adesh to

go forth and do my work."[175] Arrest or deportation was thus barred out by the Supreme Tribunal of Universal Justice.

[175] *Uttarpara Speech* by Sri Aurobindo.

XXII

"All life is a field for the practice of religion, and worldly life, too, is a part of it. Religion does not consist only in the cultivation of spiritual knowledge or the development of the heart's devotion. Doing of work, too, is religion. It is this great teaching that is a permanent leaven of all our literature — eṣa dharma sanātanaḥ *(this is the eternal religion).*

There is a general notion that action forms, indeed, part of religion, but not action of all kinds. It is only those actions that are imbued with sattwic feeling or stem from the ethical consciousness of the doer and conduce to renunciation deserve to be called religious action. This... is a mistaken notion. If sattwic action is religious, so is rajasic action. If being kind to all creatures is religious, so is the slaying of one's country's enemies in a righteous battle. If to sacrifice one's happiness, wealth and even life for the good of others is an act of religion, so is it to take proper care of one's body, which is a means of religious progress. Politics, too, is religion, and poetry, and painting, and the regaling of others with sweet music. Any action, be it great or small, which has no taint of selfishness in it, is a religious action.... The highest and best religion is that which makes us perform all our actions as an offering, a sacrifice to Him, and regard them equally as done by His Nature."

Free rendering of some lines from
Sri Aurobindo's articles in his Bengali paper *Dharma*

The *Karmayogin* prospered. Its philosophical articles were a distillation of ancient Hindu wisdom presented through the prism of a synthetising vision. What had appeared disparate, anomalous and ambiguous was discovered as

integral parts of an organic whole. Each strand of Indian spirituality, each phase of Indian culture, even each thread of the epic tapestry of ancient India was viewed and interpreted in a new light. Philosophy and history, allegory and legend, logic and satire, all came handy in a masterly dealing with the problems of national politics. The freshness, force, and piquancy of its reviews endeared the *Karmayogin* to its readers, and its popularity increased to such an extent that a cheaper edition was urgently called for. On the 1st January, 1910, the *Karmayogin* came out with the following notice:

"The difficulty felt by many students and educated men of small means in buying the *Karmayogin* at its ordinary price of two annas, has been so much pressed on our attention that we have found it necessary to bring out a cheaper edition at one anna a copy.... The *Karmayogin*... is now sufficiently successful to allow of a concession of this kind being made without financial injury..."

The publication of Sri Aurobindo's "An Open Letter to my Country" was followed by a lull. For a few days rumours of his arrest ceased. But they revived again, for the British Government felt unsafe so long as Sri Aurobindo was at large. On the 8th January the *Karmayogin* wrote under the heading, "The Menace of Deportation":

"Once more rumours of deportation are rife, proceeding this time from those pillars of authority, the police. It seems that these gentlemen have bruited it abroad that twenty-four men prominent and unprominent are within the next six or seven days to be deported from Bengal, and so successfully has the noise of the coming *Coup d'État* been circulated that the rumour of it comes to us from a distant corner of Behar. It appears that the name of Sj. Aurobindo Ghose crowns the police list of those who are to be spirited away to the bureaucratic Bastilles. The offence for which this inclusion is made is, apparently, that he criticises the Government, by which we presume it is meant that he publicly opposes the Reforms. It is difficult to judge how much value is to be attached to the rumour, but we

presume that at least a proposal has been made. If we are not mistaken, this will make the third time that the deportation of the Nationalist leader has been proposed by the persistence of the police. The third is supposed to be lucky, and let us hope it will be the last. The Government ought to make up its mind one way or the other, and the country should know whether they will or will not tolerate opposition within the law; and this will decide it. Meanwhile, why does the thunderbolt linger? Or is there again a hitch in London?"

Sri Aurobindo's *A System of National Education* began in the 12th January issue of the *Karmayogin*. Sri Aurobindo's translation of the Mundaka Upanishad was begun on the 5th Feb, 1910. In the 19th February issue Sri Aurobindo started his poem, *Baji Prabhou*. It was prefaced by the following note: "This poem is founded on the historical incident of the heroic self-sacrifice of Baji Prabhou Deshpande who, to cover Shivaji's retreat, held the pass of Rangana for two hours with a small company of men against twelve thousand Moguls. Beyond the single fact of this great exploit there has been no attempt to preserve historical accuracy".

We quote a few lines from the poem which reminds us in its concentrated force and graphic intensity of Matthew Arnold's Sohrub and Rustum, though the episode here is pitched in a higher key and the tone is nobler.

"A noon of Deccan with its tyrant glare
Oppressed the earth; the hills stood deep in haze,
And sweltering athirst the fields glared up
Longing for water in the courses parched
Of streams long dead. Nature and man alike,
Imprisoned by a bronze and brilliant sky,
Sought an escape from that wide trance of heat....
"Tanaji Malsure, not in this living net
Of flesh and nerve, nor in the flickering mind
Is a man's manhood seated. God within
Rules us, who in the Brahmin and the dog

Can, if He will, show equal godhead. Not
By men is mightiness achieved; Baji
Or Malsure is but a name, a robe,
And covers One alone. We but employ
Bhavani's strength, who in an arm of flesh
Is mighty as in the thunder and the storm..."

On the 24th January Shamsul Alam, Deputy Superintendent of the Intelligence Dept., was shot dead in the High Court by a youth of about twenty. Shamsul was the right hand man of Mr. Norton in the Alipore Bomb Case.

Under "Facts and Opinions", we have the following in the *Karmayogin* of the 29th January, 1910:

"The startling assassination of Deputy Superintendent Shamsul Alam on Monday in the precincts of the High Court, publicly, in day-light, under the eyes of many and in a crowded building, breaks the silence which had settled on the country, in a fashion which all will deplore.... All we can do is to sit with folded hands and listen to the senseless objurgations of the Anglo-Indian Press, waiting for a time when the peaceful expression and organisation of our national aspirations will no longer be penalised. It is then that Terrorism will vanish from the country and the nightmare be as if it never had been."

This daring assassination of the arch detective drove the Government crazy, and in its distraction it clutched at deportation as the only means to shore up its power and prestige. Sri Aurobindo decided to leave Bengal.

Romantic yarns have been spun by some of the enthusiastic biographers and fellow-workers of Sri Aurobindo round his departure from Calcutta. We have no space here for a consideration of those fantasies and fabrications. We quote from Sri Aurobindo himself what he has said about his departure.

"Here are the facts of that departure. I was in the *Karmayogin* Office when I received the word, on information given by a high-placed police official, that the Office would be searched the next day and myself arrested. (The Office was in fact searched but no warrant was produced against me; I heard nothing more of it till the case was started against the paper later on, but by then I had already left Chandernagore for Pondicherry.) While I was listening to animated comments from those around on the approaching event, I suddenly received a command from above, in a Voice well-known to me, in three words: 'Go to Chandernagore.' In ten minutes or so I was in the boat for Chandernagore. Ramachandra Majumdar guided me to the Ghat and hailed a boat and I entered into it at once along with my relative Biren Ghosh and Moni (Suresh Chandra Chakravarti) who accompanied me to Chandernagore, not turning aside to Bagbazar or anywhere else. We reached our destination while it was still dark; they returned in the morning to Calcutta. I remained in secret entirely engaged in sadhana and my active connection with the two newspapers ceased from that time. Afterwards, under the same 'sailing orders' I left Chandernagore and reached Pondicherry on April 4, 1910.

"I may add in explanation that from the time I left Lele at Bombay after the Surat Sessions and my stay with him in Baroda, Poona and Bombay, I had accepted the rule of following the inner guidance implicitly and moving only as I was moved by the Divine. The spiritual development during the year in jail had turned this into an absolute law of the being. This accounts for my immediate action in obedience to the Adesh (Command) received by me..."[176]

Referring to the same subject in a refutation of some of the misstatements which had appeared in the Press, Sri Aurobindo said again, "Sri Aurobindo's departure to Chandernagore was the result of a sudden decision taken on the strength of an *ādeśa* from above and was carried out rapidly and secretly without consultation with anybody or advice from any

[176] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

quarter. He went straight from the *Dharma* office to the Ghat — he did not visit the Math, nobody saw him off; a boat was hailed, he entered into it with two young men and proceeded straight to his destination. His residence at Chandernagore was kept quite secret; it was known only to Sj. Motilal Roy who arranged for his stay and to a few others. Sister Nivedita was confidentially informed the day after his departure and asked to conduct the *Karmayogin* in place of Sri Aurobindo to which she consented...”[177]

When Sri Aurobindo’s boat touched Chandernagore, Biren went to Charu Chandra Roy, a distinguished citizen of the town who was a fellow-prisoner of Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore jail to request him to make some arrangement for Sri Aurobindo’s stay. “Charu Chandra was afraid and did not know what to do. In the meantime, when Biren and Suresh were thinking of going back to the boat with a disappointing reply, one Sishir Ghose took them to Motilal Roy. Motilal, on coming to know about it, readily accepted to accommodate Sri Aurobindo. He went to the boat and brought it near to the place where he stayed. Sri Aurobindo disembarked and was taken to his house. His request to keep his arrival secret was complied with and Motilal Roy made arrangements to keep him underground.”[178]

In Sri Aurobindo’s Uttarpara Speech we have had passing glimpses of his spiritual life as it was shaping in the Alipore jail, and we can very well see how he was being directed by the Divine in all the movements of his life and to what new avenues of work he was being led. We find another instance of the divine guidance in the sudden, unpremeditated way he left Calcutta under the divine Adesh (Command). He did not pause to reflect on the pros and cons of the course dictated. He did not make any arrangements about his stay at Chandernagore. He did not care to consider

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[177] *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on The Mother*.

[178] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* — A.B. Purani (Suresh was in the boat. It was only Biren who went to Charu Chandra Roy)

what would be the consequences of his departure. He left because he was asked to leave. Why should he bother about himself and what would happen to him when he knew in every fibre of his being that the Infinite Love had taken charge of him? He belonged neither to himself nor to the world, but to God alone and he was happy to be thus possessed and moved by Him for the fulfilment of His work.

"My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight,
My body is God's happy living tool,
My spirit a vast sun of deathless light."[179]

[179] From "Transformation", a poem by Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo at Chandernagore

"... We do want to realise Dharma or spirituality in an integral way and to see Indian spiritual discipline founded for ever on renunciation. But we are not prepared to accept the meaning India once attached to the words spirituality and renunciation in a spell of delusion. We want to see India enthroned as the teacher of the art of enjoyment as well as of renunciation to the world. Let us never forget that India will give to the West the lesson of the perfect enjoyment. Why are we anxious to confine Dharma to a narrow groove? Why are we anxious to base spirituality upon the unreality or insignificance of the world? All that exists is sustained and upheld by Dharma. We may be afraid of the external aspect of life and of politics, but Dharma excludes nothing. Dharma is not enclosed and exhausted in the arcane, immutable Self. Self and not-self, all are from the one Existent, and it is only by embracing all this in its entirety that Dharma can be integral, infinite and free. That alone is Dharma which imparts to man this wholeness, infinity and freedom. We do not want the Dharma that teaches us to relinquish or scornfully reject anything. The spirituality of the new age teaches that all things have to be properly dealt with and cultivated together; it does not advise the rejection of anything as trifling. To it there is nothing like Self and not-self, virtue and vice, truth and untruth. Untroubled and unflinching, it is ready to pursue and explore everything. It has harmonised in itself both intense renunciation and intense enjoyment..."

Free rendering from an article
in Sri Aurobindo's Bengali paper, *Dharma*.

Motilal Roy conducted Sri Aurobindo from the boat to his own house. Reclining in an easy-chair in Motilal's drawing room, Sri Aurobindo asked him to lodge him at a secret place, so that the agents of the British Government might not get the scent of his whereabouts. "I led him across our unused room to a dark apartment on the first floor, set apart as a store-room for chairs. A thick layer of dust lay settled on the first floor. Bats, cockroaches, and spiders reigned undisturbed about the beams.... I swept the dust away from a part of the floor, and laid a carpet which was covered over by a sheet. He sat down noiselessly..."[1]

Sri Aurobindo sat in that dim, dust-laden store-room, silent and meditative, and apparently oblivious of his surroundings. He was living in a world of his own, vaster and more radiant than the world in which his body was temporarily lodged. But, as usual, his eyes were wide open.

When Motilal came again, Sri Aurobindo was sitting in the same posture. "I stole into the room very cautiously across the verandah, and went to the second-storey room without making any noise. Opening my eyes wide, I observed that Sri Aurobindo was sitting silently with his eyes fixed in an upward stare. What a complacent and divine look! He had come to my house in an ecstatic state. He had utterly resigned himself to God. When he talked, words came out of his mouth as if someone else made him speak. If his hand moved, it was controlled, as it were, by a third agency. I held the refreshment dish before him; he glanced at it innocently. I said, 'My wife couldn't be taken into confidence. It is my own refreshment, please accept.... He partook of some food mechanically..."[2]

There was a haunting fear in Motilal's mind that Sri Aurobindo was not quite safe even in the secrecy of his store-room. Those were days of searches and arrests, and the spies and secret agents had somehow acquired the ubiquity of the Brahman. So, Sri Aurobindo had to move to the house of a friend of Motilal's; but this house, too, proving unsuitable, he was brought back to Motilal's.

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[1] *My life's Partner* by Motilal Roy.

[2] *My life's Partner* by Motilal Roy.

"He discoursed... about Vasudeva, Sankarshan, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, and I listened with rapt attention. On the subject of incarnation, he cited instances of the philosophic and practical types of manifestation, explaining in detail that Vyasa was the philosophic type and Sri Krishna the practical. He freely expounded the Upanishadic principles...

"His continued stay at a place might cause the secret to leak out, and we talked about his removal... I was charged to escort him over the town to the southern outskirts in the darkness of night in a carriage. His disappearance had been reported in the two magazines, 'Dharma' and 'Karmayogin'. People knew that he had gone away among the Himalayas for sadhana in response to a call from the Tibetan saint Kuthumi. Nonetheless, the police were more in the know than our countrymen; they were at that time searching for Aurobindo Babu in Calcutta...

"His look never seemed to be that of any human being, as if someone behind his eyes elongated the sight to touch me with it...

"When he was in a communicative mood, I asked, 'What do you see with your eyes so focussed?' His reply is still as vividly emblazoned on my heart as ever. He said, 'A multitude of letters come trooping down in the air; I try to decipher.' He explained again, 'Gods of the invisible world become visible. They are as significant as the alphabet, and want to communicate something which I endeavour to discover....'"[3]

Sri Aurobindo had to move successively to two or three places again. Instead of deportation he was now having a series of local and temporary transportations.

At about this time, Sri Aurobindo received again "sailing orders" to go to Pondicherry.

"*Some Aphorisms of Bhartrihari*", translated by Sri Aurobindo, came out in the 19th March issue of the *Karmayogin*, and the first two instalments of "Chitrangada", a poem by Sri Aurobindo, were also published in the

[3] *My Life's partner* by Motilal Roy.

same paper on the 26th march and 2nd April 1910, respectively. *Karmayogin* was now being edited by Sister Nivedita.

In the issue of 26th March 1910, *Karmayogin* published the following:

"We are greatly astonished to learn from the local Press that Sj. Aurobindo Ghose has disappeared from Calcutta and is now interviewing the Mahatmas in Tibet. We are ourselves unaware of this mysterious disappearance. As a matter of fact, Sri Aurobindo is in our midst and, if he is doing any astral business with Kuthumi or any other of the great Rishis, the fact is unknown to his other koshas (sheaths). Only as he requires perfect solitude and freedom from disturbance for his sadhana for sometime, his address is being kept a strict secret. This is the only foundation for the remarkable rumour which the vigorous imagination of a local contemporary has set floating. For similar reasons he is unable to engage in journalistic works, and *Dharma* has been entrusted to other hands."

The Bengali paper *Dharma* published the following notice on the 21st March:

"It is rumoured that Sri Aurobindo Ghose has gone away somewhere, nobody knows where. So far as we know, he is engaged in the practice of yoga and will not take up any political or other work. Because he is not willing to see anybody for the moment, the place of his sadhana has been kept a secret."

Suresh Chakravarty (alias Moni) received a very small note from Sri Aurobindo probably in the last week of February, asking him to go to Pondicherry and arrange for Sri Aurobindo's stay there. The preparation for Suresh's departure was made by Sukumar Mitra, Krishna Kumar Mitra's son and Sri Aurobindo's cousin. Suresh started by train from Calcutta on the 28th and reached Pondicherry on the 31st March. We quote below a few

lines from A.B. Purani's *Life of Sri Aurobindo*, which throw some light on Sri Aurobindo's departure from Calcutta and his arrival at Pondicherry:

"Sri Aurobindo asked Motilal to make arrangements for his departure. Motilal wrote a letter to Amar Chatterji at Uttarpara in which he informed him of Sri Aurobindo's intended departure from Chandernagore in a boat on the 31st March and asked him to make an arrangement to change the boat at Dumurtala Ghat and to ferry him from there to the steamer Dupleix. Other arrangements would be made, said Motilal, by Sukumar Mitra. He also said that Sukumar would be present at the Calcutta ghat.

"Motilal wrote another letter to Sukumar Mitra at Calcutta informing him of Sri Aurobindo's intention of going to Pondicherry and also telling him that Sri Aurobindo wanted him to make the necessary arrangements privately so as to keep his departure secret. He was asked to meet them at the Calcutta ghat with two tickets for Pondicherry by the steamer 'Dupleix', one for himself and the other for the young man who was to accompany him...

"As soon as he got Motilal's letter, Sukumar called Nagendra Kumar Guha Roy, a nationalist worker of Noakhali, to the *Sanjivani* office and gave him two (steel) trunks and asked him to take them to the mess where he was living. Nagendra jocularly asked whether they contained bombs. Sukumar asked him not to bother about the contents, but keep the trunks with him. Nagendra took them to No. 44/1, College Street.

"The next day Sukumar gave two names[4] to Nagen and asked him to buy two second class tickets for Colombo. This was done to put the police off the scent.... The tickets for Colombo were bought so that all inquiries would be directed, if at all, to Colombo instead of Pondicherry. Sukumar also instructed Nagen to reserve a double cabin so that the two (Sri Aurobindo and Bejoy) could travel together."

