

THE REAL AWAKENER



THE LIGHT OF LIGHTS WORDS OF SRI AUROBINDO – 10

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** All the selections here have been taken from "Bengali Writings" published in 1991 by Madanlal Himatsingka on behalf of All India Books, Pondicherry - 605002. Page numbers in the source of the selections taken here are given in the parentheses.*

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I do not want to be a guru. What I want is for someone, awakened by my touch or by that of another, to manifest from within his sleeping divinity and to realise the divine life. Such men will uplift this country.

*– Sri Aurobindo
(372-73)*

BENGALI WRITINGS

I. Nationalism*

1. The Old and the New*

“The eternal and the old are not one and the same thing. The eternal belongs to all time; what is beyond the past, the present and the future, what remains as an unbroken continuity through all changes, what we perceive as the immortal in mortal – that is eternal. We do not call the dharma and the fundamental thought of India, just because they are old, the eternal dharma, the eternal truth. This thought is eternal because it is the self-knowledge obtained by the realisation of the Self; this dharma is eternal because it is based on the eternal knowledge. The old is only a form of the eternal which was suitable to the age.” (214)

2. The Problem of the Past*

“Complete domination of the educated class in India by Europe for nearly a century deprived the Indians of the Aryan enlightenment and the Aryan nature.” (214)

“The conquest of India by the English is an unparalleled achievement in the history of the world. If this immense country were inhabited by a nation, weak and ignorant, inapt and uncivilised, then such a statement could not have been made. On the contrary, India is the native country of the Rajputs, the Marathas, the Sikhs, the Pathans, the Moguls and others. The Bengalis with their quick intelligence, the thinkers

* The titles marked with an * are from the original. All the unmarked titles in the text are from the editor.

from South India, the politician Brahmins from Maharashtra are children of Mother India. A capable statesman like Nana Farnavis, a general adept in the science of war like Madhaoji Scindia and mighty geniuses and kingdom-builders like Hyder Ali and Ranjit Singh could be found in every province at the time of the British conquest.” (215-16)

“We admit that the lack of unity is truly one of the principal reasons of our misfortune but then there was never any unity in India even in the past. There was no unity in the age of the Mahabharata nor in the time of Chandragupta or Ashoka. There was no unity during the period of the Muslim conquest of India or in the eighteenth century. The lack of unity could not be the exclusive reason for such a miracle to happen. If you say that the virtues of the English are the reason then I would ask those who know the history of that period whether they would venture to say that the English merchants of that epoch were superior to the Indians either in virtue or in merit. It is difficult to suppress laughter when we hear some one talking of the great qualities of those devils, cruel and powerful, selfish and avaricious, – Clive, Warren Hastings and others,…” (216-17)

“The English did not come to India for the good of their country. They came here to do business, to make money for themselves.” (217)

“Patriotism is in its nature sattwic, whereas the national consciousness is rajasic. One who can lose his ego in the ego of the country is the ideal patriot; one who aggrandises the ego of the country, all the while maintaining intact his own ego is a nationally conscious individual. The Indians of that epoch were wanting in national consciousness.” (218)

“High moral qualities or merits alone cannot make one win a race or wrestling bout; the necessary strength is indispensable. Thus even a wicked and Asuric nation, conscious of itself, is able to found an empire, while for want of national consciousness a virtuous people possessing many high moral qualities loses its independence, and eventually forfeiting its noble character and good qualities falls into decadence.” (218-19)

“Concentration on the rajasic quality increases the rajasic power; but pure rajas soon changes into tamas. Arrogant and disorderly rajasic endeavour soon gets tired and exhausted and finally degenerates into impotence, dejection and inactivity. The rajasic power can become durable if it is turned towards sattwa.” (219)

“...Indians were a great sattwic nation. It was because of this sattwic power that they became incomparable in knowledge, courage and in spite of their disunity were able to resist and throw back foreign attacks for a thousand years. Then began the increase of rajas and the decrease of sattwa. At the time of the Muslim advent, the widespread knowledge had already begun to shrink and the Rajputs who were predominantly rajasic occupied the throne of India. Northern India was in the grip of wars and internal quarrels and, owing to a decadence of Buddhism, Bengal was overcast with tamas. Spirituality sought refuge in South India and by the grace of that sattwic power South India was able to retain her freedom for a long time.” (220)

“However, the current of rajas and tamas was so strong that by its pull, even the best were altered into the worst; common people began to justify their tamasic nature with

the knowledge given by Shankara; the cult of love revealed by Chaitanya became a cover for extreme tamasic inactivity..." (220)

"India was then enveloped in the thickest darkness of tamas, yet a stupendous rajasic impulse under the cloak of an outward religion relentlessly pursued vile and selfish ends, bringing ruin to the nation and the country. Power was not lacking in the country, but owing to the eclipse of the Aryan dharma and of sattwa, that power unable to defend itself, brought about its own destruction. Finally, the Asuric power of India vanquished by the Asuric power of Britain became shackled and lifeless. India plunged into an inert sleep of tamas. Obscurity, unwillingness, ignorance, inaction, loss of self-confidence, sacrifice of self-respect, love of slavery, emulation of foreigners and adoption of their religion, dejection, self-depreciation, pettiness, indolence, etc. all these are characteristic qualities of the tamas." (221)

"When God roused India, in the first flush of her awakening the flaming power of the national consciousness began to flow swiftly in the veins of the nation. At the same time, a maddening emotion of patriotism enraptured the youth. We are not Europeans, we are Asiatics. We are Indians, we are Aryans. We have gained the national consciousness but unless it is steeped in patriotism our national consciousness cannot blossom." (221-22)

"Next, the ancient power of the Aryans has to be resurrected. First, the Aryan character and the Aryan education must reappear; secondly, the yogic power has to be developed again; lastly, that yearning for knowledge, that capacity for work worthy of an Aryan must be utilised in

order to assemble necessary material for the new age; the mad passion worked up during these last five years has to be harnessed and directed towards the accomplishment of the Mother's work." (222)

3. The True Meaning of Freedom*

"The Aryan Rishis used to designate the practical and spiritual freedom and its fruit, the inviolable Ananda, as 'Swarajya', self-empire. Political freedom is but a limb of Swarajya, self-empire. It has two aspects – external freedom and internal freedom. Complete liberty from foreign domination is the external freedom, and democracy is the highest expression of the internal freedom." (228)

"For all people, subjection is a messenger and servitor of death. Only freedom can protect life and make any progress possible. Swadharma (self-law) or work and endeavour fixed by one's own nature is the only path of progress. The foreigner in occupation of the country, even if he is very kind, and our well-wisher, will not think twice about putting the load of an alien dharma on our heads. Regardless of whether his intention is noble or wicked, this can never do us anything but harm. We have neither the strength nor the inclination to advance on the path suitable to the nature of an alien people; if we follow it, we may be able to imitate them well enough, ingeniously covering up our own degradation with the symbols and robes of progress of the foreigner, but during an ordeal our weakness and sterility, resulting from the pursuit of a foreign dharma, will become evident. We too shall die out because of that sterility." (228)

4. A Word About Society*

“Man does not belong to the society but to the Divine. Those who try to weaken the Divine within him by imposing, on his mind and life and soul, slavery to the society and its numerous exterior bonds, have lost sight of the true goal of humanity. The sin of this oppression does not permit the Divine within him to awake, the Power goes to sleep. If you have to serve at all, then serve the Divine, not the society.” (230)

5. Fraternity*

“The three principles of the French revolution are not ethical rules for guiding the life of an individual but three ties or bonds capable of remoulding the structure of society and country, a fundamental truth of Nature yearning to manifest itself in the external condition of society and country. Fraternity means brotherhood.

The French revolutionaries were very anxious to gain social and political liberty and equality, their eyes were not set so much on fraternity. Absence of fraternity is the cause of incompleteness of the French revolution.” (232)

“The full development of these three basic principles is interdependent: fraternity is the basis of equality; without it equality cannot be established. Only brotherly feeling can bring about brotherhood. There is no brotherly feeling in Europe, equality and liberty are tainted there. That is why in Europe chaos and revolution is the order of the day. Proudly Europe calls this chaos and revolution progress and advancement.” (233)

“It is possible to have fraternity without having equality; but equality without fraternity cannot last and it will be

destroyed by dissension, quarrels and inordinate greed for power. First we must have complete fraternity and then only complete equality.

The brotherly feeling is an outward condition: if we all remain full of brotherly feeling, have one common property, one common good and one common effort, that is fraternity. The external condition is based on the inner state. Love for the brother infuses life into fraternity and makes it real. There must be a basis even for that brotherly love. We are children of one Mother, compatriots; this feeling can provide the basis for a kind of brotherly love; though this feeling becomes a basis of political unity, social unity cannot be achieved in this way. We have to go still deeper: just as we all have to overpass our own mothers in order to worship the Mother of our compatriots, in the same way we have to transcend and realise the Universal Mother. We have to transcend the partial Shakti in order to reach the Shakti in her completeness. But, just as in our adoration of Mother India, though we overpass our physical mother yet we do not forget her, in the same way, in our adoration of the Universal Mother we shall transcend Mother India and not forget her. She too is Kali, she too is the Mother.” (235)

6. Hirobumi Ito*

“Every one is aware of the pre-eminent position of Ito in history and in the tremendous progress of Japan. But all may not know that it was Ito who conceived the course, means and aim of that progress and achieved that great transformation single-handed, all the other great men were only his instruments. It was Ito indeed who conceived in his

mind the unity, independence, education, army, navy, economic prosperity, commerce and politics of Japan and translated that dream into reality.

