

MOTHER'S CHRONICLES

BOOK FIVE

Mirra Meets the Revolutionary

by

Sujata Nahar

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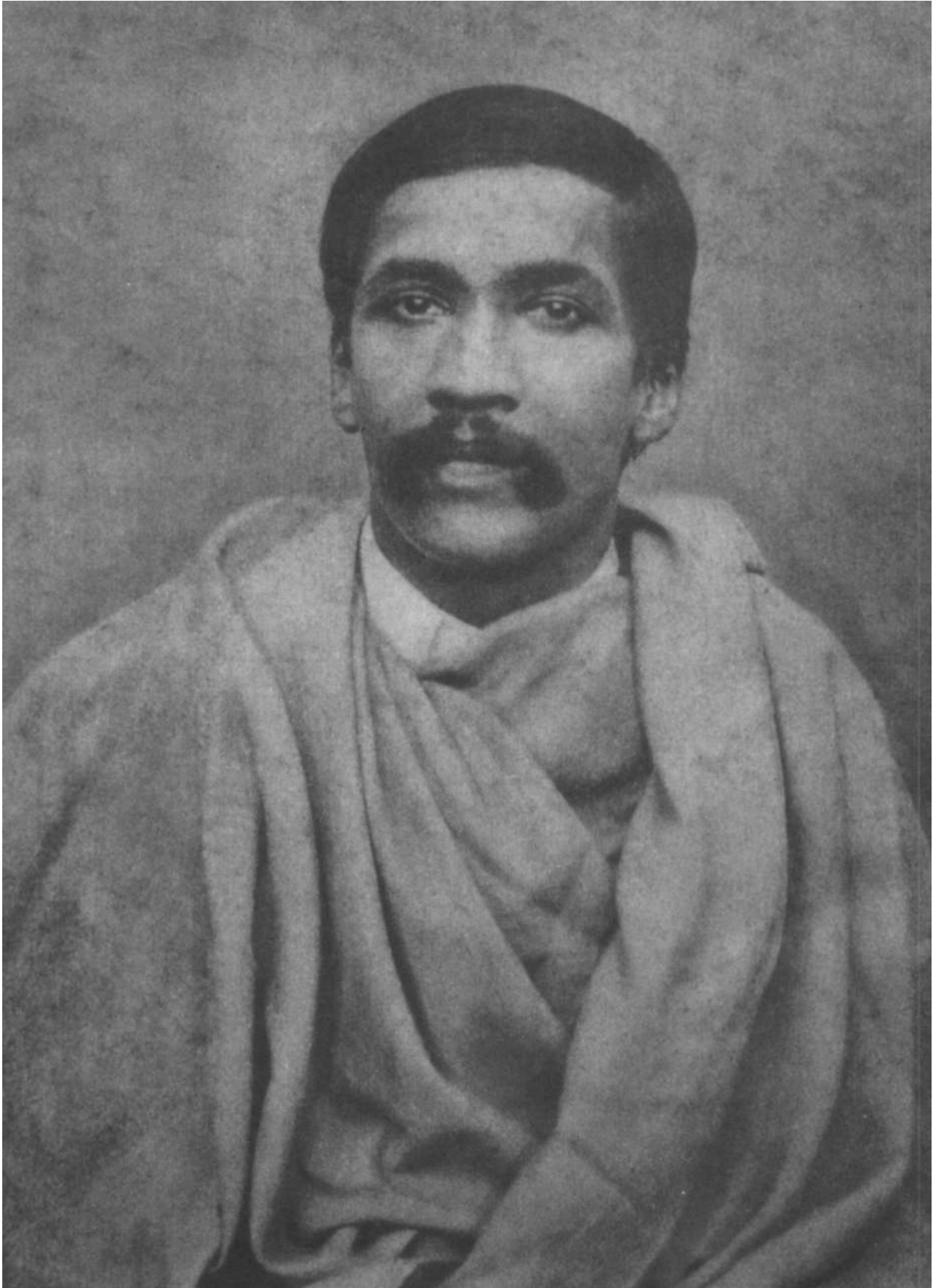
BOOK FIVE

**MIRRA MEETS
THE REVOLUTIONARY**

SUJATA NAHAR

MOTHER'S CHRONICLES

- BOOK FIVE -



Mother's Chronicles

book five

MIRRA MEETS

THE REVOLUTIONARY

SUJATA NAHAR

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*To pull her out of that tomb
was somehow our ambition.*

Sujata — Satprem

April 30, 1984

A Word With You, Please!

Hello, friends. Good morning to you. Are you well rested? Ready for the next leg of our journey? Then come along.

We shall make further acquaintance with Sri Aurobindo. For that we have to go back to days not yet beyond recall. To the dawn of the twentieth century.

Of course, he was not yet 'Sri' Aurobindo, just Arabindo Babu. This Cambridge-educated young man seemed to have gathered into himself all the qualities and more of his illustrious predecessors like Bacon, Darwin, Milton, Newton, Wordsworth, all Cambridge men.

Arabindo Babu's keen wit was more than a match for the subtle and daring policy of Curzon, who was a statesman of unusual genius. It was disturbing for the British bureaucracy to find that there were subtler wits in India which could perceive its 'subtle' goal. Let me say at once that there were very few such wits. The general run of Indian leaders suffered from a fatal inability to pass beyond superficialities and details and understand in their fullness deep truths and grand issues in politics, leaving the Indian political life miserably barren and ineffective. They also lacked backbone, that is, moral courage.

With a cool daring Arabindo Babu invaded the domain

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of the British Government. His razor-sharp pen-pricks were like sword-jabs into bureaucracy's body. Under his leadership an epoch-making movement, Nationalism or *Swadeshi*, was born in India. It shattered all human calculations. It advanced with vehemence and velocity like a tidal wave sweeping all before it. A time of great change was that dawn. For the first time patriotism became a national religion. Indians looked and saw their Mother. And loved Her.

After setting in motion the chariot of God for the independence of India from foreign yoke, Sri Aurobindo withdrew from active politics. He had been set another task which none but he could do. With another's help.

Sri Aurobindo and Mirra met in Pondicherry.

Together they were going to wage a war against the universal Nature. And give man independence from the law of Death.

Let us start on our adventurous journey.

Of course, I do not want to alarm anyone, but I feel it is my duty to warn you that in the pages ahead we shall plunge into whirlpools of dangers. Startling developments await us round the corner. We shall be encountering many exciting events and suspenseful situations. So if your taste runs to danger and suspense, you have come to the right place. But it certainly is not the right place for those with unsteady limbs, weak hearts and butterflies in their stomachs.

Off we

Prologue

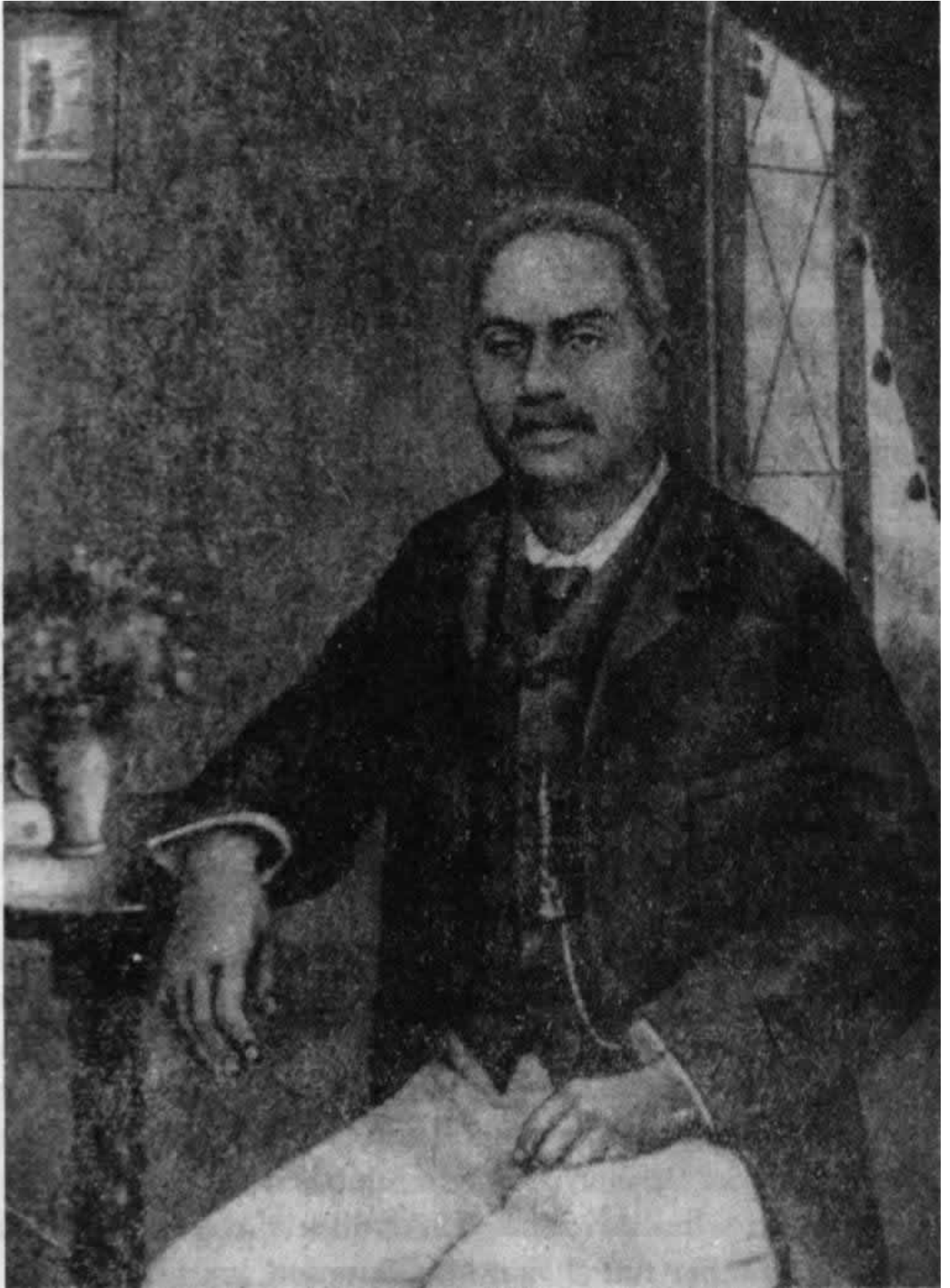
"In the times of the Mahabharata," Sri Aurobindo wrote* "the earth was reeling under the weight of demoniac might.... If Sri Krishna had not destroyed that might and established a kingdom of the Law of Truth ... India would have fallen untimely into the hands of barbarians.

"We must remember that the Kurukshetra war occurred five thousand years ago. Only after two thousand five hundred years passed was the first successful attack by barbarians able to reach the other shore of the Indus river. Therefore the Kingdom of Truth founded by Arjuna had still so much power of the warrior-force, inspired by spiritual force, that it was able to protect the country for such a long time.

"Even then, there remained such an accumulation of warrior-force that a mere fraction of it kept the country safe; great men like Chandragupta ... Vikram ... Pratap ... Shivaji, etc., fought the country's misfortune with the strength of that warrior-force. Only the other day, in the Gujerat war [1848] and the funeral pyre of Lakshmibai [the Indian Joan of Arc, died 1858], was its last spark extinguished. Then the good effect and puissance of Sri Krishna's statesmanship were exhausted.

"To save India, to save the world, there then became necessary another full Divine Manifestation, *puma avatar*."

* *Foreword to the Gita*, published in the Bengali weekly



Krishna Dhan Ghose in his later years

"Ara-Ara"

"You must have lived a very short time with your father?"

"Yes," replied Sri Aurobindo, "only the early years. When I was seven we left for England and before we returned he had died. I was in a way the cause of his death. He was suffering from heart disease. Grindlays informed him that I was to start on a particular steamer..... He asked me to return to India by a particular ship..... I don't know why on that ship.....The steamer went down off the coast of Portugal and many lives were lost. Somehow I didn't sail by it. Grindlays didn't know it. They telegraphed the news to my father and he died on receiving the news. But I hadn't sailed on it at all."

It was the vessel *Roumania*, which was wrecked in heavy weather at the mouth of the river Arelho, about eighty kilometres from Lisbon, on 27 October 1892.

According to Sarojini Ghose, her father had sent a cable to Bombay's Grindlays & Co. asking when the ship was to berth at Bombay. The reply came, 'The ship has sunk.' Dr. K. D. Ghose was then in Khulna. Said Saro, "He was on the

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point of getting into his tandem in the evening when the telegram arrived. After reading the message he put one foot on the footboard and, while raising his other foot, he fell down. He was carried indoors and placed on his bed. Three or four days later he expired owing to this blow."

No one from his immediate family was present at his bedside. His three elder sons were still in England. Saro and her younger brother Bari were in Calcutta; they were given the news after the funeral.

Krishna Dhan died in December 1892, most probably on Wednesday the 14th. An obituary was published on the 15th in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. On Saturday, 17 December 1892, the *Bengalee* published the following on the demise of Dr. Ghose.

"It is with very great regret that we have to record the death of Dr. K. D. Ghosh, Civil Surgeon of Khulna. He was in many respects a distinguished man. Rung pur owes him a debt immense of endless gratitude for the important sanitary works, which were carried out at his instance, and

under his immediate supervision. If Rung pur is a healthier place now than it was twenty years ago, the result is due in no small degree to the efforts of the late Dr. Ghosh.

"He was at one time a candidate for the Health Officer-ship of Calcutta and would have been appointed to that office, but that his dark skin was against him. We offer our heart-felt condolence to his bereaved family."

A friend of Krishna Dhan's, Brajendranath De, an I.C.S. and Magistrate at Khulna, who lived nearby, gave the

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following account of the doctor's last days. "Dr. Ghose believed up to the very end that his son had been admitted into the I.C.S. and was in fact coming out. He, in fact, took a month's leave to go and meet him in Bombay, and bring him back in triumph." The doctor had taken privilege leave from 4 September 1892 to 25 October. "But he could not get any definitive news," B. N. De's recital continues, "as to when he was coming out and returned from Bombay in a very depressed frame of mind. At last one afternoon he got a wire from his Agents in Bombay.... It so happened that that very night he and the Superintendent of Police. Were coming to dine at my house. The dinner was ready, the Superintendent came, but there was no sign of the doctor, although his bungalow was quite close to my house. After waiting for some time I sent an orderly to remind him of the fact that he had agreed to dine at my house that night. The man came back and informed me that the doctor was very ill. I at once went round, heard of the telegram and found the doctor very ill and quite unconscious. The medical men in the station were assiduous in their attentions. I did all I could. But it was all of no avail. The poor man lingered on for a day or two and then passed away.... I had to take the body to the cremation grounds and to attend the cremation."

He was not the sole man to attend the funeral. An impressive procession accompanied the mortal remains of Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghose. Heaps of garlands of flowers covered his body. The whole town poured in at the cremation ground to have a last look at its beloved doctor. Stricken with grief Khulna mourned the death of the great physician.

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His mother's grief was beyond description. "For one whole year," said Saro, "The news of Krishna Dhan's death was concealed from his mother Kailasbasini. Then, when she insistently demanded that she be shown his handwriting, we were compelled to give her the news. Instantly she fainted. She remained in this unconscious state for one month." Her son would visit her twice a year, and write a letter to his mother every month. And every month he would send her Rs. 50

It would seem that K. D. often said in sorrow, "If I were to meet Destiny,¹ I would have asked Him, why did you write so much suffering on my forehead?" We do not know what answer his Creator gave him. We only hope that as the tormented Spirit passed from the sphere of sorrow, leaving the cry and the struggle, a great peace enveloped it. And the great Spirit that was Krishna Dhan Ghose, was, at last, taken to the bosom of love of the Infinite.

Like King Dasaratha of another Age, who died while uttering his son Rama's name in lamentation, Sri Aurobindo's father also died while uttering in lamentation the name of *his* son: "Ara-Ara."

1. Destiny personified —Bidhata —who is believed to write down the future of a newborn baby on its forehead.

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2

Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad

"Do you know Bapubhai?" Sri Aurobindo asked Purani.

"I think I do," replied Purani. "Once I saw him being stopped in the street by the police for breaking a traffic rule. He gave the policeman a long lecture in English, leaving the fellow flabbergasted."

Sri Aurobindo laughed. "That must be he. It is very characteristic of him. He was my first friend in Baroda. He took me to his house and I stayed there for some time. He was a nice man, but what people call 'volatile and mercurial.'" Sri Aurobindo had known Bapubhai Majumdar from his London days.

During his thirteen years' service to the Baroda State Sri Aurobindo was to make more friends. We shall meet some of them by and by.

Except for official purposes, Sri Aurobindo had dropped his middle name Akroyd when he left England. A. Ghose reached Baroda on 8 February 1893, so far as we have been able to ascertain. He joined work from the 18th. His first job

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was to learn the work in the Land (Survey) Settlement Department, with a monthly salary of Rs. 200 as agreed upon in London.

Next year, in March 1894, he was transferred to the Stamps and Revenue departments, again to learn the ropes.

It was only after two and half years of his joining the Baroda State service that A. Ghose's salary was raised by Rs. 50. That was in October 1895. Then from November he was appointed Attaché in the Secretariat. Presumably the Gaekwad thought that A. Ghose now knew thoroughly the workings of various departments of his State. He also recognized the superb command the young man had over the English language. So from then onwards the Maharaja not only entrusted him with drawing up dispatches or orders at the Secretariat, but also employed him for his own work.

Most of the personal work for the Maharaja was, however, done in an unofficial capacity. Whenever he thought fit, which was often enough, he would send for 'Mr. A. Ghose' for the writing of an important letter, composing public speeches, writing 'many memoranda' along the lines he gave, drawing up documents of various kinds —order, dispatch, correspondence with the British Government —which needed special care in the phrasing of the language. Let work of a literary or educational character but come up, the Maharaja would at once send for A. Ghose to prepare it. At one time A. Ghose was asked to instruct the Maharaja in English grammar by giving exact and minute rules for each construction.

He was usually invited to breakfast with the Maharaja

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at the Palace and stayed on to do his work. "What work I did directly for the Maharaja," Sri Aurobindo recalled, "was quite irregular and sporadic, though frequent and I used to be called for that from my house, not from the office." Once, when the Gaekwad was holidaying in Ooty in

the Nilgiris, he sent for A. Ghose "in order to prepare a précis of the whole Bapat case and the judicial opinions on it." V. S. Bapat was a land settlement officer of the Baroda State whom the British had charged with corruption and who was to be tried by a special commission. The charge was actually false, and solely intended to malign the Maharaja's administration; in the long-drawn-out trial, Bapat was ably defended by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, whom we shall turn to later—we do not know if Sri Aurobindo met Tilak on that occasion.

A. Ghose arrived in this hill station on 26 May 1895. The Maharaja's residence in the Nilgiris mountain resort of South India was a small bungalow, 'Farrington House,' set among tall eucalyptus trees, and overlooking the Botanical gardens.

But Sri Aurobindo was not really interested in administrative work, so he got the Maharaja to transfer him to the College. It was in January 1897 that "he oscillated towards the College and entered it at first as part-time lecturer in French." It was not really joining the College, for he continued to do other work, as the Gaekwad was loth to release him completely. According to the College Principal, Mr. Tait, the Maharaja consented that A. Ghose might teach in the College for one hour a day, but wanted to keep him in the afternoons.

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Next year, in February 1898, A. Ghose was appointed Extra Professor of English at his own request. His monthly pay was accordingly increased to Rs. 300. He became very active in the College. He was elected President of the Managing Committee of the Baroda State Library, was the Chairman of the Baroda College Union, and took charge of the Debating Society and the College *Miscellany*.

For the work done for him by A. Ghose in his spare time, the Maharaja increased the pay to Rs. 360 from April 1899. Then on 15 May '99 A. Ghose received a cash bonus of Rs. 2000.

At the turn of the century, in March 1900 to be precise, Sri Aurobindo had become Acting Professor of English, succeeding the Englishman Littledale. In September the Principal pleaded with the Dewan that "it is essential to retain Mr. Ghose as a professor in the College," to make it a better institution than it had been hitherto. The Maharaja gave his assent.

But in April next year, the Gaekwad retransferred him to the Central Revenue Office. Simultaneously, from 19 April 1901, he was given charge of the tuition of the younger princes

when the regular tutor went on vacation. And how did he superintend over the children's education? The Gaekwad's daughter, who became the Maharani of Coochbehar, conjured up that episode from her past. "I was so small when Aurobindo used to come to teach us!" she was wont to say. "But he used to be so concentrated in his own studies and thoughts that he could not pay us much attention."

In 1902, A. Ghose assisted the Dewan in the Crown

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Secretariat, and his salary was raised to Rs. 450 ... after ten years of service to the state.

Next year, that is in January 1903, A. Ghose was posted back to the College. It was again the Principal who requested the Gaekwad "to spare the services of Mr. Ghose for about six hours a week for the purpose of lecturing on French books assigned for the University Examinations." The Maharaja more than granted it, advising the Principal to utilize the services of Mr. Ghose for above six hours a week by assigning him other subjects also. His teaching work, however, was much interrupted this year because of the protracted leave he took, followed by a long tour in Kashmir with the Maharaja as his Private Secretary. The experiment was never repeated as "there was much friction between them during the tour." Sri Aurobindo returned from Kashmir in October via Murree and Lahore.

From June 1904 onward A. Ghose worked as Assistant Crown Secretary. But in August 1904, the Principal, Mr. Tait, was due to retire and a successor had to be found. The State's Minister of Education gave his considered opinion: "In the interests of the College I may also remark that Mr. Ghose had acquired a reputation in the College when he was Professor of English, about four years back. If his services could be wholly spared to the College, he may be advantageously entrusted with the work I have chalked out above for a new Oxford man. With the University also, he will carry as much weight as another Englishman." Accepting his Minister's arguments in favour of Mr. Ghose, the Maharaja decreed that "Mr. Ghose's official designation will be that of Vice-Principal." Thus from

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27 September 1904 Sri Aurobindo became the Vice-Principal of Baroda College. His pay was Rs. 550 a month.

From 3 March 1905 A. Ghose was made the Acting Principal of the College —when A. B. Clarke, the new Principal, went on leave —and now earned Rs. 710. He also served for a time as the Acting Minister of Education. In February 1906, A. Ghose resumed the position of Vice-Principal.

Then, after a leave of absence for three months —combining the College's first term and the summer vacation —he returned in June, this time to quit definitely. But, at first, he took one year's leave without pay. Finally, in August 1906, from Calcutta where he then was, he sent in his official resignation from the Baroda State Service.

So far, we have spoken of A. Ghose's official employment only. The Reader will discover over the pages the unfolding of his personal life.

The Maharaja was not inappreciative of his young officer. He gave A. Ghose "a certificate for ability and intelligence but also for lack of punctuality and regularity," as Sri Aurobindo himself put it. The Gaekwad was indeed very sorry to lose this brilliant young man, quick and efficient in work. He would have much preferred giving him two or three years' leave without pay.

The then Maharaja of Baroda, Sayajirao Gaekwad (1863-1939) was born on 11 March 1863 in Kavlana village near Nasik. When he was twelve, the Dowager Maharani of Baroda State adopted him from a peasant family distantly related to the house of the Gaekwads. Thus the young Gopalrao became

Sayajirao Gaekwad III in 1875. The first few years of power brought to Sayajirao an acute awareness of his own shortcomings and at the same time of two of his dominant passions in later life: education and travel. He travelled extensively in India and abroad. It was during one of his trips to England that he found and engaged the services of A. A. Ghose. In the fields of education, health, communication, water supply, the progress was remarkable, and hardly seen in any State in India; the Baroda administration could well stand comparison with the very best to be found in British India. Having understood the value of education, Sayajirao opened schools in villages and towns of his state. Schools for boys, schools for girls. Education was made available

to children of all classes and castes. He took up the cause of removal of untouchability and the welfare of tribal people. The Baroda College —its activities financed from State funds —was built in 1881 in the State's capital Baroda. "When I knew him," recalled Sri Aurobindo in 1936, "the Gaekwad was a free-thinker without any religion; I don't know if he has



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altered his views since. Formally, he is of course a Hindu." Sayajirao was a sportsman, a patron of arts and culture. He associated with some of the eminent Poona intellectuals who were critics of the Raj. The British bureaucracy, unable to swallow his great popularity among the Nationalists, came to regard him as a 'patron of sedition' and kept filing secret reports against him.

No, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad was not a prince for nothing: honour and dignity were his watchwords. At the Delhi Durbar of 1911, when the royal couple visited India to celebrate their coronation, he went in a simple dress without the princely regalia or decorations, a walking stick instead of a golden baton. And to the consternation of the assembled dignitaries, he was the one

prince who did not walk backwards after presenting himself before the King-Emperor George V and his Queen Mary.

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3

New Lamps for Old

"Of course," said Sri Aurobindo, "I wrote many memoranda for the Maharaja. Generally he used to indicate the lines and I used to follow them. But I myself was not much interested in administrative work, and soon I got the Maharaja to transfer me to the College. My interest lay outside, in Sanskrit, in literature, in the national movement."

Sri Aurobindo had already in England decided to devote his life to the service of his country and its liberation. He even began soon after coming to India to write on political matters — without giving his name — in the press, trying to awaken the nation to the ideas of the future. "When I came to Baroda from England," Sri Aurobindo related, "I found what the Congress was like at that time and I formed a strong contempt for it. Then I came in touch with Deshpande, Tilak, Madhavrao and others [revolutionaries]. Deshpande requested me to write something in the *Indu Prakash*."

We fleetingly came across Deshpande in Cambridge. Along with Sri Aurobindo, he was a member of the Indian Majlis there. In *The Harmony of Virtue* which he wrote while at

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Cambridge, Sri Aurobindo named his chief character, Keshav Ganesh, after his college mate. After his return from England, Keshav Ganesh Deshpande settled in Bombay as a barrister. The *Indu Prakash* had two sections: Marathi and English. K. G. Deshpande was the editor of the English section. He was a Nationalist, he too. "I remember once going to a station to see Deshpande off," recalled Sri Aurobindo. "In his carriage there were many Englishmen. He told us afterwards that as soon as he sat down, the Englishmen said, 'We will beat you if you don't get out.' He replied, 'Come and try.' And they didn't dare!"

Thus it was that young A. Ghose, at the request of his friend, wrote a series of articles in the *Indu Prakash* on the Indian National Congress. "There I severely criticized the Congress for its moderate policy." Should we say, 'its mendicant policy' ? At all events, the very first two articles made a sensation and were so incisive that the Congress leaders of the time were frightened. Mahadeo Govind Ranade, the Maratha leader, 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 his Cambridge friend to continue in a modified tone and he reluctantly consented. A. Ghose then "began to write about the philosophy of politics leaving aside the practical part of politics. But I soon got disgusted with it." The articles were published at long intervals and finally dropped of themselves altogether.

The series of articles in the *Indu Prakash* numbered

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nine: from 7 August 1893 to 5 March 1894. That is to say, it began six months after Sri Aurobindo's return from England, and when he was just going to be twenty-one years old. This series was published under the title *New Lamps for Old*. "It is not used in the sense of the Aladdin story, but was intended to imply the offering of new lights to replace the old and faint reformist lights of the Congress."

A short account of how the Indian National Congress came into being may not be amiss here.

It was on 28 December 1885 that this largest political organization of Indians was founded. The initiative for its foundation was taken, among others, by a retired English Civilian, Allan Octavian Hume whom, on his death, the Congress designated as its 'father and founder.' A.O. Hume (1829-1912) entered the Indian Civil Service in Bengal in 1849 and retired in 1882. Hume had a motive for organizing the Congress. His scheme was "to save the Indian youths from the influence of Spiritual teachers" who had been secretly working for India's freedom. The sannyasins of Bankim's *Anandamath* were no fiction. Lord Dufferin, who was then the Viceroy (1884-88), lent his support to the nascent organization deeming it would serve the interests of the British Empire and save it from danger. The Congress held its first session in Bombay with Woomesh Chandra Bonnerjee, an eminent Barrister of the Calcutta High Court, as its president. A.O. Hume was one, of the conveners of the first session. He was also general secretary of the

Indian National Congress for its first twenty-one years. On the other side, the Indian leaders themselves were feeling the

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need to create a national unity as a basis for national progress. Surendranath Banerji's 'Indian Association' (1876), and the holding of the first All-India National Conference in Calcutta in 1883, were in a way precursors of the Indian National Congress. We must, however, point out that the outlook of the early leaders, such as Gokhale, or Pherozeshah Mehta and Ranade, all from the legal profession, was rather limited: redressal of grievances through petitions. Winning political liberty for India was beyond the pale of their imagination. They based themselves on the premise that the English had an innate sense of justice. They completely forgot that every government looks at its own country's interest first; the interest of its subject-nation is low on its agenda. As though the commonplace men in the government — "the sort of people England sends out to us are not as a rule exalted and chivalrous, but are usually the very reverse"— could be expected to smother all thought of their own self-interests! Thus by the time A. Ghose's articles began appearing in the *Indu Prakash*, the Congress was a forum of academic discussion by learned leaders at their holiday gatherings ; an airy-fairy annual show of oratorical feats by a sprinkling of the country's intelligentsia; and, of course, a sport of the British diplomacy.

K. G. Deshpande, in his introductory article in the *Indu Prakash* of 7 August 1893, wrote: "We promised our readers some time 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.... We have been long convinced that our efforts in

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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 strong foundation and are in hourly danger of falling down.... The questions at issue are momentous. It is the making or unmaking of a nation. We have, therefore, secured a gentleman of great literary talents, of liberal culture and of considerable English experience, well-versed in the art of writing and willing, at great personal inconvenience and probable misrepresentation, to give out his views in no uncertain voice, and,

we may be allowed to add, in a style and direction peculiarly his own. We bespeak our readers' most careful and constant perusal on his behalf and assure them that they will find in those articles matter that will set them thinking and steel their patriotic souls."

We shall now quote a few lines from here and there from those articles.

"If the blind lead the blind," began A. Ghose, or A.G. "shall they not both fall into a ditch?... 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 shall 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

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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.

"I know also that I shall stir the bile of those good people who are so enamoured of the British Constitution, that they cannot like any one who is not a partisan."

A.G. wanted to awaken our Rip van Winkles.

"It [an institution] was made for the use and not at all for the worship of man, and it can only lay claim to respect so long as its beneficent action remains not a memory of the past, but a thing of the present. We cannot afford to raise any institution to the rank of a fetish. To do so would be simply to become the

slaves of our machinery It is within the recollection of most

of us," he recalled wistfully, "to how giddy an eminence this body was raised, on how prodigious a wave of enthusiasm, against how immense a weight of resisting winds.... 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 to man 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."

But within eight years of its existence the failures of the Congress had become too flagrant to be ignored. A.G. began to tear its mask off. "Even in the first flush of enthusiasm the more deep-thinking among us were perhaps a little troubled by certain small things about the Congress. The bare-faced

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hypocrisy of our enthusiasm for the Queen-Empress,— an old lady so called by way of courtesy, but about whom few Indians can really know or care anything —could serve no purpose but to expose us to the derision of our ill-wishers. There was too a little too much talk about the blessings of British rule, and the inscrutable Providence which has laid us in the maternal, or more properly the step-maternal bosom of just and benevolent England." That was a dig at Gokhale, who declared that "the Congress freely recognises that whatever advances we seek must be within the Empire itself." And Pherozechah Mehta, "I accept British rule as a dispensation so wonderful ... that it would be folly not to accept it as a declaration of God's will."

A. G. 's exposure of the Congress' weaknesses was biting. "Yet more appalling was the general timidity of the Congress, its glossing over of hard names, its disinclination to tell the direct truth, its fear of too deeply displeasing our masters. But in our then state of mind we were disposed to pass over all this as amiable weaknesses which would wear off with time.... [They] have not at all worn off with time, but have rather grown into an ingrained habit; and the tendency to grosser errors has grown not only into a habit, but into a policy. In its broader aspects the failure of the Congress is still clearer. The walls of the Anglo-Indian Jericho stand yet without a breach, and the dark spectre of Penury draws her robe over the land in greater volume and with an ampler sweep." This analysis was made more than a hundred years ago, not today! And Sri Aurobindo was barely twenty years old.

On 21 August 1893 the *Indu Prakash* published the

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second article. "But after all my present business is not with negative criticism.... The Congress has been to our divergent races and creeds a temple, or perhaps I should be more correct in saying a school of concord. In other words the necessities of the political movement initiated by the Congress have brought into one place and for a common purpose all sorts and conditions of men, and so by smoothing away the harsher discrepancies between them has created a certain modicum of sympathy between classes that were more or less at variance.... Popular orators like Mr. Pherozshah Mehta, who carry the methods of the bar into politics, are very fond of telling people that the Congress had habituated us to act together. Well, that is not quite correct; there is not the slightest evidence to show that we have at all learned to act together; the one lesson we have learned is to talk together, and that is a rather different thing.... Not only has the concord it [the Congress] tends to create been very partial, but the sort of people who have been included in its beneficent action, do not extend beyond certain fixed and narrow limits. The great mass of the people have not been appreciably touched by that healing principle, which to do the Congress justice, has very widely permeated the middle class." Its support and its most enthusiastic votaries were drawn from the new middle class, he pointed out.

India's Muslims were, from the beginning, well represented in the Congress body. But the clear-sighted critic still refused to call it 'national.' "The Mahomedans," he wrote, "have been as largely represented on that body as any reasonable community could desire, and their susceptibilities, far from being

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denied respect, have always been most assiduously soothed and flattered." This habit became so dangerously ingrained in the Congress that finally it led to the break-up of India half a century later. And, even now, after more than a century, the pampering goes on showing a profound mental darkness that continues to pervade the Indian political leaders.

A. G. continued. "In an era when democracy and similar big words slide so glibly from our tongues, a body like the Congress, which represents not the mass of the population, but a single and very limited class, could not honestly be called

national_____ It has never been, and has made no honest

endeavour to be, a popular body empowered by the fiat of the Indian people in its entirety."

He decried the Congress body's decrepitude. "Our actual enemy is not any force exterior to ourselves, but our own crying weaknesses, our cowardice, our selfishness, our hypocrisy, our purblind sentimentalism." This was eight years after the Congress was formed; is any change discernible in this assessment after fourteen times eight years?

He told off the Congress candidly. "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."

The Congress leaders, used to flattery and adulation,

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found this honest criticism unpalatable. A. Ghose went on to make them squirm. "If the Congress cannot really face the light of a free and serious criticism, then the sooner it hides its face the better. For nine years it has been exempt from the ordeal; we have been content to worship it with that implicit trust which all religions demand, but which sooner or later leads them to disaster and defeat.... The hour seems to have come when the Congress must encounter that searching criticism which sooner or later arrives to all mortal things; and if it is so, to keep our eyes shut will be worse than idle. The only good we shall get by it is to point with a fresh example the aphorism with which I set out. 'If the blind lead the blind, shall they not both fall into a ditch?'"

The Congress leaders were not only 'blind' or, at best, 'one-eyed,' they were lame too. And when they used History as a crutch to advance their line of argument that "it does not at all signify whether we are fortified by popular sympathy or are not," it proved to be a pitfall. "History teaches us," thundered one brilliant Congress leader, "that in all ages and all countries it is the thinking classes who have led the unthinking. Another specious orator took up the refrain: "History teaches us that such has been the law of widening progress in all ages and all countries, notably in England itself." Big words. Will they stand close scrutiny? A.G., with a firm grasp of history, easily tore their arguments to shreds.

"When we find the intellectual princes of the nation," their young critic's rapier thrust was swift, "light-heartedly propagating such gross inaccuracies, we are really tempted to

inquire if high education is after all of any use. History teaches us! Why, these gentlemen can never have studied any history at all except that of England.... If then 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. ... 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." It was the revolutionary France that he presented to India as its political model.

A.G. gave a stirring call. "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 sincere fellow-feeling —so far as it can be called sincere —with the silent and suffering people of India."

Sri Aurobindo, then only twenty-one years old, was the first in Indian politics to plead the cause of the 'silent and suffering people of India,' the Indian masses. In fact, it was much before anyone had heard of Lenin. "The proletariat among us is sunk in ignorance and overwhelmed with distress. But with that distressed and ignorant proletariat ... resides, whether we like it or not, our sole assurance of hope, our sole chance in the future."

From the beginning his was an all-embracing view, not limited to one class of people. "Theorist, and trifler though I may be called, I again assert as our first and holiest duty, the elevation and enlightenment of the proletariat." With an unerring and penetrating vision he saw and declared that "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."

Five years later, in 1898, Swami Vivekananda was asked, "But have you no faith in what Congress is doing?" In his forthright manner he replied, "No, I have not." And he forcefully echoed the younger man's viewpoint. "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."

Swami Vivekananda was seven years older than Sri Aurobindo.

New Lamps for Old was like the morning light dispersing darkness. It brought with it the promise of a new sun about to rise over the horizon, and ride into the Indian political firmament.

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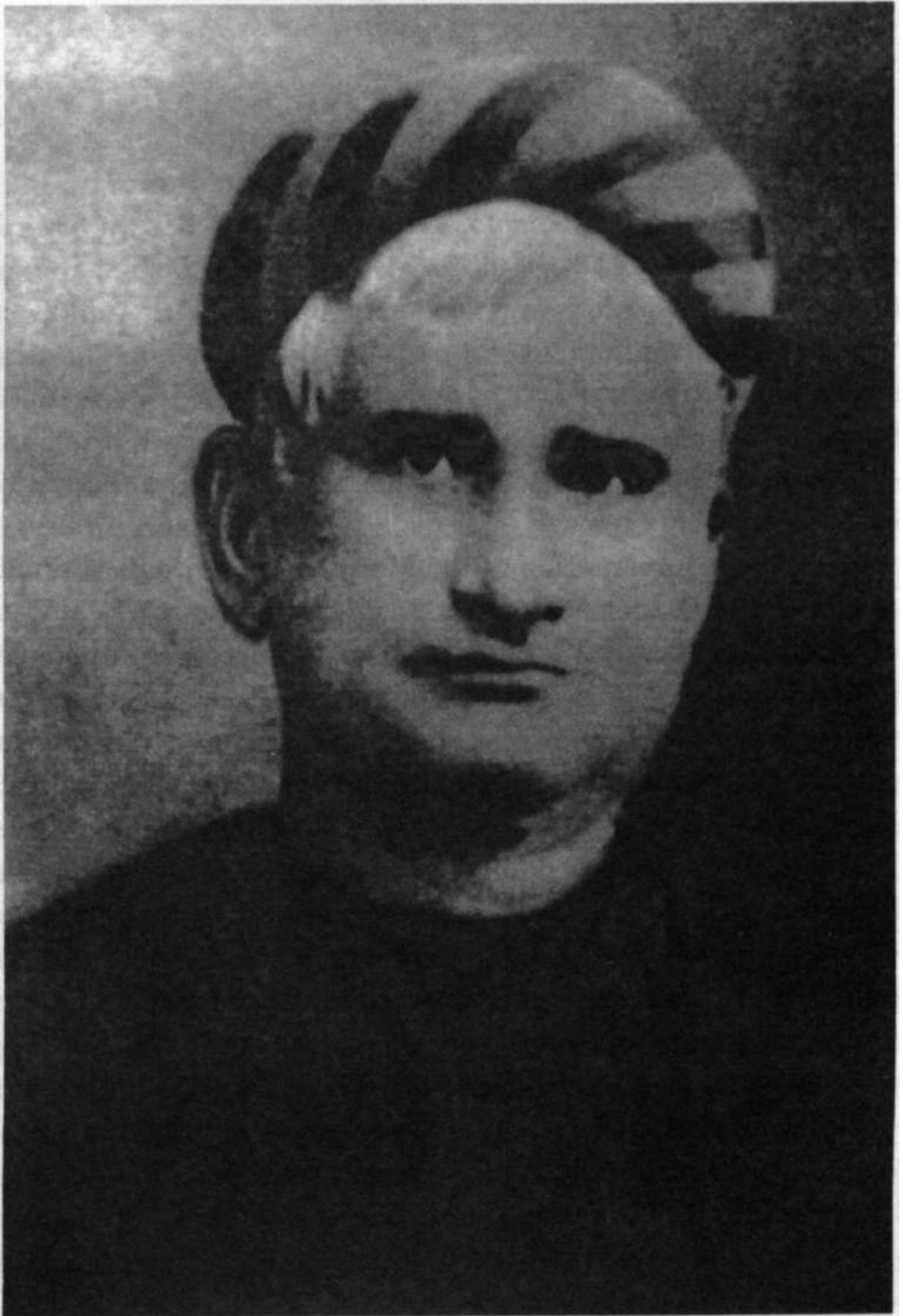
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Bankim's Bengal

At the intervention of the Maratha leader M. G. Ranade (1852-1904), the political series *New Lamps for Old* came to an end. Ranade, however, was keen to meet the intelligent and promising young critic. An interview was arranged that very year, and they met at Bombay. "I remember," wrote Sri Aurobindo in *Karakahini {Tales of Prison Life}*, "when, back home from England fifteen years ago, I started writing articles in the *Indu Prakash* of Bombay, strongly protesting against the Congress policy of prayers and petition, the late Mahadeo Govind Ranade, seeing how these articles were acting on the minds of the youths, exhorted me, from the moment I met him and for half 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 unexpected demand and turned it down." Commented Dinendra K. Roy, "Justice Ranade failed to refute Sri Aurobindo's arguments." M. G. Ranade, a judge of the Bombay High Court, was also an erudite scholar, and a reformist.

Sri Aurobindo continued ruefully: "I did not then know

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Bankim Chandra Chatterji

that this was only a prelude to the distant future and that God Himself would one day keep me in jail for one year to make me see the cruelty and futility of the system." He also resolved to propagate this view and put forward arguments to abolish such hellish imported practices in a sovereign India. Alas for the tens of thousands of jail inmates rotting in 'free' India.

Four months after the last piece of *New Lamps for Old* appeared in the *Indu Prakash*, a new series of articles was begun on Bankim Chandra Chatterji 'by a Bengali' who signed himself 'Zero' (and not: Max Theon, the supreme God!).

From criticizing the Congress to Bankim the novelist! Those unacquainted with our young A. Ghose may be surprised at this prodigious jump from one pole to the other. True, A. Ghose was profoundly interested in literature, as he said himself. But if that was all, good writers abounded. So why Bankim? Well, that's a question from those who do not know Bankim Chandra. As our A. Ghose had a very methodical mind, he at once realized that Bankim was a nationalist who despised the way the Congress worked: "All its agitations seem to have an ephemeral look and lack in inner strength." Bankim was moreover a Hindu nationalist. He had not stopped with heaping praise on Rajnarain Bose when the latter delivered his famous lecture boldly proclaiming the 'superiority of Hindu religion and culture over European and Christian theology and civilization,' but propagated the ideas of Hindu nationalism through his own writings and lectures. He told young educated Bengalis who were swept off their feet by Western culture not to forget our own culture. "Therefore, I

say, do not lose your reverence for the past," he told his audience in March 1894, after denouncing European scholars led by Max Müller. "It is on the past that you must plant your foot firmly, if you wish to mount high in the future." He reminded young Indians, "You are not a race of savages who have no past to remember; you cannot dis sever yourselves in a day from the associations and influences of a past which extends over at least five hundred centuries. You cannot annihilate in a day a past national existence which has survived the annihilation of hundreds of empires, of hundred systems of religion, and which has surveyed unconcerned the downfall and ruin of many kindred civilizations. I have to make my warning so emphatic," he

added sorrowfully, "because the general tendency of European scholars, who have so great an influence over you, is to decry your past history, to call for its virtual erasure from your memory...." European missionaries abetted by many European scholars were in the habit of presenting 'Hinduism' as a tangled jungle of gods, ghosts, demons and saints, and other monsters.

The articles on Bankim by Zero appeared in the *Indu Prakash* from 16 July to 27 August 1894.

"Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, the creator and King of Bengali prose, was a high-caste Brahman.... Born at Kantalpara on the 27th June 1838, dead at Calcutta on the 8th April 1894, his fifty-six years of laborious life were a parcel of the most splendid epoch in Bengali history; yet among its many noble names, his is the noblest.....The society by which Bankim was formed, was the young Bengal of the fifties, the most extraordinary perhaps that India has yet seen,—a society

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electric with thought and loaded to the brim with passion. A sort of miniature Renaissance was in the process. An ardent and imaginative race, long bound in the fetters of a single tradition, had suddenly put into its hand the key to a new world thronged with the beautiful or profound creations of Art and Learning.... The first impulse was gigantic in its proportions and produced men of an almost gigantic originality. Rammohan Ray arose with a new religion in his hand, which was developed on original lines by men almost greater one thinks than he, by Rajnarain Bose and Devendranath Tagore.....The calm, docile, pious, dutiful Hindu ideal was pushed aside with impatient energy, and the Bengali, released from the iron restraint which had lain like a frost on his warm blood and sensuous feeling, escaped joyously into the open air of an almost Pagan freedom. The ancient Hindu cherished a profound sense of the nothingness and vanity of life; the young Bengali felt vividly its joy, warmth and sensuousness. This is usually the moral note of a Renaissance, a burning desire for Life, Life in her warm human beauty arrayed gloriously like a bride....." He did not forget to sketch Bankim's youth and his academic life: "The first picture we have of his childhood is his mastering the alphabet at a single reading," which was an image and prophecy of the rest; he was, together with another, the first B. A. of the Calcutta University which had come into being in 1857. Its jurisdiction then extended to Burma and Ceylon till 1904 when its territory was curtailed by Lord Curzon's decree. Bankim, with his usual distinguished success appeared for the B. L. His official appointment followed close on his degree. At

the age of twenty he was sent as Deputy Magistrate to Jessore. "Khulna, the third step in the ladder, was also the theatre of his most ambitious exploits. Entangled in the Sunderban, that rude and unhealthy tract of marsh and jungle, the zillah [district] was labouring under two morbid ailments, for which none of its official doctors had found an efficient panacea —the smallpox of piracy and the greater pox of Indigoism." A. Ghose was referring to the merciless European indigo planters who enriched themselves by forcing their workers to slave, often to death. "Ruffians from Europe were in hot competition with the native breed which should deserve best the Government Scholarship for lawlessness and brutality; and as they had a racial gift for these things and a wider field it might have been safely awarded to them. Unluckily Bankim stepped into their happy hunting-grounds and spoiled the game. But to the unhappy ryots, the battle-field for these rival rascalities, he came as a champion and a deliverer. At Khulna this mild, thoughtful Bengali wears the strange appearance of a Hercules weeding out monsters, clearing Augean stables, putting a term to pests. His tranquil energy quite broke the back of the Indigo tyrants.... Fine and imprisonment meted out with a healthy severity shattered their prestige and oppressed their brutal spirits. Khulna then saw the last of government by organised ruffianism. No less terse and incisive were Bankim's dealings with the water-thieves who lurking in a creek and brushwood dominated to the perpetual alarm and molestation of travellers the hundred waters of the Sunderban.... The hydra of the waters had been crushed as effectually as the indigo pest; and since the era of Bankim's

magistracy one may travel the length and breadth of Khulna without peril except from malaria and ague. By a little quiet decisiveness he had broken the back of two formidable tyrannies and given an object lesson in what a Government can do when it heartily intends the good of the people."

Sri Aurobindo discounts the vulgar theory that "wordly abilities are inconsistent with the poetic genius." He reminds us that even if a literary genius chooses to burn the candle at one end, the candle has two ends and not one. He wrote, "Bankim, the greatest of novelists, had the versatility developed to its highest expression. Scholar, poet, essayist, novelist, philosopher, lawyer, critic, official, philologist and religious innovator,— the whole world seemed to be shut up in his

single brain.... To give impartial expression to all your gifts is to miss your vocation. Bankim was never so far led astray as that. His province was literature, prose literature, and he knew it.... To find your vocation and keep to it, that is not indeed a showy, but it is a simple and solid rule of life.... Nature gives us quartz profusely and mixed alloy in abundance, but pure gold in rare parcels and infinitesimal portions.... His ten masterpieces of fiction are enough. They would serve to immortalize ten reputations.... He saw what was beautiful and sweet and gracious in Hindu life, and what was lovely and noble in Hindu woman, her deep heart of emotion, her steadfastness, tenderness and loveliness, in fact, her woman's soul."

Bankim was also a proponent of women's education. Many of his heroines are well-educated, some are even learned, and a few are trained in martial arts. What calamity awaits a

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society that leaves half its members uneducated? he asked. He further pointed out that "the ancient Rishis of Bharatvarsha, rare men of genius that they were, had thoroughly understood that women, low-caste and high-caste men, have all an equal right to education and knowledge."

Sri Aurobindo then spoke of another great gift Bankim gave to Bengal. "Bankim moreover has this splendid distinction that he more than any one exalted Bengali from the status of dialect to the majesty of a language.... We needed a language which should combine the strength, dignity or soft beauty of Sanskrit with the nerve and vigour of the vernacular, capable at one end of the utmost vernacular raciness and at the other of the most sonorous gravity. Bankim divined our need and was inspired to meet it,—he gave us a means by which the soul of Bengal could express itself to itself.

"As he had divined the linguistic need of his country's future, so he divined also its political need. He, first of our great publicists, understood the hollowness and inutility of the method of political agitation which prevailed in his time.....He saw that the force from above must be met by a mightier reacting force from below,—the strength of repression by an insurgent national strength. He bade us leave the canine method of agitation for the leonine. The Mother of his vision held trenchant steel in her twice seventy million hands and not the bowl of the mendicant. It was the gospel of strength and force which he preached.... And he had an inspired unerring vision of the moral strength which must be at the back of the outer force."

The considered view of many Nationalist leaders of 1905-10 accorded with the perception of Bankim that for the

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work of the country's liberation three elements were necessary to strengthen the fabric of society. Complete self-devotion was one; another was self-discipline and organization; the third element of moral strength was the infusion of religious feeling into patriotic work. Mind you, it was not the limited sense of narrow religion they were thinking of, but that of Dharma, the highest law of being. It was evident to these leaders that patriotic work divorced from dharmic feeling was bound to lead to moral degradation, which would bring in its wake corruption, which in turn would rot the root and stem of the national life. Theirs was a larger view, for they fully understood that politics is only a show at the top, and the real changes that matter are the changes that come into society. The leaders changed. And the Congress soon opted for its own brand of 'secularism' which has led us to where we are now.

Summing up, Sri Aurobindo wrote, "The religion of patriotism, —this is the master idea of Bankim's writings." And Bankim gave us the great song, *Bande Mataram*. "The third and 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 the all-absorbing passion for the Mother and her service, and the patriotism that works miracles and saves a doomed nation is born."

Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1907, in the thick of the *Swadeshi* days, "Of the new spirit which is leading the nation to resurgence

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and independence, he is the inspirer and political guru."

Sri Aurobindo concluded the series in the *Indu Prakash* with these ringing words: "And when Posterity comes to crown with her praises the Makers of India, she will place her most splendid laurel not on the sweating temples of a place-hunting politician nor on the narrow forehead of a

noisy social reformer but on the serene brow of that gracious Bengali who never clamoured for place or for power, but did his work in silence for love of his work, even as nature does, and just because he had no aim but to give out the best that was in him, was able to create a language, a literature, and a nation."

Sri Aurobindo called him 'Rishi' Bankim.

When in the spring of 1894, Bankim passed away, A. Ghose wrote a poem on him. Here are a few lines from it.

"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:
Your poet's words are sweeter far than these.
Your heart was this man's heart. Subtly he knew
The beauty and divinity in you.
His nature kingly was and as a god
In large serenity and light he trod
His daily way, yet beauty, like soft flowers
Wreathing a hero's sword, ruled all his hours.
Thus moving in these iron times and drear,
Barren of bliss and robbed of golden cheer,
He sowed the desert with ruddy-hearted rose,
The sweetest voice that ever spoke in prose."

Bankim's Bengal



The Godhead

Strange things had happened to the Western-educated rationalist since his return from England. From the moment he set foot on her soil India began to prepare the ground for the full blossoming of her Lotus. She began giving him spiritual experiences. They were as ununderstandable to the agnostic's mind as they were unexpected. "I can't help that. It happened," Sri Aurobindo was to reply simply to Nirod's query years later. "The mind's canons of the rational and the possible do not give spiritual life and experience."

At London A.G. had thought that the Self, Atman, was the true thing to be realized in life. But, naturally, he had no notion of how to set about it. Then, the experience of the Self came unbidden. "A thing I knew nothing about, never bargained for, didn't understand either.....This began in London, sprouted the moment I set foot on Apollo Bunder, touching Indian soil, flowered one day in the first year of my stay in Baroda, at the moment when there threatened to be an accident to my carriage."

One day, Sri Aurobindo was driving from Camp Road

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in Baroda and had just reached the side of the public gardens when his carriage was threatened with an accident. The carriage was known as a 'victoria,' that is, a low and light four-wheeled carriage with seat for two, a raised driver's seat and a falling top. "Nobody could guess its age," recorded D. K. Roy. "The horse was very big, but in speed it was the elder brother of a donkey! Even a whip could not get it moving faster!" But something could startle it. And then? Then danger. And the vision. It was the vision of the Godhead surging up from within. In a sonnet written in September 1939, Sri Aurobindo described his experience.

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 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."

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At Baroda there was an 'Officers' Club' which was patronized by the Maharaja. A. Ghose had enrolled himself as a member. But he was a rare member of the Club. He did not have a herd instinct. A small congenial circle of friends was more to his taste and he spent most evenings with them whenever free from his studies or other works. We can now have a pleasant nodding acquaintance with one of them, Lt. Madhavrao Jadhav. He was a very close friend of A. G. 's.

Madhavrao would often drop in of an evening for a chat. A. G. himself was not talkative, but he was a very good listener. And, oh, how he would laugh I

The Jadhavs were three brothers, noted D. K. Roy. This noble and cultured family was loyal to the Gaekwad. The eldest brother was a Police Commissioner somewhere in the Baroda State. The second brother, Khaserao Jadhav was about the same age as the Maharaja, and a distant relation of his. He was a graduate in agriculture from a British college. He had entered the Baroda Civil Service where he first served as a District Collector, then was posted at Baroda itself as Revenue Commissioner. He looked after the education of the Maharaja's grandson for some time. The Gaekwad got a house built for Khaserao at Baroda: Bungalow 15 in Dandia Bazar. The two-storeyed redbrick house was completed in 1896. Among the various residences Sri Aurobindo occupied during his thirteen years' sojourn in Baroda, he spent most of his time at Khaserao's bungalow. In 1898, when he brought his Bengali teacher, Dinendra Kumar Roy, with him, both lodged at first with the Jadhavs in this bungalow.

The youngest Jadhav brother, Lieutenant Madhavrao Jadhav, was in the Baroda army. He was trained at a military school in England. "He was the same age as Aurobindo," wrote D. K. Roy in his book, "and they were great friends. Aurobindo was of a grave temperament; but when he and Madhavrao talked together, his gravity would vanish completely. From both would flow rolling laughter. No outsider could even imagine Aurobindo's lambent humour, his extraordinary artistry in brightening up a company with merry tales —as though behind a stern exterior flowed an undercurrent of humour full of flavour. That was pure, crystalline, enjoyable."

Though in society Sri Aurobindo "generally withdrew into the shell of his deep, congenial reserve," reports Dilip, "with his intimates of the inner circle he had always loved to indulge in banter and laughter and quips of every description." Dilip goes on to give an instance of Sri Aurobindo's 'pre-yogic humour,' as he heard it from an old friend of his, which occurred in a social gathering. "The Prince of Baroda was going to be married," said Sri Aurobindo's old friend. "In those days monogamy was not particularly insisted on. Sri Aurobindo was then the Vice-Principal of the Gaekwar's College. When the distinguished guests had assembled for the wedding dinner, the royal bridegroom came up to him dignified and demure. The grave Vice-Principal, revered by all, shook hands with 'the cynosure of neighbouring eyes' and wished him 'Many many happy returns of the day I' "

Dinendra K. Roy went on with his description. "Madhavrao mostly spoke in Marathi, and Sri Aurobindo generally

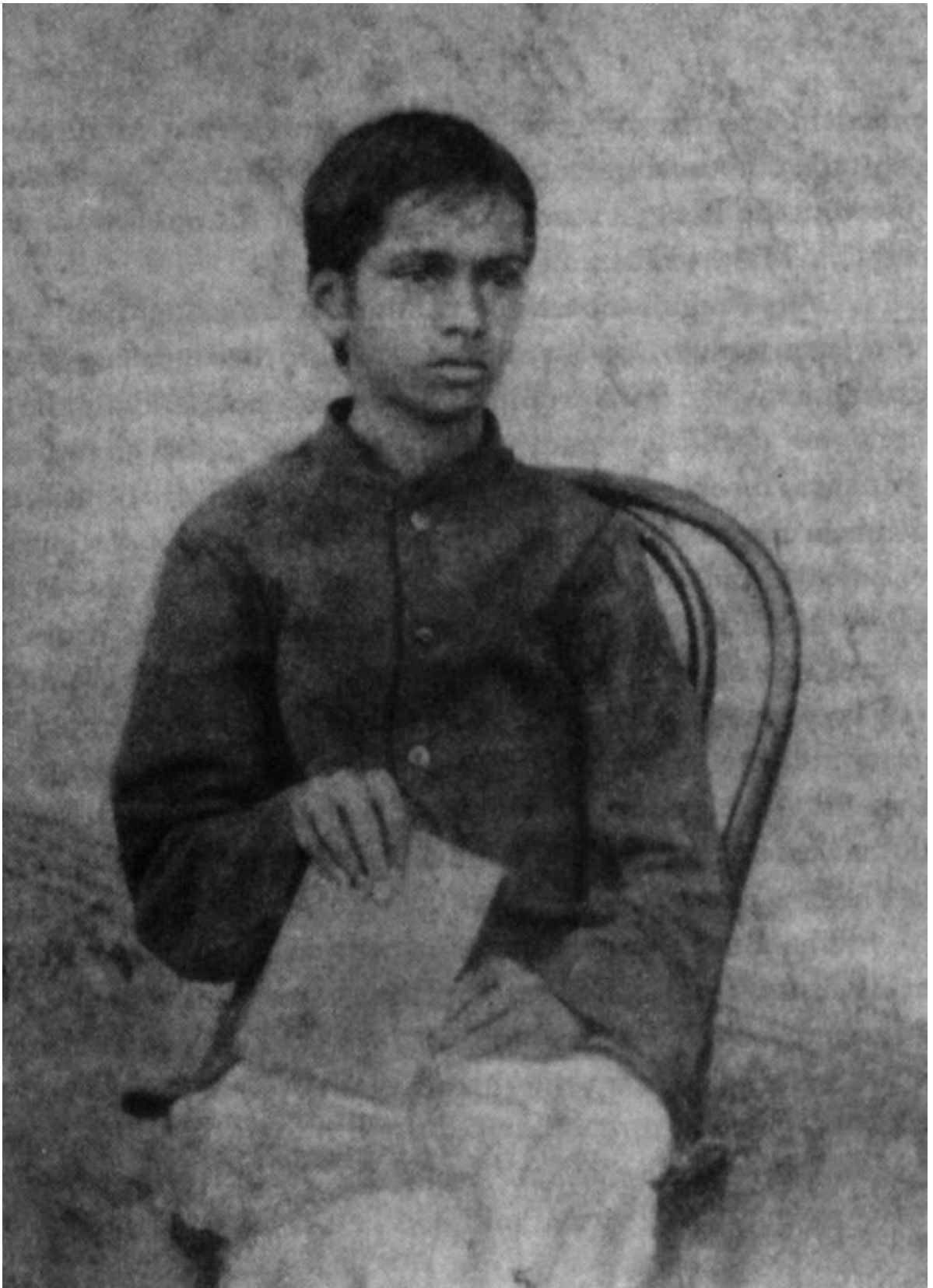
replied in English. Nine tenths of the time it was Madhavrao who talked, Aurobindo talked only one tenth of the time." However, the Bengali teacher observed that his pupil was more fluent in Marathi than in Bengali.

The Bengali 'novelist' — as Madhavrao called him —was quite surprised to see the close friendship between a serious-natured man like Sri Aurobindo, who was a poet and a philosopher, and a 'military' man with a European soldier's temperament. Sri Aurobindo himself spoke in 1940 of his two intimate friends in Baroda. "One was Deshpande who was very intimate: he is

dead. Madhavrao was another: he is also dead." Lt. M. R. Jadhav was associated with Sri Aurobindo's political projects, and was one among four or five with whom "I was planning to work on more extremist lines than the Congress," recounted Sri Aurobindo in 1938. In one of his letters to his wife, Mrinalini Devi, Sri Aurobindo mentions that he needed money to send Madhavrao to Europe for arms training so he was unable to send her more.

The Bengali novelist was to witness many other things during his two years of day-to-day life near Sri Aurobindo. But that was to be a few years later, in 1898. We were in 1894.

So let us pick up the thread where we left it.



Young Barin

Deoghar

Although more than a year had passed since his return to India, A. Ghose had neither gone to his natal land nor met any member of his family.

Bengal now beckoned him.

"I was at Deoghar several times," wrote Sri Aurobindo, "and saw my grandfather there, first in good health and then bedridden with paralysis."

It was, we guess, sometime between April and August of 1894 —during the summer vacation — that Sri Aurobindo first visited his family at Deoghar, in Bihar.

Deoghar, 'God's abode,' has as its presiding deity Shiva. His consort there is known as Bagala; and Shiva himself as Vaidyanath, the Lord of physicians. So Deoghar is also called Baidyanath.¹ People affectionately call the God there 'Booro Shib' (the old man Shiva). When Rajnarain was alive, distinguished

1. It is one of the fifty-two sacred places, straddling India and Afghanistan, known as *pitha-sthans* — where parts of Sati's body are supposed to have fallen . Here it was that the heart of Sad fell . A pond called Harda Kund exists even now. *Hārda* is derived from *hriday*, or heart.

visitors to the locality would say, "Deoghar has two Shivas: one is immobile, the other is mobile." It is a place of pilgrimage and its salubrious climate has made it a health resort.

How did the young man appear to his family? His sister Sarojini, in an interview,¹ recalled in 1940 a forty-six-year-old memory. She was a little hazy on some points, but remembered others quite clearly. "First came a telegram," she said, "then arrived Sejda [third brother]. A very young and delicate face, shoulder-length hair cut in English fashion, Sejda was a very shy person. When womenfolk surrounded him he shrank bashfully. Dadababu [grandfather] put his arms around him and embraced him in a warm welcome."

Both Sarojini and Barin were living with their grandparents after the death of their father, Dr. K. D. Ghose. Thus, it was at Deoghar that 'Sejda' found his sister Saro, quite a different person now

from the little two-year-old he had last seen ; and for the first time he laid eyes on his youngest brother 'Bari,' already a youth of fourteen years attending the local school.

During that first visit, and subsequent ones, Sri Aurobindo would look out and get a pleasant view from the house at Purandaha. To the east, etching its three peaks against the blue sky in deeper blue lines, stands Trikut; to the west is the huge Digharia hill, like a hump-backed tortoise, lit up by the glow of the setting sun; on top of the Nandan hill to the north-west was a crumbling temple (since renovated), its walls covered with growing trees. The Nandan hills were inviting and the young

1. To Girija Shankar Roy Chowdhuri.

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people would go on climbing excursions, with their Boromama, Jogin as leader. But perhaps the most favourite walks Sejda took along with his brother and cousins and uncles and aunts and grandfather, were along the Daroa river, which looked like a silver ribbon from Purandaha, flowing leisurely through the undulating red earth, by the green paddy fields. It was during one of these walks that grandfather Rajnarain was found asleep ... standing.

What was the feeling of Sejda when he had to leave behind his new-found family and return to Baroda ? He expressed it in his inimitable way to his sister Saro in a letter dated 25 August, 1894. We quote it here in full.

"Baroda Camp
25 August, 1894

"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 now 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 for me to go at all; 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

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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, Baroda seems a hundred times more Baroda.

"I dare say Beno may write to you three or four days before he leaves England. But you must think yourself lucky if he does as much as that. Most likely the first you hear of him will be a telegram from Calcutta. Certainly he has not written to me. I never expected and should be afraid to get a letter. It would be such a shocking surprise that I should certainly be able to do nothing but roll on the floor and gasp for breath for the next two or three hours. No, the favours of the Gods are too awful to be coveted. I dare say he will have energy enough to hand over your letter to Mano as they must be seeing each other almost daily. You must give Mano a little time before he answers you. He too is Beno's brother. Please let me have Beno's address as I don't know where to send a letter I have ready for him. Will you also let me have the name of Bari's English Composition Book and its compiler? I want such a book badly, as this will be useful for me not only in Bengalee but in Gujerati. There are no convenient books like that here.

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"You say in your letter 'all here are quite well'; yet in the very next sentence I read 'Bari has an attack of fever'. Do you mean then that Bari is nobody ? Poor Bari !That he should be excluded from the list of human beings is only right and proper, but it is a little hard that he should be denied existence altogether. I hope it is only a slight attack. I am quite well. I have brought a fund of health with me from Bengal , which, I hope it will take me some time to exhaust ; but I have just passed my twenty-second milestone , August 15 last, since my birthday and am beginning to get dreadfully old.

"I infer from your letter that you are making great progress in English. I hope you will learn very quickly; I can then write to you quite what I want to say and just in the way I want to say it. I feel some difficulty in doing that now and I don't know whether you will understand it.

"With love,

Your affectionate brother,
Auro

"P.S. If you want to understand the new orthography of my name, ask uncle."

Uncle is his 'Boromama' Jogindra, Swarnalata's younger brother. He may have explained to his nephew that his name spelled A-R-A did not give the correct Bengali pronunciation. That may have brought about the change in the spelling. In any case this —in 1894 —was the first time that Sri Aurobindo adopted the new orthography of his name: AURO.

It may well have been in late September 1894 that Benoy-

bhusan returned to India from England. His ship anchored off the Chandpal Ghat at Calcutta Port. From there he took a hackney-coach to go to the house of his father's lawyer friend Manomohan Ghose at Theatre Road. The coachman did not understand any English, and Benoy could not then speak any Indian language, with the result that for hours they went up and down

the street, till a kindly Brahmin priest, who was watching interestedly, asked Beno some questions and then directed the coachman and even accompanied Beno to the right house.

Benoybhusan quickly found a job as tutor to the Prince of the Coochbehar State. According to Barin, Beno who had gone to Ajmer with his pupil, borrowed Rs.1500 to send to Mano so that the latter could also return to India. Benoybhusan seems to have been in Ajmer for a long time as we gather from a letter of Sri Aurobindo's to his grandfather.

"Gujaria
Vijapur Taluka
N. Gujerat
Jan. 11th, 1895

"My dear Grandfather,

"I received your telegram and postcard this afternoon. I am at present in an exceedingly out of the way place, without any post-office within fifteen miles of it; so it would not be easy to telegraph. I shall probably be able to get to Bengal by the end of next week. I had intended to be there by this time, but there is some difficulty about my last months' salary without which I cannot very easily move. However I have written for a

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month's privileged leave and as soon as it is sanctioned shall make ready to start. I shall pass by Ajmere and stop for a day with Beno. My articles are with him; I will bring them on with me. As I do not know Urdu, or indeed any other language of the country, I may find it convenient to bring my clerk with me. I suppose there will be no difficulty about accommodating him.

"I got my uncle's letter inclosing Soro's, the latter might have presented some difficulties, for there is no one who knows Bengali in Baroda —no one at least whom I could get at. Fortunately the smattering I acquired in England stood me in good stead, and I was able to make out the sense of the letter, barring a word here and a word there.

"If all goes well, I shall leave Baroda on the 18th; at any rate it will not be more than a day or two later.

Believe me

Your affectionate grandson
Aravind A. Ghose"

By then the third brother also was back from England. But unlike his younger brother, who had booked his passage in a mail steamer, Mano chose a big liner named *Patroclus* to return to an unknown home. His uncle Krishna Kumar Mitra was at the port to receive him when he landed in Calcutta. He first brought his nephew to his house and later took him to Deoghar. Mano's first impression on his arrival and of his own family was happy. "I arrived on October 25th," he wrote contentedly to his friend Binyon, "and have been staying at a beautiful country

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place called Baidyanath, in my grandfather's house, all among the mountains and green sugarcane fields and shallow rivers. My own people I found charming and cultivated folk, and spent an extremely pleasant time among them. This, I think very fortunate indeed —to find at once friends, and that of one's own blood, so congenial and interesting as soon as I landed." However, he had not completely forgotten Bengali and could converse in it with his aunts and other members of his family. But, observed his daughter Lotika, "My father and mother used to correspond in Bengali written in Roman script." He had married Maloti Bannerjee, a girl of 16, in 1898, and had two daughters —Lotika, the younger one, was born in September 1902.

Manmohan found himself a job before long (1895) as Professor of English Literature at Patna College. For the poet-at-heart it was a dull, tiring, ill-paid work. He was transferred to other places, including Dacca, where he was professor for some five years and "soon became a living legend." He was promoted as Inspector of Schools from 1902, and transferred to Purulia in the Chota Nagpur District. In those times India was well covered with extensive forests where wild animals roamed about freely. M. M. Ghose had to undertake long, uncomfortable journeys to remote parts of the district, often by night, in an ox-cart, the then usual mode of transport, in which he would lie jolted and fearful of tigers. Finally, in October 1902 Mano was appointed Professor of English at the Presidency College, Calcutta. "He was very painstaking," recalled Sri Aurobindo. "Most of the professors don't work so hard. I saw his books interleaved and marked and full of notes." At the College Manmohan carved

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out a niche for himself. It was such a treat to hear his lectures on poetry that those who were not in the class passionately envied those who were, and students from other colleges would sometimes steal into his class. His melodious voice, as he read or recited poetry, took them with a spell, as he weaved exquisite patterns of romance and beauty. "With his wonderful poetic gifts," said Poet Tagore, "and power of imagination Manmohan could take his pupils to the inner soul of poetry and make them enjoy its beauty." It was indeed a different Professor Ghose at his desk from the one often seen going up and down the stairs of the College hat in hand, eyes downcast, and wearing an absorbed, unsmiling, and pensive look. No, he did not invite familiarity. Lamented Tagore, "The gift with which Manmohan was born was the gift of song: that he used it for teaching involved undoubtedly great personal loss. This is what he himself told me when I went to Dacca to attend a conference."

In the interview given by Sarojini on 5 July 1940, she recalled: "Sejda went to see Mother at Rohini. Mother did not recognize him. She said, 'My Aurobindo was small, he was not so big!' She said again, 'My Aurobindo's finger had a cut on it.' As a matter of fact Sejda, in his childhood, had cut his finger on a glass bottle, and since then he had had a cross mark on it. Sejda was identified by showing his finger to Mother. Borda [Benoybhusan] was also recognised by her in a similar manner. His identity was accepted when she was shown a cut mark on his chin. But trouble arose when it was the turn of Mejda [Manmohan]. Seeing his moustache, Mother said, 'But my Manas Kumar did not have any moustache !'"

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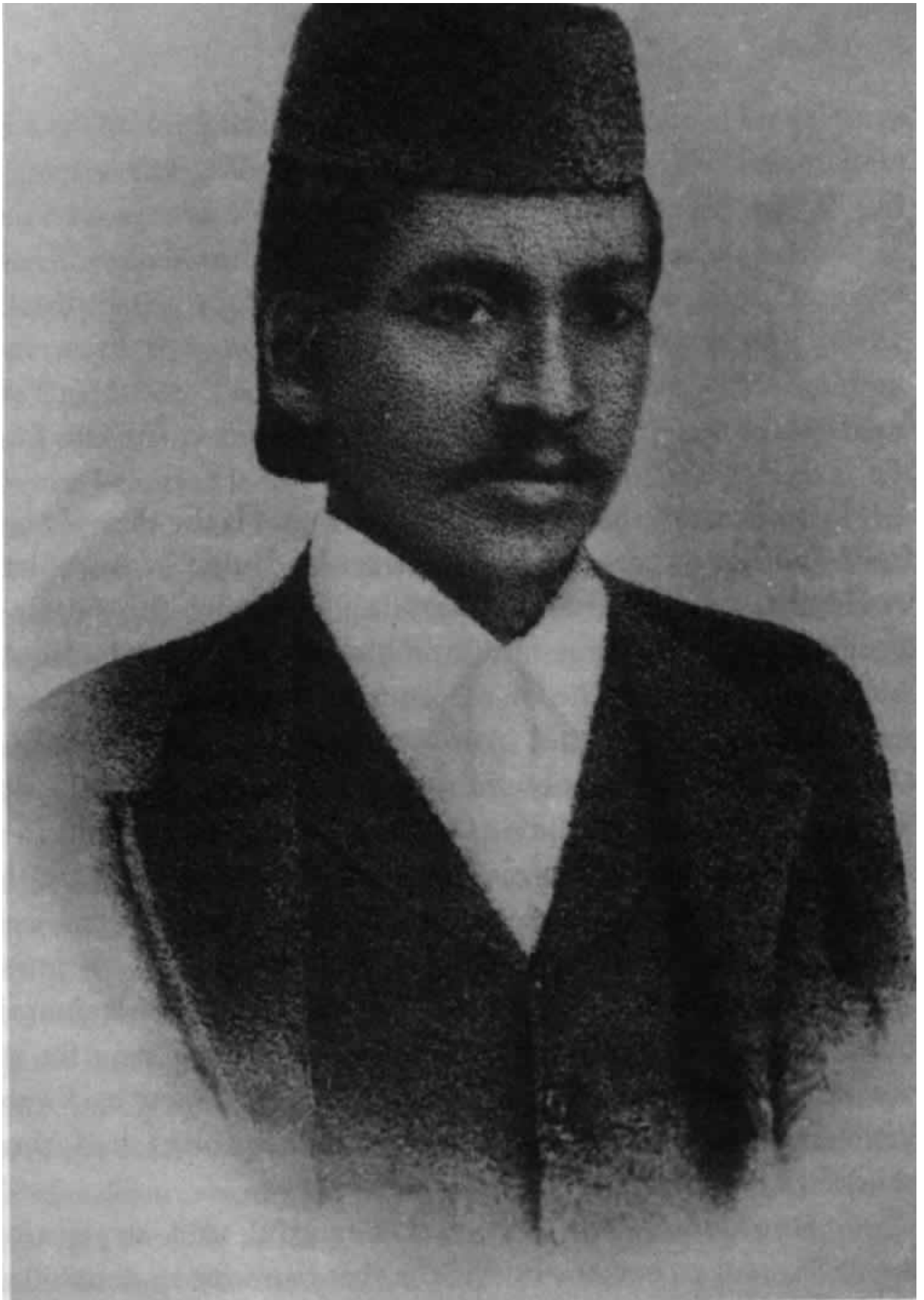
7

Auro-Dada

In Bengal, the Puja season in autumn is the time for fun, frolic and family gatherings. Whenever he could, Sri Aurobindo would take time off from his Baroda job to rejoin his family at Deoghar. He had a large family on his mother's side : uncles and aunts and cousins. One of the cousins, Basanti Chakraborty, gave reminiscences of her 'Auro-dada' in a Bengali magazine, *Galpa Bharati*. Sri Aurobindo was very close to her family, and whenever he passed through Calcutta he always dropped in to see his aunt Lilabati, 'Na-mesi,' and Krishna Kumar Mitra, his 'Na-mesi,' at their residence. K. K. Mitra and Lilabati were married at Calcutta in April 1881. A large number of guests attended the marriage party, but the bride's father, Rajnarain Bose, did not. Rabindranath Tagore composed a song for the occasion, and Narendranath Dutta, better known

as Swami Vivekananda, sang at the ceremony. The Mitras had three children: Kumudini, Basanti and Sukumar.

Kumudini (1882-1943) was beautiful and straightforward. She was to become one of the first two women councillors of the Calcutta Corporation. That was in 1933, the year my



Sri Aurobindo at Deoghar (c. 1894)

uncle Bijoy Singh Nahar also became a councillor— the first from the Jain community. Kumudini wrote several books in Bengali and was the editor of an illustrated Bengali monthly, *Suprabhat*, which ran for nine years. Tagore, a family friend, wrote a poem of the same name for the first issue (July-August 1907). Again, two years later, it was at Kumudini's request that Sri Aurobindo began to contribute in *Suprabhat* articles on his experiences in prison: *Karakahini*. A review of the magazine published in the *Karmayogin* in August 1909 is very interesting. We quote a good part of it,

"The paper *Suprabhat*, a Bengali monthly edited by Kumari Kumudini Mitra, daughter of S. Krishna Kumar Mitra, enters this month on its third year. The first issue of the new year is before us. We notice a great advance in the interest and variety of the articles, the calibre of the writers and the quality of the writing. From the literary point of view the chief ornament of the number is the brief poem *Dukhabhisar*, by S. Rabindranath Tagore. It is one of those poems in which the peculiar inimitable quality of our greatest lyric poet comes out with supreme force, beauty and sweetness. Rabindra Babu has a legion of imitators and many have been very successful in catching up his less valuable mannerisms of style and verse, as is the manner of imitators all the world over. But the poignant sweetness, passion and spiritual depth and mystery of a poem like this, the haunting cadences subtle with a subtlety which is not of technique but of the soul, and the honeyladen felicity of the expression, these are the essential Rabindranath and cannot be imitated, because they are things of the spirit and one

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must have the same sweetness and depth of soul before one can hope to catch any of these desirable qualities. We emphasise this inimitableness because the legion of imitators we mention are doing harm to the progress of our poetry as well as to the reputation of their model and we would suggest to them to study this poem and realise the folly of their persistent attempt. One of the most remarkable peculiarities of Rabindra Babu's genius is the happiness and originality with which he has absorbed the whole spirit of Vaishnav poetry and turned it into something essentially the same and yet new and modern.... These poems are of the essence of poetry and refuse to be rendered in any prose equivalent. Poetry is created not from the intellect or the outer imagination but comes from a deeper source within to which men have no means of access except when the divine part within seizes on the brain and makes it a passive instrument.... This is the divine mania and enthusiasm which the subtle spiritual discernment of Plato discovered to

be the real meaning of what we call inspiration. And of this unattainable force the best lyrics of Rabindranath are full to overflowing." There spoke the poet Sri Aurobindo.

"The article *Shantiniketan Rabindranath* by S.J. Jitendranath Banerji is another feature of great interest. The writer has a good descriptive gift and the passages which describe the *Shantiniketan* are admirable; but the chief interest naturally centres in the conversation with the poet which is recorded with great fullness. The private talk of a rich and gifted nature with a power of conversational expression is always suggestive and we await with interest the future issue of this article. We

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hope Jitendra Babu will give us a fuller view of the remarkable educational experiment which this original mind is developing in the quiet shades of Bolpur."

The Santiniketan School was established in the wide open spaces of Bolpur in 1901 by Rabindranath Tagore. He had seen the great harm done by a system of education which was cut off from Indian life, for its sources lay outside India. "In every nation," he pointed out, "education is intimately connected with the life of the people. But for us modern education is relevant only to turning out clerks, lawyers, doctors, magistrates, munsiffs and policemen, the few favourite professions of gentle folk. This education has not reached the farmer, the oil-grinder, nor the potter. No other educated society has been struck with such disaster. The reason for this is that our new universities have not been a growth from the soil but have been parasites feeding on foreign oaks." The Visionary set out to relate education closely to life beyond the confines of the class-room. A complete education that comes through communing with Nature. A child to develop into a complete man. And freedom to develop. A simple life and an ideal of self-discipline were what he endeavoured to inculcate in the schoolchildren. Waking with dawn, cleaning up, doing exercises, bathing by the well, and prayer. Cleanliness of mind and body. Emphasis on Indian culture was strong in Santiniketan. After prayer, classes, which were held in the open air, underneath trees, with only a small square carpet for seat. And work. Work together for the common weal. And everything done with a joyous spirit, with a song in one's heart.

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"The brief hints given of the moral training and the method of education followed," the review continued, "point to a system far in advance of the National Council of Education which is still tyrannised over by a tradition and method not only European but unprogressively European. A brief instalment of S. J. Aurobindo Ghose's *Karahahini* is also given which describes the identification parades of the Bomb Case, gives some glimpses of the approver Noren Gossain and deals with the personal character of some of the jail's officials."

Sri Aurobindo, although his review was unsigned, was too modest to say more about his own articles!

After this pleasant digression let us return to the Mitra family. Sukumar Mitra (1885-1973) was intimately associated with Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary work. He had been a messenger of the leader from a very young age, and was a repository of the stream of events of the time; he had also close links with several other revolutionary institutions. Sukumar's eight-part article on Sri Aurobindo, published in the Bengali magazine *Basumati* (1951), alludes to a phonograph recording of Sri Aurobindo. He was in Baroda when their grandfather, Rajnarain Bose, died, and wrote a poem on his passing. The next time he went to Calcutta, Sri Aurobindo stayed with his cousins for a few days, and readily agreeing to their request, recited his poem, *Transiit, non Periiit*. That is how the phonograph recording was made. But unfortunately, it does not seem to have been preserved.

Sukumar's father K. K. Mitra (1852-1936) was a well-known professor; a journalist, he was also the editor of a weekly,

Sanjibani, in which he exposed the barbarian and ruthless activities of the Europeans owners of tea estates of Assam and of the indigo planters. His initial disgust at British justice —which let off scot-free English murderers of breastfeeding infants and pregnant women —turned to a profound hatred for the foreign government; with the result that he did not hesitate to take full part in the movement of 1905-10 —a participation which the government cut short by imprisoning him in the Agra fort from December 1908 to February 1910. Afterwards, K. K. Mitra continued to support the Congress but he did not believe in the non-cooperation movement of N. K. Gandhi. Another political leader who did not believe in that movement was Bepin Chandra Pal.

Sri Aurobindo's 'Na-masi' Lilabati (1864-1924) was Swarnalata's younger sister. Given the social atmosphere of the times, she showed a lot of courage by getting many widows —who were sent to her by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar — to marry again. Many distressed women found a refuge in her. It never occurred to her to put a label —or use big words like 'social service' —on the help she gave spontaneously, unstintedly. What is there to make a fuss about when we help a fellow-human in his or her hour of need ? Lilabati was exceedingly fond of her nephew Auro. In fact, her son Sukumar says that she nursed her sister's third son when Swarnalata's fourth child died.