[4] The names were Jatindra Nath Mitra, assumed by Sri Aurobindo, and Bankim Chandra Basak, assumed by Bejoy.

In spite of the utmost care bestowed on the arrangement for Sri Aurobindo's departure, the plan went slightly awry and Sri Aurobindo had to go to Calcutta in order to pick up his luggage and look for Bejoy who was to accompany him to Pondicherry. When they came back to the Calcutta port, they were asked to get medical certificates from the British Medical Officer. But as it was late and the Medical Officer had finished his work on the steamer and returned home, they had to go back to the city, see the doctor and get the required certificates from him. Then at about 11 at night, they came and boarded the steamer and occupied the double cabin reserved for them. The steamer left Calcutta early morning on the 1st. April, 1910.

Asked about the reasons for his giving up politics, Sri Aurobindo once said, "I did not leave politics because I felt I could do nothing more there; such an idea was very far from me. I came away because I did not want anything to interfere with my Yoga and because I got a very distinct Adesh (divine command) in the matter. I have cut connection entirely with politics, but before I did so I knew from within that the work I had begun there was destined to be carried forward, on lines I had foreseen, by others, and that the ultimate triumph of the movement I had initiated was sure without my personal action or presence. There was not the least motive of despair or sense of futility behind my withdrawal."

Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry

> *"The illumined seer and priest of the call, free from harms, shining with light, carrying his banner of smoke, him we seek, the ray of intuition of the sacrifices."*
>
> Rig Veda: 8.44.10

On the 4th of April, 1910, Sri Aurobindo arrived by the steamer Dupleix at Pondicherry with Bejoy Nag at about 4 in the afternoon. Moni (Suresh Chakravarty) had already arrived on the 31st March and put up at the house of Srinivasachari, an orthodox Tamil Brahmin, to whom he had brought a letter of introduction from Sri Aurobindo. Srinivasachari had at first taken Moni for a spy, and did not attach any importance to his request for finding a suitable house for Sri Aurobindo. But when Moni announced the date of Sri Aurobindo's arrival, Srinivas took him at his word and thought of arranging a public reception. But Moni dissuaded him, saying that Sri Aurobindo's coming to Pondicherry was a closely guarded secret and that he would like to live in strict solitude in order to avoid harassment by the agents of the British Government. So, the idea of a public reception was abandoned, and only Moni and Srinivasachari went to the port to receive Sri Aurobindo.[1]

Sri Aurobindo, Bejoy and Moni were lodged on the second floor of Shankar Chetty's house in Comoutty Street. They stayed there till October. It was the same house where Swami Vivekananda had stayed when he had visited Pondicherry, sometime ago. As there was no bathroom in his apartment, Sri Aurobindo had to come down to the ground floor every day for his bath. They stayed there for about six months as Shankar Chetty's guests. It was a completely secluded life; and, though the agents of the

[1] According to A.B. Purani, Subramania Bharati also was with them but we have taken Moni's version as being more authentic. In his Bengali book, *Smritikatha,* Moni has given a graphic description of how he and Srinivasachari received Sri Aurobindo on board the steamer, took tea with him at the cabin, and brought down his luggage etc.

British Government must have been about, prowling and prying, they could discover no clue to their whereabouts. During the first three months, Bejoy and Moni had to keep to their room day and night. Afterwards Sri Aurobindo allowed them to go out. As a rule, visitors were not admitted, unless somebody wanted to see Sri Aurobindo on a special purpose and was fortunate enough to receive his permission.

Motilal Roy of Chandernagore sent to enquire about Sri Aurobindo's safe arrival. Subramania Bharati, the renowned poet, patriot and national worker of South India, who had been living at Pondicherry as a political refugee from British India, came in close touch with Sri Aurobindo and used to visit him very often with Srinivasachari. Later, he would see him every day in the evening. He was profoundly influenced by Sri Aurobindo. Writing about the year 1913 in his reminiscences, "Old Long Since", Amrita says, "Every evening, a little after dark, Bharati would go to Sri Aurobindo's house. He chose that time not with the purpose of avoiding people who would want to make a note of his visit. It was because Sri Aurobindo used to come out of his room and receive his friends only after seven in the evening. An exception, however, was made for close friends like Bharati and Srinivasachari, who, at a very urgent need, could see him at any time of the day. Their visits to Sri Aurobindo's house after seven had become a regular affair. Bharati would visit without fail; it was not so with Srinivasachari however.

"There was hardly any subject which they did not talk about in their meetings at night. They discussed literature, society, politics, the various arts...."[2] Long afterwards "Bharati learnt the Rig Veda from Sri Aurobindo".

About a week after Sri Aurobindo was lodged at Shankar Chetty's house, a distinguished French thinker and scholar, Paul Richard, came to Pondicherry in connection with Mon. Paul Blusion's election to the French

[2] *Old Long Since*: by Amrita (Mother India: August 1962). Amrita, who was manager of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, came into contact with Sri Aurobindo as early as 1913, when he was a school boy.

Chamber. Though the ostensible reason for his coming was the election, he had something much more important up his sleeve. “He was sent from France by Mira — she whom we know as the Mother.”[3] She had given him the sketch of a Yogachakra (a mystic symbol) saying that its interpreter was to be found in India and that he who would interpret it was her master and guide in yoga. On landing at Pondicherry, Paul Richard enquired whether there was any Yogi in the town. He was told of Sri Aurobindo, and as an interview was not an easy affair, he took the help of his friend, Zir Naidu, who was a prominent leader in politics, and obtained Sri Aurobindo’s permission. He saw Sri Aurobindo twice and had long talks with him, and he also got from him the interpretation of the mystic symbol. He was so much impressed by Sri Aurobindo that he hailed him afterwards as the greatest of the Sons of Heaven living upon earth, “the leader, the hero of tomorrow”.[4]

It was while he was staying in Shankar Chetty’s house that Sri Aurobindo fasted for about 23 days, just as an experiment. Asked about it later, he said, “when I did my fast of about 23 days in Chetty’s house, I very nearly solved the problem (of doing without food). I could *walk eight hours a day*[5] as usual. I continued my mental work and sadhana as usual and I found that I was not in the least weak at the end of 23 days. But the flesh began to grow less and I did not find a clue to replacing the very matter reduced in the body.

“When I broke the fast, I did not observe the common rule of people who undergo long fasts, — beginning with a little food, and so on. I began with the same quantity as I used to take before.”[6]

On the question of fasting, Sri Aurobindo said again afterwards: “I fasted twice: once in Alipore (jail) for ten days, and another time in Pondicherry for 23 days. At Alipore I was full of Yogic activities, I was

[3] *Old Long Since*: Amrita (Mother India: January 1963).

[4] *The Dawn Over Asia*: Paul Richard.

[5] Italics are ours.

[6] A.B. Purani: *Evening Talks*, 2nd series.

not taking my food and was throwing it away into the bucket; of course, the Superintendent did not know of it, only two warders knew about it and they informed others saying: 'This gentleman must be ill; he will not live long!' Though my physical strength was diminishing, I was able to raise a pail of water above my head which I could not do ordinarily.

"At Pondicherry, while fasting, I was in full mental and vital vigour. I was even walking eight hours a day and not feeling tired at all. And when I broke the fast I did not begin slowly but with the usual normal amount of food."

When some one asked him, "How is such fasting possible", he said, "One draws energy from the vital plane instead of depending upon physical substance... "[7]

K.V. Rangaswami, a zamindar of Kodailam, met Sri Aurobindo at Shankar Chetty's house. He represented the landlords in the Legislative Assembly in Delhi during the British rule. His guru, Nagai Japata, who was a famous Yogi, had said to him at the time of his death that a great Yogi would come from the North (of India) of whose guidance he could avail himself in his absence. The Yogi, he said, would come to South India seeking refuge, and could be recognised by the triple declaration made by him before. When K.V. Rangaswami heard that Sri Aurobindo had come down to Pondicherry, he thought that it must be he whom his guru had referred to. So he came and saw Sri Aurobindo and promised to bear the cost of publishing the book, *Yogic Sadhan*.[8]

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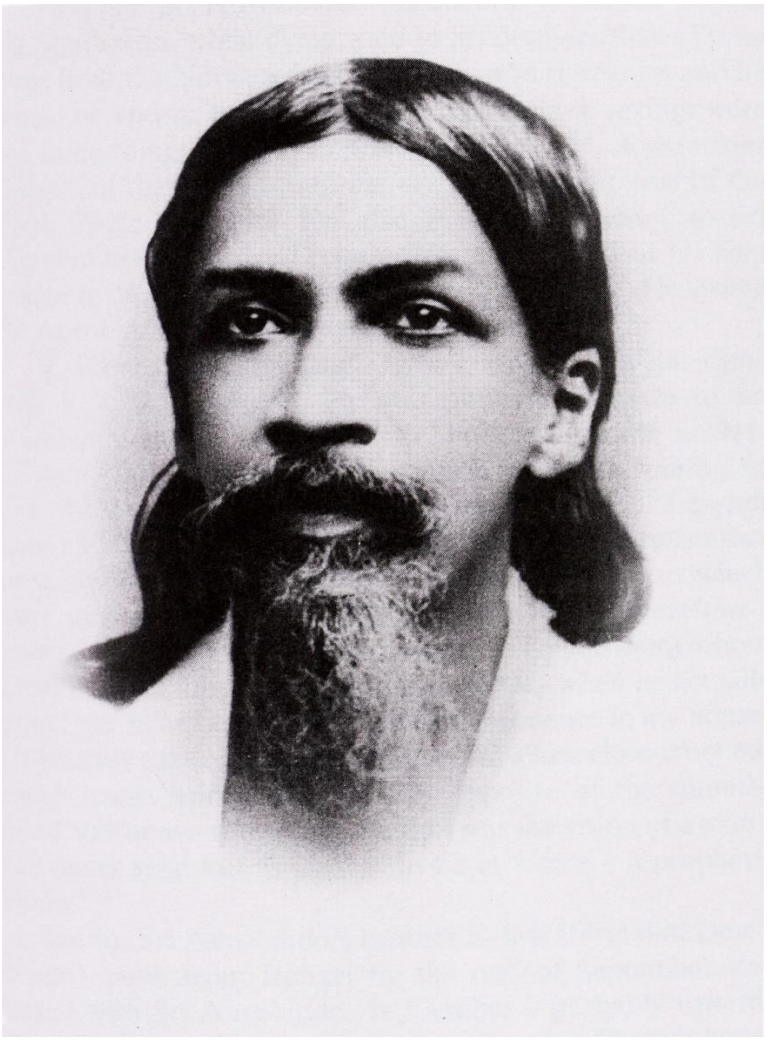
[7] A.B. Purani: *Evening Talks,* 2nd series.

[8] For the first three months of their stay at Shankar Chetty's house, they used to have Seances of an evening, in which automatic writing was done both as an experiment and an amusement. The book, *Yogic Sadhan,* was written during some of these Seances. Sri Aurobindo said in one of his evening talks, "When I was writing it, every time at the beginning and at the end the image of Ram Mohan Roy came before me". The author's name was printed in the book as Uttara Yogi. In 1927, Sri Aurobindo withdrew the book from circulation as it was not written by him.



Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry, 1918-20

To quote Sri Aurobindo, "There was a famous Yogi in the South who, while dying, said to his disciples that a Purna Yogi from the North would come down to the South and he would be known by three sayings. These three sayings were the three things I wrote in a letter to my wife. A zamindar disciple of that Yogi found me out and bore the cost of the book *Yogic Sadhan.*" He also gave some money to Sri Aurobindo and pledged regular financial help. But his help ceased to be regular and finally stopped altogether. He visited Sri Aurobindo twice again at Pondicherry.

V. Ramaswamy Iyengar[9], later known as Va-Ra, came with K.V. Rangaswami. He was powerfully drawn to Sri Aurobindo and came to live with him for sometime in 1911. Sri Aurobindo had seen him in a vision

[9] A friend of C.R. Das and a famous Tamil writer.

before his coming. In one of his evening talks he said about this vision: “I myself have had these visions, only I don’t usually try to remember or verify them. But there were two curious instances which were among the first of this kind and which therefore I remember.... The other was a certain V. Ramaswamy whom I had to meet, but I saw him not as he was when he actually came, but as he became after a year’s residence in my house. He became the very image of the vision, a face close-cropped, rough, rude, energetic, the very opposite of the smoothfaced Vaishnava who came. So that was the vision of a man I had never seen but as he was to be in future — a prophetic vision.”[10]

Saurin, Sri Aurobindo’s brother-in-law (Mrinalini Devi’s cousin) came from Bengal by the end of September and stayed with Sri Aurobindo. In October — probably towards the end — Sri Aurobindo moved from Shankar Chetty’s house to Rue Suffren in the southern part of the town and lived there till April, 1911. Nolini Kanta Gupta came from Bengal and joined them in November, 1910. Except for a few short visits to Bengal, Nolini Kanta, Moni and Bejoy lived permanently with Sri Aurobindo as his disciples. Bejoy went back to Bengal sometime in the early thirties and died there soon after. Moni passed away at Pondicherry in 1951, and Nolini Kanta, a wiry young man of eighty, the only surviving member of the first batch, has been the Secretary of Sri Aurobindo Ashram ever since its foundation.

It is remarkable how Sri Aurobindo who, shy and reserved by temperament, lived in solitude and seclusion, fully absorbed in his supramental Yoga and the whirl and rush of its revolutionary developments, attracted to himself, one after another, so many of the souls who were touched by his light and were destined to be the standard-beares of his epoch-making spiritual work. When the “Rose of God” blooms can the bees tarry to flock and forgather?

[10] A.B. Purani: *Evening Talks.*

II

Let us digress for a moment in order to peep into the flurried mind of the almighty British bureaucracy in India.

Sri Aurobindo's second "An open letter to my countrymen", published in the *Karmayogin* on the 25th December, 1909, was considered seditious, and a warrant was issued against him. But as the Police failed to trace him, the printer was convicted, sentenced to six months' imprisonment and acquitted on appeal.

We reproduce below some of the secret documents of the British Government which provide more amusing fiction and fabrication than facts about Sri Aurobindo's activities and whereabouts. Puck plays pranks even in the forbidden chambers of solemn officialdom and criminally obfuscates the intelligence of the Criminal Intelligence Department.

"...It is said that the accused, Manmohan Ghose, printer, personally had no wish to move the High Court against his conviction, as he feared an enhancement of the sentence, and the appeal appears to be preferred in the interests of Arabinda Ghose at the instance of Girija Sundar Chakravarty, former manager of this paper. It is believed that if, by any chance, Manmohan Ghose should be acquitted, it would mean the triumphant return of Arabindo Ghose to Calcutta...." (*Karmayogin Sedition case* — Extract from C.I.D. Weekly Report dated 6th September, 1910).

But the appellant printer was subsequently acquitted by Justices Fletcher J. and Holmwood who delivered two separate judgments. Justice Fletcher gave the following judgement:

"I have come to the conclusion that it does not appear from the article that it is such as is likely to cause disaffection or produce hatred and contempt of the Government, nor can I find from the article that such was the intention of the writer.... All that we have to decide is whether the law has or has not been broken by the publication of this article, and I have come to the conclusion that it has not."

The acquittal of the printer was a blow to the pride and prestige of the Police, and a chagrined embarrassment to the Government. A telegram was sent to the Secretary of State as follows:

“The result is unfortunate, but there is nothing to be done. The able judgment of Fletcher J. will attract far more attention than the somewhat flabby remarks of his learned brother, Holmwood, and will enable a writer with a facile pen (such as Arabinda Ghose) to publish Sedition with impunity in the Bengals...”

Under the date, 5th (January?) a document reads as follows:

“The Chief Presidency Magistrate issued a warrant for the arrest of Arabinda Ghose under Section 124-A.I.P.C. The warrant remains unexecuted owing to Ghose’s whereabouts not been known.”

It appears that a telegram was sent to the Secretary of State in England, acquainting him with the situation. The Secretary of State wired to the Viceroy:

“...If so, under what law has the warrant been issued? Does the article contain inducement to violence or assassination? Do you know where Arabindo is...?”

To which the flustered Viceroy replied, “Law officers considered the article clearly seditious. Whereabouts of Aravinda Ghose unknown to Government of India. But it is rumoured that he is still in hiding in Calcutta.”

Another document says, “...Arabinda is reported to be in Pondicherry, but it is not certain. Papu Rao wired again yesterday (13.4.1910) from Madras — Arabinda Ghose is certainly here. Ajit Singh is also said to be here. Both intending to proceed to Paris. — Send one to identify.

“I think by ‘here’ Papu Rao meant Pondicherry. We wired again to Bengal Special Department to send a man at once to C.I.D., Madras, who would be able to identify Arabinda Ghose.

“I am of opinion we should stop Arabinda if we can, as I think he will do great harm if he gets to a safe asylum in France or elsewhere. So far we can’t find any law on the subject of executing a British Indian warrant on a French steamer in Colombo port...

“The difficulty may be evaded by the fact that transhipment is necessary in Colombo harbour, for there are no through steamers from Pondicherry to France. The fugitive would be arrested in course of transhipment in a local boat, though not (as Legislative Department at present advise) in the ship’s boat.

“The Law Member gives the opinion that a fugitive in a foreign boat in a British port is not immune from arrest.... This makes it quite clear that Arabinda could be arrested at Colombo if he goes to that port.

“Mr. Cleveland thinks it doubtful if he bolted to Pondicherry. He went by the ‘Dupleix’ from Calcutta and must have left that port about 2nd April. It is said a house has been taken for him at Pondicherry.”

A telegram was sent to the Viceroy: “...Arabinda is in Pondicherry. Necessary action taken to secure his arrest if he tried to go to Paris via Colombo.”

Telegram Director C.I.D. Ceylon: “Aravinda Ghose of Calcutta and Ajit Singh of Lahore, absconders charged with sedition likely to leave Pondicherry for Paris by French steamer. Will you watch for them and arrest under Fugitive Offenders’ Act in Colombo harbour using this as your authority?”