He was preparing the future Japanese empire. Whatever he did he achieved mostly from behind the scenes. The world learns immediately of what the Kaiser or Lloyd George is thinking or doing. But no one knew what Ito was thinking or doing – when his secret imagination and effort bore fruit, only then the world learnt with astonishment: this was being prepared so long. And yet what great effort, what wonderful genius is manifested in his achievement. If Ito had been used to publicise his great vision, the whole world would have laughed at him as a mad idealist given to fruitless dreams and bent upon achieving the impossible. Who would have believed that within fifty years, Japan would, maintaining its priceless independence, absorb western culture, become a very powerful nation like England, France and Germany, defeat China and Russia, spread Japanese trade and commerce and painting, and also induce admiration for the Japanese intelligence and fear of Japanese courage, capture Korea and Formosa, lay the foundation of a great empire, achieve the utmost progress in unity, freedom, equality and national education. Napoleon used to say: “I have banished the word ‘impossible’ from my dictionary”. Ito did not say but in fact did so. Ito’s achievement is greater than Napoleon’s. We should have no regret that the great man has been killed by a bullet of an assassin. It is a matter of gratification, of good fortune and something to be proud of that one who dedicated his life to Japan, whose one preoccupation and object of worship was Japan, has also sacrificed it for his country. “Slain thou shalt win heaven,

victorious thou shalt enjoy the earth”. In the destiny of Hirobumi Ito we witness the attainment of both these fruits in the same life-tree.”(239-40)

7. Our Hope*

“We have no material strength, armaments, education, national government. Then where is our hope grounded, where is the strength, depending on which we are attempting to achieve a result impossible for the powerful and educated nations of Europe?” (249)

“But is it true that physical force is the only support of strength, or does strength emanate from some deeper, profounder source? Every one is bound to admit that it is impossible to achieve any great undertaking only through physical prowess. Where two opposed but equally strong powers meet in conflict, the one with the greater ethical and mental strength, – one with superior unity, courage, enthusiasm, determination, self-sacrifice, the one who has knowledge, intelligence, cleverness, keen observation, a better developed ability to evolve new means is sure to win.” (249)

“The pure spirit is the source of true strength, and the original Puissance, *ādyāprakṛti*, which moves a billion suns in the sky, and by a mere turning of its finger shaking the earth destroys all traces of the earlier splendours created by human effort, that original Puissance is controlled by the pure spirit. That Puissance can make the impossible possible, give voice to the dumb, provide the lame with the power to cross mountains.” (250)

“Every time people thought the end of the Indian people was imminent, from its hidden source the soul-force has

flooded and revitalised the dying race, created adequate and ancillary strength. That source has not dried yet, that marvellous, deathless power is still at play.

But the manifestation of all the powers of the physical universe depends on time; according to the rhythm of appropriate conditions, like the ebb and tide of the sea, they become effective in the end. With us too it is that which is happening. Now it is a complete ebb, we are waiting for the tide to turn.” (250-51)

“The independence of India is only a secondary aim, the main object is to reveal the power of Indian culture, its spread and victory throughout the world. Had we succeeded in gaining independence or autonomy through the use of western civilised techniques, through meetings and organisations, lectures and the use of physical force, that main object would not have been fulfilled. We have to achieve independence through the inherent strength of our own culture, through the strength of the spirit and the use of subtle as well as material means that the soul-force can create. That is why, by destroying our western-oriented movement, God has turned the outward energy inward.” (251-52)

“When once again it turns outward, that current will never cease flowing, and no one stop it. Redeemer of the three worlds, that holy Ganges will flood India and by its immortal touch it will usher in an era of new youth to the world.” (252)

II. Tales of Prison Life*

1. Tales of Prison Life*

I

“On Friday, May 1, 1908, I was sitting in the *Bande Mataram* office, when Shrijut Shyamsundar Chakravarty handed over a telegram from Muzaffarpur. On reading it I learned of a bomb outrage in which two European ladies had been killed. In that day’s issue of the “Empire” I read another news item that the Police Commissioner had said that he knew the people involved in the murder and that they would soon be put under arrest. At that time I had no idea that I happened to be the main target of suspicion and that according to the police I was the chief killer, the instigator and secret leader of the young terrorists and revolutionaries. I did not know that that day would mean the end of a chapter of my life, and that there stretched before me a year’s imprisonment during which period all my human relations would cease, that for a whole year I would have to live, beyond the pale of society, like an animal in a cage. And when I would re-enter the world of activity it would not be the old familiar Aurobindo Ghose. Rather it would be a new being, a new character, intellect, life, mind, embarking upon a new course of action that would come out of the ashram at Alipore. I have spoken of a year’s imprisonment. It would have been more appropriate to speak of a year’s living in a forest, in an ashram, hermitage. For long I had made great efforts for a direct vision (*sakshat darshan*) of the Lord of my Heart; had entertained the immense hope of knowing the Preserver of the world, the

Supreme Person (*Purushottam*) as friend and master. But due to the pull of a thousand worldly desires, attachment towards numerous activities, the deep darkness of ignorance I did not succeed in that effort. At long last the most merciful all-good Lord (*Shiv Hari*) destroyed all these enemies at one stroke and helped me in my path, pointed to the *yogashram*, Himself staying as guru and companion in my little abode of retirement and spiritual discipline. The British prison was that ashram. I have also watched this strange contradiction in my life that however much good my well-intentioned friends might do for me, it is those who have harmed me – whom shall I call an enemy, since enemy I have none? – my opponents have helped me even more. They wanted to do me an ill turn, the result was I got what I wanted. The only result of the wrath of the British Government was that I found God. It is not the aim of these essays to provide an intimate journal of my life in the prison. I wish to mention only a few external details, but I have thought it better to mention, at least once, in the beginning, the main theme of the prison life. Else readers may think that suffering is the only fact of prison life. I can't say there were no inconveniences, but on the whole the time passed quite happily." (261-62)

"The whole of Sunday was passed in the lock-up. There was a staircase in front of my room. In the morning I found a few young lads coming down the stairs. Their faces were unfamiliar, but I guessed that they too had been arrested in the same case. Later I came to know that these were the lads from the Manicktola Gardens. A month after in the jail I came to know them. A little later I too was taken downstairs for a wash – since there was no arrangement for a bath, I went without it. For lunch I grabbed, with some effort, a few

morsels of pulse and boiled rice, the effort proved too much and had to be given up. In the afternoon we had fried rice. For three days this was our diet. But I must also add that on Monday the sergeant, of himself, gave me tea and toast.” (269)

“I told my relative: “Tell the people at home not to fear or worry, my innocence will be fully vindicated.” From that period I had a firm belief that it would be so. In the beginning, during solitary imprisonment, the mind was a little uneasy. But after three days of prayer and meditation an unshakable peace and faith again overwhelmed the being.” (270)

“Before entering the jail precincts we were given a bath, put into prison uniform, while our clothes, shirts, dhotis and *kurtas* were taken away for laundry. The bath, after four days, was a heavenly bliss. After that they took us to our respective cells. I went into mine and the doors were closed as soon as I got in. My prison life at Alipore began on May 5. Next year, on May 6, I was released.” (271)

II

“My solitary cell was nine feet long and five or six feet in width; it had no windows, in front stood strong iron bars, this cage was my appointed abode. Outside was a small courtyard, with stony grounds, a high brick wall with a small wooden door. On top of that door, at eye level, there was a small hole or opening. After the door had been bolted the sentry, from time to time, peeped through it to find out what the convict was doing. But my courtyard door remained open for most of the time. There were six contiguous rooms like that, in prison parlance these were known as the ‘six decrees’.” (271)

“Such was the place where we were lodged. As for fittings our generous authorities had left nothing to be desired so far

as our hospitable reception was concerned. One plate and bowl used to adorn the courtyard. Properly washed and cleansed my self-sufficing plate and bowl shone like silver, was the solace of my life. In its impeccable, glowing radiance in the 'heavenly kingdom' in that symbol of immaculate British imperialism, I used to enjoy the pure bliss of loyalty to the Crown. Unfortunately the plate too shared in the bliss, and if one pressed one's fingers a little hard on its surface it would start flying in a circle, like the whirling dervishes of Arabia. And then one had to use one hand for eating while the other held the plate in position. Else, while whirling, it would attempt to slip away with the incomparable grub provided by the prison authorities. But more dear and useful than the plate was the bowl. Among inert objects it was like the British civilian. Just as the civilian, *ipso facto*, is fit and able to undertake any administrative duty, be it as judge, magistrate, police, revenue officer, chairman of municipality, professor, preacher, whatever you ask him to do he can become at your merest saying, – just as for him to be an investigator, complainant, police magistrate, even at times to be the counsel for defence, all these roles hold a friendly concourse in the same hospitable body, my dear bowl was equally multipurpose. The bowl was free from all caste restrictions, beyond discrimination, in the prison cell it helped in the act of ablution, later with the same bowl I gargled, bathed, a little later when I had to take my food, lentil soup or vegetable was poured into the same container, I drank water out of it and washed my mouth. Such an all-purpose priceless object can be had only in a British prison. Serving all my worldly needs the bowl became an aid in my spiritual discipline too. Where else could I find such an aid and preceptor to get rid of the sense of disgust? After the

first spell of solitary imprisonment was over, when we are allowed to stay together my civilian's rights were bifurcated, and the authorities arranged for another receptacle for the privy. But for one month I acquired an unsought lesson in controlling my disgust. The entire procedure for defecation seems to have been oriented towards the art of self-control. Solitary imprisonment, it has been said, must be counted among a special form of punishment and its guiding principle the avoidance of human company and the open sky. To arrange this ablution in the open or outside would mean a violation of the principle, hence two baskets, with tar coating, would be kept in the room itself. The sweeper, *mehtar*, would clean it up in the morning and afternoons. In case of intense agitation and heart-warming speeches from our side the cleaning would be done at other times too. But if one went to the privy at odd hours as penance one had to put up with the noxious and fetid smell. In the second chapter of our solitary confinement there were some reforms in this respect, but British reforms keep the old principles intact while making minor changes in administration. Needless to say, because of all this arrangement, in a small room, one had throughout to undergo considerable inconvenience, especially at meal times and during night. Attached bathrooms are, I know, often times a part of western culture, but to have in a small cell a bedroom, dining room and w.c. rolled into one – that is what is called too much of a good thing! We Indians are full of regrettable customs, it is painful for us to be so highly civilised.