As for Basanti (1884-1965) she was a good writer, and edited with distinction for ten years a Bengali magazine for children, *Mukul*. She, in her article 'Our Auro-dada,' recalled her childhood's joy-filled days at Deoghar when all the family

would reunite during the Puja holidays. "There were hills all around and we enjoyed the wide open spaces, the fields, walks along the river banks, and the loving care of our relatives." One of the spots they were certain to visit was the village of Rohini, five kilometres away, where lived their eldest aunt, Auro-dada's mother. The bungalow with so many big, shading trees was an ideal place for a day-long picnic. "We would sit around our dear Boromama, listen to stories, and make fun. Auro-dada was very fond of Boromama." Auro-dada used to call him 'the prophet of Isabgul' because that was Boromama's invariable prescription for almost all types of stomach trouble. He even seems to have brought round his nephew to his own way of thinking. For, every morning at Baroda, Sri Aurobindo would drink a glass of cold water in which a handful of Isabgul¹ had been left soaking overnight. He never missed it, noted D. K. Roy. Reportedly there were two other objects of daily use at Baroda. One was Cuticura soap —"he did not use any other variety." The other was 'Cigars of the Pharaoh.' As a student in England Sri Aurobindo had picked up the habit of smoking, and he had become a heavy smoker. Always to be found on his table was a box of Egyptian cigars. If that brand was not available in the local market, the special cigars were brought from Bombay, as Sri Aurobindo did not then smoke any other make. At Pondicherry it was 'Flor' of Spencer's that he smoked.

1, *Plantago ovata* (or *Plantago psyllium*). The fibrous husk, separated from the seed, is endowed with a few remarkable properties: it controls diarrhoea as well as constipation, and reduces blood cholesterol levels. Isabgul has been used in India since ancient times.

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"I was then a schoolgirl," wrote Basanti looking back upon things past, "young in age, alive with curiosity. Auro-dada used to arrive with two or three trunks. I would think, 'Who knows how many costly suits and coats and what varieties of luxury items these must contain!' But when he would open the trunks I would look with amazement, 'What is this? Only a few clothes for daily wear, and all the rest books and more books 1 Does Auro-dada love so much to read books? We all like only to chat and enjoy ourselves in vacations, does Auro-dada want to spend this jolly time reading these books!...' But because he was so fond of reading books did not mean that he did not join us in our chit-chats and merry-making. His talks used to be full of wit and humour." Her brother Sukumar recalls wistfully that in one of the Puja holidays he found Auro-dada daily practising *dands* and *baithaks* (push-ups and knee-bending exercises). "He used to treat me as though we were the same age," although Sukumar was his junior by thirteen years, "and he always repaid me in kind my childish playfulness, so that often we would both roll in the dust. He was never annoyed, his dignity never offended."

But Auro-dada did not simply beguile the time with his cousins, he read all the trunkfuls of books he had brought along with him. Nor was he so lost in the world of books that he remained unaware of what went on around him. Quite the contrary. Nothing was neglected in his observation. Decades later, replying to a disciple ("Can one do as one likes?"), Sri Aurobindo said, "One acts according to one's nature. Your question reminds me of the story of my grandmother. She

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said: 'God has made such a bad world. If I could meet Him I would tell Him what I think of Him.' At this my grandfather said: 'Yes, that is true. But God has so arranged it that you can't get near Him so long as you have any such desire in you.'" That was Rajnarain Bose and Nistarini.

Rajnarain always defended God. Once, when he was in a friend's house, his friend, a pandit, saw a spider being chased by a lizard and soon ending up in the jaws of the latter. The pandit cried

out, "Look here, Rajnarain Babu, you speak so often of the goodness of your God, will you tell me what goodness is there in making that poor spider fall into the jaws of that lizard?" The narrator reported, "Whereupon Rajnarain Babu looked up, laughed heartily, making the house ring with his laughter and said, 'Ah, poor God, he must establish his goodness after giving satisfactory answers to all the questions that may arise in the minds of doubters —a harder lot surely than is generally meted out to mortal men! My friend, Divine goodness is established on another basis than that. Ha! Ha! You think you have got a crushing argument! Not a bit of it. I believe God is good even if thousands of lizards eat up thousands of spiders.'" The narrator who had witnessed it said, "I shall never forget that occasion and that laughter." He concluded, "His very laugh shows he is not of this world.... He is a *devata*."

Even the priests of the Vaidyanath temple would fold their hands with reverence whenever Rajnarain's name was mentioned in their presence: 'He is our second Vaidyanath.' Indeed, many a high-caste Brahmin considered this remarkable

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Kayastha to be a better Brahmin than himself.

Rajnarain dearly loved this grandson of his, Auro, who was a man after his own heart. They talked of many things: "of cabbages —and kings —and why the sea is boiling hot —and whether pigs have wings."

And oh! so often their hearty laughs would mingle filling the air with joy; for, both grandfather and grandson were full of roaring laughter. When Dinendra Kumar Roy first went to Deoghar in 1898, the old man was already bedridden, but had lost nothing of his scintillating spirit nor his ringing laugh. A wonderstruck D. K. Roy remarked to Boromama Jogindra, "Your father can laugh a lot. I haven't met anyone who can laugh in such an open-hearted manner. Despite the pain inflicted by the illness how much he laughs!" Jogindra replied, "This is nothing! When Father talks with Dwijenbabu [Tagore's eldest brother] and the two friends go on laughing, the very roof of the house seems about to be swept away by the waves of their laughter!"

All those waves of laughter floated away to rejoin their source: the ocean of eternal Ananda.

Today's visitor will see many things at Deoghar, but not that hallowed house, hallowed by so many noble sons of India — including Vivekananda¹ — its every brick so full of sweet

1. Swami Vivekananda met Rajnarain Bose several times at Deoghar. So far as we can ascertain, his very first visit was in December 1889, that is about three and half years before he sailed for the United States on 31 May 1893 to attend the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. It is in January 1898 that we next see him at Deoghar. Again on 19 December 1898 he goes to

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memories. The bricks became rubble, for the house was auctioned and razed to the ground by a new owner who built another house in its place.



Rajnarain's house at Deoghar

Deoghar to restore his broken health and stays through January 1899. Rajnarain Bose passed away in September 1899.

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Swami Brahmananda

Today's visitors can, however, see the Tapoban hills on the outskirts of Deoghar. It was in a small cave of Tapoban that Balananda Brahmachari Maharaj practised tapasya. When Rajnarain Bose was alive, Balanandaji was already engaged in his tapasya. He had great regard for Rajnarain. In 1897 when the latter became bedridden following a stroke which paralyzed his right side, Balanandaji became a steadfast visitor ... and more. The Sanskritist Gobindo Gopal Mukhopadhyay — his Sanskrit songs or duets with his wife Madhuri Devi transport one to another world — has been kind enough to give me a few lines on Balanandaji. Both his father and uncle were close disciples of the Yogi, whom he had the honour of knowing from his childhood. Gobindo Babu still remembers that he was just a child when he saw Barindra Kumar Ghose at Balanandaji's ashram. "Barinda stayed at Deoghar for some time after his return from Pondicherry (in December 1929). I remember very clearly that one day Barinda came to pay his respects to Balananda Maharaj, who rather chided him by saying, 'Why have you returned to family life instead of following in the footsteps of Sri Aurobindo

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who has remained self-lost in yogic sadhana?' Then itself I observed how very deep was Balanandaji's affection for Barinda, and how profound was his respect for Sri Aurobindo."

To show how much the Hindu Yogi revered the Brahma philosopher, G. G. Mukhopadhyay recounted the following incident. "Shibnath Sastri," an eminent person of the time, "had gone to Deoghar to have a last look at Rajnarain who was on his deathbed." He found the whole town on tiptoe with anxiety. He saw a Christian gentleman, a retired high Government Official, spending his days and nights by the sick man's bedside. Sastri also noticed men attached to the Vaidyanath temple calling morning and evening to inquire about the state of the old man's health. When Shibnath Sastri left Deoghar after two days, he "travelled back to Calcutta in the same train with a well-known Bengali writer, a journalist of repute, a devout Hindu. The journalist told Shibnath Sastri that he had come to meet his guru Balanandaji; but his guru bade him return home, because he, the guru, had no time to sit and talk with his disciple, as all his attention was absorbed in Rajnarain Babu who was on his deathbed, and he wanted to run to Deoghar to see him. And," added Gobindo Babu, "this goes to show what high regard the guru of a devout Hindu had for Rajnarain Babu; so much so that he didn't hesitate a moment to disappoint his dear disciple by sending him back with dispatch." The Hindu journalist was none other than G. G.

Mukhopadhyay's own uncle Krishna Chandra Banerji, who was the editor of a Bengali newspaper called *Bangabasi*, and against whom the first ever sedition case was instituted

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in India. "It is this profound reverence and love for his grandfather that formed an abiding bond between Sri Aurobindo and Balananda Maharaj."

Although the chosen spot of his sadhana was Deoghar, in Bihar, Balanandaji hailed from quite another part of India. He was born near Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, by the banks of Shipra. Known as Avantika in olden times, Ujjain is made famous by poet Kalidas. There is a very old temple to Shiva as Mahakal which is considered as one of the twelve Jyotirlingas or major shrines of Shiva. Balananda was the only son of his widowed mother, Narmadabai, who had named her son Pitambara. He belonged to the Saraswat Brahmin clan. Three or four days after his sacred thread ceremony he left home and mother, pulled away by a greater call. Years went by. Narmadabai now felt that her time was nearly up. She prayed even more fervently than usual to Mahakal so that she may see her son Pitambar once more before breathing her last. Mahakal appeared to her and very lovingly said, "Daughter, soon your wish will be fulfilled. Your son is engaged in tapasya at Baidyanath, on the Tapoban hill. He is now called Balananda. Go there and you will find your lost son." Thus mother and son met after forty years. An emotional reunion.

What amazes me is how the old lady oxcarted or trudged all the way to Baidyanath-Deoghar from Ujjain—a matter of some 920 kilometres as the crow flies and, certainly more than 1500 kilometres by road? Again, how did she find her way to her son all those hundred years ago? All she knew from some pilgrims was that Deoghar lay towards Jagannath Puri. What pluck Narmadabai had!

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From him she heard many of his adventures during those forty years. After wandering here and there Pitambar had walked along the banks of the Narmada, and thus reached Gangonath. It was there that the great yogi Brahmananda's Ashram was; and, what joy! he accepted to take the young boy as his disciple, and at the time of the initiation gave Pitambar the name Balananda.

The guru of Balanandaji was therefore Swami Brahm-ananda of Chandod. Chandod, some forty kilometres south of Baroda, on the banks of river Narmada, is the railway station where one got down to proceed to Gangonath some three kilometres away. G. G. Mukhopadhyay said, "I heard from my father that whenever Sri Aurobindo came to Deoghar during the summer or Puja vacations' and was to return again to Baroda, Balananda Maharaj would send through him clothes or other useful things to his guru Brahmananda Maharaj. Thus Sri Aurobindo was the connecting link between the two, and the bridge of union between Baroda and Deoghar."

Only once did Brahmananda come to Deoghar. It was in 1905, to install Lord Shiva in a temple constructed by his disciple Balananda at his newly founded ashram.

Swami Brahmananda was a very simple man. The Gaekwad and his family were his great devotees. Whenever the Gaekwad sent his own carriage to bring the Yogi to Baroda, the Yogi, for whom high or low did not exist, would pick up farmers' children, make them sit by his side, and take them to the Maharaja's Lakshmivilas Palace. Brahmananda was dearly loved by all sections of the people. They believed him to be the Goddess

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Narmada's own favourite son. Whenever a feast was given in his ashram on some occasion or another, it was open to all and sundry. People from the surrounding villages were sure to be invited. Out of a small quantity of food Brahmananda supplied many people. But sometimes so many turned up for the feast that there was shortage of ghee (clarified butter). Then Brahmananda would take water from the Narmada and have things fried in it. And when the feast was over and a fresh supply of ghee came along he would throw into the Narmada a quantity of ghee equivalent to the water taken. These were not tricks played by Brahmananda. "They have happened," confirmed Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo was first taken to Brahmananda by his friends like Deshpande — who wanted him to take up yoga — and Deodhar, a disciple of the Yogi. Sri Aurobindo went to Chandod several times and saw Swami Brahmananda. It is said that he lived several hundred years. When Rajani Palit wrote to Sri Aurobindo, putting the Swamiji's age at 400, he replied in detail in a letter dated 1st February 1936.

"There is no incontrovertible proof. 400 years is an exaggeration. It is known however that he lived on the banks of the Narmada for 80 years and when he arrived there, he was already in

appearance at the age when maturity turns toward over ripeness. He was, when I met him just before his death, a man of magnificent physique showing no signs of old age except 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

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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 his house by the way that I sat with Lele in Jan. 1908 and had a decisive experience of liberation and Nirvana). Mazumdar learned that he was suffering from a bad tooth and brought him a bottle of Floriline, a toothwash then much in vogue. The Yogi refused saying, 'I never use medicines. My one medicine is Narmada water. As for the tooth I have suffered from it since the days of Bhao Girdi.' Bhao Girdi was the Maratha General Sadashiv Rao Bhao who disappeared in the Battle of Panipat¹ and his body was never found. Many formed the conclusion that Brahmananda was himself Bhao Girdi, 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

1. This refers to the Third Battle of Panipat, fought on 14 January 1761, between the Afghan invader, Ahmad Shah Abdali and the Marathas. Ahmad Shah belonged to the Durrani clan of Afghanistan, and after the assassination of Nadir Shah in 1747 he occupied the throne of Afghanistan. He died in 1773. But during that time he invaded India eight times, occupied the Punjab, and won a tremendous victory over the Marathas in the Third Battle of Panipat. But soon his own men compelled him to return to Afghanistan. However his victory proved to be a disaster for the Marathas. Even more disastrous was the blow it dealt to the Mughals throne, as it marked the eclipse of the imperial power of the Mughals. In a way this battle decided the fate of India for it facilitated the growth of British power in India.

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through a rusty nail that 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 knowledge kept an extraordinary aspect and energy of youth to a comparatively late or quite advanced age — but this perhaps may be not uncommon among those who practise both Raja and Hatha Yoga together."

Regarding Swami Brahmananda Sri Aurobindo recalled another incident. "While I was residing at Baroda," he told his disciples in January 1939, "a Bengali Sannyasi came to see me and asked me to help him financially. I did so. But I found that the man was extremely rajasic, jealous and boastful and could not tolerate anyone greater than himself. He used to curse everybody who was greater than he. Once he went to see Brahmananda. He began to curse him because he was so great. Shortly after Brahmananda died of the prick of a nail. The Sannyasi took all the credit to himself! What might have happened was that Brahmananda's death was near and this man got the suggestion of it from the subtle planes."

It was in 1906 that Swami Brahmananda died. Just before that, in June or July when he had gone to Baroda to wind up his thirteen years' service to the State, Sri Aurobindo went to meet Swamiji for the last time. "He had the most remarkable eyes," said Sri Aurobindo. "Usually they were either closed or half shut. When I went to see him and was coming away, he opened them full and looked at me. It seemed as if he could penetrate and see everything clearly."

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In 1940, on March 13, Sri Aurobindo was shown some photographs of Brahmananda and Balananda. Looking at Brahmananda's picture Sri Aurobindo said, "He was not so haggard when I saw him."

When he saw one of Balananda's pictures Sri Aurobindo said, "He was young when I saw him. In this photo he looks very jolly." Looking at another one, he said, "Yes, this is more like him." Added Sri Aurobindo, "I saw him only once. He was doing much tapasya."

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Dinendra Kumar Roy

Often enough we have taken recourse to Dinendra Kumar Roy's *Aurobindo Prasanga* ('Topic Aurobindo'). So now let us take a fuller look at it and at him.

Dinendra Kumar Roy (1869-1943) was a rising Bengali man of letters. His articles in *Bharati*, a magazine edited by the Tagores, had aroused appreciation in Bengal's literary circles. When Sri Aurobindo felt the need to speak Bengali fluently with the right pronunciation and to correct and perfect his knowledge of the language, his Boromama engaged this young litterateur to help his nephew. It was Rabi Babu who had recommended this name. It was towards the end of 1898, a few weeks after the pujas, that D. K. Roy arrived at Deoghar together with his pupil who had gone to Calcutta for a few days to be with his Na-masi. From Deoghar they went to Baroda, breaking their journey at Bankipore (near Patna) for a day or two, as Sri Aurobindo wished to meet an uncle of his there.

After a few days they alighted one morning from a train at Bombay's Victoria terminus. Then they rested the whole day in a comfortable room at a big European hotel. At nightfall

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Bombay's Victoria Terminus early this century

they went to the Colaba station and boarded a train of B. B. C. I. R. line (Bombay-Baroda Central India Railways). The train left the station at 10 P.M. and reached Baroda very early in the morning. Lieutenant Madhavrao Jadhav was waiting on the platform to receive them. He took them to his brother Khaserao's house. This palatial, double-storeyed building was red —like Théon's at Tlemcen! —and situated on the main road. Sri Aurobindo had a room on the first floor, and the big hall there served as his study.

Dinendra Kumar was given another room. Then for two years he had the greatest of good luck to live with his pupil as a companion. He says that he was not called upon to do any

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regular teaching. In the preface of *Aurobindo Prasanga* (1923) he narrates how he came to write the book in 1911.

"My beloved friend," wrote D. K. Roy, "the late Suresh Chandra Samajpati,¹ once said to me: 'When Aurobindo was at Baroda few Bengalis knew him or recognized 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.'" Repeated D. K. Roy, "Today millions of Bengali readers are, indeed, very anxious to know something of the past life of Aurobindo. I hope the holy saga of this dedicated votary of Mother India will be appreciated by the youth of Bengal.... I believe that in future, people born in Bengal with a heart will feel joy and satisfaction discussing the life of Aurobindo."

He admits feeling rather nervous when he was asked "to coach Aurobindo in Bengali. Aurobindo was a profound scholar. He had secured record marks in Latin and Greek in his I.C.S. examination," he explained.

"Before I met Aurobindo," began his testimony, "I had formed an image of him somewhat like this: a stalwart figure, hatted-coated-booted from head to foot, a stern gaze in his spectacled eyes, a distorted accent and an exceedingly rough

1. S.C. Samajpati (1870 1921) was a grandson of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. A leading journalist of the period, he was also an orator who never used English words in his speeches.

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temper, hell to pay at the slightest breach of form.... It is therefore needless to say 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 and long, thin, shoulder-length wavy hair parted in the middle, clad in coarse Ahmedabad dhoti and close-fitting jacket, his feet shod in old-fashioned slippers with upturned toes, a face sparsely dotted with pockmarks,¹ this slim young man was Sriman Aurobindo Ghose, a living fountain of French, Latin and Greek? I would not have been more surprised — and disappointed — had someone pointed to the hillocks of Deoghar and said, 'Look, there stand the Himalayas!' However, I had hardly known him for a couple of days when I realized that there was no meanness and dross of the earth in Aurobindo's heart. His laughter was simple as a child's, as liquid and gentle. Though an inflexible will showed at the corners of his lips, there was only the longing, rare even among gods, of sacrificing himself for the relief of human suffering; there was not the slightest trace in his heart of any worldly ambition or the common human selfishness. 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

1. It was of recent origin. "I also had a mild attack of smallpox in Baroda," Sri Aurobindo said. "It was given to me by a Bombay judge who had come to Baroda. Nobody knew that he had smallpox and in Baroda at that time there was no such illness. The judge prepared some mango drink and asked me to take it and transferred his smallpox too. The Maharaja asked me to go to Mussouri but the illness prevented me. When I got cured, I went there but the Maharaja sent me quickly away."

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night, and the more I came to be acquainted with his heart, the more I realized that Aurobindo was not of this earth — Aurobindo was a god fallen by some curse from his heavenly abode. God alone can say why he had exiled him as a Bengali to this accursed land of India.... But what struck me as most amazing was that his noble humane 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." Luxury! Sri Aurobindo?

"Aurobindo never cared for money. When I was at Baroda, he was getting a pretty fat salary [Rs.300]. He was alone, he knew no luxury, nor did he misspend a single paisa, yet at the end of the month he didn't have a shot in the locker.... The first thing he did upon receiving his salary was to send money to his mother and sister for their expenses. His sister was then living with the Aghor family at Bankipore for her studies. Occasionally, at other times also, I have seen him send money to them.

"One day, incidentally, during a conversation I said to him, 'I see that only you send a monthly allowance to your mother and sister, but your two elder brothers also earn a big amount of money, don't they send any allowance to them ?' To which Aurobindo said, "Dada is in Coochbehar State service so he has to maintain a certain standard of living. As for Mejda, he is newly married, and he thinks that marriage is an 'expensive luxury'!"

Throughout his life Sri Aurobindo never formed an attachment to money or wealth. But as life began to unfold

before him, what money and wealth represented also came to be unfolded.

But at present let us proceed with D. K. Roy's narrative. He noticed that the young man was very fond of his sister and cousins and regularly sent them money and would write them letters, but seldom wrote to his brothers. As a rule, however, "he was not much in the habit of writing letters, and he rarely completed a letter in one day. He would write ten lines or twenty on a small-sized Gray-Granite paper and leave them aside. Afterwards when he remembered or had the time he would complete the letter and post it. Some never reached the post-office, but remained buried in a notebook. Aurobindo used to say the less one reveals about oneself the better." D. K. Roy wondered, "Perhaps that is why he spoke so little." But laughed a lot. For A. Ghose was a man of few words but of uproarious laughter.

"He never favoured dressing himself up, he was unacquainted with luxury. I never saw him change his ordinary clothes even while going to the royal court. I never saw him use a hat. He used what is locally known as 'Pirali topee'." Or, as Sri Aurobindo described it: 'Palleri cap'; and admitted that "at times I used to put on Marathi dress."

"His bed was quite ordinary and simple as his dress," observed D. K. Roy. "The iron bedstead on which he slept was such that even a petty clerk would have disdained to sleep on it! He was not used to thick and soft bedding. Baroda being near a desert, both summer and winter are severe there; but even in the cold of January, I never saw Aurobindo use a quilt



Manmohan with his two daughters: Mrinalini (standing) and Lotika (seated)

— a cheap, ordinary rug did duty for it. A plain blue woolen wrapper was his winter wear. As long as I lived with him, he appeared to me as nothing but a self-denying sannyasin, 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 tapasya even in the midst of the din and bustle of an active worldly life."

D. K. Roy became familiar with some of Sri Aurobindo's habits of the time. "I have never known such an extraordinary fondness for reading as Aurobindo's." Carton-loads of books! D. K. Roy used to order for him many Bengali books from the Gurudas Library of Calcutta: "He liked most of the titles published by the Basumati Press." But Sri Aurobindo's main supply of books came from Bombay's two big booksellers: Atma-ram Radhabai Saggon and Thacker Spink & Co. "He seldom received books by book post; they came by railway parcel in great big packing boxes. Sometimes the parcels came twice or thrice in the course of a month." Exclaimed Roy, "He would finish all those books in eight or ten days and place fresh orders. I have never seen such a voracious reader." However, in later years, Sri Aurobindo remarked, "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...."

Sri Aurobindo was a fast reader, and also he read with deep concentration. C. C. Dutt narrates an incident that occurred in 1906-7 when Sri Aurobindo was the Principal of the just

established National College at Calcutta. "Once after returning from College, Sri Aurobindo picked up a novel that was lying near where he sat and began to read it, while we were noisily engaged in a game of poker or chess. After half an hour he put down the book —of nearly a hundred pages —and took up a cup of tea. That day we were lying in wait as he often used to do this. As soon as he put down the book Subodh¹ picked it up and asked, 'Have you read it in full?' —'Yes.' —'From end to end? You have not skipped anything?' —'No, no, I have read it completely.' Subodh threw the book to me and said, 'Test him *viva voce*, brother.' I opened the book at random and read out a line from it. 'Now go on with the sequel, Sir Principal.' Aurobindo thought for a moment, and then repeated the contents of the whole page unhaltingly." Swami Vivekananda was endowed with the same ability.

"He read late into the night," D. K. Roy's narrative continued, "so would get up late [about 8A.M.]. He always kept on his person an open watch that cost about four to five rupees, and upon his work-table stood a timepiece. After his morning tea he would open his notebook of poetry. He was then translating from the Mahabharata. Although he did not understand Bengali that well, he understood very well the Sanskrit Ramayana and Mahabharata. He did not translate systematically, but would take up a legend or an episode from the Mahabharata and render it into English verse. He wrote in various

1. Raja Subodh Kumar Mullick, brother-in-law of C.C. Dutt, was also a revolutionary. We shall come across him a little later.

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metres." The Bengali man of letters was wonderstruck at Sri Aurobindo's "extraordinary mastery over English." And added, "He possessed an uncommon felicity of expression, and never misused a single word."

The remark about not understanding Bengali that well needs to be amended. For, did he not in August 1894, do a literary critique of Bankim and Michael Madhusudan Dutta in a series of articles in the *Induprakash!* Then again, Mano, almost immediately upon his return, in October 1894, wrote to Rabindranath: "Aurobindo is anxious to know what you think of his book of verses,¹ but I have explained to him how busy you are just now; and that you will write later when you have a little more leisure to do justice to his book.... I think, that he might do great things. Unfortunately he has directed (or rather misdirected) all his energies to writing Bengali poetry. He is at present engaged on an epic (inspired I believe by Michael Madhusudan) on the subject of Usha and Aniruddha." This legend is found in the Mahabharata.

Pictures rose in D. K. Roy's mind. "He wrote his poems first on the Gray-Granite writing pad; seldom did he cross out anything he had written. He would puff at his cigar and think awhile, then from his pen poetry would flow like the [celestial river] Mandakini. He was not a fast writer, true, but once he got started he did not rest his pen."

Sri Aurobindo never showed his annoyance even when his poetical flow was interrupted. Says Roy, "I never saw him

lose his temper." We may assume that Sri Aurobindo did not suffer fools gladly, but certainly he was long-suffering and, decades later, answered patiently all the myriad foolish questions the disciples put to him.

"Around ten in the morning Aurobindo would lay down his pen and go for his bath." Then plunge into his notebook again to review the poetry he had written hours earlier. "He would appear very cheerful" said D. K. Roy, "on the days he was pleased with his poetry. Now and then he would read it out to me. To make me understand whether or not his translation was faithful to the original he sometimes read aloud from the original Ramayana or the Mahabharata."

Then "lunch was served around eleven o'clock. He read the newspapers during his lunch." And the cigar would be by his side even at mealtimes.

We shall take up again the subject of food.

What does come through in the recital of Dinendra K. Roy is the great admiration his junior evoked in him. It is the picture of a gentleman that Roy paints. It was beneath the dignity of A. Ghose's soul to stoop to react to the small ills of life. The armour of his soul was so complete that it was proof not only against the great ills of life but even against the small ones. Sri Aurobindo was a gentleman *par excellence*. In 1926, in one moment, he gave up his decades-old habit of cigar-smoking when he saw that it was discommoding Mother.¹

1. Reminds us of an anecdote noted by Nirod (16.1.39). Mother came in with a telegram, garbled it seems, which wanted Sri Aurobindo to send ashes for somebody's marriage. After some badinage Sri Aurobindo remarked, "If I had not given up smoking, I could have given some cigar ash."

D. K. Roy gives an illustration. After staying at Khaserao's house at Dandia Bazar, the two Bengalis had removed to lodgings in the centre of the town at Mir Bakarali's wada, also a two-storeyed building. Then when the plague began raging they went to live at a place on Baroda's

outskirts called Killedar's wada. The spacious grounds enclosed a handsome building, with an orchard at one end and a flower-garden at the other. "Bands of monkeys and squirrels made the big trees their clubhouses." There were also some sandalwood trees. In front was a large open meadow. A wide road ran along the northern side. The two men were given a large cottage, rather in a neglected state of repair, which was at the bottom of the flower-garden, and roofed with pantile ! "Those who have never lived under a pantile shed will never understand what one has to endure during summer or during winter I" The summer's heat would make the pantiles fiery hot. so much so that Roy would wet a towel and wrap it around him 1 Winter brought another problem. So cold, so cold that it almost congealed the blood in one's chest. "But come winter, come summer, I never saw Aurobindo pulled down."

Then there were flies and mosquitoes. "At night I used to think that the mosquitoes would drag me out to the field and finish me off!" When it rained, it rained right inside the room, through the unrepaired pantile roof. "Aurobindo would sit at his table and read in the light of a 'Jewel lamp' till one in the morning," marvelled D. K. Roy, "unmindful of the intolerable mosquito bites. I saw him seated there in the same posture for hours on end, his eyes fixed on the book he was reading, like

a Yogi plunged in contemplation and oblivious of all outside happenings. Even if the house had caught fire he would probably have remained unaware!"

Warm was the assessment of Dinendra Kumar Roy. "Aurobindo was always indifferent to pleasure and pain, prosperity and adversity, praise and blame." Sri Aurobindo's point was, "How can the flatteries of some selfish and ignorant men bring one joy?" Quips D. K. Roy, "Even the unstinted praise of the learned failed to make Aurobindo glow with happiness."

Romesh Chandra Dutt¹ visited Baroda towards the end of 1899, at the invitation of the Maharaja. "He had just returned from England," recounts Roy, "where his abbreviated English translations in verse of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata had then been published [in Everyman's Library] and had received a very favourable press. Hearing about Aurobindo's partial renderings of the two epics he asked to see them." The young author showed them shyly, with reluctance almost. The older man was so enchanted that he said, "After reading these translations of yours I feel sorry when I think of my fruitless toil in translating the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Had I

but seen your translations before, I certainly would not have published mine. I now feel that mine have been but child's play." D. K. Roy added with astonishment, "Even this full-hearted praise from an erudite person left Aurobindo unmoved."

I. R. C. Dutt (1848-1909) was an I.C.S., a novelist and historian, whom we shall meet again later. In 1904 he joined the Baroda State as its Finance Minister, to become the State's Dewan.

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It is with a sense of wonder and gratitude that Dinendra Kumar says, "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

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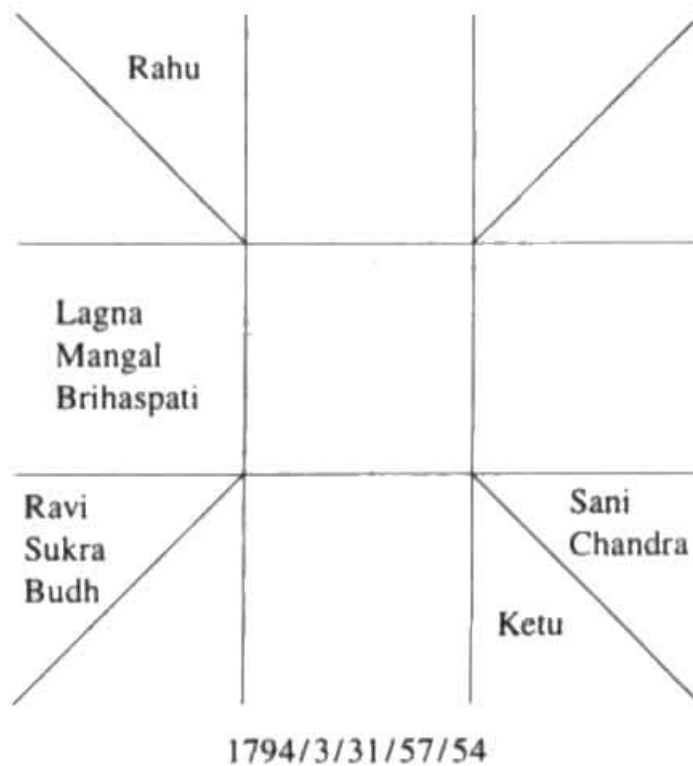
Astrology

"Aurobindo had a profound faith in astrology," averred D. K. Roy. "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.¹ ... When I met him afterwards, Sri Bhattacharya told me, 'Your pupil is an extraordinary man. Although he stands high in the Maharaja's favour, there is a lot of hardship and suffering in store for him. He is not destined to enjoy much of worldly life.'" D. K. Roy was a bit sceptic of this forecast. Hardship? thought Roy, why, is he not enjoying perfect health, and earning a good salary! "Besides, Aurobindo was just then becoming eager to get married, so what's this about not enjoying much of worldly life?"

About one year after his marriage, Sri Aurobindo wrote (2 July 1902) to his wife Mrinalini Devi confirming his faith in

1. See this horoscope on the following page.

astrology. "Forgot to write one word in the letter. You said you have got a horoscope ; send it to me. Jotin Banerjee is here and I wish to show it to him. I have faith in astrology— ten years' experience confirmed. But also amongst a thousand, nine hundred know nothing about it. A few know but most make mistakes, e.g. non-performance of the coronation ceremony of the English King this year was declared several months ago —the causes even. If there be evil consequences then there are means of knowing them beforehand —as they can be cured often. If your horoscope can't be found, the exact time of birth will do, but it must be correct to the minute."



Lagna [ascendant] in *karkata* [cancer]; *lagnapati* [lord of the ascendant], the Moon, is in the sixth (= enemy)

[Mangal = Mars; Brihaspati = Jupiter; Ravi = Sun; Sukra = Venus;

Budh = Mercury; Sani = Saturn; Chandra = Moon]

Many of us have heard of world-renowned astrologers and their striking prophecies. Cheiro prophesied that Crown Prince Edward, son of George V, would lose the throne because of a

woman. Then there was Cagliostro, "a mystic freemason with great prophetic power," said Sri Aurobindo, "who prophesied about the French Revolution, the taking of the Bastille and the guillotining of the King and Queen." And who has not heard of Nostradamus? "He wrote a book of prophecy in an obscure language," said Sri Aurobindo to his disciples who did not seem to have heard of Nostradamus, "and foretold, among other things, the execution of Charles I, the establishment of the British Empire and the lasting of the Empire for 330 years (to be counted from James I)." It so happened that Mother had seen the old Book of Nostradamus in the original form and she said that "anything could be made out of anything from it."

As a rule, people notice only the prophecies that come true and ignore most of those that don't. So what is the actual truth of astrology? In an article written in 1917, Sri Aurobindo dealt with the subject. "This at present depends upon the experience of isolated individuals, a very unsatisfactory basis. But if this experience could be collected, sifted and published, I believe it would be found that a formidable *prima facie* case exists in favour of astrology." He then illustrated this point. "I may state my own experience in the matter in the belief, justified by many instances, that it is only typical of the experience of hundreds of others. My first accidental contact with an Indian astrologer was not encouraging. This gentleman was

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the most accomplished thought-reader I have ever seen; for he asked me to think my question without speaking it and not only successfully named the unspoken question I had fixed on, but three others which had crossed my mind, one of them only in the merest flash and without leaving any impression behind: this he pretended to do by mathematical calculation, an operation which I took leave to regard as humbug or professional parade. For when it came to his answers, I found that he was still doing thought-reading and not astrology; he simply echoed the hopes or thoughts in my mind and his predictions did not come within one hundred miles of the truth." This remarkable experience occurred at Baroda. It was Sri Aurobindo's house-manager Chhotalal who had taken him to this thought-reader.

"Other practitioners," went on Sri Aurobindo, "I have found to belong, a few plainly to the class of mere flattering charlatans, but most to the inefficient who read by rule of thumb and have made no profound study of their science." It was perhaps to this type of practitioners that Sri Aurobindo referred to when he said, "Astrologers tell all sorts of things that don't come true." To a disciple who referred to Sri Aurobindo's arrival at Pondicherry as 'the birthday of Pondicherry

and of the Earth,' Sri Aurobindo wrote back saying, "Pondicherry was born long ago —but if X means the rebirth, it may be, for it was absolutely dead when I came. I don't know that there is a horoscope of the Earth. There was nobody present to note the year, day, hour, minute when she came into existence. But some astrologer," he suggested with gentle irony, in May 1936, "could take the position of the stars at the

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moment when I got out of the boat and build up the terrestrial consequences upon that perhaps I Unfortunately he would probably get everything wrong, like the astrologer who predicted that I would leave Pondicherry in March 1936 and wander about India till 1948 and disappear while bathing in a river among my disciples. I believe he predicted it on the strength of Bhrigu Samhita — the old dodge; but I am not sure. Long ago I had a splendiferous Mussolinic-Napoleonic prediction of my future made to me on the strength of the same old mythological Bhrigu."

Apart from readings, the *Bhrighu-jyotish* (astrology of Bhrigu) also makes predictions by studying the pattern of the lines of the thumbs, and as no two patterns are alike it indicates the individuality of the person. But, as said Sri Aurobindo, "I showed my hand twice or thrice but the readings about the future didn't come true."

Another type of forecasts are made by shadow-astrologers who, by measuring the shadow of a person and then correlating the signs, are able to tell one's past and predict one's future with exactitude.

But there are astrologers and astrologers. "On the other hand," continued Sri Aurobindo's text of 1917, "with capable astrologers the results have been often of such a remarkable accuracy as to put quite aside any possibility of chance hit, mere coincidence, intelligent prevision or any of the current explanations. I may instance the father of a friend of mine, a deep student of the science but not a professional, who predicted accurately the exact year, month, day, hour and

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even minute of his own death." The case in point was that of Khaserao Jadhav's father.

"The Mother told me of a French astrologer whose prediction of the future came out true." Sri Aurobindo recounted this in 1940 on Mother's birthday. "He predicted that a particular man would die of sea water. He gave the date, even the time. His people took him away from the sea, and on the day the accident was to take place they were dining together. Someone remarked ironically: 'Where is the astrologer's prophecy now ? The time he gave is passing away and there is no sea here!' Just at that moment the man who was eating a sea fish got a fishbone stuck in his throat and at once died. The hour was exactly the one mentioned by the astrologer."

Champaklal ejaculated, "It was fated that he should die."

Sri Aurobindo replied, "In this case it was." "If one is destined to die," opined Dr. Manila], "one can't escape."

"There is no fixed destiny always," countered Sri Aurobindo, "destiny can be changed. And there are many destinies." In other words, there is no inevitability about the various fate-possibilities. "Destiny does not mean that a thing is fixed. It is just a sum of forces that can be changed." For instance "by entering the spiritual life one opens to a new force which can change one's destiny."

Sri Aurobindo cited another example of accurate prediction, this time from History. "There are instances in which the exact hour and minute has been predicted," he said.

"Did I tell you the story of Louis XI and his astrologer ? He was invited by Charles of Burgundy." Louis XI (1423-83) was King of France (1461-83); Charles, the Duke of Burgundy, is commonly known as Charles the Bold (1433-77). "Louis consulted his astrologer whether he should go or not. The astrologer said, 'It is quite safe, you can go.' And Louis was imprisoned! From the prison Louis arranged to have his astrologer murdered. But the astrologer came to know of the plot from the hangman. The plot was that when the astrologer would go away after seeing the king in the prison, the king would say, 'Peace be with you, peace be with you,' which would be the signal to kill him. So when the astrologer came the king asked him, 'By the way, do you know the hour of your death?' He replied, 'Exactly twenty-four hours before your death.' The king got the fright of his life and accompanied him all along the way to see that he might be quite safe. But it turned out later on that the king died actually twenty-four hours after the astrologer."

"In my own case," Sri Aurobindo's article went on, "accuracy was hampered by the inability to fix the precise moment of my birth; still some of the results were extraordinary. Two may be mentioned, from one and the same astrologer, which related to my public career. One, given when I had not yet plunged into the political vortex and my then obscure personality was quite unknown to the astrologer, predicted as an inevitable certitude of the future a political struggle with powerful non-Indian adversaries during which for a time even my life would fall under the shadow of danger. The other, given at the time

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of my first prosecution in the *Bande Mataram* case, predicted three successive criminal trials in each of which the prosecution would fail." This was Narayan Jyotishi, "a Calcutta astrologer, who predicted, not knowing then who I was, in the days before my name was politically known, my struggle with Mlechchha enemies and afterwards the three cases against me and my three acquittals." Sri Aurobindo was taken to Narayan Jyotishi by Jatin Banerjee. "When my horoscope was shown to him, he said there was some mistake about the time of my birth. When it was corrected, he remarked, 'Ah, the lead is turned into gold now.'" He "predicted also that though death was prefixed for me in my horoscope at the age of 63, I would prolong my life by Yogic power for a very long period and arrive at a full old age." Sri Aurobindo did exactly that.

Sri Aurobindo mentioned that plenty of people can prophesy and that that capacity is very common among Yogis. "When I was arrested," said Sri Aurobindo, "my maternal grand-aunt asked Vishuddhananda, 'What will happen to our Auro?' He replied, 'The Divine Mother has taken him in her arms: nothing will happen to him. But he is not *your* Aurobindo, he is the world's Aurobindo and the world will be filled with his perfume."

Sri Aurobindo gave an example of a different type of prediction. "I may instance also two predictions by the book in which Slokas from Sanskrit astrological writings indicating the result of certain conjunctions or planetary positions were shown to be applicable to my horoscope. One foretold specific chronic illnesses for the body of which there was no sign at the

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time, but long afterwards they put in their unexpected appearance and persisted." Giving an example, he said, "I was suffering from some intermittent fever in the North for a long time. It continued here also. In the course of the fever someone above or something within me said, 'No more fever.' Something in my being accepted the suggestion and there was no fever !"

There was the second prediction. "Another indicated very precisely that one of my future activities would be to found a new spiritual philosophy and its discipline; at that time I had no knowledge of philosophy or Yoga and no turn or inclination in my mind which could make the realisation of this prediction at all probable. These are only the most precise examples out of a number."

However, Sri Aurobindo did not find it completely true that man's life is governed by the stars. "Astrology?" he wrote to a disciple. "Many astrological predictions come true, quite a mass of them, if one takes all together. But it does not follow that the stars rule 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 indicators.... 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." He was, it would seem, referring to his own case! "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."

In their turn both Sri Aurobindo and Mother made predictions. Some results are still hidden in the future, to be proven by Time. For Time is the great uncertain factor in the revelation of

prophecies. For instance, at the beginning of our own century Mother made a prediction that "Italy and England would go underwater." Over the decades she reiterated that the island of Great Britain was destined to sink underwater. Interestingly, English experts found in the seventies that London was becoming "more vulnerable to floods owing to the fact that England is slowly tilting over." I suppose we shall have to wait to see it happen!

But we need not wait at all to see another of their predictions that came true. It was one day in 1920 when Mother was meditating with Sri Aurobindo. They were seated facing each other across a table. Deep in meditation "I went to a place," Mother told us in 1953, "or reached a state of consciousness

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from where I told Sri Aurobindo, just like that, very simply, 'India is free.' He then asked me 'How?' And I replied, 'Without fight, without battle, without revolution: the English will go away by themselves, because the world condition will be such that they will have no choice but to go away.' Mother had seen India's freedom as a *fact* in 1920. For it to become a fact in the physical realm it took another twenty-seven years.

Sri Aurobindo too had forecast India's freedom from colonial rule in 1909. He had even given an assurance about it to A. B. Purani in 1918. And, of course, in 1935 he wrote in reply to a question that the question of India's freedom "is all settled. It is a question of working out only." But the great question was: "What is India going to do with her Independence? The above kind of affair?¹ Bolshevism? Goonda-raj? Things look ominous."

1. Nirod had written about "the atrocities committed by some Mohamedans on Hindu families in Bengal."

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Nineteen Hundred

Looking back on the century gone by, Sri Aurobindo said, "The nineteenth century in Europe was a pre-eminently human era —now the vital world seems to be descending there." The

invasion of the Vital caused the rout of the Intellect. "The setback to the human mind in Europe is amazing," reflected Sri Aurobindo in January 1939. "We had thought during the last years of the nineteenth century that the human mind had attained a certain level of intelligence and that it would have to be satisfied before any new idea could find acceptance. But it seems one can't rely on common sense to stand the strain. We find Nazi ideas being accepted; fifty years back it would have been impossible to predict their acceptance.... These Nazi ideas are infrarational."

The world was throwing up its blackest darkness —crookedness and corruption, cruelty and greed —smearing and permeating man's consciousness. "From one point of view," remarked Sri Aurobindo in December 1938, "there never was a time when humanity had come down so low as it has now. It looks as if a small number of violent men were the arbiters of

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humanity and the rest of the world ready to bow down before one man."

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At the turn of the century Sri Aurobindo jotted down in his diary: "The last century of the second millennium after Christ has begun; of the twenty centuries it seems the most full of incalculable possibilities and to open the widest door on destiny. The mind of humanity feels it is conscious of a voice of a distant advancing Ocean and a sound as of the wings of a mighty archangel flying towards the world, but whether to empty the vials of the wrath of God or to declare a new gospel of peace upon earth and goodwill unto men, is as yet dark to our understanding."

Soon it would no longer be dark to *his* understanding.

The first two decades of the twentieth century were to witness great human adventures, many natural calamities, and giant strides made by Science. This was the time when Amundsen reached the South Pole soon after Peary had conquered the North, when the Trans-Siberian railroad and the Panama Canal were completed. The solid Newtonian universe was shaken to its foundations by the theory of Relativity and quantum physics, while the Chinese and Soviet revolutions and the First World War showed how the road to peace was still long. The Earth seemed to agree: from the eruption of Mount Pelée to the California and Messina earthquakes, it kept reminding man that he is but 'a dwarf enamoured of the heights.'

This was a memorable time for India too, for the renaissance of the nineteenth century was now bearing its fruit. With the partition of Bengal acting as a catalyst, the first great awakening of Indian masses shook the mighty British Empire.

In September 1909, in an interview with the correspondent of a Tamil nationalist weekly, *India*, Sri Aurobindo made the following prophecy. "Since 1907, we are living in a new era which is full of hope for India. Not only India, but the whole world will see sudden upheavals and revolutionary changes. The high will become low and the low high. The oppressed and the depressed shall be elevated. The nation and humanity will be animated by a new consciousness, new thought and new efforts will be made to reach new ends. Amidst these revolutionary changes, India will become free."

Ambalal B. Purani was a Gujarati and a revolutionary. In December 1918 he came to meet Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry to inform him that after eleven years' preparation his group was "now ready to start revolutionary activity." Sri Aurobindo told him that it may not be necessary to resort to revolutionary activity to free India, as "India has already decided to win

freedom....." Purani still said, "I feel intensely that I must do something for the freedom of India. I have been unable to sleep soundly for the last two years and a half." He wanted an assurance. Sri Aurobindo gave it in a serious tone : "Then, I give you the assurance that India will be free." But even this assurance from Sri Aurobindo did not completely dispel Purani's doubts. "Are you quite sure that India will be free?" Purani wanted a guarantee.

"Sri Aurobindo became very serious," describes Purani. "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, '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.'" So Purani bowed down to Sri Aurobindo and left. "That day I was able to sleep soundly in the train after more than two years. And 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 power in it to shake the world, that firm fist planted on the table....."

So that was that. India's freedom was a certainty. But what role was to be assigned to her in the assembly of nations ?

In a 1915 interview to a correspondent of *The Hindu* Sri Aurobindo envisioned for India a great destiny, "a large place in the human future" as he put it. For, said he, "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." Was he not thinking of the Veda in which he was then engrossed ? Did not the Rishis say some five or seven millennia ago, "Weave an inviolate work, become the human being, create the divine race... ?

That there was an urgent need of change in humanity was coming into sharp focus. "It is in these directions," he told

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The Hindu's correspondent, "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." Sri Aurobindo believed in the necessity of Tapasya in silence.

He was sure that "India, if it chooses, can guide the world." But what was India going to choose? What was the world going to choose? These were the crucial questions that confronted him. In his letters to Mother in 1915, he confided to her his forebodings.

"The whole earth is now under one law and answers to the same vibrations.... 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." (6 May 1915)

What promise did 'the beyond' hold for the world?

"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 May 1915)

"Everything 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 of the physical world, that 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

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and sees that it is only a protracted episode." (28 July 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 September 1915)

At any rate, that the twentieth century was not going to be an ordinary century came out strongly in his writings. "The present era of the world" stated Sri Aurobindo in the *Arya* (July 1916), "is a stage of immense transformations. It may even be said that the future of humanity depends most upon the answer that will be given to the modern riddle of the Sphinx by the East and especially by India, the hoary guardian of the Asiatic ideal and its profound spiritual secrets. For the most vital issue of the age is whether the future progress of humanity is to be governed by the modern economic and materialistic mind of the West or by a nobler pragmatism guided, uplifted and enlightened by spiritual culture and knowledge."

Sri Aurobindo wrote a message at the request of Annie Besant for National Education Week (*New India*, 8 April 1918). We quote a passage from it: "This is an hour in which, for India as well as for all the world, its future destiny and the turn of its steps for a century are being powerfully decided, and for no ordinary century, but one which is itself a great

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turning-point, an immense turn-over in the inner and outer history of mankind."

The limitation, even the certain failure of all human systems was not hidden from Sri Aurobindo's sight. "No system, indeed," he wrote in 1920 in *War and Self-Determination*, "by its own force can bring about the change that humanity really needs; for that can only come by its growth into the firmly realised possibilities of its own higher nature, and this growth depends on an inner and not an outer change. But outer changes may at least prepare favourable conditions for that more real amelioration,—or on the contrary they may lead to such conditions that the sword of Kalki can alone purify the earth from the burden of an obstinately Asuric humanity. The choice lies with the race itself; for as it sows, so shall it reap the fruit of its Karma."

Let us hark back to 1910-11, for it was certainly from then on that his penetrating gaze had divined the burden imposed on the earth by 'an obstinately Asuric humanity' on the one side, and on the other, his eye of knowledge had looked beyond and seen the New World that was being created. "So much depends on Time and God's immediate purpose that it is more important to seek out His purpose than to attach ourselves to our own nostrums. The Kala Purusha, Zeitgeist and Death-Spirit, has risen to his dreadful work—*lokaksayakrt pravreddhah*, increasing to destroy a world—and who shall stay the terror and mightiness and irresistibility of Him? But He is not only destroying the world that was, He is creating the world that shall be; it is therefore more profitable for us to discover and help what He is

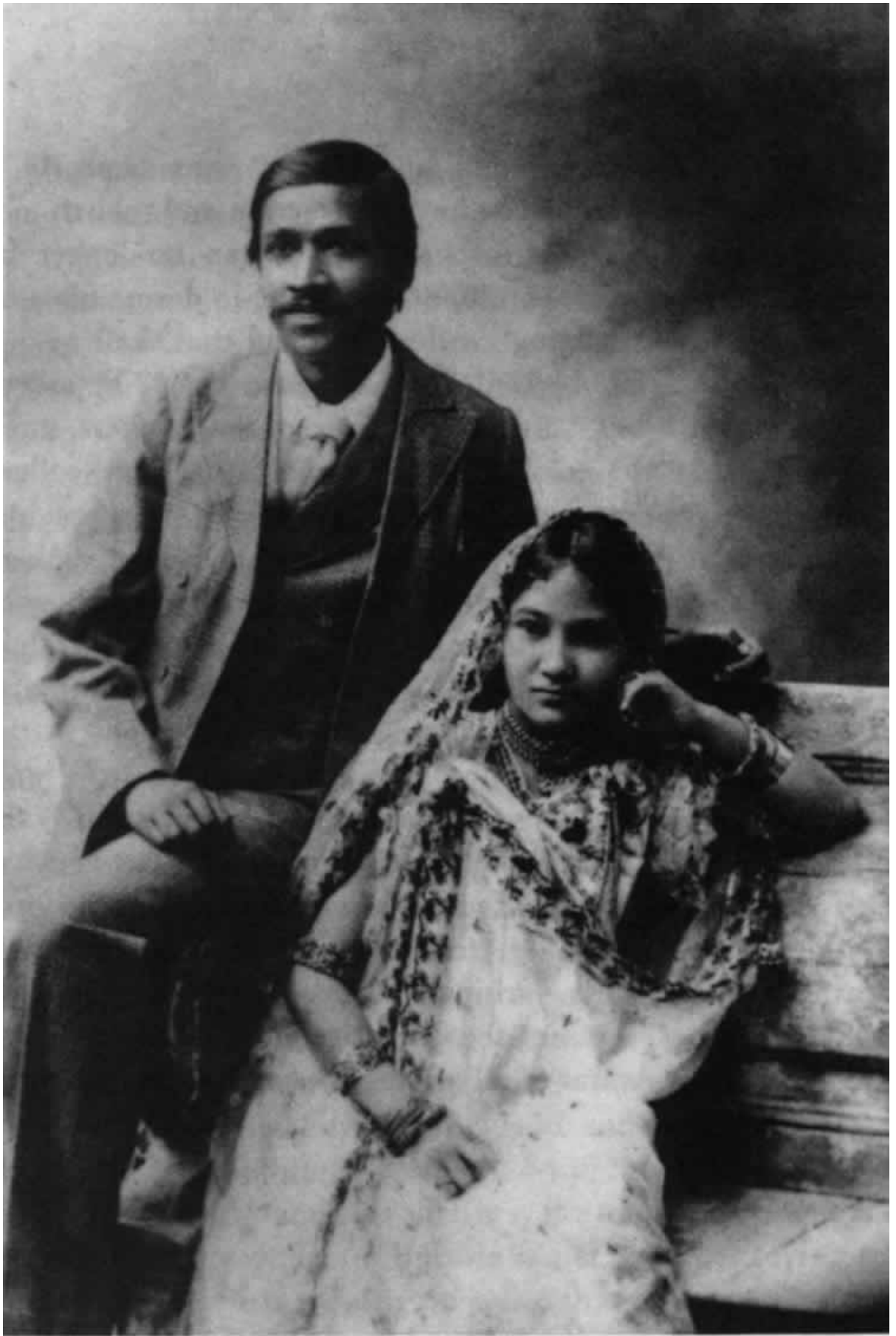
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building than to lament and hug in our arms what He is destroying.... Kali is the age for a destruction and rebirth, not for a desperate clinging to the old that can no longer be saved." Henceforth Sri Aurobindo was going to devote his time to discovering and helping create 'the world that shall be.'

"Has the time arrived for that destruction?" he asked. "We think that it has. Listen to the crash of those waters, more formidable than the noise of assault,—mark that slow, sullen, remorseless sapping,—watch pile after pile of our patched incoherent ramshackle structure corroding, creaking, shaking with the blows, breaking, sinking silently or with a splash, suddenly or little by little into the yeast of those billows." Today, at the end of the twentieth century, the uprooted

flotsam and jetsam of the old world is floating in broad daylight in the great churning Ocean of Time.

"Has the time arrived for a new construction?" Sri Aurobindo asked again. "We say it has. Mark the activity, eagerness and hurrying to and fro of mankind, the rapid prospecting, seeking, digging, founding,—see the Avatars and great *vibhūtis* coming, arising thickly, treading each close behind the other. Are not these the signs and do they not tell us that the great Avatar of all arrives to establish the first Satya Yuga of the Kali?"



Sri Aurobindo and Mrinalini at Nainital

Lotus and Lotus

Dinendra Kumar Roy remarked that in 1900 "Aurobindo was eager to get married." In fact, Sri Aurobindo advertised in Calcutta newspapers for a bride. He was twenty-nine years old and he selected a girl of fourteen for his bride. Her name was Mrinalini Bose. Curiously enough 'Mrinalini' and 'Aurobindo' both mean 'Lotus.' Now olden Hindu traditions say that a wife is the partner in her husband's spiritual life, and helper in the execution of his chosen Dharma. They are companions who walk the same road in life. There is a fullness of sharing between them. Remarkably this couple shared even their names! Aurobindo and Mrinalini. LOTUS and LOTUS.

They were married on 30 April 1901.

Mrinalini Ghose's brother Sisir Bose and their father Bhupal Chandra Bose recorded statements concerning Mrinalini and her marriage.

From Ranchi, Bihar, Sisir Bose wrote to a relation of his. That was on 25 November 1941.

"1. Sri Arabindo¹ advertised in newspapers for a bride.

1. The Reader will come across at least half a dozen, if not a dozen, different ways of spelling Sri Aurobindo's name. We present them as we found them. The same applies to a few other Indian names too.

My father's lifelong friend late Principal Girish Ch. Bose of Bangabasi College negotiated the marriage. Sri Arabindo saw my sister in Girish Babu's house personally and selected his bride.

"2. Marriage ceremony was performed according to strict Hindu rites. Sri Arabindo being a Brahmo and my sister being the daughter of an England-returned Hindu, both of them had to be purified by Prayaschitya before marriage. My uncle gave away the bride.

"3. Principal guests at the marriage were late Lord Sinha, Byomkesh Chakravarty, Principal G. C. Bose, late J. C. Bose and others.

"4. Location of the marriage—in a rented house in Baithak-Khana Road, Calcutta."

"5. Date of marriage of Sri Arabindo 16th Baisakh 1308. My sister at the time of her marriage had just completed her fourteenth year. Sister's birthday was 6th March 1887.

"6. Soon after marriage Sri Arabindo returned to Baroda with his wife via Deoghur and Nainital. The popular photograph in which Sri Arabindo is seen with his wife was taken at Nainital."

From Nainital Sri Aurobindo dropped a postcard to one Bhuvan Chakrabarty.

"Dear Bhuvan Babu, I have been here at Naini Tal 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

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on the 24th,—if there has been rain at Baroda, but as he will stop at Agra, Mathura and Mhow he will not reach Baroda before the beginning of July. I shall probably be going separately and may also reach on the 1st of July. If you like, you might go there a little before and put up with Deshpande. I have asked Madhavrao to get my new house furnished but I don't know what he is doing in that direction.

Yours sincerely,
Aurobindo Ghose"

The Kumaon hills cradle Nainital. It is a picturesque spot with a natural lake where seven peaks see their reflections in its water. *Tal* means lake in local dialect. The lake itself, according to a legend, was formed when one of Sati's emerald-green eyes fell to the ground while Lord Shiva was carrying her dead body. Knowing Sri Aurobindo's love for long walks I wondered whether our party went afield for treks. Did they go to Bhimtal which is twenty-two kilometres from Nainital? Bhimtal is a 260-metre long lake. And just four kilometres away is Nao-kuchia lake. 'Nao-kuchia' to the locals means nine-sided. They say that if someone standing on one of its sides is able to see the other eight, then that person is sure to achieve worldwide fame. Did Sri

Aurobindo? Who knows! But there is a legend attached to this lake and people hold Naokuchia lake in great esteem: nobody has ever drowned in this lake, not even children or women who could not swim. Sinking in the water of the lake they would find themselves back on land they knew not how. Local people say that the Spirit of the Lake

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always returns to the Earth what belongs to her.

From Bhupal Chandra Bose —a graduate from the Calcutta University, a State Agricultural Officer, and co-founder with Girish C. Bose of the Bangabasi College —we have a simple biography of his eldest child. This statement was also made from Ranchi, but ten years earlier than his son's, on 26 August 1931.

"Her father and mother both belong to the Jessore district. The ancestral home of the Basu family is situated in a village named Maherpore on the left bank of the Kapadaka river, 24 miles to the south of the district town of Jessore

"Mrinalini spent her early childhood in Calcutta. She was at first educated under a private teacher, and soon after her father's transfer to Shillong, she was sent down to Calcutta and lived as a boarder for nearly three years at the Brahma Girls' School until the time of her marriage in April 1901. She evinced no exceptional abilities or tendencies at this age, indeed at no stage of her life.

"There was nothing remarkable about her short school career. She however contracted two notable friendships during this time. One of the two was Miss Swarnalata Das, M. A.... Mrinalini's second friend was Miss Sudhira Bose , a classmate of hers with whom she lived in closest intimacy till the day of her death. Sudhira was a younger sister of late Debabrata Bose, an associate of Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Bomb Case, who after his acquittal at the trial , turned a Sannyasin¹ and joined

1. Taking the name of Swami Prajnananda.

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the Ramakrishna Mission. Miss Sudhira too joined the same Mission and worked as a teacher of the Sister Nivedita School, of which, after Sister Christine left for America shortly before the war, she became the head. Sudhira too was not destined to live long. She fell a victim to a sad railway accident at Benares in December 1920, thus surviving her friend by exactly two years.

"Mrinalini, though she was surrounded by Brahmo friends and was a boarder in a Brahmo School never evinced any special interest in the Brahmo movement nor in any of the reforms associated with that movement. The whole religious bent of the later years of her life was in the direction of the Hindu revival movement inspired by Paramhansa Ramakrishna and his great disciple Swami Vivekananda.

"There was no relationship, nor even acquaintance between the Boses and the Ghose family, except that Mrinalini's father once came in contact with Sri Aurobindo's father, Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose, while he was stationed as Civil Surgeon at Khulna. It must have been about the year 1890.....

"Sri Aurobindo first met Mrinalini at the house of her uncle S. J. Girish Chandra Bose in Calcutta in the course of his search for a mate to share his life, and chose her at first sight as his destined wife. Their marriage took place shortly afterwards in April 1901. It is not possible for the writer or for anybody else to say what psychical affinity existed between the two, but certain it is that as soon as he saw the girl, he made up his mind to marry her. The customary negotiations were carried on by Girish Babu on the bride's side.....

"The writer knows next to nothing about the married life of the couple at Baroda. After Sri Aurobindo came to Bengal and during the stormy years that followed, Mrinalini had little or no opportunity of living a householder's life in the quiet company of her husband. Her life during this period was one of continuous strain and suffering which she bore with the utmost patience and quietude. She spent the greater period of the time either with Sri Aurobindo's maternal relatives at Deoghar or with her parents at Shillong. She was present with her husband at the time of his arrest at 48, Grey Street in May 1908 and received a frightful mental shock of which the writer and others saw a most painful evidence in the delirium of her last illness ten years later.

"The writer is unable to say from his own knowledge how far Mrinalini agreed with and helped her husband in his public activities, but he can say this much for certain that she never stood in the way of his work. She never evinced any aspiration for public work.....

"The writer cannot throw any light on the mutual relations between Mrinalini and her husband, except that they were characterised by a sincere though quiet affection on the side of the husband and a never questioning obedience from the wife. One can gather much in this respect from Sri Aurobindo's published letters. After Sri Aurobindo left Bengal, the two never met again, but all who knew her could see how deeply she was attached to her husband and how she longed to join him at Pondicherry. The fates however decreed it otherwise.....

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"There was no issue of the marriage. During Sri Aurobindo's trial at Alipore which lasted a full twelve months Mrinalini lived with her parents at Shillong or with her uncle Girish Babu in Calcutta. She paid several visits to her husband at Alipore Central Jail in the company of her father. She never evinced any visible agitation during those exciting times, but kept quiet and firm throughout.

"Sri Aurobindo disappeared from Calcutta at the end of February or beginning of March 1910. Mrinalini was living at the time in Calcutta. We did not know his whereabouts, until several weeks later it was announced in the papers that he had escaped to Pondicherry to get out of the reach of the British Courts....

"These long years of separation (1910-18) she spent with her parents at Shillong and Ranchi, paying occasional visits to Calcutta. She devoted these years almost exclusively to meditation and the reading of religious literatures which consisted for the most part of the writings of Swami Vivekananda and the teaching of his Great Master.

"The writer believes she perused all the published writings of the Swami and all the publications of the Udbodhan Office. Of these she has left behind an almost complete collection.

"Mrinalini often visited Sri Ma¹ (widow of Paramhansa Dev) at the Udbodhan Office in Bagbazar, who treated her with great affection, calling her Baup-Ma (the normal Bengali appellation for daughter-in-law) in consideration of the fact

that the Holy Mother regarded Sri Aurobindo as her son.

"Mrinalini desired at one time to receive *diksha* from one of the Sannyasins of the Ramakrishna Mission. Her father wrote to Sri Aurobindo for the necessary permission but the latter in reply advised her not to receive initiation from any one and he assured her that he would send her all the spiritual help she needed. She was content therefore to remain without any outward initiation.

"Mrinalini passed away in Calcutta in the 32nd year of her life on the 17th of December 1918, a victim of the fell scourge of influenza which swept over India in that dreaded year.

"There was nothing notable about her death. In fact but for the fate which united her for a part of her short life to one of the most remarkable and forceful personalities of the age, her life had nothing extraordinary about it.

"Nothing happens in the world without serving some purpose of the Divine Mother, and no doubt she came and lived to fulfil a Divine purpose which we may guess but can never know.

"For some time before she passed away, she had been selling her ornaments and giving away the proceeds in charity and what remained unsold, she left with her friend Miss Sudhira Bose, at the time Lady Superintendent of the Sister Nivedita School. Soon after her death Sudhira sold off the ornaments and the whole of the proceeds, some two thousand rupees was, with Sri Aurobindo's permission, made over to the Ramakrishna Mission and constituted into an endowment named

after Mrinalini, out of the interest of which a girl student is maintained at the Sister Nivedita School."

Contrary to Bhupal C. Bose's statement Sri Aurobindo had quite another understanding on the matter of his wife's *diksha* or initiation. "I did not take my wife for initiation to Saradeshwari Devi," he stated. "I was given to understand that she was taken there by Sudhira Bose,

Debabrata's 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."

Sri Aurobindo wrote a most touching letter to his father-in-law after the demise of his wife.

Pondicherry

19 February 1919

"My dear father-in-law,

"I have not written to you with regard to this fatal event in both our lives; words are useless in face of the feelings it has caused, if even they can ever express our deepest emotions. God has seen good to lay upon me the one sorrow that could still touch me to the centre. He knows better than ourselves what is best for each of us, and now that the first sense of the irreparable has passed, I can bow with submission to His divine purpose. The physical tie between us is, as you say, severed; but the tie of affection subsists for me. Where I have once loved, I do not cease from loving. Besides she who was the cause of it, still is near though not visible to our physical vision.

"It is needless to say much about matters of which you

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write in your letter. I approve of everything that you propose. Whatever Mrinalini would have desired, should be done, and I have no doubt this is what she would have approved of. I consent to the chudis [bangles] being kept by her mother; but I should be glad if you would send me two or three of her books, especially if there are any in which her name is written. I have only of her her letters and a photograph.

Aurobindo"

Even after Mrinalini Devi's death her family—sister and father —kept up a correspondence with Sri Aurobindo. Once Bhupal Bose even came to Pondicherry.¹ He was deeply moved by the loving care Mother took of him—just as though she were his daughter.

We conclude with a letter (27 April 1936) of Nirod's and Sri Aurobindo's answers that may shed some light on a point which some people seem to find 'puzzling.' .

Nirod: "Somebody writing the biography of Confucius in Bengali says: 'Why do the Dharmagurus marry, we can't understand. ...' He goes on: 'Sri Aurobindo, though not Dharmaguru, has done it too, and can be called *dharma pagal*.¹² Well, Sir?"

Sri Aurobindo: "Well, it is better to be *dharma pagal* than to be a sententious ass and pronounce on what one does not understand."

1. Moni (in *Smritikatha*) recalls that it was nine or ten years after his meeting B.C. Bose at Ranchi in 1921: that the latter came to Pondicherry, and then followed it up with more visits.

2. Mad about religion.

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Nirod, quoting the Bengali book: "If married life is an obstacle to spirituality, then they might as well not marry."

Sri Aurobindo: "No doubt. But then when they marry, there is not an omniscient ass like this biographer to tell them that they were going to be *dharma guru* or *dharma pagal* or in any way concerned with any other *dharma* than the biographer's."

Nirod: "So according to this biographer, all of you, except Christ, showed a lack of wisdom by marrying!... I touch upon a delicate subject, but it is a puzzle."

Sri Aurobindo: "Why delicate ? and why a puzzle ? Do you think that Buddha or Confucius or myself were born with a prevision that they or I would take to the spiritual life? So long as one is in the ordinary consciousness, one lives the ordinary life —when the awakening and the new consciousness come, one leaves it nothing puzzling in that."

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To Boromama

"c/o Rao Bahadur K. R. Jadhava
Near Municipal Office

15 August 1902

"My dear Boromama," wrote the nephew to his maternal uncle, Jogindranath Bose. So far we have heard others on 'Aurobindo' or 'Auro-dada.' This letter gives Sri Aurobindo's own view on his life as it then unfolded itself. It was his 30th birthday.

"My dear Boromama,

"I am sorry to hear from Sarojini that Mejdada has stopped sending mother's allowance and threatens to make the stoppage permanent unless you can improvise a companion to the Goddess of Purulia.¹ This is very characteristic of Mejdada ; it may even be described in one word as Manomaniac. Of course he thinks he is stopping your pension and that this will either

1. Manmohan's wife Malati. Manmohan was then posted at Purulia, in the district of Chota Nagpur.

bring you to reason or effectually punish you. But the main question is, 'What is to be done now?' Of course I can send Rs. 40 now and so long as I am alone it does not matter very much, but it will be rather a pull when Mrinalini comes back to Baroda. However even that could be managed well enough with some self-denial and an effective household management. But there is a tale of woe behind.

"Sarojini suggests that I might bring her [their mother Swarnalata] or have her brought to Baroda with my wife. I should have no objection, but is that feasible? In the first place will she agree to come to the other end of the world like that ? And if she does, will not the violent change and the shock of utterly unfamiliar surroundings, strange faces and an unintelligible tongue or rather two or three unintelligible tongues, have a prejudicial effect upon her mind? Sarojini and my wife found it intolerable enough to live under such circumstances for a long time; how would mother stand it ? This is what I am most afraid of. Men may cut themselves off from home and everything else and make their own atmosphere in strange places, but it is not easy for women and I am afraid it would be quite impossible for a woman in her mental condition. Apart from these objections it might be managed. Of course I could not give her a separate house, but she

might be assured that whenever a Boro Bou¹ came, she should have one to receive her in; I daresay that would satisfy her. In case however it does

1. Eldest son's wife. Benoybhusan, the eldest, was as yet unmarried; in case he married and brought his wife to his mother.

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not or the experiment should be judged too risky, I must go on sending Rs. 40 as long as I can."

Sri Aurobindo's concern for his mother is so touching! D. K. Roy was overwhelmed when he found out "the deep loving regard in which Aurobindo held his mother. Frequently he would say with a smile 'I am the mad son of a mad mother!'"

"But there comes the tale of woe I have spoken of. We have now had three years of scarcity, the first of them being a severe famine. The treasury of State is well nigh exhausted —a miserable 30 to 40 lakhs is all that remains, and in spite of considerable severity and even cruelty in collection the revenues of the last year amount simply to the tail of the dog without the dog himself. This year there was no rain in Baroda till the first crop withered; after July 5th about 9 inches fell, just sufficient to encourage the cultivators to sow again. Now for want of more rain the second crop is withering away into nothingness. The high wind which has prevented rain still continues, and though there is a vague hope of a downpour after the 15th, one cannot set much store by it. Now in case there should be a severe famine this year, what may happen is something like this; either we shall all be put on half-pay for the next twelve months, — in other words I who can only just manage to live on Rs. 360 will have to do it on Rs. 180 —or the pay will be cut down permanently (or at least for some years) by twenty-five per cent, in which case I shall rejoice upon Rs. 270; or thirdly (and this may Heaven forbid) we shall get our full pay till December and after that live on the munificent amount of nothing a month. In any case it will be impossible to bring

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mother or even Mrinalini to Baroda. And there is worse behind. The Ajwa reservoir after four years of drought is nearly exhausted. The just-drinkable-if-boiled water in it will last for about a

month; the nondrinkable for still two months more. This means that if there is no rain, there will be a furious epidemic of cholera before two months are out and after three months this city, to say nothing of other parts of the Raj, will be depopulated by a water famine. Of course the old disused wells may be filled up, but that again means cholera *in excelsis*. The only resource will be for the whole State to go and camp out on the banks of the Narmada and the Mahi.

"Of course if I get half-pay I shall send Rs. 80 to Bengal, hand over Rs.90 as my contribution to the expenses to Khaserao and keep the remaining 10 for emergencies; but supposing the third course suggested should be pursued? I shall then have to take a third class ticket to Calcutta and solicit an 150 Rs. place in Girish Bose's or Mesho's¹ College —if Lord Curzon has not abolished both of them by that time. Of course I could sponge upon my father-in-law in Assam, becoming a *ghorjamai*² for the time being, but then who would send money to Deoghur and Benares?³ To such a pass have an all-wise Providence and the blessings of British rule brought us! However let us all hope it will rain.

"Please let me know whether Mejdada has sent any money

1. Krishna Kumar Mitra. He was professor of History at City College, and its superintendent.
2. A resident son-in-law.
3. To his grandmother Kailashbasini and aunt Birajmohini.

by the time this reaches you. If he has not, I suppose I must put my shoulder to the burden. And by the way if you have found my MS of verse translations from Sanskrit, you might send it to me 'by return of post' _____

"My health has not been very good recently; that is to say, although I have no recognised doctor's illness, I have developed a new disease of my own, or rather a variation of Madhavrao's special brand of nervous debility. I shall patent mine as A. G.'s private and particular. Its chief symptom is a ghastly inability to do any serious work; two hours' work induces a feverish exhaustion and a burning sensation all over the body as well as a pain in the back. I am then useless for the rest of the day. So for some time past I have had to break up the little work I have done into half an hour here, half an hour there and half an hour nowhere. The funny thing is that I keep up a very decent appetite and am equal to any amount of physical exercise that may be demanded of me. In fact if

I take care to do nothing but *kasrat*¹ and croquet and walking and rushing about, I keep in a grand state of health,—but an hour's work turns me again into an invalid. This is an extremely awkward state of things and if you know any homoeopathic drug which will remove it, I will shut my eyes and swallow it.

"Of course under such circumstances I find it difficult to write letters. I do not know how many letters to Sarojini and my wife I have begun, written two lines and left. The other day, however, there was a promising sign. I began to write a letter to

1. Physical exercise.

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you and actually managed to finish one side and a half. This has encouraged me to try again and I do believe I shall finish this letter today — the second day of writing. The improvement, which is part of a general abatement of my symptoms, I attribute to a fortnight's determined and cynical laziness.¹ During this time I have been to Ahmedabad with our cricket eleven and watched them get a jolly good beating; which happy result we celebrated by a gorgeous dinner at the refreshment room. I believe the waiters must have thought us a party of famine-stricken labourers, dressed up in stolen clothes, perhaps the spoils of massacred famine officers. There were six of us and they brought us a dozen plentiful courses; we ate them all and asked for more. As for the bread we consumed —well, they brought us at first a huge toast-rack with about 20 large pieces of toast. After three minutes there was nothing left except the rack itself; they repeated the allowance with a similar result. Then they gave up the toast as a bad job, and brought in two great plates each with a mountain of bread on it as large as Nandanpahad.² After a short while we were howling for more. This time there was a wild-eyed consultation of waiters and after some minutes they reappeared with large trays of bread carried in both hands. This time they conquered. They do charge high prices at the refreshment rooms but I don't think they got much profit out of us that time. Since then I have been once on picnic

1. Sri Aurobindo once avowed to a disciple who asked for a method for lolling: "... Well, there is no *how about it* : *one just lolls if one has the genius for it. I have, though opportunities are now lacking for showing my genius.*"

2. The Nandan hill at Deoghar.

to Ajwa with the District Magistrate and Collector¹ of Baroda, the second Judge of the High Court and a still more important and solemn personage whom you may have met under the name of Mr. Anandrao Jadhav.² A second picnic was afterwards organized in which some dozen rowdies, not to say Hooligans, of our club —the worst among them, I regret to say, was the father of a large family and a trusted officer of H. H., the Maharajah Gaekwar, —went down to Ajwa and behaved in such a manner that it is a wonder we were not arrested and locked up. On the way my horse broke down and so four of us had to get down and walk three miles in the heat. At the first village we met a cart coming back from Ajwa and in spite of the carters' protests, seized it, turned the bullocks round and started them back —of course with ourselves in the cart. The bullocks at first thought they were going to do the journey at their usual comfortable two miles an hour, but we convinced them of their error with the ends of our umbrellas and they ran. I don't believe bullocks have ever run so fast since the world began. The way the cart jolted, was a wonder; I know the internal arrangements of my stomach were turned upside down at least three hundred times a minute. When we got to Ajwa we had to wait an hour for dinner; as a result I was again able to eat ten times my usual allowance. As for the

1. Khaserao Jadhav was then the Collector of Baroda.

2. This Anandrao Jadhav seems to have been a lively young man (please read on), full of mischief like William Brown. In a letter to his wife, dated

3 October 1905, Sri Aurobindo wrote, "The other day I went to meet Khaserao. Anandrao has grown very big. He will become a big cheat."

behaviour of those trusted pillars of the Baroda Raj at Ajwa, a veil had better be drawn over it; I believe I was the only quiet and decent person in the company. On the way home the carriage in which my part of the company installed itself, was the scene of a remarkable tussle in which three of the occupants and an attendant cavalier attempted to bind the driver, (the father of a large family aforesaid) with a horse-rope. As we had been ordered to do this by the Collector of Baroda, I thought I might join in the attempt with a safe conscience. *Pater familias* threw the reins to Providence and fought —I will say to his credit —like a Trojan. He scratched me, he bit one of my coadjutors, in both cases drawing blood, he whipped furiously the horse of the

assistant cavalier, and when Madhavrao came to his assistance, he rewarded the benevolent intention by whipping at Madhavrao's camel ! It was not till we reached the village, after a six-mile conflict, and got him out of the carriage that he submitted to the operation. The wonder was that our carriage did not get upset; indeed the mare stopped several times in order to express her entire disgust at the improper and turbulent character of these proceedings. For the greater part of the way home she was brooding indignantly over the memory of it and once her feelings so much overcame her that she tried to upset us over the edge of the road, which would have given us a comfortable little fall of three feet. Fortunately she ' was relieved by this little demonstration and her temper improved wonderfully after it. Finally last night I helped to kidnap Dr. Cooper. the Health Officer of the State, and make him give us a big dinner at the Station with a bottle

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and a half of sherry to wash it down. The Doctor got so merry over the sherry of which he drank at least two thirds himself, that he ordered a *special-class* dinner for the whole company next Saturday. I don't know what Mrs. Cooper said to him when he got home. All this has had a most beneficial effect upon my health, as the writing of so long a letter shows.

"I suppose you have got Anandrao's letter; you ought to value it, for the time he took to write it is, I believe, unequalled in the history of epistolary creation. The writing of it occupied three weeks, fair-copying it another fortnight, writing the address seven days and posting it three days more. You will see from it that there is no need to be anxious about his stomach: it righted itself the moment he got into the train at Deoghur Station. In fact he was quite lively and warlike on the way home. At Jabal pur we were unwise enough not to spread out our bedding on the seats and when we got in again, some upcountry scoundrels had boned Anandrao's berth. After some heated discussion I occupied half of it and put Anandrao on mine. Some Mahomedans, quite inoffensive people, sat at the edge of this, but Anandrao chose to confound them with the intruders and declared war on them. The style of war he adopted was a most characteristically Maratha style. He pretended to go to sleep and began kicking the Mahomedans, in his 'sleep' of course, having specially gone to bed with his boots on for the purpose. I had at last to call him off and put him on my half-berth. Here, his legs being the other way, he could not kick; so he spent the night butting the upcountryman with his head; next day he boasted triumphantly to me that he had conquered a foot and half of

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territory from the intruder by his brilliant plan of campaign. When the Boers rise once more against England, I think we shall have to send them Anandrao as an useful assistant to Generals Botha and Delarcy.

"No rain as yet, and it is the 15th of August. My thirtieth birthday, by English computation! How old we are all getting!

Your affectionate nephew

Aurobindo Ghose

"P.S. There is a wonderful story travelling about Baroda, a story straight out of Fairyland, that I have received Rs. 90 promotion. Everybody seems to know all about it except myself. The story goes that a certain officer rejoicing in the name of Damn-you-bhai wanted promotion, so the Maharaja gave him Rs. 50. He then proceeded to remark that as this would give Damn-you-bhai an undue seniority over Mr. Would-you-ah! and Mr. Manoeu (vre) bhai, the said Would-you-ah and Manceu(vre)bhai must also get Rs. 50 each, and 'as Mr. Ghose has done good work for me,¹ I give him Rs. 90.' The beautiful logical connection of the last bit with what goes before, dragging Mr. Ghose in from nowhere and everywhere, is so like the Maharaja that the story may possibly be true. If so, it is very satisfactory, as my pay will now be — Famine permitting — Rs. 450 a month. It is not quite so good as Mejdada's job, but it will serve. Rs. 250 promotion after ten years' service does not look

1. The 'good work' alluded to by the Maharaja was the preparation by 'Mr. Ghose', and completion, of a long report on trade in Baroda State.

very much, but it is better than nothing. At that rate I shall get Rs. 700 in 1912 and be drawing about Rs. 1000 when I am ready to retire from Baroda either to Bengal or a better world. Glory Halleluja!

"Give my love to Sarojini and tell her I shall write to her — if I can. Don't forget to send the MS of translations. I want to typewrite and send to England."

The 'story' was true after all. The Maharaja was then at Coonoor, in the Nilgiris of South India, from where he had issued the following, highly descriptive Order.

Huzur Order

His Highness the Maharaja Saheb has been graciously pleased to order that

- (1) A monthly increase of Rs. 90. Ninety British is given to Mr. Aravind Ghose.
- (2) His Highness is pleased to note that he has found Mr. Ghose a very useful and capable young man. With a little more of regularity and punctual habits he can be of much greater help; and it is hoped that Mr. Ghose will be careful in future not to injure his own interests by any lack of these useful qualities.
- (3) The Minister should try to make a good use of Mr. Ghose's abilities in entrusting him with the compilation of Annual Administration Reports and other important compilations. He is a man of great powers and every use should be made of his talents.
- (4) The Minister should also suggest from time to time the different uses to which Mr. Ghose's abilities can be

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advantageously put. The Huzur will also occasionally direct the uses to be made of Mr. Ghose's services.

- (5) If convenient Mr. Ghose's services can be utilised in the Baroda College, only care should be taken that his interests do not suffer in any way by his services being lent to the College for some time.

Camp Coonoor. Sayaji Rao Gaekwar

6 August 1902

The long epistolary effort must have totally exhausted the 'capable young man.' So he rested for five days before writing to his wife ... in English—a one-time exception. By then the Huzur Order had come through confirming the Rs. 90 promotion to 'Mr. Aravinda Ghose.'

"c/o K. B. Jadhav Esq
Near Municipal Office
Baroda
20th August 1902

"Dearest Mrinalini,

"I have not written to you for a long time because I have not been in very good health and had not the energy to write. I went out of Baroda for a few days to see whether change and rest would set me up, and your telegram came when I was not here. I feel much better now, and I suppose there was nothing really the matter with me except overwork. I am sorry I made you so anxious; there was no real cause to be so, for you know I never get *seriously* ill. Only when I feel out of sorts, I find writing letters almost impossible.

"The Maharaja has given me Rs. 90 promotion —this

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will raise my pay to Rs. 450. In the order he has made me a lot of compliments about my powers, talents, capacity, usefulness etcetera, but also made a remark, on my want of regularity and punctual habits. Besides he shows his intention of taking the value of the Rs. 90 out of me by burdening me with overwork, so I don't feel very grateful to him. He says that if convenient, my services can be utilised in the College. But I don't see how it will be convenient, just now, at least; for it is nearly the end of the term. Even if I go to the College, he has asked the Dewan to use me for writing Annual Reports etc. I suppose this means that he does not want me to get my vacations. However, let us see what happens.

"If I join the College now and am allowed the three months' vacation, I shall of course go to Bengal and to Assam for a short visit. I am afraid it will be impossible for you to come to Baroda just now. There has been no rain for a month, except a short shower early this morning. The wells are all nearly dried up; the water of the Ajwa reservoir which supplies Baroda is very low and must be quite used up by next November; the crops in the fields are all parched and withering. This means that we shall not only have famine; but there will be no water for bathing and washing up, or even, perhaps for drinking. Besides if there is famine, it is practically sure that all the officers will be put on half-pay. We are hoping, rather than expecting, that there may be good rain before the end of August. But the signs are against it, and if it comes, it will only

remove the water difficulty or put it off for a few months. For you to come to Baroda and endure all the troubles and sufferings of such a state of things, is out of the question. You must decide for yourself

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whether you will stay with your father or at Deoghur. You may as well stay in Assam till October, and then if I can go to Bengal, I will take you to Deoghur where you can stop for the winter at least. If I cannot come then, I will, if you like, try and make some arrangement for you to be taken there.