Report from Deputy Superintendent, Papu Rao Naidu, 9.4.1910:

“In continuation of my previous wire of this day, I beg to inform you that Arabinda Ghose arrived at Pondicherry by S.S. Dupleix on the morning

of 6th instant.[11] He was received at the beach by the *India* office people. He is now kept in a separate house in the street wherein the proprietor Srinivasacharry lives. I am also informed that a few days before his arrival, Subramanya Bharati engaged a bungalow of Ganaprakasa Modely, a rich man of Pondicherry, and there opened a Library and Reading Room. I am making arrangement to watch him and the people who meet him every day. I am removing my Madras agent permanently thither and am sending my Sub-Inspector to stay in British limits close by Pondicherry. I have informed Deputy I.G. C.I.D. who has not known about his arrival."

What follows is a crowning evidence of the efficiency, truthfulness, fertile imagination and clairvoyance of the British Police:

(Extract paragraph 4 from the Weekly Report dated 17.10.1910 from I.G. Police to Director C.I.D.)

"Arabinda Ghose's disappearance — in regard to the reported arrival of Arabinda Ghose at Pondicherry, mentioned in my last week's report, further enquiries made in Calcutta indicate that he probably left by the S.S. Dupleix of the M.M. Company on the 1st of April. The Dupleix is the only passenger boat from Calcutta which calls regularly at Pondicherry. On the 31st of March, the Special Branch Officer of Calcutta police who supervises arrivals and departures of Indians by sea reported that two native passengers who gave their names as J.N. Mitter of Uluberia, and Bankim Chandra Bhowmik of Nilphamari, Rungpore, had reserved berths on this steamer for Pondicherry. The Health Officer's inspection for this ship was held on the evening of the 31st. The Calcutta Police Officer who was present at the Health Officer's inspection reported that neither of these two passengers had turned up for inspection. On the 4th instant a letter was received from M.M. Company to the effect that these two persons had actually sailed on the Dupleix for Pondicherry but that as they had boarded

[11] Sri Aurobindo arrived on the 4th April, as we have already seen. The Deputy Superintendent was super-efficient!

the steamer at the last moment, they had not been seen by the Calcutta Police Officer. On enquiry it was ascertained from the Health Officer that about 9.30 p.m. on the night of 31st ultimo, two Bengalees giving their names as J.N. Mitter and Bankim Chandra Bhowmik came to his private residence and requested to be furnished with health certificates to enable them to sail on the Dupleix. The Health Officer granted them the necessary certificates. On a photograph of Arabinda Ghose being shown to the Health Officer, he stated that he was probably the individual who gave his name as Jotindra Nath Mitter. The Health Officer further stated that he was struck by the fluent English which this gentleman spoke.

"Enquiries at Uluberia show that there is such a person as J.N. Mitter residing there, but he is at present at home and has never left by sea. There seems little doubt that the J.N. Mitter who embarked on the Dupleix was Arabinda Ghose.

"It is believed that the other person Bankim Chandra Bhowmik may be Nolini Kanto Sen Gupta of Nilphamari, an acquitted accused in the Alipore Bomb case who was known to be an intimate friend and admirer of Arabinda Ghose, and who disappeared about the same time as Arabinda. Unfortunately no photograph of this man is on record, but the description furnished by the Health Officer of the man calling himself Bankim Chandra Bhowmik in many respects agrees with that of Nolini.[12]

"An officer of the Special Department received information that Arabinda had decided to proceed to Berlin to throw in his lot with the Indian Revolutionary party there — the party which publishes and sends out the *Talwar*. He intended to start from Bombay in the Austrian Lloyds steamer leaving on the 1st of April, but finding that he could not catch that steamer, he decided to leave Calcutta for Pondicherry in the M.M. boat.

"Some rumours state that Arabinda Ghose has taken Rs. 25,000 in sovereigns with him, but if it is true that he intended to proceed to Berlin via Trieste in the Austrian Lloyds steamer and eventually went off in a

[12] Nolini Kanta was in Calcutta at that time. It was Bejoy who accompanied Sri Aurobindo to Pondicherry. Nolini Kanta and Bejoy were as like as chalk and cheese!

Messageries boat getting no further than Pondicherry, it looks to me rather as though there had been some difficulty about money.

*

"The Commissioner of Police is applying for warrants to be sent to Bombay, Madras and Colombo".

Telegram from D.S.P. to Director C.I.D.:

"My Pondicherry agent identified Arabinda personally on Simla photo."

The *Hindu* published the following on 13th November, 1910:

"Babu Aurobindo Ghose writes to us from 42, Rue du Pavilion, Pondicherry, under date November 7, 1910:

"I shall be obliged if you will allow me to inform every one interested in my whereabouts through your journal that I am and will remain in Pondicherry. I left British India over a month before proceedings were taken against me and, as I had purposely retired here in order to pursue my Yogic sadhana undisturbed by political action or pursuit and had already severed connection with my political work, I did not feel called upon to surrender on the warrant for sedition, as might have been incumbent on me if I had remained in the political field. I have since lived here as a religious recluse, visited only by a few friends, French and Indian, but my whereabouts have been an open secret, long known to the agents of the Government and widely rumoured in Madras as well as perfectly well-known to every one in Pondicherry. I find myself now compelled, somewhat against my will, to give my presence here a wider publicity. It has suited certain people for an ulterior object to construct a theory that I am not in Pondicherry, but in British India, and I wish to state emphatically that I have not been in British India since March last and shall not set foot on British territory even for a single moment in the future until I can return

publicly. Any statement by any person to the contrary made now or in the future, will be false. I wish, at the same time, to make it perfectly clear that I have retired for the time from political activity of any kind and that I will see and correspond with no one in connection with political subjects. I defer all explanation or justification of my action in leaving British India until the High Court in Calcutta shall have pronouced on the culpability or innocence of the writing in the *Karmayogin* on which I am indicted."

III

As he mounts from peak to peak... Indra brings consciousness of That as the goal.

Rig Veda, 1.10.2

For the first few years of Sri Aurobindo's stay at Pondicherry, life was rather hard on account of a chronic paucity of funds. Food was scanty and inadequately nutritious. Except Sri Aurobindo all slept on the floor on mats. There was no servant, and since they moved to the rented house in Rue Suffren[13] cooking had to be done by the four young men. The furniture of the house consisted of one table and two chairs only. One towel served them all with exemplary faithfulness. But these hardships failed to affect Sri Aurobindo in the least. Ascetic austerity for its own sake was always repugnant to Sri Aurobindo, but he encountered life's problems and trials as well as the difficulties and hazards of his spiritual adventure with his characteristic firmness and equanimity.

Motilal Roy of Chandernagore came to Pondicherry in 1911 and noticed the financial difficulty in which Sri Aurobindo was living. He has referred to it in his Bengali book, *Amar Jivan Sangini* (My Life's Partner). He also quotes from a letter written to him by Sri Aurobindo: "The situation just now is that we have four annas or so in hand." He quotes from another letter: "...I am not quite sure about the cash and still less sure about the sufficiency of the amount. No doubt God will provide, but He has contracted a bad habit of waiting till the last moment. I only hope He does not wish us to learn how to live on a minus quantity like B...."[14]

In April 1911 Sri Aurobindo moved with his associates from Rue Suffren to a house in Rue St. Louis and lived there till April, 1913. This house is now called Raghavan House.

[13] Then called Rue du Pavillon.

[14] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

Before we proceed with our narrative it would be useful to have a clear idea of the civic life of Pondicherry at the time when Sri Aurobindo settled in it and the dangers and hardships to which he was exposed. There cannot be a more authentic record than the Reminiscences of Nolini Kanta Gupta who was all along with Sri Aurobindo from November, 1910, onwards except for two or three short spells of absence, and we reproduce long extracts from it.

"Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry and took shelter here. We might say of course from another point of view that it was he who gave shelter to Pondicherry within his own consciousness. But why this city in particular? There is indeed the usual view that he retired into French territory to escape the wrath of the British bureaucracy. But actually, all he wanted was to find a quiet spot where he might give himself to his own work undisturbed.

"The place was so quiet that we can hardly imagine now what it was really like. It was not quiet, it was actually dead; they used to call it a dead city. There was hardly any traffic, particularly in the area where we lived, and after dusk there was not a soul stirring. It is no wonder they should say, "Sri Aurobindo has fixed upon a cemetery for his sadhana."

"It was a cemetery indeed. Whilst the Indian nationalist movement had been flooding the whole country, nothing of that regenerating flood could find an entry here, except for one or two individuals who had felt a touch. It was like a backwater of the sea, a stagnant pool by the shore. There was here no such thing as public life or youth movement or any kind of collective effort, or an experiment in educational reform, — there was no sign whatsoever of an awakening to life.

"A cemetery it was no doubt, but one with its full complement of ghouls.

"In the first rank of these ghouls were the ruffian bands. Such creatures can appear only in a highly tamasic environment. For, the greater the depth of inertia the more is the need for keen rajasic excitement followed immediately by the silence of sleep. Pondicherry of those days had a still more notorious reputation for its cheap wine-shops and its rowdy tipsies.

Of this type of ghouls there was a regular invasion from outside every week-end.

"The ruffian bands — known locally as "bandes" in French — were a peculiar institution now almost broken up. The French regime in Pondicherry was supposed to be in theory a reign of liberty, equality and fraternity. But in actual fact, it was the feudalism of pre-Revolution France that held sway here. Or perhaps it was something worse, namely, the arbitrary rule of three or four high officials and rich men of ill-gotten means. The "bandes" were in their pay and they were there to do their bidding; the police had neither the will nor the power to intervene. On certain occasions, during the campaigns for political elections, complete anarchy seemed to reign in Pondicherry, while rioting and murder continued for days on end and blood flowed freely. People would not dare stir out of their houses, especially after dark. We were not openly involved in politics, but some of our friends were. And Sri Aurobindo would sometimes send out some of us to meet them, even after nightfall and on purpose. The local people marvelled at our dauntless courage.

"These ruffian bands — these ghouls I was going to say — turned against us too on more than one occasion. Let me explain in a little more detail.

"Soon after Sri Aurobindo came, he realised that a firm seat must be established here, an unshakable foundation for his sadhana and siddhi, for the path and the goal. He was to build up on the ever-shifting sands of the shore a firm and strong edifice, a Temple of God. Have we not read in the Puranas and other scriptures that whenever and wherever a sage or a Rishi sat down to his meditation and sadhana, there rushed upon him at once a host of evil spirits to break up his work? They seemed to have a special liking for the flesh of the Rishis.

"Those who tried most to stop Sri Aurobindo from settling down and were ever on the alert to move him from his seat were the British authorities. The British Government in India could never accept that Sri Aurobindo had come away to French territory for carrying on his Yoga.

Religion and spirituality, these to them were a mere subterfuge. They thought they knew what Sri Aurobindo was — the one most dangerous man in all India, the source of all the trouble. Pondicherry was the place from where were supplied the necessary instructions and advice and perhaps even the pistols and other weapons. Here was the brain-centre of the Indian independence movement. That Sri Aurobindo had been the main-spring of Indian independence they had been told by their life-instinct, although the superficial sense in which they understood it was not, obviously, the whole truth."

"...force having failed they now tried fraud. An attempt was made to frame a trumped-up charge at law. Some of the local "ghouls" were made to help forge the documents — some photographs and maps and charts along with a few letters — which were to prove that we had been engaged in a conspiracy for dacoity and murder. The papers were left in a well in the compound of one of our men, then they were "discovered" after a search by the police. The French police had even entered Sri Aurobindo's residence for a search. But when their Chief found there were Latin and Greek books lying about on his desk, he was so taken aback that he could only blurt out, "II sait du latin, il sait du grec!" — "He knows Latin, he knows Greek!" — and then he left with all his men.[15] How could a man who knew Latin and Greek ever commit any mischief?

"In fact, the French Government had not been against us, indeed they helped us as far as they could. We were looked upon as their guests; and as political refugees, it was a matter of honour for them to give us their protection. And where it is a question of honour, the French as a race are willing to risk anything: they still fight duels in France on a point of honour. But at the same time, they had their friendship, the *entente cordiale*, with Britain to maintain, and it is this that got them into a dilemma."

[15] M. Nandot, the investigating magistrate, invited Sri Aurobindo to meet him in his chambers and he complied.

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"In addition to force and fraud, the British Government did not hesitate to make use of temptation as well. They sent word to Sri Aurobindo which they followed up by a messenger, to say that if he were to return to British India, they would not mind. They would indeed be happy to provide him with a nice bungalow in the quiet surroundings of a hill station, Darjeeling,[16] where he could live in complete freedom and devote himself to his spiritual practices without let or hindrance. Needless to add, this was an ointment spread out to catch a fly and Sri Aurobindo refused the invitation with a "No, thank you."

"Afterwards came a more serious attack, perhaps the one most fraught with danger. The First World War was on. India had been seething with discontent and things were not going too well abroad on the European front. The British Government now brought pressure on the French: they must do something drastic about their political refugees. Either they should hand them over to the British, or else let them be deported out of India.[17] The French Government accordingly proposed that they would find room for us in Algeria. There we could live in peace; they would see to our passage so that we need have no worry on that score. If on the other hand we were to refuse this offer, there might be danger: the British authorities might be allowed to seize us forcibly.

"I can recall very well that scene. Sri Aurobindo was seated in his room in what was later called "Guest House", Rue François Martin. We too had come. Two or three of the Tamil nationalist leaders who had sought refuge in Pondicherry came in and told Sri Aurobindo about the Algeria offer and

[16] "Lord Carmichael sent somebody to persuade me to return and settle somewhere in Darjeeling and discuss philosophy with him. I refused the offer." — *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* by Nirodbaran.

[17] "Lord Minto said that he could not rest his head on his pillow until he had crushed Aurobindo Ghose. He feared that I would start the Revolutionary Movement again, and assassinations were going on at that time." — *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* by Nirodbaran.

also gave a hint that they were agreeable. Sri Aurobindo paused a little and then he said, in a quiet clear tone, “I do not budge from here.” To them this came as a bolt from the blue; they had never expected anything like this. In Algeria there would be freedom and peace, whereas here we lived in constant danger and uncertainty. But now they were helpless. Sri Aurobindo had spoken and they could hardly act otherwise. They had no alternative but to accept the decision, though with a heavy heart.”

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“In those days there was in the College de France in Pondicherry a French professor named Jouveau Dubreuil — later on he became quite a well-known name — who had been engaged in research in ancient history and archaeology. We knew him quite well. He was at that time working on the early history of Pondicherry. From a study of the ancient documents and inscriptions he discovered that the city of Pondicherry, which I have called the city of the dead, had at one time been known as a city of the Veda, *Veda-puri*. That is to say, it was a centre of Vedic learning. And this Vedic college, our professor found from ancient maps and other clues, was located exactly on the spot where the main building of our Ashram now stands.

“According to ancient tradition, the Rishi Agastya came to the South to spread the Vedic lore and the Aryan discipline. His seems to have been the first project for the infusion of Aryan culture into the Dravidian civilisation.”

*

“I have said that this cemetery that was Pondicherry had been infested by ghouls and goblins. These had a special category known ordinarily as spies.... These (British) government spies tried to collect information as to who came to our houses, who were the people who met us, what places we frequented and how our guests spent their time. That was why Motilal

(Motilal Roy of the Pravartak group in Chandernagor) when he first came to Pondicherry had to come dressed as an Anglo-Indian, and he never entered our house, the Raghavan house of today, except by the back door and under cover of darkness after nightfall."

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"The British Indian police set up a regular station here, with a rented house and several permanent men. They were of course plain-clothes men, for they had no right to wear uniform within French territory. They kept watch, as I have said, both on our visitors as well as ourselves. Soon they got into the habit of sitting on the pavement round the corner next to our house in groups of three or four. They chatted away the whole day and only now and again took down something in their notebooks. What kind of notes they took we found out later on when, after India had become independent and the French had left, some of these notes could be secured from the Police files and the confidential records of Government. Strange records these: the police gave reports all based on pure fancy, they made up all sorts of stories at their sweet will. As they found it difficult to gather correct and precise information, they would just fabricate the news."[18]

In the Raghavan house in St. Louis Street, Sri Aurobindo's birthday was celebrated on the 15th August. "Some local people, Sada, Pitrus, David and four others, besides the members of the house, took part in the celebration. Sri Aurobindo sat in a chair in the outer verandah of the new house and all those who had come passed one by one in front of him. Some sweets were distributed."[19]

Immune against all hostile force, fraud and blandishment and led by the Divine Light, Sri Aurobindo's Yoga rushed on like a torrential stream bounding over rocks that threatened to impede its course.

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[18] Published in *Mother India,* December 1961 and April 1962.

[19] *Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

We have seen that Sri Aurobindo was in a state of total surrender to the Mother when he was staying at Chandernagore. On being asked by Motilal Roy, he explained and even demonstrated to him what his surrender meant. This surrender led to an identification with the Mother, which is evidenced by his signing his letters to Motilal Roy from Pondicherry as Kali. It was, in fact, a development of the Krishna-Kali experience he had in Alipore jail.

IV

"A son of the two Mothers, he attains to kingship in his discoveries of knowledge, he moved on the summit, he dwells in his high foundation."

Rig Veda, I.10.2.

We have already quoted Nolini Kanta's description of Pondicherry as it was when Sri Aurobindo came and settled here. Let us supplement it by a short history of the ancient town and its suburbs as published by = 1 (a symbolic figure), a quarterly organ of Auroville.[20] We find in it that in olden times the whole place was flourishing both spiritually and materially, and was considered an important centre of learning and commerce in South India.

"The origins of Pondicherry go back into the night of time. Pondicherry means 'the new suburb'. The original name of the town, no longer used, was *Vedapuri*, and a big temple still stands today, the Vedapurishwara

[20] Auroville or the City of the Dawn, an international city, has been a creation of the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and founded under her inspiration and guidance in Sri Aurobindo's name. It is about four miles from Pondicherry. In the Charter of Auroville the Mother says,

1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular.

Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be the willing servitor of the Divine's Consciousness.

2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.

3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.

4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.

temple, dedicated to the great god, Siva, the god of Contemplatives. Vedapuri means ‘City of Knowledge’. The patron saint of Vedapuri was Sri Agastya, legends of whose life tell of his coming from the far Himalayas, travelling South and settling in the country of the Tamils to teach the people the Veda. For thousands of years Vedapuri was a school for young Brahmins where they learnt to chant the Vedic hymns in Sanskrit and to perform complicated sacrifices in the proper way.