Among household utilities there were also a small bucket, a tin water container and two prison blankets. The small bucket would be kept in the courtyard, where I used to have my bath. In the beginning I did not suffer from water scarcity, though

that happened later on. At first the convict in the neighbouring cowshed would supply water as and when I wanted it, hence during the bathing recess amidst the austerities of prison life I enjoyed every day a few moments of the householder's luxury and love of pleasure. The other convicts were not so fortunate, the same tub or pail did for the w.c., cleaning of utensils and bath. As undertrial prisoners this extraordinary luxury was allowed to them, the convicts had to take their bath in a bowlful or two of water. According to the British the love of God and physical well-being are almost equal and rare virtues, whether the prison regulations were made in order to prove the point of such a proverb or to prevent the unwilling austerity of the convicts spoiled by excessive bathing facilities, it was not easy to decide. This liberality of the authorities was made light of by the convicts as "crow bathing". Men are by nature discontented. The arrangements for drinking water were even better than bathing facilities. It was then hot summer, in my little room the wind was almost forbidden to enter. But the fierce and blazing sunlight of May had free access to it. The entire room would burn like a hot oven. While being locked thus the only way to lessen one's irresistible thirst was the tepid water in the small tin enclosure. I would drink that water often and often, but this would not quench the thirst, rather there would be heavy sweating and soon after the thirst would be renewed. But one or two had earthen pots placed in their courtyard, for which, remembering the austerities of a past incarnation, they would count themselves lucky. This compelled even the strongest believers in personal effort to admit the role of fate; some had cold water, some remained thirsty for ever, it was as the stars decreed. But in their distribution of tin-cans or water-pots, the authorities acted

with complete impartiality. Whether I was pleased or not with such erratic arrangements the generous jail doctor found my water trouble unbearable. He made efforts to get an earthen pot for my use, but since the distribution was not in his hands he did not succeed for long, at last at his bidding the head sweeper managed to discover an earthen pot from somewhere. Before that in course of my long battle with thirst I had achieved a thirst-free state. In this blazing room two prison blankets served for my bed. There was no pillow, I would spread one of these as mattress and fold the other as a pillow, and I slept like that. When the heat became unbearable I would roll on the ground and enjoy it. Then did I know the joy of the cool touch of Mother Earth. But the floor's contact in the prison was not always pleasing, it prevented the coming of sleep and so I had to take recourse to the blanket. The days on which it rained were particularly delightful. But there was this difficulty that during rain and thunder, thanks to the *danse macabre* (*tandava nritya*) of the strong wind, full of dust, leaf and grass, a small-scale flood would take place inside my little room. After which there was no alternative but to rush to a corner with a wet blanket. Even after this game of nature was over, till the earth dried one had to seek refuge in reflection leaving aside all hope of sleep. The only dry areas were near the w.c., but one did not feel like placing the blankets near that area. But in spite of such difficulties on windy days a lot of air also blew in and since that took away the furnace-like heat of the room I welcomed the storm and the shower.

This description of the Alipore government hotel which I have given here, and will give still more later, is not for the purpose of advertising my own hardship; it is only to show what strange arrangements are made for undertrial prisoners

in the civilised British Raj, what prolonged agony for the innocent. The causes of hardship that I have described were no doubt there, but since my faith in divine mercy was strong I had to suffer only for the first few days; thereafter – by what means I shall mention later – the mind had transcended these sufferings and grown incapable of feeling any hardship. That is why when I recollect my prison life instead of anger or sorrow I feel like laughing. When first of all I had to go into my cage dressed in strange prison uniform, and notice the arrangements for our stay, this is what I felt. And I laughed within myself.” (272-76)

“The other day I noticed that the *Indian Social Reformer*, from Poona, has ironically commented on one of my simple easy-to-understand statements by remarking: “We find an excess of Godwardness in the prison!” Alas for the pride and littleness of men, seeking after renown, of little learning, proud of their little virtues! The manifestation of God, should it not be in prison, in huts, ashrams, in the heart of the poor, but rather in the temples of luxury of the rich or the bed of repose of pleasure-seeking-selfish worldly folk? God does not look for learning, honour, leadership, popular acclaim, outward ease and sophistication. To the poor He reveals Himself in the form of the Compassionate Mother. He who sees the Lord in all men, in all nations, in his own land, in the miserable, the poor, the fallen and the sinner and offers his life in the service of the Lord, the Lord comes to such hearts. So it is that in a fallen nation ready to rise, in the solitary prison of the servant of the nation the nearness of God grows.

After the jailor had seen to the blankets and the plates and bowl and left, I began to watch, sitting on the blanket, the

scene before me. This solitary confinement seemed to me much better than the lock-up at Lal Bazar. There the silence of the commodious hall with an opportunity to extend its huge body, seems to deepen the silence. Here the walls of the room seemed to come closer, eager to embrace one, like the all-pervading Brahman. There one cannot even look at the sky through the high windows of the second storey room, it becomes hard to imagine that there are in this world trees and plants, men, animals, birds and houses. Here, since the door to the courtyard remains open, by sitting near the bars one could see the open spaces and the movement of the prisoners. Alongside the courtyard wall stood a tree, its green foliage a sight for sore eyes. The sentry that used to parade before the six 'six decree' rooms, his face and footsteps often appeared dear like the welcome steps of a friend. The prisoners in the neighbouring cowshed would take out in front of the room the cows for grazing. Both cow and cowherd were daily and delightful sights. The solitary confinement at Alipore was a unique lesson in love. Before coming here even in society my affections were confined to a rather narrow circle, and the closed emotions would rarely include birds and animals. I remember a poem by Rabibabu in which is described, beautifully, a village boy's deep love for a buffalo. I did not at all understand it when I read it first, I had felt a note of exaggeration and artificiality in that description. Had I read that poem now, I would have seen it with other eyes. At Alipore I could feel how deep could be the love of man for all created things, how thrilled a man could be on seeing a cow, a bird, even an ant." (278-79)

“Even the strange spectacle of prison diet failed to disturb my attitude. Coarse rice, even that spiced with husk,

pebbles, insects, hair, dirt and such other stuff – the tasteless lentil soup was heavily watered, among vegetables and greens mixed with grass and leaves. I never knew before that food could be so tasteless and without any nutritive value. Looking at its melancholy black visage I was struck with fear, after two mouthfuls with a respectful *salaam* I took leave of it. All prisoners receive the same diet, and once a course gets going it goes on for ever. Then it was the Reign of Herbs. Days, fortnights and months pass by, but the same herbs, or *Shāk*, lentils and rice went on unchanged. What to speak of changing the menu, the preparation was not changed a jot or tittle, it was the same immutable, eternal from beginning to end, a stable unique thing-in-itself. Within two evenings it was calculated to impress the prisoner with the fragility of this world of *māyā*. But even here I was luckier than the other prisoners because of the doctor's kindness. He had arranged supply of milk from the hospital, thanks to which I had been spared on certain days from the vision of *Shāk*.” (279-80)

“Next morning at four-fifteen the prison bell rang, this was the first bell to wake up the prisoners. There is a bell again after sometime, when the prisoners have to come out in file, after washing they have to swallow the prison gruel (*lufsi*) before starting the days' work. Knowing that it was impossible to sleep with the bells ringing every now and then, I also got up. The bars were removed at five, and after washing I sat inside the room once again. A little later *lufsi* was served at my door step, that day I did not take it but had only a vision of what it looked like. It was after a few days that I had the first taste of the 'great dish'. *Lufsi*, boiled rice, along with water, is the prisoner's little breakfast.” (280-81)

“It should be added that *lufsi* was the only nutritious diet for the Bengali prisoners, the rest were without any food value. But what of that? It had a taste, and one could eat this only out of sheer hunger, even then, one had to force and argue with oneself to be able to consume that stuff.

That day I took my bath at half past eleven. For the first four or five days I had to keep wearing the clothes in which I had come from home. At the time of bathing the old prisoner-warder from the cowshed, who had been appointed to look after me, managed to procure a piece of *endi*,* a yard and half long, and till my only clothes did not dry I had to keep wearing this. I did not have to wash my clothes or dishes, a prisoner in the cowshed would do that for me. Lunch was at eleven. To avoid the neighbourhood of the basket and braving the summer heat I would often eat in the courtyard. The sentries did not object to this. The evening meal would be between five and five-thirty. From then on the door was not permitted to be opened. At seven rang the evening bell. The chief supervisor gathered the prisoner-warders together and loudly called out the names of the inmates, after which they would return to their respective posts. The tired prisoner then takes the refuge of sleep and in that has his only pleasure. It is the time when the weak of heart weeps over his misfortune or in anticipation of the hardships of prison life. The lover of God feels the nearness of his deity, and has the joy of his prayer or meditation in the silent night. Then to these three thousand creatures who came from God, victims off a miserable social system, the huge instrument of torture, the Alipore Jail, is lost in a vast silence.” (281-82)

* *A kind of coarse silk.*

“Before imprisonment I was in the habit of sitting down for meditation for an hour in the morning and evening. In this solitary prison, not having anything else to do, I tried to meditate for a longer period. But for those unaccustomed it is not easy to control and steady the mind pulled in a thousand directions. Somehow I was able to concentrate for an hour and half or two, later the mind rebelled while the body too was fatigued. At first the mind was full of thoughts of many kinds. Afterwards devoid of human conversation and an insufferable listlessness due to absence of any subject of thought the mind gradually grew devoid of the capacity to think. There was a condition when it seemed a thousand indistinct ideas were hovering round the doors of the mind but with gates closed; one or two that were able to get through were frightened by the silence of these mental states and quietly running away. In this uncertain dull state I suffered intense mental agony. In the hope of mental solace and resting the overheated brain I looked at the beauties of nature outside, but with that solitary tree, a sliced sky and the cheerless prospects in the prison how long can the mind in such a state find any consolation? I looked towards the blank wall. Gazing at the lifeless white surface the mind seemed to grow even more hopeless, realising the agony of the imprisoned condition the brain was restless in the cage. I again sat down to meditate. It was impossible. The intense baffled attempt made the mind only more tired, useless, made it burn and boil. I looked around, at last I found some large black ants moving about a hole in the ground, and I spent sometime watching their efforts and movements. Later I noticed some tiny red ants. Soon there was a big battle between the black and the red, the black ants began to bite and kill the red ants.