"I am glad your father will be able to send me a cook when you come. I have got a Maratha cook, but he can prepare nothing properly except meat dishes. I don't know how to get over the difficulty about the *jhi* [maidservant]. Sarojini wrote something about a Mahomedan ayah, but that would never do. After so recently being readmitted to Hindu society, I cannot risk it; it is all very well for Khaserao and others whose social position is so strong that they may do almost anything they like. As soon as I see any prospect of being able to get you here, I shall try my best to arrange about a maid-servant. It is no use doing it now.

"I hope you will be able to read and understand this letter; if you can't, I hope it will make you more anxious to learn English than you have been up to now. I could not manage to write a Bengali letter just now —so I thought I had better write in English rather than put off writing.

"Do not be too much disappointed by the delay in coming to Baroda; it cannot be avoided. I should like you to spend some time in Deoghur, if you do not mind, Assam somehow seems terribly far off; and besides I should like you to form a closer intimacy with my relatives, at least those among them whom I especially love.

Your loving husband.

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Pranayama

"He never gave even a remote hint," wrote an overwhelmed Dinendra Kumar Roy, "of all the sleepless nights he kept vigil over my sickbed."

He was speaking of how Sri Aurobindo took care of him in 1899, when he was stricken with high fever. They were then living at Mir Bakarali's wada, at Baroda. A military doctor treated him, and "Aurobindo nursed me." D. K. Roy said, "When day after day I lay unconscious owing to the intensity of the fever, he spent sleepless nights nursing me.... All I understood was that without his nursing care I would not have survived.... When, after a long spell, the fever left me, he said to me one day, smiling, 'Roy, this time you have scraped through by the skin of your teeth. This "Baroda fever" is a terrible sickness; it is very difficult to escape from its grip. So I thought I might not be able to save you this time.' But not the slightest hint of all that he had done to save my life, not even incidentally. Whether in word or in deed, I have never seen such control."

Sukumar Mitra, in his article on Sri Aurobindo in

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Basumati, mentions that at one time Usha, a cousin of theirs (daughter of Sukumari, Rajnarain's third daughter) was ill with fever for a prolonged period. When Sri Aurobindo went to Deoghar he heard that many medical men had treated her but to no avail. One of the doctors, however, had suggested a change of air. That had not been done and Usha continued to ail. Hearing all this "Aurobindo rented a house in Simultala and took her there. Within a fortnight she was cured of that long-standing malady."

But Sri Aurobindo's compassion was not limited to his kith and kin. In a passage of his very important letter to his wife (30 August 1905), Sri Aurobindo wrote, "I have come to understand that all this time I have pursued the profession of the animal and the thief. Having understood it, I am filled with great remorse and self-contempt. No more of it. I give up this sin for good.

"To offer money to God means spending it for sacred causes. I have no regrets giving monetary help to Sarojini or Usha, because helping others is Dharma, to protect those who depend on you is a great Dharma, but the account is not settled if one gives only to one's brothers and sisters. In its present plight, the whole country is at my door, seeking shelter. I have thirty crores of brothers and sisters in this country, many of them die of starvation, most of them afflicted with sorrow and suffering are dragging on a wretched, precarious existence. They must be helped."

Very quickly his compassionate heart would expand to embrace not only his own country but the entire world. "It is

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not without reason," Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1935, "that I am eager to see something better in this well-meaning but woebegone planet."

But during the intervening thirty years Sri Aurobindo made a series of discoveries —stupendous discoveries to found his system of Yoga. Very early on he found out that "the whole universe is a play of forces." Fire, hurricane, or earthquake and flood, eruption of volcanoes, each elemental force of Nature is directed by a specific force. If one can learn to master that specific 'force' one gains control over its range of action, and can consciously direct it or manipulate it. Did not Sri Aurobindo say that by Yogic force he had cured himself of many stubborn diseases?

In 1935, by when he had completely mastered the use of the Yoga Force, he explained a bit of it in one of his letters. "The invisible Force producing tangible results both inward and outward is the whole meaning of the Yogic consciousness.... When I speak of feeling Force of Power, I do not mean simply having a vague sense of it, but feeling it concretely and consequently being able to direct it, manipulate it, watch its movement, be conscious of its mass and intensity and in the same way of that of other, perhaps opposing forces; all these things are possible and usual by the development of Yoga."

Just as an apprentice has to apply himself to learn his *metier*, so too here: the Yoga Force is not a mere freak or miracle. "One has to train the instrument to be a channel of this force; it works also according to a certain law and under certain conditions. The Divine does not work arbitrarily or as a

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This woe-begone planet.

thaumaturge," he stated emphatically. The Force, explained Sri Aurobindo, "is neither a magician's wand nor a child's bauble, but something one has to observe, understand, develop, master before one can use it aright or else —for few can use it except in a limited manner —be its instrument."

It was in his early days in Pondicherry that Sri Aurobindo set out to thoroughly master the intricacies of the *metier*. He was always thorough in whatever he undertook and, as he said, "I do not believe in short cuts." Naturally enough, he was his own laboratory. There he tested, more scrupulously than any scientist in his laboratory, all that his yoga was throwing up.

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* *

"What led you to Yoga?" asked Nirod curiously. It was 5 January 1939, and all those who attended on Sri Aurobindo after his accident of previous November were there.

"What led me to Yoga?" Sri Aurobindo considered. "God knows what. It was while at Baroda that Deshpande and others tried to convert me to Yoga. My idea about Yoga was that one had to retire into mountains and caves ... and give up everything. I was not prepared to do that, for I was interested in the work for the freedom of my country."

He was then an agnostic, but nevertheless "always thought that the great figures of the world could not have been after a chimera and if there was such a Power why not use it for the freedom of the country?" Thus he entered the path of Yoga by a side door, as it were!

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"Then I began to practise pranayama —in 1903. A Baroda engineer [Deodhar] who was a disciple of Brahmananda showed me how to do it and I started on my own. I practised pranayama at Khaserao Jadhav's place in Baroda. 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. Formerly I used to write with difficulty; for a time the flow would increase, then again it would dry up." This Dinendra K. Roy had already

observed, when he noted that Sri Aurobindo "was not a fast writer." But now the flow "revived with astonishing vigour and I could write both prose and poetry at tremendous speed."

"I used to write poetry in those days," Sri Aurobindo said in one of his evening talks in 1926. "Before the pranayama practice, usually I wrote five to eight lines per day, and about two hundred lines in a month. After the practice I could write two hundred lines within half an hour. That was not the only result. Formerly my memory was dull. But after this practice I found that when the inspiration came I could remember all the lines in their order and write them down correctly at any time." And that flow never ceased, as he remarked in 1939. "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."

Another time Sri Aurobindo mentioned casually, "I first began on my own with pranayama, drawing the breath into my

head." He then set certain misconceptions aside: pranayama does not bring dullness in the brain. "My own experience, on the contrary," he said in 1926, "is that the brain becomes illumined. When I was practising pranayama at Baroda, I used to do it for about five hours in the day — three hours in the morning and two in the evening. I found that the mind began to work with great illumination and power." In fact, the dullness in the brain is caused by some obstruction in it which does not allow the higher thought to be communicated to it. Pranayama can remove that obstacle and bring about a change in the brain. For, as explained Sri Aurobindo, brain is not the seat of thinking, but only a communicating channel, "it is only a support for the higher activity." It is the mind that thinks; the brain is a physical device. Actually "all things on the physical plane are merely devices —they are a system of notation —just like the wireless or telegraphic messages, but often we get too busy with the device and mistake it for the thing that is behind the device." Sri Aurobindo went on to affirm that "this applies to all scientific discoveries. For instance, when you say 'hydrogen and oxygen in certain proportions form water,' the statement does not explain anything. It only states a fact. You do not know what water is. It only means there is something behind which manifests itself as water under those conditions."

"It is the same with the theory of 'electrons.' So far as the physical facts are concerned the theory may be perfectly true. But why should the blessed electrons," he asked, "which are fundamentally the same substance, form totally different

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elements and compounds by the change of arrangement of the same number?"

Our error evidently comes from giving too much importance to the form of the device, because we think the physical plane to be the most real. Is it?

"So I say," Sri Aurobindo said matter-of-factly, "there is something behind the device which already pre-exists on some plane and it is that which adopts the device in order to manifest itself. But the device is not the reality." And, as was his wont, he said something tremendous entirely in passing. "The power from behind can change the device."

He also provided us with a clue as to why people mistake the device for the real thing. "Of course, the power working from behind comes down on the physical plane through the device, and so people generally think that it is the device which is responsible for the manifestation."

Pranayama brought Sri Aurobindo good health, lightness and an increased power of thinking. "Along with these enhanced functionings I could see an electrical activity all round the brain, and I could feel that it was made up of a subtle substance. I could feel everything as the working of that substance." It brought some visible results.

"Fourthly," Sri Aurobindo continued his observations, "it was at the time of the pranayama practice that I began to put on flesh. Earlier I was frail and thin. My skin also began to be smooth and fair. The women of our family noticed it first, as they have a sharp eye for such things. And there was a peculiar new substance in the saliva, owing to which these changes were

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probably taking place." He explained. "The Yogis say some sort of *amrita* (nectar) flows down from the top of the brain that can make one immortal." Ever practical, he added, "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."

And, with the opening to the Brahman, "I used to hear sounds of crickets and bells," he said. "The sounds of crickets were so noisy that I wondered whether there were many crickets outside."

In his letters also Sri Aurobindo has indicated some of the results he obtained through pranayama. "After four years of pranayama and other practices on my own, with no other result than an increased health and outflow of energy, some 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 and was at a loss." It was at this juncture that he met the Maha-rashtrian Yogi, Lele.

About the faculty of vision, Sri Aurobindo said that it is difficult for mentally active people. "At one time I had great difficulty myself because of my mind, especially as regards vision." Nevertheless, before embarking on the practice of pranayama, Sri Aurobindo was already training his 'psychic sight' as he termed it. "I had myself a remarkable experience of the psychic sight," narrated Sri Aurobindo. "I was at Baroda and my psychic sight was not fully developed and I was trying to develop it by dwelling upon the after-image and also

by attending to the interval between wakefulness and sleep. Then I saw this round circle of light, and when I began pranayama it became very much intensified." This circle of light "is a round globe of light which goes on increasing. This is not due to anything physical" —such as by pressing the eyeballs. "It is the light from one of the inner centres, especially the *ajna* chakra, the centre of Will, and you can make it very bright and big by connecting it with the *brahmarandhra*, the centre on the top of the head." I was very pleased when I came across this, for, as it happens, as a young person and up until my teens, I always used to see a point of light —bigger than a pinhead but smaller than the head of a drawing pin —without any concentration, often with eyes open. So I could, and would, fall asleep with ease. And I thought that everybody saw the same!

Sri Aurobindo once quoted a talk he had with a scientist friend of his on the 'subtle sight.' "I remember" he wrote in 1932, "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 a 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 in the affirmative. That is how these so-called scientific explanations break down as soon as

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you pull them out of their cloudland of mental theory and face them with the actual phenomena they pretend to decipher."

. Naturally enough, I did not know anything of all these psychic or subtle sights —the only sight I knew was physical — when I first met Mother and Sri Aurobindo. It was on the occasion of Mother's birth anniversary on 21 February 1935. That was one of the three days in a year when Sri Aurobindo gave Darshan. From Calcutta we, that is Father, my brother Abhay and I, went to Pondicherry. In those days young children were rarely permitted to visit the Ashram. But for some reason, unknown to me, we two were granted permission, although I had barely completed nine and Abhay was twenty months older than me. We reached a few days before Mother's birthday.

We always saw Mother dressed in a sari, with her head covered. Every morning Mother would come down the stairs to the ground-floor meditation hall, sit in a low chair set against the wall, give a meditation, which was followed by Pranam. One by one people made their Pranam, each according to his or her liking. I always put my head on her lap, and she would lay her palm on my head, and a sense of well-being would flood my body and soul. Then, from a dish kept near her, she would take flowers and put them in my hands, as she did with others. Each flower had a meaning given by Mother.

In the evenings, there was a meditation, and —oh, joy! — we two could attend it. Mother would come down one flight of steps, pause a moment on the landing, and take three or four steps down, turn to her right to face the people sitting

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in the hall. She herself meditated standing, with her hands resting lightly on the banister. Once she had taken her position all the lights were switched off, except a dim one which was left burning in the upper flight of the staircase. A pale light could be seen through a square aperture on the wall just behind where Mother stood. The meditation lasted, I presume, from twenty to thirty minutes. But I did not fidget. Something held my attention and I watched with interest: a light around Mother's head. Coloured. My eyes would remain glued on the light—open eyes, of course! —and each day the colour would be different. I always thought that it was a fanciful electrician who changed the bulbs. Then, ages later, one day when I was talking to the electrician, I asked, "Bulada, why did you stop changing the bulbs during the evening meditations?" For, I never again saw those coloured lights around Mother's head. He was so astonished. "But it was always the same electric bulb!" He was quite taken aback. "I never, ever put any coloured bulb there." That taught me something, I can tell you. The next time I saw Mother with light around her, I did not make the same stupid mistake, I assure you.

Talking of Mother reminds me of what she said to Satprem as to what she and Sri Aurobindo did while practising pranayama. "I did it myself for years," she said, "using the same system: inhale, hold, exhale, remain empty. But holding the lungs empty is said to be dangerous, so I don't advise it. I did it for years. Without knowing it, Sri Aurobindo and I did it nearly the same way, along with all sorts of other things that aren't supposed to be done! That's telling you that the danger

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is mainly in what you think. In the course of certain movements, both of us made the air go out through the crown of the head —apparently that's only to be done when you want to die!" Mother laughed. "It didn't kill us."

This is a process much used by Indian Yogis. A yogi draws up the Life-Force— *prana* — into the brahmarandhra, and then departs leaving his body.

But what Sri Aurobindo wanted was "immunity from all sorts of diseases which are the agents of death."

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Why a Body ?

When he was practising pranayama, Sri Aurobindo noticed with curiosity that he was not bitten by mosquitoes. Yogis who practise pranayama are, as a rule, not attacked with illness. "When I practised pranayama at Baroda," said Sri Aurobindo, "I had excellent health and powers. But when I came to Calcutta, and political work did not leave me any time for regular practice of pranayama, I was attacked with malarial fever which almost carried me off. These are," he explained, "the consequences of pranayama or control— whenever these protections are withdrawn, the forces of illness rush up in a sort of revenge."

He told the story of Sakharia Swami. "Sakharia Swami also had Yogic control. One day he saw a mad dog coming. He held out his hand for the dog to bite. After the bite, he didn't allow the poison to go into the system but localised it." Even in sleep he exercised that control. "When the Surat Congress was over, he got excited and thus lost control and the poison spread in his body. He got hydrophobia and couldn't drink water. He said, 'What is this nonsense? I, who was trooper in

the Mutiny and drank water from the puddles, can't drink water?' He drank water and died." During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, he had fought alongside the Rani of Jhansi against the English army. When the Rani was killed in the battlefield he was one of those who carried her body and put it on the funeral pyre. It was this great sorrow that made him become a sannyasin. Sakharia Baba was very fond of Sri Aurobindo's brother Barin, who was at one time his disciple. It was Barin who had taken him to the Surat Congress. "Tall and fair," recalled Barin, "a straight body draped in an ochre robe, a shaven head, staff in hand, and hanging from his shoulder a cloth-bag ever full of sugar candy, and a smiling face, that was Sakharia Swami." His actual name was Vishwesharananda Swami, but as he always offered sugar candy to all and sundry he chanced to meet, he came to be called Sakharia Baba. Sri Aurobindo was high in his esteem.

You may well be wondering why we are talking so much about the body, its health and illnesses. Well, as we all have a body wouldn't it be nice to know why we have one ? Perhaps we may learn at the same time how to treat this patient beast of burden? Treat it with more respect, that

is. Besides, if the body collapses, the whole thing collapses, no? The fact of the matter is that Sri Aurobindo and Mother regarded the body in quite another light than that preached by religions or than the attitude of many Yogis — although the ancients in India believed that without body there can be no Dharma and so took care to keep it in good shape. Sri Aurobindo did not accept the idea that Matter is something different from the Spirit. Not true:

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"It is One thing," he said. He refuted that the body is an iron cage. "I say it is an instrument of the Spirit."

He admitted though that "the unconscious is the soil from which it has grown...." That, he explained, was the reason why "in the past the body has been regarded by spiritual seekers rather as an obstacle, as something to be overcome and discarded than as an instrument of spiritual perfection and a field of the spiritual change." For instance, Sri Ramakrishna's attitude with regard to the body was that it was a misuse of spiritual force to utilize it for preserving the body or taking care of it or curing its ailments. Sri Aurobindo's was quite the opposite. "I have never had any hesitation," he wrote to Dilip, "in the use of a spiritual force for all legitimate purposes including the maintenance of health and physical life in myself and in others —that is indeed why the Mother gives flowers not only as a blessing but as a help in illness."

We have already seen with Mother that the main cause of bodily illness is the impairment of the subtle sheath: the nervous envelope or aura. She has also told us about the major part played by fear which opens the door to illness enabling it to enter the body and capture it. Sri Aurobindo confirmed all this from his own experience, and clarified a few more points in the process. "Chemicals, glands and what not," he wrote to Dr. Nirod, "these things and the germs also are only a minor physical instrumentation for something supraphysical." The forces behind bacilli, viruses, etc., "first weaken or break through the nervous envelope, the aura. If that is strong and whole, a thousand million germs will not be able to do anything

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to you. The envelope pierced, they attack the subconscious mind in the body; sometimes also the vital mind or mind proper — prepare the illness by fear or thought of illness. The doctors

themselves said that in influenza or cholera in the Far East ninety percent got ill through fear. Nothing to take away the resistance like fear. But still the subconscious is the main thing." Because, thrown away from the mind, fear can be "seen passing through you, below the navel. There is a connection between fear and your intestine."

The medical man was still unconvinced. "But diseases like cholera, plague etc. are supposed to outbreak by contamination."

"If the contrary Force is strong in the body," replied Sri Aurobindo patiently, "one can move in the midst of plague and cholera and never get contaminated. Plague too, rats dying all around, people passing into Hades. I have seen that myself in Baroda."

Sri Aurobindo agreed that measures recommended by doctors —sanitation, hygiene, etc.—could raise the standard of health, yet all that they can "deal with is the physical circumstances of health. But they cannot get at the vital forces which are behind and of which the physical circumstances are mere instruments." Nowadays even a layman will understand Sri Aurobindo's remark: "Nature is not so mechanical, she is a conscious being. If you try to circumvent her in one way she circumvents you in another." Let the medical science but come up with a new drug to combat a disease, Nature confounds it by confronting it with a more virulent, more resistant strain.

For every new and potent remedy there is a new and potent affliction.

"There is a physical aspect to things," he said, writing in greater detail, "and there is an occult supraphysical aspect — one need not get in the way of the other. All physical things are the expression of the supraphysical. The existence of a body with physical instruments and processes does not, as the 19th century vainly imagined, disprove the existence of a soul which uses the body even if it is also conditioned by it. Laws of Nature do not disprove the existence of God. The fact of a material world to which our instruments are accorded does not disprove the existence of less material worlds which certain subtler instruments can show to us."

It is abundantly clear that the aim of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is not to find out the most efficient method of healing diseases, but "to change the entire consciousness — even the physical —in

order that disease may not come at all. The entire being must be so transformed that disease becomes impossible."

Sri Aurobindo's aim was to make the body an instrument of spiritual perfection. But he was quick to note that what can be attained within the human boundaries "can be something very considerable and sometimes immense." The development of the human range of achievements, especially in things of the mind and will, "can carry us halfway to the divine," he said. He dwelt at length on the body's achievements. "Even what the mind and will can do with the body in the field proper to the body and its life, in the way of physical achievement, bodily endurance, feats of prowess of all kind, a

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lasting activity refusing fatigue or collapse and continuing beyond what seems at first to be possible, courage and refusal to succumb under an endless and murderous physical suffering, these and other victories of many kinds sometimes approaching or reaching the miraculous are seen in the human field and must be reckoned as a part of our total perfection...."

He then spoke of the occult supraphysical aspect. "The body, we have said, is a creation of the Inconscient and itself inconscient or at least subconscious in parts of itself and much of its hidden action; but what we call the Inconscient is an appearance, a dwelling place, an instrument of a secret Consciousness or a Superconscient which has created the miracle we call the universe." He declared that this Superconscient "is there in the body, has made it and its emergence in our consciousness is the secret aim of evolution and the key to the mystery of our existence."

A key had to be gained for the Earth.

They gained it.

They hewed out a new evolutionary road, never before trodden.

It is impossible to measure the pioneering work done by them. For, no one before Mother and Sri Aurobindo had even thought of it. The preceding spiritual Masters —like Buddha, Shankara, Ramakrishna —had no idea of transforming the body, "their aim was spiritual *mukti* and nothing else." Sri Aurobindo did not find a ready-made integral method, he had to develop it. "If I had [found it], I should not have wasted my time in hewing out a road and in thirty years of search and inner creation,"

he wrote on 5 October 1935, "when I could have hastened home safely to my goal in an easy canter over paths already blazed out, laid down, perfectly mapped, macadamised, made secure and public. Our Yoga is not a retreading of old walks, but a spiritual adventure."

Mother said (3 April 1967), "I must tell you once more that for us spiritual life does not mean contempt for Matter but its divinization. We do not want to reject the body but to transform it..."

And Sri Aurobindo has given us a master-key : "A fully conscious body might even discover and work out the right material method and process of a material transformation."

16

Break the Habit

In the course of a single night Sri Aurobindo could cure a person of a fever and send him fresh and full of strength to his work. A cure without medicines.

And Mother. She healed. She healed all wounds —inner or outer —that life is wont to inflict on us.

She had such a tender way of doing it too! Oh, how many times did I see her with children who had fallen sick, removing their pain, curing them of fever by passing her hand over and over again, so gently, from the top of the head to the back and down the spine. Then, when she knew that the action was done, Mother would stoop and kiss the forehead of the child. A good night's sleep, and the next morning the child was shining like a new coin! Mother's hands, the right one specially, had the material power of healing.

I had a peculiar habit. At one time I got into the habit of headaches. So what did I do? I would rub my forehead against Mother's thigh and get rid of the headache! I did that standing, of course. Let me add that I was my normal 158 centimetres, it was Mother who was tall, so tall that my head did

not come higher than her thigh. You see, this used to happen at night, while my body was lying in bed.

But awake too. In my games of basketball or volleyball or ... I would get knocks. At one time it began to happen too frequently, for several months on end. As a rule I did not care. But when my hands began to get bruised much too much, hampering even my typing work, then Satprem thought fit to intervene and told Mother. She drew a circle round my hands, and said, "We'll protect that ... like this." Mother then explained. "That too is a habit. It's nothing but habits: forces playing in Nature. So it takes an inner movement," she made a tiny gesture of severing, "to break the habit."

Habit or 'groove' to use Sri Aurobindo's expression, what we call the 'law of life,' in other words, birth-growth-decay-death, is but a groove created by Nature. And just as breaking a habit does not destroy but improves us, so too this groove of Nature can be changed without destroying the universe, bringing a divinized Life here in this physical world.

In fact plenty of people in the Ashram got rid of their ills without medicine, by reliance on Mother. Whenever I said, "Mother, this person has fever, that person is suffering from terrible pain, etc.," she would select a flower, hold it in her hands for a while, eyes closed, then opening her eyes she would put the flower in my hand. I would then take the flower and go hand it over to the friend of mine who was sick, or sometimes touch lightly the patient's forehead with it. A week's fever and pain gone the next day. That was Mother's way of sending her spiritual power of healing. The power did not

wither with the flower! "Rowers," explained Sri Aurobindo, "are the moment's representation of things that are in themselves eternal."

It was intolerable to Mother to see physical suffering. "Physical suffering is to me like a child being beaten.... But then," Mother told Satprem one day, "when that true Compassion of Divine Love comes and you see all those things that look so horrible, so abnormal, so absurd, that great pain over all beings and even over things.... Then there was born in this physical being the aspiration to relieve, to cure, to make all that disappear." Mother relieved the suffering, cured the

illness of thousands, not necessarily living in the Ashram. "There is something in Love in its Origin that is constantly expressed by the intervention of the Grace; a force, a sweetness, something like a vibration of solace, spread everywhere, but which an enlightened consciousness can direct, concentrate on certain points."

But alas! Everybody does not have Sri Aurobindo and Mother. People are generally in the hands of doctors. And even the best among them are liable to make mistakes. "My grandfather and cousin," wrote Sri Aurobindo to Nirod (24 December 35) "were patently killed by the medicines administered by one the most famous and successful allopathic doctors of Calcutta."

But other systems of medicines than allopathy were known in India. "Once I had a nasty abscess on the knee in Baroda," said Sri Aurobindo. "All treatment failed. Then Madhavrao Jadhav called in a Mahomedan who pricked the

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knee at a particular point and brought out a big drop of black blood and the abscess was cured soon afterwards I

Sri Aurobindo described another type of cure. "I also remember Jatin Banerjee curing many cases of sterility by a Sannyasi's medicine given to him. Cases of ten or fifteen years' sterility have been cured by it and people got children within ten months.... Many such things known to India are being lost now."

Prayer, of course, has a great power as is known. Mother told us stories of how people on their deathbed got cured through prayer. Sri Aurobindo also. He gave some examples from his personal observation. "And then there is what happened about Madhavrao's son." Could have been the Anandrao whom we have already met. "He was dying; doctors gave up hope. Madhavrao wired to them to stop medicines and to pray to God. They did it and the son was cured. I know this as a fact. Madhavrao himself showed me the telegram."

But more frequently he would cite the case of his cousin Kumudini. Sukumar recalls that Sri Aurobindo was very fond of her and wrote a poem on her birthday; he had presented her with a coloured photograph of his. "As for prayer, no hard and fast rule can be laid down," Sri Aurobindo wrote to Dilip. "Some prayers are answered, all are not. An example? The eldest daughter of my Mesho, K. K. Mitra, editor of *Sanjibani*, not by any means a romantic, occult,

supra-physical or even imaginative person, was abandoned by the doctors after using every resource, all medicines stopped as useless. The father said

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'There is only God now, let us pray.' He did, and from that moment the girl began to recover, typhoid fever and all its symptoms fled, death also. I know any number of cases like that." About Kumudini's case Sri Aurobindo gave further details in a talk. "The doctors had given up all hope after trying all remedies, even snake-poison. She was a typhoid case — the consciousness wouldn't come back. Then they prayed and soon after the prayer the sign of life returned. Without prayer she would not have been saved." She was being treated by no less a doctor than Dr. Nil Ratan Sarkar who was the best Bengali physician of the time. Added Sri Aurobindo casually, "I was at Baroda at that time. They wired to me about her hopeless condition."

Another example: Bankim Chandra's grandson was at death's door. All the best doctors gave up and left. Then Bankim sat in front of his family deity, Radhaballav, with the resolve not to move till he got God's Grace. He got it. When he touched the boy with the water obtained by washing the feet of Radhaballav, Death fled away. The boy was cured.

"Well?" Sri Aurobindo asked Dilip. "You may ask why should not then all prayers be answered? But why should they be? It is not a machinery— put a prayer in the slot and get your asking."

In fact nothing is a 'machinery' in life. It is even less so in Yoga, as Sri Aurobindo said forcefully, this time to Nirod. "What happy-go-lucky fancy-web-spinning ignoramuses you all are. You speak of silence, consciousness, over mental, supramental, etc. as if they were so many electric buttons you have only to

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discover everything about the working of all possible modes of electricity, all the laws, possibilities, perils, etc., construct roads of connection and communication, make the whole far-wiring system, try to find out how it can be made foolproof and all that in the course of a single lifetime. And I have to do it while my blessed disciples are firing off their gay or gloomy a priori reasonings at me from a position of entire irresponsibility and expecting me to divulge everything to them not in hints but at length. Lord God in omnibus 1"

17

Kashmir

"Quite agree with your estimate of Kashmir." Dilip had waxed eloquent on Kashmir after his recent trip there towards the end of 1938, and had written to Sri Aurobindo glowingly about the idyllic life. Agreeing, Sri Aurobindo replied, "The charm of its mountains and rivers and the ideal life dawdling along in the midst of a supreme beauty in the slowly moving leisure of a houseboat —that was a kind of earthly Paradise — also writing poetry on the banks of the Jhelum where it rushes down Kashmir towards the plains." I do wonder what both of them would have said today, when there are at least one thousand foreign tourists in houseboats on the Dal lake! —a sewage canal?¹ However there is always a fly in the ointment. "Unfortunately there was the over-industrious Gaekwar to cut short the Paradise!" said Sri Aurobindo ruefully. "His idea of Paradise was going through administrative papers and making myself and others write speeches for which he got all the credit.

1. This was written in 1993; the scenario has radically changed now, in 1996, since the terrorists with their execrable acts have overrun Kashmir.



Kashmir's Dal Lake early this century

But after all, according to the nature, to each one his Eden."

Sri Aurobindo had gone on a tour of Kashmir as the Private Secretary of the Maharaja. From late May 1903 to September they toured the Princely State. In October Sri Aurobindo returned to Baroda.

Sri Aurobindo jotted down a few things in a notebook which he had taken with him for the trip. Here are a few extracts.

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"Cashmere, Srinagar.

"Saturday.

"In the morning Sardesai dropped in and we went together to Dhond, where I arranged with Rajaram to mess with him ; the dinner consisted of the usual Brahminic course, dal [lentils] and rice, two chupatties [flat bread] with potatoes and greens and amthi [tamarind sauce],—the

whole to be seasoned liberally by a great square of clarified butter at one side of the tray. Fortunately the dishes were not very pungent and, with this allowance, I have made myself sufficiently adaptable to be a Brahmin with the Brahmins."

Then other notes, written probably the very next day.

"Dinner in the morning from Rajaram, who put me *au courant* with zenana¹ politics. Not having his son to quarrel with, H. H. has filled up the gap with his wife; they have been at it hammer and tongs since the Maharani joined him at Murree, chiefly, it seems, about dhobies [washermen] and other such highly unroyal topics.... The latest trouble is about 'unnecessary tongas' from Murree to Srinagar; yet the Maharaja was assured that if he insisted upon starting at once, there was no other course open, and at the time he promised to sanction any expense entailed. Now that he has had his own convenience satisfied, he chooses not to remember that he ever promised anything of the sort, so that he may have the pitiful satisfaction of venting his ill temper on innocent people. He has also ordered

1. The *zenana* was in higher Hindu society the part of the house where the women were secluded .

that no one shall receive special bhutta [allowance] at a hill-station, unless the matter is brought to his notice and he is personally satisfied that prices are higher than in Baroda. Where will all this shopkeeping unprinceliness and pettifogging injustice end?"

Then he was contacted by his cousin, Dr. Ashutosh Mitra. Dr. Mitra was appointed the first Chief Medical Officer of the first Government hospital in Kashmir. He was instrumental in setting up the women's hospital in Srinagar and another in Jammu. A large number of dispensaries were opened all over the State in his time. The good doctor also founded the first municipality in Srinagar. As an important Minister in the Council of Maharaja Pratap Singh he was able to raise the status of the State School, and introduced the teaching of English. Was it Dr. Mitra's idea to make motorable the Jhelun Cart Road over the Banihal Pass which linked Srinagar directly with Jammu? A carriage belonging to the Maharaja was the first to cross it in 1915. The Cart Road remained the private property of the Maharaja till July 1922, when it was opened to the public.

"Ashudada sent Visva's son Hemchandra with a note to me ;" ran Sri Aurobindo's account, "the lad is a young Hercules five foot ten in height and monstrous in muscle with a roaring voice and continual outbursts of boisterous laughter over anything in the shape of a joke good or bad — a fine specimen of the outlander Bengali. His companion, a Kaviraj,¹ rejoices in the name of Satyendranath Banerji Kobirunjun and is something of

1. A physician practising one of India's traditional systems of medicine.

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an ass and much of a coward, but not a bad fellow withal. We adjourned in a body, Sardesai, Ambegavkar, Dr. Balabhai, myself and the two Bengalis to the Maharaja's green-cushioned boat and set out on the broad bosom of Lake Dal and through the lock and a canal into the Jhelum. The boatman swore that we should get drowned if we shot the lock, but Hem Babu, though he admitted there might be a little danger, insisted on having it done. In the result we only shipped a little water which sought the left leg of my trousers as naturally as a bird seeks its nest, but the Kaviraj was in a terrible fright and clamoured protestation till we were right in the swirl of the waters. The water was lined with houseboats of the ogre-monkeys in some of which there were marvellous specimens of Cashmeri beauty. After a visit to Ashu and then to the hospital, — where I found I turned the scale at 113, my old weight, and reached the height of 5ft. 51 in my shoes -we adjourned through the rain to Hem Babu's house. There we met his father, the genial and hearty Reception Officer, tall and robust in build, with a fine largely cut jovial face and a venerable beard, and several other Bengalis The tea was execrable but the cigarettes and the company were good.

"Afterwards the carriage took us through the streets of the town and then, the coachman being unable or unwilling to find his way out, back the same way. The streets are very narrow and the houses poor and ricketty, though occasionally picturesque, being built impartially of bricks, stones or other material

1. 113 lbs = 51 kg; 5 ft. 5 = 165 cm.

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imposed and intersticed irregularly and without cement, cobbled in fact rather than built. The windows are usually plastered with paper —for the sake of privacy, I suppose,—but it must make the rooms very dingy and gloomy. The roofs are often grown over with a garden of grasses and wild flowers, making a very pretty effect. The Maharaja's palace by the river in the true quaint Hindu way of building was the one building which struck me in Srinagar,—how much superior to the pretentious monstrosities of architecture at [Baroda's] Luxmivilas Palace! This drive has finally completed and confirmed my observations of Cashmeri beauty. The men in the country parts are more commonly handsome than the town people and the Hindus than the Mahomedans."

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The Invasion of the Infinite

It was here in Srinagar that Sri Aurobindo had an experience about which he spoke often. It was the experience of the Infinite. Atop the nearly 300-metre high Shankaracharya Hill — also called by Muslims Takht-i-Suleiman, meaning the seat of Solomon —there is a temple. The temple can be seen from any part of Srinagar. And from the temple one gets a scenic view of the valley: the Dal Lake to the north-west and the Jhelum on the other side, both dotted with shikaras or house-boats. The serpentine roads and the dense clusters of houses interspersed with patches of green are a feast for the eyes.

The temple stands at the very top of the hill. Made entirely of stone, it is said to have been built some twelve hundred years ago by Adi Shankaracharya. Steps cut in the rocky slope lead up to the temple. They end at a small landing, from which another flight of stairs ascends steeply to the shrine, in front of which is a big bell. Five more steps and you are at the door of the sanctuary, a small, hexagonal room about three metres wide. The large Shivalingam in the centre, made of a greenish stone, is almost two metres high and one and a half

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The temple atop Shankaracharya Hill

metres in diameter. Behind it stands a South Indian bronze: a statue of Nataraja —Shiva in the dancing pose. He is shown four-armed. The upper hands hold the drum and the fire; and the upraised palm of a third hand gives blessing and reassurance, while the fourth hand points to his raised foot.

This holy place has an atmosphere. But the whole of Kashmir is supposed to be holy. According to legend the land of Kashmir was originally a lake called Satisaras, the lake of Sati, consort of Shiva. Later a demon made the lake his residence and killed Nagas (serpents) and men living around it. King Nila of the Nagas invoked Vishnu, who counselled him to drain the water from the lake. To Ananta Naga was assigned the task of piercing the hills round about. When the water of Satisaras flowed away and the lake became dry, the demon was exposed and finally killed. Sati flew out as the main body of water: our Jhelum river —Vitasta of the Vedas. The legend goes on to say that it was here in Kashmir that Vishnu assumed the form of the Fish, his

first Avatar. The boat — *nau* — in which the creatures were saved from the deluge, was the Goddess herself. To the west of Banihal Pass is the highest peak of the Pir Panjal range or mountains. Oddly enough, this snowclad peak is called *Nau Bandhan Tirtha*, meaning, the holy-place-where-the-boat-was-tied.

Let us now get back to Sri Aurobindo. He was explaining about the 'atmosphere of a place.' After alluding to the experience of "a vastness and a tremendous calm coming over me," as soon as he set his foot on Apollo Bunder, he said, "That is the atmosphere of the place. Another instance is the sense of

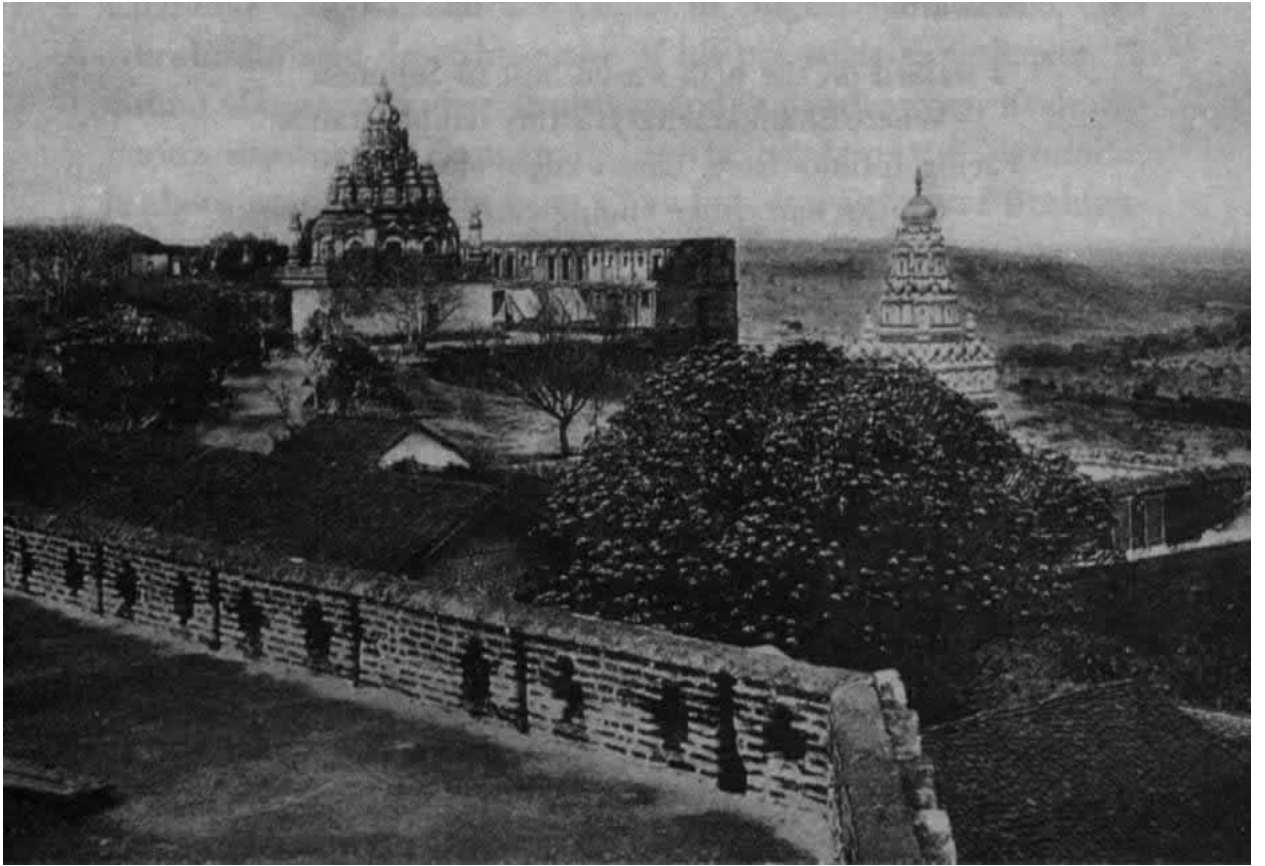
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the Infinite I had at the Shankaracharya Hill at Kashmir and at Parvati Hill near Poona, and the reality of the image in a temple at Karnali near Chandod." In his visit to the Parvati Hill in 1908 he was accompanied by Lele.

Sri Aurobindo, in a letter to Dilip, gave a comprehensive account of his pre-yogic spiritual experiences. Recalling the effect on him of Max Müller's books during his college days, Sri Aurobindo put forth how "all can be turned into a first means towards the realisation of the Divine. A philosophic statement about the Atman is a mental formula, not knowledge, not experience; yet sometimes the Divine takes it as a channel of touch; strangely, a barrier in the mind breaks down, something is seen, a profound change operated in some inner part, there enters into the ground of the nature something calm, equal, ineffable. One stands upon a mountain ridge and glimpses or mentally feels a wideness, a pervasiveness, a nameless Vast in Nature; then suddenly there comes the touch, a revelation, a flooding, the mental loses itself in the spiritual, one bears the first invasion of the Infinite. Or you stand before a temple of Kali beside a sacred river and see what? —a sculpture, a gracious piece of architecture, but in a moment mysteriously, unexpectedly there is instead a Presence, a Power, a Face that looks into yours, an inner sight in you has regarded the World-Mother."

The 'sacred river' is the Narmada. It is one of the biggest rivers of India. Starting from the Amarkantak hills and after a long westward flow, it meets the Bay of Cambay. The Narmada is said to have issued from the body of Rudra. She is specially

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View from Parvati Hill near Poona at the beginning of the century

invoked for the cure of snake bites.

In 1939 Sri Aurobindo described these three experiences in sonnets: *Adwaita*, *The Hill-Top Temple* of the Parvati Hill — his two experiences of contact with the Infinite; and *The Stone Goddess* on the northern bank of the Narmada at Karnali, where he regarded the World-Mother.

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."

.....

The Hill-Top Temple

"After unnumbered steps of a hill-stair
I saw upon earth's head brilliant with sun
The immobile Goddess in her house of stone
In a loneliness of meditating air."

.....

The Stone Goddess

"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."

.....

Among the many temples at Karnali, 'The Stone Goddess' is housed in a little shrine known as the Mahakali Mandir of Karnali. The beautiful statue of Mahakali, facing west, is about three feet high. Her mount is a tiger.

It was Deshpande —he had joined the Baroda State Service in 1898 —who had taken Sri Aurobindo there from Chandod during one of their visits there, as the temple town was not so very far from Swami Brahmananda's place. Both

Chandod and Karnali are places of pilgrimage. "Once," Sri Aurobindo said describing one of his pre-yogic experiences, "I visited Ganganath after Brahmananda's death, when Keshava-nanda was there." Ganganath, on the banks of the Narmada, is about two kilometres from Chandod. It

was Swami Brahmananda's Ashram; upon his passing away Keshav ananda had become its head. "With my Europeanised mind," said Sri Aurobindo, "I had no faith in image worship and I hardly believed in the presence of God. I went to Karnali where there are several temples. There is one of Kali. And when I looked at the image I saw the Living Presence there. For the first time I believed in the presence of God."

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A Conscientious Scientist

"I hope," wrote Sri Aurobindo to Dilip when the latter was invited to dinner by the Maharaja of Dewas (in Madhya Pradesh) who was a refugee in Pondicherry in the early forties, "I hope your dinner at Dewas did not turn out like my first taste of Maharatta cookery —when for some reason my dinner was *non est* and somebody went to my neighbour, a Maharatta 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!"

Sri Aurobindo was 'a conscientious scientific person,' as he himself put it. When I began looking closely at all the things he experimented with, it took my breath away. Moreover, he always first experimented on himself before he would tell others: This too can be done.

"Food," said Sri Aurobindo, "is rather a question of hygiene, and many of the sanctions and prohibitions laid down in ancient religions had more a hygienic than a spiritual motive.... Spiritually, I should say that the effect of food

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depends more on the occult atmosphere and influences that come with it than on anything in the food itself."

Sri Aurobindo was frugal in his eating. Dinendra Kumar Roy described in his book the food they were served, and noted in passing that Sri Aurobindo took more of bread and less of rice; but the less said about the food served the better! Sri Aurobindo's was ever the Yogic attitude; he was

never harassed by the importunity of the palate. Nor was he, let me add at once, unaware if something was pleasant to the palate or not. He could judge to a nicety the cookery. A true gastronome, what! For it was no part of his yoga "to suppress taste, *rasa*, altogether." He took all kinds of food with equal *rasa*. "Taste," he wrote to a Sadhak, "is no more a guilty thing than sight or hearing. It is the desire that it awakens that has to be thrown away."

He was for 'balance.' Balance in everything. "That was the thing that saved me all through," he said, "I mean the perfect balance." Nothing lopsided would do for him. Overeating or fasting were to be equally avoided. Sri Aurobindo had to write again and again to many of his disciples that food should be eaten for the maintenance of the body and not out of any greed. He would not allow the sadhaks to neglect their bodies. "It is a mistake to neglect the body," he wrote severally to sadhaks, "and let it waste away; the body is the means of sadhana and should be maintained in good order." Imagine my delight when I came across that! For, in my childish way, when I was getting into my teens, I had told myself, "Look, you have to live with your body for years and years, so why

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not be comfortable and keep it in good shape?"

Sri Aurobindo insisted that sleep was as necessary for the body as food. "If you do not sleep enough the body and the nervous envelope will be weakened and the body and the nervous envelope are the basis of the sadhana." He took great pains to explain to the sadhaks of his yoga that this was not a yoga in which physical austerities had to be done for their own sake. "The first thing I tell people," he wrote in black and white, "when they want not to eat or sleep is that no yoga can be done without sufficient food and sleep. Fasting or sleeplessness make the nerves morbid and excited and weaken the brain and lead to delusions and fantasies.... It is the same with everything else. How often have I said that excessive retirement was suspect to me and that to do nothing but meditate was a lop-sided and therefore unsound sadhana?... As to seclusion, I have written my distrust of retirement several times: it is only a few people who can do it and profit, but they are not a rule for others.... If I am living in my room it is not out of a passion for solitude."

Once in 1935 when Dilip wrote proposing to start periodic fasts and to 'bid adieu to tasty dishes,' and generally practise asceticism, Sri Aurobindo wrote back precipitately. "I stand aghast as I

stare at the detailed proposals made by you! Fastings ? I don't believe in them, though I have done them myself. You would really eat like an ogre afterwards." And one day Sri Aurobindo reminded him of Sri Krishna's advice. "The Gita says yoga is not for one who eats too much or sleeps too much, neither is it for one who does not eat or does not sleep, but if

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one eats and sleeps suitably, then one can do it best."

Sri Aurobindo counselled moderation. But he himself had practised extremism. "Well, one can give good advice even when one does not follow it oneself," as he told a disciple of his! He had experimented with all sorts of things "to see what happens and how far they are related to truth." When he tested ideas he found that most of them, which a man takes on trust, had very little foundation upon truth.

Take an ordinary thing like drinking whisky. "I tried also to see if the experience of drinking wine could give any experience. Once I took a heavy dose of whisky. The thing rushed to my head and I lost consciousness. In that deep trance for about half an hour I felt as if I had gone into a superior plane, wide and vast."

He told of the tests he had made with other intoxicants. "I took Bhang¹ twice: once at Baroda; it had no effect. When we asked the servant who had prepared it why it failed, he said he had purposely made it weak, for if we had lost our senses due to a strong dose, he feared we would have beaten him." Everybody laughed. "Second time," said Sri Aurobindo, "I took it here at Barin's persuasion. It was a strong dose, but had no effect." Amrita confirmed that Sri Aurobindo indeed took a very heavy dose, sufficient to kill an elephant, but it had no effect on him.

1. Bhang, an Indian hemp, is used as narcotic and intoxicant; it is taken in various ways: smoked, chewed, eaten and drunk. Traditionally people get high on it once a year.

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It was therefore with quiet competence that Sri Aurobindo could tell the sadhaks what results might be expected from the use of such stimulants. "These intoxicants put one in relation with a vital world in which such things (music, song, etc.) exist." A pleasurable world ... while it lasts.

But there is the other side of the coin, as he was quick to point out. "It is the habit in the subconscious material," he wrote cautioning a disciple, "that feels an artificial need created by the past and does not care whether it is harmful or disturbing to the nerves or not. That is the nature of all intoxicants (wine, tobacco, cocaine etc.), people go on even after the deleterious effects have shown themselves and even after all real pleasure in it has ceased because of this artificial need — it is not real."

Sadhus and sannyasins who live up in the mountains usually take recourse to bhang, siddhi, or other intoxicants, to keep themselves warm. Others might resort to them to get away from the physical consciousness so as to get into an inward-drawn condition. "My own experience in the matter," Sri Aurobindo declared, "is that wine and narcotics generally inhibit the action of the most Tamasic centers in the physical brain, and the other centres in the brain get stimulated. This helps one to escape from the limitations of the physical consciousness and one may get into other planes of consciousness." He narrated an incident. "One day," said Sri Aurobindo, "Mother asked a workman why he was drinking. He said that after drinking he got thoughts which he could never get when he was sober."

However, ninety per cent of those who take external

stimulants never go beyond the vital plane. Because "once you get into the vital plane you find it extremely difficult to get to the Truth." What happens is that "experiences on the vital plane are most exalting and exhilarating at the same time that they are most dangerous and terrible. There are many pitfalls and no reality." And to get to the Truth one has to be very open and ready to change all one's ideas, be they personal, social or national. "Take taste and food," Sri Aurobindo said. "I was once a violent non-vegetarian. Then I found that it was my own vital being that was demanding meat. Well, I gave it up and for years together I went on taking whatever came my way. Then I found even what people call 'tasteless' and 'bad' food has got a taste in it." Isn't that something! Yet from his infancy he was accustomed to non-vegetarian diet. Sri Aurobindo's views were always wide and spiritual, never narrow and moral. In the mid-1920s he told a disciple, "I have no objection to taking fish; you can even take wine if it suits you." Yet. "As a matter of fact," he clarified, "I cannot take fish nowadays, but that means nothing. I give it to the cats all right."

It was when he was practising pranayama that he "adopted a vegetarian diet. That gave lightness and some purification." He laughed. "Once [in 1909] in Calcutta I lived for a long time on rice and bananas only. It was a very good food." Sri Aurobindo's eyes twinkled. "Now let me tell you about the invitation to dinner by Romesh Chandra Dutt. He was surprised that I was taking only vegetable food, whereas he could not live without meat. With vegetable food I was feeling light and pure. It is just a belief that one can't live without

meat, and that creates a habit." The body has no desires, it has needs. If left free it will tell you what it needs.

Fastings also were not outside the purview of his tests, and prolonged Fastings at that. "I fasted twice, said Sri Aurobindo, "once in Alipore Jail for ten days and the other time in Pondicherry for twenty-three days. At Alipore I was in full Yogic activity. I was not taking any food. I was throwing away all of it into the bucket. Of course, the Superintendent didn't know. Only the Warder knew about it, and he said to the others, 'The gentleman must be ill. He won't live long.' Although I lost weight considerably, I could lift a pail of water above my head, which I couldn't do ordinarily."

The second fast took place at Shankar Chetty's house, where Sri Aurobindo lived from April to October 1910. "Then at Pondicherry," he went on, "while I was fasting, I kept up full mental and vital and Yogic activity. I was walking eight hours a day and yet not feeling tired in the least. When I broke my fast I did not begin slowly but with the usual normal food." And there he nearly got the clue to living without food. "When I did my fast of about twenty-three days while living in Chet-tiar's house," revealed Sri Aurobindo, "I very nearly solved the problem. I could walk eight hours a day as usual. I continued my mental work and Sadhana also as usual and I found that I was not in the least weak at the end of twenty-three days. But the flesh began to grow less and I did not find a clue to replacing the very material part that was reduced in the body." After a moment's pause he said, "There must be some clue and I had solved the problem almost nine-tenths." A smile twitched his

lips. "But because I did not succeed there is no reason why somebody else should not succeed."

Comparing the two fasts, he said, "The Alipore fasting gave more results than the second one. Though the fast lasted only ten days I lost ten pounds, whereas here the fast lasted twenty-three days but the loss of weight was less. At Alipore I was having tremendous visions which were all experiences on the vital plane. But as a part of my mind was critical I took them all with reservations."

In 1926 while conversing with his disciples Sri Aurobindo said that he had not tried to do without sleep. "Once I tried for two days with the result that on the third day I slept for nine hours." But when questioned he admitted that his sleep "is not all like ordinary sleep —though it is that for the most part. The only time that I very nearly conquered sleep was in jail. I used to keep awake for two days and sleep on the third. I did it for ten days." Later he clarified. "It was not for conquering sleep that I began the waking experiment, but because there was a pressure of Sadhana and I liked to do Sadhana rather than sleep."

Experiments with intoxicants, food, sleep ... Sri Aurobindo was after the perfection of the physical instrument. As he wrote to Anandrao in the first years of his stay at Pondicherry: "The physical [*siddhi* or perfection] is backward and *nearing* completion only in the immunity from disease, — which I am now attempting successfully to perfect and test by exposure to abnormal conditions."

It was also at Alipore jail that Sri Aurobindo obtained,

in a moment or two, the power to appreciate painting. A line from Manmohan's letter dated 4 April 1889, seems to indicate that his brother, while still in England, was already familiar with sculpture. "Could you tell me," Mano asked Laurence, "on what days Burn Jones' studio is open? A friend of mine and my brother would like to see it." In India, Sri Aurobindo had deepened his familiarity with sculpture and architecture, but was less familiar with the world of painting. Once, consoling Dilip, he cited his own experiences in those domains. "Don't be desperate about your incapacity as a connoisseur of painting. I was far worse in this respect: knew something about sculpture, but 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," he said with characteristic candour, "because I lack the knowledge of the proper expressions, but that does not stand in the way of a keen and understanding appreciation. So, there you are: all things are possible in Yoga." To Nirod, who disputed the power of the Yoga-force, Sri Aurobindo retorted, "Why was it that I who never understood or cared for painting, suddenly in a single hour by an opening of vision got the eye to see and the mind of understanding about colour, line and design? How was it that I who was unable to understand and follow a metaphysical argument and whom a page of Kant or Hegel or Hume or even Berkeley left either dazed and uncomprehending and fatigued or totally uninterested because I could not

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fathom or follow, suddenly began writing pages of the stuff as soon as I started the Arya and am now reputed to be a great philosopher?" And drowning Nirod with a torrent of similar experiences Sri Aurobindo told him, "Kindly reflect a little and don't talk facile nonsense."

Sri Aurobindo was rather disdainful of intellectuals. With reason of course. "These intellectuals, when they talk of something beyond their scope, make fools of themselves," he observed. When his disciples had inner experiences, Sri Aurobindo told them not to bother about the objections of physical science—which, anyway, is incompetent to sit in judgment on matters that overpass it. "Your bells etc.," he wrote to one of them in 1931, "mentioned by you as recent experiences were already enumerated as long ago as the time of the Upanishads as signs accompanying the opening to the larger consciousness. If I remember right your sparks come in the same list. The fact has been recorded again and again in Yogic literature. I had the same experience hundreds of times in the earlier part of my Sadhana. So you see you are in very honourable company in this matter and need not trouble yourself about the objections of physical science."

These are but a few experiments made by Sri Aurobindo. He developed many things by yoga. He made test after test and accumulated experience upon experience. He frankly told his intellectual disciples that testing Yogic experiences by the ordinary reason won't do. "For I am unable to see by what valid tests you propose to make the ordinary reason the judge of what is beyond it." Because, he explained in his precise way, "the experiences of Yoga belong to an inner domain and go according to a

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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 nor of the domain of rational or scientific enquiry. 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," he stated, "is the only way to test spiritual experiences, I have myself tried the other method and I have found it absolutely incapable and inapplicable."

The conscientious Scientist concluded with a counter question. "Finally, how without inner knowledge or experience can you or anyone else test the inner knowledge and experience of others?"

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20

God Contracts a Bad Habit

We have gone far ahead in time. Sri Aurobindo's Yogic activities were still hidden in the mists of the future, while his political activities were still concealed from the public eye. Let us take a journey back into time.

A. Ghose was known to all ranks of people at Baroda from the Maharaja to the street sweeper—and esteemed by all. The educated community of Baroda had a great respect for the young man's uncommon gifts.

From February 1898, when he was first appointed Extra Professor of English, Sri Aurobindo was associated with the Baroda College until he left the State Service in 1906; at the time he was the Acting Principal of the College.

By the time Dinendra Kumar Roy came to Baroda in late 1898, A. Ghose, then twenty-six years old, was already a well-known figure at the College. D. K. Roy found that "Aurobindo was revered and adored as a god by Baroda's student community. The students were charmed by his manner of teaching.... They honoured and trusted this Bengali professor more than the British Principal of their college."

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R.N. Patkar, a former student of Sri Aurobindo's, who later became an advocate at Baroda, called up the past in 1956, independently confirming in the process many observations made by D. K. Roy. "In these days he did not take any cooked food in the evening but used to take fruit — mostly plantains — and a cup of milk. This kind of austere life continued to the day he left Baroda." For active politics.

"When I came to Baroda," ran Patkar's statement, "I was a mere lad hardly sixteen in age and so was not in a position to judge things properly. However, I note down a few points that struck me and made a vivid impression on me.

"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 either. Any dish served at his meal time was welcome to him. Similarly about his dress —he never visited the market for his dress. At home he was clad in plain white *sadara* 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 fiber], on which was spread a Malabar grass mat which served as a bedsheet.

"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.'"

On another point also Patkar's and D. K. Roy's observations converged: it was Sri Aurobindo's non-attachment to money. Sri Aurobindo disclosed how it happened. "When I

joined the Baroda State Service," he said, "as I was not accustomed to getting money I got the tendency to gather and save money. I saved some money, and then suddenly spent away the whole sum at a time." That is what D. K. Roy and R. N. Patkar had noted. "Another important thing I observed about him," said the advocate, "was his total absence of love for 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 never cared to keep account of what he spent. This struck me and one day I casually asked him why he was keeping his money like that. He simply 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 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?'"

A smile must have curved God's lips when He heard that! Because, in his early days at Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo would begin to keep a detailed account of all the expenditures. With the responsibility of half a dozen young men he had worries, and then some! He who at one time "never asked anything from anyone" had to send letters to various friends asking for monetary help, so desperate was the financial situation. "At present," wrote Sri Aurobindo to one, "I am at the height of my difficulties, in debt, with no money for the morrow, besieged

in Pondicherry...." To another he wrote sometime later, "The situation just now is that we have Rs. 1^{1/2} or so in hand." That was 3 July 1912. Then wryly, "No doubt, God will provide, but He has contracted a bad habit of waiting till the last moment."

Although poverty held no terrors for him, as his study of the universal forces deepened, his position on money and wealth ultimately stabilized. "But we look upon money," Sri Aurobindo said in 1926, "as a power of the Divine, and, as with everything else, we want to conquer it for the Divine in life. As the money-power today is in the hands of the hostile forces, naturally, we

have to fight them." He explained its working. "You have really to follow a certain rhythm of the money-power, the rhythm that brings in and the one that throws out money. Money is given to you in the beginning; then, you have to deserve it. You have to prove that you do not waste it. If you waste it, then you lose your right to it.... It is not that you have to hoard money. It is there for being spent. But we must spend it in the right way—in a certain order and with an arrangement."

He dispelled plainly some wrong notions. "I may say, however, that I do not regard business as something evil or tainted," he wrote in a letter, "any more than it is so regarded in ancient spiritual India.... Even if I myself had had the command to do business as I had the command to do politics I would have done it without the least spiritual or moral compunction." Elaborating, he said, "This idea of poverty was never the Hindu ideal, not even for the Brahmin.... It is a Christian ideal to be poor.... There never was any preaching of poverty

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[in India]. Of course, there was Sannyasa having the ideal of 'no-property.' But that is quite a different thing from remaining poor. What the Indian ideal is you read in the Ramayana where the civic life is described. There was no man who was poor in Dasharatha's kingdom, none who had no garden. That is the Indian ideal and even in the Upanishads we see that the Brahmins had got wealth." In conclusion he said, "Not to be attached to property was the idea, but it is quite a different thing from remaining poor."

Sri Aurobindo knew perfectly well that money, as it circulates, accumulates and increases life wherever it flows. So he never discouraged his disciples from acquiring wealth. His only condition was the disciples' attitude. "All depends on the spirit in which a thing is done, the principles on which it is built and the use to which it is turned."

This principle applies to every field of human activity. "I have done politics," Sri Aurobindo wrote, "and the most violent kind of revolutionary politics, *ghoram karma* [dreadful works], and I have supported war and sent men to it, even though politics is not always or often a very clean occupation nor can war be called a spiritual line of action. But Krishna calls upon Arjuna to carry on war of the most terrible kind and by his example encourage men to do every kind of human work, *sarvakarmdni*. Do you contend that Krishna was an unspiritual man and that his advice to Arjuna was mistaken or wrong in principle? Krishna goes further and declares that a

man by doing in the right way and in the right spirit the work dictated to him by his fundamental nature, temperament and capacity

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and according to his and its Dharma can move towards the Divine. He validates the function and Dharma of the Vaishya as well as of the Brahmin and Kshatriya. It is in his view quite possible for a man to do business and make money and earn profits and yet be a spiritual man, practise Yoga, have an inner life." There, put succinctly, is the traditional Indian attitude towards money and wealth and property.

Let us end this chapter with some quotations from Sri Aurobindo's *The Mother*.

"Money is the visible sign of a universal force," he wrote in a letter in 1927, "and this force in its manifestation on earth works on the vital and physical planes and is indispensable to the fullness of the outer life. In its origin and its true action it belongs to the Divine.... This is indeed one of the three forces — power, wealth, sex — that have the strongest attraction for the human ego and the Asura and are most generally misheld and misused by those who retain them. The seekers or keepers of wealth are more often possessed rather than its possessors; few escape entirely a certain distorting influence stamped on it by its long seizure and perversion by the Asura." It is for this reason that some spiritual disciplines put a ban on money and riches and proclaim poverty and bareness of life as the only spiritual condition. "But this is an error; it leaves the power in the hands of the hostile forces. To reconquer it for the Divine to whom it belongs and use it divinely for the divine life is the supramental way for the Sadhaka.

"All wealth belongs to the Divine and those who hold it are trustees, not possessors. It is with them to-day, tomorrow it

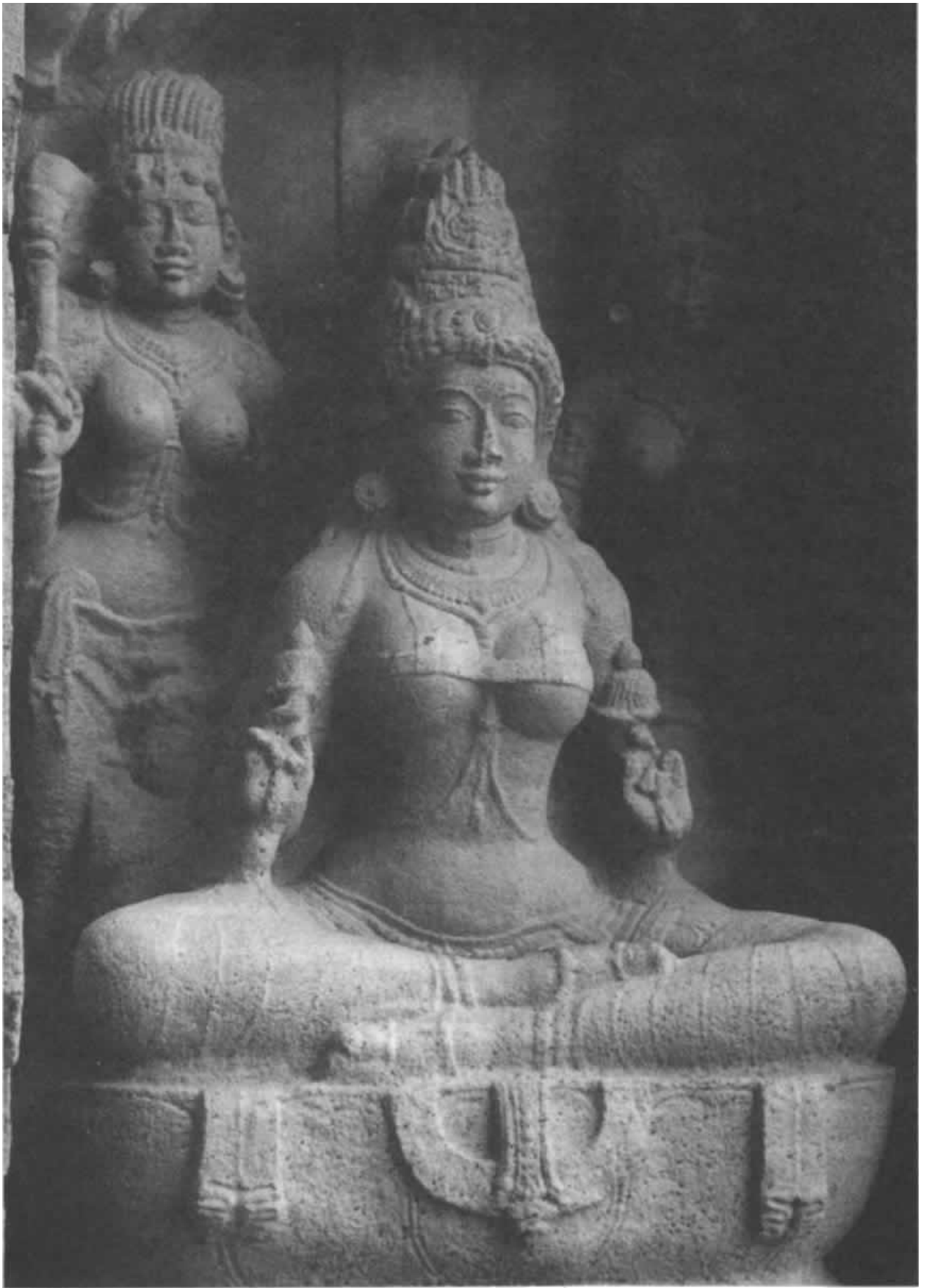
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may be elsewhere. All depends on the way they discharge their trust while it is with them, in what spirit, with what consciousness in their use of it, to what purpose."

Lakshmi, in the Indian tradition, is the presiding deity here.

"In the supramental creation the money-force has to be restored to the Divine Power and used for a true and beautiful and harmonious equipment and ordering of a new divinised vital and physical existence in whatever way the Divine Mother herself decides in her creative vision."

There are four great aspects of the Mother —Maheswari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati. The "third is vivid and sweet and wonderful with her deep secret of beauty and harmony and fine rhythm, her intricate and subtle opulence, her compelling attraction and captivating grace." That is Mahalakshmi. "All turn with joy and longing to Mahalakshmi. For she throws the spell of the intoxicating sweetness of the Divine: to be close to her is a profound happiness and to feel her within the heart is to make existence a rapture and a marvel; grace and charm and tenderness flow out from her like light from the sun and wherever she fixes her wonderful gaze or lets fall the loveliness of her smile, the soul is seized and made captive and plunged into the depths of an unfathomable bliss." Oh, Mother! "Magnetic is the touch of her hands and their occult and delicate influence refines mind and life and body and where she presses her feet course miraculous streams of an entrancing Ananda.... For it is through love and beauty that she lays on men the yoke of the Divine. Life is turned in



Mahalakshmi

her supreme creations into a rich work of celestial art and all existence into a poem of sacred delight; the world's riches are brought together and concerted for a supreme order and even the simplest and commonest things are made wonderful by her intuition of unity and the breath of her spirit."

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From His Students

It was the evening of 30 december 1938, barely a month after Sri Aurobindo's accident on 24 November. Those attending upon him stood around his bed. The talk turned to his brother Manmohan as a hard-working professor. Sri Aurobindo confirmed that generally the professors don't work so hard. Then, looking at Purani, he said, "I was not so conscientious as a professor."

Purani begged to differ. "But," he said, "people who heard you in College and those who heard you afterwards in politics differ from you. They speak very highly of your lectures."

"I never used to look at the Notes," recalled Sri Aurobindo, "and sometimes my explanations didn't agree with them. I was Professor of English and for some time of French. What was surprising to me was that students used to take down

everything verbatim and mug it up ____ The students at

Baroda, besides taking my notes, used to get notes of other professors from Bombay, especially if they happened to be examiners.

"Once I was giving a lecture on Southey's *Life of Nelson*,

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Sri Aurobindo as a professor in Baroda

and my lecture was not in agreement with the Notes in the book. So the students remarked that it was not at all like what was in the Notes. I replied that I hadn't read them. In any case they are mostly rubbish. I could never go into the minute details, I read and left it to my mind to absorb what it could. That's why," he concluded, "I could never become a scholar."

Hmmmm!

Although he never read the Notes of Bombay's examiners, he read. Book after book after book. And how! "He used to be absorbed in reading to the extent that he was at times oblivious of things around him," recounted R. N. Patkar, a former student of Sri Aurobindo's. "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). Aravind Babu simply said '*Achha*' (all right), without even moving his head. After about 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 a pleasant smile, went to the table and finished his meal in a short time and resumed his reading."

The recollections of the students open a portal to the past, and a picture emerges. A touch here, a touch there, and the picture comes alive —we glimpse another facet of Sri Aurobindo's personality.

"I had the good fortune to be his student," R. N. Patkar's narrative continues, "when I was in the Intermediate Class. His method of teaching was a novel one. In the beginning he used

to give a 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. These lectures, which were given at the close of the term, were availed of by many students belonging to other colleges.

"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 never an orator but was a speaker of a very high order and he was listened to with rapt attention. Without any gestures or movements of the

limbs he stood like a statue — motionless — and the language flowed like a stream from his lips with a natural ease and melody that kept the audience spell-bound.... Though it is more than fifty years since I heard him on the Baroda College platform," wrote Patkar, "I still remember his figure and the metallic ring of his sweet melodious voice as if I heard him yesterday."

Patkar deeply cherished the memory of his former Professor. "Being in close contact with this great man, I sometimes used to take liberties with him. While I was in Matriculation class, I once asked him how I should improve my English, what author I should read and study. I had read some portion of Macaulay's *Lives of Great Men* and I was fascinated by his style. I asked him if I should read Macaulay. Then, as was

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usual with him he smiled and replied, 'Do not be anybody's slave, but your own master. By reading Macaulay or any other writer you will never be like him. You will not be a Macaulay but a faint echo of Macaulay. You will be but a copy to be derided by the world, but never an original. Therefore you may read any good author carefully, but should think for yourself and form your own judgment. It is likely you may differ from the views of the writer. You should think for yourself and cultivate a habit of writing and in this way you will be the master of your own style.'

That appears to be the advice Professor A. Ghose generally gave to his students. Records R. S. Dalai, "He was revered by all, but being by nature shy and reserved was not easily accessible. His reading of English Texts was very simple and did not create an impression in students' minds of his Rhetorics, but we were all stunned at his genius when he dictated extemporaneous notes in a very lucid style. One sentence followed another naturally. I owe to him and his notes on *Pride and Prejudice* for my effort in writing a Gujarati novel."

M. H. Kantavala was another former student of A. Ghose. "Mr. Littledale was succeeded [in 1900] by Mr. Arvind Ghosh," began his account, given in 1933. "The speech he delivered at one of the annual social gatherings¹ was a piece of chaste and polished English, the like of which I have never heard. It occupied only three pages of the College Miscellany, but it set an example in classical English. Professor Ghosh gave

1. A part of it has been quoted in Book Four, Chapter 25.

us essays to write. He corrected all the essays. He used to teach us that every sentence should logically follow from the preceding sentence, and similarly every para should logically follow from the preceding one. Correct composition leads to correct thinking."

Purani was right of course. Student after student bore witness to the quality of A. Ghose's lectures. "Mr. Arvind Ghose," said N. K. Dikshit carrying his thoughts back to his college days, "used to grace the Debating Society's meetings with his presence. Once or twice he was accompanied by Mr. K. G. Deshpande,

B.A., Bar-at-law Rarely they addressed the meeting but

when they did it was really an intellectual feast that seemed to us. Later on Ghose was appointed Lecturer in French and English. His tutorial work was much appreciated. He took an active part in the literary activities of the College boys."

Sri Aurobindo never looked at the Notes, as he recalled in 1938. Sometimes the students remarked the disparity between what was in the Notes and his explanations, so that many of them found him difficult to understand. A Sindhi student of his at the College, Chandwani, calling up a sixty-year-old memory, confirms all that.

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

"He seldom gave homework. He never prepared the students from the point of view of examinations. But as he lectured he would throw light on the subjects in an all-round way.

"I remember him once lecturing on the political philosophy of Burke. His exposition was so luminous that there was no need of questions and answers. Also I remember the days when he was teaching us *Reflections on the Revolution in France*¹ by Burke. Sri Aurobindo never took

the help of the book and never cared to read it with us to the end. He would go on giving comments without once opening it. Some of the students, who wanted to put questions and get answers from him on this or that point, were not satisfied with his method of teaching, because he did not deal with the points of the book para by para, in the sequence of the book. He took a broad, overall and penetrating view of the subject. He would give his lecture in the class and leave the students to ponder over his exposition. He left them to study the book elsewhere with the help of his expository comments. But I was very much satisfied with his way of teaching and if I did not understand anything, I would go to him to get my difficulties solved.

"When I passed the Intermediate Examination in First Class, he was very happy over it, for First Class at that time was rare. As a result of getting First Class I was offered a scholarship in Elphinstone College [Bombay]. He tried to dissuade me from leaving Baroda College but due to my pecuniary

1. Lord Curzon vehemently opposed the teaching of it: "Though as a composition it is excellent, it is certainly dangerous food for Indian students."

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condition and the substantial amount of the scholarship I could not but go. I remember he gave me a testimonial.

"He used to attend social gatherings and dramatic performances. But mostly he remained silent. I remember how he appreciated Shakespeare's play, *The Merchant of Venice*, in which I took part as Portia. Barindra, his younger brother, was also there during those days. Later Sri Aurobindo left Baroda College and joined the National College in Calcutta. His articles in the *Bande Mataram* used to inspire me greatly. I still remember one of his articles which appeared in this paper under the caption, 'The Wheat and the Chaff.'

"A couple of years later he came to Bombay and gave a series of lectures. I enthusiastically took the opportunity to attend them.

"One day we invited him to tea among my Sindhi friends. He climbed up the three storeys to have tea with us. As I rose to introduce him and started speaking in praise of him, he made a gesture to stop me and said, 'We are all children of the Mother.' By 'Mother', he meant Mother

India. Then he spoke to us, in a calm contained tone, of our responsibilities to our country. His very silence was inspiring to all.

"As long as he was in the political field, he was the sole inspiration of my national ideals and activities. The flame of patriotism that burns intensely in my heart was lit by him. But when later he left for Pondicherry, my attitude towards him changed, for I believed that the country needed him badly at that hour. My interest was mainly confined to the freedom of the country. With his departure my extraordinary enthusiasm

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for him became a little cold, for I always thought of the battlefield of action. His leaving this field did not appeal to me. And I felt that our deep and intimate link was then severed.

"I admired and remembered him like a God. While people would repeat the name of God, I used to repeat the name 'Aurobindo, Aurobindo' in my mind. I have no words to express how much I was aflame with him."

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Palleri Cap

It was a Marathi student of Sri Aurobindo's, Sanker B. Didmishe, who gave another comprehensive statement (in Marathi). "I was in Inter at that time. Sri Aravind was teaching Burke's *French Revolution*. As his method of teaching consisted in going to the roots, one could never forget what he taught, even though the whole text was not completed. His mastery of the English language was phenomenal. Sometimes," disclosed Didmishe, "he examined our composition books. He wrote on them such remarks as 'Fit for Standard III' and 'How have you come to the College?'"

"I was in the B.A. Class in 1906. At that time he was giving us (students of Jr. B.A. with voluntary English) notes on English literature. The College started at 11.00 A.M., but Sri Aravind Babu came exactly at 11.30, went straight to his room and began teaching. We eight students used to sit in his office. Before beginning he would ask us to read seven or eight lines

from the previous day; then his dictation and our writing commenced." Other students confirm this, some saying that Prof. Ghose asked them to read only the last sentence. "While dictating," went on

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Baroda College early this century

Didmishe, "he sat on the chair and looked at the photo of Principal Tait on the wall in front. He had no books or notes with him; everything was extempore. This procedure went on for one and a half hours. These notes were on the Augustan Age of English literature.

"That same year agitation began in Bengal and his attention turned to it." The College students decided to have a photograph taken with their Professor before he left for good. Each of the three classes had one group photo taken. At the time A. Ghose was taking the Senior and the Junior B.A. classes, and French. S. B. Didmishe was in the Junior B.A. group. "I was sitting at the feet of Sri Aravind Babu," he said. "My dress at that time consisted of a long coat, Hungarian cap and

dhoti. Sri Aravind Babu used to wear English dress —coat, waistcoat and pants —but on his head a white turban, with an embroidered border. It was not customary at that time for students to go to his residence and so we did not go to the bungalow." One small detail clung to Didmishe's memory. "The buggy in which he went to the College from Khaserao Saheb's bungalow had purple glass panes."

S. B. Didmishe's remembrance of Sri Aurobindo's passage in Baroda a year later, after the Surat Congress, had remained vivid. "Then," Didmishe recalled, "after the break-up of the Congress at Surat, he came to Baroda for five or six days to speak on behalf of the Extremist party. There four lectures were delivered in the Bankaneer Theatre.¹ We used to go

1. Two lectures there and one at Manik Rao's gymnasium according to Purani.

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and sit two hours before the time. His dress then was Bengali dhoti, shirt and a shawl wrapped around him, but nothing on his head." The shawl was a concession to the biting cold of January; it was a Pashmina shawl offered by Sardar Mazumdar who saw Sri Aurobindo going about in a shirt.

The Baroda Collegians so idolized their former Professor that when he came to Baroda from Surat they unharnessed the horses from his carriage and pulled it themselves.

*

* *

Charu Chandra Dutt had heard much about Sri Aurobindo from different sources. But it was finally in 1904 that he met him. It was at the Baroda station. Dutt was on his way to Bombay, and he was with an English colleague; while Sri Aurobindo had gone to the station to see the artist Sashikumar Hesh off. "Magistrate Keshavrao Deshpande and Jatin Banerji were also with him." Just before the train's halt at the Baroda station the Englishman asked C. Dutt, "Do you know where Ghosh is now?"

"Which Ghosh?"

"That Classical scholar of Cambridge who has come away to India to waste his future."

"He is at Baroda," replied Dutt.

When the train stopped Hesh saw Dutt and shouted to him, "Dutt, do you know Ghosh?"

All that was narrated to Sri Aurobindo by Nirod decades later. Sri Aurobindo was hugely amused. Nirod continued C. C.

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Dutt's story. "Then Hesh introduced you. Dutt said to the Englishman: 'Here is Ghosh.'

"That?" the Englishman exclaimed in great surprise, because you had come to the station in the Indian official dress and turban."

"Turban?" Sri Aurobindo cut in. "Does he mean Palleri cap?... But the official dress also? I don't remember. It is true that at times I used to put on the Marathi dress."

C.C. Dutt in his book added a few more details. "After the introduction, I said to Aurobindo Babu, 'Your brother Benoybabu knows me from long.' He smiled a beautiful sweet smile and replied, 'I know all about you. Now that we are both in Gujarat we shall meet often.'"

C.C. Dutt's father, Kalikadas Dutt was the Dewan of the Maharaja of Coochbehar, where Charu Chandra was born on 16 June 1876. After his return from England, Benoybhusan was engaged by the Maharaja of Coochbehar, as we have already seen. That is how C.C. Dutt was so well acquainted with Benoybhusan, and heard from him many stories about his younger brother. C.C. Dutt too was an I.C.S. and served as judge at several places in western India, such as Thane and Bombay. After his retirement he authored several Bengali storybooks; and in 1928 he was entrusted with writing a history of the Indian National Congress which he accomplished with credit. Born twenty years after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 he was a revolutionary at heart and joined the Revolutionary Movement. When queried, Sri Aurobindo confirmed it. "Oh yes. Everybody knew of it and so he was called by the Europeans 'Disloyal

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Judge.' That's the kind of man I like. He used to talk openly and frankly about his revolutionary ideas to Englishmen." Many of them appreciated him.

In 1910 Sri Aurobindo left Bengal for Pondicherry. Thereafter for thirty years there was no direct contact between them. There was some contact in a roundabout way though. C.C. Dutt was in Santiniketan from 1931 to 1938. We too lived there in the early 30s. My father, P.S. Nahar, who knew Dutt and his past relationship with Sri Aurobindo, would pass on to him copies of some of Sri Aurobindo's letters to his disciples. This was disclosed by Dutt himself in his book.

Thirty years after they last saw each other, when C.C. Dutt wrote asking permission to visit the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo readily granted it; but he did not forget to cut a joke! "Does he still smoke a pipe like old times? Then how can he stay in the Ashram?" Retorted Dutt, "The pipe is my servant, I am not the servant of the pipe."

A disciple asked Sri Aurobindo whether he was well-acquainted with C.C. Dutt from days of yore. "Charu Dutt?" wrote back Sri Aurobindo. "Yes, saw very little of him, for physically our ways lay apart, but that little was very intimate, one of the band of men whom I used most to appreciate and felt as if they had been my friends and comrades and fellow-warriors in the battle of the ages, and could be so for ages more. But curiously enough, my physical contact with men of this type —there were two or three others —was always brief. Because I had something else to do this time, I suppose."

Charu Chandra Dutt passed the last years of his life

near the living Idol of his heart.

Then he passed away on 22 January 1952, about thirteen I months after Sri Aurobindo's departure.

* *

Sri Aurobindo had not forgotten Sashikumar Hesh either. When he was explaining that not only a Yogi but even an ordinary man can have a change of skin colour, he gave the example of Hesh. "I know a dark lower-middle-class Bengali named Hesh who returned from Europe after some years. He looked almost like a European. He came to see me at Baroda but I couldn't recognize him. Then he said, 'Don't you recognize me?'"

Sponsored by Maharaja Suryakanta Acharya of Mymen-singh, Hesh had gone to Europe to study art, which he did at several schools—in London, Paris, Venice, etc. His 'Letter from Europe' was a weekly feature in K. K. Mitra's *Sanjibani*. At Baroda, the Gaekwad offered him and his French wife hospitality at his Guest House which normally was reserved for important guests. Of an evening, recalls D. K. Roy, the artist—who looked like an Italian—would drop in on them, driving in style in a brougham with liveried coachman and a groom behind. There was quite a distance between the royal Guest House and Baroda Camp which was then the residence of A. Ghose. Sometimes Hesh would invite both of them to take a drive with him. According to Roy the only daily exercise Sri Aurobindo did in those days was walking up and down the

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verandah for a long time, before dusk; except the days he went for a drive in the brougham. When Hesh expressed a wish to do his portrait in oil, Sri Aurobindo gave several sittings at the Guest House. Roy says that Sashikumar Hesh was really a very good artist as, just with a few strokes of his brush, he was able to bring out Sri Aurobindo's serene brightness.