“Buddhism came and went, and then in the first and second centuries of our era we find on that same Coromandel Coast a Roman settlement mentioned in the *Periple* by Ptolemy of Alexandria. Heavily loaded ships from the far Mediterranean, swept by the constant trade winds, arrived via Cleopatra’s Nile — Red Sea Canal at *Poduke* as our town was then called. A Roman emporium, a trader’s town where Mediterranean wines and swords, Germanic slaves and Roman gold were exchanged for the spices and silks, precious stones, cottons and peacocks of India. The poet prince Illango, brother of the Chera King Kovalan, describes how ‘Auroville’ appeared in the first century. The text is translated from the original picturesque Tamil.

“The sun shone over the open terraces, over the warehouses near the harbour, and over the turrets with their air-holes like the eyes of the deer (a description of windows built with a Roman arch). In different places the observer’s attention was arrested by the sight of Yavanas (a name for Greeks and Romans) whose prosperity never waned.

“In the harbour were to be seen sailing vessels with many sailors from distant lands. To all appearances they lived as one Community. In the streets of the City hawkers went about with cosmetics, bath powders, cool pastes, flowers, incense and fragrant perfumes. In certain places weavers were seen dealing in fine fabrics of silk, animal hair and cotton. Whole streets were full of cloth, corals, sandalwood and myrrh, besides a wealth of rare ornaments, perfect pearls, gems and gold beyond all reckoning.”

The description of the City itself and the central highway leading to it also has its poetic charm:

"Entering into the central highway of the city, rich with the wealth of sea-borne goods and reaching down to the sea-shore where flags of foreign countries fly high, one is impressed by these stretches of white sand where are displayed various kinds of goods brought in by ships of foreign merchants who have left their houses and settled here.

"Here burning in the evening were myriads of lamps: lamps of those who sold coloured powders, who sold sandalwood, jasmine flowers, scents, and all varieties of sweets; the lamps of dexterous goldsmiths, and of those who, sitting in a row, sold pittu; the broad black lamps placed on lampstands by the sellers of muffins; the lamps of fish-mongers glimmering here and there; and high above all the bright beacon lights erected to guide ships to the shore. There were lamps taken out to sea by fishermen in their boats as they went with their nets, night-long lights set out by foreigners speaking strange languages, and finally the lamps lit by the watchmen of the warehouses containing valuable merchandise from far-away countries."

"Recent archaeological excavations of a hill called Arikamedu, south of Pondicherry, have yielded Greek and Roman coins and imported Mediterranean pottery, reminiscent of a trade very much to the detriment of the Roman empire. Such was the eagerness of Roman ladies to possess the colourful silks and fine muslins of India that Rome lost all its gold reserves in this exchange, but it benefited the kings of the Coromandel Coast, who became fabulously rich and were able to build the huge temple-towns of Rameshwaram and Chidambaram, of Madurai and Trichinopoly, and — only a hundred miles from where Auroville is being built — the magnificent Versailles of India — Mahabalipuram. Vedapuri itself fell asleep. The destructive force of Islam came and went; the Portugese came and called the town 'Puducheira' and Dutch 'Pœbser', and the Danes — all trying to get some of the gold the Romans had lost, — and built their trading offices, their 'comptoirs'. In the 17th century came the French, who built on the shore the largest and most powerful fortress in Southern India.

As a fortress it was very successful, also as a safe place for investments in gold during troubled times. It quickly became rich, too rich for the jealous British in Madras, who razed it to the ground.

"Rebuilt in the 18th century in the French provincial style the town can be seen from the hills of Auroville, now a part of free India. Only a few small fisherman's villages without history stand today where the 20th century with its big bulldozers, is moving in to build the City of a New Dawn."

The above extracts show how important were Pondicherry and its suburbs both culturally and commercially in the good old days of the Roman Empire and — who knows? — even before that. Let us hope some day a more authentic light will be shed on the history of the Aryan, the Indus-Valley and the Dravidian cultures. And at no distant date the whole world will turn to Pondicherry again not only for culture and education and commerce and industry but for the Light of the New Dawn.

To return to our narrative. Financial stringency obliged Sri Aurobindo to move from St. Louis Street to a small house in the Mission Street.

Ramaswami Iyengar came again and stayed with Sri Aurobindo in this house. Amrita, who was at that time in his early teens and a school student, as we have said above, made friends with Ramaswami, and it was through him that he got admission into Sri Aurobindo's house and had his first darshan[21] of him.

As he says in "Old Long Since":[22]

"In the Matakoil Street, now called Mission Street, Sri Aurobindo lived for six months in a house with a tiled roof. That house has at present undergone a radical change; the very spot is unrecognised. It was in this house that I had Sri Aurobindo's darshan....

[21] 'Darshan' means the holy sight of a god or of a spiritual or saintly person.

[22] *Mother India* — October, 1962.

“During his stay in this house I had the habit of meeting Ramaswami Iyengar every evening on the beach.... His heart started melting towards me little by little even as ants slowly and persistently leave a trail on granite. The result was that he began to welcome me to his room. The school remained closed two days in the week, Sundays and Thursdays. Those days I could meet Iyengar in Sri Aurobindo’s house at about 4 p.m. From 4 to 5 p.m. we would be alone conversing with each other. Our relation thus began to ripen. After 5 we would go straight to the beach and join other friends.

“Bejoy Nag’s relative, Nagen Nag, who was suffering from tuberculosis, came to Pondicherry with his friend and attendant, Biren Roy, and stayed at this house. His doctor had advised him a change of air and he hoped that Sri Aurobindo would cure him by his yogic power.

“Some evenings when engaged in conversation with Iyengar on the verandah outside his room, I would see Sri Aurobindo come out from the back portion of the house to the hall in front, take his seat on the same mat with the sick man, put to him some questions and return to his room. I was lucky to have Sri Aurobindo’s Darshan in this manner several times without going near him. At that time I could not speak English well. On his way to the front part of the house and back from there, Sri Aurobindo’s preoccupation seemed to be wholly with what he had come for. He would pay little attention, as it were, to any other thing around him. And yet, I was told, nothing could escape his notice.

“During this period I requested Iyengar once or twice to introduce me to Sri Aurobindo. But my requests seemed to carry no weight with him.

“Sri Aurobindo’s birthday was drawing near — August 15, 1913. I requested Iyengar once more. I appealed to him to take me to Sri Aurobindo on his birthday. He replied, wonderful to say, in a consenting tone. I felt an immense joy.

“On the 15th August Iyengar asked me to come at about 4.30 p.m. I reached there slightly earlier. All the invitees started coming one by one from all sides. By about 5 or 5.15 all of them had arrived. It was probably

one hour before sunset. This I surmised by the dimness of the light inside the house.

“In the hall of the front portion of the house some twenty or twenty-five banana leaves were laid out on three sides just as it is done in a marriage feast.

“As far as I can remember, no sooner was the main gate bolted from within than Sri Aurobindo came into the hall and stood on one side; someone garlanded him with a rose garland; all present clapped their hands, and Sri Aurobindo spoke something in English. All this I can recollect but vaguely. This vagueness of memory is due, I suppose, to an overwhelming joy and palpitation in me on that occasion.

“All of us sat down before the banana leaves as we do at a collective dinner. I was one of the guests; with eyes full of delight I saw Sri Aurobindo as he stood before each banana leaf, looked at the person seated there, gently passed on to the next and thus to the last person — meanwhile someone walking by his side served various kinds of sweets and other preparations.

“In the courtyard a big jar full of water was kept and by its side a small tumbler. We took some refreshments and after washing our hands we gathered together and kept chatting for a short while. In the meantime Sri Aurobindo had gone to the verandah of the middle portion of the house and sat there in a chair kept for him before a table covered with a cloth. Evidently he was waiting for some other item in the programme. By then it had become dark. In each section of the house one or two lighted hurricane-lamps were put up. The guests took leave one by one or by twos and threes and went home.

“I kept on waiting, not knowing what to do. As soon as the guests left, Iyengar came and told me that three big persons, namely, Bharati, Srinivasachari and V.V.S. Ayer, would see Sri Aurobindo to pay their respects to him. If I could wait till they left, there would only be the inmates of the house, five or six, alone with Sri Aurobindo. He had a mind to take me then to Sri Aurobindo. But for that Sri Aurobindo’s permission was

required, he said finally. I nodded assent immediately. It might have already struck seven or gone on to seven-fifteen. A fear lurked in me that I would be questioned at home, 'Why this delay?' But still I ventured to give my consent.

"Iyengar once again asked me, 'Do you intend to see Sri Aurobindo with Bharati and others? Or with the inmates?' I could not make out what answer to give. Whether in the midst of Bharati and others or in the midst of the inmates of the house Sri Aurobindo would be the same Sri Aurobindo. I began to revolve in my mind how there could be any difference. A little while, it might be less than a minute, I wavered in mind and replied. 'When the inmates are there.' 'If so, you must wait for some time,' said Iyengar and left.

"At about 8.15 p.m. Iyengar came to me and said: 'You may get Sri Aurobindo's Darshan as you pass before his table. Go with folded hands. But no permission to speak with him. While passing by his right, just stand in front, stop awhile, join your hands, silently take leave of him and go home'. Iyengar's words were imprinted upon my mind.

"I was soon called in. I got up and approached Sri Aurobindo's table. From the ceiling hung a hurricane-lamp that served to dispel the darkness only partially. Going round Sri Aurobindo by way of *pradakshinā* I stood in his presence with joined palms and made my obeisance to him. Sri Aurobindo's eyes, it seemed, burned brighter than the lamp-light for me; as he looked at me, in a trice all gloom vanished from within me, and his image was, as it were, installed in the *sanctum sanctorum* of my being. Nothing was very clear to me. I went behind him, stood again in front, offered my homage to him and, not knowing whether to stay or go, I staggered perplexed. Sri Aurobindo made a gesture with his heavenly hands to one of those who stood there. A sweet was given me once again. I felt that he had accepted me, though I did not quite know it. I left Sri Aurobindo's house and proceeded towards my own.

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“I started now frequenting Sri Aurobindo’s house. My family members knew nothing of it. I became acquainted with one or two of the inmates — particularly Bejoy Kumar. He used to send letters twice or thrice per month by registered post — called Poste Recommandée in French — to Chandernagore. As intimacy with him grew, he began to send letters through me. There was no fixed hour for this work. He used to send for me at any time between 12 noon and 3 p.m. He ordered me not to disclose this posting of letters to anyone.”

Sri Aurobindo’s household moved to 41, Rue François Martin in October, 1913. Nagen Nag and Biren Roy also moved with them. Ramaswamy went back to Tanjore before the end of the year.

V

(THE MOTHER ARRIVES)

"The luminous heart of the Unknown is she,
A power of silence in the depths of God;
She is the Force, the inevitable Word,
The magnet of our difficult ascent,
The Sun from which we kindle all our suns,
The Light that leans from the unrealised Vasts,
The joy that beckons from the impossible,
The Might of all that never yet came down."

Savitri, Book Three, Canto Two

In the Guest House something intriguingly hair-raising happened. "One day, this Birendra[23] suddenly shaved his head. Moni said he too would have his head shaved, just because Birendra had done it. That very day, or it was perhaps the day after, there occured a regular scene. We had as usual taken our seats around Sri Aurobindo in the afternoon. Suddenly, Biren stood up and shouted, 'Do you know who I am? You may not believe it, but I am a spy, a spy of the British police. I can't keep it to myself any longer. I must speak out, I must make the confession before you'. With this he fell at Sri Aurobindo's feet. We were dumbfounded, almost stunned. As we kept wondering if this could be true, or was all false, perhaps a hallucination or some other illusion — *mayā nu matibhramo nu* — Biren started again, 'Oh, you do not believe me? Then let me show you.' He entered the next room, opened his trunk, drew out a hundred-rupee note and showed it to us. 'See, here is the proof. Where could I have got all this money? This is the reward of my evil deed. Never, I will do this work again. I give my word to you, I

[23] Biren Roy who had come with Nagen Nag and stayed at the Guest House as already stated.

ask your forgiveness...'. No words came to our lips, all of us kept silent and still.

"This is how it had come about. Biren had shaved his head in order that the police spies might spot him as their man from the rest of us by the shaven head. But they were nonplussed when they found Moni too with a shaven head. And Biren began to suspect that Moni, or perhaps the whole lot of us, had found out his secret and that Moni had shaved on purpose. So, partly out of fear and partly from true repentance, for the most part no doubt by the pressure of some other Force, he was compelled to make his confession.

"After this incident, the whole atmosphere of the house got a little disturbed. We were serious and worried. How was it possible for such a thing to happen? How could an enemy find his entry into our apartments, and live as one of us? What should be done? Bejoy was furious, and it was a job to keep him from doing something drastic. However, within a few days, Biren left of his own accord and we were left in peace. I hear he afterwards joined the Great War and was sent to Mesopotamia with the Indian army."[24]

"This shows how the atmosphere in those days was full of suspicion and also how great was the number of secret agents in Pondicherry. The way in which Biren's confession came out was a miracle."[25]

Nolini Kanta, Saurin and Moni went to Bengal in February, 1914, but their sojourn was cut short by the outbreak of the first World War, and they had to return post-haste in September, for fear of being clapped into prison as old criminals. After their return, Bejoy became eager to go to Bengal. Sri Aurobindo did not quite approve of it, but headstrong that he was, he left, only to be grabbed by the British police who were lying in wait for him just outside the boundary of the French territory. He was held in detention for five long years and was released only after the War had ended.

[24] *Reminiscences* by Nolini Kanta Gupta.

[25] *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* by A.B. Purani.

Motilal Roy received contributions from some patriotic persons in Bengal and sent them to Sri Aurobindo from time to time. There were some men like Durgadas Seth of Chandernagore who were really anxious to help Sri Aurobindo, so that he might not suffer the pinch of want in his life of sadhana.

On the 29th March, 1914, the Mother arrived from Paris with Paul Richard. They met Sri Aurobindo in the Guest House at 3.30 in the afternoon. As soon as the Mother saw Sri Aurobindo, she recognised him as the very person who had been guiding her in her sadhana (spiritual self-culture) in France and whom she knew to be Sri Krishna. Her meeting with the Master was of an immeasurable spiritual significance. It was an epochal event, a landmark in the spiritual culture of man. It inaugurated a new era of dynamic spirituality. It initiated a movement unknown to history and humanity. It led to an unwearied collaboration in their mission of raising man from the troubled twilight of his mind into the infinite splendour of the Supramental Light-Force. The age-old propensity to ascetic withdrawal from the world of action was stripped of its customary mask, exposed to the light of an integral spirituality and tossed into the limbo of the past. Life was affirmed and accepted as the field of divine Manifestation, and a deadly grapple with the entrenched powers of the Ignorance and the Inconscience began its fateful career. The Supramental Light-Force that alone can overthrow the sovereignty of darkness and suffering and death with which earthly life is ever afflicted, was brought down and set to fashion the future and realise the divine destiny of mankind. Earth prepared to receive Heaven. Spirit descended to embrace Matter.

The Mother had realised the Divine and organised her whole life — a life of dynamic spirituality — round the Divine, centred in her heart. "I said yesterday", she wrote in her diary on the 19th November, 1912, "to that Englishman who is seeking for Thee with so sincere a desire, that I had definitively found Thee, that the Union was constant."[26]

[26] *Prayers and Meditations* — The Mother.

Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry, 1914

On the 28th March, the day before she arrived, she had written in her dairy, “Since our departure [from Paris] more and more we can see in everything Thy divine intervention, everywhere Thy law is expressing itself...

“At no moment do I seem to live outside of Thee and never have the horizons appeared to me more vast and the depths at once more luminous and more unfathomable. Grant, O Divine Teacher, that we may more and

more, better and better, know and accomplish our mission upon the earth, that we may fully utilise all the energies that are in us, and that Thy sovereign Presence may become more and more perfectly manifested in the silent depth of our soul, in all our thoughts, all our feelings, all our actions..."[27]

Here we find a remarkable identity between the vision and ideal of the Mother and those of Sri Aurobindo, though outwardly the Mother knew nothing of Sri Aurobindo till their first meeting.

On 30th March, the day following her visit to Sri Aurobindo, she wrote:

"How in the presence of those who are integrally Thy servitors, of those who have arrived at the perfect consciousness of Thy Presence, I perceive that I am still far, very far, from that which I would realise; and I know that what I conceive to be highest, noblest and purest is still dark and ignorant in comparison with that which I have to conceive. But this perception, far from being depressing, stimulates and strengthens my aspiration, my energy, my will to triumph over all obstacles so as to be at last identified with Thy law and Thy work.

"Little by little the horizon becomes precise, the path becomes clear. And we advance to an ever greater certitude.

"It matters not if there are hundreds of beings plunged in the densest ignorance. He whom we saw yesterday is on earth: His presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, when Thy reign shall be, indeed, established upon earth.

"O Lord, Divine Builder of this marvel, my heart overflows with joy and gratitude when I think of it, and my hope is boundless.

"My adoration surpasses all words and my reverence is silent."[28]

On the 3rd April, she wrote:

[27] *Prayers and Meditations* — The Mother.

[28] *Prayers and Meditations* — The Mother.

"It seems to me that I am being born into a new life and that all the methods and habits of the past can no longer be of any use. It seems to me that what was once a result is now only a preparation. I feel as if I had done nothing yet, as if I had not lived the spiritual life, as if I was only entering upon the way which leads to it; it seems to me that I know nothing, that I am incapable of formulating anything, that all experience is yet to commence. It is as if I was stripped of all my past, of my errors as well as my conquests, as if all that had disappeared to give place to one new-born whose whole existence has yet to take shape, who has no Karma, no experience it can profit by, but no error either which it must repair. My head is empty of all knowledge and all certitude, but also of all vain thought. I feel that if I can surrender without any resistance to this state, if I do not strive to know or understand, if I consent to be completely like a child, ignorant and candid, some new possibility will open before me. I know that I must now definitively give myself up and be like a page absolutely blank on which Thy thought, Thy will, O Lord, will be able to inscribe themselves freely, secure against all deformation.

"An immense gratitude rises from my heart, I seem to have at last arrived at the threshold which I have so long sought.

"Grant, O Lord, that I may be pure enough, impersonal enough, animated enough with Thy divine love, to be able to cross it definitively.