I felt an intense charity and sympathy for these unjustly treated red ants and tried to save them from the black killers. This gave me an occupation and something to think about. Thanks to the ants I passed a few days like this. Still there was no way to spend the long days ahead. I tried to argue with myself, did some deliberate reflection, but day after day the mind rebelled and felt increasingly desolate. It was as though time weighed heavy, an unbearable torture, broken by that pressure it did not have leisure even to breathe freely, it was like being throttled by an enemy in a dream and yet without the strength to move one's limbs. I was amazed at this condition! True, while outside, I never wished to stay idle or without any activity, still I had spent long periods in solitary musings. Had the mind now become so weak that the solitude of a few days could make me so restless? Perhaps, I thought, there is a world of difference between voluntary and compulsory solitude. It is one thing to stay alone in one's home, but to have to stay, forced by others, in a solitary prison cell is quite another. There one can turn at will to men for refuge, find shelter in book knowledge and its stylistic elegance, in the dear voice of friends, the noise on the roadside, in the varied shows of the world, one can find joy of mind and feel at ease. But here, bound to the wheels of iron law, subservient to the whim of others, one had to live deprived of every other contact. According to the proverb, one who can stand solitude is either a god or a brute, it is a discipline quite beyond the power of men." (289-90)

"I remembered, fifteen years back, after returning home from England, I had written some bitterly critical articles in the *Induprakash*, of Bombay, against the petitionary ethics of the then Congress. Seeing that these articles were influencing

the mind of the young, the late Mahadeo Govind Ranade had told me, when I met him, for nearly half an hour, that I should give up writing these articles, and advised me to take up some other Congress work. He was desirous of my taking up the work of prison reform. I was astonished and unhappy at his unexpected suggestion and had refused to undertake that work. I did not know then that this was a prelude to the distant future and that one day God himself would keep me in prison for a year and make me see the cruelty and futility of the system and the need for reform. Now I understood that in the present political atmosphere there was no possibility of any reform of the prison system, but I resolved before my conscience to propagate and argue in its favour so that these hellish remnants of an alien civilisation were not perpetuated in a self-determining India. I also understood His second purpose: it was to reveal and expose before my mind its own weakness so that I might get rid of it for ever. For one who seeks the yogic state crowd and solitude should mean the same. Indeed, the weakness dropped off within a very few days, and now it seems that the mental poise would not be disturbed even by twenty years of solitude. In the dispensation of the All-Good (*maṅgalamaya*) even out of evil cometh good. The third purpose was to give me this lesson that my yoga practices would not be done by my personal effort, but that a spirit of reverence (*śraddhā*) and complete self-surrender (*ātma-samarpaṇa*) were the road to attain perfection in yoga, and whatever power or realisation the Lord would give out of His benignity, to accept and utilise these should be the only aim of my yogic endeavour. The day from which the deep darkness of Ignorance began to lessen, I started to see the true nature of the All-Good Lord's amazing infinite

goodness as I watched the different events in the ward. There is no event – great or small or even the smallest – from which some good has not accrued. He often fulfils three or four aims through a single event. We frequently see the working of a blind force in the world, accepting waste as part of nature’s method we ignore God’s omniscience and find fault with the divine Intelligence. The charge is unfounded. The divine Intelligence never works blindly, there cannot be the slightest waste of His power, rather the restrained manner in which, through the minimum of means, He achieves a variety of results is beyond the human intelligence.” (291-92)

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

unease because of lack of activity, bodily trouble or disease, in the lean periods of yogic life, these have come, but that day in a single moment God had given my inner being such a strength that these sorrows as they came and went did not leave any trace or touch on the mind, relishing strength and delight in the sorrow itself the mind was able to reject these subjective sufferings. The sufferings seemed as fragile as water drops on a lily leaf.” (292-93)

“On one side were the jail industries, on the other, the cowshed – my independent kingdom was flanked by these two. From the industrial section to the cowshed, from the cowshed to the industrial section, travelling to and fro I would recite the deeply moving, immortal, powerful *mantras* of the Upanishads, or watching the movements and activities of the prisoners I tried to realise the basic truths of the immanent Godhead, God in every form. In the trees, the houses, the walls, in men, animals, birds, metals, the earth, with the help of the *mantra*: All this is the Brahman, (*sarvam khalvidam Brahma*), I would try to fix or impose that realisation on all of these. As I went on doing like this sometimes the prison ceased to appear to be a prison at all. The high wall, those iron bars, the white wall, the green-leaved tree shining in sunlight, it seemed as if these common-place objects were not unconscious at all, but that they were vibrating with a universal consciousness, they love me and wish to embrace me, or so I felt. Men, cows, ants, birds are moving, flying, singing, speaking, yet all is Nature’s game; behind all this is a great pure detached spirit rapt in a serene delight. Once in a while it seemed as if God Himself was standing under the tree, to play upon his Flute of Delight; and with its sheer charm to draw my very soul out. Always it

seemed as if someone was embracing me, holding me on one's lap. The manifestation of these emotions overpowered my whole body and mind, a pure and wide peace reigned everywhere, it is impossible to describe that. The hard cover of my life opened up and a spring of love for all creatures gushed from within. Along with this love such *sāttvik* emotions as charity, kindness, *ahimsā*, etc., overpowered my dominantly *rājasik* nature and found an abundant release. And the more these qualities developed, the greater the delight and the deeper the sense of unclouded peace. The anxiety over the case had vanished from the beginning, now it was a contrary emotion that found room in my mind. God is All-Good, He had brought me into the prison-house for my good, my release and the quashing of charges was certain, I grew firm in this faith. After this for many days I did not have to suffer any troubles in the jail." (294-95)

"Of the national movement I was the alpha and the omega, its creator and saviour, engaged in undermining the British empire. As soon as he* came across any piece of excellent or vigorous writing in English he would jump and loudly proclaim, Aurobindo Ghose! All the legal and illegal, the organised activities or unexpected consequences of the movement were the doings of Aurobindo Ghose! and when they are the doings of Aurobindo Ghose then when even lawfully admissible they must contain hidden illegal intentions and potentialities. He probably thought that if I were not caught within two years, it would be all up with the British empire. If my name ever appeared on any torn sheet of paper, Mr. Norton's joy knew no bounds, with great

* *Prosecution Counsel Eardley Norton*

cordiality he would present it at the holy feet of the presiding magistrate. 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 release, *mukti*, then and there and both the period of our detention and the government's expenses would have been curtailed.”(300-301)

2. Prison and Freedom*

“Men as we are, we are mostly creatures of circumstance, confined to the sensations of the outer world. Our mental activities depend upon such external sensations, even our reason is unable to go beyond the limits of the material; and the joys and sorrows of life are but echoes of outward events. This slavery is due to the domination of the body. In the Upanishad it has been said, “The self-born has set the doors of the body outwards, therefore the soul of a man gazes outward and not at the self within; hardly a wise man here and there, desiring immortality turns his eye inward and sees the Self within him.” Normally, the outward, physical eyes with which we observe the life of man, in that kind of seeing the body is our chief support. However much we may call the Europeans materialists, in fact all men are materialists. The body is an instrument for the fulfilment of religious life, a chariot with many horses to pull it, the body-chariot on which we ride across the ways of the world. But, admitting the false importance of the body we give such a prominence to the physical mind that we find ourselves wholly entangled by outward activity and superficial good and evil. The result of such ignorance is life-long slavery and subordination. Joys and sorrows, good and evil, affluence and danger, compel us

to mould our mental states in their own terms, and we too float along the waves of desire to which we give our thoughts. Greedy of enjoyment and afraid of sorrow we come to depend on others, and receiving our joy and sorrow from others, we suffer endless misery and humiliation. Because, be it man or nature, whoever or whatever is able to exercise control over our body, or can bring it within the field of its own forces, we have to submit to that influence. Its extreme example is to fall into the hands of enemies or the life of imprisonment. But the person, who, surrounded by friends and boon companions, moves about freely, even his condition is just as wretched as of those who spend their days in prison. The body is the prison, the body-centred intelligence, the reasoning Ignorance is the enemy that imprisons.

This state of imprisonment is the perennial condition of man. On the other hand, on every page of literature and history we find the irrepressible eagerness and enthusiasm on the part of the human race to gain freedom. As in the political and social spheres, so in the life of the individual in every age we find the same endeavour. Restraint, self-torture, indifference, stoicism, Epicureanism, asceticism, Vedanta Buddhism, Advaita, the doctrine of Maya, Raja Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Gita, the path of Knowledge, Devotion and Activity – the paths are many, the goal is the same. The aim is always – victory over the body, getting rid of the domination of the physical, the freedom of the inner life. Western scientists have arrived at the conclusion that there is no world other than the physical, the subtle is based on the material, the subtle experiences are but reflections of the external experiences, man's attempt to be free is in vain; the philosophy, religion and Vedanta are but unreal imaginings, and wholly limited by

the physical reality as we are, the attempt to untie the knot or cross the limitations of our physical nature is an attempt doomed to fail. But the longing to be free is lodged in such a deep layer of the human heart that a thousand arguments are helpless to uproot it. Man can never remain content with the conclusions of the physical sciences. In all ages he has felt vaguely that the subtle elements capable of conquering the physical limits are definitely to be found in his own inner being, that there is an Inner Controller, a Person, for ever free and full of Delight, within him. It is the object of religion to realise this state of eternal freedom and pure Delight. This object of religious seeking is also the object of evolution of which science speaks. Reason or its absence is not the real difference between man and animals. The animals have the power to judge, but in the animal body that power does not develop. The real difference between man and animal lies elsewhere: a complete submission to the body is what constitutes the animal state, while in the conquest of the body and the effort at inner freedom lies man's manhood!"(320-22)

“To acquire by ignoring the outward joys and sorrows the inner freedom is possible only for the Indian, the Indian alone is capable of undertaking activity in a spirit of non-attachment, while the sacrifice of ego and indifference in action are acknowledged as the highest aim of her education and culture and are the seed of her national character.