What happened to that oil painting? We don't know.

Nor have we come across a photo of Dinendra Kumar Roy with Sri Aurobindo taken by Fadke.

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"Why, if I had followed the line of external success," exclaimed Sri Aurobindo in the course of a conversation with his disciples, "I would have been somewhere in Baroda! That life was easy.... If I had stuck to my job I would have been a Principal, perhaps, written some poetry and lived in comfort like a bourgeois."

But Sri Aurobindo did not care a whit for any personal comfort, nor for amassing wealth. "Poverty has never held any terrors for me nor is it an incentive," he said in his forthright manner. "You seem to forget that I left my very safe and 'handsome' Baroda position without any need to it, and that I gave up also the Rs.150 of the National College Principalship, leaving myself with nothing to live on. I could not have done that if money had been an incentive." It was in January 1935 that Sri Aurobindo made this reply to Nirod's ignorant remarks.

"If you don't realise that starting and carrying on for

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ten years and more a revolutionary movement for independence ' without means in a country wholly unprepared for it meant living dangerously, no amount of puncturing of your skull with words will give you that simple perception."

Sri Aurobindo chose to live dangerously.

By 1903 —actually before that —Sri Aurobindo got more and more drawn into the vortex of all-India politics, and took long leaves of absence to go to Calcutta which was then the seat of the British Government. Three years later he gave up his 'safe' Baroda job and dove head foremost into the uncertain turbulence of politics.

Sri Aurobindo's sweetness and affection had filled the hearts of his students. R. N. Patkar, while going back over his college days, said, "The day of his departure came at last and it was extremely touching.... In the evening, Aravind Babu, though he had a very busy time, called me in his room and I sat by his side. With a caressing touch of his hand on my shoulder he affectionately said to me, 'Well, Rajaram, we part after all. We part in body but not in soul — which is omnipresent. I leave Baroda because Supreme Duty demands my presence elsewhere and I cannot shirk.... You will come out successful and triumphant only if you remain honest and good and obey the dictates of your conscience. If you observe this dictum your path will be smooth and you will be happy.' He finished these words and got up. He went straight to his book case, and knowing my love for Sanskrit picked up Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* and *Vikramorvasie* and presented them to me as a token of his love. He also gave me / his book of poems: *Songs to Myrtilla* and another, *Urvasie*. I

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quietly bowed, touched his feet and left the room with a heavy heart and wet eyes. Though an old man now, with one foot in the grave," said Patkar in 1956, "I still remember the parting * scene with a heavy heart."

R. S. Dalai, the Gujarati novelist, recorded among other things that "While we were in the B.A. class, Mr. S. K. Mullick, a friend of Prof. Ghose, delivered us a lecture laying stress on Swadeshi, and many of us took to the Swadeshi vow from that date. Prof. Ghose also spoke and we were enamoured of his Rhetorics full of sentiments and ardour. Every syllable that he spoke was full of patriotic spirit."

Dr. Sarat Kumar Mullick, a reputed physician, was an enthusiastic patriot. He was perhaps the first to take the initiative in forming an army of Bengalis by inducting Bengalis into the Bengal regiment; similarly he was foremost in forming the Bengal Territorial Force. As Chairman of the Baroda College Union, Professor A. Ghose was required to deliver "a few speeches at functions in the Palace itself such as the reception of Dr. S. K. Mullick."

Now, it so happened that Dr. Manilal —my friend Chandanbala's father—who hailed from Baroda, had been a student of A. Ghose. After Sri Aurobindo's accident to his knee in November 1938, the doctor, who had come for the Darshan with his family (in those days we saw Sri Aurobindo only three times a year), became one of the attendant doctors. Once in the course of the daily talk, he remarked to Sri Aurobindo, "I heard your lecture after the Surat Congress. You had some paper in your hand."

"That was the speech I made from an entire silence of the mind," replied Sri Aurobindo, "and that was my first experience of the kind." Then he asked, "You didn't hear me at Baroda?"

"Yes, Sir, once only," replied Dr. Manilal. "I was in the Matric class then. Only one sentence I remember of that speech. Dr. Mullick had come to Baroda. The meeting was held in his honour. Prof. Saha proposed you to the chair saying, 'Dr. Mullick is a Bengali and Mr. Ghose is a Bengali. So I propose him to the chair.' You replied: 'I consent to take the chair not because Dr. Mullick is a Bengali and I am a Bengali, but because I am an Indian and Dr. Mullick is an Indian.'"

23

K. M. Munshi

When Sri Aurobindo wholly gave up his job at Baroda, the College students were naturally sad at losing such a teacher, but their pride in him more than offset their sadness: 'their' Professor was now a political leader of all-India stature. We may note too that many of those who served the country under B. G. Tilak's leadership were Sri Aurobindo's students from Baroda College. Just as Auro-dada had tried to kindle the spirits of his brother and cousins at Deoghar with patriotic fire, so did Prof. A. Ghose with his students.

K. M. Munshi was one of them. Munshi was the founder of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, an organ to revitalize Indian culture. His own position in Gujarat's literary world was preeminent ; plays and novels (many of them written while in jail) flowed abundantly from his pen. His historical novels in particular gave life to the epic of the ancient Aryans, living on the banks of the Saraswati in Vedic times. Agastya and Lopamudra, Vasishtha and Arundati, Vishwamitra and kings and gods all became characters of flesh and blood. His novel in English, *Krishnavatara*, based on the life of Sri Krishna is

fascinating —being a historian helped. By profession he was a lawyer, which did not prevent him from becoming a successful educationist and journalist; in each and every field he rose to prominence. After India's Independence Kanhaiyalal Maneklal Munshi (1887-1971) held charge of several ministries in the cabinet of Jawarharlal Nehru. As a member of the Constituent Assembly, his contribution to the drafting of Indian Constitution was considerable.

When I visited Ooty, in the Nilgiris of South India in the late '70s, I was disappointed to see most hillsides either barren or dotted with houses. But I noticed that on several hillsides there were stands of trees. An old local resident told me that those trees had been planted at the request of K. M. Munshi in the '50s when he had visited Ooty and seen the ongoing de-greening of the mountains. He was a nature lover. But both he and his wife Lilavati were botanists. I know

because when they visited the Ashram they greatly rejoiced seeing all the flowering plants and came out with many botanical names. I told them the meanings given by Mother.

Writing in *Bhavan's Journal* in 1962, he readily admitted that Sri Aurobindo "whose contact goes back to my boyhood" influenced him profoundly.

"To the students of our College, Prof. Ghosh was a figure enveloped in mystery," ran his article, "He was reputed to be a poet, a master of many languages and in touch with Russian nihilists." Was he? "Many stories of his doings were whispered from mouth to mouth among the students almost with awe.

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"The Russo-Japanese War, declared in 1904, shook some of us in the College to our very depth. Port Arthur fell to the Japanese in January 1905. Admiral Togo destroyed the Russian Fleet in May. Asia had successfully challenged the mastery of Europe!

"Prof. Ghosh, as our acting Principal, declared a prize in an essay-cum-debate competition on 'Japan and the Japanese'.....

"We became ardent revolutionaries. We talked of Garibaldi and the French Revolution, and hoped to win India's freedom by a few hundred drachms of picric acid.

"I remember only one occasion when I directly talked to Prof. Arvind Ghosh. 'How can nationalism be developed?' I asked. He pointed to a wall-map of India 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 Her 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 nine-fold way of Bhakti----'

"During the Partition [of Bengal] movement, Prof. Arvind Ghosh resigned his post of professor in our College. While leaving Baroda, he gave us a stirring speech, the substance of which I

noted down on the spot. The summary of that speech and his messianic utterance, the *Uttarpara Speech*,

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remained the source of inspiration for me for years."

Decades passed. Many changes had taken place in the schoolboy's life; the most important of which was his becoming a Gandhian. What, however, had remained unchanged was Munshi's profound concern for Indian culture. His thoughts were turning more and more towards Sri Aurobindo. On 2 July 1950 he met Sri Aurobindo. We came across two texts¹ by Munshi where he described what he saw.

"As you may know, Sri Aurobindo was my professor in the Baroda College, and his militant nationalism of 1904 moulded my early outlook. Later, I casually read some of his works. During the last few years, however, his influence has been coming over upon me intermittently, but, more and more perceptibly I have felt benefited by it. Often in the past I wanted to go to Pondicherry, but I did not wish to offer formal respects to a man whom I revered so deeply. In July 1950, however, I felt an urge to visit the Ashram. Normally, as you know, Sri Aurobindo would not see people, except on three days in the year. But in my case, he told the Secretary, he treated me as a disciple and would make an exception.

"When I visited him, after the lapse of more than forty years, I saw before me a being completely transformed, radiant, blissful, enveloped in an atmosphere of godlike calm."

It was indeed 'a rare privilege' that was granted to him, and he was the first to acknowledge it.

1. *Our Greatest Need and Other Addresses* (1953), *Janu's Death and Other Kulapati's Letters* (1954), published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

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"The other day I had the rare privilege of meeting Sri Aurobindo. I had seen him last in 1908 at Bombay. Now, however, I saw something different; the most beautiful old age imaginable in an atmosphere of inspiring serenity. He sat enthroned on an upholstered chair with a quiet,

unaggressive dignity. His thin white beard and well-brushed, long hair framed a radiant face which bore me down with the unfamiliar weight of veneration. A deep light of knowledge and wisdom shone in his eyes. The wide calm of the Spirit appeared to have converted the whole personality into a radiant Presence, not that of a thunder-wielding Jove but of one who shone with the light of Consciousness.

"It was neither my old Professor whom I admired from a distance, nor the seer from whose teachings I had profited at several periods of my life. It was a being complete in himself. In my works, I have written about integrated personality. I have seen it in a vision. I have described it in fiction. I sensed it in the titanic efforts of Gandhiji to realise Truth and Nonviolence. But this was absolute integration of personality; attachment, wrath and fear had been transmuted into a power which was at the same time beautiful and calm; the Central Idea in Aryan culture materialised in human shape. When, in our objectives I mentioned Sri Aurobindo as one of the great architects of creative life, it was an estimate; at that moment in Pondicherry, I saw, I felt, he was." He is.

Munshi also has given a very brief account of the interview. "He spoke in a low, clear voice, which stirred the depths of my being.

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"I talked of my spiritual needs. I said: 'I am at a dead end. The world is too much with me.'

"The Sage replied: 'You need not give up the world in order to advance in self-realization. But you cannot advance by impatience. I wrote to you that I would help you, and in my own way I am helping you.... You have the urge and the light. Go your own way. Do not be deflected from the faith in your natural evolution. I will watch over your progress.'

"Then we discussed Indian culture, its present crisis, even the Hindu Code. When I said: 'The younger generation is being fed on theories and beliefs which are undermining the higher life of India,' Sri Aurobindo replied: 'You must overcome this lack of faith. Rest assured that our culture cannot be undermined. This is only a passing phase.'

"Then he sprang a surprise on me. 'When do you expect India to be united?' he asked.

"I was taken aback. I explained to him how our leaders had agreed to partition. 'So long as the present generation of politicians is concerned, I cannot think of any time when the two countries — India and Pakistan — can be united.'

"The Master smiled. 'India will be re-united. I see it clearly.' Was it an opinion? Was it a prophecy? Or was it clear perception ?

"I shook my head in doubt and asked how India could be re-united. In two short sentences he described what Pakistan stood for and indicated how the two countries could come together."

What does Pakistan stand for?

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24

Resistance to Evil

Sri Aurobindo's words, "The spirit of her [India's] culture is her soul," had taken root in the heart of K. M. Munshi. Unlike his Prime Minister who never made a real discovery of India, Munshi had done it. He had imbibed her culture. He was a novelist among other things, and what pleases me more than anything else is that his heroes are no weaklings. A man of integrity, he had the moral courage to act on what he perceived as right and truth. To him the Mahatma, M. K. Gandhi, was his 'master,' but it did not prevent him from revolting to Gandhi's advice to Congressmen. Mr. M. K. Gandhi advised Hindus not to resist Muslim goon das, not to stand up to Muslim violence, and certainly not to retaliate. Munshi was thrown into a turmoil when he read that advice of Gandhi's in the papers. He dashed off a letter to his master, saying he was resigning from the Congress.

"Forgive me," he wrote on 26 May 1941 from Nainital, "if I cannot reconcile myself to these injunctions. Since [the movement for] Pakistan has been in action in Dacca, Ahmedabad, Bombay and other places, it is clear that such riots are going

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to be a normal feature of our life for some years." He feared that the riots "will perhaps grow more frequent and intense if a division of India is sought to be enforced by internal and external agencies through organised violence. If life, home and shrine and honour of women is threatened by *goondaism*, organised resistance in self-defence appears to me to be a paramount and inalienable duty, whatever form such resistance may take." Firm in his resolve, he added, "I cannot pledge myself not to preach, help, organise or sympathise with organised resistance to violence in self-defence by all possible means. I do not want to be dishonest to myself nor to the country whose integrity is

now threatened_____ "

Two points in Gandhi's letter had specially shocked Munshi.

1) "Those [Congressmen] who favour violent resistance (by way of self-defence) must get out of the Congress and shape their conduct just as they think fit and guide the others accordingly."

2) "A Congressman may not directly or indirectly associate himself with gymnasia where training in violent resistance is given."

Munshi had already been for over fifteen years associated with such gymnasia. He resigned from the Congress.

That advice of Gandhi's, flying in the face of actual happenings as it does, is surprising, if not unbelievable. Muslim goon das had let loose a reign of terror. The 'law-

abiding' Hindus generally waited for the police to come and rescue them, or simply ran away. These riots were "outbursts of the predatory instincts of the goon das in a community," to put it in Munshi's words. He also felt that "cowards will always create bullies."

So what did the Mahatma teach? Non-violence or cowardice? As a matter of fact, the Mahatma's 'non-violence' had become the excuse of the coward, the opportunity for the ruffian. Not to speak of the humiliation of a whole society.

When M. K. Gandhi captured the Congress in 1920, and launched his Khilafat Movement, Annie Besant, the leader of the Home Rule movement, foresaw certain dangers. She did not hesitate to

warn Gandhi that the movement he contemplated "would result in the release of forces whose potentialities for evil were quite incalculable."

There was an ominous trait in Gandhi's nature which Munshi had missed. So had I. It was reading a narrative¹ of my uncle's that suddenly opened my eyes.

The Mahatma was famous for his fasts. But when communal riots broke out a subtle pattern emerged: So long as Muslim hoodlums held the upper hand, Gandhi held his peace, or, at best, verbally expressed his dismay. But when the Hindus began to retaliate then—only then—he would go on a fast.² The criminal elements in the Muslim society were always the first to start riots. "But when," said Bijoy Singh Nahar, "during the riots, we Hindus had organized ourselves, and not only begun

1. *Ja dekhéchhi ja karechhi (What I have seen , what I have done).*

2. R. C. Majumdar's *A History of Modern Bengal, vol.2* , is illuminating in this respect.

to resist but to beat back the attackers, Gandhiji announced that he was going on fast to stop the riots."

Intrepid that he was, my uncle had not hesitated to move about in the streets of riot-torn Calcutta during those pre-partition days, at the risk of his life and limbs. He and a few other Bengali leaders had organized the 'Resistance Group' in Calcutta. At first the Muslim Chief Minister of Bengal had watched unmoved the unfolding riots: what harm if Hindus are trampled and killed? But when the tide began to turn, the Hindus resisted keeping the Muslim ruffians at bay, he went and met Gandhi who was then in Calcutta. After a talk, at his instance, Gandhi invited my uncle and the other resistance leaders to meet him. They went. They saw a feeble man lying in his bed. Their soft hearts melted at the sight. It was then very easy for Gandhiji to extract a promise from them to stop retaliation. For, said he, he had resolved to withdraw his 'indefinite' fast only when people, 'Muslims and Hindus,' could move about freely in the streets of Calcutta.

Instead of telling everybody "You are Indian," and healing the rift, Gandhi widened the communal divide.

A few ambitious politicians decided the fate of millions of Indians.

India was partitioned.

Did Mr. M. K. Gandhi try to prevent it?

Did the Mahatma go on a fast? Never heard of it.

Pakistan was created. A bloodbath.

Now listen to Sri Aurobindo.

Decades earlier, commenting on similar circumstances of Muslim ruffianism, he said that it was high time to give our

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youth a physical and moral education "of our old Kshatriyas or the Japanese Samurai." It was the British who had sown the seeds of violence. Terrified at the rising nationalism the Anglo-Indian Government had turned to turbulent Mahomedan fanaticism, hoping to drive out poison by poison. It took no time at all for the seeds to bear fruit. "We must organise physical education all over the country," Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Bande Mataram* on 18 March 1907, "and train up the rising generation not only in the moral strength and courage for which Swadeshism has given us the materials, but in physical strength and courage and the habit of rising immediately and boldly to the height of even the greatest emergency." We must be trained, he said, to protect ourselves and "not be at the mercy of a Police efficient only for harassment, whose appearance on the scene after a crime means only a fresh and worse calamity to the peaceful householder."

How strange to link cowardice with spirituality! The product of a weak brain, I decided; and taken up by people who are too lazy to think for themselves. Spirituality, by its very definition, is a resistance to evil. A constant war against evil. That is the first step. Mastery over evil is a next higher step. The ultimate step is the rooting out of the evil.

Do you know what Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1533) did when threatened with dire consequences by the Kazi (Muslim magistrate) of Nabadwip? He defied the order. The very evening Kazi's prohibitory order came into force, Chaitanya led his *san-kirtan*¹ party, larger than ever, around the streets of Nabadwip.

1. Public singing of hymns to Sri Krishna.

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Thus singing, the party marched to the Kazi's house. Such a huge crowd! The Kazi was intimidated. Then he admired the courage of Chaitanya. So charmed was the Kazi by young Chaitanya that he himself ended up taking part in the sankirtan.

Is it 'immoral' to resist evil? Sri Ramakrishna Parama-hansa, after telling a story to his disciples, gave its moral: "You must hiss at wicked people. You must frighten them lest they should do you harm."

Who says resistance to evil is 'irreligious'? Swami Vivek-ananda said flatly, "Strength is religion, and nothing is greater than strength." He explained that "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."

Sri Aurobindo told Indians: "The brain is impotent without the right arm of strength.... What India needs especially at this moment," he wrote in June 1907, "is the aggressive virtues, the spirit of soaring idealism, bold creation, fearless resistance, courageous attack.... We would apply to the present situation the vigorous motto of Danton, that what we need, what we should learn above all things is to dare and again to dare and still to dare." He declared: "Strength attracts strength; firm and clear-minded courage commands success and respect; strong and straight dealing can dispense with the methods of dissimulation and intrigue. All these are signs of character and it is only character that can give freedom and greatness to nations."

With his unerring instinct, Sri Aurobindo went to the

heart of the matter. "It is not enough that our own hands should remain clean and our souls unstained," he wrote in the *Essays on the Gita*, almost like an antidote to Gandhi's creed of 'nonviolence,' "for the law of strife and destruction to die out of the world; that which is its root must first disappear out of humanity. Much less will mere immobility and inertia unwilling to use or incapable of using any kind of resistance to evil, abrogate the law; inertia, *tamas*, indeed, injures much more than can the rajasic principle of strife which at least creates more than it destroys." The individual's abstention from strife, he said, "leaves the Slayer of creatures unabolished." He asked, "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 men 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."

Sri Aurobindo warned. "But even soul-force, when it is effective, destroys. Only those who have used it with eyes open, know how much more terrible and 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."

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Barin

But again I have got ahead of myself so let us take the back trail.

One who was closely associated with Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary activity, and had great responsibility, was his younger brother Barin.

After their father's death in December 1892, Barin and Sarojini were taken to their grandfather's at Deoghar, where for the first time they were to meet their three elder brothers. It was at Deoghar that Barin went to school. He passed his Matriculation from Patna University in 1900, then continued his college studies at Dacca. His 'Mejodada' Manmohan, who was then professor at Dacca University, offered him hospitality. Barin then fancied the career of a farmer for himself. It did not work out. After a few meanders he opened a tea stall at Patna, 'near the Patna College:

'B. Ghose's

TEA STALL

Half-anna cup, rich in cream'

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Predictably the business failed. So Barin decided to go to Baroda, and get some money from his 'Sejda.' This was his first long train journey —almost 2,000 kilometres in B. N. R. 's Bombay Mail —which lasted for four days and four nights. The train passed through the Sal forests of Midnapore, skirted the Chilka Lake, and, oh, so many sights greeted the young man. Then after a crowded Bombay he reached Baroda early the next morning. He took a rickshaw at the railway station. "Aurobindo then lived at Collector Khaserao's house, very near the Maharaja's 'Lakshmivilas Palace.' The two-storeyed house was built in red brick. In that society of *finished gentlemen* suddenly one morning appeared a strange creature, in travel-stained clothes, carrying a cheap, torn canvas valise, and wearing canvas shoes in worse condition, looking like a vagabond," narrates Barin in his Bengali autobiography.

"The butler was amazed to see me. He was hard put to it to believe that this was 'the brother of Ghose Saheb.' He dubiously ushered me into the fine drawing room near the portico, and disappeared upstairs to announce my arrival. Almost immediately Sejda hurriedly came down the grand staircase and spirited me away to a bathroom upstairs. With the help of soap and towel I was able to shed the skin of coal and dust accumulated during those four days and nights. Then after donning Sejda's shirt and clean dhoti, and my long hair combed in Rabindric style, when I came out everybody heaved a sigh of relief." By 'everybody' Barin means his Didi (Sarojini), Sejda and Sejo-baudi (Sejda's wife). It was several months after Sri Aurobindo's marriage in April 1901 that Barin turned up. "By

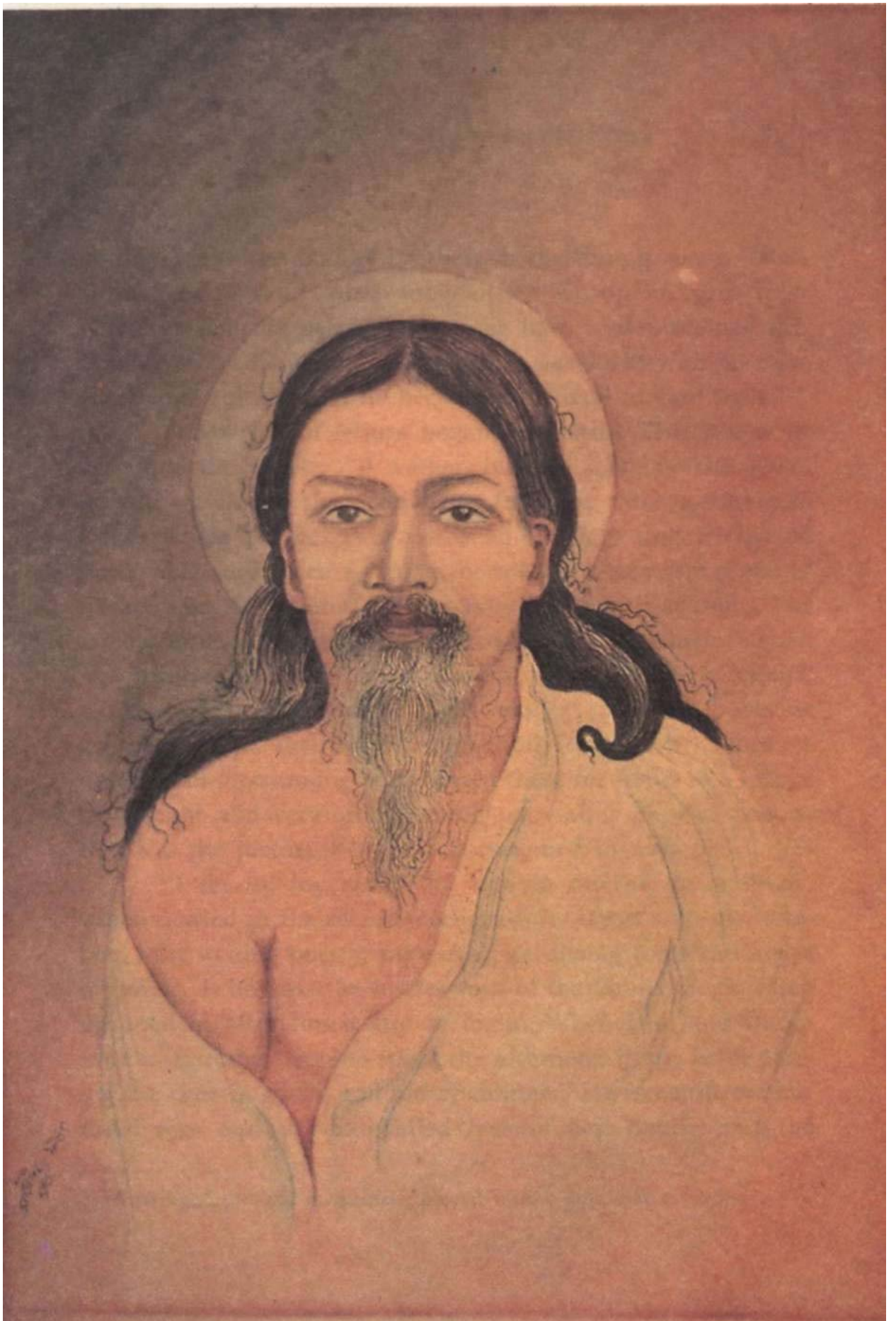
and by I met the Jadhav brothers in the dining room. 'Well, young man!' and with such other European greetings, Khaserao heartily patted me on the back and welcomed me. Madhavrao, a lieutenant in the army, was dark; with his calm grace and quick smile, he became my friend at first sight."

A new life of leisure began for Barin. This is how he describes the house. "A rather big hall, facing the lawn, beyond which ran the main street from the railway station to Lakshmivilas Palace, two rooms on its right and a covered inner courtyard, with a dining room on one side and servants' quarters on the other. That was how the house was built. The same number of rooms was repeated upstairs, of which the hall was Sri Aurobindo's study. A table, a sofa, a number of chairs, all heaped pellmell with books, and a revolving bookcase groaning under their weight —

all thinly covered with dust; a quiet small unassuming man buried there for hours in a trance of thought and very often writing page after page of poetry, that was the picture I became accustomed to daily-

"I set up my abode in a room on the groundfloor, which nestled in the remote corner of the lawn, with my notebooks for writing poetry, my esraj,¹ gardening tools and heaps of novels. It became the rendezvous of the family. Sejda often dropped in after lunch and at night. When Didi and Baudi were in Baroda, they too spent the afternoon in my hole, passing the time in gossip and merry chatter." He remembered the timid eyes and shy half-veiled face of Sejo-Baudi, and the

1. A stringed musical instrument played with a bow, like a violin.



far-off detached look and absent-minded smile of Sejda.

Whenever Barin brought up the subject of finance for his tea stall, Sejda always evaded committing himself. He, who was so generous with his money, was quite unwilling to spend it on something which did not meet with his approval. Thus the short visit of Barin got prolonged. He led a carefree life, filled with writing poetry and reading novels, painting and hunting and vegetable gardening. He was a young man of many parts, brilliant in all he did, attractive and persuasive. Barin had great energy and capacity. "Yes, he had brilliance," Sri Aurobindo said, and sketched a quick portrait of his younger brother, "but he was narrow and limited. He wouldn't widen himself. That is why his things won't last. For instance, he was a brilliant writer and he also composed devotional poetry, but, because of his limitedness, nothing that will endure. He was an amusing conversationalist, he had some musical ability, he was good at revolutionary activity. He did well in all these matters, but nothing more. He was also a painter, but it did not come to much in spite of his exhibitions."

Now and then Barin would go, accompanied by his gardener, for a day-long outing, leaving at four in the morning and returning around eight in the evening. These were actually his hunting expeditions. He shot birds with a small sporting rifle and a breech-loading gun that Madhavrao had given him. But when he returned home, his Didi could not stomach the sight of all those killed or half-killed wild fowl. She refused to taste the 'tastily cooked' meat.

When the Puja vacations came, all of them went to

urn's portrait

Sri Aurobindo

Deoghar. Barin had taken with him Madhavrao's gifts, the rifle and breech-loading gun. The two brothers would go to the Daroa river bank to shoot birds. Ostensibly. "While my brother Barin and I were at Baidyanath," Sri Aurobindo recalled, "we used to go out with guns to shoot at birds, obviously with the idea of practising. My aunty saw us and said, 'These two boys will be hanged.' The prophecy came almost true, for Barin got a death sentence."

Let us hear a racy tale from C.C. Dutt. "Once Sri Aurobindo came to Thane, 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 'Ghose Saheb' should be given the rifle to have a try at it. But Sri Aurobindo refused, saying that he had never handled a rifle. At our insistence he finally agreed. We showed him how to hold the rifle and take aim. He then said to my wife, 'Lilabati, come and stand near me. Charu is too restless.' Taking up the rifle he took aim, and the very first shot hit the target; the first hit was followed up by a second, and the second by a third! It took our breath away. Do you know what the target was? The black, tiny head of a matchstick, hung at a distance of ten to twelve feet."

This anecdote is in C.C. Dutt's *Reminiscences*.¹ Upon hearing this story from Nirod, about his aiming at the tip of the matchstick, Sri Aurobindo commented, "That is all fantasy." About the rest, however, he said, "What was actually the case

1. *Purano-Katha Upasanghar*.

was that I and Barin went somewhere in Midnapore to practise shooting. No doubt, it is true that I didn't know how to handle a gun."

Another story Dutt narrates in his book is about playing bridge. This too occurred at Thane. Lilabati was making watermelon ice cream, as both 'Ghose Saheb' and her brother Subodh Mullick were there. The ice cream needed time to set. So Subodh said, "Come, let's play a game of card." Smilingly, Ghose Saheb replied, "Yes, let's. But I don't know your modern games of bridge or poker. Ages ago, in my boyhood I played whist a few times with old people." Lilabati explained the basics of the game to Ghose Saheb who was her partner. On the other side were Subodh and Charu. Then began the game. "And they kept winning and winning!" said C.C. "So I flung down the cards on the table. 'You are quarrelsome fellows,' said my wife. 'All right we release all that we have won. What do you say Partner?' The Partner laughed much and said, 'I have no objection in being charitable and releasing what we have won. But we won by our sharp intelligence.'"

Sri Aurobindo and the others all laughed upon hearing the story. Sri Aurobindo had half forgotten about the game of cards. "All I remember," he said at first, "is that it was a game of

bridge which I didn't know and I and Mrs. Dutt were thoroughly beaten by the opposite party." The others present laughed again. "But the shooting incident I can't forget because that was the first time I was handling a gun."

When the full memory came back, Sri Aurobindo corrected himself, "It is true I didn't know how to play cards

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and bridge is a difficult game, but I kept winning. So he thought I knew everybody's hand. As for shooting with a gun, it is quite easy. I could have taken aim at even small birds high in the air."

It was at Thane that Sri Aurobindo first met Subodh Mullick. Then when he accepted the post of Principal of National College at Calcutta he very often stayed with the Mullicks like a member of the family. He called Lilabati's mother, 'Ma.' And, most unusual with him, he let Lilabati materially take care of him. When he returned from the College, tired out, Lilabati would wipe his perspiring head, and comb his hair. They had really become like brother and sister.

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Planchette

After the Puja holidays the family returned to Baroda. This time, apart from Didi and Sejo-Baudi, an aunt of theirs joined them.

Barin had recently read some books on spiritism. So to while away the evening hours he began experimenting with planchette and table-tapping. Once begun it caught hold of everyone, and they would sit daily for two to three hours. Barin says that among all those who sat for it, the automatic writing came mostly or more easily to him and to Sejda.

Sri Aurobindo himself practised automatic writing for a time at Calcutta and at Pondicherry. The book *Yogic Sadhan* was written at Pondicherry in that fashion —the 'spirit' was Raja Rammohan Roy.

"The writing was done as an experiment as well as an amusement and nothing else," stated Sri Aurobindo. "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 and statements of

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fact which also proved to be true although unknown to the persons concerned or anyone else present: there was notably a symbolic anticipation of Lord Curzon's subsequent unexpected departure from India, and, again, of the first suppression of the national movement and the greatness of Tilak's attitude amidst the storm; this prediction was given in Tilak's own presence when he visited Sri Aurobindo at Baroda and happened to enter 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 himself what there was behind it. This is what he was doing in Calcutta. But the results did not satisfy him and after a few further attempts at Pondicherry he dropped these experiments altogether." Whatever others may say, Sri Aurobindo did not give too high a value to his efforts, "for they had none of those remarkable features of Barin's writings." Sri Aurobindo's final conclusion was that "though there are sometimes phenomena which point to the intervention of beings of another plane, 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 of things known in the present and past come up, but otherwise these writings have not a great value." Sri Aurobindo added that there was "no guide at all, though someone calling himself Theramenes broke in from time to time. The writings came haphazard without any spirit mentor such as some mediums claim to have."

Nolini Kanto Gupta also remembered Theramenes, and

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a few others besides. He says that Sri Aurobindo made them hear specimens of automatic speech. "At about eight in the evening, we used to sit around him in a room." That was the *Karmayogin* office. "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.'" Adds Nolini, "Theramenes was a political leader in ancient Greece. In a quiet mellow voice, he gave us a lecture on politics...."

Years later, during a talk with the attendant disciples, Sri Aurobindo gave several additional details of sittings at Baroda. "Barin at that time was trying some automatic writing," he recollected. "Once a spirit purporting to be that of my father came and made some prophecies. He said that he had once given a golden watch to Barin. Barin tried hard to remember and at last found that it was true."

Then he referred to the sudden departure of Curzon from

India. "The spirit prophesied that Lord Curzon would shortly leave India: he saw him looking across a blue sea. At that time there was no chance at all of Curzon's going back. But the prophecy came true. Curzon had a row with Lord Kitchener and had very shortly to leave India." But before he was chucked out of India, Lord Curzon had already put in motion forces that were to bring unexpected results. Results beyond anybody's imaginings —India's liberation from foreign yoke. For in history most beneficent results have often followed hard upon harsh measures taken by the ruler. Strangely enough, great evils have also sometimes arisen from an act of virtue. As with Prithviraj Chauhan, the King of Delhi, who was steeped in the valorous lore of Rajputana. Well, when he had Muhammad Ghori at his mercy after winning easily the battle against the Muslim invader in 1192, he chivalrously let him off. Ghori returned the next year and treacherously killed Prithviraj. Thus was the way paved for Muslim rule in India, which lasted for the next six hundred years.

Sri Aurobindo continued his narration. "The spirit also said that there was a picture of Hanuman on the wall of the house of Deodhar who was present at the sitting. Deodhar also tried to remember and said there was no such picture. When he went back, he asked his mother about it. She replied that there used to be the picture but it had been plastered over."

At that time it was Barin who was holding the pen. "Lastly, the spirit prophesied that when everybody had deserted us, a man who was present there —meaning Tilak — would stand by us. This also came true." The actual words

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spoken by the spirit of Dr. K. D. Ghose are supposed to have been, "When all your work will be ruined and many men will bow their heads down, this man will keep his head erect."

It was about the same time that Sri Aurobindo came into contact with a Naga Sannyasi, Mohanpuri. "I told him that I wanted to get power for revolutionary activities. He gave me a violent mantra of Kali, with 'Jahi, Jahi' etc. to repeat. I did so, but, as I had expected, it came to nothing."

Mohanpuri was a member of the governing body of the Naga Sannyasis. He also "conducted certain *kriyas* and a Vedic *yajña*, but all this was for his political success in his mission and not for Yoga." Barin waxed more eloquent. "Another ash-covered yogi with long and tawny matted locks used to visit Aurobindo at this time and leave long stotras or hymns to Shiva behind in Sanskrit manuscript. He sent a Brahmin once to do japa or tapasya for Aurobindo, and a hut was created in our compound and a golden image of Bagala was prepared. With closed doors the Brahmin devotee used to perform his secret ceremonies in front of this image."

We have met Devi Bagala in Deoghar. She is yellow-coloured, dressed in yellow garments and bejewelled in yellow — all golden. She has only two arms, sometimes four. With her right hand she strikes the Enemy with a cudgel, and with her left hand she pulls out the tongue of the Enemy.

"On another occasion," Sri Aurobindo went on, "a spirit purporting to be that of Ramakrishna came and simply said, 'Build a temple.' At that time we were planning to build a temple for political Sannyasis and call it Bhawani Mandir. We

thought he meant that, but later I understood it as 'Make a temple within.'" Bhawani is one of the names of the Supreme Mother.

"This," revealed Sri Aurobindo, "gave me the final push to Yoga. I thought: great men could not have been after a chimera, and if there was such a more-than-human power, why not get it and use it for action?"

Still waters run deep. The youth's pent-up love for a mother found a channel in his Motherland. He loved India deeply and passionately. It was that love that led Sri Aurobindo to Yoga.

He wrote the pamphlet *Bhawani Mandir*, in 1905 I reckon. R. N. Patkar disclosed the following fact. "In the beginning of 1905 Sri Aurobindo, Deshpande and Jadhav were meeting in the evenings." We suppose it really was Khaserao, as Madhavrao had been sent to England in 1905. "One evening," Patkar called up into his narrative a scene from those bygone days, "I saw Barindra going with the planchette into the room where all the three used to meet. Successively for three days they met in that very room, along with Barindra with the planchette. On the fourth day I asked Barindra what the matter was. Without the least hesitation he told me that a message from the Goddess had been received with detailed directions, which after being put in a readable form will be printed and published in the form of a book. The book was out in a few days under the title 'Bhawani Mandir,' or 'The Message of the Goddess.' It was for private circulation only."

In a letter Sri Aurobindo clears up some points.

"*Bhawani Mandir* was written by Sri Aurobindo but it was more Barin's idea 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, but something of the kind was attempted by Barin in the Manick-tala Garden...." The idea of Bhawani Mandir simply lapsed of itself. "The selection of a site and a head of the monastery [Sakharia Baba] 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. Subsequently he went back to Bengal, but Sri Aurobindo did not hear of any discovery of a suitable place."

It was after Barin's futile quest in the Vindhya hills that Sri Aurobindo met Mohanpuri, the Naga Sannyasi. Sri Aurobindo was searching for a Guru then. "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." That was a first-hand knowledge of yogic cure. Later in a talk, Sri Aurobindo described more fully the procedure. "I first knew about yogic cure from a Naga Sadhu or Naga Sannyasi. Barin had mountain fever when he was wandering in the Amarkantak hills. The Sannyasi took a cup of water, cut it into four by making two crosses with a knife and asked Barin to drink it, saying, 'He won't have fever tomorrow.' And the fever left him."



Agastya

The National Mantra

The Vindhyas, where Barin had gone in search of a temple site, are a chain of mountains that roughly divides India into North and South.

Legend has it that once upon a time the mountain began to grow and grow. It grew till it pierced the sky. And then the Sun could not cross it. At a standstill in the northern sky, the sun beat fiercely down on the earth there and burned all creatures great and small. A perpetual day in the North. In the South it was perpetual night. Consternation! Everybody prayed to Rishi Agastya to come to the rescue. As Vishnu always came to the rescue of the heavenly gods, so did Agastya come —time and time again —to the rescue of earthly men. Had he not drunk the ocean to its last drop to expose the demons hiding in its waters? Only ... by the time the demons were killed Agastya had already digested all the water he had drunk! At any rate, this time too he accepted to extricate the people from the peculiar state of things. Agastya decided to go down south. As he approached, Vindhya bowed his head, as the Rishi was his Guru. Rishi Agastya blessed his disciple,

and said to him: "Son, keep your head bowed as you are, till the time I return." And Agastya never returned.

The extreme eastern part of the Vindhyas is called Mekhala or Maikal range. There lies the plateau of Amarkantak. Several great Indian rivers have their sources on this plateau of Amarkantak: Narmada, Sone and Mahanadi. It may interest the Reader to know that some geophysicists believe the fifty-to-sixty-kilometre wide Narmada rift which starts at Amarkantak and its entire length of 1,312 kilometres to be a highly earthquake-prone zone, which one day may split India into two.

The basic idea of the *Bhawani Mandir* was in all likelihood derived from Bankim Chandra Chatterji's revolutionary novel, *Anandamath*.¹ Its central theme was actually based on a revolt of North Indian Sannyasins against the British rule. These Sannyasins were here, there and

everywhere, like seeds sown by the wind. For several years they kept engaging British troops in guerilla warfare. In 1763 they suddenly appeared in Dacca, then as suddenly reappeared in Coochbehar where they worsted the British soldiers in a skirmish. In 1767 five thousand of them fought openly against a contingent of sepoys in the Saran district of Bihar, killed many of them and put the rest to flight. In 1770 they were found in Dinajpur, then in Dacca, then in Rajshahi. Fighting a regular battle, some fifteen hundred Sannyasins, joined by peasants, defeated the British troops led

1. Bankim seems to have been deeply stirred by the exploits of the Sannyasins. In another of his novels —*Dew' Choudhurani* — he weaves his tale on real-life folk heroes, Devi Choudhurani and her guru Bhavani Pathak, some of whose deeds were chronicled by men of the East India Company.

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by Capt. Thomas in 1772 near Rangpur, leaving only a few survivors. Warren Hastings, the then Governor General of India, extolled (!) 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."

It was to those saffron-clad men that Sri Aurobindo alluded in his poem *The Mother Awakes*, which he wrote in Bengali c. 1903:

"With a grieving heaving heart was there none awake
In the darkest of night for the sake of the Mother?
A few only with saffron robes covering their bodies
Sat in the temple with the bare sword in hand,
Devotees of the terrible Mother,
To anoint with their own blood
The Mother's feet, wakeful they passed the night.
Hence rose the Mother:
With a mighty thirst, in wrath awoke the Mother;
With a lion's roar filling the universe awoke the Mother
To awaken the world."

Barin, in a statement on 12 June 1943, recalled how *Bhawani Mandir* was printed. "I came to Calcutta from Baroda, with the ms. of *Bhawani Mandir*, written by Sri Aurobindo in English. It was printed secretly at night in D. Gupta's Press at Kalitola under the supervision of Sudhir Sarkar of Khulna, Joshi (a Mahratta) and myself in pamphlet form. The pamphlet was fifteen to sixteen pages, and in it there was a scheme for the establishment of a temple to Bhawani, to be erected in some inaccessible hilly region of India. Though the region was not mentioned, the site had been selected near the Sone River....."

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But Sri Aurobindo was never told of any definite selection of site.

"In this temple," Barin stated, "devotees were to receive initiation both spiritually and politically for the delivrance of India from foreign rule. The scheme undoubtedly owed its origin to *Anandamath* of Bankim Chandra Chatterji."

It was in 1872 that Bankim Chandra started his monthly journal *Bangadarshan* and, again, it was in 1872 that he started writing *Anandamath* beginning with the 'Bande Mataram' mantra. But it was only during the Swadeshi days that the song became the National Anthem. It was sung across the length and breadth of India, and sung fervently. Sri Aurobindo translated the song into English, spoke about it and wrote about it.

After the Surat Congress, Sri Aurobindo had to give lectures wherever he went. On Wednesday 29 January 1908 he delivered one in the Grand Square of the National School, at Amraoti, in Berar. The meeting had commenced with the singing of *Bande Mataram*. He made it the subject of his speech. We quote a little from a summary printed in the newspaper *Bande Mataram*. "The song, he said, was not only a national anthem to be looked on as the European nations look upon their own, but one replete with mighty power, being a sacred *mantra*, revealed to us by the author of *Ananda Math*, who might be called an inspired Rishi. He described the manner in which the *mantra* had been revealed to Bankim Chandra, probably by a Sannyasi under whose teaching he was. He said that the *mantra* was not an invention, but a revivification of the old *mantra* which had become extinct, so to speak, by the treachery of one Navakishan."

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Mahakali at Lalgola's temple

Now, by a strange coincidence, a newspaper article¹ came into my hands, which describes how Bankim and the Raja of Lalgola (in the district of Murshidabad, Bengal) became close friends. The Raja, Jogindra Narayan Roy, invited Bankim to come on a visit to Lalgola, on the bank of the Kalkali river. There were dense forests in those days. In the forest by the river, Bankim was "surprised to find there three temples honouring Jagaddhatri, Mahakali, and Dashabhuj Durga. Bankim in fact stayed on the first floor of the Mahakali temple for some time, writing major portions of *Anandamath*. He wore saffron like a sannyasi.... Bankim heard a centenarian tantrik chant *Bande Bandini Matarang* [I salute the shackled Mother]. By deleting '*Bandini*' Bankim coined the immortal *Bande Mataram*."

How did Sri Aurobindo know all that, and in such detail ?

The summary of Sri Aurobindo's speech continued. "The *mantra* of Bankim Chandra was not appreciated in his own day, / and he predicted that there would come a time when the whole of India would resound with the singing of the song, and the word of the prophet was miraculously fulfilled. The meaning of the song was not understood then because there was no patriotism except such as consisted in making India the shadow of England and other countries which dazzled the sight of the sons of this our Motherland with their glory and opulence. The

1. 'The Making of Anandamath,' by Kishanchand Bhakat (*The Statesman*, 9 April 1994).

so-called patriots of that time might have been the well-wishers of India but not men who loved her. One who loved his mother never looked to her defects, never disregarded her as an ignorant, superstitious, degraded and decrepit woman."

Soon after that speech, Sri Aurobindo wrote on the same subject in the journal *Bande Mataram*. "When a great people rises from the dust," he said on 19 February 1908, "what *mantra* is the *sanjivani mantra* or what power is the resurrecting force of its resurgence? In India there are two great mantras, the *mantra* of 'Bande Mataram' which is the public and universal cry of awakened love of Motherland, and there is another more secret and mystic which is not yet revealed. The *mantra* of 'Bande Mataram' is a *mantra* once before given to the world by the Sannyasins of the

Vindhya hills. It was lost by the treachery of our own countrymen because the nation was not then ripe for resurgence and a premature awakening would have brought about a speedy downfall. But when in the great earthquake of 1897 there was a voice heard by the Sannyasins, and they were conscious of the decree of God that India should rise again, the *mantra* was again revealed to the world. It was echoed in the hearts of the people, and when the cry had ripened in silence in a few great hearts, the whole nation became conscious of the revelation."

And here is a bit of the song as translated by Sri Aurobindo.

"Mother, I bow to thee !

Rich with thy hurrying streams,

Bright with thy orchard gleams

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Cool with thy winds of delight,

Dark fields waving, Mother of might,

Mother free.

Who hath said thou art weak in thy lands,

When the swords flash out in seventy million hands

And seventy million voices roar

Thy dreadful name from shore to shore?

With many strengths who art mighty and stored,

To thee I call, Mother and Lord !

Thou who savest, arise and save !

To her I cry who ever her foemen drave

Back from plain and sea

And shook herself free.

Thou art wisdom, thou art law,

Thou our heart, our soul, our breath,

Thou the love divine, the awe

In our hearts that conquers death.

Thine the strength that nerves the arm,

Thine the beauty, thine the charm..."

*

* *

Years later, in 1920, Sri Aurobindo wrote again: "We used the Mantra *Bande Mataram* with all our heart and soul, and so long as we used and lived it, relied upon its strength to overbear all difficulties, we prospered. But, suddenly the faith and the courage failed us, the cry of the Mantra began to sink and as it rang feebly, the strength began to fade out of the

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country. It was God, who made it fade out and falter, for it had done its work. A greater Mantra than *Bande Mataram* has to come. Bankim was not the ultimate seer of Indian awakening. He gave only the term of the initial and public worship, not the formula and the ritual of the inner secret *upāsanā* [worship]. For the greatest Mantras are those which are uttered within, and which the seer whispers or gives in dream or vision to his disciples. When the ultimate Mantra is practised even by two or three, then the closed Hand of God will begin to open; when the *upāsanā* is numerous followed the closed Hand will open absolutely."

This Mantra was revealed to Mother by Sri Aurobindo.

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Bhawani Mandir

Needless to say that *Bhawani Mandir* was sure to be adjudged seditious matter by the British Government of India. The revolutionaries' chief means of propaganda was the publication of books and periodicals. The pamphlet *Bhawani Mandir* provided them with a golden opportunity.

"The pamphlet opened with an invocation of Bhawani," Barin stated, "and in most stirring and appealing language called for initiates to this cult in the new spirit of Nationalism. But the appeal was more in the nature of a spiritual than a political one, as the failure of the first attempt (1902-1904) at the formation of a secret society clearly proved that without spiritual background, the movement was not likely to have the moral stamina required for the facing of death ungrudgingly, nor for giving moral tone to terrorist activities."

On 10 December 1917, the British Government set up a Sedition Committee with Mr. Justice Rowlatt as President. The Committee submitted its report on 15 April 1918. Among the pile of

materials it studied, three books in particular drew its attention. *Bhawani Mandir* was the first. "The *Bhawani Mandir*

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(temple to Bhawani, one of the manifestations of Goddess Kali)" ran the Report, "exalt Bhawani as the manifestation of *Sakti*. Indians must acquire mental, physical, moral and spiritual strength.... They must draw strength from religion. How this is to be done is described in moving and powerful terms. The book is a remarkable instance of perversion of religious ideals to political purposes." A little farther the Sedition Com-mitee's Report again refers to *Bhawani Mandir*. "The central idea as to a given religious order is taken from the well-known novel *Ananda Math* of Bankim Chandra. We find the glorification of Kali, under the names of Sakti and Bhawani (two of her numerous names) and the preaching of the gospel of Force and Strength as the necessary condition for political freedom.¹ The necessity for Indians to worship Sakti (or Bhawani manifested as the Mother of Strength) is insisted upon if success is desired. A new order of political devotee was to be instituted. A new organisation of political Sannyasins was to be started, who were to prepare the way for revolutionary work. It was the liberation of India from foreign yoke." The Rowlatt Committee admitted though that "at this stage there is no reference to violence or crime."

The Committee drew the following conclusion. "The samities and associations formed later than 1908, gradually dropped the religious ideas underlying the *Bhawani Mandir* pamphlet and developed the terroristic side with its necessary accompaniments of dacoity and murder."

But, in spite of himself, Justice Rowlatt had to praise *Bhawani Mandir*: "It was remarkable in more ways than one."

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Lord Ronaldsey in his book *The Heart of Aryavarta*, writes this about *Bhawani Mandir*. "Couched in sparkling English, the booklet is a piece of inspired writing. These ideas seem indeed to have been the mainspring behind Sri Aurobindo's activities in support of the revolutionary movement."

So that the readers may judge for themselves the truth or otherwise of the above statements, we give here a few extracts from *Bhawani Mandir*.

OM Namas Chandikayai

A temple is to be erected and consecrated to Bhawani, 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 Bhawani?

Who is Bhawani, the Mother, and why should we erect a temple to her ?

Bhawani is the Infinite Energy

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 Bhawani, She also is Durga, She is Kali, She is Radha the Beloved, She is

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Lakshmi, She is our Mother and the Creatress of us all.

Bhawani 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

Let us raise our eyes and cast them upon the world around us. Whenever we turn our gaze, huge masses of strength rise before our vision, tremendous, swift and inexorable forces, gigantic figures of energy, terrible sweeping columns of force. All is growing large and strong. The Shakti of war, the Shakti of wealth, the Shakti of Science are tenfold more mighty and colossal, a hundredfold more fierce, rapid and busy in their activity, a thousandfold more prolific in resources, weapons and instruments than ever before in recorded history. Everywhere the Mother

is at work; from Her mighty and shaping hands enormous forms of Rakshasas, Asuras, Devas are leaping forth into the arena of the world. We have seen the slow but mighty rise of great empires in the West, we have seen the swift, irresistible and impetuous bounding into life of Japan. Some are Mlechchha Shaktis clouded in their strength, black or blood-crimson with Tamas or Rajas, others are Arya Shaktis, bathed in a pure flame of renunciation and utter self-sacrifice : but all are the Mother in Her new phase, remoulding, creating. She is pouring Her spirit into the old; She is whirling into life the new.

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We in India Fail in All Things for Want of Shakti

But in India the breath moves slowly, the afflatus is long in coming. India, the ancient Mother, is indeed striving to be reborn, striving with agony and tears, but she strives in vain. What ails her, she who is after all so vast and might be so strong? There is surely some enormous defect, something vital is wanting in us, nor is it difficult to lay our finger on the spot. We have all things else, but we are empty of strength, void of energy. We have abandoned Shakti and are therefore abandoned by Shakti. The Mother is not in our hearts, in our brains, in our arms.

The wish to be reborn we have in abundance, there is no deficiency there. How many attempts have been made, how many movements have been begun, in religion, in society, in politics! But the same fate has overtaken or is preparing to overtake them all. They flourish for a moment, then the impulse wanes, the fire dies out, and if they endure, it is only as empty shells, forms from which the Brahma has gone or in which it lies overpowered with Tamas and inert. Our beginnings are mighty, but they have neither sequel nor fruit....

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

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we have strength everything else will be added to us easily and naturally. In the absence of strength we are like men in a dream who have hands but cannot seize or strike, who have feet but cannot run.

India, Grown Old and Decrepit in Will, has to be Reborn

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 can be Reborn

Many of us, utterly overcome by Tamas, the dark and heavy demon of inertia, are saying nowadays that it is impossible, that India is decayed, bloodless and lifeless, too weak ever to recover; that our race is doomed to extinction. It is a foolish and idle saying. No man or nation need be weak unless he chooses, no man or nation need perish unless he deliberately chooses extinction.

What is a Nation? The Shakti of Its Millions

For what is a nation? What is our mother-country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation....

It is Our Own Choice whether We Create a Nation or Perish

What is it that so many thousands of holy men, Sadhus and Sannyasis, have preached to us silently by their lives ? What was the message that radiated from the personality of Bhaga-wan Ramakrishna Paramahansa? What was it that formed the kernel of the eloquence with which the lion-like heart of Vivek-ananda sought to shake the world? It is this, that in every one of these three hundred millions of men, from the Raja on his throne to the coolie at his labour, from the Brahmin absorbed in his Sandhya to the Pariah walking shunned of men, GOD LIVETH. We are all gods and creators, because the energy of God is within us and all life is creation; not only the making of new forms is creation, but preservation is creation, destruction itself is creation. It

rests with us what we shall create; for we are not, unless we choose, puppets dominated by Fate and Maya ; we are facets and manifestations of Almighty Power.

*India must be Reborn, because her Rebirth
is Demanded by the Future of the World*

India cannot perish, our race cannot become extinct, because among all the divisions of mankind it is to India that is reserved the highest and the most splendid destiny, the most essential to the future of the human race. It is she who must send forth from herself the future religion of the entire world, the Eternal Religion which is to harmonise all religion, science and philosophies and make mankind one soul. In the sphere of morality, likewise, it is her mission to purge barbarism (Mlechchha hood)

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out of humanity and to Aryanise the world. In order to do this, she must first re-Aryanise herself....

To get Strength we must Adore the Mother of Strength

Strength then and again strength and yet more strength is the need of our race. But if it is strength we desire, how shall we gain it if we do not adore the Mother of strength? She demands worship not for Her own sake, but in order that She may help us and give Herself to us....

Religion, the Path Natural to the National Mind

All great awakenings in India, all her periods of mightiest and most varied vigour have drawn their vitality from the fountain-heads of some deep religious awakening. Wherever the religious awakening has been complete and grand, the national energy it has created has been gigantic and puissant; wherever the religious movement has been narrow or incomplete, the national movement has been broken, imperfect or temporary. The persistence of this phenomenon is proof that it is ingrained in the temperament of the race. If you try other and foreign methods we shall either gain our end with tedious slowness, painfully and imperfectly, or we shall not attain it at all. Why abandon the plain way which God and the Mother have marked out for you, to choose faint and devious paths of your own treading?...

We need a nucleus of men in whom the Shakti is developed to its uttermost extent, in whom it fills every corner of the personality and overflows to fertilise the earth. These,

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having the fire of Bhawani in their hearts and brains, will go forth and carry the flame to every nook and cranny of our land....

The Message of the Mother

When, therefore, you ask who is Bhawani the Mother, She herself answers you,. "I am the Infinite Energy which streams forth from the Eternal in the world and the Eternal in yourselves. I am the Mother of the Universe, the Mother of the Worlds, and for you who are children of the Sacred Land, Aryabhumi, made of her clay and reared by her sun and winds, I am Bhawani Bharati, Mother of India."

Then if you ask why we should erect a temple to Bhawani, the Mother, hear Her answer, "Because I have commanded it, and because by making a centre for the future religion you will be furthering the immediate will of the Eternal and storing up merit which will make you strong in this life and great in another. You will be helping to create a nation, to consolidate an age, to Aryanise a world. And that nation is your own, that age is the age of yourselves and your children, that world is no fragment of land bounded by seas and hills, but the whole earth with her teeming millions."

Come then, hearken to the call of the Mother. She is already in our hearts waiting to manifest Herself, waiting to be worshipped,—inactive because the God in us is concealed by Tamas, troubled by Her inactivity, sorrowful because Her children will not call on Her to help them. You who feel Her stirring within you, fling off the black veil of self, break down

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the imprisoning walls of indolence, help Her each as you feel impelled, with your bodies or with your intellect or with your speech or with your wealth or with your prayers and worship, each man according to his capacity. Draw not back, for against those who were called and heard Her

not She may well be wroth in the day of Her coming; but to those who help Her advent even a little, how radiant with beauty and kindness will be the face of their Mother.

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* *

The cover of the *Bhawani Mandir*, it seems, had a drawing of a falchion on it. It came to official notice only in August 1905.¹ Although there was nothing on the pamphlet to show who the author or the publisher was, the government was in no doubt about its authorship: Aurobindo Ghose. During the searches in Calcutta in May 1908, the police found three copies of *Bhawani Mandir*: one in the *Bande Mataram* office, a second in the bomb store at 134 Harrison Road, and a third in the house of Debabrata Bose, one of the chief writers with Barin for the revolutionary Bengali journal, the *Yugantar*.

1. In the *History of Modern Bengal*, Part 2 (p. 175), R. C. Majumdar mentions about "its Hindi and Bengali translations."

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"They Laugh. at Death"

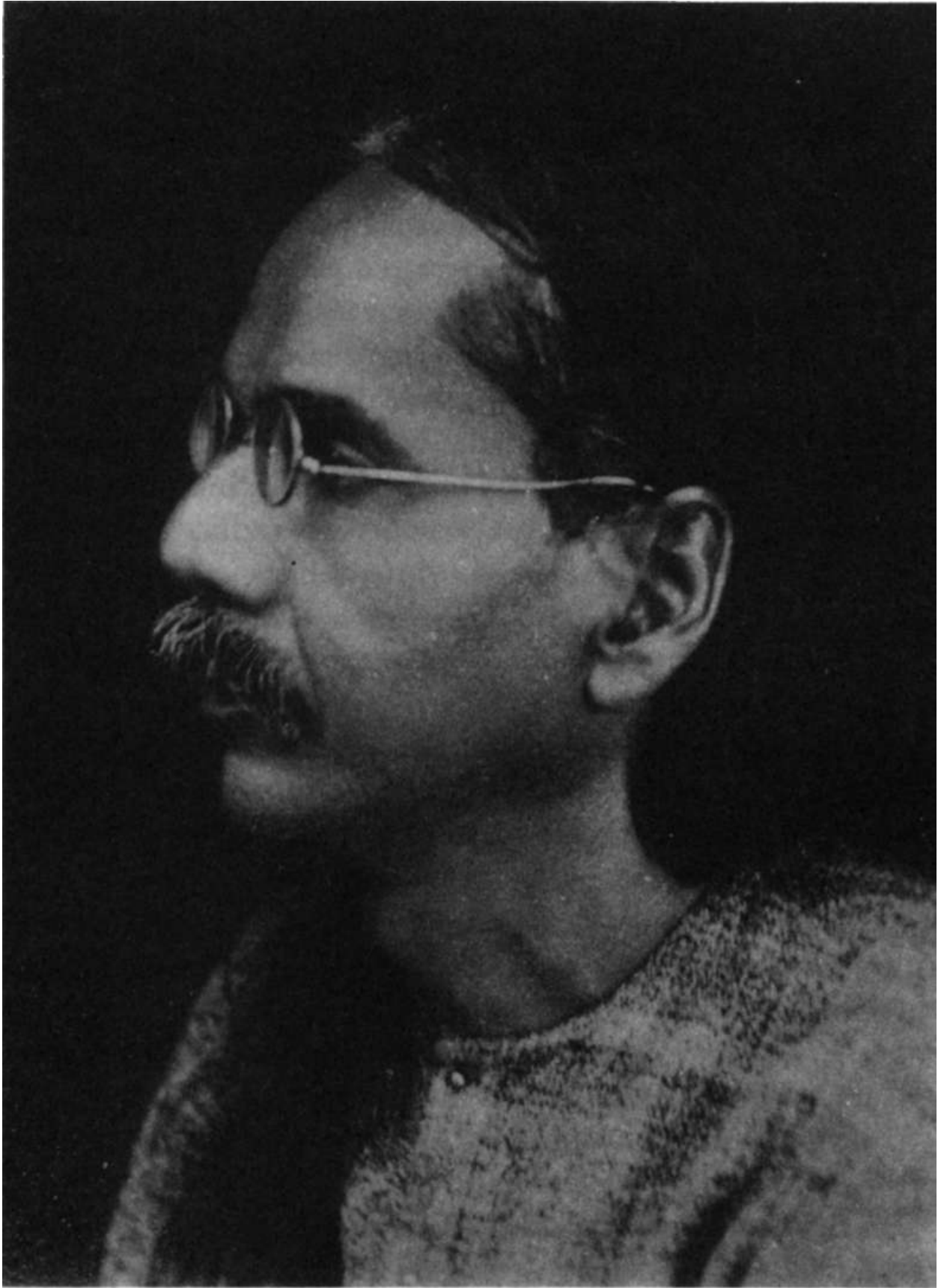
"Barin was preparing bombs at my place at Baroda," Sri Aurobindo said with a reminiscent smile, "but I didn't know it. He got the formula from Ullaskar Dutt who was a very good chemist. He, Upen and Debabrata were very good writers too. They wrote in the *Yugantar*."

Upen, or Upendranath Banerji (1879-1950), came from Chandernagore, then in French India. Throughout his life he was associated with a number of newspapers, including the *Bande Mataram*. He wrote profusely, except when he was put in prison by the British government.

Upen Banerji and Debabrata Bose "were masters of Bengali prose," Sri Aurobindo declared, "and it was their writings and Barin's that gained an unequalled popularity for the paper." Even petty shopkeepers, tea-stall owners read the *Yugantar* and were fired with patriotism.

The *Yugantar*, according to its promoters — among them Vivekananda's brother, Bhupendranath Dutt — "was dedicated to the service of the country and was the first newspaper of the

revolutionary party." Again Maharaja Suryakanta Acharya helped them in financing the paper.
The



Barin the revolutionary

British Government naturally viewed the matter in quite a different light. "This journal," reported the Rowlatt Sedition Committee, "began to pour forth racial hatred in March 1906, attained a circulation of 7,000 and rapidly reached a still wider range before it ceased to appear in 1908 in consequence of newly passed Newspapers (Incitement to Offence) Act." The Committee also quotes a learned Chief Justice, Sir Lawrence Jenkins: "They exhibit a burning hatred of the British race, they breathe revolution in every line, they point out how revolution is to be effected. No calumny and no artifice is left out which is likely to instil the people of the country with the same idea or to catch the impressionable mind of youth."

The Sedition Committee goes on to add that "the *Yugantar* was by no means the only newspaper organ of the associates. There were others, such as the *Sandhya*, which proclaimed abroad: 'We want complete independence.... *Swadeshi*, boycott, all are meaningless to us, if they are not the means of retrieving our whole and complete independence.' " The editor of *Sandhya* was Brahmabandhab Upadhyay. According to the Rowlatt Committee both these vernacular newspapers expressed "virulent hatred."

Let us say at once that Sri Aurobindo "never brought any rancour into his politics. He never had any hatred for England or the English people; he based his claim for freedom of India on the inherent right to freedom."

Sri Aurobindo was of course behind the paper *Yugantar*. "At Barin's suggestion he agreed to the starting of a paper, *Yugantar*," he wrote while giving a general sketch of his political

life, "which 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; when a member of the sub-editorial staff, Swami Vivekananda's brother, presented himself on his own motion to the police in a search as the editor of the paper and was prosecuted, the *Yugantar* under Sri Aurobindo's orders adopted the policy of refusing to defend itself in a British Court on the ground that it did not recognise the foreign Government and this immensely increased the prestige and influence of the paper." Vivekananda's younger brother, Bhupendranath Dutta, was sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment on 24 July 1907 for 'seditious' matter that appeared in the *Yugantar*.

The fact is that the Government was scared stiff of the *Yugantar*. The Sedition Committee laid the blame squarely on the Ghose brothers, Barindra and Arabinda: "The brothers with their immediate followers started various newspapers the most popular of which, published in fluent vernacular Bengali, was the *Jugantar*." Lamented Sri Harvey Adams, "In spite of five prosecutions *Yugantar* still exists and is as violent as ever." When the Government's own violent repression failed to suppress the paper, it enacted a new 'Act' in 1908 against the Swadeshi press.

The revolutionary movement in Bengal was spearheaded by a band of young men under the leadership of Barin, who worked among schoolboys giving them religious, moral and

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political education. He taught the boys all about the state of the country and the necessity for independence, and told them that the only way left was to fight for independence and to start secret societies in different parts of the country in order to propagate revolutionary ideas. It was during his sojourn at Baroda with Sejda that Barin had imbibed these ideas, for, he read not only novels but studied history and political literature also. In 1902 he went to Bengal and made an extensive tour all over the province. After one year, in 1903, he returned to Baroda, quite disappointed with the response to his efforts at spreading revolutionary ideas. It was, however, this first tour which convinced him of the necessity of imparting spiritual training to the would-be revolutionaries so that they could face danger and death with equanimity. His training bore fruit as subsequent events were to prove. The young boys faced the gallows calm and smiling. In 1909, Barin and Ullaskar were sentenced to death by hanging in the Alipore Bomb Case.¹ After the verdict, when they returned to the prison from the court, a European warder seeing Ullaskar laughing called an Irish friend and pointing to him said, "Look, look, the man is going to be hanged and he laughs." The Irishman replied, "Yes, I know; they all laugh at death."

It was a sudden transformation of attitude, as Sri Aurobindo put it. "At one time, before the Swadeshi movement, our people were terribly afraid of these Europeans. But after

1. U. Dutt (1885-1965) came from Tripura. The sentence was changed on appeal to life imprisonment. Along with Barin and a few others he was deported to the Andamans where he remained a prisoner until 1920.

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that movement the fear has gone and it has not come back."

Barin and his group dreamed of a far-off revolution. To that end they collected arms, learned to prepare explosives, and formed secret societies. These young men came mostly from educated class, but were not necessarily rich. In fact these revolutionaries could not afford metal containers for their gunpowder. So what to do? Why, there's coconut shells, and in abundance too! So coconut shells became the bombs of the first batch of Indian revolutionaries.

But money was badly needed to keep the revolutionary party's activities running; and money does not come out of thin air. So? So after a great deal of heart-searching it was decided to take recourse to ... dacoity. A few ground rules were adopted —such as, no woman of the house raided must be touched, and this was strictly adhered to. Another resolution adopted was: We shall keep a correct account of the money collected by dacoity and when independence will have been achieved all these amounts will be repaid. There were, in fact, a few instances when the owner of the house raided received in writing that such-and-such an amount of money had been credited to his account as loan taken and it would be paid back to him on the attainment of Independence.

It may be noted that the secret societies did not include terrorism in their programme, but this element grew up in Bengal as a result of the Government's strong repression and the reaction to it.

Although Sri Aurobindo was the Nationalist party's principal leader in action in Bengal and the organizer there of

its policy and strategy, he had left Barin with his boys to train them as he liked, and had no direct contact with the young men.

"I? Good Lord! I had nothing to do with them," Sri Aurobindo exclaimed, amazed at an account brought to him. "It was all Barin's work. I never knew who these boys were and never saw them. Only once Barin brought a troop of them to my house but they were all waiting below. It is true that Barin used to consult me or Mullick for any advice. But the whole movement was in his

hands. I had no time for it. I was more busy with Congress politics and *Bande Mataram*. My part has been most undramatic in it."

Perhaps. But did he not admit that he had "changed cowards into heroes— not by yoga shakti — merely by an inner force"?

Barin may have consulted Sejda or Subodh Mullick from time to time, but he was a most careless person. "If I had been the head, I would have been more cautious," Sri Aurobindo said. "Barin was very reckless. On the eve of the search he brought two bombs to my house. I told him, 'Take them away. Don't you know that the house is going to be searched ? And remove the things from Manicktola.' He took the bombs away but didn't do anything at Manicktola." Actually, the police arrived before Barin and his band of young men could remove or destroy all the incriminating articles.

Those were tumultuous days. The first revolutionaries were all very young —school-going boys or college students. Not only were they green in age, but they were all totally

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inexperienced. They were, all of them, sublimely unaware of danger. Listen how they acted when they put a bomb together for the first time. Remember Rohini village where Swarnalata, Barin's mother, lived? These boys chose a little, single-storeyed house about two kilometres from Rohini, and some eight kilometres from Deoghar. A desolate place. The house was set in open fields —amid the red and barren moorlands of Bihar. There they set up their laboratory, under the tutelage of Ullaskar Dutt. He had four assistants: Barin, Prafulla Chakravarti,¹ Bibhuti Bhusan Sarkar² and Nolini Kanto Gupta. So when a real live bomb was ready, they went to the top of the Dighariya hill for testing it. The five chose an afternoon for their purpose, so as to have a witness-free demonstration!

"On an afternoon," narrates Nolini in his *Reminiscences*, "the five of us made for the hill. It fell to my lot to carry the bomb. I carried it along with due care no doubt, but I had no idea of the risks I carried. We were quite ignorant and inexperienced at the time." In a few moments they were to gain experience ... a bitter one. "We broke through the thickets and chose a spot right on top of the hill. There we came across a huge boulder rising steep and straight on one side about breast-high and on the other sloping gradually to a distance of some ten or twelve yards. The

plan was that Prafulla would take his shelter behind the steep and abrupt side as he threw the bomb at the

1. P. Chakravarti was the elder brother of Suresh Chakravarti (Moni).
2. B. B. Sarkar (1890-1942), of Bankura in East Bengal. He had formed a secret society in a village there. He was one of the first batch of deportees taken to the Andamans.

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sloping rock." Ullas was to stand by Prafulla to oversee the operation and both were to duck behind the slab right after the throw; the bomb was supposed to explode after hitting the hard ground. The other three took up their positions; Nolini shinned up a tree to have a clear view of the whole scene. "As we lay in wait, — my eyes were glued to the boulder, — suddenly I saw a spark of fire flash out over there with a puff of smoke and such a terrific noise! The whole sky seemed to be getting broken up into bits, and waves of sound went echoing forth from one end to the other as if in a hundred simultaneous claps of thunder." With what excitement and joy he climbed down the tree, and ran towards the boulder shouting at the top of his voice, "Successful, successful!"

But as he reached the boulder his joy turned to grief. The explosive was so powerful that it had exploded in mid-air. "What a gruesome spectacle! Prafulla lay limp on Ullas's chest. Ullas held him in his arms. Slowly the body was laid down. One side of the forehead was broken through and a portion of the brain coming out. It was an unbearable sight. We sat around and no one spoke a word. At last Barin said, 'It's all over, there is not a hope.' The body lay motionless, showed no signs of life. The eyes were closed, the face looked serene."

Thus Prafulla Chakravarti became the first martyr in India's Freedom movement of the twentieth century.

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The King

and the Taxpayer

"The water tax, the land laws, the Colonisation Act legalising the oppressions and illegalities under which Punjab landholders and peasantry have groaned, had generated the feeling of an intolerable burden," wrote Sri Aurobindo in the *Bande Mataram* issue of 6 May 1907.

After he had stopped writing the political articles in the *Indu Prakash*, Sri Aurobindo had suspended all public activity of this kind and worked only in secret till 1905. First of all he studied the conditions in the country so that he might be able to judge more maturely what could be done. The first thing his study revealed to him was the oppressive taxation which was surely leading the country to a gradual death by bleeding. How to stop this? "The only true cure for a bad and oppressive financial system is to give the control over taxation to the people whose money pays for the needs of Government," wrote Sri Aurobindo in April 1907. "The only possible method of stopping the drain is to establish a popular government which may be

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relied on to foster and protect Indian commerce and Indian industry conducted by Indian capital and employing Indian labour." He wanted the entire removal of the foreign control. But the irresponsible Government did not care. Why should they? Hadn't they found a human cattle farm for their own profit? As Prince Dwarakanath Tagore put it in 1836, "They have taken all which the natives possessed : their liberty, property, all held at the mercy of Government."

But a few Britons saw the trouble that was brewing due to the Government's policy. Bryan said of British rule in India during the Swadeshi days: "Let no one cite India as an argument in defence of colonialism.... He [the Briton] has conferred some benefits upon India, but he has extorted a tremendous price for them.... While he has boasted of bringing peace to the living he has led millions to the peace of the grave; while he has dwelt upon order established between warring troops, he has impoverished the country by legalized pillage. Pillage is a strong word, but no refinement of language can purge the present system of its iniquity." Montgomery Martin, writing in 1838, went further: "This annual drain of £ 3,000,000 on British India amounted in thirty years, at 12 per cent (the usual Indian rate) compound interest to the enormous sum of £ 723,997,917 sterling [724 million pounds of the time!] So constant and accumulating a drain even on England would soon impoverish her; how severe then must be its effect on India, where

the wages of a labourer is from two pence to three pence a day?... I do not think it is possible for human ingenuity to avert entirely the evil effects of a continued drain of three or four

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million pounds a year from a distant country like India, and which is never returned to it

Remember Lord Salisbury, the one-time Secretary of State for India? In 1875 he said, "India must be bled." That's what the Colonial Government set out to do from the very beginning. First they ruined the trade and industry- Bengal, for instance had a thriving commerce before the advent of the British both in agricultural produce and textile. "Time was, not more distant than a century and a half ago, when Bengal was much more wealthy than was Britain," wrote the British historian William Digby in 1901. Already in 1853, John Sullivan, Collector of Coimbatore and founder of Ootaca-mund, had told the East India Company that he was in favour of returning a large part of Indian territory to native rulers "upon principles of justice, and upon principles of financial economy.... They [the people of India] have been in a state of the greatest prosperity from the earliest lime, as far as history tells us." And Clive when he first saw Murshidabad in 1757 rubbed his eyes. "This city," he wrote, "is as extensive, populous and rich as the city of London, with this difference, that there are individuals in the first possessing infinitely greater property than in the last city."

But now the peasant, the cultivator, and zamindar, all were ruined along with the craftsman, the artisan and the trader. The Indian historian Romesh Dutt paints this harrowing picture: "The facts which were deposed to at the celebrated impeachment of Warren Hastings [first Governor-General of the East India Company] relating to the collection of rent from

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the impoverished tenantry [of Bengal] are sufficiently dismal. It was stated that the defaulters were confined in open cages, and it was replied that confinement in such cages under the Indian sun was no torture. It was stated that fathers were compelled to sell their children, and it was replied that Colonel Hanny had issued orders against such unnatural sales. Large masses of the people left their villages and fled the country, and troops were employed to prevent their flight. At last a great rebellion broke out; farmers and cultivators rose against the unbearable exactions;

and then followed horrors and executions with which the untrained tillers of the soil are put down by the infuriated soldiery.... Land revenue was increased even after the famine of 1770 had swept away one-third of the population of Bengal; landed families who had owned their estates for centuries were made to bid for them as annual farmers against money-lenders and speculators; cultivators flying from their homes and villages or rising in insurrection were driven back by soldiers to their homes with cruel severity; and a great portion of the money so raised was annually sent in the shape of Investments to the gratified shareholders in England."

Throughout the parts of India under British control, the collection of 'revenues' was implemented so ruthlessly and inhumanly that a few Britons could not help protesting. Brooks Adams speaks of the 'Indian plunder.' "It has always been our boast how greatly we have raised the revenue above that which the native rulers were able to extort," said John Shore in 1837. "Since the world began," wrote Holt Mackenzie in 1833, "there is probably no example of a Government carrying the principle

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of absolutism so completely through the civil administration of the country [India], if that can be called civil which is in its spirit so military."

As regards the artisans, the import of Indian cotton and silk goods into England was either prohibited or burdened with high duties, in effect killing India's manufactures and enabling England to reverse the flow of trade and sell its own inferior goods in India. "Had this not been the case," writes H. H. Wilson, "had not such prohibitory duties and decrees existed, the mills of Paisley and Manchester would have been stopped in their outset, and could scarcely have been again set in motion, even by the power of steam. They were created by the sacrifice of the Indian manufacture. Had India been independent, she would have retaliated, would have imposed prohibitive duties upon British goods, and would thus have preserved her own productive industry from annihilation. This act of self-defence was not permitted her; she was at the mercy of the stranger. British goods were forced upon her without paying any duty, and the foreign manufacturer employed the arm of political injustice to keep down and ultimately strangle a competitor with whom he could not have contended on equal terms."

The whimsical and ever-changing policies of the rulers brought deplorable results to all parts of India where the British 'governed.' And the taxes. All sorts of new taxes—salt tax, water tax ...—

were introduced by the foreign rulers. It was all too baffling for the Indians. Each movement of life was taxed. Heavily taxed and cruelly imposed. Wrote Romesh Dutt in 1901: "Taxation raised by a king, says the Indian poet, is

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like the moisture of the earth sucked up by the sun, to be returned to the earth as fertilising rain ; but the moisture raised from the Indian soil now descends as fertilising rain largely on other lands, not on India.... In one shape or another all that could be raised in India by an excessive taxation flowed to Europe, after paying for a starved administration.... The 'Home Charges' remitted annually out of the Indian revenues to Great Britain have increased to sixteen millions. The pay of the European officers in India, virtually monopolising all the higher services, comes to ten millions. One-half of the nett revenues of India, which are now forty-four millions sterling, flows annually out of India. Verily the moisture of India blesses and fertilises other lands."

In ancient India maxims of taxation were clearly formulated and principles enunciated. Kautilya in his *Artha Shastra* says, "The King should be like a gardener and not be like the maker of charcoal. The resources of the State should be allowed to grow before taxes are imposed on them. Taxation should be in proportion to the paying capacity of the people. Collection of revenue by the State before the subject is ready for it is comparable to plucking unripe fruit. One should be careful with both so as not to cause harm to the source." But Britain did not seem to know this simple rule of governance, at least it was not applied to the colonies. In consequence, the Indian farmer was forced to pay in full even if the crop failed. Inhuman torture was his lot if he could not. A government report of 1818 describes the state of affairs in Bombay. "Every effort was made, — lawful and unlawful,—to get the utmost out of the wretched peasantry, who

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were subjected to tortures — in some instances cruel and revolting beyond description —if they could not or would not yield what was demanded." Graphic enough? Madras, Punjab, U. P., all, all land under the British umbrella suffered the same fate. The result does not need any imagination: a great misery inflicted on the people of this rich and fertile land.

From 1850 to 1875 British India was visited by famine I which led to death by starvation: five million people dead. Then in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, eighteen times famine ravaged the land. These awful recurring famines were accompanied with plague and cholera. Death toll: twenty-six million humans, untold numbers of cattle.

A government medical report: "Fever is a euphemism for insufficient food, scanty clothing and unfit dwelling." Man has made of life a long process of death.

Even in the best of times half of the agricultural population never knew from year's end to year's end what it was to have their hunger fully satisfied. Sir Henry Cotton, Commissioner of Assam, averred, "The resources of India will vie with those of America itself ... yet no country is more poor than this." Affirmed Digby in 1900, "Because among other things we have destroyed native industries, and, besides, have taken from India since 1834-35 (according to a calculation made by that sane and moderate journal, the *Economist* two years ago), more than *ten thousand millions of Rupees*." The Indian rupee in those days, as everybody knows, had a much higher value.¹ At any rate,

1. Lord Curzon had fixed the exchange rate at Rs.15 to the pound sterling. Before that it used to be Rs. 15 to the pound. And in 1761, Rs. 8 to the pound.

there was thus a constant drawing away of the wealth of India to England—in Sri Aurobindo's words, "the murderous drain by which we purchase the more exquisite privilege of being exploited by British capital." As the Englishman grew fat on accumulations made in India, the Indian remained as lean as ever.

When in 1813 the East India Company brought a few cosmetic changes to its Charter, it invited testimonies from its officers in India. Most were naturally convinced that they were bringing enlightenment and material progress to a fallen and benighted nation—for a price, of course. A few of them, however, could not conceal their admiration of the Indian nature: "If a good system of agriculture, unrivalled manufacturing skill, a capacity to produce whatever can contribute to convenience or luxury; schools established in every village for teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic; the general practice of hospitality and charity among each other; and above all, a treatment of the female sex full of confidence, respect, and delicacy, [if all these] are among the

signs which denote a civilised people, then the 'Hindus are not inferior to the nations of Europe; and if civilisation is to become an article of trade between the two countries, I am convinced that this country [England] will gain by the import cargo.'" This was Thomas Munro. But here was a 'trade' Britain was hardly interested in. Sir John Malcolm put it in a less commercial language: "The Hindoo inhabitants are a race of men, generally speaking, not

1. In 1924 Sri Aurobindo asked, "By the way, what is the average income of an Indian?" To which replied a disciple, "Rs. 30/- per annum."

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more distinguished by their lofty stature ... than they are for some of the finest qualities of the mind; they are brave, generous, and humane, and their truth is as remarkable as their courage."

But this 'lofty stature' was put to a severe test, not so much by decades of brutal treatment as by the moral degradation brought about by British law and government and education, R. N. Cust said baldly: "In the course of comparatively few years we succeed in destroying whatever of truthfulness and honour they have by nature [I], and substituting in its place habits of trickery, chicanery, and falsehood You are only to compare our new provinces with our old." The reason is really not far to seek. It was brought about by the contact with the 'soiled card-houses' as Sri Aurobindo describes so marvellously the Churches. Yes, I am speaking of Christian missionaries. In 1813 they were granted the right of unrestricted entry. And, as they have done everywhere else in the world with local populations, in India too they poured forth "venomous abuses against the Hindus." Rev. Alexander Duff said contemptuously: "Of all the systems of false religion ever fabricated by the perverse ingenuity of fallen man, Hinduism is surely the most stupendous." Or did he mean Christianity? Was he looking at his own mirror? Do you know that the great Vyasa did not accept "the Jesuistic doctrine of any means to a good end," as Sri Aurobindo explained, "still less justify the goodness of the end by that profession of an utterly false disinterestedness which ends in the soothing belief that plunder, arson, outrage and massacre are committed for the good of the slaughtered nation?" So much so that the Indians

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feared it to be the "deliberate policy of the British Government to convert them en masse to Christianity," notes the historian R. C. Majumdar.