"O to belong to Thee, without any darkness or restriction!"[29]

It was a meeting of two prophet-souls, two God-sent Pioneers, and their fusion into an identity of Consciousness for the evolution and perfection of the Integral Yoga and the initiation of an all-inclusive spirituality that would lead to earthly transfiguration and the Life Divine. From this identity of their consciousness, the Mother once observed, "Without him (Sri Aurobindo), I exist not, without me he is unmanifest". This statement, clear

[29] *Prayers and Meditations* — The Mother.

and categoric, clinches the dual role they are destined to play in the evolutionary crisis of the modern age.

The Mother in Japan, 1918

The Mother at once set about laying the foundation of her work. With some young men of the town who had begun to take interest in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga she started a Society, called "L'ldée Nouvelle" (The New Idea). It was, in a way, a continuation and extension of the work of the group she had founded in Paris and which was known as the Cosmique (Cosmic). A record of the proceedings of this group has appeared in part in the Mother's *Paroles d'Autrefois (Words of Long Ago).*

The following is the short notice on the New Idea which appeared in Sri Aurobindo's journal, *Arya*[30], on the 15th August, 1914 (vide *Mother India*, April 24, 1962).

"The Society has already made a beginning by grouping together young men of different castes and religions in a common ideal. All sectarian and political questions are necessarily foreign to its idea and its activities. It is on a higher plane of thought superior to external differences of race, caste, creed and opinion and in the solidarity of the Spirit that unity can be realised.

"The Idée Nouvelle has two rules only for its members, first, to devote some time every day to meditation and self-culture, the second, to use or create daily at least one opportunity of being helpful to others. This is, naturally, only the minimum of initial self-training necessary for those who have yet to cast the whole trend of their thought and feeling into the mould of a higher life and to enlarge the egoistic into a collective consciousness.

"The Society has its headquarters at Pondicherry with a reading-room and library. A section has been founded at Karaikal and others are likely to be opened at Yanam and Mahe."

[30] We shall presently speak about the *Arya* and how and why it came into existence.

VI

We have already noted the coming of the Mother to Pondicherry, her meeting with Sri Aurobindo and her founding a society called "L'Idée Nouvelle" (The New Idea). On the 15th of August, 1914, (Sri Aurobindo's birth day) Sri Aurobindo started a monthly journal called *Arya*. About the journal he wrote to a disciple later: "...I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry — I was a poet and a politician, not a philosopher. How I managed to do it and why? First, because X proposed to me to cooperate in a philosophical review — and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything, I could not very well refuse; and then he had to go to the war and left me in the lurch with sixty-four pages a month of philosophy all to write by my lonely self. Secondly, because I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and came to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there automatically. But that is not being a philosopher!"

A French version of the magazine, Revue de la Grande Synthése (A Review of the Great Synthesis) was also published at the same time.[31]

Arya was printed at the Modern Press, Pondicherry, and published from 7, Rue Dupleix, where the Mother was staying. It was called a Review of pure philosophy.

The object which it set before itself was twofold: —

"1. A systematic study of the highest problems of existence;

"2. The formation of a vast Synthesis of knowledge, harmonising the diverse religious traditions of humanity occidental as well as oriental. Its method will be that of a realism, at once rational and transcendental, — a realism consisting in the unification of intellectual and scientific discipline with those of intuitive experience.

[31] It was discontinued after some time.

"This Review will also serve as an organ for the various groups and societies founded on its inspiration.

"The Review will publish: —

"Synthetic studies in speculative Philosophy.

"Translations and commentaries of ancient texts.

"Studies in Comparative Religion.

"Practical methods of inner culture and self-development."

Referring to the aim and object of the *Arya*, Sri Aurobindo declared again:

"Its object is to feel out for the thought of the future, to help in shaping its foundations and to link it to the best and most vital thought of the past.

"The earth is a world of Life and Matter, but man is not a vegetable nor an animal, he is a spiritual and thinking being who is set here to shape and use the animal mould for higher purposes, by higher motives, with a more divine instrumentation.

"The problem of thought is to find out the right idea and the right way of harmony; to restate the ancient and eternal spiritual truth of Self so that it shall re-embrace, permeate and dominate the mental and physical life; to develop the most profound and vital methods of psychological self-discipline and self-development so that the mental and psychical life of man may express the spiritual life through the utmost possible expansion of its own riches, power and complexity; and to seek for the means and motives by which his external life, his society and his institutions may remould themselves progressively in the truth of the spirit and develop towards the utmost possible harmony of individual freedom and social unity.

"This is our ideal and our search in the *Arya*. "Philosophy is the intellectual search for the fundamental truth of things, religion is the attempt to make the truth dynamic in the soul of man. They are essential to each other.

"Our first preoccupation in the *Arya* has therefore been with the deepest thought that we could command on the philosophical foundations of the problem; and we have been so profoundly convinced that without this basis nothing we could say would have any real, solid and permanent value that we have perhaps given too great a space to difficult and abstruse thought..."

The contents of the first issue of the *Arya* were as follows:

The Life Divine

The Wherefore of the Worlds

The Secret of the Veda

a) The Problem and its Solution

b) Selected Hymns

Annotated Texts — Isha Upanishad

The Synthesis of Yoga

The Eternal Wisdom

Varieties — The Soul of a Plant

The Question of the Month

The News of the Month

We find that Sri Aurobindo started in the *Arya* with his *magnum opus*, *The Life Divine*, and *The Secret of the Veda*, and *The Synthesis of Yoga* — all three embodying the philosophical, the mystical, and the psychological and spiritual expressions of his Yogic experiences. *The Secret of the Veda* gives an entirely new mystical interpretation of the symbolic verses of the Veda and throws a new light on the history of ancient Indian spiritual culture.

It should be recalled that Sri Aurobindo's mind fell silent when he meditated with the Yogi Lele for three days in Baroda in December, 1907, and he ceased to think at all. All that he spoke and wrote since then came down to him from the higher planes of consciousness above the thought-mind.

Under the caption, *The Question of the Month*, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the first issue of the *Arya*:

"What is the Synthesis needed at the present time?

"Undoubtedly, that of man himself. The harmony of his faculties is the condition of his peace, their mutual understanding and helpfulness the means of his perfection. At war, they distract the kingdom of his being; the victory of one at the expense of another maims his self-fulfilment.

"The peculiar character of our age is the divorce that has been pronounced between reason and faith, the logical mind and the intuitive heart. At first, the declaration of war between them was attended by painful struggles, a faith disturbed or a scepticism dissatisfied. But now their divorce has created exaggerated tendencies which impoverish human life by their mutual exclusiveness, on the one side a negative and destructive critical spirit, on the other an imaginative sentiment which opposes pure instinct and a faith founded on dreams to the sterile fanaticism of the intellect.

"Yet a real divorce is impossible. Science would not move a step without faith and intuition and to-day it is growing full of dreams. Religion could not stand for a moment if it did not support itself by the intellectual presentation, however inadequate, of profound truths. To-day we see it borrowing many of its weapons from the armoury of its opponent. But a right synthesis in virtue of a higher and reconciling truth can alone dissipate their mutual misunderstandings and restore to the race its integral self-development.

"The synthesis then of religious aspiration and scientific faculty, as a beginning; and in the resultant progress an integrality also of the inner existence. Love and knowledge, the delight of the Bhakta and the divine science of the knower of Brahman, have to effect their unity; and both have to recover the fullness of Life which they tend to banish from them in the austerity of their search or the rapture of their ecstasy.

"The heart and the mind are one universal Deity and neither a mind without a heart nor a heart without a mind is the human ideal. Nor is any perfection sound and real unless it is also fruitful. The integral divine harmony within, but as its result a changed earth and a nobler and happier humanity."

In reply to a question on the significance of the word Arya, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the September, 1914 issue of the *Arya*:

"The question has been put from more than one point of view. To most European readers the name[32] figuring on our cover is likely to be a hieroglyph which attracts or repels according to the temperament. Indians know the word, but it has lost for them the significance which it bore to their forefathers. Western Philology has converted it into a racial term, an unknown ethnological quantity on which different speculations fix different values. Now, even among the philologists, some are beginning to recognise that the word in its original use expressed not a difference of race, but a difference of culture. For in the Veda the Aryan peoples are those who had accepted a particular type of self-culture, of inward and outward practice, of ideality, of aspiration. The Aryan gods were the supra-physical powers who assisted the mortal in his struggle towards the nature of the godhead. All the highest aspirations of the early human race, its noblest religious temper, its most idealistic velleities of thought are summed up in this single vocable.

"In later times, the word Arya expressed a particular ethical and social ideal, an ideal of well-governed life, candour, courtesy, nobility, straight dealing, courage, gentleness, purity, humanity, compassion, protection of the weak, liberality, observance of social duty, eagerness for knowledge, respect for the wise and learned, the social accomplishments. It was the combined ideal of the Brahmana and the Kshatria. Everything that departed

[32] Referring to the word "Arya" written in Devanagari characters.

from this ideal, everything that tended towards the ignoble, mean, obscure, rude, cruel or false, was termed un-Aryan. There is no word in human speech that has a nobler history.

"In the early days of comparative Philology, when the scholars sought in the history of words for the prehistoric history of peoples, it was supposed that the word Arya came from the root *Ar*, to plough, and that the Vedic Aryans were so called when they separated from their kin in the northwest who despised the pursuits of agriculture and remained shepherds and hunters. This ingenious speculation has little or nothing to support it. But in a sense we may accept the derivation. Whoever cultivates the field that the Supreme Spirit has made for him, his earth of plenty within and without, does not leave it barren or allow it to run to seed, but labours to exact from it its full yield, is by that effort an Aryan.

"If Arya were a purely racial term, a more probable derivation would be *Ar*, meaning strength or valour, from *ar* to fight, whence we have the name of the Greek wargod Ares *areios*, brave or warlike, perhaps even *arete*, virtue, signifying, like the Latin *virtus*, first, physical strength and courage and then moral force and elevation. This sense of the word also we may accept. 'We fight to win sublime Wisdom, therefore men call us warriors'. For Wisdom implies the choice as well as the knowledge of that which is best, noblest, most luminous, most divine. Certainly, it means also the knowledge of all things and charity and reverence for all things, even the most apparently mean, ugly or dark, for the sake of the universal Deity who chooses to dwell equally in all. But, also, the law of right action is a choice, the preference of that which expresses the godhead to that which conceals it. And the choice entails a battle, a struggle. It is not easily made, it is not easily enforced.

"Whoever makes that choice, whoever seeks to climb from level to level up the hill of the divine, fearing nothing, deterred by no retardation or defeat, shrinking from no vastness because it is too vast for his intelligence, no height because it is too high for his spirit, no greatness because it is too great for his force and courage, he is the Aryan, the divine fighter and victor, the noble man, *aristos*, best, the *śreṣṭha* of the Gita.

“Intrinsically, in its most fundamental sense, Arya means an effort or an uprising and overcoming. The Aryan is he who strives and overcomes all outside him and within him that stands opposed to the human advance. Self-conquest is the first law of his nature. He overcomes earth and the body and does not consent like ordinary men to their dullness, inertia, dead routine and tamasic limitations. He overcomes life and its energies and refuses to be dominated by their hungers and cravings or enslaved by their rajasic passions. He overcomes the mind and its habits, he does not live in a shell of ignorance, inherited prejudices, customary ideas, pleasant opinions, but knows how to seek and choose, to be large and flexible in intelligence even as he is firm and strong in his will. For in everything he seeks truth, in everything right, in everything height and freedom.

“Self-perfection is the aim of his self-conquest. Therefore what he conquers he does not destroy, but ennobles and fulfils. He knows that the body, life and mind are given him in order to attain to something higher than they; therefore they must be transcended and overcome, their limitations denied, the absorption of their gratifications rejected. But he knows also that the Highest is something which is no nullity in the world, but increasingly expresses itself here, — a divine Will, Consciousness, Love, Beatitude which pours itself out, when found, through the terms of the lower life on the finder and on all in his environment that is capable of receiving it. Of that he is the servant, lover and seeker. When it is attained, he pours it forth in work, love, joy and knowledge upon mankind. For always the Aryan is a worker and warrior. He spares himself no labour of mind or body whether to seek the Highest or to serve it. He avoids no difficulty, he accepts no cessation from fatigue. Always he fights for the coming of that kingdom within himself and in the world.

“The Aryan perfected is the Arhat. There is a transcendent Consciousness which surpasses the universe and of which all these worlds are only a side-issue and a by-play. To that consciousness he aspires and attains. There is a Consciousness which, being transcendent, is yet the universe and all that the universe contains. Into that consciousness he enlarges his limited ego; he becomes one with all beings and all inanimate

objects in a single self-awareness, love, delight, all-embracing energy. There is a consciousness which, being both transcendental and universal, yet accepts the apparent limitations of individuality for work, for various stand-points of knowledge, for the play of the Lord with His creations; for the ego is there that it may finally convert itself into a free centre of the divine work and the divine play. That consciousness too he has sufficient love, joy and knowledge to accept; he is puissant enough to effect that conversion. To embrace individuality after transcending it is the last and divine sacrifice. The perfect Arhat is he who is able to live simultaneously in all these three apparent states of existence, elevate the lower into the higher, receive the higher into the lower, so that he may represent perfectly in the symbols of the world that with which he is identified in all parts of his being, — the triple and triune Brahman."

Under the Heading, *The News of the Month*, it was announced: *The War*.

"The *Arya*, a Review of pure Philosophy, has no direct concern with political passions and interests and their results. But neither can it ignore the enormous convulsion which is at present in progress, nor at such a time can it affect to deal only with the pettier happenings of the intellectual world as if men were not dying in thousands daily, the existence of great empires threatened and the fate of the world hanging in the balance. The War has its aspects of supreme importance to a synthetic Philosophy, with which we would have the right to deal. But now is not the hour, now in this moment of supreme tension and widespread agony. Therefore, for the time, we suppress this heading in our Review and shall replace it by brief notes on subjects of philosophical interest, whether general or of the day. Meanwhile, with the rest of the world, we await in silence the predestined result."

On the completion of first year of the *Arya*, Sri Aurobindo announced in the July number of 1915:

"The *Arya*, born by a coincidence which might well have been entirely disastrous to its existence in the very month when there broke out the greatest catastrophe that has overtaken the modern world, has yet, though carried on under serious difficulties, completed its first year....

Sri Aurobindo writing for the 'Arya', 1918-1920

"We have been obliged in our first year for reasons we shall indicate in the preface to our August number to devote the Review almost entirely to high philosophy and severe and difficult thinking. But the object we had in view is now fulfilled and we recognise that we have no right to continue to subject our readers to the severe strain of almost 64 pages of such strenuous intellectual labour. We shall therefore in the next year devote a greater part

of space to articles on less profound subjects written in a more popular style. Needless to say, our matter will fall within the definition of a philosophical Review and centre around the fundamental thought which the *Arya* represents.

"We shall continue *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Secret of the Veda*; but we intend to replace the *Selected Hymns* by translation of the Hymns of the Atris (the fifth Mandala of the Rig Veda) so conceived as to make the sense of the Vedic chants at once and easily intelligible without the aid of a commentary to the general reader....

"Without the divine Will which knows best what to use and what to throw aside, no human work can come to the completion hoped for by our limited vision. To that Will we entrust the continuance and the result of our labours and we conclude the first year of the *Arya* with the aspiration that the second may see the speedy and fortunate issue of the great world-convulsion which still pursues us and that by the Power which brings always the greatest possible good out of apparent evil there may emerge from the disastrous but long-foreseen collapse of the old order a new and better marked by the triumph of higher principles of love, wisdom and unity and a sensible advance of the race towards our ultimate goal, — the conscious oneness of the Soul in humanity and the divinity of man."

VII

We reproduce below long passages from the *Reminiscences* of Nolini Kanta, as they are extremely valuable, being the only authentic record available about how the Mother lived and worked and moved about in the good old days and what the inmates of Sri Aurobindo's house and others who were connected with them learnt from the Mother's presence and example — a pen-picture with delicate touches, revealing the Mother's greatness in her little acts and movements.

"The first time I heard about the Mother was shortly after our arrival here. It was Sri Aurobindo himself who told us about a French lady, an advanced Sadhika (advanced in Yoga), who was desirous of establishing personal contact with him. Whether the Great Soul she was looking for was Sri Aurobindo would be proved by an emblem she would send for him to assign its significance. The emblem was Sri Aurobindo's own symbol in the form of a diagram, known as Solomon's Seal. Needless to add, after the proof of identity was received by the Mother, she made preparartions for coming here. Monsieur Paul Richard was at that time much interested in spiritual thought and practice, and he found an opportunity for coming to India. He wished to stand as a candidate for election as a representative of French India in the French Parliament. In those days there used to be two elected representatives of French India — one in the Upper Chamber, the Sénat, the other in the Lower House, the Chambre des Députes....

"The first time he (Mon. Paul Richard) had come, he was alone. The next time the Mother came with him. To all outward appearances, they came here to canvass support for the election, though M. Richard did not in the end get many votes. But this provided an occasion for the Mother to meet Sri Aurobindo and attach a few faithful friends and followers to herself. In connection with the election, the Mother had to pay a visit to Karaikal. It was her first direct experience of the actual India, that is to say, what India was then in its outward aspect. She gave us an amusing description of the room where she had been put up — an old tumble-down room, as dirty as it was dark, and infested with white ants. Thus it was that

the Divine Mother, she who is fairer than the fairest and lovelier than infinite beauty, has had to come down and enter into the dirt and muck of human life; how else could we, helpless mortals, have a chance of deliverance?

"When it was known that such a great lady was going to come and live close to us, we were faced with a problem:

What should be our conduct and deportment towards her? Should there be a change in our way of life? For we had been a pack of devil-may-care chaps, dressing and talking, sleeping and eating and moving about in an unconventional way which would not pass in a civilised society. Nevertheless, it was finally decided that we would stick as far as possible to our free and easy ways even in the new circumstances. Why should we let our freedom and ease be compromised or curtailed? This, indeed, is how the ignorance and egotism of man assert the arrogance of his individuality.