The truth of this view I first realised in the Alipore jail. Those who live there are usually thieves, robbers, murderers. Though we were forbidden to speak with the convicts, in practice this rule was not strictly observed. Apart from that there were the cook, the waterman, the sweeper, the cleaner,

with whom one could not help coming into contact, and many times we would speak freely with each other. Those who were arrested with me for the same offence, they too were described in such unspeakable adjectives as heartless murderers. If there is any place where the Indian character has to be looked upon with eyes of contempt, if it is possible to see it at its worst, lowest and most hateful state, then Alipore Jail is that place; imprisonment at Alipore is that inferior and degenerate state. In such a place I spent twelve months like this. Thanks to my experience of these twelve months I have been able to return to the world of action with tenfold hope, with a fixed notion about Indian superiority, with redoubled respect for human character, the future progress and well-being of the motherland and the human race. This is not due to my inherent optimism or excessive trust. Srijiut Bipinchandra Pal had felt the same way in the Buxar Jail; in the Alipore Jail Dr. Daly, who had served here earlier, supported this view. Dr. Daly was a generous and wise person, experienced in the ways of men, the worst elements of human nature were present to him every day, yet he used to tell me: "The more I see and hear of Indian gentlemen or the poor folk, men who are distinguished in society or the convicts in a prison, I am convinced that in quality and character you are much superior to us. Looking at these lads has further confirmed me in my judgement. Who can judge from their behaviour, character and other high qualities that they are anarchists or assassins? Instead of finding in them cruelty, wildness, restlessness or impropriety I find the opposite virtues." Of course thieves and robbers don't turn into holy men while they are serving a term in prison. The British prison is not a place for reform of character, on the contrary, for the ordinary convict it is

but an instrument for the degradation of character and manhood. They remain the thieves and robbers that they had been before being sent to gaol; they continue to steal even in the prison, in the midst of the strict prohibitory rules they manage to indulge in addiction, continue to cheat. But what of that? The humanity of the Indian survives every loss. Fallen because of social abuses, crushed out because of loss of humanity, on the outside are the distortions of dark, dubious, shameful emotions, yet, within, the nearly vanished humanity seems to save itself in hiding, thanks to the inborn virtue of the Indians, it expresses itself time and again in their speech and act. Those who, having seen the filth outside, turn away their face in contempt, only they can say that they have failed to find in them the least trace of humanity. But one who has given up the pride of holiness and looks at them with one's own natural clear vision will never agree to such a view. After six months of imprisonment in the Buxar jail Srijiut Bipinchandra Pal had seen God among the thieves and robbers, which he had openly confessed in an Uttarpara meeting. In the Alipore Jail itself I too could realise this fundamental truth of Hinduism for the first time among the thieves, robbers and killers, in the human body I could realise the divine Presence.”(324-25)

“Let me speak of an innocent person at Alipore. As an accused in a dacoity case he had been sentenced to ten years' rigorous imprisonment. A cowherd by profession, uneducated, without anything to do with reading or writing, his only support was his faith in God and patience worthy of an Aryan and other noble qualities. Faced with this old man's attitude towards life, my pride of learning and

forbearance was completely shattered. There was a serene and simple friendliness written in the old man's eyes, his talk was always full of amiability and friendliness. At times he would speak of his sufferings, even though he was innocent of the charges, and speak of his wife and children, he even wondered when God would bring him release so that he could meet them, but never did I find him depressed or restless. Waiting for God's Grace, he spent his days quietly doing his duties in the prison. All his efforts and thoughts were not concerned about himself, but about the well-being of others. His sense of kindness and sympathy for the sorrowing frequently came out in his speech, serving others was the law of his being. The noble qualities were further set off by his humility. Knowing that he had a heart thousand times nobler than mine I would feel ashamed at his humility, to have to accept the old man's services embraced me, but he would not be held back so easily. He was all the time anxious about my comfort. As with me – so with the others, his kindly attention and humble service and respect seemed to be much greater especially for the innocent and miserable ones. Yet on his face and in his conduct there glowed a natural serene gravity and majesty. He had a great love for the country too. I shall always remember the white-whiskered serene visage of this old convict full of kindness and generosity. Even in these days of decline among the Indian peasantry – whom we describe as uneducated, "small people", *chhotolok* – may be found such representatives of the Indian race. India's future is hopeful only because of this. The educated youth and the unlettered peasantry, the future of India lies with these two classes. The future Aryan race will be a blend of the two.

I have spoken about an uneducated peasant. Let me now speak of two educated young men. These were the two Kavirajs of Harrison Road, Nagendranath and Dharani.* The manner in which, quietly and contentedly, they too suffered this sudden mishap, this unjust punishment, was astounding. I could never find in them the slightest anger or censure or annoyance over those for whose fault they had to pass their youth in a hellish prison. They were devoid of the glory of modern education, a knowledge of western languages and familiarity with western learning. The mother-tongue was their only stay, but among the English-educated group I have found few men of comparable calibre. Instead of complaining to either man or God, both of them had accepted the punishment with a smile. Both brothers were *sādhaks* but their natures were different. Nagendra was steady, grave, intelligent. He was very fond of godly conversation and religious topics. When we had been kept in solitary confinement the jail authorities had permitted us, at the end of the day's labour, to read books. Nagendra who had asked for the Gita had been given the Bible instead. In the witness box he would tell me of his feelings on reading the Bible. Nagendra hadn't read the Gita but I noticed with surprise that instead of speaking about the Bible he was expressing the inner sense of the Gita's verse – once in a while it even appeared as if the sublime and divine statements of Krishna at Kurukshetra were coming out of the same lotus lips of Vasudeva in the Alipore dock.

*Thinking that the police had come to know of the bombs Ullaskar, one of the conspirators, had removed a packet containing bombs to his friend Nagendranath's house, who did not know anything about its content. Later, to save his friend, Ullaskar gave a true confession. But the police did not release the brothers.

Without reading the Gita to be able to realise in the Bible the spirit of equality, renunciation of the desire for fruit, to see the Divine in all things, etc., is the index of a not negligible inner life or spiritual capacity, *sādhana*. Dharani was not as intelligent as Nagendra, but he was obedient and tender by nature, temperamentally a devotee. He was always wrapt up in the idea of Divine Motherhood, and looking at the Grace that shone on his face, his innocent laughter and gentle devotional attitude it was hard to realise that we were confined in a jail. Knowing these men, who can say that the Bengali is low and despicable? This power, this manhood, this sacred fire is only hidden amidst the ashes.

They were both innocent. Imprisoned without any fault of their own, by their own qualities or by virtue of their training they had been able to reject the supremacy of external joys and sorrows and succeeded in preserving the freedom of their inner life. But the virtues of the national character came out even among the real offenders. I stayed in Alipore for twelve months, and excepting one or two all the convicts, the thieves, the dacoits and the murderers with whom we had come in contact, we received from all and sundry good behaviour and helpfulness. Rather it was among those spoilt by modern education that these qualities seemed to be lacking. Modern education may have many virtues to recommend itself, but civility and selfless service form no part of these. The kindness and sympathy that are such valuable elements of an Aryan education, I found that even among the thieves and robbers. The sweeper, the cleaner, the waterman, they all had to share, for no fault of their own, part of the misery and hardship of our solitary confinement, but they never expressed to us their anger or annoyance on that score. At

times they ventilated their distress before the native jailors, but they would also cheerfully pray for our release from detention. A Mohammedan convict used to love the accused like his own children and at the time of parting he could not restrain from shedding tears. Pointing out their suffering and humiliation as the price of patriotism he would tell others and express his sorrow by saying, "Look, these are gentlemen, sons of the rich, and this their suffering is because they have tried to help the poor and the distressed." Those who vaunt about western culture, I would like to ask them: Is this self-control, charity, generosity, gratitude, godly love for others to be found among the lower order of criminals, the thieves and robbers of England? In fact, Europe is the land of enjoyment, India of sacrifice. The Gita describes two kinds of creatures – *deva* and *asura*. The Indian is intrinsically of the *deva* kind, the western of the *asura*. But in this age of deep darkness (*ghor kali*) because of the disappearance of Aryan education, due to the predominance of inertia, in our national decline, we are acquiring the inferior qualities of the *asura* while the westerners, because of their national progress and the evolution of manhood are acquiring the qualities of the *deva*. But in spite of this, in their *deva* qualities something of the *asura* and in our *asuric* qualities something of the *deva* can be imperfectly glimpsed. Among them those who are the cream, even they cannot wholly get rid of the *asuric* qualities. When one compares the inferior specimens of both cultures, the truth comes out quite strikingly.

There is much to be written on this topic, but I forbear for fear of the lengthiness of the article. But those persons in whose bearing I have seen this inner freedom, while I was in the prison, they are the prototypes of the godward emotions,

devabhāva. I have an idea of writing in future an article on this subject.” (326-30)

3. The Aryan Ideal and the Three Gunas*

“In the essay entitled “Prison and Freedom”* I have, by describing the psychology of some innocent prisoners, tried to establish that, owing to the Aryan discipline, the priceless ancestral legacy of inner freedom which the Indians have, is not destroyed even in prison – indeed something of the godly disposition, garnered through thousands of years and inherent in the true Aryan character, remains even in the worst of imprisoned criminals. The main principle of the Aryan discipline is the sattwic temperament. He who is sattwic is pure; normally all human beings are impure. This impurity is nourished and increased by the predominance of rajas and the great density of tamas. The impurity of mind is of two kinds. First, inertia or impurity due to lack of inclination to work; this is produced by tamas. Secondly, excitement or impurity due to wrong impulses; this is caused by rajas. The signs of the mode of tamas are ignorance, delusion, crudeness of intelligence, unsystematic thinking, laziness, too much sleep, irritation owing to inertia in work, pessimism, despondency, fear – in short, whatever nourishes lack of effort. Inertia and disinclination are the results of ignorance; excitement and bad inclinations, of wrong knowledge. But if the impurity of tamas is to be removed it can be done only by the increase of rajas. Rajas is the cause of impulsion and effort and these are the first steps to detachment. He who is inert is not truly detached –

* Included in Sri Aurobindo’s Bengali book, *Kara Kahini*.

the state of inertia is devoid of knowledge; and knowledge indeed is the path of spiritual detachment. He who engages himself in works without desire is detached; mere renunciation of work is not freedom. This is why Swami Vivekananda, noticing the deep *tamas* of India, used to say, “*Rajas* is needed, the country needs heroes of action, let the strong current of impulsion flow. Even if evil follows in its wake, it will be a thousand times better than this *tamasic* inertia.”