Many of the facts and figures quoted above can be found in Romesh Dutt's *Economic History of India*. Romesh Dutt —remember him? —met Sri Aurobindo in Baroda in 1899 and praised his translations of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. After his death in 1909, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the course of an article about him in *The Karmayogin*: "Without the *Economic History* and its damning story of England's commercial and fiscal dealings with India we doubt whether the public mind would have been ready for the Boycott [movement]. In this one instance it may be said of him that he not only wrote history but created it."

I have also quoted from *Deshar Katha*¹ by Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar (1869-1912). Son of a Marathi Brahmin who had settled in Bengal, Sakharam was born in Deoghar. He studied in the Deoghar School and later became a teacher there. He was Barin's teacher of History. "One of the ablest men in these revolutionary groups," Sri Aurobindo reminds us, "[he] was an able writer in Bengali (his family had been long domiciled in Bengal)... He published a book entitled *Deshar Katha* describing in exhaustive detail the British commercial and industrial exploitation of India. This book had an immense

1. Dadabhai Naoroji's *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, published in 1900, also exposed thoroughly the British plunder in India. These three studies together had an enormous influence in India.

repercussion in Bengal, captured the mind of young Bengal and assisted more than anything else in the preparation of the Swadeshi movement." Published first in June 1904, *Deshar Katha* sold ten thousand copies in four editions within the year. The fifth edition came out in 1905. The government of Bengal banned the book in 1910 and confiscated all the copies. Deuskar was the first to bring in the name of *Swaraj*, and Sri Aurobindo was the first to endow it with its English equivalent, 'Independence.' The Nationalists adopted this word, and *Swaraj* became the chief item of the fourfold Nationalist programme.

The British administration introduced measures that were quite unfamiliar to Indians. Take the system of impersonal administration —bureaucracy. To whom now could people go to place their grievances? Besides, did not this new system of governance bring in its wake slowness of

proceedings, delay in taking action, corruption...? And, how strange was the character of the foreigners' laws and judicial procedure! To get justice you had now to pay tax in the shape of stamps.

But in ancient India the right of the State to tax was not a divine right. It arose from the protection the state gave to its subjects. The State had to guarantee security to the people in exchange for taxation.

Taxation in ancient India served to secure social and political objectives. "In our country," observed Rabindranath "it was the duty of the king to wage war, to maintain peace and to administer justice, but supplying the other needs of the people, from imparting education to supplying drinking water, was the responsibility of the society, and this was discharged with ease."

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May I tell you a story?

A Brahmin came to the King. "Sire," he said to the King seated on his throne, "Sire, I have lost my wife." "How?" asked His Majesty. "She was abducted." "When?"

"Last night, Sire."

"?" The King raised his eyebrows in a silent question.

"We were sleeping in our cots, and when I woke up this morning she wasn't there."

"How do you know she was abducted? She may have gone out somewhere."

"No, no, Sire. I have come to you after ascertaining that my wife was abducted. We were, as usual, sleeping with the door wide open to get a little cooling breeze. And I saw distinct signs of two men who came and took her away." The Brahmin added in desperation, "I must have my wife back, Sire."

"Is she young, your wife?"

"No, Sire, she is about my age," replied the middle-aged man.

"Is she beautiful?" the King asked curiously.

"No, Sire. Not at all. She may even be called ugly."

"Sweet-tempered, is she?" asked the envious King.

"No, Sire. In fact, she is rather quarrelsome."

"Then you should be glad to be rid of her! Why do you want her back?" the King was perplexed.

"Sire, she is my wife. I know my duty. I cannot perform my *dharma* without my wife."

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The King, who happened to have just banished his queen, bowed his head. "But how can I now find your wife?" he asked the Brahmin.

"That, O King, is your affair. But find her you must. Restore her to me you must. It is your duty." Then the Brahmin added with asperity, "Sire, we give you one-sixth of our earnings. What for? It is so that you may protect us from thieves and robbers. It is so that we may sleep in peace knowing the King is vigilant. Vigilant enough so that no harm befalls us. So then what kind of a king are you who take a part of our earnings and give us nothing in return?"

The King acknowledged the Brahmin's logic. And, to cut a long story short, he went out, had adventures, but ended up finding the Brahmin's wife —sweet-tempered now —and found his own queen too. And the King learned that right and duty go hand in hand. So he ruled wisely.

Thus all ended happily for them and for the country.

But all did not end happily for India.

It was not for nothing that Mother said, "England came and stayed much too long." Indians have imbibed to saturation Western ideas. For, sadly enough, after Independence instead of dismantling the onerous system of governance introduced by Britain, the indigenous government chose to Indianize it. Indeed, the new rulers made it so peculiarly Indian that we ended up having a government that shirks its responsibility, fails in discharging its duty to protect the lives and properties of its citizens, and has no accountability. The result? More and more poverty, more and more misery for the common man. In a

word, corruption. Corruption which eats into the very root of national existence. A dangerous choice as it has turned out.

Yet, way back in April 1908, writing in the *Bande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo had spelled out the one needful thing for India. "Every nation," he wrote, "has certain sources of vitality which have made it what it is and can always, if drawn upon in time, protect it from disintegration. The secret of its life is to be found in the recesses of its own being." Where is that source?

"The root of the past is the source from which the future draws its sap and if the tree is to be saved it must constantly draw from that source for sustenance. The root may be fed from outside, but that food will have to be assimilated and turned to sap in the root before it can nourish the trunk."

31

Evolving

the Genius of the Race

"If the truth which the yoga [of Sri Aurobindo] wants to achieve is attained and if India accepts it, then it will give quite a new turn to Indian politics —different from European politics. It would be a profound change." Sri Aurobindo had said that in an informal talk on 21 January 1925.

It was the evening of 14 December 1938. Nirod asked Sri Aurobindo, "What about India's independence? Is it developing along your lines?"

"Surely not," Sri Aurobindo was categorical. "India is now going towards European Socialism, which is dangerous for her, whereas we were trying to evolve the genius of the race along Indian lines and all working for independence."

Referring to the uprising of 1905 he said, "Take the Bengal Movement. The whole country was awakened within a short time. People who were such cowards and trembled at the sight of a revolver were in a short period so much changed that the police officials used to say, 'That insolent Barisal

look !¹ It was the soul of the race that awoke , throwing up very fine personalities. 2 The leaders of the Movement were either yogis or disciples of yogis - men like Monoranjan Guha Thakurta, the disciple of Bejoy Goswami Then there were others , like Brahma Bandhab Upadhyay. The influence of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda worked from behind."

The genius of the Bengali race had, all of a sudden, burst into full bloom. Its main flowering was in the field of literature. A many-faceted literature which expressed itself in songs and dramas, poems and street-theatres, bringing to the remotest villages a new spirit of patriotism: Nationalism. A wonderstruck Ramsay MacDonald ejaculated that Bengal "is creating India by song and worship, it is clothing her in queenly garments."

The 'Bengal Movement' was triggered by Lord Curzon's proposal to restructure Bengal ... by breaking it into pieces. But then India did not lack wide and clear intelligences which could see through his stratagem. Nor did they hesitate to proclaim the eventual goal underlying that measure: "This measure is no mere administrative proposal but a blow straight at the heart of the nation," wrote he who was to be named the

1. Barisal, a town in East Bengal where in 1906, as we shall see, a Nationalist conference was brutally broken up by the police.

2. The 'fine personalities' were not exclusively among the leaders. A whole crop of young people could be counted among them. Sri Aurobindo himself said that when he was in prison, "I found myself among the young men and in many of them I discovered a mighty courage, a power of self-effacement in comparison with which I was simply nothing." We greatly regret not to be able to speak even a little about them. Each life of these untold numbers of revolutionaries would make a full story in itself.

Flaming Apostle of Nationalism. In the event, Lord Curzon, on a tour of East Bengal, confessed 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 ascendancy."

Sri Aurobindo set out to demolish many delusions held by the British government and shared by a part of the Indian intelligentsia. And, as was his wont, he went beyond and opened up a vast Promise. "When the word of the Eternal has gone abroad," he wrote in the *Bande Mataram* on 17 December 1907, "when the spirit moves over the waters and the waters stir and life begins to form, then it is a law that all energies are forced to direct themselves, consciously or unconsciously, willingly or against their will, to the one supreme work of the time, the formation of the new manifest and organised life which is in process of creation. So now when the waters of a people's life are stirred and the formation of a great organic Indian state and nation has begun, the same law holds. All that the adversaries of the movement have done whether they have tried to repress or tried to conciliate, has helped what they sought to destroy and swelled the volume and strength or purified as by fire the forces of Nationalism."

It is, indeed, passing strange to see how a people which had slumbered for over a millennium, awoke so suddenly, so vigorously, full of life and energy —as though a Master of Hypnosis had "laid His finger on India's eyes and cried, 'Awake.'"

The whole country seemed to be bubbling and boiling. The agitation generated by the Partition of Bengal had spilled

over its borders and spread to the whole of India. The hearts of Maharashtra, Punjab and Bengal seemed to beat to the same rhythm.

In Calcutta, a mammoth gathering was held on 7 August 1905 at the Town Hall, in which "amid unprecedented scenes of enthusiasm the resolution of boycotting British manufactures was formally moved and passed amid deafening shouts of 'Bande Mataram' which had now become the war cry," wrote the noted historian R. C. Majumdar. The cream of Bengal was strongly represented, as was its milk which poured itself on the Town Hall. The freedom struggle of 1905-10 came to be known by its twin movement: Swadeshi and Boycott. And Sri Aurobindo it was who had pushed secretly for the adoption of this idea of boycott through his Nameso, K.K. Mitra —cousin Sukumar being the go-between —for Sri Aurobindo was still in Baroda service.

On 13 July, a few days after the Government's final decision to partition Bengal had been announced, K.K. Mitra had in his *Sanjibani* called for the boycott of British goods and of government employees.

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." Both Tilak and Sri Aurobindo were in favour of an effective boycott of British goods—but British goods only, not American, Austrian or German. They were for national self-sufficiency in key industries but it did not seem desirable to them to go in for a complete self-sufficiency "since a free India would need to export goods as well as supply them

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for internal consumption and for that she must import as well and maintain an international exchange. But the sudden enthusiasm for the boycott of all foreign goods was wide and sweeping and the leaders had to conform to this popular cry and be content with the impulse it gave to the Swadeshi idea." Tilak called boycott 'political Yoga.'

But all this 'sudden enthusiasm' did not explode out of nothing. A secret preparation of the ground had been going on for several years before 1905. Before the advent of the Nationalists, India's struggle for freedom grew by fits and starts. There was no constant effort to achieve it. "Sri Aurobindo had to establish and generalise the idea of independence in the mind of the Indian people and at the same time to push first a party and then the whole nation into an intense and organised political activity which would lead to the accomplishment of that ideal." This, in a country wholly unprepared for it. And without means.

But Sri Aurobindo had already decided in his mind the lines on which he wanted the country's action to run. His plan was fourfold: Boycott — "boycott of British trade;" National Education — "the substitution of national schools for the Government institutions;" People's Court — "the creation of arbitration courts to which the people could resort instead of depending on the ordinary courts of law;"¹ and youth-training

1. It is worth quoting Bankim. "Courts and brothels are of the same type; unless one is ready to pay for it one can have no admittance to either of these.... What kind of law is that by which the weak alone are punished and which is not applicable to the powerful?" In fact, the barbarous system of punishments makes the Indian Penal Code a triumph of civilized savagery.

"the creation of volunteer forces which would be the nucleus of an army of open revolt, and all other action that could make the programme complete." He took advantage of the Swadeshi movement to popularize the idea of violent revolt in the future. Never rigid, Sri Aurobindo was always ready to change his tactics and strategies with the changing circumstances.

When Sri Aurobindo went on a tour of Bengal with Debabrata Bose —remember Khulna and the dishes I

Thus the revolution he and other Nationalist leaders envisaged was a four-pronged effort, its constituents being: youth, labour, peasantry and army. He told others who were pushing for a 'bomb programme' that "if we don't work among them and bring them to our way of thinking, the whole programme will fizzle out."

There was a possibility of a general revolt by the army. The youth was to be attracted to the revolutionary aim through public propaganda and overt or covert associations. Sri Aurobindo "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." Thus the Nationalist Party was the first to gather under its umbrella youth and labour and peasantry. In this way was the whole nation converted to the idea of independence.

It was clear to Sri Aurobindo that aiming only at the highest ideal would engender a mighty movement. Wide and high and vast.

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A Unit of Force

Sri Aurobindo took part in the Barisal Provincial Conference held on 14 April 1906. He was in the front row of three in the procession, with Bepin Pal and Bejoy Chatterji. The president of the Conference, Abdul Rasul, passed with his English wife in a carriage. Other prominent leaders followed on foot in a procession. Nobody stopped them. But just as a band of young men came behind, the policemen lathi-charged the unarmed boys. Chittaranjan, the son of Monoranjan Guha Thakurta, was assaulted and pushed into a tank. Although he was severely injured the police could not stop him from shouting 'Bande Mataram.' That exemplifies the tyranny of the first Lieutenant-Governor of East Bengal, Sir Bampfylde Fuller, and the undaunted courage of the youth.

After the breaking up of the Conference Sri Aurobindo accompanied Bepin Pal in a tour of East Bengal "where enormous meetings were held—in one district in spite of the prohibition of the District Magistrate."

"When after the Barisal Conference, we brought in the peasants into the Movement, forty or fifty thousands of them used to gather to hear Pal," recalled Sri Aurobindo. B.C. Pal,

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though lacking in organizational ability and not capable of political leadership, was perhaps the best and most original political thinker in the country, an excellent writer and a magnificent orator. Said Sri Aurobindo, "Pal was a great orator and at that time his speeches were highly inspired, a sort of descent from above."

Up to 1901 Bepin Chandra Pal was an avowed Moderate who believed in the 'Divine Providence' that had brought the British to India "to help it in working out its salvation." But the political turmoil unleashed by the Partition of Bengal, which brought him in close contact with B. B. Upadhyay and in closer association with Sri Aurobindo, wrought a change in him. Pal's speeches became full of the fire of Nationalism laced with philosophical knowledge. "Every large human movement, essentially a movement of thought, has, whether consciously or unconsciously, some Philosophy of Life behind it." By 1907 he became, not only a foremost political preacher in Bengal, but swept Madras off its feet with his impassioned nationalism. Srinivasa Shastri gives a vivid description of those speeches. "Babu Bipinchandra Pal burst into full fame in Madras as a preacher of the new political creed. For several days on the sands of the beach, he spoke words hot with emotion and subtly logical, which were wafted by the soft evening breeze to tens of

thousands of listeners invading their whole souls and setting them aflame with the fever of a wild consuming desire. Oratory had never dreamed of such triumphs in India ; the power of the spoken word had never been demonstrated on such a scale."¹

1. *Swadeshi and Swaraj*,

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Pal spoke on Swadeshi and Swaraj. "Swaraj," he explained, "will be the Swaraj of the Indian people, not of any section of it." This new National Movement in India, he asserted, "is essentially a Spiritual Movement." In a word, he became a popular exponent of the spiritual nationalism of Swami Vivek-ananda and Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo was always more explicit. "Swaraj" he said in his address at Jhalakati in June 1909, "is not the Colonial form of Government nor any form of Government. It means the fulfilment of our national life. That is what we seek, that is why God has sent us into the world to fulfil Him by fulfilling ourselves in our individual life, in the family, in the community, in the nation, in humanity.... There are some who fear to use the word 'freedom,' but I always used the word because it has been the *Mantra* of my life to aspire towards the freedom of my nation."

Sri Aurobindo based his understanding of Swaraj on the Vedic literature. The nature of the Universal, explain the Vedas, is "independent, self-protecting, and stands by its greatness, and in its greatness—stands *sva-mahimni*," which is synonymous with Swaraj.

The word 'Swaraj' was a bugbear to the Europeans. When they heard it they became full of unreasoning terrors. So there is no need to describe the consternation of the Anglo-Indian Government at Bepin Pal's triumphant oratory. "I do not think we should allow Bepin Chandra Pal to stump the country preaching sedition as he has been doing," wrote Minto, the Governor-General of India, to Morley, the Secretary of

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State for India, on 2 April 1907. Within three months of this, Minto went further and proposed the deportation of Pal on the ground that "Pal's behaviour has been monstrous, and it is the

danger of it that we cannot ignore." No, the government did not ignore the danger. On a flimsy charge a few months later, the Government got him sentenced to six months' imprisonment. His sin? He refused to testify in court against his colleagues, in what came to be known as the *Bande Mataram* Sedition Case.

Bepin Pal had been writing articles in his weekly organ *New India*. Then he started another journal with the name of *Bande Mataram*. He asked Sri Aurobindo to join him in this venture to which a ready consent was given, for now Sri Aurobindo saw his opportunity for starting the public propaganda necessary for his revolutionary purpose. In article after article Sri Aurobindo traced out the programme of the new Nationalist Party. One of the recurring themes was the inclusion of the neglected masses and the organization of all forces in the nation for revolutionary action as the sole effective policy. A few samples.

1 September 1906 —"The true policy of the Congress movement should have been from the beginning to gather together under its flag all the elements of strength that exist in this huge country. The Brahman Pandit and the Mahomedan Maulavi, the caste organisation and the trade-union, the labourer and the artisan, the coolie at his work and the peasant in his field, none of these should have been left out of the sphere of our activities. For each is a strength, a unit of force; and in politics the victory

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is to the side which can marshal the largest and most closely serried number of such units and handle them most skilfully, not to those who can bring forward the best arguments or talk the most eloquently.

December 17, 1907 —"Nationalism depends for its success on the awakening and organising of the whole strength of the nation; it is therefore vitally important for Nationalism that the politically backward classes should be awakened and brought into the current of political life;... the shopkeepers, the artisan class, the immense body of illiterate and ignorant peasantry, the submerged classes, even the wild tribes and races still outside the pale of Hindu civilisation, Nationalism can afford to neglect and omit none.

April 1908 (?) —"The new [Nationalism] overleaps every barrier; it calls to the clerk at his counter, the trader in his shop, the peasant at his plough; it summons the Brahmin from his temple and takes the hand of the Chandala in his degradation ; it seeks out the student in his

College, the schoolboy at his book, it touches the very child in its mother's arms; and the secluded zenana has thrilled to its voice; its eye searches the jungle for the Santal and travels the hills for the wild tribes of the mountains. It cares nothing for age or sex or caste or wealth or education or respectability.... It speaks to the illiterate or the man in the street in such rude vigorous language as he best understands, to youth and the enthusiast in accents of poetry, in language of fire, to the thinker in the terms of philosophy and logic, to the Hindu it repeats the name of Kali, the Mahomedan it spurs to

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action for the glory of Islam. It cries to all to come forth, to help in God's work and remake a nation, each with what his creed or his culture, his strength, his manhood or his genius can give to the new nationality. The only qualification it asks for is a body made in the womb of an Indian mother, a heart that can feel for India, a brain that can think and plan for her greatness, a tongue that can adore her name or hands that can fight in her quarrel."

Just as he would leave not a single element out of the national life, so would he leave not an element out of yogic life. "To the last atom," said Sri Aurobindo.

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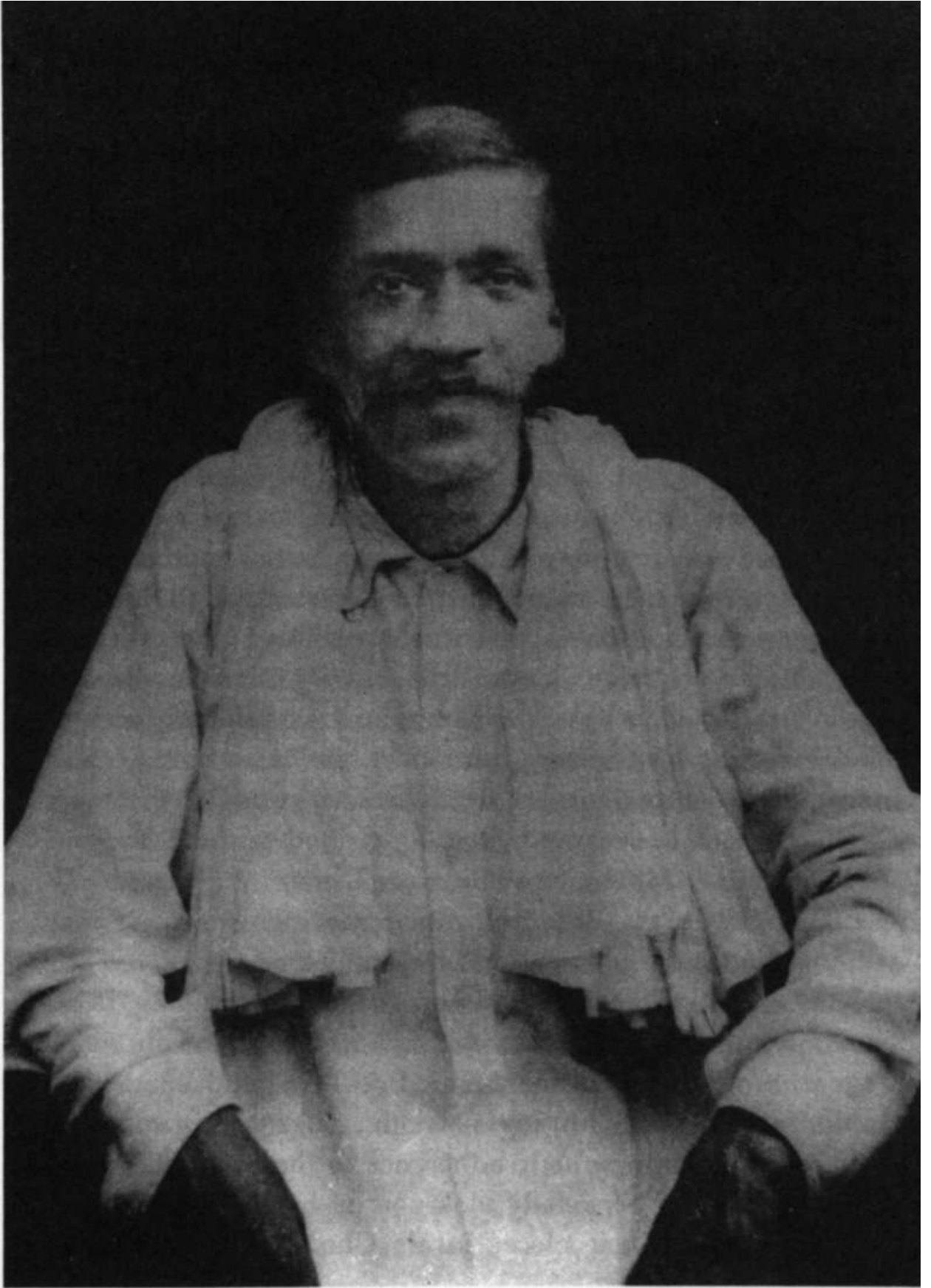
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The Revolutionary

A public propaganda to convert the whole nation to the idea of independence was a later acquisition in Sri Aurobindo's armoury. He had started out with a secret revolutionary propaganda and organization of which the central object was the preparation of an armed insurrection. "We wanted," he said, "to give battle after awakening the spirit of the race through guerilla warfare.... My idea was for an open armed revolution in the whole of India."

It was in 1901 that Sri Aurobindo made his first move by sending Jatin Banerji "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." It took about forty-five years.

Jatin Banerji (1877-1930) had turned up one day in 1898 at the door of A. Ghose. He wanted to get military training in order to prepare himself for the revolutionary work. With the help of Madhavrao and Khaserao Jadhav, Sri Aurobindo got him admitted to the Baroda army as a trooper in the cavalry regiment. Under the British, Bengalis were forbidden to be



Sri Aurobindo in his revolutionary days

trained in any army, so he was declared a Hindustani and shortened his name from Bandopadhyay to Upadhyay. Later in life he became a sannyasi (Niralamba Swami), and his wife Hiranmoyee too took sannyas (Chinmoyee Devi).

Towards the end of 1901, Jatin was sent to Bengal to recruit young men. Barin states that that was six months before he himself was sent to Bengal. Jatin was also charged with setting up centres 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." The few young men with revolutionary aim in no time became many. At Calcutta Jatin set up his residence at 108C, Upper Circular Road. It became a training ground and the Society's study centre. P. Mitter, Surendranath Tagore, A. Rasul, S. G. Deuskar, Debabrata Bose and others met here every Sunday evening, and discussed revolutionary subjects.

Bengal, of course, had secret societies running in its blood. Remember Rajnarain Bose who formed one in which Tagore brothers were members? Both Jyotirindranath and Rabindranath wrote rousing patriotic songs, a testimony to their continued sympathetic adherence to the Swadeshi Movement. Rabi Babu personally took part in many meetings that were held then. Their niece, Sarala Ghosal (or, Sarala Devi

Choudhurani —1872-1945) was an exceptionally gifted woman. A polyglot, she knew English (gold medallist in B.A. Hon.), French, Persian, and naturally Sanskrit and Bengali. A talented writer, a gifted singer, and an educationist, she helped Jatin in his task of setting up a secret society, as Sri Aurobindo had sent him with a letter to her and to P. Mitter.

P. Mitter (Pramathanath Mitra— 1853-1910), a disciple of the famous Yogi Bejoy Goswamy, was the founder of the Anushilan Samiti. "P. Mitter had a spiritual life and aspiration and a strong religious feeling; he was like Bepin Pal and several other prominent leaders of the new nationalist movement in Bengal," said Sri Aurobindo. Along with P. Mitter, Sarala Ghosal had already started a sort of Revolutionary party of which Sister Nivedita was a member. Sarala Ghosal founded several clubs where not only boys but girls too were taught to wield lathi and

sword. A worshipper of Shakti, she was the foremost organizer of physical education in Bengal. The Tagores had a tradition of physical training. There was a wrestling pit in their compound at Jorasanko and, as a young lad, Rabindranath practised wrestling.

"I was neither the founder nor the leader [of the revolutionary movement in Bengal]," Sri Aurobindo said candidly. "It was P. Mitter and Miss Ghosal who started it on the inspiration of Baron Okakura.¹ They had already started it before I went to Bengal and when I was there I came to hear of it. I simply kept

1. Baron Kakujo Okakura (1862-1913), a Japanese artist friend of the Tagores.

myself informed of their work." He was still going and coming between Bengal and Gujarat.

Before openly joining politics Sri Aurobindo was pushing the movement from behind. "Okakura started the revolutionary movement at Calcutta, but there was always a quarrel going on among the members." After sending his emissaries, Sri Aurobindo went personally to Bengal to see and arrange things himself. "When I came to Calcutta, I came in contact with the party. They had no organization at all. Their main programme was to beat some magistrates and the quarrels were going on. So I organized them and reconciled their quarrels and went back to Baroda." He had constituted a Working Committee comprising P. Mitter, C.R. Das, Surendranath Tagore, Sister Nivedita, and himself. From the beginning, Sri Aurobindo used to contribute big sums for the work of the secret society; C.R. Das and P. Mitter also contributed. But he got a bit disappointed at the continued quarrels among the workers. "Again a quarrel broke out, again I came and reconciled them; the whole thing went then into Barin's hands. Terrorism was only a subordinate movement. It could have been important when the armed revolution would have come, the revolution for which we wanted to prepare the whole country; and I was too busy with the open political movement to prepare the country in that way. This terroristic movement was to prepare the young men to have some sort of a military training, to kill and get killed. Otherwise it was never my idea that by throwing a few bombs we could overthrow the British Government. And that probably was the reason of the split among them. P. Mitter was for

the original idea while Barin was for this terrorism. I was never in direct contact with the movement nor with the young men and didn't know them. Only in jail I came in contact with them, especially Nolini, Bejoy, etc. When I came out of jail, Jatin Banerji and others again approached me and I organized the party again."

People do not know what an exceptional organizational ability Sri Aurobindo had. Almost single-handedly he brought order out of the primordial chaos of Bengal politics. In Bengal "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 the barrister P. Mitra as the leader of the revolution in Bengal and a central council of five persons, one of them being Nivedita. The work under P. Mitra spread enormously and finally contained tens of thousands of young men and the spirit of revolution spread by Barin's paper *Yugantar*¹ became general in the young generation ; but during my absence at Baroda the council ceased to exist as it was impossible to keep up agreement among the many groups."

Although Sri Aurobindo's attempt at a close organization of the whole movement did not succeed, "the movement itself did not suffer by that," he wrote, "for the general idea was taken up and activity of many separate groups led to a

1. According to a Secret Police report, "In more than one case a visit to the *Yugantar* office was th e first step towards an introduction to th e innercircles of the society ."

greater and more widespread diffusion of the revolutionary drive and its action."

There were many leaders of all-India calibre —world-class, I ought to say—during the Swadeshi days, such as the Mahratta Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the Punjabis Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh and the Tamilian Chidambaram Pillai. Bengal had a galaxy of them. But that Sri Aurobindo was the driving force behind the movement remains an undisputable fact. 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."

Sri Aurobindo was no believer in the gospel of nonviolence. If he "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." Historical studies had taught him quite the opposite lesson. "He had studied with interest the revolutions and rebellions which led to national 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 Maz-zini." Additionally, "Sri Aurobindo's position and practice in this matter was the same as Tilak's and that of other Nationalist leaders who were by no means Pacifists or worshippers of Ahimsa."

At the same time as he studied the conditions of the country, Sri Aurobindo was also studying the temperament of the leaders of the day. He met many of them, such as G. K.

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Gokhale. "After an hour's conversation with Gokhale, in the train between Ahmedabad and Baroda," he recorded, "it was impossible for Sri Aurobindo to retain any great respect for Gokhale as a politician, whatever his merits as a man." Khaparde was more plainspoken: "Gokhale has no backbone." The British Government also had a very poor opinion of the politician: "Gokhale, as a party manager, is a baby," wrote Morley to Minto on 31 October 1907. "Gokhale is always *whining*. ..." But it suited them to use him as they wanted to win over the Moderates with his help. They played the same game with several other prominent Congress leaders such as Pherozeshah Mehta.

The only one who came up to scratch was Bal Gangadhar Tilak, whom Sri Aurobindo regarded as "the one possible leader for a revolutionary party." Tilak had profoundly appreciated the lucid exposure of the mendicant policy of the Congress in the articles 'New Lamps for Old.' He had seen the writer at Baroda in 1901. It was at the Ahmedabad Congress that the two met again; "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." The Ahmedabad Congress was held in December 1902 under the chairmanship of Surendranath Banerji, who declared: "We plead for the permanence of British rule in India."

Sri Aurobindo built up a very close contact with Tilak, for he became — unless he already was ? — a member of a secret society started by Tilak in Maharashtra. It was one Mandal

"who introduced me through someone else¹ to the Secret Society," disclosed Sri Aurobindo, "where I came into contact with Tilak and others.... I and some others joined [the Society] along with some Rajput Thakurs."

Thus Sri Aurobindo took the oath of the Society and was introduced to the Council in Bombay. Later he became the president of this Bombay Council. The oath-giver placed in the hands of the oath-taker an unsheathed sword and a copy of the Gita, with a pledge to the effect: "As long as there is life in me and as long as India is not liberated from her chains of subjection, I will carry on the revolution. If at any time I disclose a single word or a single event of the Society or harm it in any way, it shall be at the cost of my own life."²

Sri Aurobindo's future action was not pursued under any directions by this Council, but he took up on his own responsibility the task of generalizing support for its objects in Bengal where as yet it had no membership or following. He "spoke of the Society and its aim to P. Mitter and other leading men of the revolutionary group in Bengal and they took the oath of the Society and agreed to carry out its objects on the lines suggested by Sri Aurobindo." He revealed an unknown aspect of the revolutionary movement. "It was our men who got hold of the movement in Bengal and gave it a revolutionary character. Otherwise it would have been a

1. Purani says that a Marathi gentleman, "Mr. Mandvale, gave the oath of the Revolutionary Party to Sri Aurobindo," in 1901.

2. *Agniyuga (in Bengali)*. by Barindra K. Ghose .

moderate movement. We were training people in our Secret Society started by Tilak."

The leader of the Secret Society's movement was one of the Thakurs. He was not a Ruling Chief, "but a noble of the Udaipur State with the title of Thakur. The Thakur was not a member of the Council in Bombay; he stood above it as the leader of the whole movement while the Council helped him to organise Maharashtra and the Mahratta States. He himself worked principally upon the army of which he had already won over two or three regiments. Sri Aurobindo took a

special journey into Central India to meet and speak with Indian sub-officers and men of one of these regiments," Sri Aurobindo stated explicitly.

Sister Nivedita also had links with Rajput Thakurs. "She went about among the Thakurs of Rajputana trying to preach to them revolution," said Sri Aurobindo with a chuckle. "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. One Thakur, Ram Singh, who joined our movement, was afterwards caught and put in jail. He suddenly died there in a short time. Moro-pant said, 'He died out of fright.' But he was not a man to be frightened. They may have poisoned him. Moropant, you know, turned afterwards a Moderate."

Sri Aurobindo then said earnestly, "More than one Indian battalion were ready to help us. I knew a Punjabi sentry at Alipore who spoke to me about the revolution."

When a man wanted to enter his yoga in 1923, Sri

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Aurobindo hid nothing. He told the aspirant that this yoga was a high adventure, for it was a radical transition from the present state of human consciousness; a sadhak of his yoga would be attacked by tremendous forces, and the sadhak would have to prove again and again his strength. "It is not a revolt against the British Government which anyone can easily do," Sri Aurobindo said candidly. "It is, in fact, a revolt against the whole universal Nature."

The Revolutionary of the Swadeshi days would become the Revolutionary of the universal Nature.

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The National College

Sri Aurobindo had an abiding interest in education. He had himself passed through school and college in England. He was therefore amply qualified to evaluate the education as it was imparted in India. Its calculated poverty, its antinational character, its inculcation of loyalty to

the British Government, proved that its aim was to churn out clerks and low-rung bureaucrats. Quite apparent to him were the disastrous effects of the system on body, mind and character of the Indians. These effects were apparent to others as well. To counter them Rabindranath Tagore established the Santiniketan School at Bolpur in 1901; B. B. Upadhyay was one of the first to help him. Satish Mukherji founded the Dawn Society in 1902 in Calcutta ; it sought not only to develop the students' personality and build up their character, but to awaken in them the nationalist spirit and a sense of patriotism.

The modern reader is most probably unaware that before the advent of the British every village had at least one school, larger villages several, and cities one or more in every divisions. Young people — Brahmins and non-Brahmins —were

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taught reading, writing and arithmetic. The indigenous educational system was so economical that it amazed the British. The new rulers quickly wiped out the native system.

As the Swadeshi movement gathered momentum and the youth were mobilised — they "proved to be the chief props and pillars of the Swadeshi and Boycott movement," noted R. C. Majumdar — the Government was worried. Indeed, it viewed the development with fear and resolved to crush it. To that end it sent out a secret circular to Magistrates and Collectors, under the signature of the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, R. W. Carlyle. The Carlyle Circular of 10 October 1905 asked the officers to ban schoolboys and college students from participating in the Swadeshi Movement: any disobedience was to be met with exemplary punishment. This was hideous enough. Then, close upon the heels of the Carlyle Circular came the 21st October letter of Pedler, the Director of Public Instruction, to the Principals of certain Calcutta colleges, asking why the students who took part in the Harrison Road picketing should not be expelled. The publication of the above two brought a storm of indignation in the whole of Bengal. Then, adding insult to injury, P. C. Lyon, Chief Secretary of the newly formed province of East Bengal, sent two circulars to the Divisional Commissioner of Dacca, which let loose a ruthless repression. In the Lyon Circular of 8 November were orders such as:

- a) 'Bande Mataram' was not to be shouted on the streets or in public places.
- b) Students must not crowd on streets for singing nationalist songs or for shouting slogans like 'Bande Mataram.'

c) The police could arrest anybody guilty of discourteous conduct to an Englishman or a Muslim on the streets....

If the Carlyle Circular and the Pedler letter had brought resentment, the Lyon Circular brought revulsion to the whole country. Nor did the students take it all lying down. They raised their voice of protest with tremendous courage. As the newspapers published incident after incident of the administration's crackdown, an intense fire of discontent blazed forth. Almost immediately the public of Bengal took up the gauntlet. A public meeting was held on 24 October 1905, under the chairmanship of Abdul Rasul, in which eminent speakers like B.C. Pal suggested the inauguration of an independent system of National education.

Incidentally, another meeting was held at College Square on the same day, where about two thousand Muslims took the vow of Swadeshi.

Meeting after meeting were held by public-spirited men of Bengal. Rabindranath was there, as were B.C. Pal, K.K. Mitra, C. R. Das, Satish Mukherji, Monoranjan Guha Thakurta, and scores of eminent men. It was finally decided to establish a National Council of Education.

It was on 11 March 1906 that the National Council of Education, Bengal, was constituted. It was registered on 1st June. There were 96 Foundation Members of the Council. Among them were some of our acquaintances. Maharaja Suryakanta Acharya of Mymensingh was one of the vice-presidents. Then there were Subodh Chandra Mullick, Bepin Chandra Pal,

P. Mitter, Surendranath Banerji, Gaganendranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore, Chittaranjan Das, Aravindo Ghose, Satish Chandra Mukherji, A. Rasul, Aswini Kumar Dutt, Radha Kumud Mukherji, etc. And Dr. Nilratan Sarkar, that enemy of death. Add a galaxy of eminent personalities of the then Bengal.



For his part, Sri Aurobindo who was never really interested in administrative work at Baroda State, was waiting for an opportunity to join the political storm then raging in the country and more particularly in Bengal. "As soon as I heard that a National College had been started in Bengal," he explained in 1938, "I found my opportunity and threw up the Baroda job and went to Calcutta as Principal." Thus he gave up his Rs. 750-a-month job for a pittance of Rs. 75-a-month, later increased to Rs. 150.

He was not only motivated by politics to such an act of renunciation, but was genuinely indignant at the current education system. "He had been," as he himself put it, "disgusted with the education given by the British system in the schools and colleges and universities, a system of which as a professor in the Baroda College he had full experience. He felt that it tended to dull and impoverish and tie up the naturally quick and brilliant and supple Indian intelligence, to teach it bad intellectual habits and spoil by narrow information and mechanical instruction its originality and productivity." Already in 1894, in the series of articles he had written on 'Bankimchandra Chatterji,' he had characterized this system as "the most ingeniously complete machine for murder that human stupidity ever invented, and murder not only of man's body but of a man's soul, of that sacred fire of individuality in him which is far holier and more precious than this mere mortal breath."

On 9 November 1905 a big meeting was held at 'Panti's Math' in Calcutta to give birth to the National Council of Education. Subodh C. Mullick was in the chair, and very spontaneously announced a donation of one lakh rupees for national education. A great cheer broke out in the populous field, and the grateful people gave him the honorific title of 'Raja.' His gesture was later matched by Maharaja Suryakanta Acharya of Mymensingh who donated two and a half lakhs, and the Zamindar of Gouripore, Brajendra Kishore Roy Choudhury who donated five lakhs to the fund. Finally it was on 15 August 1906 that the Bengal National College and School (registered on 1st June 1906) began to function, with Sri

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Aurobindo as its first Principal.¹ When he resigned the next year following the *Bande Mataram* Sedition Case, it was Satish Mukherji who became the second Principal of the College.

Raja Subodh Mullick (1879-1920) was one of Sri Aurobindo's collaborators in his secret action and afterwards also in Congress politics. "I mixed intimately with Mullick," said Sri Aurobindo. When giving a lakh of rupees for its foundation he had stipulated that Sri Aurobindo should be given a post of professor, in the National College. In July 1906 when he took a protracted leave without pay from Baroda, and went to Calcutta, he put up at 12 Wellington Square, the residence of Raja Subodh Mullick. It was not really out of the blue that Subodh Mullick had chosen him as the first Principal of the National College. This was his way of acknowledging Sri Aurobindo's ideas on education: "National education cannot be defined briefly in one or two sentences, but we may describe it tentatively as the education which starting with the past and making full use of the present builds up a great nation. Whoever wishes to cut off the nation from its past is no friend of our national growth. Whoever fails to take advantage of the present is losing us the battle of life. We must therefore save for India all that she has stored up of knowledge, character and noble thought in her immemorial past. We must acquire for her the best knowledge that Europe can give her and assimilate it to

1. Almost simultaneously, on 25 July 1906 to be precise, was established the Bengal Technical Institute. In 1910 the two institutions merged. After Independence they became part of the Jadavpur University. (*History of Modern Bengal*,

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Subodh Mullick's house at Wellington Square, Calcutta

her own peculiar type of national temperament. We must introduce the best methods of teaching humanity has developed, whether modern or ancient. And all these we must harmonise into a system which will be impregnated with the spirit of self-reliance so as to build up men and not machines."

The public interest in national education grew apace. In the second week of February 1908, a special conference was held at Pabna, attended by about ten thousand men. Rabindranath Tagore was in the chair. He delivered a stirring speech, in the course of which he said, "The control and direction by foreigners of education in India is a most unnatural phenomenon not to be met with elsewhere." He also said that the aim and end of national education in India was to realize the fulfilment of the country by "building up true sons of the country ... who will quietly organise the villages, the real seat of the India to be." In that Bengal Provincial Conference a resolution was passed "to establish and maintain national schools throughout the country." Reports R. C.

Majumdar, "In moving this resolution Arabinda Ghose explained in a few words the object of maintaining these schools. 'The National Schools,' said he, 'will train and send out workers who will devote themselves completely to the service of the country and raise her once more to the old position of glory which she once occupied in the scale of Nations.'"

At another meeting, Sri Aurobindo once more explained the aims and ideals of national education. He pointed out that the University system "turned out machines for administrative and professional work, not men." He went on to add that "the

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National system of Education was intended to create a nation. It must produce men with all their faculties trained, full of patriotism, and mentally, morally, physically, the equals of the men of any other nation." Hardly had he finished his speech when a local pleader, Dinanath Biswas, leaped to the platform and promised on the spot a donation of Rs.500, a monthly subscription of Rs. 5, and two of his own children as aids to the foundation of the National School at Pabna. He had opened a floodgate, and donations poured in. Scores of such schools sprung up in the whole country, many under the aegis of the National Council.

National education was a sign of the times. It rode high on the crest of Swadeshi, then almost ceased, broken and spent.

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Professor Extraordinary

"The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task-master, he is a helper and a guide." Sri Aurobindo had written a series of introductory essays on a sound system of teaching applicable to national education in any country; they were published in the weekly *Karmayogin* between February and April 1910.

The National College was first located at 191/1 Bow-bazar Street. Students came—not only those rusticated from Government Colleges. They were attracted by the Principal's method of teaching, and his personality. Their love and adoration for Sri Aurobindo was not a degree less

than the devotion he was accorded by his students at Baroda College. "When he would lecture in the class," wrote Rishabhchand,¹ "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

1. *Sri Aurobindo—His Life Unique.*

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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 Bengali writer, was one of the students at the National College. He describes his first experience in the class.¹ "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 [cotton wrapper]. 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 they 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

1. Article in the Bengali magazine *Galpa Bharati*, Paus 1357. We have taken the English rendering done by *Rishabhchand*.

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would be united with the spirituality of India, our national character would evolve such a type as would be incomparable in the world."

In his speech at the Panti's Math meeting a few months earlier, Subodh Mullick had said:

"Brother-students and Gentlemen,

At the outset I must ask your indulgence for addressing you in English. I am ashamed to own that I am one of the products of the present denationalised system of education, who can better express themselves in the foreign tongue than in their own....

"I have known our own bastard system of education as well as the natural type of it in the West. It is a matter of great rejoicing that a great truth has at last dawned upon us today in all its glory..... The attitude of the Government towards the students with regard to the present movement has been an eye-opener to us. We have seen what a dangerous weapon they can make of this control over education and, secure career of national progress will be impossible for us unless we take the same away from their hands.

"The freedom that we desire is freedom from the trammels which have so long hindered our national growth---Ideas of nationality, self-respect and the higher attributes which ennoble a man have had no place in [our education]. With the pulsation of a national sentiment throbbing in our breast our first care should be to put education on a sound basis What in the world is there in the way of starting a National University?... We have heard of able and learned

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men in the lucrative professions promising to give up their prospects for this great national cause. Why then do we halt and falter?... Let us make a beginning here today. The students are already stinting themselves of their comforts in order to contribute their humble mite to the National University Fund. Their example has not been lost and is bound to evoke universal response. For my part, to show my sympathy with their laudable efforts, I most humbly beg to place at the disposal of the promoters of this cause my humble contribution of a lakh of rupees. I am not, gentlemen, a wealthy man. I can ill afford the luxury of making such a gift. But the call of the Mother is clear, and respond we must, be we great or small."

The foremost among the 'able and learned men' to give up his 'lucrative profession' was Sri Aurobindo. Not only was he the Principal of the National College, he taught various subjects also: French, German and of course, English; Indian History and Geography; English History; and Political Science (Western). He also set examination papers, for instance, Fifth and Seventh Standard papers in History were set by him. Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar taught Bengali at the College. And if we don't speak of Satish Chandra Mukherji, the founder of the Dawn Society, it will be unpardonable. He was the Superintendent of the Bengal National College. Sri Aurobindo said about him in a speech he delivered at Bombay in 1908: "I spoke to you the other day about National Education and I spoke of a man who had given his life to that work, the man who really organised the National College in Calcutta, and that man also is a disciple of a Sannyasin, that man also,

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though he lives in the world, lives like a Sannyasin."

The first lot of teachers tried to place before their pupils great ideals which they themselves practised in their personal lives. No sermonising. No. But daily converse and books that contained lofty examples of the past as things of supreme human interest, the great thoughts of great souls, the records of history and biography which exemplify the living of those great thoughts, the passages of literature which set fire to the highest emotions and prompt the highest ideals and aspiration. And personal example.

What did the teachers at the National College feel about Sri Aurobindo? Perhaps the Reader may welcome a reminiscence or two from them ?

There was Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay, who later became a sannyasin, under the name of Swami Pratyagatma-nanda.¹ "In the beginning I sought to recognize 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.

1. An acknowledged authority on Tantra, the Swami had collaborated with Sir John Woodroffe in his exposition on Tantric sadhana. Our text is derived from Rishabhchandra.

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"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 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."

One of our great historians, Dr. Radha Kumud Mukhopadhyay (1881-1963), was Professor of History at the College. "I happened perhaps to be one of the very few," said Dr. Radha Kumud, "who had the rare good fortune of coming into direct touch with Sri Aurobindo as a youth in the full bloom of his life and power when he was pleased to take over the appointment of the Principalship of the Bengal National College at which I was appointed Professor of History directly working under him. I recall my personal anecdotes about his life and

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work in those stirring times when the country, especially Bengal, was thrown into a whirlwind agitation over the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon.

"At that time Sri Aurobindo took up the personal leadership of the Revolution which ushered in the nation's battle for freedom. Every day he would go from the Bengal National College to the evening gathering at the house of one of India's patriotic martyrs Raja Subodh Chandra Mullick in Wellington Square. The gathering, by its thought and inspiration, resembled that of the French

Encyclopaedists, the intellectuals who paved the way of the French Revolution. That was before Sri Aurobindo was prosecuted in the Alipore Bomb Case and before his historic 'flight' to Pondicherry.

"At home, in the domestic sphere, at the college, I had rare glimpses of his innate spirituality which made him always keep calm and reticent. I used to sit by him and had the natural advantage of studying some of the remarkable traits of his spiritual life at close quarters."

He also mentions meeting Poet Manmohan Ghose at Subodh Mullick's house. Manmohan was often accompanied by one of his students, Sailendranath Mitra. The latter was wonderstruck to see how even in the thick of Sri Aurobindo's political activities the two brothers would happily read and discuss Greek poetry "entirely lost to a sense of time."

The nature of fire is not only to burn but to set aflame all that comes into contact with it. When Sri Aurobindo was arrested on 16 August 1907 on a charge of sedition in the *Bande Mataram* Sedition case, he had already, on 2 August,

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resigned from the Principalship of the National College. In June the College premises had been changed to 164/166 Bowbazar Street. It was there that on 23 August, released on bail, he delivered an impromptu address, pressed by the assembled students and teachers of the College. That was another stirring speech, sure to ignite a patriotic fire in the hearts of students.

"I have been told that you wish me to speak a few words of advice to you. But in these days I feel that young men can very often give better advice than we older people can give. Nor must you ask me to express the feelings which your actions, the way in which you have shown your affection towards me, have given rise to in my breast. It is impossible to express them. You all know that I have resigned my post. 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, 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 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 your country, to the

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Mother in me, because what little I have done has been done for her, and the slight suffering that I am going to endure will be endured for her sake. Taking your sympathy in that light I can feel that if I am incapacitated from carrying on my work, there will be so many others left behind me. One other cause of rejoicing for me is to find that practically all my countrymen have the same fellow-feeling for me and for the same reason as yourselves. The unanimity with which all classes have expressed their sympathy for me and even offered help at the moment of my trial, is a cause for rejoicing, and for the same reason. For I am nothing, what I have done is nothing. I have earned this fellow-feeling because of serving the cause which all my countrymen have at heart.

"The only piece of advice that I can give you now is — carry on the work, the mission, for which this college was created. I have no doubt that all of you have realised by this time what this mission means. 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. That is why we started this college and that is the work to which I want you to devote yourselves in future. What has been insufficiently and imperfectly begun by

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*Sri Aurobindo on 23 August 1907, about to
address the students of the Bengal National College*

us, it is for you to complete and lead to perfection. When I come back I wish to see some of you becoming rich, rich not for yourselves but that you may enrich the Mother with your riches. I

wish to see some of you becoming great, great not for your own sakes, not that you may satisfy your own vanity, but great for her, to make India great, to enable her to stand up with head erect among the nations of the earth, as she did in days of yore when the world looked up to her for light. Even those who will remain poor and obscure, I want to see their very poverty and obscurity devoted to the Motherland. 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 is 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. All is contained in that one single advice. My last word to you is that if you have sympathy for me, I hope to see it not merely as a personal feeling, but as a sympathy with what I am working for. I want to see this sympathy translated into work so that when in future I shall look upon your career of glorious activity, I may have the pride of remembering that I did something to prepare and begin it."

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Bande Mataram

Sri Aurobindo did not wield a gun. He wielded a pen.

In August 1906, when the National College began its work, Bepin Pal "who had been long expounding a policy of self-help and non-cooperation in his weekly journal [*New India*], now started a daily with the name *Bande Mataram*," wrote Sri Aurobindo. On 6 August 1906 the declaration of *Bande Mataram* was filed. S. K. Ratcliffe, a previous editor of *The Statesman*, in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* of 28 December 1950 just after the passing away of Sri Aurobindo, wrote: "We knew Aurobindo Ghose only as a revolutionary nationalist and editor of a flaming newspaper which struck a ringing new note in Indian daily journalism ... *Bande Mataram* (Hail to the Mother). It was a full-size sheet, was clearly printed on green paper, and was full of leading and special articles written in English and with brilliance and pungency not hitherto attained in Indian Press. It was the most effective voice of what we then called

nationalist extremism." Ironically, it was the very *Statesman* that used to complain that the *Bande Mataram* "reeked with sedition patently visible

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Vol 71

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The "Swadeshi" Edition Case.

UPADHAYA BHAGAWAN BHANDARI STATEMENT.

NOT RESPONSIBLE TO THE ALLEGEES.

TAKES ENTIRE RESPONSIBILITY.

The following is the statement made by Upadhyaya Bhagawan Bhandari regarding the case of the "Swadeshi" Edition of the "Bande Mataram" newspaper. He states that he is not responsible for the actions of the subscribers and that he has taken the entire responsibility for the publication of the newspaper.

From the correspondence to have been... The "Swadeshi" Edition of the "Bande Mataram" newspaper has been a subject of much discussion and controversy. It is a daily organ of Indian nationalism, and its publication is a testament to the spirit of the nation. The subscribers of the "Swadeshi" Edition are those who are true to the cause of Indian nationalism and who are willing to support the newspaper in its struggle for the freedom of the nation.

E. G. PAUL'S "SWADESHI" AND MOBILITY.

It is a well-known fact that the "Swadeshi" Edition of the "Bande Mataram" newspaper is a daily organ of Indian nationalism. It is a testament to the spirit of the nation and a source of inspiration for the people. The publication of the "Swadeshi" Edition is a sign of the growth of Indian nationalism and a step towards the freedom of the nation.

KALSHAY MONSTER MEETING.

The Kalshay monster meeting was held in the city of Calcutta on the 24th of September, 1907. It was a meeting of the people of the city and was attended by a large number of people. The meeting was held in the city of Calcutta and was a success. It was a sign of the growth of Indian nationalism and a step towards the freedom of the nation.

Prosecution of Babu Arbinda Ghosh.

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Katni Lime.

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Swadeshi Cigarettes.

10, BOWBARAN STREET, CALCUTTA.

Swadeshi Cigarettes.

These cigarettes are highly recommended and created by the great Swadeshi leader... The Swadeshi Cigarettes are a source of pride for the people of India. They are made of natural ingredients and are of high quality. They are a sign of the growth of the Indian industry.

Swadeshi Cigarettes.

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between every line, but it was so skilfully written that no legal action could be taken," recounted Sri. Aurobindo.

Do you know how these brilliant and pungent leading articles were written? "When a man from the Office would come for articles," explained Abinash C. Bhattacharya, a revolutionary worker, who was residing with Sri Aurobindo at 48 Grey Street, from where they were arrested at the same time in May the following year, "he would ask him to wait and start writing and go on sometimes with his eyes on, sometimes away from, what he wrote. No stop of his pen or pencil. A few pages done, he would ask if that would do." Any handy paper, even the back of a bill or a torn piece of packing paper served equally well for these editorials written without a scratch; editorials for which the whole of India waited with bated breath to read the next morning.

However, Suresh Chandra Deb, a sub-editor of the paper, in his first-hand account says: "It fell to me to come to him every evening about 5 P.M. and receive from him the article promised. I found it ready; I did not have to wait for it on any single day." Then Sri Aurobindo began to attend the *Bande Mataram* office. Here is Deb again. "We 'edited' the telegrams, and Sri Aurobindo passing through our room would ask us for the day's news on which to comment. He generally finished his articles by 3 P.M., and when handing these over to us would enquire whether they would be sufficient. If we replied in the negative, he would stand by our table, look over the telegram sheets, and write a 'para' or two, as the mood was on. Other denizens of the editorial sanctum were Shyam Sundar Chakravarty

*A first page of the Bande Mataram,
with Swadeshi advertisements*

and Hemendra Prasad Ghosh, a witness to the 'high audacity' of those days, Sri Aurobindo's favourite words. The 'Chief,' the title by which he was known in the *Bande Mataram* Office, showed an instinct for journalism that was remarkable for one of his retiring and recluse habits."

When the British saw the fire of Nationalism taking hold of Punjab they hastened to stamp it out. On 9 May 1907, Lala Lajpat Rai, the Lion of Punjab, was arrested and deported to Mandalay in Burma, along with Ajit Singh. The news reached Calcutta at about midnight. In a couple of hours the *Bande Mataram* was to go to press. Sri Aurobindo was roused from his sleep and given the news. Instantly he wrote the following:

"The sympathetic administration of Mr. Morley has for the present attained its records;—but for the present only. Lala Lajpatrai 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 for 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 Lajpat will arise in his place. Let them hear a hundred times louder your war-cry—*Jai Hindustan.*"

Years later, Sri Aurobindo gave a brief but comprehensive note on the genesis of the paper *Bande Mataram*, which could have been but a brief adventure since Pal began with a paltry amount and no firm assurance of financial assistance.

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"Bepin Pal started the *Bande Mataram* with Rs. 500 in his pocket donated by Haridas Halder. He called in my help as assistant editor and I gave it. I called a private meeting of the young Nationalist leaders in Calcutta and they agreed to take up the *Bande Mataram* as their party paper with Subodh and Nirod Mullick as the principal financial supporters. A company was projected and formed, but the paper was financed and kept up meanwhile by Subodh. Bepin Pal who was strongly supported by C. R. Das and others remained as editor. Hemendra Prasad Chose and Shyam Sundar joined the editorial staff but they could not get on with Bepin Babu and were supported by the Mullicks. " The editorial staff comprised Bepin C. Pal , Sri Aurobindo, Shyam Sundar Chakrabarty! and Bejoy Chandra Chatterji , both of them 'masters of the English language,' and Hemendra Prasad Chose. The dissension between Bepin Pal and others arose because of differences of political views "especially with regard to the secret revolutionary action with which others sympathised but to which Bepin Pal was opposed," clarified Sri Aurobindo. "Finally, Bepin Pal had to retire, I don't remember whether in November or December [1906], probably the latter. I was myself very ill , almost to death , in my father in-law's house in Serpentine Lane and I did not know what was going on." Sri Aurobindo would not have consented to Bepin Pal's departure as he regarded the qualities of Pal , an ardent

1. "Shyam Sundar was a witty parodist and could write with much humour as also with a telling rhetoric.... In Sri Aurobindo's absence from Calcutta it was Shyam Sundar who wrote most of the *Bande Mataram* editorials, those excepted which were sent by Sri Aurobindo from Deoghar."

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Nationalist, as a great asset to the *Bande Mataram*. But it was effected behind his back when he lay ill with a dangerous attack of malarial fever, after he had stopped Pranayama practices for lack of time. On 4 November he had such high fever that he could not write his editorial. He recovered partially at the end of November, but had a relapse in December. On 11 December he went to Deoghar for a change, but returned to Calcutta by the 26th in order to attend the Congress session. "They put my name as editor on the paper without my consent," continued Sri Aurobindo, "but I spoke to the secretary pretty harshly and had the insertion discontinued." For one day only, on 12 December, Sri Aurobindo's name appeared as the Editor of the paper. But from then on he controlled the policy of the *Bande Mataram* and the policy of the Nationalist Party.

It was not only against the British government that the articles abounded. "When I began the paper," Sri Aurobindo told a politician disciple in 1926, "I started attacking the big heads of the Moderate Party —among them Surendranath Banerji. And you will wonder, Bepin Pal wrote to me that I was unnecessarily creating trouble by writing them. Of course, I went on writing my articles without listening to what he said. I saw how little practical insight he had got in politics. At the 1906 Congress [at Calcutta] Tilak had to do the whole fighting alone against Pherozeshah and the rest and Bepin Pal could be of no help to him! I was then working behind the scenes."

Sri Aurobindo then called a meeting of the party leaders at which it was decided at his instance to give up the

behind-the-scenes jostlings with the Moderates, and declare an open war on Moderatism — the Nationalist Party was born — and place before the country what was practically a revolutionary propaganda. In an inconceivably short time the *Bande Mataram* became the spearhead of the new party in Bengal. The Nationalist Party was at once successful and the *Bande Mataram* paper began to circulate throughout India. It came into being in a great and critical hour for the whole nation, and it had a message to deliver. Indeed, "the *Bande Mataram* was almost unique in journalistic history in the influence it exercised in converting the mind of a people and preparing it for revolution." Even three or four years before the Swadeshi movement was born the prevailing mood in Bengal was one of apathy and despair. But then came a sudden transformation. And the *Bande Mataram* played no mean part in it. "Anyone with an open

mind," remarked a contemporary reader, "reading even a stray issue of the *Bande Mataram* was sure to be persuaded to its views and become a Nationalist."

Wrote Lajpat Rai to the *Bande Mataram* on 4 May 1907, just five days before his deportation, "Let me assure you that I spare no opportunity of recommending your excellent paper to my friends as well as those whom I meet. For me it is generally an intellectual feast and it is my earnest desire that nothing will happen to mar its usefulness. It is doing a splendid service. May it live long is the earnest prayer. "I am

"A humble servant of the motherland Lajpat Rai"

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Bepin Pal said, "Morning after morning not only Calcutta, but the educated community almost in every part of the country, eagerly awaited its vigorous pronouncements on the stirring questions of the day. It even forced itself upon the notice of the callous and self-centered British press. Long extracts from it commenced to be reproduced week after week, even in the exclusive columns of the *Times* in London." Even Theodore Roosevelt, President of the USA from 1901 to 1909, after reading a copy of the *Bande Mataram* found that it was 'a very interesting paper.'

But the *Bande Mataram* did not confine itself to the 'stirring questions of the day.' It spoke of History—of Indian History to awake the people to India's glorious past. It spoke of Indian culture, comparing it with the Western one. It instilled a moral tone into the murkiness of politics. In a word, the *Bande Mataram* elevated Nationalism to another, higher level. Nationalism was the new religion.

Before closing the chapter we give a little extract from an assessment of the journal's impact made by J. L. Banerji. "The *Bande Mataram* leaped into popular favour almost in a day; and soon achieved for itself a remarkable position in the field of Indian journalism. The vigour and energy of its style, the trenchant directness of its tone, the fearless independence of its attitude, the high and inspiring ideal which it held up before the people, its passionate faith in the genius of the country—all combined to root the new paper in the hearts and affections of its ever-widening circle of readers. Moreover, the people knew that the *Bande Mataram* was their very own—no

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organ of any clique, or faction, but wide as Indian nationality itself. No newspaper that we know of has ever evoked such passionate personal enthusiasm as the *Bande Mataram* did during its short tenure of life.

"Whoever the actual contributor to the *Bande Mataram* might be —the soul, the genius of the paper was Arabinda. 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 Arabinda Ghose: his the clear clarion notes calling men to heroic and strenuous self-sacrifice; his the unswerving unfaltering faith in the high destinies of his race; his the passionate resolve to devote life, fame, fortune, all to the service of the Mother."

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The Bureaucracy

The Anglo-Indian bureaucrats were tearing their hair. What was the vernacular press doing? To add insult to injury here was the *Bande Mataram* merrily using a language that was 'a direct incentive to violence and lawlessness.' But they felt helpless. The Government shared the view of the editor of *The Friend of India (The Statesman)* who complained that the editorials were too diabolically clever, crammed full of sedition between the lines, but legally unattackable because of the skill of the language.

"This agitation," wrote Sri Aurobindo in the *Bande Mataram* of 4 September 1906, a few days after he had actually joined the paper, "is not an agitation merely against [Bengal's] Partition.... The attainment of absolute national autonomy — it is this alone that will settle down this movement." Indeed, "Sri Aurobindo's first preoccupation was to declare openly for complete and absolute independence as the aim of political action in India and to insist on this persistently in the pages of the journal; he was the first politician in India who had the courage to do this in public and he was immediately successful."

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Let us repeat for posterity. that Sri Aurobindo was the first Indian to declare Independence as India's aim. It was neither Mr. M. K. Gandhi nor Jawaharlal Nehru, as some people have begun to claim.

For the record, it was again Sri Aurobindo who first set in motion the doctrine of passive resistance, or non-cooperation with the colonial Government. Years later Gandhi adopted the doctrine and adapted it to suit his own political programme.

Asked Sri Aurobindo, "Are we to guide our own destinies or are we to have no destiny at all except nullity, except death? For it is nonsense to talk of other people guiding our destinies, that is only a euphemism for killing our destinies altogether; it is nonsense to talk of others giving us enlightenment, civilisation, political training, for the enlightenment that is given and not acquired brings not light but confusion, the civilisation that is imposed from outside kills a nation instead of invigorating it, and the training which is not acquired by our own experience and effort incapacitates and does not make efficient. The issue of freedom is therefore the only issue."

He declared that "the rule of one nation over another is against natural law and therefore a falsehood, and falsehood can only endure so long as the Truth refuses to recognise itself." Stated Sri Aurobindo, "Nationalism is the gospel of inalienable freedom. Boycott is the practice of freedom. To break the Boycott and to stop the preaching of Nationalism is the whole object of the bureaucracy. The *Times* saw this when it singled out the writings of *Bande Mataram* and *Yugantar*, the speeches

of Bepin Chandra Pal and his like and above all, the Boycott as the root of all evil. Behind all technicalities this is the true and only issue in these sedition cases."

The *Bande Mataram*, from its very inception, began attacking without fear and without disguise the then system of Government and advocated a radical and revolutionary change. Its blistering attack on the bureaucracy left the latter gasping for breath.

"The Anglo-Indian bureaucrats,"¹ wrote Sri Aurobindo in 1907, "have set out on the slippery path where futile ferocity and vain blood guiltiness hurry down the car of empire to sink in the sea of shame and blood below. Seldom and by a miracle can the wheels that have once gone some way down by that slope be retarded and stopped.

"What is it that you seek, rulers who are eager to confuse the interests of a handful of white administrators with the welfare of humanity, or what is it that you dream, traders who think that God made this India of ours only as a market for your merchandise?"

What then was India? "This great and ancient nation was once the fountain of human light, the apex of human civilisation, the exemplar of courage and humanity, the perfection of good Government and settled society, the mother of all religions, the teacher of all wisdom and philosophy. It has suffered much at

1. The astute Reader must have noticed that all the criticism in this book has been directed towards the policy-makers and policy-implementers only. There were —there are—many Westerners who loved India more than any Indians do.

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the hands of inferior civilisation and more savage peoples; it has gone down into the shadow of night and tasted often of the bitterness of death. Its pride has been trampled into the dust and its glory has departed. Hunger and misery and despair have become the masters of this fair soil, these noble hills, these ancient rivers, these cities whose life story goes back into prehistoric night." He asked a question. "But do you think that therefore God has utterly abandoned us and given us up for ever to be a mere convenience for the West, the helots of its commerce, and the feeders of its luxury and pride?" Sri Aurobindo asserted, "We are still God's chosen people.... The time for our resurgence is come. And no power shall stay that uprising and no opposing interest shall deny us the right to live, to be ourselves, to set our seal once more upon the world. Every race and people that oppressed us even in our evening and our midnight has been broken into pieces and their glory turned into a legend of the past. Yet you venture to hope that in the hour of our morning you will be able to draw back the veil of night once more over our land.... God has lighted the fire in a quarter where you least feared it and it is beginning to eat up your commerce and threaten your ease. He has raised up the people you despised as weaklings and cowards, a people of clerks and babblers and slaves and set you to break their insurgent spirit and trample them into the dust if you can. And you cannot. You have tried every means except absolute massacre and you have failed. And now what will you do?"

That was the big question troubling the bureaucrats.

Had the English mind taken the first step and tried to see things from the Indian standpoint, and acted accordingly,

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most, if not all, of the difficulties might have been solved. "The Indian mind has not the Irish memory for past wrongs and discords," analyzed Sri Aurobindo, "it forgives and forgets easily. Only it must be made to feel that the approach on the other side is frank and whole-hearted. If it once felt that, every difficulty would be solved."

Never known for its imaginative ideas, the bureaucracy simply reacted. "Barren of resources, it blindly persists in the old stupid violences that can hurt and enrage but cannot kill, the old menaces and outbursts of barbarous rage that have lost their power to intimidate an incensed and stubborn people, and will not realise that every blow evokes a mightier reaction, that every missile of death it hurls is returning with fearful rapidity upon the thrower, that the chains with which it binds the limbs of the nation's martyrs are so much iron which the nation will forge into weapons against its oppressors, that the blood it sheds is so much water of life to foster the young plant of liberty, that, when sentence has been passed upon men or class or institution, every device invented for safety becomes an instrument for destruction and the fiercer the attempts to escape, the swifter the motion straight towards doom."

The Anglo-Indian bureaucrats had issued a spate of ordinances and savagely tightened the sedition laws. Any Indian who asserted his countrymen's natural right to rule over India was apt to be accused of "waging war against the Empire," against a King seated on a throne at the other end of the world, and to be thrown into jail and kept there without trial as long as it pleased His distant Majesty. John Morley was alarmed at the

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severe penalties for seditious writings. "These sentences are monstrous and outrageous and can never be supported," he wrote to Minto. "I must confess to you that I am watching with the deepest concern and dismay the thundering sentences that are being passed for sedition, etc. We must keep order, but excess of severity. is not the path to order. On the contrary, it is the path to the bomb."

He was proved right. Very soon.

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The Confounded

British Government

"And the second fact is," wrote Sri Aurobindo to Dilip on 2 October 1934, giving his reasons for declining a request from Dr. Radha Krishna for a philosophical contribution. "And the second fact is that 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, push people without their knowing it and getting things done. It was the confounded British Government that spoiled my game by prosecuting me and forcing me to be publicly known as a 'leader.'"

That was the *Bande Mataram* Seditious Case.

In 1907 the Government began 'seditious' proceedings against the Press, targeting in the main the three extremist newspapers running in Bengal: *Yugantar*, *Sandhya*,¹ an evening paper,

1. *Sandhya*, a Bengali daily, made its debut in 1904, that is two years before

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and the *Bande Mataram*. Between them they practically revolutionized the political attitude of Bengal.

Press prosecutions were also directed against other vernacular papers, including *Sanjibani*, *Sonar Bangla*, *Barisal Hitabadi*, etc.

On 30 July 1907 the *Bande Mataram* premises at 2/1 Creek Row, were searched. The Office was situated at the back of 12 Wellington Square, the house of Subodh Mullick. The next day the *Bande Mataram* described the raid in its columns. "The wolf has come at last.... Inspector Lahiri

with the Casabianca like devotion to duty ransacked every creek and corner of the Manager's office and caught hold of everything that bore the semblance of paper.... They spent nearly two hours in the Office of the Joint Stock Company and went on with the

Yugantar and *Bande Mataram*. Its articles were written in a language easily understandable by ordinary citizens-tram conductors, shopkeepers, stall owners. It prepared the common man for uncommon ideas by speaking out against the ineptitudes of the Congress Moderates and by exposing the foreign government's misdeeds .

Sri Aurobindo said about its editor Brahma Bandhab Upadhyay, that he "was another great man." Upadhyay was arrested on 31 August 1907. He accepted full responsibility for the paper; then added, "But I don't want to take any part in the trial, because I do not believe that in carrying out my humble share of this God-appointed mission of 'Swaraj,' I am in any way accountable to the alien people who happen to rule over us and whose interest is, and must necessarily be, in the way of our National development." He also boasted, "No foreign government can imprison me." True to his word he died on 27 October 1907 at Campbell Medical Hospital while the *Sandhya*

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same monotonous investigation and after a laborious search Lahiri afterwards stepped out of the room and paced the corridor heroically, carrying in both of his hands a cart load of booty. Lahiri seems to be the presiding genius of the Detective Department. Nothing escapes his vigilance; he suspects sedition bacillus in every bit of paper, closely eyes it, devours its contents and includes it into his trophy. Then they turned-towards the editorial room where the whole staff offered to sweeten their labour by jovial talk, evil retorts and repartees----

Here ends the much expected search and the sequel will be felt in due time."

On 15 August Sri Aurobindo was thirty-five.

On 16 August "the police arrested many young men including Sri Aurobindo," wrote Jyotishchandra Ghose, "whom they considered to be the brain, the motor-power behind the whole organisation and the ring-leader of the Conspiracy."¹

The Government was not wide of the mark, of course! It had kept tabs on the participants of the various sessions of the Congress. The role of Sri Aurobindo in shaping the new Indian politics was causing alarm to the rulers. Already, the Intelligence Bureau was categorical that Arabindo

Ghose was "the chief of the *Yugantar* band, who has exercised a greater influence over the revolutionary movement in India than perhaps any other man."²

1. *Life-Work of Sri Aurobindo*.

2. West Bengal govt.'s I. B. Records (L.N.54A). From Haridas and Uma Mukherji's *Sri Aurobindo ba Banglar Biplabbad*.

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We have further details from Professors Haridas and Uma Mukherjee.¹ "Aurobindo was arrested on August 16 and the Manager and the Printer on August 19 and August 21 respectively. From the reports of the *Bengalee* we learn that at about 11 A.M. on August 16 a Detective Officer went to the *Bande Mataram* office and informed it that a warrant had been issued for the arrest of Aurobindo Ghose. On receiving the information at his residence, Aurobindo voluntarily presented himself before the Detective Police Office at Royd Street at about 9-30 P.M. He was at once arrested by Inspector Puma Chandra Lahiri." Sri Aurobindo was taken to Padmapukur police station and then released on bail the next morning. "Principal Girish Chandra Bose and S.J. Nirode Chandra Mallick stood sureties for him Rs. 2500 each." The two Professors also say that "the chief object of the bureaucracy in undertaking this case was to silence the voice of Aurobindo, the real controlling spirit behind *Bande Mataram*, and to remove the man who had been preaching discontent and sedition against the Government with unflinching candour, from the political arena."

The Press was playing its role.

It was high time to crack down on these radical papers and stop their incitement to revolution.

Thus the second year of the paper, the first out-and-out Nationalist daily in the English tongue published in India, began with a prosecution for sedition.

1. 'The Story of *Bande Mataram Sedition Trial*' (*The Modern Review*, October 1959)

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Sri Aurobindo, like Tilak, was thrice prosecuted. Both were prosecuted for sedition, for certain of their writings in their respective newspapers: the *Bande Mataram* and the *Kesari*.

For Sri Aurobindo this was the first prosecution.

The prosecution, in the court of the Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, D. H. Kingsford, began with a great flourish. An official translation from the *Yugantar* had been printed in the pages of the *Bande Mataram*. "The whole *tone* of this article is of a seditious character," asserted Mr. Gregory, Standing Counsel for the Government. Mind you, it was not for any editorials that the Government ventured to attack the paper.

"It is rather surprising," wrote the *Punjabi*, "that out of the hundreds of articles published in the *Bande Mataram* animated by the 'New Spirit' and which have almost revolutionised native-Indian journalism, the Government could fasten upon only one single piece.... This is perhaps an indication that the Government have got a rather tough customer to deal with, if indeed they have not caught a Tartar. Mr. Aravinda will be found a foeman fully worthy of the sharpest steel.....The ability with which the *Bande Mataram* is conducted is now known up to the highest quarters in England The fact is such ability is not to be found in the whole of the Anglo-Indian Press, and is rare even in the British Press It is a pity that our Government has to follow with the rack and the thumbscrew such talented men, who would form an ornament to any nation.... Strange that such men, endowed with the highest qualities of both head and heart, cannot be made to reconcile themselves to the current policy of British rule!"

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The case opened on 26 August. Next day the public read in the pages of the *Bande Mataram*: "Yesterday on the opening of the Bande Mataram Case the students mustered strong in the Court premises and its neighbour hood. They were there to pay their tribute of respect to Srijut Arabindo Ghose.... Students were assaulted by the police." That was the occasion when the fifteen-year-old boy Sushil Kumar was given fifteen stripes¹ by the order of Kingsford, order carried out then and there in front of him —was he not a civilized Englishman?

And, Bepin Pal was subpoenaed by the government as one of its witnesses. What a dilemma! If he refuses, he will be charged with contempt of court; if he says the truth he will implicate his young friend, harm the paper, and hurt the new Nationalist Party. People were in a dither to hear this witness. "I honestly believe," said Pal refusing to testify, "that prosecutions like that of the

Bande Mataram are unjust and injurious; unjust because they are subversive of the rights of the people, and injurious because they are calculated to stifle freedom of thought and speech —nor are they justified in the interest of public peace. I have accordingly conscientious objection to take any part in that prosecution. I therefore refuse to be sworn or affirmed in that case."

Through his refusal, Bepin Chandra Pal became the first exponent of Passive Resistance.

1. When, tired, the flogger stopped after fourteen lashes, the bleeding Sushil piped up reminding him, 'One more.'

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Judge Kingsford sentenced him to six months' imprisonment. Pal was sent to Buxar jail.

It was on 23 September that the judge delivered his verdict. The prosecutor had completely failed to prove its case. Kingsford was forced to admit that "the general tone of the *Bande Mataram* is not seditious." Nor could the prosecution prove that Sri Aurobindo was the editor of the *Bande Mataram*. He was acquitted. As was the publisher of the paper, Hemendra Nath Bagchi. To save the face of the Government, the printer Apurba Krishna Bose was sentenced to three months' rigorous imprisonment.

Here are a few extracts from the columns of the paper dated 25 September 1907, written of course by Sri Aurobindo himself, but still under the cover of a nameless editor.

"The prosecution of the *Bande Mataram*, the most important of the numerous Press prosecutions recently instituted by the bureaucracy, commenced with a flourish of trumpets, eagerly watched by a hopeful Anglo-Indian Press, has ended in the most complete and dismal fiasco such as no Indian Government has ever had to experience before in a sedition case. The failure has not been the result of any lukewarm ness or half-heartedness in the conduct of the prosecution or any unwillingness to convict on the part of the trying Magistrate. The Police left no stone unturned to get a particular man convicted, the Standing Counsel did not hesitate to press every possible point and make the most of every stray scrap or faint shadow of evidence against the accused, the Magistrate was a Civilian Magistrate whose leanings have never been concealed, the same

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who gave two years to the *Yugantar* Printer, who sent Bepin Pal before a subservient Bengali Magistrate with a plain hint to give him a heavy punishment, who sentenced Sushil Kumar to fifteen stripes, who brushed aside the evidence of barristers in favour of Police testimony, and every paragraph of whose judgement in the present case shows that he would readily have dealt out a handsome term of hard labour if the evidence had afforded him the slightest justification for a conviction. All the winning cards in the game are in the hands of the bureaucracy

in such a trial----They have their own servants sitting on the

bench to try a case in which they are deeply interested, there is no trouble about juries who might be unwilling to convict, the Police have unlimited powers of search and can even turn the Post Office into a branch of the detective department; their methods of discovering witnesses are various and effective; yet with all this they were unable to bring forward a single scrap of convincing evidence to prove that the particular man they were bent on running down was the Editor. The Magistrate in his judgment and the affectionate *Friend of India* [*The Statesman*] in Chowringhee in his comments have drawn from this failure the lesson that the laws against the freedom of the Press should be made more stringent.¹ An ordinary unilluminated intelligence would have come rather to the conclusion that the executive authorities would do well to reform their method of instituting proceedings in a political trial....

1, Kingsford: "The case affords a curious instance of the inadequacy of the existing law to deal with sedition."

"What has been the whole meaning and aim of this prosecution ? ... It has been an obvious attempt to crush a particular paper and a particular individual. The bureaucracy has sought to cripple or silence the *Bande Mataram* because it has been preaching with extraordinary success a political creed which was dangerous to the continuance of bureaucratic absolutism and was threatening to become a centre of strength round which many Nationalistic forces might gather. It has sought to single out and silence a particular individual because it chose to think that he was, as the *Friend of India* expresses it, the master mind behind the policy of the paper. If we are challenged to justify this assertion, it will be sufficient to point to the conduct of this case from its very inception. The *Bande Mataram* ... has not minced matters or sought to conceal revolutionary aspirations under the veil of moderate professions or ambiguous phraseology. It has not concealed its opinion that the bureaucracy cannot be expected to transform itself, that the

people of India, and not the people of England must save India, and that we cannot hope for any boons but must wrest what we desire by strong national combination from unwilling hands. Hundreds of articles have appeared in the paper in this vein and the bureaucrats had only to pick and choose. But they have not attacked one of these articles, nor did their counsel venture to cite even a single one of them to prove seditious intention. The fact is that, however dangerous such a propaganda may be to an absolutist handful desiring to perpetuate their irresponsible rule, no government pretending to call itself civilised can prosecute it as seditious without forfeiting all claim to the last vestige

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of the world's respect.... What is the matter for which the *Bande Mataram* was prosecuted? A reprint of the official translation of certain articles from a vernacular paper, translations issued as part of a case in the law courts and reproduced as such,—that is one count; and an insignificant correspondence which does not even profess to give voice to the policy of the paper,—that is the second and third; and there is no other. The *Yugantar* was prosecuted on articles expressing its essential policy; the *Sandhya* has been proceeded against on articles expressing its views on important matters; but it was sought to crush the *Bande Mataram* partly for a technical offence and partly on a side issue.... Sanction is given to prosecute a nameless Editor and the Police at once proceed to ask for a warrant against Aurobindo Ghose. It is in evidence that they had nothing better to go on than hearsay. But they had no hesitation in immediately pouncing on one particular writer of the *Bande Mataram* without possessing the least scrap of evidence against him. Obviously they cannot have done this without instructions. It was popularly believed that Srijiut Aurobindo Ghose was all in all on the *Bande Mataram* staff, that all the best articles were written by him, that he gave the tone of the paper and that it could not last without him. Why did the Police take a body-warrant against Aurobindo Ghose to the office and why, having taken it, did they not arrest him? Obviously they took it because they thought that they would find plenty of evidence against him in the search, and they did not execute it because they found that not a scrap of proof rewarded their efforts. After that there was a pause till

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Anukul¹ Mukherjee's testimony was secured, and on that flimsy evidence the trial was started. Had it been honestly intended to deal only with the Editor, whoever he might turn out to be, the

proceedings against Aurobindo Ghose would have been given up, but the Police made no secret of the fact that it was this one man who was wanted and that no other, whatever the evidence against him, would be thought worth capture. Even when the case for the prosecution was complete without any evidence fit to raise more than a flimsy presumption, the Standing Counsel would not give up, but in an outrageous address in which he rode roughshod over the higher traditions of his office, pressed weak points and wrested ambiguous evidence to get the charge framed. And after Anukul had broken down in cross-examination and made admissions fatal to their case, still the prosecution struggled for a verdict. And with what result? Even a Civilian Magistrate willing to support the prestige of the Government had more sense of law and justice than the bureaucracy and its advisers and was able to see that a man could not be sent to two years' rigorous imprisonment without any shadow of evidence. Their prey escaped them; the Manager who seems to have been arrested on spec and tried without even any pretence that there was any evidence against him was acquitted, and only an unfortunate Printer who knew no English and had no notion what all the pother was about, was sent to prison for a few months to vindicate the much-damaged majesty of the almighty bureaucracy."

1. He was a proof-reader.



*Sri Aurobindo photographed after his acquittal
in the Bande Mataram Sedition Case*

Outpourings of Sympathy

The collapse of the *Bande Mataram* Sedition case put the nose of the bureaucracy out of joint. B. B. Upadhyay's *Sandhya* commented gleefully, "The *Bande Mataram* newspaper has pulled you by both your ears, and slapped both your cheeks and made fools of you in the midst of the market place."

In its hour of trial the paper had the sympathy of the whole of Bengal at its back. "We note with satisfaction and gratitude," wrote Sri Aurobindo, "that all classes of men, rich and poor, all shades of opinion, moderate or extremist, the purveyors of ready-made loyalty alone excepted, have given us a sympathy and support which is not merely emotional. This growing unity is mainly due to the action of the bureaucracy in attempting to put down by force a movement which has now taken possession of the nation's heart beyond the possibility of dislodgment."

The Anglo-Indian bureaucrats ought to have read Edmund Burke with attention. "If the entire population of a country comes to be awakened by the sacred light of patriotism is it proper to call it sedition? A whole nation cannot commit sedition."

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The news of Babu Aravindo Ghose's arrest spread all over India like wildfire. And the nation grieved. On 22 August the *Bande Mataram* reprinted extracts from many newspapers, such as *Indian Daily News*, *Empire*, *Maharatta*, *Madras Standard*, *Indian Patriot*, etc. Thus the young man who was not so well known publicly outside Bengal, became an all-India household name overnight. So far people had been wont to think that the pithy and pungent articles flowed out of Bepin Pal's pen, but now everybody knew that those were from the pen of Arabindo Babu, 'the power behind the paper.'