"The Mother arrived. She used to meet Sri Aurobindo in the afternoon sittings. She spoke very little. We were out most of that time, but occasionally we would drop in too. When it was proposed to bring out the journal, *Arya*, the Mother took charge of the necessary arrangements. She wrote out in her own hand the list of subscribers and kept the accounts. Perhaps those papers might still be found somewhere.... The ground floor of the Dupleix House was used as the stock room and the office was on the ground floor of the Guest House. The Mother was the chief executive in sole charge. Once a week all of us used to call at her residence with Sri Aurobindo and have our dinner there. On these occasions the Mother would cook one or two dishes with her own hands. Afterwards, too, when she came from France and settled here for good and all, the same arrangement continued at the Bayoud House.... About this time, she also formed a small group with a few young men....[33] A third line of her work, connected with business and trade, also began at about this time. Just as we have today among us men of business who are devotees of the Mother and work under

[33] We have spoken of it in the previous section.

her protection and guidance, so in that period also there appeared, as if in seed-state, this particular line of activity. Our Sourin founded the Aryan Stores, the chief object of which was to earn money. We were very hard up in those days — not that we are flush with money now, but still.... The Mother, even after her leaving here, corresponded with Sourin from Japan in connection with these business matters.

"Once for some time the Mother took keen interest in cats as a part of her work. Not only was she concerned with human beings, the animal creation and the world of plants, too, were equally fortunate in coming into close touch with her living presence. The Veda speaks of the animal sacrifice; the Mother has also done animal sacrifice, but in a novel sense, by helping them forward on their upward way with a touch of her consciousness. She took a few cats as representatives of the animal world. She said that the king of the cats who rule in the occult world — one might call him the Supercat — had established a sort of amicable relation with her. How this feline brood appeared first in our midst is rather curious. One day all of a sudden a wild-looking cat made its appearance at the Guest House where we lived then; it just happened to come along and stayed on. It was wild enough when it came, but soon turned into a tame cat, very mild and polite. When it had its kittens, Sri Aurobindo gave to the firstborn the name of Sundari, for she was very fair with a pure white fur. One of Sundari's kittens was called Bushy for she had a bushy tail and her ancestress had now to be given the name of Grandmother. It was about this Bushy that the story runs: she used to pick up with her teeth all her kittens one after another and drop them at the Mother's feet as soon as they were old enough to use their eyes — as if she offered them to the Mother and craved her blessings. So you see how much progress this cat had made on the path of Yoga. Two of these kittens of Bushy were well-known by their names and became great favourites with the Mother: the older one was Big Boy and the younger Kiki. It is said about one of them — I forget which, perhaps it was Kiki — that he used to join in the collective meditation and meditated like any of us. He perhaps had visions during meditation and his body would shake and tremble while the eyes remained closed. But in spite

of this sadhana, he remained in his outward conduct like many of us, rather crude in many respects. The two brothers, Big Boy and Kiki, could never get on well together and had always to be kept apart. Big Boy was a stout fellow and poor Kiki often got a good beating. Finally, both of them died of some illness and were buried in the courtyard. Their grandmother disappeared one day as suddenly as she had come and nobody knew anything about her again.

"The way in which these cats were treated was something extraordinary. The arrangements made for their food were quite a ceremony; it was for them alone that special cooking was done, with milk and fish and the appropriate dressings, as if they were children of some royal family, — all was according to rule. They received an equally good training: they would never commit nuisance within doors, for they had been taught to use the conveniences provided for them. They were nothing like the gipsy-bedouin cats of our Ardhendu.

"In the days before the Mother came, we used to have a pet dog. Its story is much the same. All of a sudden one day there appeared from nowhere in our former residence a common street dog — it was a bitch; she too just came in and stayed on. Sri Aurobindo gave her the name of Yogini. He told us a story about her intelligence. It was already nightfall, and we did not know that she had not yet returned. She came to the front door, pushed against it and did some barking, but we heard nothing, as we were in the kitchen next to the backyard. Suddenly she recalled there was a door at the back through which she might perhaps gain entrance or at least draw our attention. She now ran around three corners of the house and appeared at the back door. From there she could make herself heard and was admitted. She too bore some puppies and two of them became particular favourites with Sri Aurobindo. I cannot now recall how they were called.

"You all know about the deep oneness and intimate relation the Mother has with plants, so I leave out that subject today. As with the world of animals and men, so with the beings of the occult worlds — from the little elves and fairies to the high and mighty gods, all have had their contacts

with the Mother, all have shared in her Grace as you may have heard, but the Grace meant at times smacks too!

"Today I leave out the Mother's role as our Guide on the path of sadhana or yogic discipline. Let me speak in a very general way of an aspect of her teaching that concerns the first principles of the art of living.

"The core of this lies in elevating our life to a cleaner level, and the first and most important need is to put each thing in its place. The training that the Mother has throughout been giving us — I am not here referring to the side of spiritual practice but to the daily routine of our ordinary life — is precisely this business of putting our things in order. We do not always notice how very disorderly we are; our belongings and household effects are in a mess, our actions are haphazard, and in our inner life we are as disorderly as in our outer life, or even more. Indeed, it is because we are so disorderly within that there is such disorder in our outer life. Our thoughts come to us pell-mell and our brains are crowded with stray bits of random thoughts. We cannot sit down quietly for a few minutes and pursue a particular line of thought with any kind of steadiness or order. Our heads are full of noise like a market-place without any peace or restraint or harmony. If the mind is in such a state, the vital being (*prāṇa*) is still worse. You cannot keep count of the strange desires and impulses that play about there. If the brain is a market-place, the heart is no better than a madhouse. Well, I shall not now enlarge further on the state of our inner being. One of the things the Mother has been trying to teach us both by her word and her example is that to keep our outer life and its materials in proper order and neat and tidy is a very necessary element of our life upon earth. I do not know to what extent we have yet been able to assimilate this teaching in our individual or collective living. How many of us have realised that beauty is at least half the sense of life and serves to double its values? And even if we do sometimes realise it, how many are impelled to shape our lives accordingly?

"The Mother taught us to use our things with care, but there was more to it than this. What is special about the Mother is that she uses things not merely with care but with love and affection. For, to her, material things

are not inanimate objects, not mere lifeless implements. They are endowed with a life of their own, even a consciousness of their own, and each thing has its own individuality and character. The Mother says about material things what the ancients have said about the life of plants, that they have in them a latent consciousness that feels pleasure and pain, *antaḥ-saṅjñāh bhavanti ete sukha-duḥkha-samanvitāh.* We are all aware how carefully the Mother treasures old things and does not like them to be thrown away simply because they are old. The reason for this is not niggardliness or a spirit of conservation; the reason is that old things are to her like old friends, living companions.

"The Mother did not appear to us, — the older people, — as the Mother at the outset; she came to us first perhaps as an embodiment of beauty, grace and harmony. We received her as a friend, as one very close to ourselves, first, because Sri Aurobindo himself received her like that, and secondly because of her qualities. Now that we are on this subject of her qualities, although it is not necessary for a child to proclaim the virtues of his mother, I cannot help telling you about another thing we learnt from her, something deeper. The first time Sri Aurobindo happened to speak of her qualities, he said he had never seen anywhere a self-surrender so absolute and unreserved. He had also commented that perhaps it was only women who were capable of giving themselves so entirely and with such sovereign ease. This implies a complete obliteration of the past, erasing it with its virtues and faults. Referring to it in one of her *Prayers and Meditations,* the Mother has said that when she came here, she gave herself up to the Lord, Sri Aurobindo, with the candid simplicity of a child, blotting out all her past, all her spiritual attainments, all the riches of her consciousness. Like a new-born babe, she stripped herself of everything; she was to learn everything right from the beginning as if she had known or heard nothing.

"Now to come back to a personal experience. The first thing I had heard and come to know about the Mother was that she was a great spiritual person. I did not know then that she had other gifts too; these were revealed to me gradually. First I came to know that she was an accomplished painter;

and afterwards that she was an equally gifted musician. But there were other surprises in store. For instance, she had an intellectual side no less richly endowed, that is to say, she had read and studied enormously, had cultivated her intellect even as the erudite do. I was still more surprised to find that while in France she had already studied and translated a good number of Indian scriptures like the Gita, the Upanishads, the Yoga-sutras, the Bhakti-sutras of Narada, etc. I mention all this merely to tell you that the Mother's capacity for making her mind a complete blank was as extraordinary as her enormous intellectual acquisitions. This was something unique in her. In the early days, when she had just taken charge of our spiritual life, she told me one day in private, perhaps seeing that I might have got a pride in being an intellectual, that at one time she used to take an interest in philosophy and other intellectual pursuits. But although all that had now gone below the surface, she could bring it up again at will. So, I need not have any apprehension on that score! It was as if the Mother was trying to apologise for her deficiencies in scholarship. This was how she set an example of humility, what we call Divine Humility.

"As I was saying, this capacity for an entire annulment of the past has been one of the special powers of her spiritual consciousness and sadhana. It is not an easy thing for a human being to strip himself naked of all his past acquisitions, whether they are intellectual knowledge or the traits and tendencies of the vital, let alone the habits of the body. And yet this is the first and most important step in spiritual discipline, and the Mother has given us a living example of this. That is why she decided to shed all her past, forget all about it and begin anew the a-b-c of her training and initiation from Sri Aurobindo. And it was in fact at the hands of Sri Aurobindo that she received as a token and outward symbol her first lessons in Bengali and Sanskrit, beginning with the alphabet.

"However all this is simply an attempt on the part of the small to comprehend something of the Vast; it is as if a particle of sand was trying to reflect a little of the sun's rays, a dwarf trying to catch at the high tree-top with his uplifted arms, a child prattling of his mother's beauty.

"In the beginning, Sri Aurobindo would refer to the Mother quite distinctly as Mira. Afterwards for some time (this may have extended over a period of years) we could notice that he stopped at the sound of M and uttered the full name Mira as if after a slight hesitation. To us it seemed rather enigmatic at the time, but later we came to know the reason. Sri Aurobindo's lips were on the verge of saying 'Mother', but we were not ready for it, so he ended with 'Mira' instead of saying 'Mother'. No one knows for certain on which particular date, at what auspicious moment, the word 'Mother' was uttered by the lips of Sri Aurobindo. But that was a divine moment in unrecorded history, a crucial moment in the destiny of man and earth; for it was at this supreme moment that the Mother was installed in the external consciousness of man on this material earth.

"Let me now end this story with a last word about myself.

"I have said that so far the Mother had been to us only a friend and companion, a comrade almost, at the most an object of reverence. I was now about to start on my annual trip to Bengal — in those days I used to go there once every year, and that was perhaps my last trip. Before leaving, I felt a desire to see the Mother. The Mother had not yet come out of her seclusion nor had Sri Aurobindo retired. I said to Sri Aurobindo 'I would like to see Her before I go'. — Her with a capital H, in place of the Mother, for we had not yet started using that epithet. Sri Aurobindo informed the Mother. The room now used by Champaklal was the Mother's room in those days. I entered and waited in the Prosperity room, for Sri Aurobindo used to meet people on the verandah in front. The Mother came in from her room and stood near the door. I approached her and said, 'I am going', and then bowed down to her. That was my first Pranam to the Mother. She said, 'Come back soon'. This 'come back soon' meant in the end, 'come back for good'."

Sri Aurobindo corrected the proofs of the *Arya* and saw to it that the printed copies were dispatched to the subscribers regularly on the 15th of every month. Sometimes he would make drafts of his articles and type them, but mostly he would type them off without any drafts. Sometimes he

would be typing away late into the night so that the matter could be sent to the press the next morning. Sourin was in charge of the *Arya* office and Moni was managing the household and the kitchen.

At about this time Sri Aurobindo translated C.R. Das's Bengali poem, *Sagar Sangeet* (songs of the sea) into English. It is a beautiful poem the last stanza of which we quote below:

"This shore and that shore, — I am tired, they pall.
Where thou art shoreless, take me from it all.
My spirit goes floating and can find oppressed
In thy unbanked immensity only rest.
Thick darkness falls upon my outer part,
A lonely stillness grips the labouring heart,
Dumb weeping with no tears to ease the eyes.
I am mad for thee, O king of mysteries.
Have I not sought thee on a million streams,
And wheresoever the voice of music dreams,
In wondrous lights and sealing shadows caught,
And every night and every day have sought?
Pilot eternal, friend unknown embraced,
O, take me to thy shoreless self at last."

VIII

Our narrative has come up to the year 1914 when the monthly review, *Arya*, was started. *Arya* at once captured the spiritual idealism of the progressive mind of India and evoked an admiring response in some of the thinkers in the West, particularly in France. Its message of synthesis sounded a heartening note in the discord and chaos of the time. It paid its way "With a large surplus," and was regularly published. Sri Aurobindo was particular about its regularity.

On February 21, 1915, the Mother's birthday was celebrated. As the First World War had broken out, the Mother had to return to France, and she left on February 22, 1915.

Khasirao Jadhav, an old Baroda friend of Sri Aurobindo's came down to visit him.

We reproduce below the seven letters written by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to each other on the subject of their Yoga between 1915 and 1916. They are extremely important as they throw much light on their joint mission and the trials and difficulties they had to pass through in order to bring down the new Light to the earth and make "Heaven and Earth equal and one".

Letters of Sri Aurobindo to The Mother

All is always for the best, but it is sometimes from the external point of view an awkward best...

The whole earth is now under one law and answers to the same vibrations and I am sceptical of finding any place where the clash of the struggle will not pursue us. In any case, an effective retirement does not seem to be my destiny. I must remain in touch with the world until I have either mastered adverse circumstances or succumbed or carried on the struggle between the spiritual and physical so far as I am destined to carry it on. This is how I have always seen things and will see them. As for

failure, difficulty and apparent impossibility I am too much habituated to them to be much impressed by their constant self-presentation except for passing moments...

One needs to have a calm heart, a settled will, entire self-abnegation and the eyes constantly fixed on the beyond to live undiscouraged in times like these which are truly a period of universal decomposition. For myself, I follow the Voice and look neither to right nor to left of me. The result is not mine and hardly at all now even the labour.

6-5-1915

*

Heaven we have possessed, but not the earth; but the fullness of the Yoga is to make, in the formula of the Veda, “Heaven and Earth equal and one”.

20-5-1915

*

Every thing internal is ripe or ripening, but there is a sort of locked struggle in which neither side can make a very appreciable advance (somewhat like the trench warfare in Europe), the spiritual force insisting against the resistance disputing every inch and making more or less effective counter-attacks.... And if there were not the strength and Ananda within, it would be harassing and disgusting work; but the eye of knowledge looks beyond and sees that it is only a protracted episode.

28-7-1915

*

Nothing seems able to disturb the immobility of things and all that is active outside our own selves is a sort of welter of dark and sombre

confusion from which nothing formed or luminous can emerge. It is a singular condition of the world, the very definition of chaos with the superficial form of the old world resting apparently intact on the surface. But a chaos of long disintegration or of some early new birth? It is the thing that is being fought out from day to day, but as yet without any approach to a decision.

16-9-1915

A Letter of The Mother to Sri Aurobindo:

The entire consciousness immersed in divine contemplation, the whole being enjoyed a supreme and vast felicity.

Then was the physical body seized, first in its lower members and next the whole of it, by a sacred trembling which made little by little even in the most material sensation all personal limits fall away. The being progressively, methodically, grew in greatness, breaking down every barrier, shattering every obstacle, that it might contain and manifest a force and a power which increased ceaselessly in immensity and intensity. It was as if a progressive dilatation of the cells until there was a complete identification with the earth: the body of the awakened consciousness was the terrestrial globe moving harmoniously in ethereal space. And the consciousness knew that its global body was thus moving in the arms of the universal Personality, and it gave itself, it abandoned itself to Her in an ecstasy of peaceful bliss. Then it felt that its body was absorbed in the body of the universe and one with it; the consciousness became the consciousness of the universe, in its totality immobile, in its internal complexity moving infinitely. The consciousness of the universe sprang towards the Divine in an ardent aspiration, a perfect surrender, and it saw in the splendour of the immaculate Light the radiant Being standing on a many-headed serpent whose body coiled infinitely around the universe. The Being in an eternal gesture of triumph mastered and created at one and the same time the serpent and the universe that issued from it; erect on the

serpent he dominated it with all his victorious might, and the same gesture that crushed the hydra, enveloping the universe, gave it eternal birth. Then the consciousness became this Being and perceived that its form was changing once more; it was absorbed into something which was no longer a form and yet contained all forms, something which, immutable, sees, — the Eye, the Witness. And what It sees, is. Then this last vestige of form disappeared and the consciousness itself was absorbed into the Unutterable, the Ineffable.

The return towards the consciousness of the individual body took place very slowly in a constant and invariable splendour of Light and Power and Felicity and Adoration, by successive gradations, but directly, without passing again through the universal and terrestrial forms. And it was as if the modest corporeal form had become the direct and immediate vesture, without any intermediary, of the supreme and eternal Witness.

26-6-1915

Letters of Sri Aurobindo to The Mother:

The experience you have described is Vedic in the real sense, though not one which would easily be recognised by the modern systems of Yoga which call themselves Yogic. It is the union of the “Earth” of the Veda and Purana with the divine Principle, an earth which is said to be above our earth, that is to say, the physical being and consciousness of which the world and the body are only images. But the modern Yogas hardly recognise the possibility of a material union with the Divine.

31-12-1915

*

The difficulties you find in the spiritual progress are common to us all. In this yoga the progress is always attended with these relapses into the ordinary mentality until the whole being is so remoulded that it can no

longer be affected either by any downward tendency in our own nature or by the impressions from the discordant world outside or even by the mental state of those associated with us most closely in the yoga. The ordinary yoga is usually concentrated on a single aim and therefore less exposed to such recoils; ours is so complex and many-sided and embraces such large aims that we cannot expect any smooth progress until we near the completion of our effort, — especially as all the hostile forces in the spiritual world are in a constant state of opposition and beseige our gains; for the complete victory of a single one of us would mean a general downfall among them. In fact by our own unaided effort we could not hope to succeed. It is only in proportion as we come into a more and more universal communion with the Highest that we can hope to overcome with any finality. For myself I have had to come back so often from things that seemed to have been securely gained that it is only relatively that I can say of any part of my yoga, “It is done.” Still I have always found that when I recover from one of these recoils, it is always with a new spiritual gain which might have been neglected or missed if I had remained securely in my former state of partial satisfaction. Especially, as I have long had the map of my advance sketched out before me, I am able to measure my progress at each step and the particular losses are compensated for by the clear consciousness of the general advance that has been made. The final goal is far but the progress made in the face of so constant and massive an opposition is the guarantee of its being gained in the end. But the time is in other hands than ours. Therefore I have put impatience and dissatisfaction far away from me.