It is true indeed that sunk in deep *tamas* but using *sattwa* as an excuse we are pretending and boasting as being highly *sattwic*. I notice that many people hold the view that we have been conquered by *rajasic* nations because we are *sattwic*, that we are degraded and backward because we are spiritual. They try to prove the superiority of Hinduism to Christianity by using that argument. The Christian nations believe in practical results; they try to establish the superiority of a religion by showing the results it produces in this world. They say that the Christian nations are paramount in the world, therefore Christianity is the greatest religion. And many among us argue that this is wrong; it is not possible to decide upon the superiority of a religion by recounting what one gains from it in this world; rather its consequences in the next world should be considered; because the Hindus are more religious they are subject to a powerful and titanic nation. But this argument involves a serious mistake which is opposed to the Aryan wisdom. *Sattwa* can never be the cause of downfall; indeed a nation which is predominantly *sattwic* cannot remain bound in chains of slavery. The spiritual power of the true Brahmin is the chief result of *sattwa*, the prowess of the *Kshatriya* is the foundation of spiritual power. From calm spiritual power, when it receives a blow, sparks of the prowess of the *Kshatriya*

fly in all directions, everything catches fire as it were. Spiritual power cannot survive where there is no Kshatra-prowess. If there is one true Brahmin in the land he can create a hundred Kshatriyas. The cause of the downfall of this country is not an excess of sattwa but want of rajas and a preponderance of tamas. Owing to the lack of rajas, the sattwa inherent in us becomes weak and concealed in tamas. Along with laziness, delusion, ignorance, disinclination, pessimism, despondency and lack of dynamic effort, the sad condition and degradation of the country become worse. This darkness was thin and rare at first; however, in course of time it gradually became so dense, and we, sunk in the obscurity of ignorance, became so utterly devoid of high aspiration and great endeavour, that in spite of the advent of great men sent by God, that darkness has not dissipated entirely. Then the Sun-god decided to save the country through the impulsions roused by rajas.

It is true that tamas tends to disappear when rajas is roused and powerfully active. On the other hand, there is the danger of demoniac qualities like licentiousness, evil impulses, complete lack of restraint, etc. If the force of rajas operates under its own momentum for the sole satisfaction of large assertive inclinations for the fulfilment of wrong ends, then there is enough reason for apprehension. Rajas cannot endure long if it goes along its own path without any control; ennui follows, tamas appears, as the sky, instead of becoming clear, is overcast and becomes devoid of the movement of air after a storm. This was the fate of France after the revolution. There was in that revolution a frightful manifestation of rajas and at the end of it, a resurgence of tamas to some extent, then another revolution, followed by tiredness, loss of force and

more degradation – this is the history of France during the last century.”(331-33)

“The only means of avoiding such a result is to engage powerful rajas in the service of sattwa. If the sattwic disposition is roused and becomes the guide of rajas, then there will be no danger of the re-emergence of tamas, and uncontrolled force, being disciplined and controlled, can do the country and the world a great deal of good according to high ideals. The means to rouse sattwa is the spiritual temperament – to renounce selfish interests and deploy all one’s energies for the good of others – to make the whole of life a great and pure sacrifice by surrendering oneself to the Divine. It is said in the Gita that sattwa and rajas when together suppress tamas; sattwa alone cannot conquer tamas. This is the reason why God has in modern times spread the force of rajas all over the land after rousing the religious spirit and the sattwa inherent in us. Great souls and religious leaders like Rammohan Roy have ushered in a new age by reawakening sattwa. In the nineteenth century there was not the same awakening in politics and society as in religion. The reason was that the field was not ready. That is why there was no crop though plenty of seeds were sown. In this also can be seen how kind and pleased with India God has been. An awakening caused only by rajas cannot be enduring or completely beneficial. It is necessary to rouse the spiritual force to some extent in the mind and heart of the nation. It is because of this that the current of rajas was arrested for so long. Owing to this, the tendency towards an uncontrolled enthusiasm does not cause much alarm, since this is the play of rajas and sattwa; whatever excitement there is in this will soon be controlled and regulated. Not by any external

power but by the inner spiritual force and the sattvic disposition will this be conquered and disciplined.”(334)

“Just as sin binds men, so does virtue. There cannot be complete freedom unless we surrender ourselves to God, being fully free from desire and giving up egoism. In order to renounce these two harmful things, we must have pure understanding. To attain mental freedom after eschewing the idea that the body and the spirit are the same is the stage preceding the purification of understanding. When the mind becomes free, then it becomes subject to the soul. After that, conquering the mind and with the help of the understanding, man can to some extent be free from selfishness. Even then it does not cease altogether. The last selfishness is the desire for spiritual liberation, the wish to be rapt in one’s own delight forgetting the misery of others. Even that has to be given up. Its antidote is to realise and serve Narayana in all creatures; this is the perfection of sattwa. There is still a higher state than this, and that is to take refuge in God utterly by transcending sattwa and going beyond the modes of Nature.”(335-36)

“Though this state beyond the gunas is not attainable by all, it is not impossible for the pre-eminently sattvic man to achieve the state preceding it. The first step to that is to give up sattvic egoism and to see in all action the play of the Divine’s Power of the three gunas. Knowing this, the sattvic doer, renouncing the idea that he is the doer, does all his works surrendering himself to God.

What we have said about the gunas and the transcendence of them is the fundamental teaching of the Gita. But this teaching has not been widely accepted. Till now what we have

known as the Aryan education has been mostly the cultivation of the sattwic temperament. The appreciation of the rajasic mode has come to an end in this country with the disintegration of the Kshatriya order. And yet there is a great need for the rajas-force in national life. That is why the attention of the nation has again been drawn to the Gita. The teaching of the Gita, though based on the ancient Aryan wisdom, goes beyond it. Its practical teaching is not afraid of the rajas quality, there is in it the way to press rajas into the service of sattwa and also the means of spiritual liberation even through the path of works. How the mind of the nation is being prepared for the practice of this teaching I could first understand while in jail. The current is still not clean but contaminated and impure; but when its excessive force slows down a little, then there will be the action of the pure Energy in it.

Many of those who were accused with the same offence as myself and were in jail with me have been acquitted as not guilty. Others have been convicted as being involved in a conspiracy. There is in human society no graver crime than killing. The personal character of the man who commits murder in the interests of the nation may not be blackened. But that does not lessen the gravity of the crime from the social point of view. It must also be admitted that there is as it were a blood-stain on the mind, an invasion by cruelty, if there is an impression of killing on the inner being. Cruelty is a quality of the savage; it is the chief among those characteristics from which mankind is becoming free in the evolution of its upward march. A dangerous thorn will be uprooted from the path of the ascent of humanity if we can renounce it completely. If we assume the guilt of those who have been accused, it must be understood that it is only an

excessive but temporary and uncontrolled manifestation of rajas-force. There is in them such hidden sattwic force that this temporary lack of discipline is not a cause for alarm.

The inner freedom I have mentioned before was a natural quality of my companions. During the days we were lodged together in a big verandah, I observed with great attention their conduct and psychological dispositions. Apart from two of them, I never saw even a trace of fear in the face or speech of anyone. Almost all were young men, many mere boys. Even strong-minded people were likely to be quite upset at the thought of the dire punishment to be given to the accused if found guilty. But these young men did not really hope to be acquitted at the trial. Especially, on observing the frightful paraphernalia of witnesses and written evidence at the court, people not versed in law would have easily formed the idea that even the innocent could not find a way of escape from that net. Yet instead of fear or despondency on their faces there were only cheerfulness, the smile of simplicity and discussion about their country and religion, with forgetfulness of their own danger. A small library grew up as everyone in our ward had a few books with him. Most books in the library were religious – the Gita, the Upanishads, the works of Vivekananda, the life and conversations of Ramakrishna, the Puranas, hymns, spiritual songs, etc. Among other volumes were the works of Bankim, patriotic songs, books on European philosophy, history and literature. A few of the men practised spiritual disciplines in the mornings, some used to read books, still others used to chat quietly. Occasionally there were roars of laughter in the peaceful atmosphere of the morning. If the court was not in session, some slept, a few played games – it might be anything, nobody was attached to

a particular one. On some days, a quiet game with people sitting in a circle, on others, running and leaping; there was football for a few days, though the ball was made of a unique material; blind man's buff was played on some days, on others a number of groups were formed for lessons in ju-jitsu, high and long jumping or for playing draughts. Except a few reserved and elderly people everybody joined in these games at the request of the boys. I observed that even those who were not young had a childlike character. In the evenings there were musical soirées. Only patriotic and religious songs were sung; we used to sit around and hear Ullas, Sachindra, Hemdas, who were experts at singing, sing. For the sake of amusement, Ullaskar sang comic songs or did acting, ventriloquism, miming or told stories about hemp addicts on some evenings. Nobody paid any attention to the trial but all passed the days in religious pursuits or in just being gay. This unperturbed disposition is impossible to one used to evil actions; there was not the slightest trace in them of harshness, cruelty, habitual evil-doing or crookedness. Laughter, conversation or play, all was joyful, sinless, full of love.

The result of this freedom of the mind began to show itself soon. The perfect fruit can be obtained only if the spiritual seed is sown in this kind of field. Pointing at some boys Jesus said to his disciples, "Those who are like these boys will attain the Kingdom of God." Knowledge and delight are the signs of sattwa. They alone have the capacity for yoga who do not consider misery as misery but are full of joy and cheer in all situations. The rajasic attitude does not get any encouragement in jail and there is nothing there to nourish the tendency to worldly pleasures. Under these circumstances, since there is a dearth of things to which it is used and in

which its rajas can be indulged, the demoniac mind destroys itself like a tiger. There follows what the Western poets call “eating one’s own heart.” The Indian mind when in seclusion, though there be external suffering, turns through an eternal attraction to God. This is what happened with us too. A current, I do not know from where, just swept us all. Even people who had never taken God’s name learnt to practise some spiritual discipline and realising the grace of the most Gracious became steeped in Joy. Those boys achieved in a few months what yogis take a long time to attain. Ramakrishna Paramahansa once said, “What you are seeing now is really nothing – such a flood of spirituality is coming into this land that even boys will attain realisation after three days’ sadhana.” To see these boys was not to have any doubt about the truth of this prophecy. They were as it were the manifest precursors of that spiritual flood. The sattvic waves overflowing the prisoners’ docks swept over all, except four or five persons, with great joy. Anyone who has tasted that once cannot forget it nor can he acknowledge any other joy as comparable. This satvic temperament is indeed the hope of the country. The ease with which brotherliness, self-knowledge and love of God possess the Indian mind and express themselves in action is not possible in the case of any other nation. What is necessary is the renunciation of *tamas*, the control of *rajas*, and the manifestation of *sattwa*. This is what is being prepared for India in accordance with God’s secret purpose.”(337-41)

4. New Birth*

“In the Gita Arjuna asks Sri Krishna: “He who takes up yoga but before going through to the end, wanders away and falls from it, what happens to him? Does he lose both worldly

and spiritual gains and perish like a cloud dissolving?” In answer Sri Krishna said: “Neither in this life nor hereafter is there destruction for him. Never does any one who practises good come to woe. Having attained to the world of the righteous and having dwelt there for immemorial years, he who fell from yoga is again born in the house of such as are pure and glorious and driven by his longing for yoga, acquired during past lives, he tries even more for perfection and, finally, through the practice of many lives gets rid of all sins and achieves the supreme end.”