The *Bande Mataram* continued to reprint extracts in some of its numbers. We give here a few outpourings of sympathy.

From Jhalakati, Barisal: "We heartily sympathise with you in your trouble which has been brought on you for your unflinching devotion to the Swadeshi cause and for the independence of

thought and the force of language which you have displayed all along in gallantly supporting the Swadeshi cause. We fervently pray to God for your ultimate success."

From Chandpur : "Much concerned on hearing the arrest of Sri Aurobindo. Hearty sympathy, high esteem for the noble soul. Country's hearts will bleed at his incarceration. May his delicate constitution bear the rigours of the ordeal of imprisonment."

From Rawalpindi: "The news of Sri Aurobindo Ghose's arrest has been received here in grave silence. Nationalists hope he will manfully face the ordeal."

From Tuticorin: "The prosecution of *Bande Mataram*, the daily Nationalist organ of new thoughts at Calcutta, has

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brought to light the hidden jewel and priceless gem of its Editor, Mr. Arabinda Ghose. It was a real feast of reason and flow of soul to read the thrilling discourses in its leading columns. Within the short period of its existence it has done more to awaken Nationalistic and patriotic aspirations than any other known power of agency...."

From a public meeting of the Swadeshi Manda at Amraoti: "The several speakers dwelt upon the rare attainments, the sage-like career and the exemplary character of Babu Aurobindo Ghose whose [vigorous] writings have gained him an abiding name in the journalistic literature of India."

From the Sanmitra Samaj, Poona: "We regard Sri Aurobindo Ghose as a true champion of the Nationalists, a patriot of the patriots and a worthy model of the young generation of the Motherland. His sacrifice is great, but without it none can really be great. We sincerely believe that his name will occupy a high place in the history of future India."

From *Daccaprakash*: "The patriotism of this great man and his uncommon self-sacrifice attracted the heart of every son of Bengal. It rends the heart to say that the man who, in response to the call of duty, thus threw away all luxuries of life and was, though a human being, exhibiting divine traits, is now like a thief being sent to jail by the rulers of this land! Alas! the unfortunate land Our reckless rulers are yet unable to understand that as a result of their misdeeds a fire of disgust is burning in the country which it will be beyond their power to extinguish."

Babu Aurobindo Ghose's acquittal was greeted with rejoicings and relief by one and all in the country, and even

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beyond the seas —a letter of sympathy came from ... Tokyo, Japan I

"Today let sounds of mirth rise from all directions," wrote *Purba Bangla*, Dacca, "and let 'Bande Mataram' be shouted with immense joy, piercing the Indian firmament.... This joy is not the outcome of tasting pleasure after a period of sorrow. For we have no ground to be sorry.... But when we saw that a devotee to the Mother, in his desire to worship her, was about to be burnt by the fiery anger of alien rulers, when we understood that in his attempt to restore the pristine glory of India and to bring under control the ideal of ancient India, the worthy son of the country was at every moment apprehending the fall of the thunderbolt as a result of the ire of the rulers upon his exposed head, we indeed prayed to God for his safety from danger, but we were not sorry for him. For he who has been suffering from persecution for his devotion to the country has his life blessed and his sacred personality, like a living ideal, will point out the duties of the Indians desirous of salvation. We are, therefore, glad indeed not because Arabinda has been let off, but because we have seen justice triumphant over injustice. Today we shall thank God alone, to whom is due all glory, and no man has any claim upon it."

Tilak's *Kesari* wrote: "The result of the *Bande Mataram* trial has been made known to the public by a telegraphic communication. Babu Arabindo Ghose, who was arraigned as Editor, has been acquitted.... His learning and patriotism are so profound that in his acquittal we discern the hand of providence." We forego the pleasure of quoting from Bengali newspapers.

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Rabindranath Tagore was in Bolpur, at his Santiniketan Ashram, when the news of the arrest of Sri Aurobindo reached ' him. Then and there he wrote his inspired 'Salutation' poem, in which he called him 'the voice incarnate of India's soul.' He had expected a term of imprisonment for Arabindo Babu. He was back in Calcutta and upon hearing about his acquittal, he went to 12 Wellington Square, at Subodh Mullick's. Many others had gathered there, of course. Rabi Babu hugged Sri Aurobindo in a big embrace. After congratulating him he said to the younger man (in

Bengali), "What! You have deceived us!" Replied Sri Aurobindo in English, "Not for long will you have to wait." Prediction ? Premonition ? Some seven months later Sri Aurobindo was prosecuted on a charge of conspiracy to wage war against the Government, and was in prison for one year as an undertrial prisoner.

Remember Sir Harvey? His lamentations on the *Yugan-tar*? Well, he was always strong on the 'seditious' press, in other words, the organs of anti-bureaucratic Nationalism. Lambasting the Scottish official's slander of such publications, which he said had "discovered that sedition is a commercial success," Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Bande Mataram's* columns : "Fudge, Sir Harvey! If you could be transformed from a perorating official Scot into the manager of a Nationalist newspaper for the first year or two of its existence, you would 'discover' at what tremendous pecuniary and personal sacrifice these papers have been established and maintained. If Sir Harvey knew anything about the conditions of life in the land he is helping to misgovern, he would know that an Indian newspaper, unless it is

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long established, and sometimes even then, can command immense influence and yet be commercially no more than able to pay its way, especially when on principle it debar itself from taking all but Swadeshi advertisements. Fudge, Sir Harvey! The Nationalists are not shopkeepers trading in the misery of the millions; they are men like Upadhyay and Bepin Chandra Pal and numbers more who have put from them all the ordinary chances of life to devote themselves to a cause, and in the few instances in which a Nationalist journal has been run at a profit, the income has gone to Swadeshi work and the maintenance of workers and not into the pockets of the proprietors, while in almost every case men of education and ability have foregone their salary or half-starved on a pittance in order to relieve the burden of the struggling journal. These are your editors of low newspapers, traders in sedition, 'interested agitators,' men without sense of responsibility or 'matured understanding.' You say the thing which is not and know it, a licensed slanderer of men a corner of whose brains has a richer content than your whole Scotch skull and whose shoes you are unworthy to touch."

Bande Mataram's 'economic situation was always rather weak, but during Sri Aurobindo's incarceration at Alipore it became desperate. Bejoy Chatterji then wrote an article, 'A Traitor in the Camp,' which brought down the wrath of the Government : it confiscated the journal's press.

Thus instead of perishing by starvation Bande Mataram died a glorious death. A fitting end to that which had painted the sky with a fiery stain .

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The Man and the Moment

"God prepares the man and the moment," wrote Sri Aurobindo in *Historical Impressions*. "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." He was giving his impressions of the French Revolution of 1789 and its four central personalities.

In India the 'moment' was the partition of Bengal. From the spontaneous outpourings from his countrymen Sri Aurobindo stands out as the 'man.' Some of his greatest contemporaries and the most ordinary of them alike, as well as his associates, biographers and historians —all have commented on the uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo, and his unique place in India's political movement for freedom.

"He was the outstanding personality in the great National Movement of Bengal," wrote Professor Jyotishchandra Ghose in *Life- Work of Sri Aurobindo*. "The coming of Sri Aurobindo to Bengal marks an epochmaking period in the annals of the

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country. Never before in the history of the political evolution of the country had there been such a precious acquisition in the cause of the country's fight for freedom ... because there was no equal to him in the supreme self-consciousness he possessed of his God-ordained mission of which he was to be the chosen instrument some day to work out this Divine will as a spark of fire to burn up all that was base and false in the national life of the country and turn it into true gold.....Everybody felt in his heart of hearts that the man for Bengal who had been long overdue ... had at last come and the honour of Bengal and her interest, and, for the matter of that, of all India would be safe in his keeping.

"This 'Fire-Spark' as we know him was a man of medium height and could be called short of stature and of average weight, looking almost like a child. He was amiable in disposition and was mild, gentle in his manners; when he would speak, he would do so in soft musical accents and his words in a private conversation had the effect of soothing the troubled nerves of the hearer, not by virtue of their intellectual impressiveness but by a sort of ethereal transmission of psychic, spiritual fluid, so to say.... Meek as a lamb in the ordinary pursuits of life, he roared as a lion, a man divinely inspired, when he had to work as a public man. This even balance between the two extremes was the great secret of his popularity and his power over the politically-minded, middle-class intelligentsia and specially over the patriotic youths of the country."

When he gave up his professorship, from being 'a tutor of a few hundred youths' Sri Aurobindo became 'the teacher of

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a whole nation,' as B.C. Pal said.

"We of the generation that grew up under his piercing eyes, caught fire from his flaming words.... He showed us the way out of bewilderment; we learnt to understand what Indian Nationalism stood for and the ideal of the 'Karma-Yogin.'" That was from Suresh Chandra Deb, who was one of the volunteers accompanying Bepin Pal, Subodh Mullick and Sri Aurobindo when they toured East Bengal for forty-five days after the Barisal Conference in April 1906.

"Sri Aurobindo stood out and drew the admiration of the young," wrote Jawaharlal Nehru, bringing to mind his boyhood days. "... The brilliant champion of Indian nationalism ... he shone like a brilliant meteor and created a powerful impression on the youth of India."

Nehru's political rival Subhash Chandra Bose said much the same thing with more fervour.¹ "In my undergraduate days Arabindo Ghosh was easily the 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 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 the three young men expressed

regret and puzzlement at Sri Aurobindo's withdrawal from political life.

"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.... He flooded the land from Cape to Mount with the effulgence of his light." That is Pattabhi Sitaramayya writing in the *History of the Congress*.

"The 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.... By the general verdict of his countrymen Aravinda stands today among these favoured sons of God...." Thus wrote Bepin Chandra Pal, in his *Character Sketches*.

"Aravinda's contribution to Indian politics is beyond measure," wrote R. C. Majumdar in the *History of Freedom Movement*. "Above all, 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. 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."

Commenting on the 'sudden emergence' of Sri Aurobindo in the political arena, Girija Shankar Roy Choudhuri exclaimed, "His first advent is not lit up by the rays of the morning sun; rather he enters with hidden steps by a terrible path concealed in darkness. This advent is novel, awe-inspiring, yet extraordinary."¹

Lala Lajpat Rai said of Sri Aurobindo: "... 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." In his Presidential address at the 1920 special Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress, he added: "It was at Calcutta that the ideas of new Nationalism that have since then grown into a mighty tree, were first expounded and explained by one of the purest minded and the most intellectual of Bengal's gifted sons, I mean Sri Aurobindo Ghosh."

Professor of Philosophy, M. A. Buch's assessment is interesting. "The most typical representative of Bengal Nationalism,

1. Translated from the Bengali.

in its most intense metaphysical and religious form, was Aravinda 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 Hindustan in its pristine purity and nobility.... 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 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....'

Those who had seen Sri Aurobindo from afar were struck by his earnestness and dignified appearance. Those who came in close contact with him were moved to the core.

"So pure and complete a man," described B. B. Upadhyaya with moist eyes, "a fire-charged thunder yet tender and delicate as the lotus petal."

Writing an editorial in his paper *Kesari*, B. G. Tilak said, "If one sees him, one won't think it was Aravinda ... so weak of body and so simple in dress and bearing.... He writes from divine inspiration, sattwic intelligence, and unshakable determination.... None equal to Aravinda in self-sacrifice, knowledge and sincerity."

H. W. Nevinson (as quoted in the *Indian Patriot*) on Sri Aurobindo : "A man of very fine culture, his is a lovable nature,

1. *Rise and Growth of Indian Militant Nationalism.*

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merry sparkling with wit and humour, ready in refined repartee. He is one of those men, to be in whose company is a joy; and behind whose exterior, is a steadily glowing fire of unseen devotion to a cause."

Professors Haridas and Uma Mukherjee are a pair of historians who have done much scrupulous research on the movement of 1905-10, and have written several books on Sri Aurobindo's political life. "At first he stayed behind the scenes. Then when appeared [on the stage] he at once demanded swaraj. No middle path, no compromise — full independence." It was a revolution. They call Sri Aurobindo "a hero of that revolution." They assert: "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 fullness as well as of the practical means to attain it by strenuous and sustained struggle."

In other words, perseverance. "In the Yoga as in life," to quote Sri Aurobindo, "it is the man who persists unwearied to the last in the face of every defeat and disillusionment and of all-confronting, hostile and contradicting events and powers who conquers in the end and finds his faith justified because to the soul and Shakti in man nothing is impossible."

Each commented on some aspect or the other of the diamond-faceted personality of Sri Aurobindo, but it was left to the Poet Tagore to have the widest and deepest insight into the Man of the Moment.

The remittances will be duly announced in the *Yugantar* and other local papers.

THE MEMBERS OF THE DEFENDERS ASSOCIATION.

Sept. 4.

UNNECESSARY HARASSMENT BY POLICE

A Correspondent writes from Benares under dated 4th September.

There was a sensation at Banarash this morning. That is the quarter where the Malliks have put up several residences and come to reside at times. An European Police Inspector came to see Mr. M. C. Mallik—the uncle of Sri Jit Subodh Chandra—who has been residing at Benares for several months. Finding the gate closed, as it always remains owing to Mr. Mallik leading a life of seclusion and not receiving visitors, the Inspector went to another of the Mallik residences and said that the Superintendent of Police had received a communication from Calcutta and wanted to see M. C. Mallik urgently. The residents of the house said that "Mr. Mallik does not see anybody" but they sent his message to Mr. Mallik. He thereupon went to his cousin's residence where he met the Police officers and was told that he had to go to the Superintendent's bungalow beyond the Varuna. Mr. Mallik said that "he does not go anywhere but if here is any great need for him he will come." He came back to his residence a short while after another message came that the Kotwal had come with a garry and wished him to come with him at once to the Superintendent's bungalow. His relatives not seeing him back for some time drove to the Superintendent's residence to ascertain what was the matter. They met him coming back and were glad to find that he had not been deported which is now the order of the day and for which every patriot has to be prepared.

It appears that the Police authorities at Calcutta had been informed of Mr. Mallik's relationship to the Mallik's at Wellington Square, which was represented as his residence, and wanted him to come down to give evidence in the case against the "Bande Mataram." As Mr. Mallik has been away from Calcutta for several months he was unable to say anything which might help the prosecution.

A Letter in Verse

FROM
Rabindra Nath Tagore
TO
ARABINDA GHOSE.

নমস্কার।

ও

শান্তিনিকেতন,
বোলপুর।

অগ্নিবিন্দু, স্ববীজের লহ নমস্কার !
হে বহু, হে যেশবহু, যশেশ-আছার
বাণী-মুষ্টি তুমি ! তোমা লাগি নহে মান,
নহে ধন, নহে সুখ ; কোনো ক্ষুদ্র দান
চাহ নাই, কোনো ক্ষুদ্র রূপা ; তিন্ধা লাগি
বাড়া গনি আকুর অঙ্গলি ! আহু জাগি
পরিপূর্ণতার জরে সর্ব্ববাধাহীন,—
যার লাগি নর-বেশ চিরস্বাভিমান
তপোময় ; যার লাগি কবি বয়সবে
গেয়েছেন মহাগীত, মহাবীর সবে
গিয়েছেন সঙ্ঘটনাত্মক ; যার কাছে
আরাম লক্ষিত শির নত করিয়াছে ;
মৃত্যু ভুলিয়াছে তর ;—সেই বিধাতার
শ্রেষ্ঠ মান—আগনার পূর্ণ অধিকার—
চেয়েছ দেশের হ'বে অকুণ্ড আশায়,
সত্যের পৌরবদুপ্ত প্রদীপ্ত তাবায়,
অখণ্ড বিশ্বাসে। তোমার প্রার্থনা আমি
বিধাতা কি ভ্রমেছেন ? তাই উঠে যদি
অরশম্ব তাঁর ? তোমার দক্ষিণ করে
তাই কি ছিলেন আমি কঠোর আদরে
দুঃখের দাক্ষিণ্য বীণ, আলোক বাহার
অলিয়াছে, বিদ্রু কবি দেশের আশায়
কবিতারকার মত ? হায়, তব ময় !
কে আমি কেনিবে অক্ষ, কে করিবে তর,
সত্যেরে কতিবে ধর্ম কোন্ কাপুরুষ
নিসেরে কতিবে রক্ষা ! কোন্ অমাত্ম
তোমার বেদনা হ'তে না পাইবে বল !
যেই রে, হর্ষল চক্ষু, মোছ অক্ষয় !

সেই ভীক নতশির চিরশান্তিভায়ে
রাজকান্তি বাহিরেতে নিজা-জায়াগারে

বকন শীড়ন চুঃখ অসম্মান মাথে
হেরিরা তোমার মুষ্টি, কণে যোর বলে
আছার বকনহীন আনন্দের গান,
মহাতীর্থগাত্রীর সঙ্গীত, চিরগোপ
আপার উন্নয়, গভীর নির্ভর বাণী
উদায় সূচায়। ভারতের বীণালাগি,
হে কবি, তোমার মুখে রাখি দুটি তাঁর
ভরে তায়ে গিয়েছেন বিপুল কবর,—
নাহি তাহে হুঃখজন, নাহি কুণ্ড নাথ,
নাহি দৈত, নাহি ভ্রাম ! তাই শুনি আমি
কোথা হ'তে অস্ত্রগারে শিশুর গঞ্জন,
অকুণ্ডে নির্বোধ উন্মত্ত নর্তন
পায়াপিত্তর টুটি,—বহুগর্জর
কেশ-মস্ত্রে মেঘপুঞ্জ আশার তৈরব।
এ উদাত্ত সখীতের তরঙ্গমাকার,
অগ্নিবিন্দু, স্ববীজের লহ নমস্কার !

তার পরে তাঁরে মনি, যিনি স্রীকামলে
গড়েন নৃতন স্পৃষ্ট প্রাণ-অনলে,
মৃত্যু হ'তে যেন প্রাণ, বিপদের বৃক
সম্মুখেরে করেন লাগন, হানিমুখে
তরুরে পাঠায়ে যেন কণ্টক-কাষ্ঠারে
বিক্রমেরে পরমাতে রাজি-অঙ্ককারে।
যিনি নানা কঠে ফন নানা ইতিহাসে,
সকল মনঃ কণ্ঠে, পয়ন প্রাধাসে,
সকল চরম লাতে—"হুঃখ কিছু নহ,
অত মিথ্যা, অকতি মিথ্যা, মিথ্যা সর্ব্ব তর,
কোথা মিথ্যা বাণী, কোথা রাজকণ্ড ভার,
কোথা মৃত্যু, অস্ত্রায়ন কোথা অত্যাচার।
ওরে ভীক, ওরে মুচ, তোমো তোমো শির,
আমি আছি, তুমি আছ, সত্য আছে স্বির।"

১ই ভাদ্র, ১৩১৪।

LAW.

SALANGAHAT LOOT CASE
JUDGMENT DELIVERED.

Puban, Sept. 2.

The Sessions Judge Mr. Huda delivers judgment in the Salangahat loot case. Bhatulakir, Asgarali, Amedali, an Saridulla were acquitted; the conviction and sentence of the rest being upheld. The Judge gives no opinion regarding

Rabindranath's homage to Sri Aurobindo
in the *Bande Mataram* of September 8, 1907

"O Friend, O my country's friend, you are the voice incarnate of India's soul!..."

Unobstacked, you are awake for the fullness of perfection

God's greatest gift, our birthright,
You have asked for the country
In flaming words of noble truth, in boundless faith.
Has God today heard your prayer ?
Is that why His victory-trumpet sounds blast on blast ?
Has He put in your right hand, with austere love,
The dreadful lamp of sorrow,
Whose light pierces the country's gloom, like the
Northern star ?...

The fiery messenger

Who has come on Earth with the lamp of God ...
O Poet, the Muse of India,
Fixing her eyes upon your face, has struck vast chords ...
Today I hear the ocean's roar mingled with the raging
storm;
In a blind impetuosity the fierce dance of the fountain
breaking its rocky cage."¹

1. Instead of taking the official English translation of *Salutation*, I have taken a few verses to try to convey in simpler language a little of its original feeling.

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The Strategist

A Voice called.

The voice of the Lord of Tempest.

Millions started up from their sleep. A new dawn greeted their eyes. A glorious dawn, breaking the gloom of centuries, bathed their Mother in a golden-rose light.

The loud trumpet of thunder was the music of Rudra. Its blare infused strength into their souls. "I am the Spirit of freedom and pride," pealed the Voice.

"The pride in our past, the pain in our present, the passion for the future are the trunk and branches of our Indian life," wrote Sri Aurobindo expounding the concept of Nationalism. "... Nationalism is not a mere political programme ; nationalism is a religion that has come from God; it is a creed which you will have to live." His invitation did not go unanswered.

Asserted Moni Bagchi, "It was he and he alone who gave a new orientation, a new dimension to our concept of nationalism." I dare say that the Nationalist movement aimed at restoring the spiritual greatness of the nation. A spiritual

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nationalism? Sri Aurobindo puts it more cogently. "The emergence of Bengal as a sub-nation in India was throughout a strongly subjective movement," he said, describing the discovery of the Nation-Soul which had become the demand of the Time-Spirit. "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...."

The soul that was India told her children to dare. For true spirituality means courage, means strength. "Don't linger on the shore with fearful eyes. Dive into the roaring ocean. Dare the vast battering billows. Dare and know what rapture lives in danger. Conquer the adverse fate. Be men...." The youth responded to the Call. Oh, it was heaven to be young I

Young though he was — in his early thirties — Sri Aurobindo was already an accomplished statesman and strategist. "Sri Aurobindo was not only a profound political theorist," affirms Moni Bagchi, "but a shrewd political tactician also, a combination only too rare in history."

We shall see how he brought into full play these rare qualities.

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"Were you 'modest' in your early life?" asked Nirod.

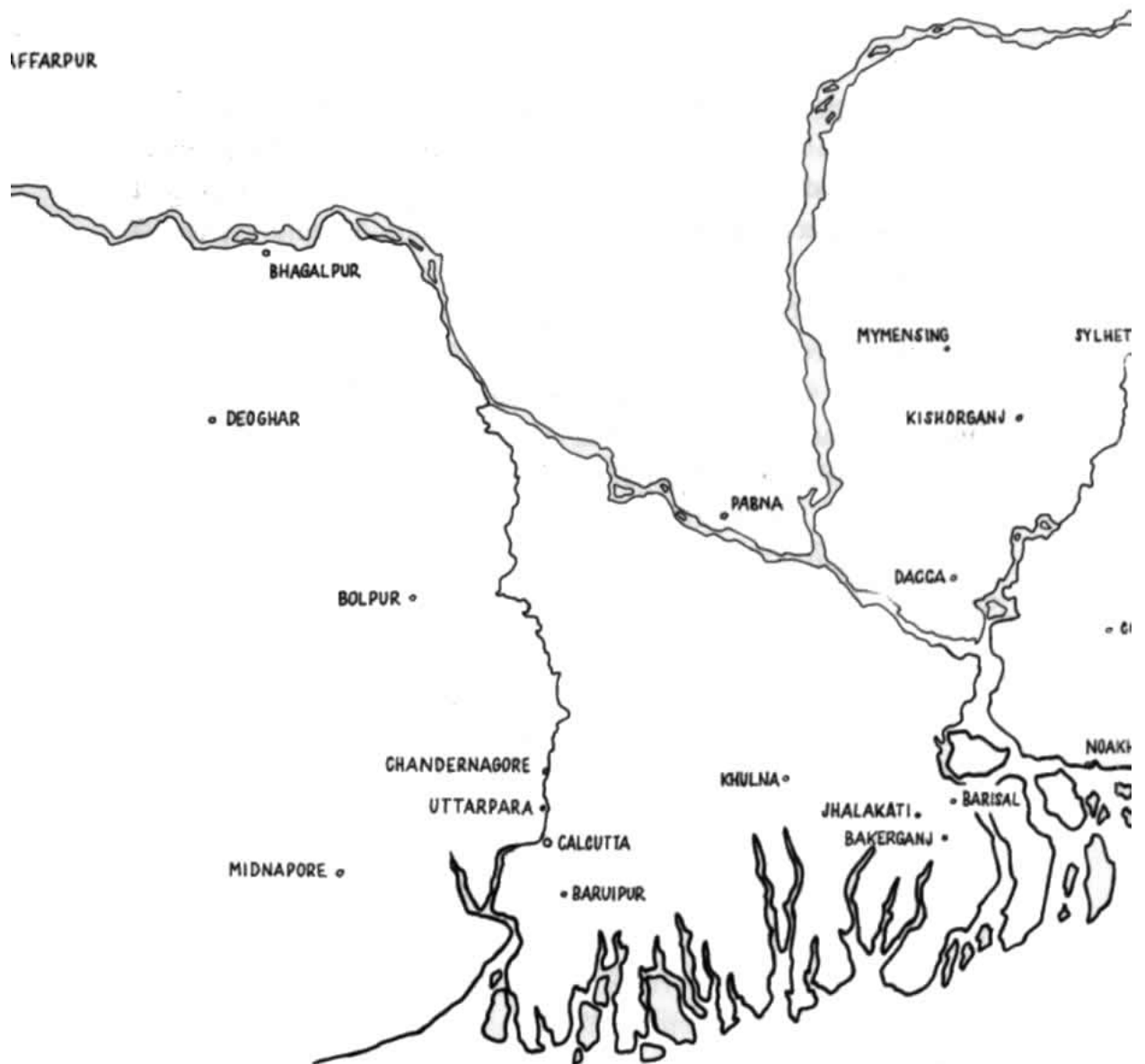
"I can't say that I was more modest within than others." Sri Aurobindo said candidly. "When I differed in anything, I used to say very few words and remain stiff, simply saying, 'I don't agree.'

"Once Surendranath Banerji wanted to annex the Extremist Party and invited us to the U. P. Moderate Conference to fight against Sir Pherozezshah Mehta. But there was a clause that no association that was not of two or three years' standing could send delegates to the Conference. Ours was a new party. So we could not go. But Banerji said, 'We will elect you as delegates.' J. L. Banerji and others agreed to it, but I just said, 'No.' I spoke at most twenty or thirty words and the whole thing failed. How can you call a man modest," demanded Sri Aurobindo, "when he stands against his own party?"

Surendranath Banerji, a Moderate leader, was called the 'uncrowned king of Bengal' at one time, so popular was he. But his popularity rapidly waned with the rise of the Nationalists. He was unequal to the new surging currents which were fast shifting the political seat from Council halls and Conferences to the masses.

"Tilak used to do the same thing," Sri Aurobindo said. "He used to hear all the speeches and resolutions of the delegates but at the end pass his own resolutions. They said, 'What a democratic leader he is! He listens to and considers all our opinions and resolutions.'"

After a moment's pause, Sri Aurobindo continued. "Then at the Hooghly Provincial Conference we met again to



Main towns and cities of Bengal visited by Sri Aurobindo

consider the Morley-Minto reforms." The Morley-Minto reforms provided separate electorates for Indian Muslims, and after the partition of Bengal, were the British rulers' next step to divide Hindus and Muslims. "The Moderates urged in favour of accepting the reforms. We were

against. We were in the majority in the Subjects Committee, while in the Conference they were so." In the Subjects Committee Sri Aurobindo was able to defeat the Moderates' resolution welcoming the Reforms and pass his own resolution stigmatizing them as utterly inadequate and unreal and rejecting them. "Surendranath Banerji was very angry with us and threatened that he and his party would break away from the Conference if their resolution was not accepted. I didn't want them to break away at that time, for our party was still weak. So I said to him, 'We will agree to your proposal on condition I am allowed to speak in the Conference.' In the Conference there was a great row and confusion." The Moderates were caught trying to play underhand tricks and were hooted down. "In the midst of it Ashwini Dutt began jumping and saying, 'This is life, this is life!' Banerji tried hard to control the people and failed and became furious. Then I stood up and told them to be silent and to walk out silently. I said that whatever agreement we came to, we would inform them. Everybody became silent at once and walked out. This made Banerji still more furious. He said, 'While we old leaders can't control them, this young man of hardly thirty commands them by just lifting a finger!'" This incident caused much amazement and discomfiture in the minds of Moderate leaders. They did not pause to reflect and find out why it was so. Sri Aurobindo explained.

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"He could not understand the power of a man standing for some principles and the people following the leader in obedience to those principles.

"It was at that time that people began to get the sense of discipline and order and of obeying the leader from within. They were violent but at the command of the leader they obeyed."

Sri Aurobindo then gave his own impression of Surendranath's character. "Banerji had personal magnetism, was sweet-spoken and could get round anybody. He also tried to get round me by flattering, patting and caressing. His idea was to use the Extremists as the sword and use the Moderates for the public face. In private he would go up to revolution. He wanted a Provincial Board of Control of Revolution. Barin once took a bomb to him. The name of Surendranath Banerji was found in the [Alipore] Bomb Case. But as soon as Norton pronounced the name there was a 'Hush, hush' and he shut up."

With his customary modesty —notwithstanding his disclaimer —Sri Aurobindo did not breathe a word about his own part in the drama that preceded the Hooghly Provincial Conference in September 1909. But Professor Jyotish Ghose recorded it in 1929.

"Alone and single-handed, Sri Aurobindo was called upon to break the clique of the moderate caucus who had combined to prevent even Sri Aurobindo being returned as a delegate and were using unfair means to chuck out men of pronounced nationalistic views from the list of the delegates...." This took place after the Alipore Bomb Case was over, and the other

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Nationalist leaders, like Tilak, were exiled and languishing in prison in Mandalay or elsewhere. "Nothing daunted, Sri Aurobindo begun his vigorous campaign to defeat the moderates hollow and capture the entire machinery ..., chucked out the age-limit of twenty-one for delegates from the delegation certificate issued by the Reception Committee, printed the certificates for his own party from his own press ... advised his Nationalist followers at Hooghly to organise a students' volunteer corps in open protest against the rules of the Reception Committee who had refused to enlist students even as volunteers on the ground that it was not permissible by the Risley Circular to allow students to serve as volunteers. He also revised the Draft Resolutions of the Reception Committee, printed his own counter resolutions against each of them and circulated it to the Nationalists through the columns of the *Karmayogin*. Thus organised, he went to attend the conference."

The Risley Circular was a more comprehensive and carefully studied edition of the Carlyle Circular. It was "a desperate attempt of the bureaucracy not only to recover and confirm its hold on the student population and through them on the future, but to make that hold far more stringent, rigid, ineffugable than it ever was in the past." The Government could not afford to lose control of the education of the country, it had to keep its hold on the mind of the young—the India of the future. It certainly did not want to lose India I

Professor Jyotishchandra noticed particularly a certain characteristic trait in Sri Aurobindo, while referring to "certain illegal and unconstitutional barriers which he knocked down

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and removed without much fuss." And "everyone instinctively felt, not excluding his opponents, that he was doing just the right thing." Besides, "through the intervention of Sri Aurobindo as the peace-maker, order and tranquillity prevailed." Yet the Moderates had always accused him of being at the root of all disorder and violence!

After saying that all the delegates and volunteers were "magnetised by his very presence," the Professor concludes: "To those, who had anything to do with the conference, it was proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that a great spiritual force was working there and everyone felt assured that all opposition, in the face of that great force, was bound to break down."

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Taken at the Flood

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures."

"My eyes first set themselves on Sri Aurobindo," said Suresh Chandra Deb at the beginning of his narrative, "on a November evening on the eve of the Benares Congress held during the last days of December, 1905. The place of the meeting was a room at the Field and Academy Club in the Sib Narayan Das Lane just north-east of the present Vidyasagar College on Cornwallis Street.... Leaders of thought and society had been discussing the pros and cons of the then methods of political activity that were confined to petition, prayer and protest to the alien Authority which held India under subjection.... On the November evening referred to above, there were gathered Bipin Chandra Pal, Chittaranjan Das, Surendranath Halder,

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and Sarat Chandra Sen — all familiar faces; the only exception was a retiring figure sitting quietly in a chair, whose name I later came to know as Aurobindo Ghose. The discussion that

ensued referred to the resolutions of the forthcoming session of the Congress. The Boycott resolution had been passed at a meeting held at the Calcutta Town Hall on the 7th of August, 1905.... Though the control of the Congress was in the hands of the 'Moderates' they dared not renege from the position taken up at the Calcutta meeting. Advanced opinion in Maharashtra and the Punjab, represented by Balwant Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai, pressed home this advantage, and the Benares Congress endorsed the resolution under pressure of that militant group of Indian politicians. All the possibilities of situation were discussed at this meeting. Sri Aurobindo remained a silent listener."

As we have before said, Sri Aurobindo had been a looker-on at the tame Ahmedabad session of the Congress in 1902, where a disgusted Tilak had taken him out of the pavilion and talked with him for an hour expressing his contempt for the Moderates' bankrupt policy of prayer and protest.

Sri Aurobindo had also attended the 1904 Bombay Congress. It was at this 20th session of the Congress that Sir Henry Cotton in his Presidential address mooted for the first time the ideal of 'a Federation of free and separate states, the United States of India.' With the stipulation, however, that the whole country should remain a colony of the British Empire.

The Benares Congress of 1905 was attended by eminent leaders from all the provinces. Rabindranath inaugurated the

Conference by singing the Bande Mataram song. Sister Nivedita was present. Sri Aurobindo also. In his book, *The Liberator*, Sisir Kumar Mitra reports the remembrances of a boy volunteer in charge of Sri Aurobindo's camp there. The boy was none other than Kalimohan Ghose, a co-worker of Rabindranath at Santiniketan when my family stayed there. Naturally enough the boy had "hoped to attend the open session along with his guest. But to his surprise, he saw that Sri Aurobindo remained where he was and the prominent leaders came to him, discussed matters, went back to the open session and acted accordingly. Kalimohan spoke from personal knowledge on the ongoing in both the places to Sri Aurobindo who, sensing the boy's desire to attend the meeting, provided him with an admission card. Kalimohan related this to the writer with tears of love and gratitude in his eyes."

After a good deal of discussion between the Moderates and the Nationalists a resolution urging boycott of British goods was moved before the Congress and ... passed.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale was the President of the 21st Congress at Benares. He it was who said, "Only mad men outside lunatic asylums could think or talk of independence." So it is quite astonishing what a revolutionary like Sister Nivedita found in him. "One thing only about Nivedita I couldn't understand," said Sri Aurobindo reflectively. "She had an admiration for Gokhale. I don't understand how a revolutionary could admire him. On one occasion she was much exercised over a threat to his life. She came to me and said: 'Mr. Ghose, is it one of your men who is doing this?' I said: 'No.' She was much relieved

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and said: 'Then it must be a freelance.'"

Till the Benares session Sri Aurobindo had carefully evaded appearing in public at any political meeting, as he had still not decided to leave the Baroda Service. That did not prevent him from taking part in Congress politics from behind the scenes, and associating himself closely with the forward group in the Congress.

In 1906 he founded the new political party in Bengal. Then he "attended the Congress session at Calcutta at which the Extremists, though still a minority, succeeded under the leadership of Tilak in imposing part of their political programme on the Congress." Sri Aurobindo had played a major role in the formulation of its four-fold programme: Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott, and National Education. It was the clever maneuvering by the Nationalist Party that forced the Moderate leaders to incorporate the programme in the resolutions of 1906. The programme was adopted after a severe tussle behind the scenes. But this partial triumph of the Nationalists was due to the organization of Sri Aurobindo. Under his captaincy the forward group of young men in the Congress who had formed a new party, how decided to openly "join hands with the corresponding group in Maharashtra under the proclaimed leadership of Tilak and to join battle with the Moderate party which was done at the Calcutta session."

The Congress of 1906 is an important landmark in several ways. First of all for India's freedom struggle. For, by adopting the Swadeshi programme the Congress identified itself with it. Secondly, the main demands of the Bengal movement

were more or less met, and it became an all-India movement. Thirdly, this was no tame affair, no mere passing of already framed resolutions, with nobody bothering to put in even an amendment; the Calcutta session of the Congress witnessed the first great public clash between the Moderates and Nationalists.

Fourthly. The 'Grand Old Man' as Dadabhai Naoroji was called —he was then eighty-two years old —was persuaded to be the President of the 22nd Indian National Congress. The attendance at the sessions was quite impressive for those days: 1663 delegates and an audience of 20,000. A tumultuous enthusiasm greeted his words when in his Presidential address Dadabhai uttered the word 'Swaraj.' "We do not ask for any favour. We want Swaraj." He did not define the meaning he attributed to 'Swaraj.' The Moderates interpreted it as 'colonial self-government,' while the Nationalists said it meant 'Independence.'¹

Even the compromise programme, which the Moderates had agreed to—willy-nilly maybe—they found it hard to bear. It went against the grain of 'the intellectual princes of the nation.' Was it possible to stand up to the insolence and cynical contempt of the rulers ? The Moderates were extremely anxious to conciliate a Government that answered conciliation with titles or ... contempt. So they quickly set out to repudiate the resolutions adopted by the Calcutta Congress. Pherozeshah Mehta, for instance, at the Surat Provincial Conference held in April 1907,

1. The Nationalist's definition of *Swaraj*: " *It at once embodies the ideals of independence, unity, liberty.*" (*Bande Mataram*, 19-20.8.1907) . *A very good picture of the then prevailing scenario can be had from 'The man of the Past and the Man of the Future' (Bande Mataram, 26.12 .1906).*

secured the exclusion of questions of Boycott and National Education.

Were the Bengal Moderates to be left behind? Not on your life !They set the stage for the second clash between the two parties which resulted in an open rupture. The District Congress Conference at Midnapore was held from December 7 to 9,1907. Surendranath Banerji led the Moderate Party from Calcutta. Sri Aurobindo , now the recognized leader of Nationalism in

Bengal, led his party at the Midnapore Conference. This was the first time that he was acting publicly as the leader.

Midnapore. The seeds sown there by Rajnarain had taken root. Midnapore was a stronghold of the Nationalists. Sri Aurobindo had gone there several times from 1902 onwards. There he had initiated Hemchandra Das Kanungo into revolutionary cult. When Hemchandra went to Paris in 1906 to learn bomb-making, Satyendranath Bose took his place. He was Rajnarain Bose's nephew and Barin's uncle. He taught History at the Midnapore Government School. It was also Satyen who gave shelter to the orphaned Khudiram and initiated him into revolutionary activities. I

In 1906 the leader of the Nationalist party had put up

1. All the three were implicated in the Alipore Bomb Case. Khudiram (born 1889), one of the two who threw the bomb at Muzaffarpur on 30 April 1908, was hanged on 11 August 1908. So was Satyen (born 1882) on 27 November 1908, after he had helped Kanailal Dutt (born 1888) in the assassination of the approver Naren Goswami. Kauai was hanged on 10 November 1908. Hemchandra (1871-1950) was one of the deportees to Andaman. When he was in Paris, through the instrumentality of Madame Cama, he came into contact with the French Socialists and was apprenticed into their secret workings.

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at the house of Gyanendranath Bose, elder brother of Satyen. There he received a note from S. N. Banerji.

"My dear Aurobindo Babu,

"I am here. Will you kindly if convenient come over with Sham Sunder Babu and Lalit Babu. Kristo Babu is also coming here.

Yours sincerely, Surendra Nath Banerjea."

Surendranath tried his best to convince Sri Aurobindo that the Moderate policy would not only bring about the reunion of Bengal but even a great measure of self-government within a short period. His magnetism did not work. He had quite misjudged the stuff that had gone into the making of the mild-mannered young Aurobindo Babu. For all his easy-going ways, and the kindness which endeared him to so many people, there was never any turning him from his

purpose, once he had made up his mind. His purpose? The tide in the affairs of his countrymen was to be 'taken at the flood.'

The dispute between the two parties was centred round the previous year's Calcutta resolution passed by the Congress. The Moderates were going back on their acceptance of the programme. Was it not betraying the nation? How could the Nationalists let them wriggle out of that acceptance? See whom the Moderates wanted as the President of the Conference. What does it matter if he happens to be the leader of the Midnapore bar? See him break his promise to the Reception Committee. What does he mean by refusing to discuss *Swaraj* in the

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open session? Vehemently objecting to K. B. Dutt, the false-hearted President-elect, the audience heckled him and hooted him down. Peeved, the Moderates called in the police. What an entertaining spectacle that was!

Next day, 8 December, Sri Aurobindo successfully conducted the meeting convened separately by the Nationalists, and arranged to pass resolutions supporting the Nationalist programme. Which was done on the 9th. Maulvi Abdul Huq presided. For the first time a resolution calling for *Swaraj*— Independence — was passed unanimously.

Actually, it was these acts of betrayal, their repudiation of the 1906 Congress resolutions, that robbed the Moderate leaders of the old reverence people had for them. "The reverence," to put it in Sri Aurobindo's words, "has been transferred from persons to the ideal of the motherland."

In a letter to his wife, dated 6 December 1907, Sri Aurobindo gave a graphic description about his situation. He wrote from Calcutta.

"Dear Mrinalini,

"Here I do not have a moment to spare. I am in charge of the writing; I am in charge of the Congress work; I have to settle the *Bande Mataram* affair. I am finding it difficult to cope with it all. Besides, I have my own work to do; that too cannot be neglected.

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"Will you listen to one request of mine ? This is a time of great anxiety for me. There are pulls from every side that are enough to drive one mad. If at this time you also get restless, it can only increase my worry and anxiety. But if you could write encouraging and comforting letters, that would give me great strength. I should then be able to overcome all fears and dangers with a cheerful heart. I know it is hard for you to live alone at Deoghar. But if you keep your mind firm and have faith, your sorrows will not be able to overwhelm you to such an extent. As you have married me, this kind of sorrow is inevitable for you. Occasional separations cannot be avoided, for, unlike the ordinary Bengali, I cannot make the happiness of family and relatives my primary aim in life. Under these circumstances, there is no way out for you except to consider my ideal as your ideal and find your happiness in the success of my appointed work.... If you find it absolutely impossible to stay on, I shall tell Girish Babu; your grandfather can come and stay with you while I am at the Congress.

"I am going to Midna pur today. On my return I shall make the necessary arrangements here, and then proceed to Surat. That will probably be on the 15th or 16th. I shall be back on the 2nd of January.

Yours ..."

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Calling All Nationalists

No, he did not return in the first days of the New Year as expected.

After returning to Calcutta from Midnapore, and before leaving for Gujarat, Sri Aurobindo delivered speeches at College Square on 14 December and at Beadon Square on the 15th. At the latter the audience would not rest till it heard Aurobindo Babu. He gave in, saying "I have made it a rule not to speak in public and I have good reasons for it. I went to England when too young to learn my mother tongue and I can't speak it. And rather than address you, my countrymen, in a language which is not mine and which is not yours I kept 'self-silent'...." In both speeches he explained the position of Nationalists.

We rather doubt he had time to go to Deoghar before leaving for Surat on the 21st. According to Purani, Mrinalini Devi was then living in N°29/3 Chhaku Khansama Lane, Calcutta. So in all likelihood Sri Aurobindo at least saw his wife and could bid her good-bye.

Every day counted; there were pulls from every side. He was organizing the Bengal delegates for the Surat Congress.

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This included all the practical details for their journey and stay too I

The experience of the Midnapore Conference had shown Arabindo Babu how the delegates, young or old, were smarting under the 'autocracy' of the old leaders. He was quick to seize on that chance and at once used it to give an organized shape and form to Nationalism. The *Bande Mataram* gave a call to all Nationalists to attend the Surat Congress in force. "We call upon Nationalists in Calcutta and the Mofussil [countryside], who are at all desirous of the spread of Nationalist principles and Nationalist practice all over India, to make ready at whatever inconvenience and, if they find it humanly possible, go to Surat to support the Nationalist cause. ... If Bengal goes there in force it will, we believe, set flowing such a tide of Nationalism as neither bureaucrats nor Bombay Loyalists are prepared to believe possible." That was a reference to the followers of Pherozshah Mehta. "When Sir Pherozshah Mehta juggled the Congress into Surat, he thought he was preparing a death-blow for Nationalism : he was only preparing the way for a Nationalist awakening in Gujerat." Arabindo Babu urged the Nationalists "to fling ourselves at once on Gujerat and organise Nationalism there, so that the Loyalist's chosen haven of refuge might become another place of shipwreck."

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Arrangements made for the Nationalist delegates were published in the pages of the *Bande Mataram*. "The Christmas concessions given by the Railway companies reduce the expense to a minimum and for those who travel by the intermediate,¹ Rs.75 at the outside should be enough." A 'Delegates' Fund' was set up. "We may mention that all we propose to give out of the fund is assistance; no single delegate will be given all his expenses to and from or at Surat." The delegates were asked to take an uncompromising attitude towards any backsliding but support

progress to help Congress move a step forward. The collection, it seems, amounted to Rs.360 or so. Sri Aurobindo made a fervent appeal. "We must go as poor men whose wealth is our love for our Motherland, as missionaries taking nothing with them but the barest expenses of the way, as pilgrims travelling to our Mother's temple. We have a great work to do and cannot afford to be negligent and half-hearted. Be sure that this year 1907 is a turning-point of our destinies, and do not imagine that the session of the Surat Congress will be as the sessions of other years. Let us fear to miss by absenting ourselves the chance of helping to put in one of the keystones of the house we are building for our Mother's dwelling in the future, the house of her salvation, the house of Swaraj."

On 21 December a whole contingent of Bengal Nationalists boarded the Bombay Mail from Howrah station. Among the leaders were Sri Aurobindo, Shyam Sundar, Suresh Chandra

1. Railways had four classes of bogies: first, second, intermediate, and third.

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Samajpati; among the young men were Barin, Satyen Bose, Abinash Bhattacharya. As a rule, Barin who was a member of the secret society, did not take part in any public affairs. But then on that very morning he had been handed a ticket for Surat and was told that he was to go there as a delegate of the Anti-Circular Society, which had been created two years earlier to oppose the repressive Carlyle Circular. At such a short notice he just managed to throw a few things in a canvas bag, and reach Howrah station in time. Such a crowd there was on the platform ! What jostling ! Compartments crammed full to overflowing. The young men got into any compartment they could manage to squeeze themselves in. When the train halted at Kshara pur , Sejda sent a volunteer to fetch his young brother. Barin came to the leaders' compartment. That too was a third class carriage. The Nationalist Party was not a party of rich men ; nor were those Gandhian days when the 'third-class' carriage in which Mr. M. K. Gandhi travelled was often converted to one with the comforts of a first -class. As Sarojini Naidu commented wryly, "It costs the people of India a lot of money to maintain the poverty of the Mahatma."

In the event, this was a real third-class, and the Bengali Nationalist leaders were travelling in it. Barin says in his autobiography that he found the compartment almost like a bedlam! A deafening uproar was going on when he arrived ! Seeing the young man without any suitable clothing and shivering with cold ,Shyam Sundar wrapped his own warm overcoat round

Barin. Then he gave a packet of food to the hungry young man who thought it was near enough to be termed 'nectar'! After such

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a welcome it was natural enough for Barin to stay on in the same compartment. Now then, from one of the stations, a wonderful procedure began —at each station their carriage was flooded with garlands of flowers, luchs, sweetmeats and tea. The packed crowd, the cry of 'Bande Mataram' rending the air, and all trying to get a glimpse of 'the leader.' Oh, but so many had to go away disappointed! How could one imagine that such an eminent person would travel third-class? Had not Aurobindo Babu's name spread like wildfire all over India, almost overnight? An important person like him would surely be travelling by first or at least by second class? Why, there was the Congress Secretary of the Moderate Party, J. Ghosal, seated comfortably in a first-class compartment, in his European dress! And there was their idol, dressed simply in a dhoti and shirt, and in a third-class! By the time people realized their mistake the train was already leaving the platform. Many were luckier. Garlands for Sejda flooded the compartment! But whether the train stopped or not every wayside station was jampacked with admiring crowds cheering lustily. 'Bande Mataram' rang out from thousands of throats. And as many hands waved lights. Thus the 'Congress special' rushed from light to darkness and then to light again. What with all the din and overstuffed stomachs, most of the passengers passed sleepless nights. I can see in my mind's eye the spontaneous adoration of the masses for the young Leader. The word of his passage had gone forth and the more they got a glimpse of him the more they wanted to see him. Do you know how Sri Aurobindo was travelling? No bedding, no pillow. He slept on the hard board. His arm was his pillow.

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The train reached Nagpur the next day. The station was a sea of heads. Like claps of thunder from stormy clouds, cheers burst forth from the waiting throng for the Herald of the New Awakening, mingling with cries of 'Bande Mataram.' At every place students formed the better part of the crowd. Nagpur was no exception. What a reception they accorded to their adored one! Sri Aurobindo broke his journey for a few hours, as he had been asked to give a speech in this town. Unharnessing the horses from the carriage they themselves pulled it. We may note here with amusement that as the students repeated this action everywhere, a jittery Government

watched with nervousness. During the Alipore trial the next year the Prosecution Counsel, Y. Norton stated that "Aurobindo was treated with the reverence of a king wherever he had gone. As a matter of fact he was regarded as the leader not merely of Bengal but of the whole country."

From the station Dr. Munje and others escorted Sri Aurobindo and Shyam Sundar to the Raghbir Theatre. There Sri. Aurobindo delivered an address to the packed house. And whom did he see there ? Sir Moropant Joshi, one of those who had taken the oath of the revolutionary society 'Lotus and Dagger' in England, but now become a Moderate I "On my way to Surat Congress we had stopped at Nagpur. My lecture was fixed in the theatre. On the front bench," Sri Aurobindo's eyes lit with reminiscent amusement as he spoke, "was sitting Moropant Joshi. Deshmukh was by his side. Joshi was all along gaping at me."

At 6 in the evening the train chugged away from Nagpur. Then it stopped at Amraoti, the home town of Khaparde. Here

too a big reception party led by him waited with garlands in hand and cries of 'Bande Mataram' on its lips. Here again Sri Aurobindo made a speech.

On the 23rd the train reached Bombay. This was the terminus. Everyone got down. Another train would take the party to Surat. On Bombay's beach, lapped by the Arabian sea, a meeting was arranged to be addressed by Sri Aurobindo. "We could hardly walk to the place through the living streams converging by the streets and lanes towards the chosen spot, automatically stopping all vehicular traffic for a time," Barin was to recall years later. Let us remind the reader that in the first decade of the century the crowds were spontaneous ones, unlike today's contrived crowds brought by truckloads.

The speaker too was quite unlike any you have ever seen. He did not gesticulate, he did not harangue, he was not given to histrionics. No. He always spoke in his calm, clear and measured tones, and in a lucid style. As soon as the assembled people saw Sri Aurobindo rise to speak, they accorded him a magnificent ovation. Again at the end of the speech. But when he spoke, people listened to him in pin-drop silence so as not to miss a single word. For this shy, frail young man was the Harbinger of the creed of Nationalism. His inspiring speech produced a deep and lasting impression. A single example should suffice, so here is a report from Amraoti: "The manner in which 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...."

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But I imagine that it was not only his words that cast a spell over the people. Once Satprem and I —Sunil the musician joined us —were invited to a musical recital given by Sri Aurobindo. There were others also. But we had just sat down when Sri Aurobindo began his song. He had a *tanpura* in hand. His melodious voice propelled our inmost beings to a region of grandeur of beauty and strength. A light. A vastness. Our home.

Dream, would you say?

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A few Nationalist leaders at Surat:
(centre:) Ajit Singh, Sri Aurobindo, Tilak, Haider Reza
(front:) Khaparde, Ashwini Kumar Dutt
(back:) Dr. Munje, Ramaswamy, Kuverji Desai

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Surat

On Christmas eve, the Nationalist Party from Bengal reached Surat. There were already many delegates who had come and they kept arriving from all over the country. Among them were Ashwini Kumar Dutt from Bengal, G. S. Khaparde and Dr. Munje from the Central Provinces, Lala Lajpat Rai from Punjab, Chidambaram Pillai from the South¹ —in fact, all the leaders worth their salt. And, of course, Tilak from Maharashtra, who had reached Surat a day earlier, on the 23rd.

The happenings from December 24 onwards are now history. In point of fact, historians have written extensively on them; scholars have presented learned papers; numerous eyewitness accounts have been left for posterity. But for our tale we would like to borrow from the factual report of Sri Aurobindo, and Barin's and Nevinson's racy narrations. All the same, a little background briefing might help the Reader better to follow the subsequent events.

1. In this volume there have been but glancing references to the South. When we go there with Sri Aurobindo we shall meet a good number of its revolutionaries, including Mahakavi Bharati who had translated Bankim's song 'Bande Mataram' into Tamil.

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H. W. Nevinson had met Sri Aurobindo and S. N. Banerji in Calcutta, and had travelled to Surat with the Moderate Party. He had been held in wonder by the magnificence of Surendra nath's phrases and continuity of expression, but found the theme of his speech without much substance.

The same evening he had gone to see Sri Aurobindo. "When I reached the house in a large square ... I found it dark and apparently empty. A Hindu servant let me in, and after a time Mr.

Arabindo Ghose himself appeared alone. He had not expected me, because the letter about my coming had been stopped, no doubt by the postal spies, as he said nearly all his letters were. He had no special reason to complain of that, nor did he complain.... 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." During their talk Sri Aurobindo explained his purpose and the simple means he proposed to work on. "But behind these simple means a deeper spirit was at work." Nevinson found a fervour of nationality in the young man. "There is a religious tone, a spiritual elevation, in such words very characteristic of Arabindo Ghose himself, and of all Bengali Nationalists.... He was possessed by that concentrated vision.... But at the end of that road he saw a vision more inspiring and spiritual than any fanatic saw who rushed on death with Paradise in sight. Nationalism to him was far more than a political object or a means of material improvement.....Grave with intensity, careless of fate or opinion, and one of the most silent men I have known, he was of the stuff

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that dreamers are made of, but dreamers who will act their dream, indifferent to the means."

And Sri Aurobindo on Nevinson. "Yes, I met him twice. Once in Bengal at Subodh Mullick's place. I was very serious at that time. The next occasion was when I was president of the National Conference at Surat. Then also I couldn't laugh, being the President. So he called me 'the man who never laughs.'" And Sri Aurobindo laughed.

Surat was then a sleepy little old town on the West coast, on the Gulf of Khambat, between Bombay and Baroda. Here the early European traders, Portuguese, Dutch, English and French — they came in that order—had set up their factories soon after Emperor Akbar's death in 1605.

The Moderate Party leaders from Bengal reached the town on Christmas Day. "It was roses, roses all the way—almost all the way during the forty-four hours in the train from Calcutta to Surat ..." wrote Nevinson in his book *The New Spirit in India*. "The crowd round the station was so tightly jammed that it was a long time before any one could leave the train." Youthful bands of volunteers "in khaki and forage caps at last cleared a space." I met four of them in later life: K. M. Munshi; Durai-swamy Iyer, an eminent and brilliant advocate at the Madras High Court; Dr. Satyendra Thakore, the dentist who was one of the team attending on Sri Aurobindo; and Dr. Manilal from Baroda. "A procession of carriages was formed and began to advance step by step

through the shouting throngs of orange, crimson, and white-clad people. All the windows and tottering balconies of the beautiful but decrepit city that starves upon its

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past—even the galleries of Islam's crumbling minarets and the roofs of Hindu temples—were crammed with faces. Women peeped through shutters or stood shamelessly beside their children and brothers. Boys and girls thrust their heads through holes in the ruinous walls. At every few yards more garlands were offered, more bunches of flowers and sweet-smelling seeds. Thick fell the showers of rose-water sprayed from silver bottles. On every side rose the great cheer of 'Bande Mataram!' From end to end the streets were hung with strings of pink and yellow paper flags, and here and there a triumphal arch uttered the universal welcome in Indian or English words."

The two parties had set up separate camps. The Moderates lodged mostly in comfortable tents pitched around the Congress Pandal, a grand pavilion constructed in the historic French Garden, about three kilometres from the town, on the banks of the river Tapti. The Nationalists lodged as best they could. A temple sheltered Sri Aurobindo and a roomful of others. Another temple became Tilak's home-cum-office. "From morning to one o'clock at night an unending stream of people mounted a flight of steps, had 'darshan' of the two leaders as they sat working, then went down other steps," reports Barin, adding that it was far more difficult and complicated to obtain glimpses of the Moderate leaders. The Nationalists' line of work was to mix with the masses ... "till the Indian nation is free." It did everyone's heart good to see them all sit down together to their meals irrespective of caste or religion. "One day as I sat down to my meal," relates Barin, "I saw seated side by side Tilak, Chidambaram Pillai, Haidar

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Reza, Aurobindo and so many others ..." from every part of the country.

In the Extremists' view, "Democracy and equality between the rich and the poor was an essential part of nationalism. " Sri Aurobindo, who was an 'Extremist,' said, recalling illustrative incidents at Surat, "Thinking it our duty to turn the theory into practice, we had travelled together, on our way to Surat, in the same third class. In the camp the leaders, instead of making separate

arrangements, would sleep in the same room along with the others. Rich, poor, Brahmin, businessman, Shudra, Bengali, Mahratta, Punjabi, Gujarati, we all stayed, slept, ate together with a wonderful feeling of brotherhood. We slept on the ground, ate the normal fare, made of rice-pulse-curd, in every way it was superlatively *swadesi*. The 'foreign-returned' from Bombay and Calcutta and the Madrasi Brahmin with his tilak¹ had become one body."

To put the matter cogently we quote Sri Aurobindo's statement which neatly covers the facts. "The session of the Congress had first been arranged at Nagpur, but Nagpur was predominantly a 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

1. The mark of vermilion or sandalwood paste worn by Hindus on the forehead.

Nationalists however came there in strength from all parts, they held a public conference with Sri Aurobindo as President."

It was in the afternoon of the 24th that the Nationalist Conference in Ghee-Kanta Wadi was held. The delegates paid one rupee each, as it had been announced in the pages of the *Bande Mataram*. More than a thousand delegates attended the conference. On the motion of Khaparde, Sri Aurobindo was elected to the Chair. In a few brief words the Chairman stated the purpose of Nationalism. He then called upon Tilak to speak in detail. Tilak made a very clear and forceful statement. He regretted the watering down of the resolutions adopted at the Calcutta Congress the previous year. But he reiterated the resolve of the Nationalists not to break the Congress but to arrive at an amicable settlement with the Moderates. In fact, he and other Nationalist leaders spared no effort to bring about a compromise. "We Nationalists have no desire to break the Congress or to part company with our less forward countrymen," the *Bande Mataram* had written on 4 December, "but we have our path to follow and our work to do."

To continue with Sri Aurobindo's statement. "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

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and the older leaders. But it was known to Sri Aurobindo." Being a true politician, he did not give out his plans but kept things to himself.

On Boxing Day—a Thursday—at 2:30 in the afternoon, the Congress Convention began. "In that enormous pavilion of striped canvas full ten thousand people were already assembled," wrote Nevinson. There were the Congress delegates, with a separate block for each province, and the vast audience who had paid for seats. "The whole interior, constructed on different levels so that all might see, rose and fell in waves of brilliant turbans, orange, crimson, gold, and white, according to the provinces from which they came, and in a black and solid square sat the bare-headed delegates from Bengal," Nevinson describes picturesquely.

The first business was the election of the President. The Nationalists had proposed Lala Lajpat Rai, just released from prison, to be the President of the 23rd Congress. The Moderates opposed this, and chose instead Dr. Rashbehari Ghose, a lawyer from Calcutta. His name was duly proposed, and Lajpat Rai withdrew his.

But when Surendranath rose to second the motion, and before he could utter a full sentence, tumult burst. "Waving their arms, their scarves, their sticks, and umbrellas, a solid mass of delegates and spectators on the right of the Chair sprang to their feet and shouted without a moment's pause." That is Nevinson giving an eyewitness account. "Over their heads was the label, 'Central Provinces'— Central Provinces where Nagpur stands and the Congress was to have been.

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'Remember Nagpur!' they cried; 'Remember Midnapur!' ... White turbans from Madras joined them. The whole ten thousand were on their feet, shouting for order, shouting for tumult." Surendranath tried again and again to speak, again and again he was shouted down with cries of 'Shame, shame !Traitor I' The Congress broke up without transacting any business.

"Wild defence was met by wild denunciation, but no violence followed. It was still a polite and peaceful people, anxious to leave conciliation open."

Thus ended the first day of the Surat Congress.

Surendranath called a meeting of all the Bengali delegates that night at his camp, thinking perhaps to be able to bring round the Extremists to his side. "Eh !Scandalous, shameful! Isn't it! Come. come let us make it up," and more words in that vein. He got prepared a document to that effect and expected everyone to sign it. But the young invitees showed no interest. "Show it to the other man." "See if that person will sign it? " and so on. Then when Sat yen Bose of Midnapore was approached, he said, "Give it to me. Mister, I'll sign it." As soon as the paper was in his hand he tore it to pieces, and from hand to hand all the torn bits disappeared.

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A Mahratta Shoe

"History very seldom records the things that were decisive but took place behind the veil; it records the show in front of the curtain," said Sri Aurobindo. "Very few people know that it was I (without consulting Tilak) who gave the order that led to the breaking of the Congress and was responsible for the refusal to join the new-fangled Moderate Convention which were the two decisive happenings at Surat." He then added, "Even my action in giving the movement in Bengal its militant turn or founding the revolutionary movement is very little known."

The morning of Friday, 27 December, dawned. Few had slept the two previous nights as the emissaries went back and forth. Amid uncertainty a general anticipation of peace prevailed. The Nationalist party men were instructed to allow all speakers a fair hearing and create no tumult. But unknown to older leaders, a "Mahratta leader —a lieutenant —came to me and asked me whether they should break the Congress," recalled Sri Aurobindo. "I said, 'y^{ou} must either swamp it or break it.' They couldn't swamp it as the other party was strong

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in number." The Moderate Party had managed to chalk up the number of delegates to 1300 while the Nationalists could muster something over 1100. "So they broke it." Sri Aurobindo was frank.

But anticipating some untoward happenings —at least not discounting their possibility —some revolutionary cadres from Midnapore were detailed to guard Sri Aurobindo. Some eight to ten young men were positioned around him. Barin was there, Satyen was there. Asked Dr. Manilal, "Was there any chance of personal injury, Sir?"

"Not that I know of," replied Sri Aurobindo. "Only Satyen Bose was with me and he had a pistol. He said to me, 'I have a pistol with me. Shall I shoot Suren Banerji?' I said, 'For heaven's sake, don't do that.'"

"But why did he want to shoot him?" queried Dr. Manilal.

"He must have got very excited. At any rate there was a pistol, there was Satyen and there was Banerji."

Here is Nevinson to take up the tale. "By noon the Pan-dal was again full to overflowing. At one o'clock the Presidential procession entered." The Congress leaders "took their seats behind the green table that stretched the whole length of the high-raised platform, before which there was no railing, but only, as it were, an escarpment for defence."

Nevinson was surprised to see that "in the front row of the delegates, not in the place reserved for him on the platform, Mr. Tilak was seated." As a matter of fact, no Nationalist leader was seated on the dais. "As the procession entered he sent a note

to the Chairman by one of the boy Volunteers to say he wished to speak on the election of the President after the seconder had spoken." The Chairman of the Reception Committee was Tribhuvandas Malvi of Surat.

It is likely that Nevinson did not know. The Nationalists had really striven hard to avoid a showdown. Tilak and Khaparde had failed in their attempt to meet Malvi the previous day. Nor did they meet with more success in seeing Gokhale or Pherozeshah Mehta. Finally at about 12:30, with a bare half-hour left Tilak gave up all hope and pencilled a note to T. D. Malvi, the Chairman:

"Sir, I wish to address the delegates on the proposal of the election of the President after it is seconded. I wish to move an adjournment with a constructive proposal. Please announce me.

Yours sincerely,

B. G. TILAK

Deccan Delegate (Poona)."

This note, noticed by Nevinson, was put by a volunteer into the hands of the Chairman as he was entering the pandal with the President-Elect in procession.

Tilak received no reply. Even a reminder to the Chairman that "Mr. Tilak requests a reply to his note," went unanswered.

Several speakers spoke, including Surendranath and Motilal Nehru. "Everyone went delicately, moving on a crust of ashes," describes Nevinson picturesquely. "In inaudible words Mr. Malvi proposed that Dr. [Rash Behari] Ghose

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should take the Chair as President, and amid various shouting he declared the motion carried. Heavy with years and knowledge, Dr. Ghose transferred himself to the seat, and rose at once to deliver that thoughtfully prepared address. 'Brother Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,' he began, 'my first duty is to tender you my thanks for the signal honour you have done me.'

"Beyond his first duty he never went. As when lightning flashes in air surcharged with storm, Mr. Tilak was seen standing straight in front of the Presidential Chair itself, expostulating, protesting, all in that calm, decisive voice of his, the voice of a man indifferent to fate. He had given notice of an amendment, he was there to move it, and there he would remain. 'You cannot move an adjournment of the Congress,' cried Mr. Malvi; 'I declare you out of order.' 'I wish to move an amendment to the election of President, and you are not in the Chair,' Mr. Tilak replied. 'I declare you out of order!' cried Dr. Ghose. 'You have not been elected,' answered Mr. Tilak; 'I appeal to the delegates.'

"Uproar drowned the rest. With folded arms Mr. Tilak faced the audience. On either side of him young Moderates sprang to their feet, wildly gesticulating vengeance. Shaking their fists and yelling to the air, they clamoured to hurl him down the steep of the platform. Behind him, Dr.

Ghose mounted the table, and, ringing an unheard bell, harangued the storm in shrill, agitated, unintelligible denunciations. Restraining the rage of Moderates ... Mr. Gokhale, sweet-natured even in extremes, stood beside his old opponent, flinging out both arms to protect him from the threatened onset. But Mr. Tilak asked for no protection. He stood there with folded arms, defiant, calling on violence to do its worst, calling on violence

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to move him, for he would move for nothing else in hell or heaven. In front, the white-clad audience roared like a tumultuous sea."

A flash from Sri Aurobindo. "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." The Mahratta youth all jumped down towards the platform. And "a Mahratta shoe came hurtling across the pavilion aimed at the President...."

Nevinson takes it up here. "Suddenly something flew through the air —a shoe! —a Mahratta shoe — reddish leather, pointed toe, sole studded with lead. It struck Surendra Nath Banerjea on the cheek; it cannoned off upon Sir Pherozechah Mehta. It flew, it fell, and, as at a given signal, white waves of turbaned men surged up the escarpment of the platform. Leaping, climbing, hissing the breath of fury, brandishing long sticks, they came, striking at any head that looked to them Moderate, and in another moment, between brown legs standing upon the green-baize table, I caught glimpses of the Indian National Congress dissolving in chaos."

When the young Mahrattas in a body charged up to the platform, the Moderate leaders fled. "I never saw such a human race I"

Tilak was borne off by his followers. Then Sri Aurobindo quietly left the pavilion. He had stood there calm and rocklike amid the whirlwind.

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And Nevinson. "Like Goethe at the battle of Val my, I could have said, 'Today marks the beginning of a new era, and you can say that you were present at it.'"

The Mahratta shoe acted like a lighted matchstick thrown on a pile of dynamite. "In the vast pavilion itself a combat raged at large. Chairs, useless now except as missiles, flew through the air like shells discharged at a venture; long sticks clashed and shivered; blood flowed from broken heads. Group rushed upon group, delegate upon delegate. Breathing slaughter, they glared for victims. It was hard to tell friend from foe. Ten thousand men, all crowded together among ten thousand chairs, no uniform, no distinction, nothing to mark off Extremist from Moderate except the facial expression of a temperament — it was a confused and difficult conflict to maintain." Finally the police arrived. "Within an hour the vast Pandal, strewn with broken chairs, sticks, and rags of raiment, stood empty as a banquet-hall deserted."

In the twinkling of a shoe the Congress had been changed, and "a new spirit, a different and difficult spirit had indeed arisen in the country."

It had been "roses, roses all the way" on the Wednesday before when the Moderate leaders had travelled to Surat. On Sunday, as the party returned by train, "each station rang with shouts of 'Down with Rash Behari ! 'Down with Gokhale!' 'Down with Surendra Nath!'..."

The *Bande Mataram* had kept its promise.¹

1. For a hilarious reading see *Bande Mataram of 16 February 1918 : 'The Slaying of Congress. A Tragedy in Three Acts.'*

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Tilak

In times of revolution everything is unsettled. It was an immense revolution that had begun in India. "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?" wrote Sri Aurobindo in the *Bande Mataram*, on 6 February 1908. "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 that Wisdom. 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?"

Bal Gangadhar Tilak's name is recorded in History in golden letters. His work, his speech, his writing, and his immense suffering. Tilak did not serve the Mother for a reward or do God's work for hire. He was a patriot who "has kept

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back nothing for himself or for other aims, but has given all himself to his country." Sri Aurobindo said, "He was a really great man and a rare disinterested one. Tilak had a brilliant mind."

In his Introduction to *Speeches and Writings of Tilak* in 1918, two years before Tilak's death, Sri Aurobindo wrote: "Neither Mr. Tilak nor his speeches really require any presentation or foreword. His speeches are, like the featureless Brahman, self-luminous. Straightforward, lucid, never turning aside from the point which they mean to hammer in or wrapping it up in ornamental verbiage, they read like a series of self-evident propositions. And Mr. Tilak himself, his career, his place in Indian politics are also a self-evident proposition, a hard fact baffling and dismaying in the last degree to those to whom his name has been anathema and his increasing pre-eminence figured as a portent of evil.... He could not but stand in the end where he stands today, as one of the two or three leaders of the Indian people who are in their eyes the incarnations of the national endeavour and the God-given captains of the national aspiration." Tilak's life, his character, his work and endurance, were some of the reasons of his immense hold on the people. He was accepted by the heart and the mind of the people: 'Lokmanya' — honoured by the people. "All honour to the sturdy elder brother," wrote the editor of *The Modern Review* for December 1916, "who has loved and dared and worked and suffered for the Motherland." Tilak was the first political leader to develop "a language and a spirit and [to use] methods which in dianised the movement and brought into it the masses.... To bring in the

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Tilak in 1916

mass of the people, to found the greatness of the future on the greatness of the past, to infuse Indian politics with Indian religious fervour and spirituality are the indispensable conditions for a great and powerful political awakening in India. Others, writers, thinkers, spiritual leaders, had seen this truth. Mr. Tilak was the first to bring it into the actual field of practical politics."

It was the Swadeshi movement that brought forward Tilak prominently as an all-India leader. "From the inception of the Boycott to the Surat catastrophe and his last and longest imprisonment, which was its sequel, the name and work of Mr. Tilak are a part of Indian history."

We have made before a glancing reference to the three prosecutions of Tilak. His first imprisonment—with hard labour —was in 1897 on a charge of sedition for publishing an article in *Kesari*. Tilak's second imprisonment took place in 1908, again charged with sedition, for publishing certain articles favouring the accused in the Alipore Bomb case.

That was a lengthy trial. Tilak was fifty-two years old then. He was not granted bail, and remained in prison throughout. Even the bail plea of M. A. Jinnah's — then a budding lawyer, later the creator of Pakistan—was refused, although he had pleaded that Tilak was under treatment for diabetes. Tilak conducted his own defence, assisted by Khaparde, Karandikar, Kelkar, Baptista and other eminent lawyers. But from the start there was little doubt about the outcome of the case. The colonial government was desperately looking for an opportunity to neutralize Tilak, whose immense popularity rattled it. The

judge obligingly toed the line and, brushing aside all the arguments from Tilak's side, made no pretence to impartiality. Tilak was made to stand in the dock while charges against him were read out. The nine-member jury was made up of six Europeans, two Parsis and one Jew. When the jury pronounced its verdict of 'guilty'—with two dissenting voices saying 'innocent'—Tilak, the iron-willed, said, "All I wish to say is that in spite of the verdict of the jury, I maintain that I am innocent. There are higher powers that rule the destiny of things, and, it may be the will of Providence that the cause I represent may prosper more by my suffering than by my remaining free." He was given a sentence of six years' transportation to Mandalay in Burma, and a fine of Rs. 1000. In 1916 he was prosecuted once again for sedition, but was acquitted.

Tilak had accepted the leadership of the Nationalists. After the debacle of the Congress on 27 December at Surat, the Moderates opened their Convention on the 28th, while two hundred policemen guarded the wreck of the pandal.

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

In their book *Lokamanya Tilak*, G. P. Pradhan and A. K. Bhagwat, wrote: "Tilak and Aurobindo were master



*Sri Aurobindo presiding over the Nationalists'
Conference at Surat. On his right is Khaparde;
on his left, standing, is Tilak.*

minds and when they came together each had his impact on the other ... 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 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 biographers conclude, "The association of Tilak and Aurobindo was a happy coincidence." Little wonder that after his release in 1914, Tilak tried through a few friends to convince Sri Aurobindo to return to the political scene.

Both being hard-headed realists, they knew that India's independence was not for tomorrow or the day after, but they knew also that it could be hastened. So they spared no effort to sow the seed of the high aim and point the mind of the people to a great and splendid destiny, not in some distant millennium but in the comparatively near future.

When a course of life is chosen, emergencies have to be met with as they come. "The great rule of life" explained Sri Aurobindo, "is to have no schemes but one unalterable purpose. If the will is fixed on the purpose it sets itself to accomplish, then circumstances will suggest the right course," and gave a warning, "but the schemer finds himself always tripped up by the unexpected."

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Sri Aurobindo followed this rule of life, for his habit in action was "not to devise beforehand and plan but keep a fixed purpose, watch events, prepare forces and act when he felt it to be the right moment."

Both Tilak and Sri Aurobindo had the 'unalterable purpose' of winning India her freedom.

As for the 'right moment' to act, Tilak thought that only Sri Aurobindo and himself could take any decision of the opportune moment. Tilak knew that "a revolutionary action was too serious a matter to be decided by anyone except those who had attained a philosophic calm of mind." Few, indeed, can be extremists while retaining their calmness.

Philosophic? Sri Aurobindo's second nature, I dare say. Not a ripple ever ruffled that equanimity and calm. I still remember Sudhir Sarkar of Khulna, narrating such a tale, with tears streaming down his cheeks. "You won't believe me, Sujata." He was then a boy of seventeen and had been deputed to serve Sri Aurobindo. He had accompanied Sri Aurobindo and family to Deoghar. Sudhir was sick with malarial fever. He was lying in a large room where many of them slept on a durries [cotton carpet] spread on the floor. Sri Aurobindo had his foolscap typescripts of the translations from the Mahabharata scattered round him. Sudhir violently threw up, spattering those papers. Not a word of reproach. Not even an exclamation of annoyance. "Sri Aurobindo got up, and calmly began cleaning up the ejected matter."

Sri Aurobindo had established equanimity and calm right down to his body-consciousness so that nothing stirred

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whatever happened. It was this quality in him to which Tilak referred when he used the word *sthitaprajna*. Or, like 'the Yogi on the Whirlpool.'

"On a dire whirlpool in the hurrying river
A life-stilled statue naked, bronze, severe
He kept the posture of a deathless seer
Unshaken by the mad water's leap and shiver."

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Lele

"As one who gazes at futurity." Henry Nevinson had perception.

On 31 December Sri Aurobindo left Surat for Baroda. Barin and Sakharia Baba were with him in the reserved compartment of the train. In that biting cold of Gujarat, Sri Aurobindo was going about with one shirt, and cheap canvas shoes.

The Principal of Baroda College had issued orders to students that they were not to meet Sri Aurobindo nor even go to hear his lectures. But students are students, and who can restrain the impetuosity of youth? As soon as the carriage came in front of the College gates, out rushed the students, who unyoked the horses and pulled the carriage themselves, says Barin who was sitting in it, with Sakharia Baba beside him.

The two brothers were guests of Khaserao Jadhav at Dandia Bazar. Sri Aurobindo delivered two lectures at Vankaneer Theatre; and a third one a few days later at Manik Rao's gymnasium. All the three speeches dealt with the political situation. Our A. B. Purani was present at those

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lectures. He reports that during Sri Aurobindo's "stay in Baroda he met Chhotalal Purani in a private interview and explained to him the scheme of the revolutionary work by drawing a pencil sketch on a paper. He then advised him to meet Barin who met C. B. Purani for three consecutive days explaining the details of the revolutionary organisation. It was thus that seeds were sown of that movement in Gujarat which became so well known afterwards. The inspiration for it came from Sri Aurobindo." Chhotalal was A. B. 's elder brother. Purani also says, "Barin had intensity and fire at that time. Once I saw him at Baroda with my brother. They were discussing revolutionary plans. I saw that fire in his eyes."

It was 8A.M. when Sri Aurobindo and Barin had reached Khaserao's house. Within the hour Sri Aurobindo had met Lele. It was only after this that Sri Aurobindo had gone to meet the Maharaja and addressed the two meetings. Then ... vanished into thin air! Where was Aurobindo Babu? People searched for him. They searched high and low. They searched like mad. They searched in vain. Sri Aurobindo remained untraceable for about a week —at least for over three days.

Now, who was Lele? And why did Sri Aurobindo meet him?

When the Government cracked down on the press, and after the *Sandhya-Yugantar-Bande Mataram* cases, Barin and company decided that mere verbal attacks on the foreigners were not

going to lead them anywhere. That pushed, them to start the Maniktola garden where the inmates were to live as in an ashram. The Maniktola garden was a family property of the

Ghoses. A plot of about two and a half acres comprised a three-roomed single-storey building with a veranda, a good number of trees, a pond, and a tank with well-laid steps. There Upen Banerji taught the Gita to the young recruits, or 'pestilential agitators' as the then rulers dubbed them.

But Barin felt a deep need of spiritual power for their enterprise. He, therefore, set out in search of a guru along with Upen. Barin had heard about Swami Brahmananda when he was in Baroda. But Brahmananda was no more. In his stead was his disciple Swami Keshavananda who ran the ashram. Keshavananda seems to have been a Hatha yogi, at any rate he knew a lot of *asanas*. But he was as dry as dust. Disappointed, Barin sent Upen back to Calcutta, but he himself persevered a little longer. One day, while he was practising *shirshāsana* (doing a headstand —he calls it *vrikshāsana* or the tree posture!), a man suddenly entered the room and began to help him keep the proper posture. When Barin, tired, sat up, he looked at the stranger. He was short and fair, with blue eyes, a great big white turban on his head, and Mahratta shoes on his feet; clean and neat, though not overdressed. An indescribable but very pleasant aroma of purity emanated from his body. The stranger went away. So did Barin. He reached Chandod's station. From there he went to Navasari to the house of a friend from Baroda days. As he entered he found the short, fair stranger sitting there in a chair. Both were astonished. "Then the man asked me, 'A man from Bengal, what are you doing in these parts?'

" 'I seek a Guru.'

"'Why?'

" 'I have taken a vow to accomplish a difficult task, and I have an idea that without God's help, the task will not be accomplished.'

"'I know everything.'

"He knew all about everything to do with our secret society; he had been a member of the Maharashtra branch of it, but had now left it. Then, out of the blue, he said, 'Do you seek a guru? Come, take your sadhana from me.'

"Taken aback, I asked, 'Do you know the way to God?'

"A little, certainly. You take it; you will get from me what you want.'

"When do you want to give initiation?'

" 'Now.'

"Give, I shall take.'

"He took me to an empty room and closed the door. We sat down face to face in the dark. He told me, 'Close your eyes, don't look, don't think.' After fifteen minutes I opened my eyes at his bidding and saw us sitting as before.

"Did you feel something?'

" 'No. Felt sleepy.'

"Don't worry, you will achieve!!!"

That was Vishnu Bhaskar Lele.

That unexpected encounter brought unexpected results in its wake.

When Barin asked him for a mantra, he refused to give any. He was not a sannyasin, he said, but a family man, he had no right to give a mantra, but could give only sadhana. Which he did, in the form of a few instructions. Well, the

upshot of it all was that almost at the first attempt Barin got an experience of Kamananda.¹ "Lele was surprised to hear about it," said Sri Aurobindo, "for he said that this experience comes usually at the end."

Upon his return to Calcutta, Barin spoke to Sejda about this extraordinary man. Sejda expressed a wish to meet this yogi. Soon the opportunity came. Right after the Surat Congress was over Barin sent a wire to Lele. It was in answer to that wire from Barin that Lele had come to Baroda and met Sri Aurobindo at the Jadhavs' house there. From 1923 onwards Sri Aurobindo himself explained in his talks and letters what then transpired.

We have already seen that Sri Aurobindo's pranayama had become irregular when he went to Calcutta and plunged into political activities. As it was, after certain experiences — "not many nor important ones" — already known to the Reader, he had a complete arrest and was at a loss. But pranayama, said Sri Aurobindo, "didn't carry me far and I came to a point beyond which I couldn't proceed further. I gave it up and fell dangerously ill! I was on the point of death." That was in late 1906, when he had the attack of malaria. He had wanted to resume his yoga but did not know how to begin again. That is why he was searching for some guidance — a guru. "I asked Barin if he knew anyone who could help me in Yoga. This was in Surat where I had attended the Surat Congress. Barin knew of Lele who was in Gwalior. He wired to him and asked him to

meet us at Baroda_____ Now Lele took me to a quiet room

upstairs in Khaserao Jadhav's house. I told him that I wanted

1. *Kamananda*: transmutation of sensuous pleasure.

Yoga to help me in my political work, for inspiration and power and capacity. I didn't want to give up my activities for the sake of Yoga ... but after years of spiritual effort I had failed to find the way and it was for that I had asked to meet him. His first answer was, 'It would be easy for you as you are a poet.'

Sri Aurobindo wanted neither Sannyasa nor Nirvana, nothing which required him to give up action and life. "I wanted spiritual experience and political action together," he said. "I had to liberate my country. I took it [yoga] up seriously when I learnt that the same Tapasya which one does to get away from the world can be turned to action. I learnt that yoga gives power and I thought: why should I not get power and use it to liberate my country?"

Commented a disciple, "God very cleverly exploited your desire to liberate India."

"It was the time of country first, humanity afterwards and the rest nowhere," replied Sri Aurobindo. "It was something behind that got the idea accepted by the mind; mine was a side-door entry into the spiritual life."

As leaving completely all political activity was not possible for Sri Aurobindo, Lele asked him to suspend it at least for several days. Sri Aurobindo consented. When Lele left after half an hour, Barin asked his brother how he had found him as a Yogi. Sri Aurobindo replied briefly, "Lele is a wonderful Yogi."

Lele was a follower of Dattareya Yoga, a traditional method of yoga in Maharashtra. He was then without fame, and Sri Aurobindo found him to be a Bhakta with a limited mind but with some experience and evocative power. "In my

own case," he wrote, "I owe the first decisive turn of my inner life to one who was infinitely inferior to me in intellect, education and capacity and by no means spiritually perfect or supreme; but, having seen a Power behind him and decided to turn there for help, I gave myself entirely into his hands and followed with an automatic passivity the guidance."