An absolute equality of the mind and heart and a clear purity and calm strength in all the members of the being have long been the primary condition on which the power working in me has insisted with an inexhaustible patience and an undeviating constancy of will which rejects all the efforts of other powers to hasten forward to the neglect of these first requisites. Wherever they are impaired it returns upon them and works over and again over the weak points like a workman patiently mending the defects of his work. These seem to me to be the foundation and condition

of all the rest. As they become firmer and more complete the system is more able to hold consistently and vividly the settled perception of the One in all things and beings, in all qualities, forces, happenings, in all this world-consciousness and the play of its workings. That founds the Unity and upon it the deep satisfaction and growing rapture of the Unity. It is this to which our nature is most recalcitrant. It persists in the division, in the dualities, in the sorrow and unsatisfied passion and labour, it finds it difficult to accustom itself to the divine largeness, joy and equipoise — especially the vital and material parts of our nature; it is they that pull down the mind which has accepted and even when it has long lived in the joy and peace and oneness. That, I suppose, is why the religions and philosophies have had so strong a leaning to the condemnation of Life and Matter and aimed at an escape instead of a victory. But the victory has to be won; the rebellious elements have to be redeemed and transformed, not rejected or excised.

When the Unity has been well founded, the static half of our work is done but the active half remains. It is then that in the One we must see the Master and His Power, — Krishna and Kali as I name them using the terms of our Indian religions; the Power occupying the whole of myself and my nature which becomes Kali and ceases to be anything else, the Master using, directing, enjoying the Power to his ends, not mine, with that which I call myself only as a centre of his universal existence and responding to its working as a soul to the Soul, taking upon itself his image until there is nothing left but Krishna and Kali. This is the stage I have reached in spite of all set-backs and recoils, imperfectly indeed in the secureness and intensity of the state, but well enough in the general type. When that has been done, then we may hope to found securely the play in us of his divine Knowledge governing the action of divine Power. The rest is the full opening up of the different planes of his world-play and the subjection of Matter and the body and the material world to the law of the higher heavens of the Truth. To these things towards which in my earlier ignorance I used to press forward impatiently before satisfying the first conditions — the effort, however, was necessary and made the necessary preparation of the

material instruments — I can now only look forward as a subsequent eventuality in a yet distant vista of things.

Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry, 1918-20

To possess securely the Light and the Force of the Supramental being, this is the main object to which the power is now turning. But the remnant of the old habits of intellectual thought and mental will come so obstinate in their determination to remain that the progress is hampered, uncertain and always falls back from the little achievement already effected. They are no longer within me, they are blind, stupid, mechanical, incorrigible

even when they perceive their incompetence, but they crowd round the mind and pour in their suggestions whenever it tries to remain open only to the supramental Light and the Command, so that the Knowledge and the Will reach the mind in a confused, distorted and often misleading form. It is, however, only a question of time: the siege will diminish in force and be finally dispelled.

23-3-1916

After the Congress of 1914 Sri Aurobindo gave an interview to a correspondent of the Madras paper, *Hindu.* We quote the following as it appeared in the *Hindu*:

"But what do you think of the 1914 Congress and Conferences?" I insisted.

'He spoke almost with reluctance but in clear and firm accents. He said:

"I do not find the proceedings of the Christmas Conferences very interesting and inspiring. They seem to me to be mere repetitions of the petty and lifeless formulas of the past and hardly show any sense of the great breath of the future that is blowing upon us. I make an exception of the speech of the Congress President which struck me as far above the ordinary level. Some people, apparently, found it visionary and unpractical. It seems to me to be the one practical and vital thing that has been said in India for some time past."

'He continued: "The old, petty forms and little narrow, make-believe activities are getting out of date. The world is changing rapidly around us and preparing for more colossal changes in the future. We must rise to the greatness of thought and action which it will demand upon the nations who hope to live. No, it is not in any of the old formal activities, but deeper down that I find signs of progress and hope. The last few years have been a period of silence and compression in which the awakened *Virya* and *Tejas* of the nation have been concentrating for a greater outburst of a better directed energy in the future."

“We are a nation of three hundred millions,” added Mr. Ghosh, “inhabiting a great country in which many civilisations have met, full of rich material and unused capacities. We must cease to think and act like the inhabitants of an obscure and petty village.”

‘I asked: “If you don’t like our political methods, what would you advise us to do for the realisation of our destiny?”

‘He quickly replied: “Only by a general intellectual and spiritual awakening can this nation fulfil its destiny. Our limited information, our second-hand intellectual activities, our bounded interests, our narrow life of little family aims and small money-getting have prevented us from entering into the broad life of the world. Fortunately, there are ever-increasing signs of a widened outlook, a richer intellectual output and numerous sparks of liberal genius which show that the necessary change is coming. No nation in modern times can grow great by politics alone. A rich and varied life, energetic in all its parts, is the condition of a sound, vigorous national existence. From this point of view also the last five years have been a great benefit to the country.”

‘I then asked what he thought of the vastly improved relations that now exist between the Briton and the Indian in our own country and elsewhere.

“It is a very good thing,” he said, and he explained himself in the following manner: “The realisation of our nationhood separate from the rest of humanity was the governing idea of our activities from 1905 to 1910. That movement has served its purpose. It has laid a good foundation for the future. Whatever excesses and errors of speech and action were then disclosed came because our energy, though admirably inspired, lacked practical experience and knowledge.

“The idea of Indian nationhood is now not only rooted in the public mind, as all recent utterances go to show, but accepted in Europe and acknowledged by the Government and the governing race. The new idea that should now lead us is the realisation of our nationhood not separate from, but in the future scheme of humanity. When it has realised its own

national life and unity, India will still have a part to play in helping to bring about the unity of the nations."

'I naturally put in a remark about the Under-Secretary's "Angle of Vision".

"It is well indeed," observed Mr. Ghosh, "that British statesmen should be thinking of India's proper place in the Councils of the Empire, and it is obviously a thought which, if put into effect, must automatically alter the attitude of even the greatest extremist towards the Government and change for the better all existing political relations.

"But it is equally necessary that we Indians should begin to think seriously what part Indian thought, Indian intellect, Indian nationhood, Indian spirituality, Indian culture have to fulfil in the general life of humanity. The humanity is bound to grow increasingly on. We must necessarily be in it and of it. Not a spirit of aloofness or a jealous self-defence, but of a generous emulation and brotherhood with all men and all nations, justified by a sense of conscious strength, a great destiny, a large place in the human future — this should be the Indian spirit."

'The oneness of humanity is a topic dear to the heart of Babu Arabinda Ghosh and when I suggested to him that Vedantic ideas would be a good basis for unity, his reply was full of enthusiasm:

"Oh, yes," he said, "I am convinced and have long been convinced that a spiritual awakening, a re-awakening to the true self of a nation is the most important condition of our national greatness. The supreme Indian idea of the oneness of all men in God and its realisation inwardly and outwardly, increasingly even in social relations and the structure of society is destined, I believe, to govern the progress of the human race. India, if it chooses, can guide the world."

'And here I said something about our "four thousand" castes, our differences in dress and in "caste-marks", our vulgar sectarian antipathies and so on.

"Not so hard, if you please," said Mr. Ghosh with a smile. "I quite agree with you that our social fabric will have to be considerably altered before

long. We shall have, of course, to enlarge our family and social life, not in the petty spirit of present-day Social Reform, hammering at small details and belittling our immediate past, but with a larger idea and more generous impulses. Our past with all its faults and defects should be sacred to us. But the claims of our future with its immediate possibilities should be still more sacred."

'His concluding words were spoken in a very solemn mood:

"It is more important," he said, "that the thought of India should come out of the philosophical school and renew its contact with life, and the spiritual life of India issue out of the cave and the temple and, adapting itself to new forms, lay its hand upon the world. I believe also that humanity is about to enlarge its scope by new knowledge, new powers and capacities, which will create as great a revolution in human life as the physical science of the nineteenth century. Here, too, India holds in her past, a little rusted and put out of use, the key of humanity's future.

"It is in these directions that I have been for some time impelled to turn my energies rather than to the petty political activities which are alone open to us at the present moment. This is the reason of my continued retirement and detachment from action. I believe in the necessity at such times and for such great objects of Tapasya in silence for self-training, for self-knowledge and storage of spiritual force. Our forefathers used that means, though in different forms. And it is the best means for becoming an efficient worker in the great days of the world."

IX

In 1917, B. Shiva Rao, a co-worker of Annie Besant, visited Sri Aurobindo. A report of his interview was published in the *Hindu* of Sunday, May 10, 1959, which we reproduce below:

"The Home-Rule movement was at that time quickly gathering support and vitality mainly as a result of the internments. Some of us who were on the staff of *New India* went out on trips to build up a campaign of organisation. One of these trips took me to Pondicherry where Sri Aurobindo had made his home after leaving Bengal in 1910. Even in those early days there was an atmosphere of great peace and serenity about him which left on me a deep, enduring impression. He spoke softly, almost in whispers. He thought Mrs. Besant was absolutely right in preaching Home Rule for India, as well as in her unqualified support of the Allies in the first World War against Germany. It was a brief meeting of some minutes' duration. I believe I saw him again some months later. For twenty-five years I had no sort of contact with him but he was gracious enough to remember me, during Sir Stafford Cripps' wartime mission to India in 1942. I was surprised one morning when the negotiations were threatening to reach a deadlock (on the transitional arrangements in regard to defence) to receive a message from him for Gandhiji and Sri Nehru: the Cripps' offer, it was his deliberate view, should be accepted unconditionally by the Congress leaders. It is futile to speculate now what India's subsequent fate might have been, if the advice of the sage at Pondicherry had been accepted."

Chandrasekhar, a young scholar of Andhra, first came to Pondicherry probably in 1919. He came again in 1920 and stayed for some time. In 1923 and 1926 he stayed much longer and came into close contact with Sri Aurobindo. Speaking about him, Amrita says in *Old Long Since*, "Once on my way to Pondicherry I met an Andhra young man, Chandrasekhar Ayya

by name. He enquired of me, ‘How can I meet Sri Aurobindo?’ I told him, ‘You may come with me and take your chance.’

“...His first interview with Sri Aurobindo for only five minutes laid the foundation of the priceless things he gleaned in future from Sri Aurobindo.

“A man of intellectual attainments, he was a scholar in Sanskrit and knew English very well... Sri Aurobindo kindled the fire in him.

“...He gave himself entirely to Sri Aurobindo. There grew up steadily an intimacy between them.

“Subramania Bharati learnt the *Rig Veda* from Sri Aurobindo. Chandrasekhar also studied the *Rig Veda* with Sri Aurobindo methodically at a particular hour. He studied in this way for two or three years, not by the old traditional commentaries, not in the old style, but in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s own revealing interpretation. I listened to the interpretation with great delight, whenever I could be present.”

Nolini Kanta, Subramania Bharati and Chandrasekhar attended the reading of the *Rig Veda* regularly. Chandrasekhar’s younger brother, V. Chidanandan, who was then a student of English literature, saw Sri Aurobindo once or twice and sought his advice on his literary studies. He also recorded some of the talks from day to day.

A.B. Purani, who had been reading the *Arya* and feeling greatly attracted towards Sri Aurobindo, saw him for the first time in December, 1918. We quote a part of Purani’s report of the interview which shows that even in 1918 Sri Aurobindo knew and assured him that the freedom of India would be won by other means than revolutionary activities.

“...he put me questions about my sadhana, spiritual practice. I described my efforts and added: ‘Sadhana is all right, but it is difficult to concentrate on it so long as India is not free’.

"'Perhaps it may not be necessary to resort to revolutionary activity[34] to free India', he said.

"'But without that how is the British Government to go from India?' I asked him.

"'That is another question; but if India can be free without revolutionary activity, why should you execute the plan? It is better to concentrate on the Yoga — spiritual development', he replied."

"'But the concentration of my whole being turns towards India's freedom. It is difficult for me to sleep till that is secured.'

"Sri Aurobindo remained silent for two or three minutes. It was a long pause. Then he said, 'Suppose an assurance is given to you that India will be free?'

"'Who can give such an assurance?' I could feel the echo of doubt and challenge in my own question.

"Again he remained silent for three or four minutes. Then he looked at me and added, 'Suppose I give you the assurance?'

"I paused for half a minute — considered the question within myself and said, 'If you give the assurance, I can accept it'.

"'Then I give you the assurance that India will be free', he said in a serious tone.

"The question of India's freedom again arose in my mind, and at the time of taking leave, after I had got up to go, I could not repress the question, — it was a question of life for me — 'Are you quite sure that India will be free?'

"Sri Aurobindo became very serious. His gaze was fixed at the sky that appeared beyond the window. Then he looked at me and putting his fist on the table, he said:

[34] Purani had told Sri Aurobindo that they were prepared to start executing their plan of the revolutionary work.

"'You can take it from me, it is as certain as the rising of the sun tomorrow. The decree has already gone forth, it may not be long in coming.'

"I bowed down to him. That day in the train after nearly two years I was able at last to sleep soundly. In my mind was fixed for ever the picture of that scene: the two of us standing near the small table, my earnest question, that upward gaze, and that quiet and firm voice with the power in it to shake

Sri Aurobindo with disciples, 1918-20

the world, that firm fist planted on the table, — the symbol of self-confidence of the divine Truth. There may be rank kali yuga, the Iron Age, in the whole world but it is the great fortune of India that she has sons who know that Truth and have an unshakable faith in it, and can risk their lives for it. In this significant fact is contained the divine destiny of India and of the world."

Amrita came in 1919 and was permitted to stay with Sri Aurobindo. In 1918 the Montagu Chelmsford Reforms were announced by the British Government. Mrs. Annie Besant wrote to Sri Aurobindo pressing him to express his opinion of the Reforms. In reply Sri Aurobindo sent an article signed "An Indian Nationalist" in which he characterised the Reforms as a "Chinese puzzle" and "a great shadow".

In 1919 the artist Mukul Chandra De, who later became the Principal of the Calcutta School of Art, came to Pondicherry and drew a portrait of Sri Aurobindo, but it was not successful. Let us quote a short letter written by Rabindranath Tagore in connection with a review of his novel, *The Home and the World*, in the November, 1919, issue of *The Modern Review*. The letter has been recently acquired by us and we quote it only because it throws further light on Rabindranath's attitude towards Sri Aurobindo.

Shantiniketan
Nov. 30, 1919

Dear Sir,

I have not yet read Jadu Babu's review of my book, but I feel sure that he could never mean to say that Sri Aurobindo Ghose belongs to the same type of humanity as Sandip of my story. My acquaintance with the literature of our contemporary politics being casual and desultory, I do not, even to this day, definitely know what is the political standpoint of Aurobindo Ghose. But this I positively know that he is a great man, one of the greatest we have and therefore liable to be misunderstood even by his friends. What I myself feel for him is not mere admiration but reverence for his depth of spirituality, his largeness of vision and his literary gifts, extraordinary in

imaginative insight and expression. He is a true Rishi and a poet combined, and I still repeat my Namaskar which I offered to him when he was first assailed by the trouble which ultimately made him an exile from the soil of Bengal.

Yous sincerely,
Rabindranath Tagore

In 1920 Joseph Baptista, a barrister of Bombay, wrote to Sri Aurobindo at the instance of Tilak, requesting him to accept the editorship of a paper they wanted to bring out as a mouthpiece of the Nationalist Party which had gained considerable strength under the leadership of Tilak. Sri Aurobindo sent the following reply explaining in detail the nature of the spiritual work he was engaged in and regretting his inability to accede to his request.

Pondicherry, January 5, 1920

Dear Baptista,

Your offer is a tempting one, but I regret that I cannot answer it in the affirmative. It is due to you that I should state explicitly my reasons. In the first place I am not prepared at present to return to British India. This is quite apart from any political obstacle. I understand that up to last September the Government of Bengal (and probably the Government of Madras also) were opposed to my return to British India and that practically this opposition meant that if I went back I should be interned or imprisoned under one or other of the beneficent Acts which are apparently still to subsist as helps in ushering in the new era of trust and co-operation. I do not suppose other Governments would any more be delighted by my appearance in their respective provinces. Perhaps the King's Proclamation may make a difference, but that is not certain, since, as I read it, it also does not mean an amnesty, but an act of gracious concession and benevolence limited by the discretion of the Viceroy. Now I have too much work on my hands to waste my time in the leisured ease of an involuntary

Government guest. But even if I were assured of an entirely free action and movement, I should yet not go just now. I came to Pondicherry in order to have freedom and tranquillity for a fixed object having nothing to do with present politics — in which I have taken no direct part since my coming here, though what I could do for the country in my own way I have constantly done, — and until it is accomplished, it is not possible for me to resume any kind of public activity. But if I were in British India, I should be obliged to plunge at once into action of different kinds. Pondicherry is my place of retreat, my cave of tapasya, not of the ascetic kind, but of a brand of my own invention. I must finish that, I must be internally armed and equipped for my work before I leave it.

Next, in the matter of the work itself, I do not at all look down on politics or political action or consider I have got above them. I have always laid a dominant stress and I now lay an entire stress on the spiritual life, but my idea of spirituality has nothing to do with ascetic withdrawal or contempt or disgust of secular things. There is to me nothing secular, all human activity is for me a thing to be included in a complete spiritual life, and the importance of politics at the present time is very great. But my line and intention of political activity would differ considerably from anything now current in the field. I entered into political action and continued it from 1903 to 1910 with one aim and one alone, to get into the mind of the people a settled will for freedom and the necessity of a struggle to achieve it in place of the futile ambling Congress methods till then in vogue. That is now done and the Amritsar Congress is the seal upon it. The will is not as practical and compact nor by any means as organised and sustained in action as it should be, but there is the will and plenty of strong and able leaders to guide it. I consider that in spite of the inadequacy of the Reforms the will to self-determination, if the country keeps its present temper, as I have no doubt it will, is bound to prevail before long. What preoccupies me now is the question what it is going to do with its self-determination, how will it use its freedom, on what lines is it going to determine its future?