The theory of re-incarnation which has been always held in the Aryan religion as a part of the knowledge acquired through yoga, had lost its position among the educated folk, due to the influence of western learning. After the advent (*tīlā*) of Sri Ramakrishna and the spread of Vedantic knowledge and the study of the Gita that truth is being re-established. Just as heredity is the chief truth of the physical world, so, in the subtle world, re-incarnation is the chief truth. There are two truths implied in Sri Krishna’s statement. Persons who have fallen from the path of yoga are born with the tendencies (*samskāras*) of learning acquired in their past lives, and, like a boat moved by the wind, the tendencies bring them to the path of yoga. But, in order to achieve results, for the production of a suitable body it is necessary to be born into a family that is fit and proper. An excellent heredity produces a fit body. When one is born in a pure and glorious home, one has a pure and strong body, born in a family of yogis one has an excellent body and mind and has the advantage of the requisite education and mentality.

For the past few years in India one can see as if a new

race is being created in the midst of the old that was dominated by the gross influences. The earlier children of Mother India were born in an irreligious atmosphere or one of religious decline and receiving an education in keeping with that, they had grown short-lived, small, selfish and narrow in spirit. Many powerful great souls were born among these people and it is they who have saved the race in its hour of great peril. But without doing work commensurate with their energy and genius, they have only created a field for the future greatness and the marvellous activity that awaits this race. It is because of their good deeds that the rays of the new dawn are brightening up all the corners. These new children of Mother India, instead of getting the qualities of their parents, have grown bold, full of power, high-souled, self-sacrificing, inspired by the high ideals of helping others and doing good to the country. That is why, instead of being obedient to their parents, the young men go their own way, there is a difference between the old and the young, and in deciding a course of activity there is a conflict between the two. The old are trying to keep these youth, born of divine emanations, the pioneers of a golden age, confined to the old, selfish and narrow ways, without understanding they are trying to perpetuate the Age of Iron. The youth are sparks born of the Great Energy, *Mahāśakti*, eager to build the new by destroying the old, they are unable to be obedient or submit to the laws of respect for the parent. God alone can remedy this evil. But the will of the Great Energy cannot be in vain, the new generation will not leave without fulfilling the purpose for which they have come. In the midst of the new the influence of the old lingers on. Because of the fault of inferior heredity and an *āsuric* education many black sheep have also taken birth; and those

who have been ordained to inaugurate the new age are unable to manifest their inherent force and strength. Among the youth is a marvellous sign of manifesting the age of gold, a religious bent of mind, and in the hearts of many, a longing for yoga and half-expressed yogic powers.

Ashok Nandi, accused in the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy Case, belongs to this second category. Those who know him would hardly believe that he might be involved in any conspiracy. He had been sentenced on slender and rather incredible evidence. He was not overwhelmed, like the other young people, by a strong desire to serve the national cause. In intellect, character and life he was wholly a yogi and devotee, he had none of the qualities of a man of the world. His grandfather was a realised Tantric yogi (*siddha*), his father too was known to have acquired powers through the pursuit of yoga. The rare birth in a family of yogis of which the Gita speaks, that had been his good fortune. Signs of his inherent yogic powers had shown themselves intermittently even at a tender age. Long before his arrest he had come to know that he was destined to die while young, hence his mind did not take to schooling or the preliminaries of leading a worldly life, yet on his father's advice, by ignoring the 'failure' (*asiddhi*) of which he had earlier intelligence, he was pursuing what he considered to be his duty and had taken to the path of yoga. It was then that he was suddenly arrested. At this danger, which was the result of his own action, Ashok remained unperturbed and in the jail he devoted his entire energies to the pursuit of yoga. Many of the accused in the case had adopted this path, and though not foremost he was one among these. In love and devotion he was inferior to none. His generous character, sober devotion and loving

heart charmed every one. At the time of Gossain's murder he was ailing in the hospital. Before regaining his health he began to fall ill frequently during his solitary confinement. Even when sick he had to stay during the chilly nights in a room that was open on all sides. Because of this he developed tuberculosis and then, when there was no chance of his surviving, sentenced to the heaviest punishment, he had been kept once again in that death-cell. Thanks to the petition of the barrister Chittaranjan Das arrangements were made to remove him to the hospital, but he was not given bail. In the end, due to the Governor's generosity, he was allowed to die in his own home, looked after by his own people. Before he could be freed through appeal God released him from the body's prison. Towards the end Ashok's yogic powers developed considerably; on the day of his passing away, overwhelmed by the power of the Lord as Vishnu, 'distributing' the holy, salvation-inducing Name and spiritual advice he gave up the body with the Name on his lips. Ashok Nandi had been born to work out the consequences due to a previous incarnation, hence all this misery and his untimely death. The energy needed to usher in the Age of Gold did not descend in him, but he has shown a brilliant example of the natural yogic powers. Men of good deeds spend a little time in this world to work out their previous sins, then, freed from all sins, they leave the defective body and, assuming another body, they come to express their inherent energies and to do good to men and creatures." (342-45)

III. Letters*

1. Letters to Mrinalini*

(1)

30th August, 1905

“Dearest Mrinalini,

Your letter of the 24th August is to hand. I was sorry to learn that your parents have once again the same kind of bereavement, but you have not mentioned which of their sons died. However, how does sorrow help? Seeking happiness in the world inevitably leads one to find suffering in the midst of that happiness, for suffering is always intertwined with happiness. This law holds good not only in regard to the desire for children, but it embraces all sorts of worldly desires.

In place of twenty rupees I read ten rupees (in your letter) and so I wrote that I will send you ten rupees; if you need fifteen, I shall of course send you fifteen rupees. This month I have sent the money for the clothes which Sarojini bought for you in Darjeeling. How could I know that you have already made a loan? As was needed, I had sent fifteen rupees; if you need three or four rupees more, I will send the same next month. I will send you twenty rupees this time (i.e. next month).

Now, let me tell you about that matter. You have, perhaps, by now discovered that the one with whose destiny is linked yours is a very strange kind of person. Mine is wide apart from what the people in this country have at present as their mental outlook, their aim of life and their field of work. It is quite different in all respects; it is uncommon. Perhaps you

know how the ordinary people view extraordinary ideas, uncommon efforts, extraordinary high aspirations. They label all these as madness, but if the mad man succeeds in the field of action then instead of calling him a lunatic, they call him a great man, a man of genius. But how many succeed in their efforts? Out of a thousand persons only ten are extraordinary, and out of these ten one succeeds. For me, success in the field of action is far away: I have not yet been able to enter into it fully; so, I may be considered a mad man. It is very unfortunate for a woman to be married to a mad man; for all the hopes of women are limited to the joys and the agonies in the family. A mad man would not bring happiness to his wife – he would only inflict suffering.

The founders of the Hindu religion understood this matter very well, and they loved very much characters, action and hopes which were extraordinary; they regarded highly all uncommon persons, whether great or insane. But what remedy could be there for the terrible plight to which women were put by such things? The Rishis decided upon this remedy: they said to women, “Know that, for you, the husband is the supreme Guru; this and nothing else, is the only *mantra*. The wife is the husband’s co-partner in the practice of Dharma. She will help him, advise him and encourage him in the work he chooses for his Dharma; she will obey him as God, feel happy in his happiness and suffer in his suffering. It is the man’s right to choose the work, to help and encourage him is the right of the woman.”

Now the question is which would you choose, the path of the Hindu Dharma or that of the new so-called cultured Dharma? That you have married a lunatic is a fruit of faulty actions of your previous life. It is better to make a settlement

with one's fate; but what kind of settlement would it be? Swayed by the opinion of others, will you also dismiss him as a mad man? The mad man will, by all means, run on the path determined by his madness. You will not be able to hold him back; his nature is stronger than yours. Will you then just sit in a corner and weep and wail, or join him in his run and try to become the mad wife to match the mad husband, like the queen of the blind king who covering her eyes with a piece of cloth lived as blind? Whatever be the impact on you of the education you have received in a Brahmo school, you are, after all, a daughter of a Hindu family; the blood of Hindu ancestors runs in your veins, and I have no doubt that you will choose the latter path.

I have three madnesses. Firstly, it is my firm faith that all the virtue, talent, the higher education and knowledge and the wealth God has given me, belong to Him. I have the right to spend only so much as is necessary for the maintenance of the family and on what is absolutely needed. Whatever remains should be returned to the Divine. If I spend all on myself, for personal comfort, for luxury, then I am a thief. Up till now I have been giving only one-eighth of my money to God and have been spending the rest of it for my personal happiness – thus trying to settle the account and remain immersed in worldly pleasures. Half of the life has already been wasted; even an animal feels gratified in feeding itself and its family.

I have realised that all these days I had been pursuing the life of the animal and of the thief. Having realised this, I have felt much repentant and have grown a repulsion for myself; no more of it, – this sinful act I abandon for good. Giving the money to the Divine means using it for works of *dharmā*.

I have no regrets for the money that I gave to Sarojini or to 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 these hard days, the whole country is seeking refuge at my door, I have thirty crores of brothers and sisters in this country – many of them die of starvation, most of them weakened by suffering and troubles are somehow dragging on. They must be helped.