Lele came again the next day and whisked away Sri Aurobindo, "to a lonely old place tucked away in the heart of the city," said Barin. That was the house of Sardar Majumdar. "There, day in and day out, the two of them sat wrapped in deep meditation facing each other. Their simple needs were looked after by Vishnu Bhaskar's wife, a matriculate girl of small stature, of very subdued nature." Morning and evening Barin joined the other two in meditation.

"We went to Sardar Majumdar's place," narrates Sri Aurobindo. "On the top floor in a room we were shut up for three days. He asked me to do nothing but throw away all thoughts that came to my mind. '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." Sri Aurobindo had never before heard of thoughts coming visibly into the mind from outside. But he simply sat down and did it.

"In three days —really in one—my mind became full of an eternal silence —it is still there," wrote Sri Aurobindo. From then on "I began to think from above the brain and have done so ever since." A liberation. As a result "the whole being became

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quiet and in seven days I got the Nirvanic experience...." Nirvana, said Sri Aurobindo, "in my case was the first positive spiritual experience and it made possible all the rest of the sadhana."

Lele was astonished with his student. He "said to others that he had never met anyone before who could surrender himself so absolutely and without reserve or question to the guidance of the helper."

And astonished with the result. Lele had "wanted me to get devotion and love and hear inner voices. Instead I got into the silent Brahman Consciousness." In other words, Nirvana.

Since then Sri Aurobindo's mind became the Master in its own house. "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 and thought-empire." Sri Aurobindo said, "It was my great debt to Lele that he showed me this."

Sri Aurobindo describes his experience in his poem, '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, a shadow picture without tone,
Floats, quivers unreal; forms without relief

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Flow, a cinema's vacant shapes; like a reef
Foundering in shore less 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.

"Nirvana," explained Sri Aurobindo, "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. 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 and to do my work in it, yet it came —without even a 'May I come in' or a 'By your leave.' It just happened and settled in as if for all eternity or as if it had been really there always. And then it slowly grew into something not less but greater than its first self." For in the months that followed, "realisation added itself to realisation and fused itself with this original experience."

Sri Aurobindo could have remained in the Brahman Consciousness eternally without caring for anything else, but "I came out as I got the command from above."

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A Seed Force

It was "in that condition of Nirvanic silence that I went first to Poona and then to Bombay." Lele went with him. They visited together the Parvati hill, where Sri Aurobindo had that experience at the 'Hill-Top Temple.'

During his visit at Poona, supposedly a private one, "citizens thronged to see him whenever he appeared," reports the *Bande Mataram*. On 12 January Sri Aurobindo was invited by Professor Ramamurti, the 'Indian Hercules,' to witness his extraordinary feats of strength. Sri Aurobindo thanked the Professor for his performance, invited him to Bengal, and requested the audience to develop their physical faculties so as to serve the country not only mentally but also physically, and to develop their will-power for national work. Some time later, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Bande Mataram*: "We have seen Ramamurti break over his chest a strong iron chain tightened

round his whole body and break it by the sheer force of will working through the body. India must work a similar deliverance for herself by the same inner force. It is not by strength of body that Ramamurti accomplishes his feats, for he is no stronger than

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many athletes who could never do what he does daily, but by faith and will. India has in herself a faith of superhuman virtue to accomplish miracles, to deliver herself out of irrefragable bondage, to bring God down upon earth. She has a secret will power which no other nation possesses. All she needs to rouse in her that faith, that will, is an ideal which will induce her to make the effort."



Girgaum Road, Bombay, early this century

The next day another meeting was held at Tilak's residence, Gaekwarwada. It was at six in the evening, a good number of Poona's citizens attended it. Tilak's Guru, Anna-saheb Patwardhan

presided. Sri Aurobindo was the principal speaker, and he gave a brief sketch of the Nationalist Movement. At the end Tilak summed up the speech in Marathi and thanked the speaker. It was immediately after that Sri Aurobindo met in private the Yogi Annasaheb. What they talked about is anybody's guess !But it seems that Annasaheb predicted the yogic greatness of Sri Aurobindo; and considered him to be the greatest of all contemporary leaders. Later at night, Sri Aurobindo met some of Poona's young revolutionaries at another private meeting. Then to Bombay. There, at Cirgaum, for an hour and a half. he spoke on National Education. Among the things he said , as reported in the Kesari of Tilak: "The very geographical position of the country. isolating it from other parts of the world. argues its separate national existence Let us bear in mind that we have a debt to discharge not only towards our ancestors. but also to our posterity.... 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 ." He also favoured learning and harnessing modern scientific inventions of the West for the welfare of mankind.

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But he was finding it more and more difficult to make speeches in that state. "In that very silence, in that thought-free condition, we went to Bombay. There I had to give a lecture at

the National Union. So, I asked him [Lele] what I should do. He asked me to pray. But I was absorbed in the silent Brahman and so I told him I was not in a mood to pray." So Lele held a day of prayer with other disciples "for me and at the end he said: 'Make a pranam to Narayana in the audience before you start and with your mind completely vacant. Then you will see that everything will come down and some power speak through you.' I did as he had said and found that the whole speech came down from above; not a single thought or expression was mine. It

got hold of my organ of speech and expressed itself through it from beginning to end. In my tour from Bombay to Calcutta all the speeches I made were from that condition of silence." Sri Aurobindo, who always liked to be precise, added that those speeches "were of the same nature—with some mixture of mental work in some parts."

'The present situation' is the heading of Sri Aurobindo's lecture at Mahajan Wadi under the auspices of the National Union. "I did exactly as he told me. On my way to the meeting somebody gave me a paper to read. When I rose to speak the impression of the headline flashed across my mind and then all of a sudden something spoke out." The paper had reported more sentences passed by the British against printers and editors. After dealing with the Administration's repressive measures, he ridiculed those who thought that "what God cannot give for the salvation of India, the British Government will give. What you cannot expect from God you are going to expect from the British Government. Your expectation is vain." Stands to reason! The interests clashed. He then spoke of the "Avatar



in the nation." He spoke of the three hundred millions of people of this country who are "God in the Nation." He spoke of Nationalism. "... It is not, at the heart of it, a political self-interest that

we are pursuing. It is a religion which we are trying to live. It is a religion by which we are trying to realise God in the nation..." Nationalism was a religion given by God, he said. "Nationalism is the gospel of inalienable freedom," he said elsewhere. I counted. Nationalism recurs ... twenty-two times in the speech!

That was "my second experience from Lele. It also shows that he had the power to give yogic experience to others." Then when he was parting from Lele he asked him what he should do. "Before parting I told Lele: 'Now that we shall not be together I should like you to give me instructions about Sadhana.' In the meantime I told him of a Mantra that had arisen in my heart. He was giving me instructions when he suddenly stopped and asked me if I could rely absolutely on Him who had given me the Mantra. I said I could always do it. Then Lele said there was no need of instructions. We had then no talk till we reached our destination." The destination was Nasik.

"When I was in Bombay, from the balcony of a friend's house, I saw the whole busy movements of Bombay city as a picture in a cinema show all unreal, shadowy. That was a Vedantic experience."

"All that I wrote in the *Bande Mataram* and in the *Karmayogin* was from that state. It used to run down to my pen while I sat down to write."

In a letter to Dilip, written in May 1932, Sri Aurobindo summed it all up, and went beyond. When he had sat with Lele at Sardar Majumdar's house, he had not had the least understanding where Lele was leading him or where he himself was 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, 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. The final upshot was that he was made by a Voice within him to hand me over to the Divine within me enjoining an absolute surrender to its will —a principle or rather a seed force to which I kept unswervingly and increasingly till it led me through all the mazes of an incalculable Yogic development bound by no single rule or style or dogma or Shastra to where and what I am now and towards what shall be hereafter. Yet he understood so little what

he was doing that when he met me a month or two later, 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."

Lele had come to Calcutta at Barin's invitation. "He asked me if I meditated in the morning and in the evening. I said, 'No.'" Without waiting for any explanation Lele began to give Sri Aurobindo instructions. "I did not insult him but I did not act upon his advice. I had received the command from within that a human Guru was not necessary for me. As to *dhyana* I was not prepared to tell him that I was practically meditating

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on "we began to follow our own ways."

Therefore for a very short time Sri Aurobindo had a guru.

In later years Sri Aurobindo came to be known as a great 'philosopher.' Decades later, on 4 September 1934 to be precise, Dilip transmitted to him a request from Dr. Radha Krishnan that he would introduce Sri Aurobindo to the West if he wrote a philosophical article for the Westerners; Sri Aurobindo declined.

"Look here !" he wrote back to Dilip . "Do these people expect me to turn myself again into a machine for producing articles? The times of the Bande Mataram and Arya are over , thank God f I have now only the Ashram correspondence and that is 'overwhelming' enough in all conscience without starting philosophy for standard books and the rest of it.

"And philosophy! Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher — although I have written philosophy which is another story altogether. 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 Paul Richard 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

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of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there automatically. But that is not being a philosopher!"

The *Arya* first appeared on 15 August 1914. Its last issue was on January 1921. That makes six years and six months of publication. Of course, Richard was there for the first seven months, and then he left in the last week of February 1915. We don't know whether he helped any after his return from Japan towards the end of April 1920. That leaves seventy-one months of *Arya* to Sri Aurobindo, "all by my lonely self."

How did he write them? He wrote to Nirod on 1st November 1935: "Let me remind you also that when I was writing the *Arya* and also since, whenever I write these letters or replies, I never think or seek for expressions or try to write in good style; it is out of a silent mind that I write whatever comes ready-shaped from above." Another snippet of precision, when he added that since 1909 everything he wrote was "out of or rather through a silent mind and not only a silent mind but a silent consciousness."

Out of an absolute silence of the mind Sri Aurobindo, edited the *Bande Mataram* for three months, the *Karmayogin* for eight months, the *Dharma* for six months, and wrote seven volumes of the *Arya*, "not to speak of all the letters and messages etc., etc. I have written since." Whew!

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The Most Dangerous Man

Barin reports that he called Lele to Calcutta for his own sadhana, as well as for training and giving initiation to his boys. Lele came in February 1908 and put up at Sejda's Scott's Lane house. He even went one day to Belur Math and sat in meditation with Swami Brahmananda. He also met Baba Bharati. But it seems that Lele "knew the man by the dress" only ! Lele also used to think that the appearance has some value," Sri Aurobindo said. "Once I met X with him. He asked me , 'Why don't you bow down to him?' I replied that I didn't believe in the man. He said, 'But you must respect the yellow robe .'" Sri Aurobindo was no respecter of sham.

Before leaving Calcutta in mid-March, Lele had met young people of the Secret Society. Barin had not told him that they were revolutionaries. Nor did he tell Lele what they were doing in the Maniktola Garden. Lele on his several visits met Upen, Prafulla Chaki, and other young men and boys. He understood. Upen says that Lele tried to wean them from their revolutionary activities. He also told them that India's independence would come inevitably and in a peaceful way.

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Unbelievable !A fairy tale, thought the sceptic boys. Recounts Sri Aurobindo, " One day Barin took him into a garden where they were practising shooting. As soon as Lele saw it he understood the nature of the movement and asked Barin to give it up. Lele said that if Barin did not listen to him Barin would fall into a ditch -s-and he did fall."

Barin, let us admit it, had never acquired the good habit of listening to any advice. He pursued his course. The consequences were not long in coming.

Remember Kingsford, the sadistic Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, who delighted in imposing harsh sentences on Indians for the love of it? Well, fearing for his life, the Government had transferred him to Muzaffarpur in Bihar. Revolutionaries, not quite unnaturally, wanted to get him. Khudiram Bose of Midnapore and Prafulla Chaki of Rangpur drew the lot to carry out his liquidation. For several days the two kept watch on Kingsford's movements, then decided that the most suitable time would be in late evening when he habitually went to the Club in a victoria. So on 30 April 1908, around 9 P.M., the boys threw bombs on a carriage they presumed to be Kingsford's. But it was not. It is amazing how many of the most brutal of men seem to have a charmed life ... for a time. Mrs. Kennedy and her daughter were going to the Club in their own carriage, and both of them were killed. The next day, 1* May, Khudiram was arrested at a wayside station. Prafulla, resisting the attempt to arrest him, shot himself with his last bullet. For Khudiram, after a summary trial, it was a hangman's noose, on 11 August 1908.

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In the night of 1st May police swooped down on 32 Muraripukur Road, otherwise the Maniktola Garden, and arrested all whom they could lay their hands on. In simultaneous searches that went on for hours, they arrested many more from all over the city; and on subsequent days from other

parts of Bengal, and the whole country. On May 2 Aurobindo was arrested from his Grey Street quarters.

The first phase of the trial took place at the court of L. Birley, the District Magistrate of Alipore, and it lasted from 19 May to 19 August 1908. "He seemed to be a credit to his Scotch origin," Sri Aurobindo wrote in *Karakahini*, and went on to give a lively description of Birley. "Very fair, quite tall, extremely spare, the little head on the long body seemed like little Auchterlonie sitting on top of the sky-kissing Auchter-lonie monument, or as if a ripe coconut had been put on the crest of Cleopatra's obelisk !" The Auchterlonie monument at Calcutta is now called the Shahid Minar. "Sandy-haired, all the cold and ice of Scotland seemed to lie frozen on his face .So tall a person needed an intelligence to match, else one had to be sceptical about the economy of nature. But in this matter of the creation of Birley, probably the Creatrix had been slightly unmindful and inattentive Finding so little intelligence in such a tallish body one indeed felt pity." He then had a dig at the Administration. "Remembering how a few such administrators were governing thirty crores of Indians could not but rouse a deep devotion towards the majesty of the English masters and their methods of administration. "

The ubiquitous Eardley Norton led the Crown in the

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trial in all three Courts —the Magistrate's, the Session Judge's and the High Court. Describing the drama being played out in the Alipore Magistrate's Court, Sri Aurobindo said, "Looking at the amazing spectacle I often thought that instead of sitting in a British court of justice we were inside a stage in some world of fiction.... The star performer of the show was the government counsel, Mr. Norton. Not only the star performer, but he was also its composer, stage manager and prompter.... It gave me great happiness that Mr. Norton had chosen me as the protagonist of this play.... Of the national movement I was the alpha and omega, its creator and Saviour, engaged in undermining the British empire.... It is a pity I was not born as an Avatar; otherwise, thanks to his intense devotion and ceaseless contemplation of me for the nonce, he would surely have earned his *mukti* then and there and both the period of our detention and the government's expenses would have been curtailed." The government was paying Norton at the rate of Rs. 1000 a day. The entire trial lasted one full year.

The fact of the matter was that Norton's sentiment was fully shared by the Administration. The Bureaucracy was dead certain that 'Arabinda Ghose' was at the centre of the mighty rebellion. The highest-ranking officials gave him full credit for being 'extraordinarily sharp, intelligent and powerful.' And to crown it all, a bold bad man!

In fact, the Government — used to the amazing timidity of Congress Moderates—must have assumed that Indians were a nation of cowards and old women, and were taken unawares at the rapid rise of the Nationalist Movement. "The Government,"

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recalled Sri Aurobindo, "were absolutely taken by surprise when our Movement was launched. They never expected that Indians could start revolutionary activities." He reflected a moment. "The Movement and the Secret Society became so formidable that in any other country with a political past they would have led to something like the French Revolution. The sympathy of the whole nation was on our side."

The Movement could no longer be dismissed. Nationalism had become "a force which has shaken the whole of India, trampled the traditions of a century into a refuse of irrecoverable fragments and set the mightiest of modern empires groping in a panic for weapons strong enough to meet a new and surprising danger...." The bureaucrats were certain that 'Aurobindo Ghose' was the prime mover of the Movement. It should not therefore cause us surprise to learn that that frail young man was giving sleepless nights to government functionaries. "Lord Minto said that he could not rest his head on his pillow until he had crushed Aurobindo Ghose," said Sri Aurobindo with a laugh.

The straight of it is that from the Governor-General of India to the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal and down to the village Inspector of police, all, all without exception suffered from Aurobindo-phobia. "The police seem to be suffering from Aravinda-phobia," wrote the *Nakya* of Calcutta sarcastically in its paper dated 24 June 1909. "Whenever there is a talk of Aravinda Babu's going anywhere, the police of that place are panic-stricken, thinking perhaps that the people of the places visited by Aravinda Babu will at once declare their independence."

Here was 'Aravinda Babu,' a man who never feared to

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speaking unvarnished truth. A spade was a spade. And freedom was freedom. And he said so. "There are some who fear to use the word 'freedom,' but I have always used the word because it has been the *mantra* of my life to aspire towards the freedom of my nation."

Obviously, the man was dangerous! Lord Minto, the Viceroy of India, obsessively used that term: "Arabindo was the most dangerous man with whom we had to deal." "He is the most dangerous man ... and he has great influence with the student class." "... He is the most dangerous man we now have to reckon with." And so on.

Lord Morley, the Secretary of State for India, used another adjective: "the redoubtable Arabinda."

Sir Edward Baker, the Governor of Bengal, regarded Sri Aurobindo as "one of the most dangerous factors in the present situation..." When Minto transmitted the opinion of the Secretary of State to Sir Edward, he protested, saying that there was no reason to show any favour to "our most conspicuous and most dangerous opponent." Was not Aurobindo "preaching sedition almost without disguise"? Again it was Baker who, writing in great detail to the Viceroy, gave it as his strong belief that "he is not a mere blind and unreasoning tool, but an active generator of revolutionary sentiment.... I attribute the spread of seditious doctrines to him personally in a greater degree than to any other single individual in Bengal, or possibly in India."

In a confidential note of 19 May 1908, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Sir Andrew Fraser, said that the public

records which he had collected, "make him the undisputed leader of the Bengal revolutionaries."

The Movement must be throttled.

The 'most dangerous man' must be severely dealt with.

It was Judge Beachcroft who put his finger on the hub. "His ideal is independence," he wrote about Sri Aurobindo in his judgment, and described him as "a man who seems to have an extraordinary hold over the affections of his countrymen."

The Government was afraid of that hold.

The Bureaucracy was afraid of the power of the words penned or pronounced by Sri Aurobindo.

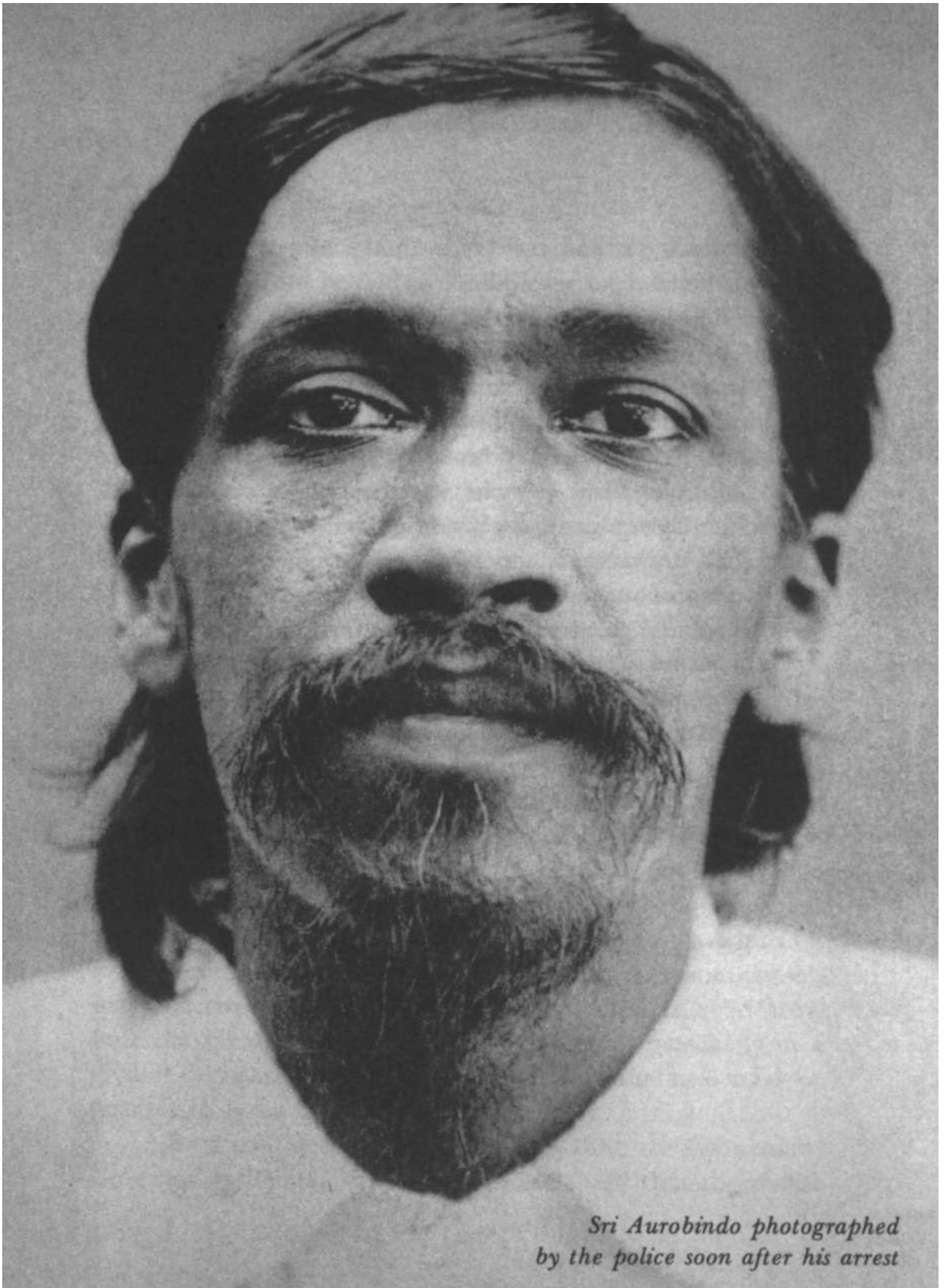
Recently, reading his speeches and writings of that period, it came to me that here was the Trident of Mahadeva.

One prong jabbed the Bureaucracy.

One prong jabbed the Moderates.

One prong, Nationalism, jabbed the Indian people.

The trident's handle was the Mother. "We recognise no political object of worship except the divinity in our Motherland."



*Sri Aurobindo photographed
by the police soon after his arrest*

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In the Alipore Jail

"Mr. Aravinda Ghose and a few other persons have been acquitted in the Alipore bomb case," wrote the *Daily Hitavadi*, a Calcutta journal, in its edition dated May 9, 1909, "and it is not unlikely that one or two more will be acquitted on appeal. Mr. Beachcroft, the Judge, has openly said that but for Aravinda's complicity in the case, it would not have taken such a long time to come to an end. This means that the case was dragged on for such a long time, because the prosecution tried to prove Aravinda guilty by stretching and twisting what was only light and flimsy evidence. The police and Counsel for the prosecution always knew that it would be difficult to prove the guilt of Aravinda and some of his companions in the case. Knowing all this, the police have for one year made these seventeen accused persons rot in hajut [jail], suffering solitary confinement and submit to the ignominy of being handcuffed like mean thieves and dacoits....." The hearts of the other co-accused in the Court ached —'rebelled' says Upen —to see their 'Chief being led handcuffed to the lavatory across the road at midday.

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The way the government machinery had gone about this case evoked great disgust in the country. "There are very few Bengalis who are held in such high respect as Aravinda Ghose is," went on the *Daily Hitavadi*. "In education, talent, intelligence and character, he is honoured not only in Bengal, but in all India. Although he has many opponents in the field of political polemics, yet none is unwilling to give him the honour he deserves. Such a man the police arrested quite carelessly and with a joyous mind made him rot in hajut for nearly a whole year without collecting sufficient incriminating evidence against him."

Sri Aurobindo was arrested on 2 May 1908 and released on 6 May 1909.

Sri Aurobindo had decided to take up charge of the Bengali daily *Navashakti*, and just on 30 April —the day of the failed attempt on Kingsford's life—had moved with his family —wife, sister and aunt Lajjabati—from his rented house in Scott's Lane, to the newspaper office at 48 Grey Street. Abinash Bhattacharya lived on the ground floor while the family occupied the first floor.

It was there, just two days later, that before daybreak, while Sri Aurobindo was still sleeping, the police charged up the stairs, revolver in hand, and arrested him. He was taken to the police station along with two others, Abinash and Sailen, and allowed to have a bath and lunch. Thence to Lai Bazar, where the accused were in lock-up for about three days, and kept on a starvation

diet; no bath, just a wash, no change of clothes either. After this the prisoners, now swelled in number,

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were taken to Alipore Jail. After four days they had a bath, and a change of clothing—prison uniforms — before entering their cells. There Sri Aurobindo remained for a year during the magistrate's investigation and the trial in the Sessions Court at Alipore.

And how did the prisoners fare in the Jail ?

When Sri Aurobindo was released he was interviewed by newspaper reporters. Here is one report from the *Sanjibani* of the 13th May:

"At the lock-up, my morning meal consisted in *dal khichuri* (pulse and rice boiled together); in the afternoon I had *muri* (fried or puffed rice). There was no arrangement for a bath. A European Sergeant used to give me a share of bread and tea off his own meal." He was to meet kindness and humaneness from others.

"At the Alipore prison, I was not treated as a political prisoner, but kept in a solitary cell. The early morning meal here consisted in a preparation called *lafsi* made up of rice and gruel. At midday, meal used to consist in a quantity of very coarse and dirty rice, and of a perfectly tasteless watery dal, soup and vegetables. The rice was mixed plentifully with bran, hair, gravel and dirt, and the vegetables used to contain dry leaves, grass, etc. Altogether it was a most terrible sort of a meal. At 5 in the evening, there was a repetition of the same menu.

"As regards bathing arrangements, a single tubful had to suffice for bath, washing of utensils, etc.

"No books were permitted, and at night my repose used

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to be disturbed three to four times by each fresh guard who took his turn of duty calling me up." After some time the undertrials were allowed to have books. Sri Aurobindo asked for the Gita and the Upanishads.

It was at an identification parade that Sejda saw Bari ! They had not met since their arrest.

The Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Sir Andrew Fraser, once went to see 'the most dangerous man' in the jail, soon after the imprisonment of the accused. In later years Sri Aurobindo, in one of his numerous anecdotes, said, "He visited me in Alipore Jail and told Charu Dutt, 'Have you seen Aurobindo Ghose's eyes?'

"Yes, what about them?" asked Charu.

"I have seen him. He has the eyes of a madman!"

"Dutt replied, 'No, he has the eyes of a Karma yogi.' Charu took great pains to convince him that I was not at all mad but a Karma yogi I"

Sri Aurobindo's eyes ... A look from those eyes ... oh ! it bathed you , your whole being with such a compassionate love. You perhaps have never met such affection from' any eyes. I was lucky, doubly lucky to have had looks from Sri Aurobindo and from Mother.

Others have seen in-drawn or penetrating eyes of Sri Aurobindo; or sparkling with humour; or with a smile of recognition, reports Sisir Mitra. Even the English Principal of the Baroda College, A. B. Clarke, said to C. R. Reddy who had succeeded Sri Aurobindo as the Vice-Principal of the Baroda College, and later to be the Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra

University: "So you 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."

Sri Aurobindo heard and saw. He had broken the wall above the head. He had broken the walls all around. "My soul, unhorizoned widens to a measureless sight ..." he was to write later. And, strange are the ways of Destiny, for it was during his imprisonment that he changed completely.

At the request of his cousin Kumudini, Sri Aurobindo began to write his jail experiences, *Karakahini*, in her Bengali magazine *Suprabhat*. From there let me quote a little on his actual arrest.

"On Friday night I was sleeping without a worry. At about five in the morning my sister, terrified, rushed to my room calling me by name. I got up. The next moment the small room was filled with armed policemen. They all came running like heroes, pistols in hand, as though they had come to capture a well-armed fort with guns and cannon. Though I did not see it with my own eyes, I heard that a certain brave white man [an allusion to Superintendent Creagan] presented a pistol at my sister's breast. I was then sitting upon my bed still in a half-drowsy condition when Creagan asked: 'Who is Aurobindo Ghose, is that you?' I answered, 'Yes, I am Aurobindo Ghose.' Whereupon he ordered a Police officer to arrest me. Then on a certain most ungentlemanly expression proceeding from Creagan, an altercation went on between both of us for some time." Creagan had led the police force to arrest 'the most dangerous man,' Aurobindo Ghose. And

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Creagan seemed to think that he had entered the lair of some ferocious animal. "I was, by the Superintendent's orders, handcuffed, and a rope was tied round my waist. A Hindustani constable stood behind me holding the rope end." The search which had begun at 5:30 in the morning went on till 11:30.

When they finally came out of the house Sri Aurobindo found his Na-Meso, K. K. Mitra, and Bhupendranath Basu outside. The police had prevented them from entering the premises, and had also turned down the request of Sri Aurobindo's solicitor, Hirendranath Dutta, to be present during the search.

To whet the Reader's appetite, let me reproduce here from *Bangabasi* dated July 3rd 1909.

"I and my fellow accused were kept in solitary cells, about nine feet long by five." A windowless cell; only a big iron grating was in front. Such was the cage assigned to Sri Aurobindo. "It is only unsubordinate and unruly convicts who are punished with solitary imprisonment, and it is against the provisions of the Jail to inflict such punishment on undertrial prisoners. But then persons accused of swadeshi or Bande Mataram offences cannot claim the protection of any rules and regulations, and so the police did with us just as they pleased. A dish and a cup were all the utensils that were allowed to each of us. This cup was like a member of the Indian Civil Service, intended to serve any and every purpose. It was meant for use in the water-closet, in the

bath, and at meals, on which last occasion it was to serve a dual function, being used for holding our dal or vegetable curry, and also as a drinking cup. It is only in an English Jail that one can

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The High Court of History

When Sri Aurobindo was imprisoned and it became apparent that it would be a long-drawn-out case, K. K. Mitra persuaded his niece to make a public appeal for her brother's defence. Saro's appeal was as a sister for the defence of her brother to every brother and sister in the country. Her brother was a sannyasin who was a devoted servant of the Motherland, he was the brother of all Bengalis, the brother of all Indians. Small contributions helped fill the kitty, coming as often from remote villages or poor labourers as from the educated elite. Swarnakumari Devi, well-known litterateur and Rabindranath's elder sister, gave Rs. 100. The *Basumati* reported on 18 July about the touching contribution of one rupee from a blind beggar, and related the story of a poor schoolboy. "The boy used to spend two pice every day for his lunch and he has been denying himself this daily necessity and paying the amount to the Aurobindo Defence Fund." The collection on that date amounted to Rs. 13,000/-.

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Some defence counsels withdrew when they could not be sufficiently paid. Some simply did not dare to take up the defence of the accused. Because the charges framed against the prisoners were serious enough in all conscience. It was a charge of "waging war against His Majesty the King-Emperor of India;" it was to conspire "to deprive His Majesty the King-Emperor of India of the Sovereignty of British India or a part thereof ..."; it was "to overawe by criminal force the Government of India or the Local Government of Bengal," etc.

But all men are not alike. There were those who had courage. Among them was Bejoy Krishna Bose, who appeared for the accused from the very beginning to the end of the trial in all the Courts and "was possessed of all the materials." He brought out a narrative of the trial in *The Alipore Bomb Trial* (Law Publishers, 1922). He says in the Preface: "The Alipore Bomb Trial was the first State Trial of any magnitude in India, because it was held at a time when discontent

reached its highest point in Bengal and it concerned people who were gentlemen belonging to the best society, cultured, educated and highly intelligent." The book tells us that the mass of documents filed, if counted individually, amounted to over 4000 pages, and the exhibits—bombs, revolvers and what not —numbered over 300. The Prosecution witnesses examined were 222 in the Magistrate's Court and 206 in the Sessions Court. The committal proceedings in the Magistrate's Court began on 18 May 1908 and ended on 15 August. On that day Sri Aurobindo was thirty-six. On 19 August, Mr. Birley, I.C.S., the committing Magistrate, committed the accused to Sessions Court.

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It was very dull going for the prisoners, and tiring besides. They were supposed to keep standing all day long, and day after day. How could they? If bored with the farce of a case some started talking among themselves, Birley would at once order all the prisoners to 'stand up!' Like a schoolmaster! Let us remind the Reader that most of the accused were very young, their age ranging from fifteen to the mid-twenties. Barin, the leader, was twenty-eight years old. A few senior leaders, like Sri Aurobindo, had crossed the threshold of thirty. They were a jolly lot. "I greatly enjoyed the laughter and the pleasantries of the accused lads," said Sri Aurobindo. He himself was once found by his brother to be ... napping I

inside the court room_____ All the *golmal* [hubbub] in the

room—even on the veranda —was at once hushed into perfect silence. Even the European sergeants ... adopted the posture of attention and began to listen with undivided attention." It was Ullaskar singing a patriotic song by Rabindranath.

Sri Aurobindo had left standing instructions with Barin and his group that they were not to admit anything immediately if they were caught by the police, reminisced Nolini, one of the arrested young men. But Barin, Upen, Ullaskar, and some other senior members of the group made a full confession after

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their arrest, which was taken down by L. Birley. In fact Barin's statement is quite a document. Chivalrous Barin, as the leader, sought in his confession to bear the whole blame on himself and

exonerate his colleagues. The others, however, kept their mouths shut. They made their statements through their lawyers. We are coming soon to Sri Aurobindo's own statement at the Sessions Court through his counsel C.R. Das. But let us pass a brief glance at the period before the proceedings started at Judge Beachcroft's court.

At the Presidency Jail Sri Aurobindo and two or three others were lodged for a month in solitary cells — nicknamed the 'six decrees.' Afterwards they were transferred to a large section of the jail where they lived in a huge room. It was then that Sri Aurobindo made the acquaintance of most of his fellow accused. One of them, Narendranath Goswamy, unable to bear the rigours of imprisonment, was an easy prey for the police, who offered to drop charges against him if he would only denounce Sri Aurobindo as the real chief of the bomb makers. But before he could record his approver's 'confession,' he was shot dead in the jail hospital. After his assassination, all the prisoners were confined in contiguous but separate cells. The assailants were Satyen and Kanai. Satyen Bose missed, but Kanailal Dutt's bullet found its mark. It was 31 August 1908. Kanai, waiting in the death cell, gained sixteen pounds. His fearless, serene and smiling face utterly confused the prison officials. Kanailal, just turned twenty, was hanged on 10 November. The Government got such a fright at the huge funeral procession and the mad crowd at the burning ghat that when Satyen, then twenty-six,

was hanged to death on 21 November, his relatives were not allowed to perform the last rites, nor even his friends ; in fact, the jail precincts were guarded by a strong force of armed police. Even his ashes were not allowed to be immersed in the Ganga.

The assassination of the approver was why the accused were placed behind a network of wire — 'a large prisoners' cage' — at the Sessions Court, and police with fixed bayonets stood on guard throughout the room. "I had," said Norton, "a five-chambered loaded revolver lying on my brief throughout the trial."

The Sessions Court trial began on 20 October 1908. After the preliminaries were over, Norton opened the case for the Crown, and took six days doing it. Then he called evidence. On 4 March 1909 the Crown counsel closed the evidence. The Judge then examined the accused to explain the evidence against them. Almost all the accused merely stated that the lawyers on their behalf had their full instructions to argue and explain the evidence. After this Norton began his

argument which he finished on the 20th March. The various defence counsels and pleaders then addressed the Court. Chittaranjan Das was among them. He took eight days of counter-arguments to defend Sri Aurobindo. The court was occupied with these up to 13 April 1909.

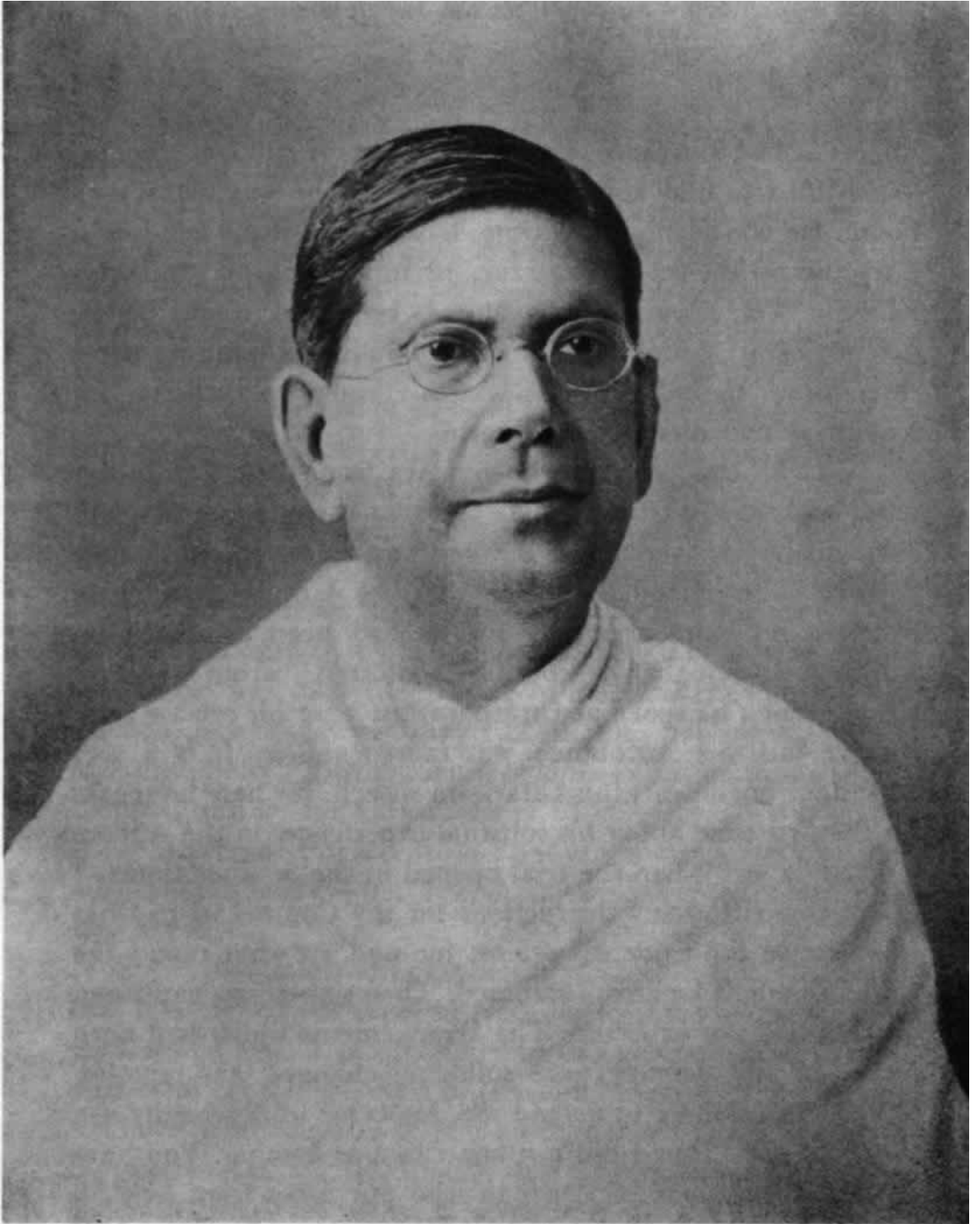
Charles Portent Beachcroft was the District and Sessions Judge for 24-Parganas and Hooghly at the time of the Alipore Bomb Case trial. A good cricketer, he had been a scholar at Clare College, Cambridge, during the same two years that Sri Aurobindo was a fellow at King's College of the same university. Both A.A. Ghose and CP. Beachcroft had passed the Open

Competitive Examination for the I.C.S. held in 1890. Ironically, Sri Aurobindo in the dock had stool eleventh while Beachcroft on the bench had stood thirty-sixth. Amusingly, the results of the final examination reveal that the Englishman beat the Bengali—in Bengali I

The two students were not close acquaintances. Years later, Sri Aurobindo recalled, "I met him only in the I.C.S. classes and at the I.C.S. examinations and we never exchanged two words together." Still the young Ara must have left some impression on Beachcroft, who "couldn't somehow believe I could be a revolutionary."

Coming back to the progress of the trial, two days before his own arrest, on 11 December 1908, K. K. Mitra had requested C. R. Das to take up the defence of his nephew Ara. K. K. Mitra was suddenly arrested along with several other prominent men — Ashwini Kumar Dutt, Shyam Sundar Chakraborty, Subodh Mullick, Manoranjan Guha Thakurta were among them; they were unceremoniously packed off to distant jails or even overseas, and kept imprisoned without trial for more than one year. There's British justice for you!

Chittaranjan Das (1870-1925) —later known as *Deshban-dhu* (Friend of the Country)—was then thirty-eight years old, and a rising barrister. He was the son of Attorney Bhuban Mohan Das, who was a close friend of K. K. Mitra's. At the time there remained only Rs. 3000 in the defence Fund. C.R. Das accepted the job. With some initial hesitation though. For he had a large family to support. But his mother urged him to take



Chittaranjan Das

up his friend's defence even at the cost of all his practice. When he was first approached by others, he was in his own house. He was silent a long time, looking out of the window at a tree across the road. Then turning to the waiting gentlemen he said, "Yes, I know. I have already been

told to take up the defence of Sri Aurobindo. Brahma Bandhav Upadhyay came three times to tell me." That was through planchette, for Upadhyay had died one year earlier.

C.R. Das, who had known Ara from their Cambridge days, and who was one of his Nationalist collaborators, put aside his large practice and devoted himself for months to the defence of his friend, "who left the case entirely to him and troubled no more about it; for he had been assured from within and knew that he would be acquitted," wrote Sri Aurobindo. When he spoke at Uttarpara just after his release from Alipore jail, Sri Aurobindo was more explicit. It is a very important document, this Uttarpara speech, for here he speaks for the first time about his spiritual experiences in the Alipore Jail. He says, "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 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

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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 away 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 result you know."

Sri Aurobindo, through the mouth of his Counsel, persistently used the word 'freedom.' "What he said for me —and it was said not only on my behalf, but on behalf of all who cherish this ideal —was this: If to aspire to independence and preach freedom is a crime, you may cast me into jail and there bind me with chains. If to preach freedom is a crime, then I am a criminal and let me be punished."

Here are extracts from Sri Aurobindo's statement read out —and, as likely as not, prepared —by C. R. Das before Judge Beachcroft.

"The whole of my case before you is this. If it is suggested that I preached the ideal of freedom to my country which is against the law, I plead guilty to the charge.... If it is an offence to preach the ideal of freedom, I admit having done it — I have never disputed it. It is for that that I have given up all the prospects of my life. It is for that that I came to Calcutta to live for it and to labour for it. It has been the one thought of my

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waking hours, the dream of my sleep. If that is my offence, there is no necessity to bring witness into the box to depose to different things in connection with that. Here am I and I admit it. My whole submission before the Court is this. Let not the scene enacted in connection with the sedition trial of the *Bande Mataram* be enacted over again, and let the whole trial go into a side issue. If that is my offence let it be so stated and I am cheerful to bear any punishment. It pains me to think that crimes I could never have thought of or deeds repellent to me, and against which my whole nature revolts, should be attributed to me and that on the strength, not only of evidence on which the slightest reliance cannot be placed, but on my writings which breathe and breathe only of that high ideal which I felt I was called upon to preach.... I have adopted the principles of the political philosophy of the West and I have assimilated that to the immortal teachings of Vedantism. I felt I was called upon to preach to my country to make them realise that India had a mission to perform in the committee of nations. If that is my fault you can chain me, imprison me, but you will never get out of me a denial of that charge."

Concluding his argument, Deshbandhu spoke. "My appeal to you is this: that long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands. Therefore I say that the man in his position is not

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only standing before the bar of this Court but before the bar of the High Court of History."

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Beachcroft delivered his judgment on 6 May 1909 at 11 o'clock. Barin and Ullaskar were sentenced to death, but could appeal within one week. The Appellate Court delivered its judgement on 23 November 1909, commuting their death sentences to life transportation. Their destination was the Andamans where they went with ten others who too had been sentenced to life transportation. After the First World War, all the prisoners were released by a Royal Proclamation of 24 December 1919. That is how Barin "fell into a ditch."

Seven others were awarded different jail terms. The other seventeen were acquitted.

"I now come to the case of Arabinda Ghose," pronounced the judge, "the most important accused in the case. He is the accused, whom more than any other the prosecution are anxious to have convicted and but for his presence in the dock there is no doubt that the case would have finished long ago." Much to the chagrin of Prosecutor Norton, and the British Indian Government, Judge Beachcroft proceeded to acquit Sri Aurobindo.

Here is an extract from the report of a dashed F. C. Dally, Deputy Inspector General, Special Branch, to the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bengal, F. W. Duke, on the moment all had been expecting for the past twelve months: "The sentences were received in silence —that is, silence compared to the

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turmoil that there has usually been in the Dock. Arabindo, as usual, looked stoically indifferent, but seemed well pleased with himself when he was allowed to walk out and leave the Court. The accused all embraced Barin in turn. Hem Das for the first time looked seriously depressed. I think he was disappointed at not being sentenced to death."

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Jail Experiences

Dilip Kumar Roy was an eternal sceptic. He had heard stories about levitation, and such other claims by sannyasis. He very much doubted the authenticity of such phenomena. But Sri Aurobindo told him not to dismiss these occurrences out of hand, nor term them as fraud, but to become competent to judge; for, said he, an ounce of experience is worth a ton of theory. That is why Sri Aurobindo could tell Dilip, "I take levitation as an acceptable idea, because I have had experience of the natural energies which, if developed, would bring it about and also physical experiences which would not have been possible if the principle of levitation were untrue." Yogis have verified levitation. Experience, after all, is the last touchstone of reality.

Other disciples before Dilip had heard that when he was in jail some part of Sri Aurobindo's body was raised in a peculiar fashion. "That was once in jail," he confirmed. "I was then having a very intense sadhana on the vital plane and I was concentrated. And I had a questioning mood: 'Whether such things as the *siddhi* of *utthāpana* [power of levitation] were

possible?' Then suddenly I 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, and I know I could not have held my body like that normally even if I had wanted to. I also found that the body remained suspended like that without any exertion on my part." In his characteristic way he added, "That is the only thing that happened." He had thought at one time that physical *siddhi*, that is spiritual power over matter, was impossible, but when after his meditation he found that his body had taken a physically impossible position — "it was actually raised some inches above the ground"—he accepted the fact of these *siddhis*.

Another experiment he tried was this: "Then, again, I was practising for a time to raise my hands and keep them suspended in the air without any muscular control. Once in that condition I fell asleep. The warder saw me in that posture and reported that I was dead. The authorities came and found me quite alive. I told them the warder was a fool."

In Alipore Jail his sadhana moved very fast. And it showed physically, as had happened when he was doing prana-yama. His hair, for instance. The boys were greatly struck by its brilliance.

They thought at first that it was due to oil. But the prisoners were not getting any oil in the jail! Upen put the question to Sri Aurobindo, to which he simply replied that the hair's brilliance was due to Yoga. "You see, I am passing through some physical changes as I develop spiritually. My hair draws fat from the body."

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Upen goes on to say, "Later, I saw more of this sort of wonders in Arabinda. Once I was sitting in the prisoner's dock when I chanced to look at him. I saw his eyes set like glass-balls. I had heard that the total suspension of the diverse functions of the mind, and its concentration on a single thing might produce a physical result of this kind. I at once called the attention of some boys to it. None dared approach him; and at last Sachin slid up to him and asked, 'What have you got by your spiritual practices?' Arabinda put his hands on Sachin's shoulders and answered, 'Why, my boy, the thing I looked for.'"

Pain and pleasure shed their masks. "As for Divine rapture," he wrote in 1932, "a knock on head or foot or elsewhere can be received with the physical Ananda of pain or pain and Ananda or pure physical Ananda.... It began by the way as far back as in Alipore Jail when I got bitten in my cell by some very red and ferocious-looking warrior ants and found to my surprise that pain and pleasure are conventions of our senses."

The Yoga also throws up some uncharacteristic things in the nature. Anger had always been foreign to Sri Aurobindo. So when he saw anger coming up and possessing him—"it was absolutely uncontrollable when it came"—he was very much surprised to see it in his nature. "While I was an undertrial prisoner in Alipore, my anger would have led to a terrible catastrophe which luckily was avoided. Prisoners there had to wait outside for some time before entering the cells. As we were doing so the Scotch Warder came and gave me a push. The young men around me became very excited and I did

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nothing, but I gave him such a look that he immediately fled and called the Jailor. It was a communicative anger and the young men rallied round to attack him. When the Jailor, who was rather a religious man arrived, the Warder said I had given him an 'insubordinate look.' The

Jailor asked me and I told him I had never been used to such treatment. He pacified the whole group, and said while going: 'We have each to bear our cross.' " In a letter (13 November 1936) Sri Aurobindo explained: "I was noted in my earlier time before Yoga for the rareness of anger. At a certain period of the Yoga it rose in me like a volcano and I

had to take a long time eliminating it Must have come from

universal Nature." He clarified that that anger was not *rudra-bhava* which, naturally, he had also experienced. *Rudrabhava* is a violent severity against something very wrong. It rises from the heart.

In the jail, said Sri Aurobindo, "My views on illness and cure had undergone change and I did not have much faith in medicines. Unless the disease was severe, nature herself would cure it in her own way, such was my belief." Once he ran a very high temperature. Somehow he managed to get up from his bed of blanket, lurched to the door and asked the sentry to bring some water. The sentry did ... ice-cold water. Sri Aurobindo drank two or three glasses of that icy water, then lay down on his blanket on the floor. When he awoke the fever had gone.

Doors swung wide.

He heard. Bells rang and crickets chirped. So loud were the crickets that he thought they were just outside the door ! Also, "I have heard the change of music strange from a lyre

which our hands cannot master."

He saw. Visions trooped, group upon group ... Among them: "I had an experience of Krishna-Kali in Alipore Jail. It was a very powerful vision."

Strange! Sri Krishna was born in a prison. He came to reveal himself to Sri Aurobindo in a prison.

"In the jail," he noted, "there were many such extraordinary, and one may say, abnormal experiences.... All these experiences passed away and did not repeat themselves." But something else established itself. For he was to have the second full realization, out of four on which his Yoga is founded. Close upon the heels of the realization of liberation and Nirvana in January

1908, he got the experience in the Alipore jail of the cosmic consciousness, that is, the Divine in all beings and all that is. "For instance," Sri Aurobindo said to Dr. Manilal, "as I look around this room, I see everything as the Brahman. No, it is not mere thinking, it is a concrete experience. Even the wall, the books are Brahman. I see you no more as Dr. Manilal but as the Divine living in the Divine. It is a wonderful experience." It all began in the Magistrate Barley's court. "I looked and it was not the Magistrate whom I saw, it was Vasudeva, it was Narayana who was sitting there on the bench. I looked at the Prosecuting Counsel and it was not the Counsel for the prosecution that I saw; it was Sri Krishna who sat there ... and smiled." Sri Aurobindo disclosed all this in his speech at Uttarpara on 30 May 1909.

These and other experiences proved to him the truths of Hindu dharma. "They became living experiences to me

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and things were opened to me which no material science could explain."

He who once had been inclined to believe that many things in Hinduism were imaginations, was now given proof of its reality. Day after day, month after month, he realized in his body its truth, in his mind and in his heart the truth of Hinduism. And, unexpectedly, he was helped in his yoga by Vivekananda.

"In the jail I had the Gita and the Upanishads with me, practised the Yoga of the Gita and meditated with the help of the Upanishads; these were the only books from which I found guidance."

Then during his meditation Vivekananda came. "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 but 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 talk Sri Aurobindo disclosed the field on which Vivekananda had come to teach him. "It was Vivekananda who, when he used to come to me during meditation in Alipore Jail, showed me the Intuitive plane.... He gave instructions about Intuition. One can get a glimpse of Supermind

from the Intuition level, and such a glimpse was my first step." Thus in the jail itself he was on his way to the other two realizations on which his Yoga is founded.

There in Algeria, at Tlemcen, Mirra too had seen the prototype of the Supramental body when she had stood at the

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Vivekananda's revelation to Sri Aurobindo

threshold of the Formless. That was in 1907, just a year before Sri Aurobindo's own experience.

"It was the spirit of Vivekananda who first gave me a clue in the direction of the Supermind. This clue led me to see

how the Truth-Consciousness works in everything He didn't

say 'Supermind.' 'Supermind' is my own word. He just said to me, 'This is this, this is that,' and so on. That was how he proceeded — by pointing and indicating. He visited me for fifteen days in Alipore Jail and, until I could grasp the whole thing, he went on teaching me and impressed upon my mind the working of the Higher Consciousness — the Truth-Consciousness in general — which leads towards the Supermind. He would not leave until he had put it all into my head." Sri Aurobindo disclosed, "I had no idea about things of the Higher Consciousness. I never expected him and yet he came to teach me. And he was exact and precise even in the minutest details."

When Sri Aurobindo had returned from England to Baroda, he had been interested in the sayings of Sri Rama-krishna and his life, as also in the utterances and writings of Swami Vivekananda. He found their influence very strong all over India. He himself felt the influence of their words and books. In fact, as he related, "I had another direct experience of Vivekananda's presence when I was practising Hatha yoga. I felt this presence standing behind and watching over me. That exerted a great influence afterwards in my life."

Sri Aurobindo always acknowledged the role played by Ramakrishna and Vivekananda in his life, saying how, at one time, he had received inspiration from the sadhana of Rama-

krishna and Vivekananda. "For myself," he wrote in 1913, "it was Ramakrishna who personally came and first turned me to this Yoga. Vivekananda in the Alipore Jail gave me the foundations of that knowledge which is the basis of our Sadhana."

But Ramakrishna's yoga was turned only to an inner realization of the inner' Divine. He himself never thought of transformation or tried for it. "He had not the idea of a new consciousness and a new race and the divine manifestation in the earth-nature." Where was the answer to the why of life and body? "If I did not try to repeat them [the experiences of the previous spiritual men], it is because I do not find in them the solution, the reconciliation I am seeking." But the importance of the stage reached by his predecessors had not escaped him. "The work that was begun at Dakshineshwara is far from finished, it is not even understood. That which Vivekananda

received and strove to develop, has not yet materialised," he wrote in the *Karmayogin*, after his experience in the prison.

Sri Aurobindo was a born Pioneer. Always farther. "From the beginning I didn't feel Nirvana to be the highest spiritual achievement. Something in me always wanted to go farther."

His was not to sit on the realization of others. His was to proceed, to discover new territory.

Always beyond. To the peak of Divine endeavour. He had come to reconcile the two ends of existence and all that lies between them.

But certainly not to found a new religion. "I may say," he set forth in 1935, in clear and unambiguous terms, "that it is

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far from my purpose to propagate any religion, new or old, for humanity in the future. A way to be opened that is still blocked, not a religion to be founded, is my conception of the matter."

He did remove the block.

He did open the Way.

He fixed a new principle in the earth's atmosphere.

Supermind. The full fullness of evolution.

Sri Aurobindo, who had passed his childhood without a mother's love, loved Mother India passionately in his youth, and in his manhood he loved profoundly this planet, Mother Earth.

"I am concerned with the earth," Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1932, "not with worlds beyond for their own sake; it is a terrestrial realisation that I seek and not a flight to distant summits."

A concentrated evolution.

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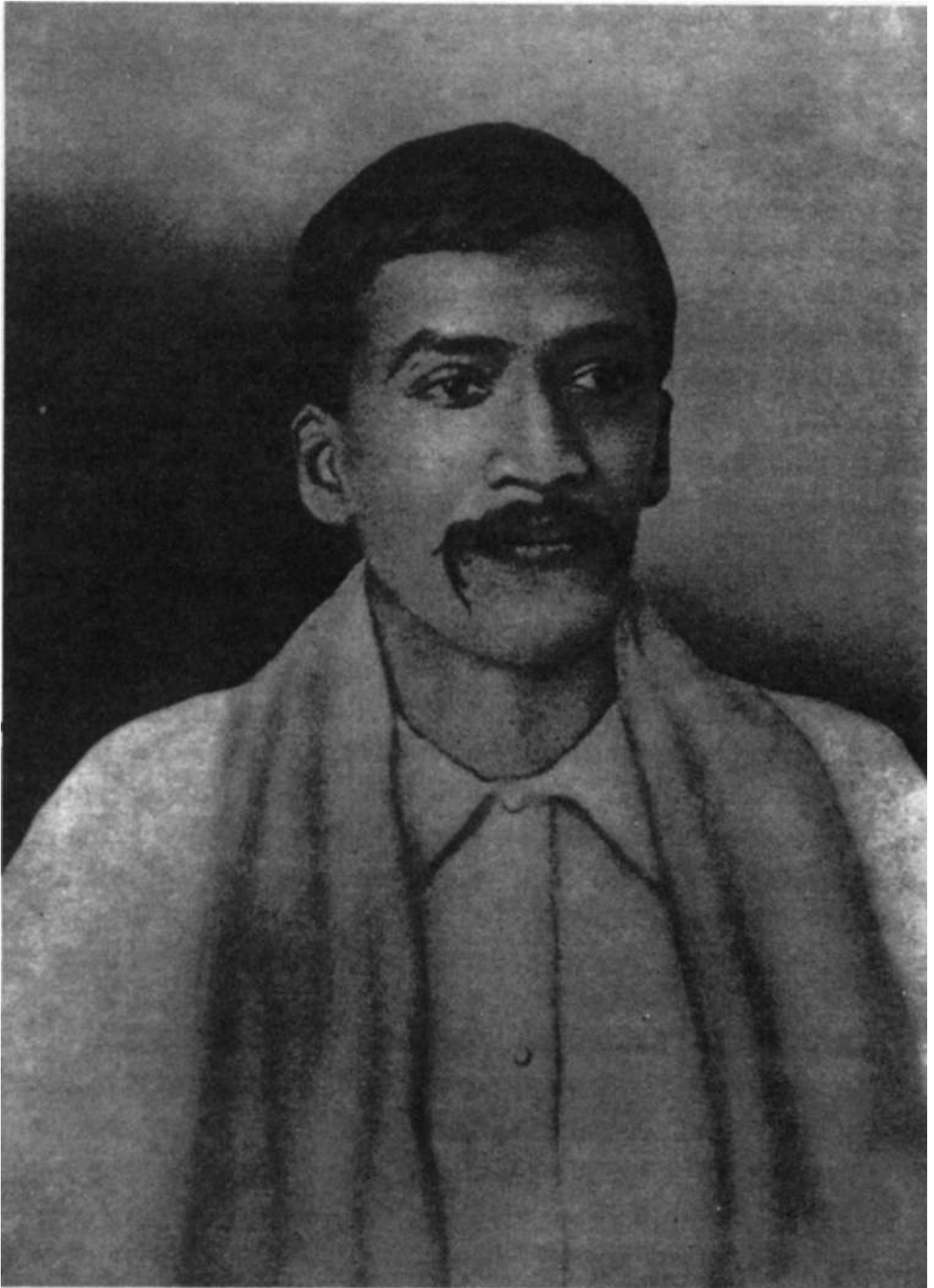
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"Welcome to Aravinda"

One of the first things Sri Aurobindo did after his acquittal was to thank publicly those who had helped in his cause and acknowledge the congratulatory telegrams and letters that kept pouring in from his innumerable admirers and well-wishers. His letter was published on 18 May both in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and *The Bengalee*.

"Sir,

Will you kindly allow me to express through your columns my deep sense of gratitude to all who have helped me in my hour of trial? Of the innumerable friends known and unknown, who have contributed each his mite to swell my defence fund, it is impossible for me now even to learn the names, and I must ask them to accept this public expression of my feeling in place of private gratitude. Since my acquittal many telegrams and letters of congratulation have reached me and they are too numerous for me to reply to them individually. The love which my countrymen have heaped upon me in return for the little I have been able to do for them, amply



Sri Aurobindo after his release from Alipore

repays any apparent trouble or misfortune my public activity may have brought upon me. I attribute my escape to no human agency, but first of all to the protection of the Mother of us all who has never been absent from me but always held me in Her arms and shielded me from grief and disaster, and secondarily to the prayers of thousands which have been going up to Her on my behalf ever since I was arrested. If it is the love of my country which led me into danger, it is also the love of my countrymen which has brought me safe through it.

Aurobindo Ghose
6, College Square, May 14, 1909"

Commenting, the *Bharat Mitra* (Calcutta, 22 May 1909), wrote admiringly that the letter "shows the purity of his love for his country, like gold after it has undergone a fire test."

In fact, unlike the Anglo-Indian press, many Indian newspapers which had followed closely the unfolding drama in the two Courts for one full year, welcomed Sri Aurobindo's release from the Alipore Prison.

Emotional Bengal rapturously poured its heart out.

The *Daily Hitavadi* (Calcutta, 8 May 1909) wrote a long article entitled 'After All This Time.' Here is a short extract.

"And after all these days, Aravinda's sufferings have come to an end. We are particularly afraid lest he has been reduced to the condition of a piece of lady which has been wrung out. We are very much afraid lest driven out of his patience by the ills of the world, he should seek

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refuge in the recesses of a contemptuous disregard of mundane concerns. We are very much afraid lest the punishment of the Courts should make his fertile heart barren. After all this time, hence all this fear. That Aravinda, innocent, stainless man of genius as he is, has come back home is enough and should be regarded as a stroke of good fortune. And we are bound to praise profusely the manliness of the cool-minded Judge whose impartiality has given Aravinda back to the Bengali. And we thank God and the Judge that 15 other youths also have been acquitted. At last sons have come back to the embrace of their parents and joy awakens in hearts filled with despair...."

The *Jasohar*, of May 20, 1909:

"Carrying the flag of liberty, equality and fraternity in thy hand, come, O hero, O patient man, let us enthrone thee in our hearts. We shall wash away the stains of thy past with our tears. The despicable prison-house, from contact with thy pure self, has come to be a place of emancipation. The iron fetters should probably be held to have glorified their existence, inasmuch as they had been put around thy wrist. The endeavour which thou hast for years with thy heart's blood been carrying on for the sake of thy unfortunate Mother is now accomplished. Hence we welcome thee home today !"

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The *Bangabandhu* of May 18, 1909, went to town I

WELCOME TO ARAVINDA

"O great man who sees the truth! We shall give you a welcome today.... You have returned today after a period of solitary endeavour. You have no desire for happiness; your heart is not made anxious by sufferings, oppression could not upset your equanimity. You are pure and stainless like the Homa [sacrificial] fire. You have assigned to God the consequences of your Karma—you did not pray for any reward. Worldly pleasures and comforts could not bring you to spiritual ignorance. O favorite son of Saraswati! Lakshmi, choosing you as one of her own, wanted to put the mark of ease on your sacred forehead—you wiped that off, and voluntarily sought out the cottage of the poor. How few choose poverty like this in this world?

"This voluntary vow of poverty has not been able to dim your lustre.... This your vow of poverty, instead of dimming your splendour, has, like the poison which casts off lustre around the throat of Mahadeva,¹ created such a halo of beauty round you as will animate all Bengal with hope, will regulate the license of every heart, will bring a new life to Bengal.

1. Lord Shiva, who drank the poison that emerged from the churning of the ocean and held it in his throat (hence his name 'Nilakanta,' or 'blue-throated').

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"We give you a welcome to-day. Come, O man, O loved one, come!! We have not spread our most valuable carpet and made a seat for you on the outside, but we have placed a throne for you in every heart — O idol of our heart, come! The white gardenia, the red hibiscus and the *bilwa* leaves which your brethren and compatriots have garnered will never at any time wither. These offerings, these gifts of love, we have smeared with sandalwood paste in the shape of reverence only for you! Come to the beautiful golden seat in our hearts, well smoothed with affection and love. Come, sit, O glory of Bengal!"

He was not to remain seated for a long time. The Anglo-Indian press was furious at the release of Sri Aurobindo.

The Anglo-Indian government was flabbergasted, and at once began actively to consider the expediency of again 'prosecuting Arabindo Ghose."

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The Karmayogin

Sukumar Mitra had gone to Agra to see if he could do something for his father, Krishna Kumar Mitra, held a prisoner in the Agra Fort from December 1908. So he was not at home to welcome his cousin when he was released from Alipore Jail. Upon his return he found his Auro-dada at home in N°6 College Square which was their house as well as the *Sanjibani* office. It was to remain Sri Aurobindo's anchor from then on until he left Calcutta and politics behind in February 1910. Saro was living there as well. For after Sri Aurobindo's arrest she had gone to live with Na'masi, and not with her elder brothers, Beno or Mano.

Needless to say that it was not in Sri Aurobindo's nature to sit idle. Oh, no I Barely a month after his release from jail he began a new English weekly, the *Karmayogin*. He was not inclined to revive the defunct *Bande Mataram* as asked by many. The *Karma yogin's* first number hit the stands on 19 June 1909, and every Saturday thereafter. The *Karmayogin* (Registered N°C. 532) was: "A weekly Review of National Religion, Literature, Science, Philosophy, etc. Contributors:

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Sj. Aurobindo Ghose and others. Office : 14 Sham Bazar Street, Calcutta." The office was shifted to 4 Shyampukur Lane in December 1909, which was commonly known as the 'Karmayogin Office.' The weekly, which filled the gap left by the closure of the *Bande Mataram*, knew an instant success and, unlike its predecessor, was easily self-supporting. Priced at 2 annas (i.e., one eighth of a rupee), it had a very large circulation and brought a rich and varied fare to its readers. "The *Karmayogin* and *Dharma*, the two weeklies preaching a new Nationalism, were more in my line," recalled Suresh Chandra Deb. "These brought to our thoughts and activities some sort of a coherence out of the confusion created by the repression by the Government and the safe policy of our elder politicians. He [Sri Aurobindo] showed us the way out of bewilderment; we learnt to understand what Indian Nationalism stood for and the ideal of the 'Karma-Yogin': 'It [Indian Nationalism] must be on its guard against any tendency to cling to every detail that has been Indian. That has not been the spirit of Hinduism in the past....' " S. C. Deb admitted, "Many of us who had been carried away by this spirit of revivalism needed this warning so that we could devote ourselves to the service of our people with a becoming spirit of humanity." He then goes on to say, "The *Karmayogin* and the *Dharma* gave us intimations, faint and obscure of the 'human dream of perfectibility,' of 'aspiration to a heaven on earth common to several religious and spiritual seers and thinkers.' ... The majority of us looked to the *Karmayogin* and the *Dharma* to give us a new lead in our political bewilderment."

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But every Bengali was not so familiar with the English tongue. A demand grew up for its Bengali version. Amarendra Nath Chattopadhyya of Uttarpara—a revolutionary initiated by Sri Aurobindo himself—broached the matter to him. He at once got Sri Aurobindo's consent. Thus the Bengali *Karmayogin* was begun. That was a Friday weekly. It came out from July 1909. It was published from N°4 Telkal Ghat Road, Howrah (Manager-cum-Proprietor: Gyanendra Nath

Bandopadhyay, B.A.'). Amar notes that a Hindi *Karmayogin* was published from Allahabad under the editorship of Prof. Sundarlal.

But then Sri Aurobindo had become the centre of life and hope to the Bengalis. They clamoured to read him in his and their mother-tongue. Not translation, but original Bengali from Sri Aurobindo was the only thing that would satisfy them! Diffident, he hesitated, but was persuaded to take up his pen and let the Bengali Muse use it. Thus *Dharma* came into being. This one was a Monday weekly. It was priced at 2 paise a copy (Registered N°C.550). The first number is dated 7 Bhadra 1316 (23 August 1909). The name of its editor is 'Srijukta Aurobindo Ghose'; he had turned thirty-seven but a week earlier. So, Sri Aurobindo ran two weeklies single-handedly?

Well, yes, almost. A few young men —such as Nolini K. Gupta, Bejoy Nag, Suresh Chakrabarty (Moni), Ramchandra Majumdar helped with the proof-reading and news reporting, and ... But let us hear from Nolini himself.

"On coming out of jail, Sri Aurobindo found shelter in the house of his maternal uncle, Krishna Kumar Mitra; the

place was known as the *Sanjibani* Office. Bejoy Nag and myself had got our release along with him, but we could not yet make up our minds as to what we should do next; we were still wandering about like floating weeds or moss. But both of us used to go and see him every afternoon."

When he went out on a tour for a short while in the East Bengal area in connection with political work Sri Aurobindo took the two of them along. On return from the tour he asked Nolini if he had any practice in writing. "I said that I had never written anything beyond College essays, but I could try. 'Then get hold of an English newspaper tomorrow,' he said, 'pick out some of the important items of news, write them out in Bengali and bring them to me. I shall see.' I did that the next day. He seemed to be pleased on seeing my writing and said that it might do. He gave me the task of editing the news columns of his Bengali paper *Dharma*. Half of it would be articles, etc., and the rest would be news. Needless to say, I accepted the offer. He added that for this work he would give me a stipend of ten rupees per month and that I should not take that amiss. For, he explained, this was for him a matter of principle as he did not consider it fair to exact work without giving its due reward. That was why he offered this token payment and I

should accept it as part of my pocket-expenses. This was the first time I was going to earn any money."

Sri Aurobindo also offered them the journal's office to live in. "So we came to stay at Shyampukur, on the *Dharma* and *Karmayogin* premises. There were two flats or sections. In the front part were set up the press and the office; and at the

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back, in the inner apartments, so to say, we set up our household. There were three or four rooms on the first floor and downstairs there were the kitchen and stores and things.

"Sri Aurobindo used to come here every afternoon from his uncle's place. He would first look to the work in the office and then come to our rooms. Till about ten in the evening he used to spend his time with us."

From College Square, Sejda, as the boys called him, would take a tram or a long solitary walk to come to Shyam-pukur Lane every afternoon at about four or five. The boys had not got into the habit of taking tea. But when Sejda was there they served him with a cup of tea and a plate full of *luchis*, potatoes with thick gravy highly seasoned with curry, and, respecting our shastras, with sweets — *halua* in this case—to wind up; all bought from a corner sweetmeat shop in Grey Street.

After he had finished with his work connected with the two papers, he would drop in on the young men, join in their talks or teach them languages, like French. Nolini began straight away with Moliere's *L'Avare*. Nolini and Moni and Bejoy were the permanent residents. Ganen Maharaj, of Ramakrishna Mission, was a frequent visitor. Biren Ghosh, Saurin Bose and Ramchandra Majumdar turned up almost daily. Amar Chatterji, Hem Sen and several others came once in a while. Almost every evening Sri Aurobindo would do some automatic writing—or, as Nolini puts it, automatic speech. Then by nine-thirty or ten he would leave for College Square. The young men would see him off at the Grey Street corner

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where he caught the tram. But occasionally he would be so late that the last tram had left, then a horse carriage was hired for him.

Can you guess under what conditions Sri Aurobindo was producing those weekly articles for the *Karmayogin* and the *Dharma*? B. G. Tilak was writing his *Gita-Rahasya* in the undisturbed quiet of Mandalayjail in Burma. But Sri Aurobindo was living with his aunt and family, amidst constant comings and goings. Here is Sukumar Mitra to tell us. "In deep absorption he wrote or typed articles for the weeklies in the first-floor sitting room while, in the same room, somebody played the gramophone, or others talked loudly, and all kinds of hubbub went on. To all of which he paid no heed; he continued his writing without an interruption to his thought."

Luckily he was not dependent on brain-thought like us! Interruptions? Well, yes, there was no lack of that I He met a lot of visitors. Young men also came regularly in groups to meet him.

Basanti Chakravarty, Sukumar's sister, recounts an anecdote or two. Father was in jail in Agra. Mother, always sickly, became very sick with worry. Their doctor, Dr. Col. U.N. Mukherji, Surendranath's son-in-law, advised Lilabati to have a daily bath in the Ganges. Somebody always went with her. She seemed to prefer her nephew. Na-masi would come up to Auro-dada when he was writing an article for the *Dharma* or the *Karmayogin* and say, "Auro, please come along with me, let's go for a bath in Ganga." At once Auro-dada would put down his pen and leaving the writing in the middle, accompany her.

"I never saw Auro-dada getting angry," marvelled Basanti. "He is sitting in the hall and writing. His sandals are lying at a little distance. My mother comes, puts on his sandals and goes up to the terrace to take her walk. After some time people come to see Auro-dada. He gets up, searches all around for his sandals. In the meantime he sees Ma, smiles and asks her, 'Na-masi, have you put on my sandals? There are visitors who have come to see me.' Ma gives him his sandals. That she took them away—that he had to wait—nothing of it made him the least bit annoyed."

But sister Sarojini used to get pretty annoyed at Sejda's lack of anger. When they lived in Deoghar she frequently asked him to scold their cook who, she said, never listened to her. One day she got exasperated. Sejda then called the cook and said, 'Thakur, why don't you listen to my sister? Please listen to my sister.' Saro never asked her brother again to scold anybody.

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The Laboratory of the Soul

When he came out from jail Sri Aurobindo found the whole political aspect of the country altered. Most of the Nationalist leaders were in prison or in self-imposed exile "and 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 wrote. Suppression. Repression. The colonial government had let loose severe repression over the whole country. A steamroller of repression. And passed a profusion of strangling laws. Bengal bore the brunt of its wrath. Under an arbitrary 'law' of deportation the police had suddenly hurried away from their homes, or from the streets, nine of the most active and devoted workers for the country and exiled them without trial, as the Bureaucracy was unable to formulate a single definite charge against them. The particular law under which the nine were exiled had already been impugned in British Parliament as an antiquated and anomalous regulation. When its use by the Government of India was challenged, Lord Morley, the then Viceroy, answered, "The law is as good a law as any of the Statute Book." Common

sense would have called it a travesty of law and justice. Sri Aurobindo was incisive. "We say it is a lawless law, — a dishonest law, — a law that is, in any real sense of the word, no law at all." In a speech at Jhalakati he took a swing at that specious 'law.' "For what is its substance and purpose? It provides that when you cannot bring any charge against a man which can be supported by proofs — and when you have no evidence which would stand for a moment before a court of justice, in any legal tribunal—when you have nothing against him except that his existence is inconvenient to you, then you need not advance any charge, you need not bring any evidence, you are at liberty to remove him from his home, from his friends, from his legitimate activities and intern him for the rest of his life in a jail. This is the law which is as good a law as any on the Statute Book!" I must say that Indian legislators have beaten the British at *that* game I

At any rate, with its repressive measures the Government had succeeded in bringing about an outward quietness, pushing underground a simmering discontent. The *Daily Hitavadi* in its

article of 8 May 1909, 'After all this time,' had prefaced its welcome to Sri Aurobindo by alluding to the prevailing situation. "The educated community of Bengal is at the present moment silent in fear, amazement and confusion, the cry of Bande Mataram which used to pierce the heavens is hushed, all the energy, exultation and demonstration which used to be

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displayed in the accomplishment of the Swadeshi vow have died away, the sounds of song which used to fill the four quarters of the heavens are absent and the burning words of the orator are no longer heard. Everything is quiet, everything is subdued, everything seems to be under the spell of a great confusion. The incessant pouring of hot oil in the shape of official wrath seems to have stilled the powerful waves of feeling, which at one time, surging through the Bengali community, purified and purged it."

Sri Aurobindo told his audience at Uttarpara more or less the same thing. "When I went to jail," he said, "the whole country was alive with the cry of Bande Mataram, alive with the hope of a nation, the hope of millions of men who had newly risen out of degradation. When I came out of jail I listened for that cry, but there was instead a silence. A hush had fallen on the country and men seemed bewildered; for instead of God's bright heaven full of the vision of the future that had been before us, there seemed to be overhead a leaden sky from which human thunders and lightnings rained. No man seemed to know which way to move...."

It was Amarendranath Chatterji who had gone to Calcutta from Uttarpara to fetch Sri Aurobindo, on behalf of the organizers¹ of the 'Society for the Protection of Religion.' "I went to the *Sanjibani* office to fetch Sri Aurobindo," writes Amar. "I saw him there absolutely quiet, as if he were in

1. Piyarimohan Mukherji, the zamindar of Uttarpara and his eldest son, Rajendranath, generally called Michhari Babu. Michhari Babu was a generous donor to the cause of the revolutionaries.

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meditation." So Amar too did not talk long with him. They went by train to Uttarpara. Many of the audience took the same train. The time for the meeting was fixed for 5: 30 P. M. and Sri

Aurobindo was the only speaker. "The meeting was fixed at the open courtyard of the Library on the eastern side, on the west coast of the Ganges There were about ten thousand men in the audience . His voice was not voluminous and so the audience established pin-drop silence in order to be able to hear him The reception he got here was extraordinary."

So was the speech. This was probably his very first speech after coming out of prison on 8 May. It was here at Uttarpara, on 30 May 1909, that Sri Aurobindo for the first time spoke publicly of his Yoga and his spiritual experiences. The audience was stunned. Their beloved leader did not utter any trenchant or weighty political views as they had expected I The press of people listened to his usual calm, clear and measured accents. When he raised his right arm to stress a point, they saw a flapping sleeve with a missing button. But as they listened a new atmosphere stole over them. Their souls stirred strangely: like the breath of the Eternal and the Infinite blowing through the conch-shell of Time.

Sri Aurobindo revealed here the change of tack. He used to say before that "Nationalism is a religion, a creed, a faith." Now he said, "It is the Sanatan Dharma which for us is Nationalism...." Fourteen months earlier he had written: "God has set apart India as the eternal fountainhead of holy spirituality." He said now, "This is the Dharma that for the salvation of humanity was cherished in the seclusion of this

peninsula from of old. It is to give this religion that India is rising. She does not rise as other countries do, for self or when she is strong, to trample on the weak. She 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."

India had to be great ... for the sake of the world. This became his recurring theme-song. In his speeches, in his writings, he spoke over and over again of the need for India's freedom which was the first condition for India to recover her spiritual freedom. For, on the spiritual life of India depended the world's destiny. "So with India rests the future of the world." No other nation but India had what it takes for the spiritualization of the human race. "India," he said, "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."

Mother put it simply. "O India, Land of Light and spiritual knowledge, wake up to your true mission in the world. Show the way to harmony and unity."

And Sri Aurobindo. "The world waits for the rising of India to receive the divine flood in its fullness."

The Reader has certainly understood the reason for this insistence on India. "The grand workshop of spiritual experiment, the laboratory of the soul has been India."



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Divorce From the Past

Sri Aurobindo determined to continue the struggle.

Through his articles in the *Karmayogin* and *Dharma* he tried to dispel the confusion and show a path which the nation could tread. He toured the country, especially East Bengal, and he spoke in many towns and districts — Jhalakati (Barisal), Bakergunj, Khulna.... "Out on tour," reminisced Nolini, "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

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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."

Back in Calcutta he held meetings. His speech at Beadon Square, under the Presidentship of Ramananda Chat-terji, editor of *The Modern Review*, was delivered on 13 June, followed by a speech at College Square on 18 June where he had presided. He also spoke at the annual meeting of the Howrah People's Association, where he dwelt on the subject of 'The Right of Association.' But the attendance which had numbered formerly thousands full of enthusiasm, had now dwindled to hundreds and had no longer the same force and life. "Once while describing his experience of the ebb of political enthusiasm," Purani tells us, "he said humorously, 'The experience I had in Bengal gave me a good insight into our people's psychology. Even when all the leaders were jailed and some deported we continued to hold our political meetings in College Square. In all there used to be about a hundred persons, that too, mostly passers-by. And I had the honour to preside over several such meetings!' "

Those small matters could easily have been set right by Sri Aurobindo, as he proved at the Hooghly Conference in September. But the diagnostician that he was, he had perceived that India was already infected by a virus. Instead of a nation rising to fulfil her true function, India

was rising "as a faithful pupil of Europe, a follower of methods and ideas borrowed from the West, a copyist of English politics and society." She was infected by the deep-seated moral disease that was gnawing at

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the European society. The malady had entered into the Indian national system and was threatening to corrupt its blood and destroy the soundness of its organ. "If India follows in the footsteps of Europe," he predicted, "accepts her political ideals, social system, economic principles, she will be overcome with the same maladies." He went on to sound a note of warning, "India must remain India if she is to fulfil her destiny. Nor will Europe profit by grafting her civilisation on India, for if India, who is the distinct physician of Europe's maladies, herself falls into the clutches of the disease, the disease will remain uncured and incurable and European civilisation will perish as it perished

when Rome declined ____" His X-ray eyes had pierced the fair

appearance of the civilization of the West, and he had perceived 'this red evening of the West.' How it lingers, this red evening! It seems endless.

He had seen daily at close quarters the convicts in the jail —thieves, murderers, swindlers — and the ordinary jail employees—cook, waterman, sweeper, cleaner, "with whom one could not help coming into contact, and many times we would speak freely with each other." Sri Aurobindo said, "Even the ordinary criminals I found very human, they were better than European criminals." Darwin too had remarked on the human qualities of Indian convicts. "Such noble-looking persons," he wrote in the *Voyage Round the World*, after seeing convicts in the Andamans. "These men are quiet and well conducted; from their outward conduct, their cleanliness and faithful observance of their strange religious rites, it is impossible to look at them with the same eye as on our wretched convicts...."

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That was one side of the coin. The other was the rising generation. "Our first necessity," wrote Sri Aurobindo, "if India is to survive and do her appointed work in the world, is that the youth of India should learn to think —think on all subjects, to think independently, fruitfully, going to the

heart of things, not stopped by their surface, free of prejudgments, shearing sophism and prejudice asunder as with a sharp sword, smiting down obscurantism of all kinds as with the mace of Bhima."

But the blame for the notorious moral corruption in the young men could be laid directly at the door of the English system of education — "it was the direct result of the purely mental instruction."

X-ray eyes? Listen. "The debasement of our mind, character and tastes by a grossly commercial, .materialistic and insufficient European education..." he wrote in the *Karma-yogin* of 25 September 1909. The key word is 'insufficient.' The education given was neither universal nor sufficient. "The practical destruction of our artistic perceptions and the plastic skill and fineness of eye and hand which once gave our productions pre-eminence, distinction and mastery of the European markets, is also a thing accomplished." Worse. "Most vital of all, the spiritual and intellectual divorce from the past which the present schools and universities have effected, has beggared the nation of the originality, high aspiration and forceful energy which can alone make a nation free and great."

Free? Yes.

But great?

The question was: Was India going to cling "to the

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lassitude of decay and the laissez-faire of the moribund" and fall into an inevitable disintegration and collapse? Or did she have the will in the being to rise "in a mighty flame of renovation to the light of a more splendid life"?

How was the dice of chance loaded?

Was India going to realize the past and the future?

Or remain divorced from the past and crippled for the future?

Had not the malady gone too deep into India's vitals?

How was she to be cured?

Who was to cure the 'physician of the world'?

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Time to Leave

"All the Indians are rejoicing at the acquittal of Babu Aurobindo, as God protects his devotees at last," wrote a paper of Bihar.

All Indians? Not quite. Not the loyalists, and certainly not the Anglo-Indian papers. "From that very day that Srijiit Arabindo came out of prison," wrote the *Samaj Darpan* on 4 August 1909, "the *Englishman*, *Capital*, and the Anglo-Indian newspapers of Calcutta have set themselves against him. The manner in which they are conducting themselves have led many people to fear lest something should happen to Arabindo again."