You may ask why not come out and help, myself, so far as I can, in giving a lead? But my mind has a habit of running inconveniently ahead of

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

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

Yours sincerely,
Aurobindo Ghose

The Mother came again on April 24, 1920 and settled in India. She knew that her work was the same as Sri Aurobindo's and that their collaboration was the secret of its success. At first she stayed at Magrie's Hotel, then at Subbu's Hotel in Rue St. Louis, and from there she moved to 1, Rue St. Martin. While she was staying at this house, one day there was a great storm and heavy rain and the old house was considered unsafe to live in. Sri Aurobindo advised her to move to his own house, 41, Rue François Martin where she remained till October, 1922, when they all moved finally to the building in 9, Rue de la Marine which is the present Ashram building.

A few memorable interviews that took place in 1920 are noted below:

W.W. Pearson came from Shantiniketan and met the Mother.

James H. Cousins came and met Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Dr. Munje came and stayed with Sri Aurobindo. He had long talks with the Master on political subjects.

Sarala Devi Choudhurani came sometime in 1920 or later and had an interview with Sri Aurobindo.

Colonel Joshua Wedgewood, an English M.P., visited Sri Aurobindo.

X

In 1919, after the armistice, Barin was released from the Andamans. He wrote to Sri Aurobindo asking him about his personal sadhana, the future of the country and the nature of the movement to be carried on for its freedom and resurgence. Sri Aurobindo's reply was a long one covering practically all aspects of national life and indicating his own line of spiritual work for humanity. We reproduce here some lines from that Bengali letter which has been translated into English:

April 7, 1920

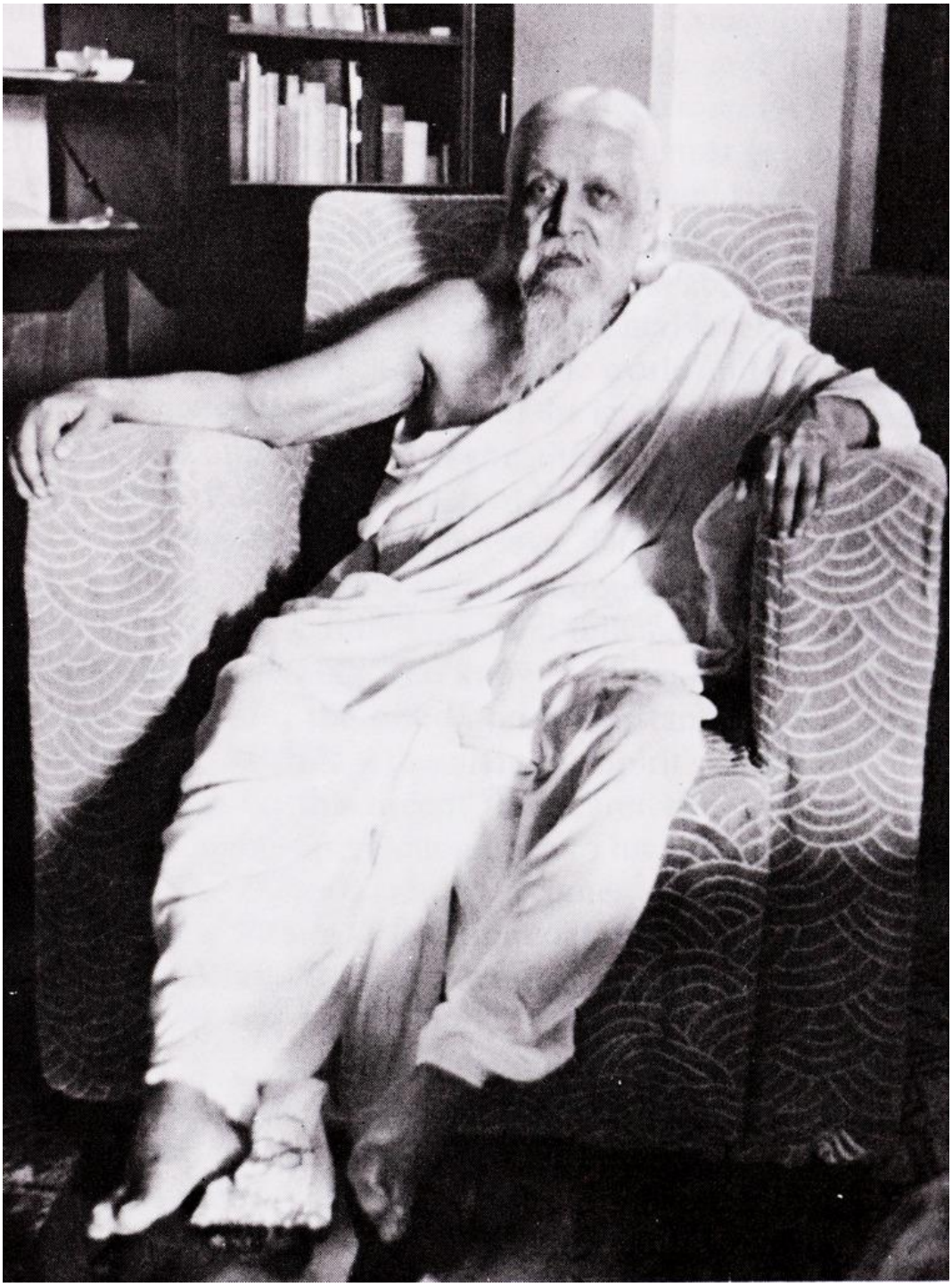
Dear Barin,

...First about our yoga. You wish to give me the charge of your yoga and I am willing to take it, but that means giving its charge to Him who is moving by His Divine Shakti, whether secretly or openly, both you and me. But you must know that the necessary result of this will be that you will have to walk in the special way which He has given to me, the way which I call the path of Integral Yoga, — what I began with, what Lele gave me was a seeking for the path, a circling in many directions — a touch, taking up, handling, scrutinising this or that in all the old partial yogas, a complete experience in some sense of one and then the pursuit of another.

Afterwards, when I came to Pondicherry this unsteady condition came to an end. The Guru of the world who is within us then gave me the complete direction of my path — its complete theory, the ten limbs of the body of this Yoga. These ten years He has been making me develop it in experience, and it is not yet finished. It may take another two years; and as long as it is not finished I doubt if I shall be able to return to Bengal. Pondicherry is the appointed place for my yoga siddhi, except indeed one part of it, and that is action...

I shall write and tell you afterwards what is this way of yoga. Or if you come here I shall tell you about it. In this matter the spoken word is better than the written one. At present I can only say that its root-principle is to

make a harmony and unity of complete knowledge, complete works, and complete Bhakti, to raise this above the mind and to give it its complete perfection on the supramental level of the Vijnana. The defect of the old Yoga was here — the mind it knew and the Spirit it knew, and it was satisfied with the experiences of the Spirit in the mind. But the mind can grasp only the divided and partial, it cannot utterly seize the infinite, the



Sri Aurobindo, 1950

indivisible. The mind's means to reach the infinite are Sannyasa, Moksha and Nirvana, and it has no others. One man or another may get indeed this featureless Moksha, but what is the gain? The Brahman, the Self, God are always there. What God wants in man is to embody Himself here in the individual and in the community, to realise God in life.

The old way of yoga failed to bring about harmony or unity of the Spirit and life: it rather dismissed the world as Maya or a transient play. The result has been loss of life-power and the degeneration of India. As was said in the Gita, 'These peoples would perish if I did not do works', these people of India have truly gone down to ruin. A few Sannyasis and Bairagis to be saintly and perfect and liberated, a few Bhaktas to dance in a mad ecstasy of love and sweet emotion and Ananda, and a whole race to become lifeless, void of intelligence, sunk in deep *tamas* — is this the effect of a true spirituality? No, first we must get indeed all the partial experiences possible on the mental level and flood the mind with the spiritual delight and illumine it with the spiritual light but afterwards we must rise above. If we cannot rise above, that is, to the supramental level, it is hardly possible to know the last secret of the world and the problem it raises remains unsolved. There, the ignorance which creates a duality of opposition between the Spirit and Matter, between truth of spirit and truth of life, disappears. There one need no longer call the world Maya. The world is the eternal Play of God, the eternal manifestation of the Self. Then it becomes possible to fully know and fully possess God — to do what is said in the Gita, 'To know me integrally'. The physical body, the life, the mind and understanding, the supermind and the Ananda — these are the Spirit's five levels. The higher we rise on this ascent the nearer to man comes the state of that highest perfection open to his spiritual evolution. Rising to the Supermind, it becomes easy to rise to the Ananda. One attains a firm foundation in the condition of the indivisible and infinite Ananda, not only in the timeless Parabrahman but in the body, in life, in the world. The integral being, the integral consciousness, the integral Ananda blossoms out and takes form in life. This is the central clue of my yoga, the fundamental principle.

This is no easy change to make. After these fifteen years I am only now rising into the lowest of the three levels of the Supermind and trying to draw up into it all the lower activities. But when this Siddhi will be complete, then I am absolutely certain that God will through me give to others the Siddhi of the Supermind with less effort. Then my real work will begin. I am not impatient for success in the work. What is to happen will happen in God's appointed time. I have no impulse to make any unbalanced haste and rush into the field of work in the strength of the little ego. If even I did not get success in my work I would not be shaken. This work is not mine but God's. I will listen to no other call; when God moves me then I will move....

Now let me discuss some particular points of your letter. I do not want to say much in this letter about what you have written as regards your yoga. We shall have better occasion when we meet. To look upon the body as a corpse is a sign of Sannyasa, of the path of Nirvana. You cannot be of the world with this idea. You must have delight in all things — in the Spirit as well as in the body. The body has consciousness, it is God's form. When you see God in everything that is in the world, when you have this vision that all this is Brahman, *sarvamidam brahma*, that Vasudeva is all this — *vasudevaḥ sarvamiti*, then you have the universal delight. The flow of that delight precipitates and courses even through this body...

... Not our strength but the Shakti of God is the sadhaka of this yoga.

...But to get that Shakti one must be a worshipper of Shakti. We are not worshippers of Shakti. We are worshippers of the easy way. But Shakti is not got by the easy way. Our forefathers dived into a sea of vast thought and gained a vast knowledge and established a mighty civilisation. As they went on in their way, fatigue and weariness came upon them. The force of thought diminished and with it also the strong current of Shakti. Our

civilisation has become *acalāyatana*,[35] our religion a bigotry of externals, our spirituality a faint glimmer of light or a momentary wave of religious intoxication. And so long as this sort of thing continues any permanent resurgence of India is improbable...

...I wish to make a large and strong equanimity the foundation of the yoga. I want established on that equality a full, firm and undisturbed Shakti in the system and in all its movements. I want the wide display of the light of Knowledge in the ocean of Shakti. And I want in that luminous vastness the tranquil ecstasy of infinite love, delight and oneness. I do not want hundreds of thousands of disciples. It will be enough if I can get a hundred complete men, purified of petty egoism, who will be the instruments of God. I have no faith in the customary trade of the Guru. I do not wish to be a guru. If anybody wakes and manifests from within his slumbering godhead and gets the divine life — be it at my touch or at another's — this is what I want. It is such men that will raise the country.

Yours Sejda[36]

Barin came to Pondicherry. Ullaskar Datta, one of the revolutionaries and a fellow worker of Barin also came. Some of the revolutionaries were trying to seek inspiration and guidance from Sri Aurobindo, but since Sri Aurobindo had cut off all connection with active politics, his influence upon them was mainly spiritual.

At about this time the Mother took charge of the management of the house and the kitchen, and, as in everything else she took up, there was a marked and progressive improvement. Order, harmony and beauty flowed spontaneously out of her touch.

Sarojini Ghose, Sri Aurobindo's sister, came to Pondicherry in 1921. In order to render her some financial help Sri Aurobindo gave her the right to take the sale proceeds of his book, *War and Self-determination*.

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[35] The fossilled House or the Home of Conservatism.

[36] Elder brother.

The magazine *Arya* which Sri Aurobindo had started in 1914 discontinued publication in the beginning of 1921, as probably Sri Aurobindo's yoga left him little time for such philosophical writing. He became more and more absorbed in his life's real work: the ascent to and the descent of the Supermind.

In this year collective meditation began. In Purani's words, "At four in the evening the inmates of the house practised meditation with Sri Aurobindo in the verandah of 41, Rue François Martin."

Arunchandra Dutt, a disciple of Motilal Roy, came from Chandernagore and stayed at Sri Aurobindo's house for a few months.

Mrinalini Chattopadhyaya and Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya also came and met Sri Aurobindo in this year.

In September, 1922, as already stated, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother moved with their disciples to No 9, Rue de la Marine which is now the main building or central quarter of the Ashram.

On the 15th August, 1920, the Prabartak Sangha of Chandernagore, which was founded by Motilal Roy under the inspiration of Sri Aurobindo, had brought out a weekly paper *The Standard Bearer*. Motilal Roy had come into close contact with Sri Aurobindo and his visits to Pondicherry helped him to avail himself of Sri Aurobindo's direct guidance. But after 1920 he separated from Sri Aurobindo who then withdrew his inner help and guidance.

To some of the issues of *The Standard Bearer* Sri Aurobindo contributed articles on different subjects. In the very first issue he wrote the leader under the caption "Ourselves". The article written about 50 years back reads so fresh today and contains the most vital message for modern India which if carried out in life, can raise this ancient nation to heights of an unprecedented glory and greatness. To struggle in a quagmire is not to progress. To be tossing about in a welter of imported ideologies is not to advance the cause of the nation. There must be determined ascent from the obscurity of the mind into a higher Consciousness. Otherwise the struggle and the tossings will never end and one will have only the illusion of doing

something useful. Spirituality is the very soul of India's culture, and to revert to it and to let it remould and direct life is the only way to national resurgence.

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo, 1950

OURSELVES

The *Standard-Bearer* comes into the field today entrusted with a special mission and as the bearer of an ideal and a message. The standard it carries is not that of an outward battle, but the ensign of a spiritual ideal and of a life that must be its expression and the growing body of its reality. Our endeavour shall be to prepare the paths and to accomplish the beginning of a great and high change which we believe to be and aim at making the future of the race and the future of India. Our ideal is a new birth of humanity into the spirit; our life must be a spiritually inspired effort to create a body of action for that great new birth and creation.

A spiritual ideal has always been the characteristic idea and aspiration of India. But the progress of Time and the need of humanity demand a new orientation and another form of that ideal. The old forms and methods are no longer sufficient for the purpose of the Time Spirit. India can no longer fulfil herself on lines that are too narrow for the great steps she has to take in the future. Nor is ours the spirituality of a life that is aged and world-weary and burdened with the sense of the illusion and miserable inutility of all God's mighty creation. Our ideal is not the spirituality that withdraws from life but the conquest of life by the power of the spirit. It is to accept the world as an effort of manifestation of the Divine, but also to transform humanity by a greater effort of manifestation than has yet been accomplished, one in which the veil between man and God shall be removed, the divine manhood of which we are capable shall come to birth and our life shall be remoulded in the truth and light and power of the spirit. It is to make of all our action a sacrifice to the master of our action and an expression of the greater self in man and of all life a Yoga.

The West has made the growth of the intellectual, emotional, vital and material being of man its ideal, but it has left aside the greater possibilities of his spiritual existence. Its highest standards are ideals of progress, of liberty, equality and fraternity, of reason and science, of efficiency of all kinds, of a better political, social and economical state, of the unity and earthly happiness of the race. These are great endeavours, but experiment

after experiment has shown that they cannot be realised in their truth by the power of the idea and the sentiment alone: their real truth and practice can only be founded in the spirit. The West has put its faith in its science and machinery and it is being destroyed by its science and crushed under its mechanical burden. It has not understood that a spiritual change is necessary for the accomplishment of its ideals. The East has the secret of that spiritual change, but it has too long turned its eyes away from the earth. The time has now come to heal the division and to unite life and the spirit.

This secret too has been possessed but not sufficiently practised by India. It is summarised in the rule of the Gita, *yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi*. Its principle is to do all actions in Yoga, in union with God, on the foundation of the highest self and through the rule of all our members by the power of the spirit. And this we believe to be not only possible for man but the true solution of all his problems and difficulties. That then is the message we shall constantly utter and this the ideal that we shall put before the young and rising India, a spiritual life that shall take up all human activities and avail to transfigure the world for the great age that is coming. India, she that has carried in herself from of old the secret, can alone lead the way in this great transformation of which the present *sandhyā* of the old *yuga* is the forerunner. This must be her mission and service to humanity, — as she discovered the inner spiritual life for the individual, so now to discover for the race its integral collective expression and found for mankind its new spiritual and communal order.

Our first object shall be to declare this ideal, insist on the spiritual change as the first necessity and group together all who accept it and are ready to strive sincerely to fulfil it: our second shall be to build up not only an individual but a communal life on this principle. An outer activity as well as an inner change is needed and it must be at once a spiritual, cultural, educational, social and economical action. Its scope, too, will be at once individual and communal, regional and national, and eventually a work not only for the nation but for the whole human people. The immediate action of this will be a new creation, a spiritual education and culture, an enlarged social spirit founded not on division but on unity, on the perfect growth

and freedom of the individual, but also on his unity with others and his dedication to a larger self in the people and in humanity, and the beginning of an endeavour towards the solution of the economic problem founded not on any western model but on the communal principle native to India. Our call is to young India. It is the young who must be the builders of the new world — not those who accept the competitive individualism, the capitalism or the materialistic communism of the West as India's future ideal, nor those who are enslaved to old religious formulas and cannot believe in the acceptance and transformation of life by the spirit, but all who are free in mind and heart to accept a completer truth and labour for a greater ideal. They must be men who will dedicate themselves not to the past or the present but to the future. They will need to consecrate their lives to an exceeding of their lower self, to the realisation of God in themselves and in all human beings and to a whole-minded and indefatigable labour for the nation and for humanity. This ideal can be as yet only a little seed and the life that embodies it a small nucleus, but it is our fixed hope that the seed will grow into a great tree and the nucleus be the heart of an ever-extending formation. It is with a confident trust in the spirit that inspires us that we take our place among the standard-bearers of the new humanity that is struggling to be born amidst the chaos of the world in dissolution and of the future India, the greater India of the rebirth that is to rejuvenate the mighty outworn body of the ancient Mother.