Already on 28 May the *Samaj* had expressed its apprehension that "it is not at all improbable that this good and highly educated man may be arrested and harassed on the same charge on which he has already been prosecuted twice for serving the country."

The Government continued to look upon him with suspicion, and the police kept him under strict surveillance. His acquittal had in no way allayed their fear. Sir Andrew

Fraser, the Lt. Governor of Bengal, went on pestering Lord Minto, the Viceroy to again deport Arabindo Ghose. The information gleaned from British intelligence reports, he claimed, had revealed that Arabindo Ghose had been the 'ring-leader' of a band of anarchists as early as 1900, if not earlier; the man was the 'principal advisor' of the revolutionary party. "It is of utmost importance," urged Sir Andrew, "to arrest his potential for mischief, for he is the prime mover, and can easily get tools, one to replace another." Already, on 19 May 1908, just after the arrests, he had written to Minto, "There is one matter which I desire to press very strongly on Your Excellency's earnest attention : viz., the necessity for deporting Arabindo Ghose. He is the ring-leader. He is able, cunning, fanatical.... I earnestly trust that no sentiments will be allowed to prevent this.... See what the man has done; see the length to which he is prepared to go; see the skill with which he has used his human tools and kept himself in the background. It would be

deplorable to set him free to recommence operations. Tools are easily got. It is a grave responsibility to set free against society a man who can get them as easily and use them as effectively as Arabindo Ghose." But in the end, they could not gather enough evidence against him that would have secured his conviction in a court of law.

When the Sessions Judge set him free, the Government found itself on the horns of a dilemma. They considered two courses of procedure against him : deportation or prosecution in accordance with law. At first the Government did, indeed, contemplate an appeal against his acquittal; but decided against it as they could not be sure of the machinery of the law. As the

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Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal reported, "If there were a good prospect of obtaining a conviction, he [Sir Edward Baker, the Lieutenant-Governor] would have been ready to prefer an appeal. Such a course would, however, certainly cause a revival of public feeling against Government and in favour of the accused, a feeling which at present shows signs of dying out; and, if the appeal should fail, that price would have been paid for nothing." So, was it not surer, argued the bureaucrats, to arrest and deport him ... to the Andamans where his brother and colleagues in revolution were rotting? By that time Sir Edward Baker had replaced Sir Andrew as the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. The new incumbent began giving his most close and careful attention to the situation. He was convinced that after his release, Arabindo Ghose was again on the warpath. His Majesty's Government was ready to pounce on him at the flimsiest excuse. The Detective Department of the Police set a round-the-clock watch at N°6 College Square, as well as at the *Karmayogin* Office at Shyampukur. Letters to Arabindo Babu were regularly intercepted and often the Post Office neglected to deliver them to him. But no. No evidence worth the name could the police turn up for the Bengal Government.

Now that he was at large, the Government was afraid of a recrudescence of the unrest and violence that had preceded Sri Aurobindo's arrest. And some acts of violence were indeed taking place. Stray assassination attempts—successful now and then — were made by small groups driven underground by the repressive policies of the Government. "They are the rank and noxious

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fruit of a rank and noxious policy" wrote the *Karmayogin* on 31 July 1909, "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."

Other poison-seeds planted by the rulers had not escaped the eyes of the 'irreconcilable opponent to British rule in India.' Those seeds were soon to blossom into luxuriant flower, leading to the partition of India. That seemed a logical conclusion from the partition of Bengal. From then onward the colonial rulers had done all they could to separate Hindus and Muslims as if both were not Indians, but two distinct species. The Muslims succumbed to the temptation of the carrot the Government dangled before them. They forgot that 90% of them were descendants of converted Hindus and that they, the Indian Muslims, belonged as much to the Indian Nation as the Hindus.

Maybe, left to themselves Hindus and Muslims could have united and grown as a single nation. Obviously, it was not in British interest to let them be. The Morley-Minto Reform cunningly introduced a separate electorate and a separate representation for ... Muslims only. Mind you, no safeguards were incorporated in these reforms for Parsis, for Christians, for Buddhists and other minority sections. There was a danger there in these reforms. "We will be no party," stated Sri Aurobindo, "to a distinction which recognises Hindu and Mohammedan as permanently separate political units and thus precludes the growth of a single and indivisible Indian nation." It is given to few to be able to tear off a mask and see the real face. The Nationalists saw the face. What to say of the notorious

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self-serving Congress moderates, when even Tilak fell into the trap? The 1916 Lucknow Pact with Jinnah made the Muslims 'permanently a separate political entity in India.' But Gandhi's Khilafat affair made that entity, 'an organised separate political power.' India is still paying the price.

After this long jump across time let us go back to our point of departure.

The Bengal Government, determined to get rid of Sri Aurobindo as the only considerable obstacle left to the success of their repressive policy, and failing to procure a conviction by ordinary law, decided to deport him. This came to the knowledge of Sister Nivedita. In mid-July, Nivedita had returned to India after a two-year self-imposed exile. She had come back with Sir

Jagadish Chandra and Lady Abala Bose, under the assumed name of Miss Margot, and disguised! As soon as she came to hear of the Government's decision to arrest and deport Sri Aurobindo she at once informed him when he visited her at Bagbazar. She also asked him to go into secrecy or 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: 'An Open Letter to My Countrymen' was dated 31 July 1909. He called it his 'Last Will and Testament.' He felt sure that this would kill the idea of deportation, and in fact it so turned out. Nivedita afterwards told Sri Aurobindo that it had served its purpose, and the Government had abandoned the idea of deportation.

He refused to have anything to do with the sham reforms

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which were all the government at that period cared to offer. He held up always the slogan of no compromise —'No control, no cooperation'— as he wrote in the 'Open Letter to My countrymen.'

To revive the national movement under the changed circumstances, Sri Aurobindo had toyed with the idea of falling back on a Home Rule movement which the Government could not repress —an idea later realised by Annie Besant and Tilak. But at the time it would have meant a falling back from the ideal of independence. "He looked also at the possibility of an intense and organised passive resistance movement in the manner afterwards adopted by Gandhi," wrote Sri Aurobindo later. But he decided that such movements were not for him and that he must go on with the movement of independence.

On 25 December Sri Aurobindo wrote a second signed article, 'To My Countrymen,' where he reviewed the political situation. Although the article was sufficiently moderate in its tone—later on the High Court refused to regard it as seditious — the government thought to have found the opening they were looking for. From January 1910 the menace of deportation again loomed large. Then came the startling assassination of Deputy Superintendent of Police, Shamsul Alam, in the precincts of the High Court, in daylight, under the eyes of many and in a crowded building. Shamsul Alam had been the right-hand man of Eardley Norton in the Alipore Bomb case. "As for the crime itself," wrote the *Karmayogin* of 29 January, "it is one of the boldest of

the many acts of violence for which the Terrorists have been responsible.... The Indian Terrorist seems to be usually a man fanatical in his determination and daring, to prefer public places

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and crowded buildings for his field and to scorn secrecy and a fair chance of escape. It is this remarkable feature which has distinguished alike the crimes at Nasik, London, Calcutta, to say nothing of the assassination of Gossain in jail."

In the same issue of the *Karmayogin*, Sri Aurobindo wrote, "We are beginning to feel that Fate is more powerful than the strongest human effort. We feel the menace in the air from above and below and foresee the clash of iron and inexorable forces in whose collision all hope of a peaceful Nationalism will disappear, if not for ever, yet for a long, a disastrously long season."

He did not have the time to wait for the 'long season.' Time had come to leave politics and journalism behind. In January 1910 when Ramsay MacDonald, a future prime minister of Britain, came to Calcutta, he went to see Sri Aurobindo at College Square. "He himself practically told me when I saw him," MacDonald disclosed in the British House of Commons in April, "that he would not be very much longer in the affairs of the world and engaged in journalistic work."

Sri Aurobindo remained in Calcutta just long enough to see the return home of a freed Krishna Kumar Mitra and Shyam Sundar Chakraborty, in February 1910.

If we take August 1906 —when he joined the National College and began the *Bande Mataram* — as the beginning of his open political career, then by February 1910 he had been three and a half years in the field. We may, however, deduct the year he spent in jail. That gives us two and a half years. In that span of thirty months, Sri Aurobindo had brought about a

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revolution, taking Indians at least fifty years forward. He had set an ideal before the nation. He had given a new shape to Indian politics. He had chalked out the broad lines that were to lead to India's freedom. And he knew from within before leaving that the ultimate triumph of the

movement "I had initiated was sure without my personal action or presence." Thirty-seven years it would be before India gained her Independence from the British.

He had to leave because his Yoga now claimed him entirely. He had work to do which none else could do. The submerged forces were rising. Black nesses threatened to engulf mankind. Where was the Light of God? He had to draw aside a veil, to lift a curtain. He was seeking the Veda, the truth about Brahman, about His manifestation. "I believe that Veda to be the foundation of the Sanatan Dharma; I believe it to be the concealed divinity within Hinduism.... I believe the future of India and the world to depend on its discovery and on its application, not to the renunciation of life, but to life in the world and among men."

His work would be to build a bridge "marrying the soil to the sky."

In 1926 (10 August), Sri Aurobindo said to a disciple, "There is a great and profound purpose behind this Yoga. It is not solely for India. It is for the whole world —although, India may be its starting-point."

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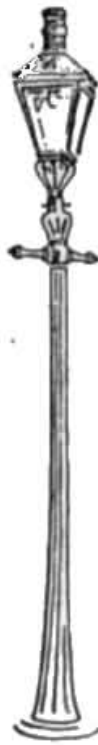
Where is Aurobindo Babul

Calcutta.

Mid-February 1910.

Halley's Comet had begun to be visible in 'the Indian sky. Reports of sightings had come from different parts of the country, from Karachi and Dumka, from Bombay and Nasik_____

It was 8 o'clock. Dusk had given way to night. Night had come swiftly, as it does in those climes. N°4 Shyampukur Lane, Shyambazar. A young man is seen—only there was no one to see!—trying to melt himself in the shadows, trying to avoid the bright patches of lamp lights. Furtively he enters the building, with many a backward glance, to make sure that he has not been followed. To his relief he does not see any C.I.D. men who are always hanging around watching the comings and goings at N°4. Once inside, he quickens his steps, and almost runs up the stairs. He stops at the door of a room from where mingled loud laughter was spreading outward in waves.



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Inside, seated on a sort of wooden cot —the only furniture in the room —was a man in his late thirties. Younger men, in their early twenties or adolescents, sat around him, one or two on the cot, the others on the floor. In this inner part of the building, the 'Chief'¹ as some called him, had a pencil in hand and a paper in front of him. Sri Aurobindo was doing automatic 'speech.' It was Bejoy's room. Bejoy was there, as were Nolini, Saurin, Hem Sen, Biren and Moni.² Saurin Bose was Mrinalini Devi's cousin; Biren was related to Sri Aurobindo.

The day had been quite normal for Sri Aurobindo. After his morning work he had taken as usual his midday meal, then worked on his articles for the two weeklies, the *Karmayogin* and *Dharma*. After that he had set out from N°6 College Square —never again to return as it turned out—to come to Shyampukur office and had done the office work. The day's work done, he had joined the boys as he habitually did.

Forgetting all cares the seven of them had become absorbed in the seance. The 'spirits' that came during the seances were a variegated lot. Some were serious, others were fiery. But that day it was a humorous spirit. The young men were responding with incessant merry laughter. The seance was in full swing when Ram babu suddenly appeared. He was big with news. He informed Sri Aurobindo that the Government

1. Moni says that Sri Aurobindo was known to young people under various names. 'Sejda' to Barin's friends; 'Katta' (Chief) to young workers; 'A.G.' in early Pondicherry days; Sri Aurobindo after his retirement.
2. In regard to Sri Aurobindo's sudden departure from Calcutta Moni's narrative in his Bengali book, *Smriti Hatha*,

was decided to search the *Karmayogin* office and arrest him. He added in anguish that the arrest of Sri Aurobindo was imminent, quite possibly that very night or the next day. A warrant had been issued in his name. Ramchandra Majumdar's father had it all from a high-ranking police officer. Although the news was not quite unexpected, the atmosphere in the room underwent an electric change. The bubbling mirth gave way to a shocked silence ... for a moment. Then animated comments flew around from the young men on the approaching event; Ram babu was proposing to give a fight to the police! Many other ideas were flying about.

Sri Aurobindo listened silently for a few minutes. As he was considering what should be his attitude, he received a sudden Command from above, "in a Voice well known to me, in three words: 'Go to Chandernagore.'" He obeyed the Command at once. He did not stay to consult with anyone nor to pack a change of clothing. He said, "I shall go to Chandernagore."

"Just now?" asked Ram babu in astonishment.

"Now. This very moment."

Sri Aurobindo stood up and left the house. With him, and walking by his side and guiding, went Ram babu. Biren followed a little behind, keeping them in sight. Moni brought up the rear, keeping Biren in sight. That particular evening, there was "no trace of any policemen anywhere about the house," Moni noticed thankfully. In fact, when newspapers came to know of the 'mysterious disappearance of Arabindo Babu' they pointedly asked how was it possible for Arabindo Babu to escape Government's surveillance for which it was spending four hundred

rupees every month? But all those questions began to be raised about a month after the night in question.

The silent procession, seemingly unconnected, went through a maze of lanes and by lanes and alleys. Ram babu, a resident of the locality, seemed to know every byway. Taking the shortcut thus shown, the four of them reached a Ganga-giar¹



A ghat in Calcutta in the 1900s

1. Ghat : harbour, quay, wharf, moorings.

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within ten or fifteen minutes. Next day when Ram babu went to inform Sukumar of Sri Aurobindo's sudden departure, he told him that they had gone straight to Ahiritola Ghat.

On arriving at the ghat, Ram babu hailed one of the boatmen and asked him if he would take a fare ; and the two talked in a low voice for a few minutes. Sri Aurobindo then got into the boat. Biren and Moni followed. Ram babu took his leave. The boat sailed off. "It was a common Ganges boat rowed by two boatmen," Sri Aurobindo said, setting all doubts at rest. "As we sailed up the river and reached midstream," Moni reminisced, "it was apparent that it happened to be a night of waxing moon. The waves danced and sparkled all round in the bright moonlight. I don't know what the exact phase was, but perhaps:

"Today is the eleventh day of the bright phase. See the sleepless moon Sailing alone on her dream-boat."

(Rabindranath Tagore)

No, it was not the 'eleventh' day: that would have occurred on the 20th. For Saraswati Puja, which is always held on the 5th day of the waxing moon, was performed on the 14th. But analyzing newspaper reports we find that Sri Aurobindo was no longer in Calcutta on the 19th, for he did not attend a meeting held in honour of his uncle's release. On the other hand, press reports make it evident that he was still in Calcutta on the 15th when he went to Chandpal Ghat to welcome back Shyam sundar Chakrabarty, released after fourteen months' exile in Burma. We have therefore the choice between 16-17-18 February 1910

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— the 7th - 8th - 9th day of the moon's bright half—for the day Sri Aurobindo left Calcutta on the spur of the moment.

Chandernagore is some thirty kilometres upriver from Calcutta. They reached it before dawn, about four in the morning. It had taken the boat almost seven hours to reach Rani Ghat where it moored. The sailing-rowing had gone smoothly, except for a slight delay of ten to fifteen minutes when the boat got stuck on a sandbank. Eight pairs of hands pushed and shoved, and lo! the boat was free, and the sailing was smooth.

Sri Aurobindo sent Biren to a fellow-revolutionary, who had been arrested in the Alipore Bomb Case along with him and others: Charu Chandra Roy of Chandernagore. Could C.C. lodge him? Charu Roy expressed his inability to give shelter to Sri Aurobindo. But he did give a piece of advice: Tell Aurobindo to go to France.... No, Sri Aurobindo did not follow that advice, but waited quietly in the boat. Not in vain. For Motilal Roy

— who had not previously met Sri Aurobindo, but had seen him at Uttarpara on 30

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and on to his house.¹ Assured that their presence was no longer needed, the two young men sailed back for Calcutta. They, however, stopped at Uttarpara Ghat, not only to give rest to the boatmen, but because they suddenly realised how very hungry they were! Not a morsel of food had passed their throats since the midday meal of the previous day! It was around eight, when night had fallen, that they reached Shyampukur. At Namasi's house, the ladies waited and waited to serve dinner or breakfast to Auro-dada.

Sri Aurobindo had sent a confidential message through a young man from the office to Sister Nivedita asking her to take up the editing of the *Karmayogin* in his absence. That is how Nivedita came to know about his departure for Chandernagore the next day. "She consented" said Sri Aurobindo, "and in fact from this time onward until the suspension of the paper she had the whole conduct of it.... The editorials during that period were hers ... I was absorbed in my Sadhana and sent no contributions nor were there any articles over my signature. There was never my signature to any articles in the *Karmayogin* except twice only, the last being the occasion for the prosecution which failed." The *Karmayogin* ceased with its last issue dated 2 April 1910. On January 20, just a month before taking charge of the paper, Nivedita had written to S. K. Ratcliffe, the editor of *The Statesman*, who was then in England: "How I wish you could get the *Karmayogin* every week! In my opinion, it is a triumph

1. From clarifications given on 13.3.1990 by Renuka Ghose of Prabartak Sangha to my brother Nirmal.

of style and thought. Aravindo is magnificent."

As for his Bengali weekly, "the articles published in *Dharma* during February and March 1910 were not written by me," Sri Aurobindo clarified, adding that they were by a "young man on the sub-editorial staff of the paper." That was Nolini Kanta Gupta. The *Dharma* breathed its last on 28 March 1910. Because Nolini and his comrades had also to go into hiding fearing arrest. Nolini left for "an obscure little village in distant Barisal." The other three dispersed in Calcutta itself.

Moni went from one hiding place to another ... till one day, in late March, at N°6 Crouch Lane, a hostel where he had taken lodgings, he received "a tiny note, about two inches square" with three or four lines in Sri Aurobindo's handwriting. He was asked to go to Pondicherry to arrange

a house for Sri Aurobindo ; attached was an introductory letter to a Revolutionary of Pondicherry. Moni's friend , the bearer of the note, told him that Sukumar and Saurin would make all the necessary arrangements for his travels. Thus Moni left Calcutta on 28 March and reached Pondicherry in the early hours of 31 March. That was also the day when Sri Aurobindo left Chandernagore.

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April Fool

Motilal made secret arrangements for Sri Aurobindo's stay at Chandernagore. Several times the hideaway had to be changed. For had he stayed long in one place he might have been discovered. Everything was done in a cloak-and-dagger manner, so that nobody except Motilal and a few friends knew where Sri Aurobindo was. The first day Motilal hid Sri Aurobindo in his lumber-room. But he spent the night and next day in another house. Brought back to Motilal's in the night he spent a few days in an unused room ... where he was discovered by Motilal's wife I During the five to six weeks that Sri Aurobindo remained in Chandernagore, his hideouts consisted of a thatched hut —in the 'coolie line' —a garden-house in the middle of the town, and the last was a dilapidated shed near a temple of Jagannath. The shed was kept locked during the day, and at night, the revolutionary responsible for him brought dried fruits and nuts ... to keep his body and soul together!

During this time, Sri Aurobindo was plunged entirely in solitary meditation. He often spoke to Motilal about spiritual matters. Seeing the strangely fixed stare of the Yogi, Motilal

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once asked him what he was seeing. "A multitude of letters come trooping down," he replied, "I try to decipher." That was the *akasa-lipi* "that keeps the record of all things past, transcribes all that is in process in the present, writes out the future." He also saw divine Forms, "Gods of the invisible worlds become visible," he told Motilal. "They are as significant as the *lipi* and want to communicate something, which I endeavour to discover." Among the divine Forms he saw at

Chandernagore were those of Ila, Saraswati and Sarama, Vedic goddesses of revelation, inspiration and intuition.

But by solitary meditation, I don't mean to say that Sri Aurobindo was completely out of touch with the world. Not at all. He was in regular contact with other revolutionaries. Especially his cousin Sukumar. The latter got a pencil-written note from his Auro-dada, a day or two after he had left Calcutta. Accordingly he sent to Chandernagore some clothes, papers and money — Sukumar was Sri Aurobindo's treasurer!¹ Three or four times a week, says Sukumar, young men came to him with messages from Auro-dada.

At Chandernagore, said Sri Aurobindo, "some friends were thinking of sending me to France. I was wondering what to do next. Then I heard the *Adesh*, 'Go to Pondicherry.'"

He therefore told Motilal and others about his decision. He wrote to cousin Sukumar to arrange for the voyage. Sukumar,

1. Sukumar says that when imprisoned Sri Aurobindo had given him his 'power of attorney.' Sukumar had it till the end, as Sri Aurobindo never withdrew it.

himself under constant double surveillance of the C.I.D., had necessarily to take help from others. But having learnt some stratagem in the conduct of politics and revolution, he kept the number to a minimum, and did not let the right hand know what the left was doing. He proved worthy of his cousin's confidence.

Nagendra Kumar Guharoy, a youth of twenty, whom Sukumar knew well through his connection with the Anti-Circular Society and who had become almost like a member of the Mitra family, was roped in. Surendra Kumar Chakravarty, Nagen's hostel-mate, was to be Nagen's helper. Taking all factors into consideration, Sukumar rejected an overland, long train journey as fraught with danger. He opted instead on a sea voyage as less risky for Auro-dada. Nagen was sent to procure two Calcutta-Colombo tickets, and reserve a second-class two-berth cabin. For the two passengers —Bejoy was to accompany Sri Aurobindo —he chose two names from *Sanjibants* list of subscribers.

Then there was Amar of Uttarpara. Motilal from Chandernagore sent him word to pick up Sejda from Agarpara, upriver from Uttarpara, on the 31st. Amar informed Michhari Babu, who would have loved to go to meet Sri Aurobindo. But Amar persuaded him not to, given the risk entailed. But Michhari Babu sent an offering through Amar to Sri Aurobindo. Amar took his right-hand man, Manmatha Biswas, who would draw less attention than Michhari Babu.

It was 31 March 1910.

All the actors in the drama of the day were ready to

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play their parts. What a responsibility! They were going to be plunged into a whirlpool of danger and be confronted with unforeseen situations. Would they prove equal to the task?

As I speak to you, dear Reader, over eighty years have rolled by. Fog has obliterated many details. I shall try to call back out of the mists of the past those scenes which were brisk enough in the acting. But alas! they may read like flights of fancy in the pages of the worthy men¹ who set themselves to record them ... thirty or forty years after the event. They had grown old, their memories had dimmed. A considerable amount of chaff got mixed up with the wheat. But a little winnowing may provide us with a reasonable amount of grains in all that chaff, who knows!

At dawn Sri Aurobindo began the reverse, downriver sailing from Chandernagore to Calcutta. Amar and Manmatha were at their appointed place, and took up Sejda in their own boat. The two men from Chandernagore went back. From Agar-para Amar's boat sailed down the Ganga to the designated ghat from where Nagen and Suren were to pick up Sri Aurobindo. But where was the boat from Calcutta? Nagen had miscalculated. Amar went up to Chandpal Ghat, where the Colombo-bound ship was berthed, hoping to find Nagen waiting there with the tickets. But again, no Nagen! Amar, not having the ghost of a notion of Nagen's whereabouts, disembarked. The three

1. Nagendra Kumar Guharoy's Farewell to God (Devata-Biday), Arnaren-dranath Chattopadhyay's letter to Nagen in the same book , and Sukumar Mitra's Aurobindo Acroyd Ghose, an eight-part article in Masik Basumati

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procured a closed carriage, put Sri Aurobindo inside, and directed the coachman to Harrison Road, where he stopped the carriage. He then sent Manmatha to Sukumar at nearby College Square. What a tense ride that was for Amar and Manmatha through the streets of Calcutta! But he for whom their worry remained serene, "as though in samadhi," as Amar put it.

Nagen, in the meantime, having missed the rendezvous with Amar, returned to consult with Sukumar. The latter told him to go back to the ship and retrieve the two trunks he (Nagen) had put in the ship's cabin that morning. While the porter was removing the trunks from the ship, Nagen learnt that the medical examination, compulsory for all passengers, had already been done and the doctor had gone home. The Captain told Nagen that if the passengers went to the doctor's house he might still give them the health certificates, and they could board the ship even as late as 10:30P.M. The porter assured Nagen that he knew the doctor's house. Nagen went back to his hostel, left the trunks there and hurried to Sukumar's. Before he could explain his share of the doings, Sukumar cut in saying that Amar had already informed him of the situation. But when Nagen explained his arrangement for getting the health certificates from the doctor, Sukumar was happy, went inside and brought out some money. He told Nagen to return to Chandpal Ghat, for Amar was waiting there with Sejda, Bejoy and Manmatha. Upon his return, a relieved Nagen found his porter waiting near a closed carriage, and inside were the three men. The middle-aged porter told the twenty-year-old Babu to hurry up. "I have already spoken of

you to the doctor, but if you delay longer he won't be available, as he will retire to bed."

They went to the Doctor's, a European, who lived in Chowringhee. It was then about 9:30. They waited for half an hour in the verandah. Nagen then handed over the two second-class tickets to Sejda and Bejoy, as well as the doctor's fees. He also told Sejda that it had been given out that he was a malaria patient, wishful of taking a cruise for the sake of his health. He also told Sejda and Bejoy their respective names as chosen by Sukumar. Obviously Sri Aurobindo could not travel under his own name!

Nagen narrates an incident that occurred while they were waiting. The porter saw the three of them talking among themselves; but seeing Sri Aurobindo who had relapsed into meditative silence, thought that the Babu, having never met any Europeans, was full of fear. When he whispered his thought to Nagen, the latter replied, "No, no, why should he be afraid? He is like

that because he is suffering from malaria fever." The man did not feel reassured. He quickly went to Sri Aurobindo, and said slowly, "Don't be afraid, Babu. Saheb is a very good man. There is nothing to fear." Then abruptly he caught hold of Sri Aurobindo's arms in his firm grasp and shook him. All, including Sri Aurobindo, smiled at the man's concern.

Presently the two passengers were called in to the doctor's chamber. Within fifteen minutes they came out with the required certificates. Naturally the European doctor had not forgotten to charge double as late-fee! But he was also

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struck with the English spoken by Sri Aurobindo —sorry, Jatin dranath Mitra, as was his assumed name for that journey. Bejoy's was Bankim Chandra Bhowmik.

What was Sri Aurobindo's own impression about those interminable rides through the streets of Calcutta? "I had to apply for a passport under a false name," Sri Aurobindo said one day on 18 December 1938. "The District Commissioner required a medical certificate by an English doctor. After a great deal of trouble I found one and went to his house. He told me that I was speaking English remarkably well. I replied that I had been to England."

A shocked Nirod asked, "How could you agree to take a false name for the certificate?"

Sri Aurobindo retorted, "If I had given my real name I would have been at once arrested. With due respect to Gandhi's Truth, I could not be so very precise here. You can't be a revolutionary otherwise."

The night was creeping on, and it was well nigh eleven when they returned to board the ship. The porter went up the gangplank with the luggage on his head, the others followed. In the reserved cabin, Bejoy busied himself making the beds. Amar offered the wad of banknotes from Michhari Babu to Sri Aurobindo; then bowing his head over his folded hands, he made his namaskar, and bade him farewell. Nagen, in his turn, put his forehead on Sri Aurobindo's feet. Amar, Nagen and Manmatha went down with a heavy heart from the ship, and returned to Calcutta and Uttarpara respectively.

The next morning, 1st April, as the black shaded

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imperceptibly into grey, S.S. *Dupleix*, the French liner of the Messageries Maritimes, began to move away from the dock. Then steamed out of Calcutta harbour. Then was out in the Bay of Bengal.

The 'most dangerous man,' the prize Catch eluded the net cast wide for him by the mighty British empire.

On 1st April 1910, the British Government was made an April Fool I

Whose whimsical humour weaves such time nets? On 4 April S.S. *Dupleix* reached Pondicherry harbour. There she dropped her anchor.

That is how Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry.

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Sister Nivedita

"I hear, Mr. Ghose, you are a worshipper of Shakti." That is how Sister Nivedita greeted Sri Aurobindo when they first met at Baroda in 1902. '

Nivedita has flitted in and out of our narrative; a longer look at her will enrich us.

Sister Nivedita. Daughter-disciple of Swami Viveka-nanda. That is how she came to India on 28 January 1898.

Miss Margaret Noble was born in North Ireland on 28 October 1867. Her parents were Reverend Samuel Richmond Noble and Mary Isabelle Hamilton. Samuel's father, John Noble, was by profession a Protestant priest. But he was a rebel at heart. He rebelled against the subjugation of his motherland by the British. His heart was torn to shreds at the inhuman torture inflicted upon his countrymen, not to speak of the indignities heaped on his people by the foreign rulers. With the fire of rebellion he travelled from town to town, from village to village, and set alight the heart of his countrymen with revolt. Samuel and Mary continued with his unfinished work under the leadership of Parnell. Margot was brought up by her grandmother

Noble. In this way little Margot's nature was moulded by her family of revolutionaries. She had a fantastic retentive memory; and was naturally a brilliant student. But, as her father died quite young, she shouldered the responsibility of her family, that is to say, her mother, her younger sister and brother. So she took up a job as a teacher in a school at Keswick. That was her first job in educational lines. She had decided to make education her life's work. Then, when at Texton, she heard of a new method of education of children developed by J. H. Pestalozzi (1746-1827), the Swiss educational reformer, and F. W. A. Froebel (1782-1852), the German educator and the originator of kindergarten. She went to Liverpool to learn this method from a disciple of Froebel. Then she was offered a job at a children's school and with great love and care began to form children.

Finally Margaret settled in London. Here she met the exiled Prince Peter Alekseyevich Kropotkin (1842-1921), author and revolutionist. She also joined a revolutionary society named 'Free Ireland.'

Just when her name had become well known to educationists, scientists and writers—the cream of London's intellectuals—the root of her life was shaken by the advent of Swami Vivekananda. It was six days to go before her twenty-eighth birthday. October 22, 1895 would be written in her heart with golden letters. That was the first time she saw and heard Swamiji.

It was not to be the last. Though shaken to the core, this sharp intelligence would not accept the utterances of the Indian Sannyasin unquestioningly. She once told him frankly,

"My nature is not such as to understand or accept as truth all that you say." Vivekananda's mind had been very agnostic, and it had taken him years before he accepted Ramakrishna. So he replied happily, "I never ask anyone to accept any words without testing."

But he had seen the leaping flames in her heart. Wrote Vivekananda to M. Noble on 7 June 1896. "My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.... One idea that I see clear as daylight is that misery is caused by ignorance and nothing else...."

"I am sure, you have the making in you of a world-mover, and others will also come. Bold words and bolder deeds are what we want. Awake, awake, great one! The world is burning with misery. Can you sleep? Let us call and call till the sleeping gods awake, till the god within answers to the call. What more is in life? What greater work? The details come to me as I go. I never make plans. Plans grow and work themselves. I only say, awake, awake!"

"May all blessings attend you for ever I"

Margaret Noble arrived in India on 28 January 1898. On 11 March she made her first public address in Calcutta. The venue was Star Theatre. It was a full house. Vivekananda presided. He introduced her to the audience with the words, "Nivedita is the fairest flower of my work in England."

On 16 March 1898 her Guru gave her the mantra.¹ As he

1. *Atmano mokshārtham jagad-dhitāya cha*, i.e., "Free the Self and serve the world."

breathed it at her ear, he breathed into her a new life, a dedicated life: 'Nivedita'.

After Swami Vivekananda left his mortal frame on 4 July 1902, she began to tour India, to come into contact with people and spread the revolutionary message of Swamiji. She had come to India with the idea of doing Yoga. She did too. As Sri Aurobindo affirmed, "She found no difficulty in arriving at realisation on the lines of Vedanta." She took up politics as a part of Vivekananda's work. "Her book¹ is one of the best on Vivekananda," remarked Sri Aurobindo. "Vivekananda himself had ideas about political work and had spells of revolutionary fervour. Once he had a vision which corresponded to something like the Maniktola Gardens. It is curious that many Sannyasins at that time had thought of India's freedom. Maharshi's young disciples were revolutionaries. Thakur Dayananda was a revolutionary, I think."

During one of her addresses on her tour she said, "Swamiji is verily our great national hero." She asked, "What was the idea that caught Vivekananda?" Answering her own question she said, "He saw before him a great Indian nationality, young, vigorous, fully the equal of any nationality on the face of the earth."

When, at Sri Aurobindo's request, she took up the editing of the *Karmayogin*,

1. *The Master as I Saw Him*.

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"I believe that India is one, indissoluble, indivisible.

"National unity is built on the common home, the common interest, and common love.

"I believe that the strength which spoke in the Vedas and Upanishads, in the making of religions and empires, in the learning of scholars, and the meditation of the saints, is born once more amongst us, and its name to-day is Nationality.

"I believe that the present of India is deep rooted in her past, and that before her shines a glorious future.

"O Nationality! Come thou to me as joy or sorrow, as honour or as shame! Make me thine own!"

(Signed:) N.

It was in September 1902 that Nivedita began her whirlwind tour of the North. She went to Nagpur during Durga Puja. There she met Bal Gangadhar Tilak. She knew already that Tilak was an intense admirer of Swami Vivekananda, who had spent a few days with the former when he was on his India pilgrimage.

From there she went to Baroda: Sri Aurobindo and Khaserao were delegated by the Maharaja to receive the State guest. "I do not remember whether she was invited," Sri Aurobindo wrote in a note, "but I think she was there as a State guest. Khaserao and myself went to receive her at the station and to take her to the house assigned to her." While at Baroda she gave some lectures.

"I do not remember Nivedita speaking to me on spiritual

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subjects or about Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. We spoke of politics and other subjects. On the way from the station to the town she cried out against the ugliness of the College building and its top-heavy dome—"What an ugly pile!" quotes Barin — "and praised the Dharamshala [a shelter for pilgrims] near it. Khaserao stared at her and opined that she must be at least slightly cracked to have such ideas!"

Sri Aurobindo was more forthcoming in his talks. "She had an artistic side too," he said amplifying. "Khaserao Jadhav and I went to receive her at the station. Seeing the Dharamshala near the station she exclaimed, 'How beautiful!' While looking at the College building she cried, 'How horrible!' Khaserao said later, 'She must be a little mad.'" But Sri Aurobindo, agreeing with her, said, "At any rate it is the ugliest dome possible."

Indeed, Nivedita took an active interest in Indian art. Already, in New York in June 1900, she had given a lecture on the art of ancient India, at the instance of Vivekananda. She it was who arranged for Nandalal Bose and Asit Kumar Haldar in December 1909 to accompany Mrs. Herringham to Ajanta. She was so happy, so happy and full of praise when she went there herself and saw the two Indian artists' work of copying the murals of Ajanta. These two boys were students of Abanindranath Tagore, whom she knew so well.

Artist Abanindranath Tagore and his students owe her a lot. Her critical articles in Indian magazines and periodicals contributed in a great measure to the understanding of Indian art by the then rather ignorant intellectuals.

She left an abiding impression on Nandalal Bose. "I have



Sister Nivedita

seen such spiritedness and radiance and purity on her face, not to be commonly seen, but once seen one can never again forget it." This many splendoured personality radiated beauty. "Oh,

how to make you understand what I saw!" Abanindranath said sadly. He described a party thrown by the Art Society which was full of glow and glitter. So many aristocratic European men and women had come, all of them fashionably dressed, all bejewelled. The party was in full swing when Nivedita entered. She was dressed in the "same white ankle-length robe, a necklace of *rudraksha*¹ round her neck, her silver-and-gold hair tied in a top-knot. When she came in it was as though the moon had risen among the stars. All the ladies present instantly lost their lustre."

Abanindranath had kept a photo of Nivedita on his table. When Lord Carmichael² saw the photo, struck by its beauty, he wanted to know whose it was. Hearing that it was Nivedita's, he said, "Oh, so this is Sister Nivedita? I want just such a photo." And he took it away with him. Then Abanindranath said, "Had you but seen the photo you would have known beauty at its highest excellence." She never dolled herself up, he said, and compared her to a mountain bathed in moonlight. "A talk with her fortified one's spirit."

Lord Carmichael seems to have been a congenial person.

1. Beads made with the dried seeds of an ornamental tree, called 'Bead tree' (*Elaeocarpus ganitrus*).
2. Lord Carmichael was the first Governor of Bengal (1912-16) after its eastern and western parts were reunited and made into a province but without Assam, Bihar and Orissa.

Sri Aurobindo, while denying that there was ever any ban on his re-entry into British India, said, "On the contrary, Lord Carmichael sent somebody [in 1915] to persuade me to return and settle somewhere in Darjeeling and discuss philosophy with him. I refused the offer."

Vivekananda had once taken Nivedita to Jorasanko to meet Maharshi Debendranath. She came to hear about his youngest son, Rabi. One day she went to meet him. The young poet too had heard about the disciple of Vivekananda. From the first meeting they were drawn to each other, both felt a profound respect for each other. From then on Nivedita became a frequent visitor to that cultural centre. What enhanced the character of the young Rabi to the eyes of Sister Nivedita was that when Tilak was arrested by the Government on a charge of sedition, Rabindranath raised money to help finance his defence. Also at a mammoth protest meeting held in the town hall he read out an essay on 'gagging.'

As Nivedita wrote in a letter of 7 April 1910, after the *Karmayogin* had been stopped by the Government, "They want to leave no adverse voice. A paper must be broken up if it shows the slightest independence. Evidently the Govt, is thirsting for the day when the propaganda of assassination shall be the *only* method of service for men who desire to give their lives to their country."

Baron Okakura had come to India with Vivekananda. He was a Japanese artist and art critic, besides being a revolutionary who dreamed of One Asia, a dream he set forth in his book *Ideals of the East*. So between Okakura and Nivedita and

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Sarala Ghosal and the Tagores, Jorasanko became a lively centre for revolutionary activity; just as it had become a cultural centre with Havel, Justice Woodroffe, Okakura, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Nivedita and Abanindranath.

Every facet of Indian life interested Nivedita. And she gave herself unstintedly to propagate Indian art, Indian culture, Indian science. She "had the eye of sympathy and intuition and a close appreciative self-identification," is how Sri Aurobindo described it. She it was who stood by Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose when he was all alone, encouraged him when he was depressed, and even helped him in the setting up of his laboratory and the preparation of manuscripts of his scientific works, such as *Plant Response*. Nivedita herself was a botanist. Sweet was her relationship with J. C. and his wife Lady Abala.

"I was very much enamoured at the time of her book *Kali the Mother*," Sri Aurobindo wrote in a note, "and I think we spoke of that; she had heard, she said, that I was a worshipper of Force,— 'believed in strength and was a worshipper of Kali' — by which she meant that I belonged to the secret revolutionary party like herself, and I was present at her interview with the Maharaja whom she invited to support the secret revolution; she told him that he could communicate with her through me. Sayajirao was much too cunning to plunge into such a dangerous business and never spoke to me about it."

For her part, Nivedita found a kindred spirit in Sri Aurobindo. "In Aurobindo," she wrote in her diary, "I at once discovered a great spiritual personality. Here is a dormant volcano in the sultry desert of the Guzerat which is destined to erupt soon."

Was she not just 'some sort of revolutionary'? "What do you mean by 'some sort'?" Sri Aurobindo retorted. "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 of her revolutionary plans to everybody. There was no concealment about her. Whenever she used to speak on revolution, it was her very soul that spoke, 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 I

Gandhi once criticized Nivedita, reported Nirod, as being volatile and mercurial; there was violent protest and he had to recant. "Nivedita volatile? what nonsense I

When a disciple asked "How much is India indebted to Sister Nivedita?" "Indebted?" replied Sri Aurobindo. "There can be no measure of our indebtedness to Nivedita."

Sri Aurobindo would, once in a while, drop in to see her at her Bagbazar Road house-cum-school: N°17 Bose Para Lane. It was in a narrow lane. He like others had seen her eyes. "Her eyes showed a power of concentration and revealed a capacity for going into a trance." But although they don't seem to have spoken of spiritual matters, yet "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."

But the Ramakrishna Mission got afraid of her revolutionary activities and asked her to keep them separate from the

Mission's work. She refused. In January 1903 the Mission's authorities, headed by Swami Brahmananda, made her write an open letter which was published the next day in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, and in *The Statesman* whose editor Ratcliffe was a friend of hers; in the letter she said that she was cutting off her relations with the Mission of her own free will.

The Mission made the error of keeping too much to the forms of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. The authorities did not keep themselves open for new outpourings of their spirit, thus making the

error of all organized religious bodies, all 'Churches.' Yet was Vivekananda fiercely progressive. Yet was Sri Ramakrishna an Avatar for them.

Thus the Instrument which Swami Vivekananda had forged so meticulously over the years — from 1895 to 1902—was rejected by the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission which too was Vivekananda's handiwork. They disowned Nivedita.

Ma Sarada Devi, on the contrary, never ceased to pour her maternal love on the 'child'—her pet name for Nivedita was 'Khuki.'

India took this daughter in her arms and in her heart.

The awakened Spirit of India was then pouring itself out in myriad streams. The beautiful daughter, who had seen the beauty of India's soul, poured her own energies into these streams.

She was "for many years a friend and a comrade" of the revolutionary Sri Aurobindo.

Nivedita was the living link between Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo.

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Sri Aurobindo went away at the call of a greater work. She was now alone.

The work she was given by her Guru was done.

The Boses took an ailing Nivedita to their house in Darjeeling.

On 13 October 1911, a few days away from her forty-fourth birthday, she took a last breath of India's air.

An eventful, tumultuous life found its rest in the Eternal. ... For a time.

A live Volcano is never extinguished.

We may see it erupt once again.

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Swami Vivekananda

Vivekananda was born on: 12 January 1863.

Nivedita was born on: 28 October 1867.

Sri Aurobindo was born on: 15 August 1872.

Does something strike you? Now, if we look closely at these dates we find that:

a) Vivekananda is older than Nivedita by 4 years 290 days,

b) Sri Aurobindo is younger than her by 4 years 291 days.

As though the three formed an equilateral triangle in Time.

We have seen two sides of the triangle; let's now take a brief look at the third.

Noren was born in Calcutta to Bishwanath Dutta and Bhubaneswari Devi. His grandfather, Durgacharan Dutta, left his home to become a sannyasin the very day his son Bishwanath was born. The young one grew up to become an attorney in Calcutta High Court. He earned a lot and spent all he earned; all sorts of relatives sponged on him, and his own generous nature could never say 'no' to anyone.

Bishwanath's wife was gifted. Any passing beggar but sang a song, and it was registered in the throat of Bhubaneswari

—words and melody were caught with precision in her sweet voice. Busy as an Indian housewife all day long, looking after the myriad needs of the relatives and guests who were constantly dropping in, in the evening this lady would tell the women of the house who sat crowding round her, stories from the Rama-yana and the Mahabharata, and recite from memory long passages from them. All the same, she was sad in her heart, for she was childless. Then an aunt-in-law living in Benares called her there. At Benares, with great devotion, she poured Ganga water everyday on the head of Vireshwar Shiva. One day she saw in a dream-vision Mahadev. He blessed her and then changed himself into a small boy. She took the child in her arms.

It was the day of Ganga-puja — Makarsankranti — and group after group of people were on their way to Ganga for a holy dip. Six minutes before sunrise, her child was born. He was named Narendranath Dutta. His mother called him 'Bilay.'

But, my gosh, what a child I A handful if ever there was one. If he wanted something, he wanted it. There was no gainsaying him. Nor could he be distracted. Neither caresses nor scoldings did ever stop his lusty crying. One day his adoring mother lost her patience and exclaimed, "Oh, why, why instead of coming himself, has Shiva sent one of his *bhuts* [attendants] ?" But soon she discovered a remedy: whenever Bilay became uncontrollable, she would pour water over his head and say "Shiy-Shiy," and instantly the child would become calm.

From his childhood Noren proved himself to be a born leader. The older he grew the more pronounced became this trait. From school to college —from the Metropolitan Institute



Swami Vivekananda

to the Presidency College —the student community could not do without him. Games? He was one of the best players, if not the best. Scuffles? Who could put more force in his punches? School debates? Who could defeat the logic of that razor-sharp intelligence? Drama? Who could recite in such a well-modulated voice? It was Noren-Noren-Noren all the way. You give him any musical instrument and he knows how to play it. And, could he sing! Ah, what a voice! His voice itself was a combination of all the musical instruments.

Noren was an agnostic. And like many of his contemporaries, he was attracted by Brahmoism.

But behind all of life's activities, a question was rising in him. The great question that India has asked herself from the dawn of her civilization, the very question the earliest of our Forefathers asked: O Golden Purusha, where are You? Who are You?

Why did the question arise in the young man? Who can say?

Who could answer his question?

He had but to see a sadhu or a sannyasin, and he would rush to him with his question. "Have you seen God?" He rushed to Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, "Have you seen God?" The Maharshi did not give him a plain answer. Nobody, really, ever gave him a plain answer. But it is a law of Nature that when a question burns within, a response is bound to come.

A neighbour of the Duttas, Surendranath Mitra, was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. One day, the Guru came to the house of his disciple. Knowing how much 'Thakur' loved to hear

songs, Mitra went to get a good singer. Who better than Noren? But Noren, by then, was disgusted with these sadhus and sannyasis. He did not care to sing to one of them. But Mitra would not give up, so to please his neighbour Noren went with him to sing to Thakur. He sang, but thought that Thakur was half-lunatic. That is how the first meeting came about between Thakur Sri Ramakrishna and Noren.

One day, early in their acquaintance, Noren put his burning question to Thakur, "Have you seen God?" without really expecting an answer, for he had put it to so many and knew their stock reply. But this man, who had seemed half-mad to him, stunned him. "Oh, exactly as I see you in front of me, I have seen him.... One can speak with Him...." So said Sri Ramakrishna.

The 'half-mad' Thakur not only could himself see God, he could also make others see Him—or rather Her, for She was Kali. Kali as Bhavatarini, the Deliverer of the world.

When Noren's father died the relatives who had so long merrily sponged on him, now began to appropriate his lands that lawfully belonged to Bishwanath's immediate family. That did not satisfy their greed, they now wanted to turn the widow and her children out of her own house. Noren did what he could to shoulder the burden of his family, that is his widowed mother, brothers and sisters. After a great deal of searching he found a job at the office of an attorney and another one at a book publisher's. But his tireless effort did not bring in enough to feed all of them and pay the fees for the court-case. As it was, he was trying to make both ends meet

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with the help of his mother. Where before the monthly expenditure of the family was one thousand rupees a month, they were making do with thirty rupees a month. But even those thirty rupees were hard to obtain.

On the other hand his soul was urging him to take up another kind of life. One day he decided to put his dilemma to his Guru. "I shall no longer worry about family affairs, Thakur," Noren told Ramakrishna. "Please ask the Mother to make some arrangement."

"Oh, but I can't talk to Her of such matters. Why don't you tell the Mother yourself? All your trouble stems from the fact that you don't believe in Her. Go to the Kali temple, whatever you ask Her today She will give you. Go to Her."

That night Noren sat in deep meditation in front of Mother Bhavatarini. The image made of earth became full of consciousness. She was alive I A flood of love and devotion washed the heart of the young man. He bowed again and again to the Mother. "Mother, give me consciousness, give me renunciation, Knowledge, devotion, give, make me such that I may see You always freely."

A dazed Noren told Thakur what had transpired. A second time then a third time the same thing happened. Noren was unable to ask the Mother to look after the need of his family. Finally Ramakrishna himself had to give Noren the assurance that his family would never lack any basic necessities of life.

Thus reassured, Noren was now free from family responsibilities. He committed himself totally to the path of Yoga. The Yoga of Sri Ramakrishna.

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After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna in 1886 and before leaving for America in 1893, Noren had become a wandering ascetic. With a staff in hand he had set out on a long peregrination of India. From the East to the West, from the Himalayas to Cape Comorian, he came to know India. He already knew India as she was in her inner reality: the richness of her spirituality, the Path of Light she had built.

"This is the ancient land," said Swami Vivekananda in one of his Madras lectures, "where wisdom made its home before it went into any other country, the same India whose influx of spirituality is represented, as it were, on the material plane by rolling rivers like oceans, where the eternal Himalayas, rising tier after tier, with their snowcaps, look as it were into the very mysteries of heaven. Here is the same India whose soil has been trodden by the feet of the greatest sages that ever lived.... 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." Sri Aurobindo added that "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 of mankind and assure it of immortality."

It was Vivekananda's intense patriotic feelings which inspired Sister Nivedita. He adored Mother India. This country was not an inert piece of matter. He had seen in the poor of

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this land the richness of spirit, he had seen in the despised of the earth the milk of kindness.

His circumambulation had stirred Noren to the core. He had seen to what an abject state of weakness his countrymen had been reduced by a century of British rule. Obscurity, ignorance, inaction, loss of self-confidence, loss of self-respect, love of slavery, pettiness, indolence ... India had plunged into an inert sleep of *tamas*. Above all, in this land of plenty, the son of the soil was

a walking skeleton. India's sons were fallen, abject, cringing to a foreign hand. To quote Sri Aurobindo, "A people emasculated, kept ignorant, out of the world's life, poor, intimidated, abjectly under the thumb of the police constable or the provincial prefect.... The nation which has passed through a century of such a misgovernment must necessarily have degenerated. The bureaucracy has taken care to destroy every centre of strength not subservient to itself. A nation politically disorganised, a nation morally corrupted, intellectually pauperised, physically broken and stunted is the result of a hundred years of British rule."

Swami Vivekananda was a walking volcano. He spewed fire wherever he went. The sparks from his Fire set alight other fires. India began to stir in her sleep of the ages. He recalled Indians to their source. For he had seen a people who had forgotten their wealth, a people who had begun to ridicule their own past of which, unfortunately, they knew practically nothing. The divorce from the past was well-nigh complete. He said to the self-repudiating Indians, "Look back, therefore, as far as you can, drink deep of the eternal foundations that are behind, and after

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that, look forward, march forward and make India brighter, greater, much higher than she ever was." He reminded the amnesiac that "our vigour, our strength, nay, our national life, is in our religion." Dharma, he said, "is India's national mind, its national life-current. Follow it and it leads to glory. Give it up and you die."

Vivekananda in his lifetime was the most powerful exponent of a freer dealing with past and present—respecting the forms of the ancient culture yet not hesitating to remould and reject the outworn.

India needed to dip in the Fountain of Strength. "This Self," says the Upanishad, "cannot be won by any who is without strength." Gather strength, gather strength, went out Swami Vivekananda's call. "Nothing worthwhile can be achieved by the weak." Said the Fearless One, "Shed fear." Vivekananda preached that India must seek freedom by the aid of Shakti, the Mother of Strength. "Oh India, wouldst thou, with these provisions only, scale the highest pinnacle of civilisation and greatness? wouldst thou attain, by means of the disgraceful cowardice, that freedom deserved only by the brave and heroic Oh thou Mother of strength, take away my weakness, take away my unmanliness, and make me a man!"

Vivekananda's lectures, along with the Gita and Anandamath, later became the handbooks of the Nationalists. And they did shed fear. The patriots received British bullets on their chests with 'Bande Mataram' on their lips, their last words on the gallows were 'Bande Mataram,' and a smile for the executioners. The Nationalists had become Men.

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It was not for nothing that in 1918, the Rowlatt Committee lay the blame for the birth of Nationalism at Vivekananda's door. "His preachings gave rise to Nationalism with a religious tendency."

More appropriate would be these two lines from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*.

"A demigod shaping the lives of men;
"One soul's ambition lifted up the race"

The standing ovation accorded to Swamiji by the audience at the Parliament of Religions, on 11 September 1893, when he began his address by 'Brothers and Sisters of America,' was in reality a salute to Mother India, for he spoke in her name. Among the many accounts of the impact the 'warrior-monk' made on his audience, we give but one. "The handsome monk in the orange robe," wrote Miss Monroe, "gave us, in perfect English, a masterpiece. His personality, dominant, magnetic; his voice rich as a bronze bell; the controlled fervour of his feeling; the beauty of his message to the Western world he was facing for the first time —these combined to give us a rare and perfect moment of supreme emotion."

The visit of Swami Vivekananda to America and the work of those who followed him did more for India than a hundred London Congress sessions could have effected. He showed the nations that Indians were a people with a great past and ancient civilisation who still possess something of the genius and character of their forefathers, have still something to give the world and therefore deserve freedom. "That is the

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true way of awaking sympathy ... by proof of our manliness and fitness, not by mendicancy," said Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo was also certain that "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 to conquer."

Without a shadow of doubt Vivekananda was Sri Ramakrishna's strongest disciple. Sri Aurobindo mentions in a letter "the powerful and vivid vision in which Ramakrishna went up into higher planes and saw the mystic truth behind the birth of Vivekananda." The Master used to say about his Noren that he was a portion of Shiva — *Ishwara Koti*—and that he was of the eternally liberated souls — *Nitya mukti*—who can go up and down the ladder of existence. "And what was Vivekananda ?" asked Sri Aurobindo and answered: "A radiant glance from the eye of Shiva ..."

The lion-heart of Vivekananda sought to shake the world. Yet ... "Vivekananda was a soul of puissance if ever there was one," said Sri Aurobindo talking of leaven, a power of unformed stir and ferment out of which forms must result, great souls and great influences who live on in the soul of India, "a very lion among men, but the definite work he has left behind is quite incommensurate with our impression of his creative might and energy. 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, up heaving that has entered the soul of India and we

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say, 'Behold, Vivekananda still lives in the soul of his Mother and in the souls of her children.'" Sri Aurobindo concluded with the remark: "So it is with all. Not only are the men greater than their definite works, but their influence is so wide and formless that it has little relation to any formal work that they have left behind them."

After his pilgrimage to Amarnath (Kashmir) in August 1898, where he saw the Presence of Lord Shiva, followed by the vision of the Divine Mother at Kshir Bhavani, his bonds began to break.

In January 1899 the work of Belur Math was completed.

In June he left for Europe and America for the second time. In 1900, April 18, he wrote a letter from California to Miss Josephine MacLeod. "After all, Joe, I am only a boy who used to listen with rapt wonderment to the wonderful words of Ramakrishna under the banyan at

Dakshineswar. That is my true nature, doing good and so forth are all superimpositions. Now I again hear the voice; the same old voice thrilling my soul...."

In 1902 he made a last pilgrimage to Benares.

On 4 July 1902 Swami Vivekananda's soul was set free. From earth he slipped into the white Ray.

He was thirty-nine years old.

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Sri Ramakrishna

Once upon a time, there lived a Brahmin. Like his tribe elsewhere, he too was poor. Also, like most of his tribe, he was upright. He earned his living by officiating as a priest in several villages whenever the occasion arose —puja, thread-ceremony, deaths and marriages. He lived a contented life in his village Dere. But human contentment depends on so many things. Specially if one is poor. The local zamindar wanted our upright Brahmin to testify falsely in a case. The Brahmin refused.

Thus it was that Khudiram Chattopadhyay left his village Dere to go and settle at Kamarpukur, about seven kilometres away from Dere, and some twenty kilometres south of Burdwan. Both these villages are in the Hooghly District of Bengal. Khudiram got a small mud house with thatched roof, a small plot of land on which stood a few fruit-bearing trees, and a little garden to grow flowers and vegetables.

Khudiram's wife Chandromani was very simple and very kind-hearted. She was already mother of two sons and a daughter —Ram Kumar, Rameshwaram and Katyayani. A poor but contented family.

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One day Khudiram was returning home from another village. He felt quite tired and sat down under the shade of a tree. Then gradually he fell asleep. And he had a dream. His family deity Raghunathji had come and was standing near him pointing to a place and saying, "Oh, take me

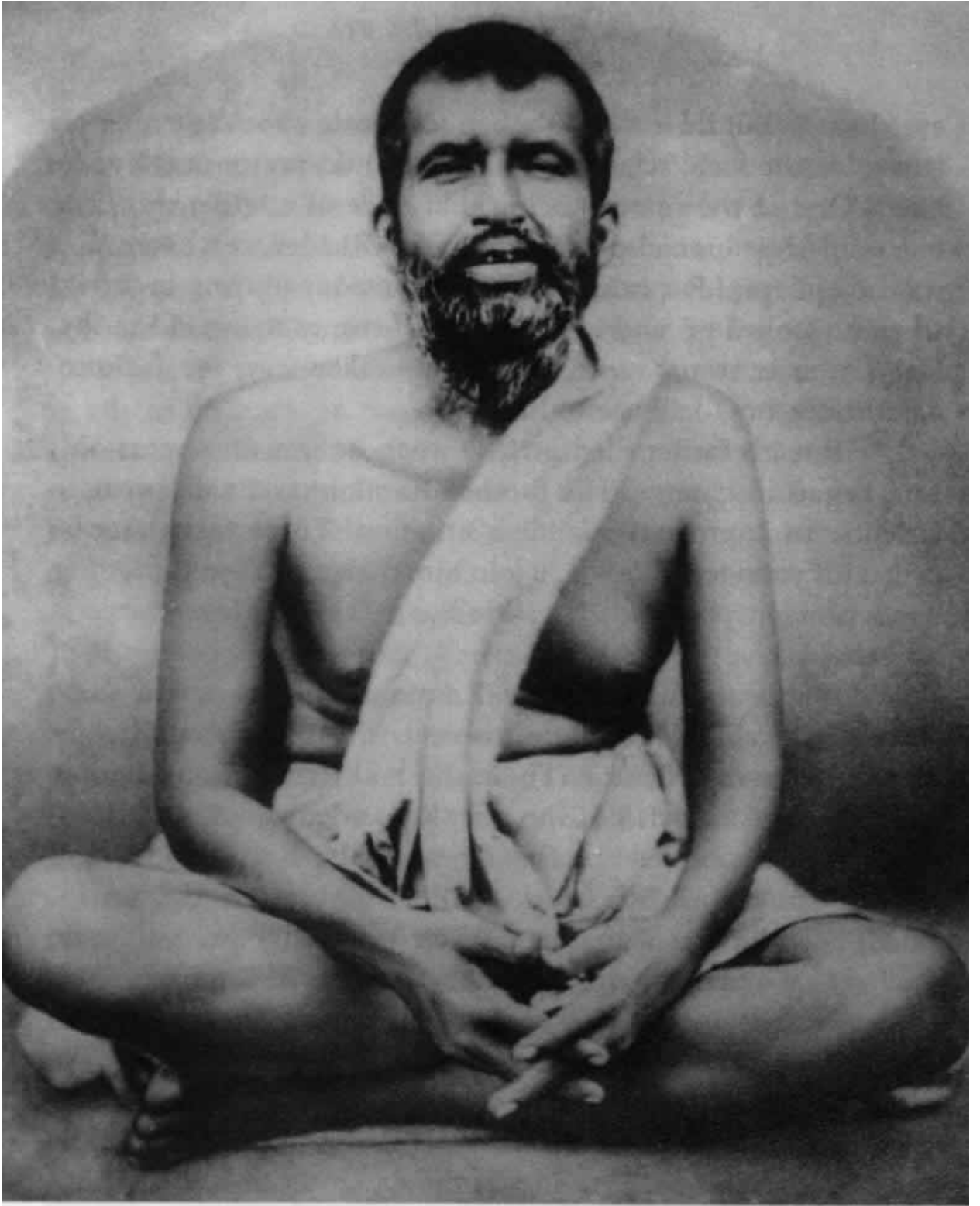
from there. Take me home and care for me." Startled, Khudiram awoke. He looked around, but no, there was nobody there. He went, however, to the place pointed out by Raghunathji, and was rendered speechless. There was indeed a *Shalagram shila*¹ half-buried in the earth, and a serpent was shading it with its hood. Both husband and wife installed the Shalagram and worshipped it regularly with great devotion. The fruit of their devotion was not long in coming. Khudiram had gone to Gaya on a pilgrimage. Again he had a dream. Lord Gadadhar² was seated on a jewelled throne, in his radiant form. Looking at Khudiram, He said smilingly, "I shall descend in your house as your son." And, Chandromani, in her village, had exactly the same dream at the same time.

Gadadhar was born on 18 February 1836.³ He was very sweet, this child, and became a pet of the whole village. He had a sweet voice and could sing any song he

1. *Shālagram shilā* is a black geode worshipped as the symbol of Vishnu.

2. *Gadadhar*: holder of the mace, another name of Vishnu.

3. This date is according to the officially adopted horoscope, prepared by Narayan Jyotirbhusan. Other astrologers differ in the date of birth (20 February says one), even the year. But all seem to agree that it was a Wednesday), and Shukla Dwitiya (the 2nd day of the waxing moon) in the month of Phalgun.



Sri Ramakrishna

ever heard. But he was less than enthusiastic about learning his lessons at the local school. He was left to do pretty much as he liked. One of the reasons being that once in a while this little boy would lose his consciousness. No-no, Reader, rest assured, it was no epilepsy! For example,

he was one day playing in a field when he looked up and saw a wedge of cranes flying in the sky. He lost his outward sense, for he was taken into the Infinite. That indeed made sense to him.

But his father died in 1845 when he was nine years old. Life began to change. His brother Ram Kumar finally went to Calcutta to improve the family's situation. Three years later he called his youngest brother to join him there. By then Gadadhar was seventeen years old. He served as a family priest to several households.

In the meantime, Rani Rasmoni had purchased some land in a locality called Dakshineswar which was around eight kilometres from Calcutta. There she built temples and temple gardens. On 31 May 1855, the temple was dedicated, and Ram Kumar was appointed the first priest of the Kali temple. Kali here is known as Bhavatarini—the Deliverer of the world. Gadadhar also was a frequent visitor, and after some time he too became a priest at the Bhavatarini temple of Rani Rasmoni.

Next year, in 1856, his eldest brother passed away.

The same year Gadadhar had his first vision of the Mother.

In 1859, when he was around twenty-three years old, he married a girl of six. Sarada was the daughter of Ramchandra Mukhopadhyay of Jayrambati, a village six kilometres away from Kamarpukur.

After the marriage Gadadhar returned to Dakshineswar. From this time onward his 'state' changed. While worshipping the image of Mother Kali, he began to see Her divine forms. People thought he had gone mad. Complaints began to reach Mathuranath, the son-in-law of Rani Rasmoni, who in effect ran her estate. He came to see for himself. Seeing was understanding. He realized that this young Brahmin was not mad, not at all, at least not in the ordinary sense. The young man was under the spell of an ecstasy. So Mathur made arrangements to continue with the ritualistic worship by engaging another priest. He also gave strict orders that Gadadhar was not to be disturbed in any way.

Gadadhar told the Mother, "Mother I shall listen to Thee only. I know neither shastras, nor do I recognize pandits. Thou makest me understand, then only shall I accept it." Such friendship

developed between this couple of Mother and son! It was the most intimate relationship there could ever be. Like a little child he always asked Mother Kali whether he should do something or not. For example, when the Vedantist Totapuri wanted to initiate him in Vedanta —"I'll give you *Nirvikalpa samadhi*,¹ will you take it?"—he replied, "I don't know what I should or should not do. Mother knows everything. If She gives Her permission, then only shall I do your bidding." The Vedantist could not control his laughter. What is this weakness to be tied to form I

1. A complete trance in which there is no thought or movement of consciousness or awareness of either inner or outer things.

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The Mother gave Gadadhar Her permission. That day, Totapuri gave initiation to Gadadhar, and made him a sannyasin. Gadadhar became Ramakrishna.

Totapuri was the greatest living Vedantist. He had practised intense sadhana on the banks of the Narmada for forty years before he achieved realisation. And what did this 'idol-worshipper' do? Within three days he had mastered all that the Vedantist could teach him, and had entered *Nirvikalpa samadhi*.

One by one Ramakrishna mastered all the different lines of Hindu spirituality: Tantrism, Vaishnavism, Buddhism, etc. His teacher of Tantrism was a Bhairavi, a Brahmin lady. Not only did Ramakrishna master the intricacies of various lines of Hindu spirituality, but he experienced also the essence of Islam and Christianity ... and found them dry and poor.

Ramakrishna summed up in his life the final message of Hinduism. "In the life of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, 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. Such an example cannot be generalised," Sri Aurobindo wrote in *The Synthesis of Yoga*.

It was when scepticism had reached its height that the time had come for spirituality to assert itself. "This is the work

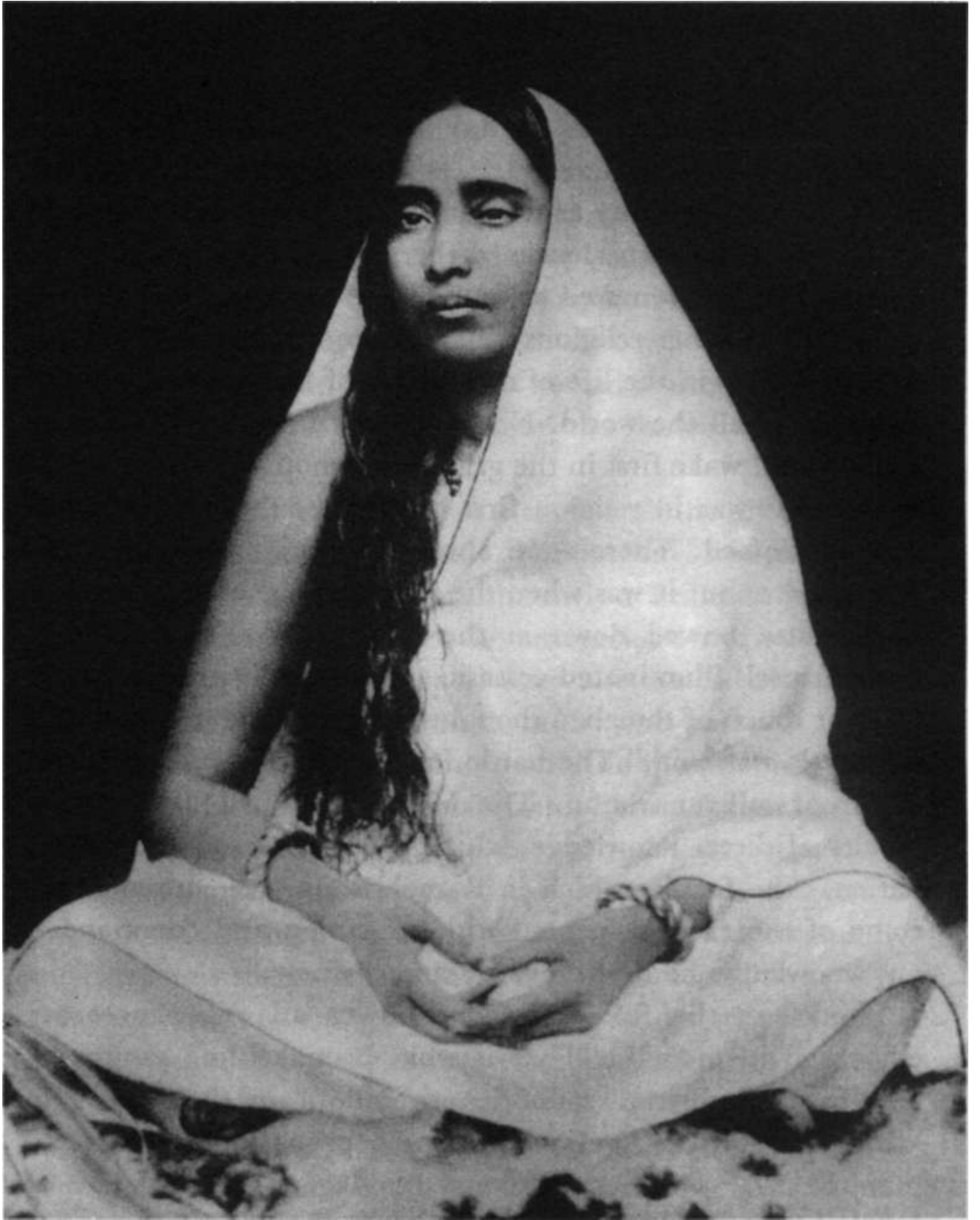
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whose consummation Sri Ramakrishna came to begin ... for while others felt God in a single or limited aspect, he felt Him in His illimitable unity as the sum of an illimitable variety. In him the spiritual experiences of the millions of saints who had gone before was renewed and united."

What other religions failed to do or achieve, Hinduism as summed up in the life of the Avatar of Dakshineswar has to attempt for all the world. Nor is it surprising that the soul of India would wake first in the grand workshop of spiritual experiment. "It was in religion first that the soul of India awoke and triumphed. There were always indications, always great forerunners, but it was when the flower of the educated youth of Calcutta bowed down at the feet of an illiterate Hindu ascetic, a self-illuminated ecstatic and 'mystic' without a single trace or touch of the alien thought or education upon him that the battle was won." The battle for our national elasticity and power of self-renovation. The Master-Soul had developed a faculty of direct knowledge, which is above reason and imagination, "the faculty which in Ramakrishna, the supreme outcome of the race, dispensed with education and commanded any knowledge he desired easily and divinely."

When the full knowledge dawns all experiences are embraced in oneself. "That is what Ramakrishna taught by His life and Sadhana," said Sri Aurobindo, "and therefore is He the Avatar of the Age, the One who prepares the future of humanity.... The destruction of bondage, the realisation of freedom, the trampling upon our fetters, that is the first need of the future. It was to give *mukti*

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Ma Sarada Devi

impose a new bondage. Therefore was Vivekananda His Apostle to the Gentiles, a man who in all things asserted freedom."

Sarada Devi had heard perturbing news of her husband. People said that he had gone mad! In 1872, the year Sri Aurobindo was born, she went to Dakshineswar accompanied by her father. It was a perilous journey for the young girl in her first womanhood.

From 1879-80 disciples started to come to Ramakrishna.

In April 1885, the first signs of throat cancer appeared.

On 16 August 1886, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa left the earthly body. But not the Earth.

It was in the *Karmayogin*

In a word, "A Power worked, but none knew whence it came."

Another had started his walk through Time. His walk outstripped the human stride. A radical change in the earth-consciousness was *his*



Mother before leaving Japan to return to India

They Meet

She who was to be his companion in this dangerous enterprise was on her way.

"I began my Yoga in 1904 without a Guru," wrote Sri Aurobindo ; "in 1908 I received important help from a Mahratta Yogi and discovered the foundations of my Sadhana;" then, clearly he said, "but from that time till the Mother came to India I received no spiritual help from anyone else."

When they met, they helped each other in perfecting the Sadhana. To his realisations, which otherwise would have remained 'theoretical,' she showed the way to a practical form. For Mirra had brought with her all the accumulated knowledge of her own experiences, over and above all that she had learnt from Max Theon and Alma. She shared it all with Sri Aurobindo.

She also shared Sri Aurobindo's love for India, which she made her home for more than fifty years. On the day of Independence, 15 August 1947, standing on the terrace in front of her room Mother read to us her 'Invocation.'

"O our Mother, O Soul of India, Mother who hast never forsaken thy children even in the days of darkest depression, even when they turned away from thy voice, served other masters and denied thee, now when they have arisen and the light is on thy face in this dawn of thy liberation, in this great hour we salute thee. Guide us so that the horizon of freedom opening before us may be also a horizon of true greatness and of thy true life in the community of the nations. Guide us so that we may be always on the side of great ideals and show to men thy true visage, as a leader in the ways of the spirit and a friend and helper of all the peoples."

Like Sri Aurobindo — and Vivekananda before him — Mother too believed that India was destined to do a singular work for the human race: the spiritualization of the race.

But in 1947, Mirra was already the Mother. She had returned to Pondicherry on 24 April 1920 after a long stay in France and Japan. She had left Pondicherry on 22 February 1915, after spending almost a year in India.

On her eightieth birthday, 21 February 1968, Mother declared, "The reminiscences will be short." And short they were! "I came to India to meet Sri Aurobindo; I remained in India to live with Sri Aurobindo. When he left his body, I continued to live here in order to do his work which is by serving the Truth and enlightening humanity, to hasten the rule of the Divine's Love upon earth."

It had been a pretty long voyage. Since March 7 Mirra

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had not put her foot ashore, till the *Kaga Maru* reached Colombo. There, small boats were bobbing up and down to ferry the passengers to the shore. As she jumped from the ship's ladder to a waiting boat, Mirra missed a step, saved herself the best she could with a jerky movement. Now, Mirra happened to have a gold pencil given to her by her grandmother ; she considered it to be the most precious thing in the world and was greatly attached to it. She always wore it on a watch-chain round her neck. But her jerky movement made the gold pencil fall into the sea and sink right down to the bottom. She felt deeply troubled at first; but then it struck her that the mishap was no mishap perhaps: "Ah, the effect of India: I am being liberated from my attachments." After narrating this story, Mother added, "After all, avalanches of trouble are always for sincere people"!

From Colombo to Dhanushkodi where the Richards disembarked, on the eastern tip of the Rameswaram island, then a long train journey without a halt had brought the travellers to Pondicherry.

What could have been Mirra's thoughts during that train journey? Did they turn to the series of visions she had had all those years ago? They were still so fresh in her mind's eye! Oh, that Being of Light, with a golden-bronze hue, almost thin, a clear-cut profile, an unruly beard, long hair, dressed in a *dhoti* with one end thrown over his left shoulder. Bare-armed and bare-footed,

and bare was a part of his body. Would her visions prove to be premonitory? What lay at the end of her journey?

They met.

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It was on Sunday the 29th of March, 1914, at 3:30 in the afternoon, at N°41 rue Francois Martin.

"I came here.... But something in me wanted to meet Sri Aurobindo all alone the first time. Richard went to him in the morning and I had an appointment for the afternoon. He was living in the old Guest House. I climbed up the staircase and he was standing there, waiting for me at the top of the stairs.... EXACTLY my vision I Dressed the same way, in the same position, in profile, his head held high . He turned his head towards me . . . and I saw in his eyes that it was He."The recognition was mutual.

The recognition was mutual.

"The Mother's consciousness and mine are the same," Sri Aurobindo said simply, "the one Divine Consciousness in two, because that is necessary for the play."

He stated further, setting at rest any doubt anyone could have, "There is no difference between the Mother's path and mine; we have and have always had the same path, the path that leads to the supramental change and the divine realisation; not only at the end, but from the beginning they have been the same."

The next day, on 30 March 1914, Mirra wrote in her diary, *Prayers and Meditations*: "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 proof enough that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, when Thy reign shall effectively be established upon earth."

Their meeting was the turning point in the destiny of the earth.

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No, it is not their own salvation that they sought but a terrestrial realization. Their concern was the earth. "My Sadhana was not done for myself but for the earth-consciousness."

The fulfilment of evolution.

Concentrated into a brief period.

To bring down the Spirit Divine into Matter.

To raise up the Divine latent in Matter.

To join the Two.

The Life Divine upon Earth.

Here and now.

"It is now, in this life that I insist on it and not in another or in the hereafter."

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The stairs Mirra climbed to meet Sri Aurobindo



Mother's Chronicles

Book Five: Mirra Meets the Revolutionary

Chronology

1893, February 6 — Sri Aurobindo, returning from England, lands at Apollo Bunder, Bombay.

February 18 — Joins the Baroda State Service.

May 31 — Swami Vivekananda sails for America to attend the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in

September.

August 7 — Sri Aurobindo publishes in the *Induprakash* the first of nine articles entitled 'New Lamps for Old' in which he criticizes the leaders of the Indian National Congress and their 'mendicant' policy.

November 16 -Annie Besant comes to India.

1894, April 8 — Bankim Chandra Chatterji passes away. In July- August, Sri Aurobindo writes a series of articles on him in the *Induprakash*.

1897 - Sri Aurobindo begins to teach at the Baroda College, as a lecturer in French; teaches English also the

following year.

January 15 — Swami Vivekananda lands at Colombo, and on his way north delivers many lectures throughout India.

1899, October — Beginning of the Boer War.

1900 — Max Planck lays the foundation of quantum physics.

— International Exposition in Paris.

-J.C. Bose demonstrates the basic unity of inorganic and living matter at the International Congress of Physicists; Swami Vivekananda is present.

— Zeppelin builds his first dirigible.

-In China, Sun-Yat-Sen founds the Socialist Revolutionary Party; Boxer rebellion in Peking.

- Sri Aurobindo makes first contacts with revolutionary

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groups in Maharashtra and Bengal.

1901 - Rabindranath Tagore founds his school at Santiniketan.

January 21 - Death of Queen Victoria; accession of King Edward VII

April 30 - Sri Aurobindo marries Mrinalini Bose.

September 9 — US President William McKinley is assassinated; he is succeeded by Theodore Roosevelt.

1902 — The Trans-Siberian railroad is completed.

- Powerful eruption of Mount Pelée in Martinique; 30,000 dead, town of St. Pierre annihilated.

— Beginning of the Sinn Fein organization.

— Sri Aurobindo begins organizing revolutionary action in Bengal.

July 4 — Swami Vivekananda passes away.

December -Sri Aurobindo meets Bal Gangadhar Tilak at the Ahmedabad session of the Indian National Congress.

1903, May-August — Sri Aurobindo accompanies the Gaekwad on his tour of Kashmir as his Private Secretary.

December 17 - First successful flight of a plane by the Wright brothers in the USA.

1904, February - Beginning of the Russo-Japanese war. The Japanese sink the Russian fleet at Port Arthur (now Lüshun).

August 3 — British forces under Younghusband, sent by Lord

Curzon, reach Lhasa in Tibet.

December - Sri Aurobindo attends the Bombay session of the Con-

gress. 1905 - Einstein sets forth the special theory of Relativity and postulates the existence of the photon.

- Sri Aurobindo writes *Bhawani Mandir*.

-Mother meets Max Theon.

January — Sri Aurobindo becomes Vice-Principal of the Baroda College.

January 22 -"Bloody Sunday" massacre in St. Petersburg: repression from the Czar against petitioners.

April 4 - Severe earthquake in Kangra (India); thousands dead.

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October 16 -The Partition of Bengal comes into force, giving rise to massive protests and the beginning of the Swadeshi movement.

October 17 - First message by wireless telegraphy across the Atlantic.

December — Sri Aurobindo attends the Benares session of the Congress.

1906 -Earthquake in Chile; 5,000 lives lost. — Earthquake in California, followed by great fires; hundreds of deaths.

March 11 — Sri Aurobindo attends the creation of the National Council of Education in Calcutta.

March 12 - Declaration of the *Yugantar* (Bengali weekly).

April 14 -Sri Aurobindo attends the Barisal Conference, then tours East Bengal with Bepin Chandra Pal.

June 19 - Sri Aurobindo leaves Baroda for good.

July 12 -In France, Dreyfus is cleared from all guilt twelve years after being convicted of treason, and reinstated to the Army.

August 6 - Declaration of the *Bande Mataram* (English daily).

August 15 -The Bengal National College opens in Calcutta, with Sri Aurobindo as its principal.

December — In Calcutta, the Indian Congress, presided over by Dadabhai Naoroji, declares Swaraj as its goal.

1907 - Powerful earthquakes in Jamaica and Turkestan.

— A. Lumiere invents colour photography.

May 9 — Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh are deported.

August 16 - Sri Aurobindo is arrested on a charge of sedition for articles published in the *Bande Mataram*; released on bail; after his acquittal in September, Sri Aurobindo becomes the leader of the Nationalist party in Bengal.

December 7-9 - Sri Aurobindo is the leader of the Nationalists at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Midnapore.

Dec. 26-27 -The Surat session of the Congress, which ends in a break-up; on the 28th, Sri Aurobindo presides over the conference of the Nationalists.

1908, January - Sri Aurobindo meets the Maharashtrian yogi Vishnu

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- Bhaskar Lele at Baroda.

May 2 — Sri Aurobindo is arrested in the Alipore Bomb Case.

He is defended by Chittaranjan Das.

June 30 — A large area at Tunguska in Siberia is devastated, supposedly by the falling piece of a comet.

July 22 — Tilak is sentenced to six years' transportation to

Burma for alleged seditious writings in the *Kesari*.

December 16 - Deportation of Ashwini Kumar Dutt, Krishna Kumar

Mitra, Satish Chatterjee, Subodh Mullick, Monoranjan Guha Thakurta, and four others.

December 28 — An earthquake followed by a tidal wave in Messina,

Sicily, leaves 160,000 victims.

1909 — Morley-Minto Reforms.

April 7 - American explorer Peary reaches the North Pole in his sixth attempt.

May 6 - Sri Aurobindo is acquitted in the Alipore Bomb Case.

May 30 — Gives his famous speech at Uttarpara.

June 19 — First issue of *The Karmayogin* (English weekly).

July 25 — French aviation pioneer Bleriot flies over the English Channel.

August 23 - First issue of the *Dharma* (Bengali weekly).

September - Sri Aurobindo is the leader of the Nationalists at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Hooghly.

1910, February — Halley's comet becomes visible to the naked eye; its perihelion is on April 20. It is preceded in January by the Great Daylight Comet.

mid-February — Sri Aurobindo abruptly leaves Calcutta for Chandernagore.

April 1 - Leaves for Pondicherry on board S.S. *Dupleix*.

April 4 - Sri Aurobindo arrives at Pondicherry.

— Charged in Calcutta with sedition for an article published in *The Karmayogin*; acquitted by the Calcutta High Court in November.

May 6 -Death of King Edward VII and accession of King George V.

1911 - British physicist Rutherford experimentally confirms

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the existence of the electron and sets forth the

'planetary model' of the atom.

October — In China, formation of the Kuo-min-tang by Sun-Yat-Sen; revolutionary movement against the Manchu dynasty.

December 12 -'Delhi Durbar' for the visit of King George V.

December 14 — Norwegian explorer Amundsen is the first to reach the South Pole.

1912 - Powerful earthquakes in Mexico and Turkey.

January 17 - British explorer Scott reaches the South Pole a month

after Amundsen, but perishes along with his companions on his way back.

February 2 -The Chinese Emperor abdicates; China becomes a Republic under Sun-Yat-Sen.

April 14 -The *Titanic* collides with an iceberg off Newfoundland and sinks; 1,517 victims.

October 10 -Outbreak of the Balkans War over Serbia.

December 23 — India's capital is transferred from Calcutta to Delhi.

1913 - Danish physicist Niels Bohr modifies Rutherford's model of the atom with the help of quantum mechanics.

December - Rabindranath Tagore receives the Nobel prize for literature.

1914, March 29 -Mother meets Sri Aurobindo.

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Who is Mother?

I can hear you, dear Reader, wondering. You ask, "What is so interesting in the story of Mother?"

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Dear Reader, if you like any or many or all of these things, then come with me. Let us walk together in Mother's Geography and find out.

Then, perhaps, we shall know: Who is MOTHER.

S. N.

MIRRA MEETS THE REVOLUTIONARY is *book five* in MOTHER'S CHRONICLES. It looks at Indian history from the time of Sri Aurobindo's return from England until he left it all behind. How he revolutionized Indian politics from the mendicant policy of the Congress by straight away demanding Independence. The British government came to fear this champion of Nationalism as their 'most dangerous' adversary. Through it all something else, was growing within him. A greater task now awaited the Revolutionary. To revolutionize the evolution is the whole meaning of the meeting of Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

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