What do you say? Will you be, in regard to this, the copartner of my *dharma*? We will eat and dress like simple people and buy what is really essential, and give the rest to the Divine. That is what I would like to do. If you agree to it, and can make the sacrifice, then my urge can be fulfilled. You were complaining, "I could not make any progress." Here is a path to progress that I point to you. Would you proceed in that path?

The second madness has recently taken hold of me; it is this: by any means, I must have the direct experience of God. The religion of today, that is, uttering the name of God every now and then, in praying to Him in front of everybody, showing to people how religious one is – that I do not want. If the Divine is there, then there must be a way of experiencing His existence, of meeting Him; however hard be the path, I have taken a firm resolution to tread it. Hindu Dharma asserts that the path is there within one's own body, in one's mind. It has also given the methods to be followed to tread that path. I have begun to observe them and within a month I have been able to ascertain that the words of the Hindu Dharma are not untrue. I am experiencing all the signs that have been mentioned by it. Now, I would like to take you also along that

path; you would of course not be able to keep up with me as you have not yet acquired so much knowledge, but there is nothing to prevent your following me. Anybody can have the realisation by following the path, but it is left to one's will to choose to enter the path. Nobody can force you to enter it. If you are willing, I will write more on the subject.

The third madness is this: whereas others regard the country as an inert piece of matter and know it as the plains, the fields, the forests, the mountains and the rivers, I know my country as the Mother, I worship her and adore her accordingly. What would a son do when a demon, sitting on his mother's breast, prepares to drink her blood? Would he sit down content to take his meals or go on enjoying himself in the company of his wife and children, or would he rather run to the rescue of his mother? I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race; not a physical strength, I am not going to fight with a sword or a gun, but with the power of knowledge. The force of the *kṣatriya* is not the only force, there is also the force of the Brahmin which is founded on knowledge. This is not a new feeling in me, not of recent origin, I was born with it, it is in my very marrow. God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission. At the age of fourteen the seed of it had begun to sprout and at eighteen it had been firmly rooted and become unshakable. Listening to the words of Aunt N you thought that some wicked person had led your simple and good-natured husband to the evil path. In fact, it was your good-natured husband who brought that person and hundreds of others to that path, be it good or evil; and he will bring thousands more to it. I do not say that the work will be accomplished while I live, but it will certainly be accomplished.

Now I ask you: What do you want to do in this matter? The wife is the *śakti* (the power) of the husband. Are you going to be the disciple of Usha and adulate the sahibs? Would you be indifferent and diminish the power of your husband? Or would you double his sympathy and enthusiasm? You might reply: “What could a simple woman like me do in all these great works? I have neither will power, nor intelligence, I am afraid even to think of these things.” There is a simple solution for it – take refuge in the Divine, step on to the path of God-realisation. He will soon cure all your deficiencies; fear gradually leaves the person who takes refuge in the Divine. And if you have faith in me, and listen to what I say instead of listening to others, I can give you my force which would not be reduced (by giving) but would, on the contrary, increase. We say that the wife is the *śakti* of the husband, that means that the husband sees his own reflection in the wife, finds the echo of his own noble aspiration in her and thereby redoubles his force.

Would you always remain like this? “I shall dress well, eat good food, laugh and dance and enjoy all possible pleasures” – such a state of mind is not called progress. Nowadays the life of women in our country has assumed a very narrow and humiliating form. Abandon all these things and come with me. We have come to the world to do God’s work, let us begin it.

There is one defect in your nature – you are too simple. You listen to all that people say. This always keeps the mind restless, does not allow intelligence to develop, and there is no concentration in any work. This has to be corrected; you must acquire knowledge by listening to one person only, accomplish

the work with a firm aim and firm mind, you have to disregard the slander and ridicule of people and keep your devotion firm.

There is another defect also – not of your nature but of the times. The times have become like that in Bengal; people are unable to listen seriously even to a serious talk; they laugh at and make fun of all that is high and noble, Dharma, philanthropy, high aspiration, great endeavour, liberation of the country; they try to laugh away everything. You have developed this fault a little by your association with the Brahmo school; Barin also had it, and to some extent we all are subject to this fault, but it has increased to a surprising degree among the people of Deoghar. It is necessary to throw out this mentality with a strong resolution; you will be able to do it easily, and once you cultivate the habit of thinking, your real nature will blossom; you are already inclined to philanthropy and sacrifice; only what is wanting is the strength of mind. You will get that strength from your devotion to God. Your praying to God will bring you that strength.

This was my secret. Without divulging it to anybody, reflect over these things with a tranquil mind. There is nothing to be afraid of, but plenty to think about. In the beginning you won't have to do anything more than to devote half-an-hour every day to meditate on God. You should put before Him your strong aspiration in the form of a prayer. The mind will get gradually prepared. You should always offer to Him this prayer: "May I not come in the way of my husband's life, and his ideals, and in his path to God-realisation; may I become his helper and his instrument." Will you do it?

Yours

(2)

23 Scotts Lane
Calcutta
17th February, 1907

Dear Mrinalini,

I have not written to you for a long time. If you do not, out of your own goodness, pardon me for this eternal fault of mine, then I am helpless. What is in the marrow cannot be got rid of in a day. I may have to spend this whole life trying to correct this fault.

I was to come on the eighth of January, but I could not come; this did not happen of my own accord. I had to go where the Lord led me. This time I did not go for my own work, I had gone for His work. The state of my mind has at present undergone a change; about that I would not reveal in this letter. Come here, then I will tell you what I have to say. The only thing that can be stated for the moment is that henceforward I am no longer subject to my own will: I must go like a puppet wherever the Divine takes me; I must do like a puppet whatever He makes me do. At present you will find it hard to grasp the meaning of these words. But it is necessary to tell you about it lest my activities cause you regret and sorrow. You may think that I am neglecting you and doing my work. But do not think so. So far I have been guilty of many wrongs against you and it is but natural that you were discontented on that account; but henceforth I have no freedom of my own, you will have to understand that all that I do depends not on my own will but is done according to the command of the Divine. When you come here, you will realise the significance of my words. I hope the Lord will show you

the light of His infinite Grace which He has shown me, but that depends on His will. If you want to be the co-partner of my *dharma*, then you must try most intensely so that He may point out to you the path of His Grace by the sheer force of your concentrated will. Do not allow any one to see this letter for what I have written is extremely secret. I have not spoken about it to any one but you. That is forbidden. This much for today.

Your husband

P.S. I have written to Sarojini about the family matters, it is not necessary to write to you separately about them; when you see that letter you will know.

(3)

6th December, 1907

Dear Mrinalini,

I received the letter day before yesterday; the shawl was sent the same day; I do not understand why you did not get it.

*

At present I have not got a moment to spare; the burden of writing is on me, the burden of works regarding the Congress is on me, and also that of settling the affairs of Bande Mataram. I can hardly cope with the work. Besides I have my own work to do which I cannot neglect.

Would you listen to a request of mine? I am passing through very anxious times, the pressure from all sides is enough to drive one mad. If you too get restless now, it would only add to my anxiety and worry, a letter of encouragement and comfort from you would give me much strength, and I

can overcome all fears and dangers with a cheerful heart. I know, it is hard for you to live alone at Deoghar, but if you make your mind firm and rest on faith, then the feeling of sorrow cannot dominate your mind. This suffering is your inevitable lot, since you have married me. At intervals there is bound to be separation, because unlike ordinary Bengalis, I am unable to make the happiness of the family and of the relations the main aim of my life. In these circumstances, what is my *dharmā* is also your *dharmā*; and unless you consider the success of my mission as your happiness, there is no way out. One thing more: most of the persons with whom you are staying at present are our elders, and even if they say hard things or pass unjust remarks, do not be cross with them. Also, do not believe that all that they say is what they really mean, or that they say it with a purpose to hurt you. Many a time words come out of anger without thought; it is no good holding on to them. If you find it absolutely impossible to stay there, then I will speak to Girish Babu to arrange for your grandfather to come and stay in the house while I am away for the Congress session.

Today I am going to Midnapore. On my return I will make all arrangements here and then proceed to Surat; that will probably be on the 15th or 16th. I will return on the 2nd of January.

Yours” (349-58)

2. A Letter to Barin*

“Dear Barin,

I have received your three letters (and another one today), but up till now I have not managed to write a reply. That now

I sit to write is itself a miracle, because I write letters once in a blue moon, especially letters in Bengali. This is something I have not done even once in the last five or six years. If I can finish the letter and post it, the miracle will be complete.

First, about your yoga. You want to give me the charge of your yoga, and I am willing to accept it. But this means giving it to Him who, openly or secretly, is moving me and you by His divine power. And you should know that the inevitable result of this will be that you will have to follow the path of yoga which He has given me, the path I call the Integral Yoga. This is not exactly what we did in Alipur jail, or what you did during your imprisonment in the Andamans. What I started with, what Lele gave me, what I did in jail – all that was a searching for the path, a circling around looking here and there, touching, taking up, handling, testing this and that of all the old partial yogas, getting a more or less complete experience of one and then going off in pursuit of another. Afterwards, when I came to Pondicherry, this unsteady condition ceased. The indwelling Guru of the world indicated my path to me completely, its full theory, the ten limbs of the body of the yoga. These ten years he has been making me develop it in experience; it is not yet finished. It may take another two years. And so long as it is not finished, I probably will not be able to return to Bengal. Pondicherry is the appointed place for the fulfilment of my yoga – except indeed for one part of it, that is, the work. The centre of my work is Bengal, but I hope its circumference will be the whole of India and the whole world.

Later I will write to you what my path of yoga is. Or, if you come here, I will tell you. In these matters the spoken

word is better than the written. For the present I can only say that its fundamental principle is to make a synthesis and unity of integral knowledge, integral works and integral devotion, and, raising this above the mental level to the supramental level of the Vijnana, to give it a complete perfection. The defect of the old yoga was that, knowing the mind and reason and knowing the Spirit, it remained satisfied with spiritual experience in the mind. But the mind can grasp only the fragmentary; it cannot completely seize the infinite, the undivided. The mind's way to seize it is through the trance of samadhi, the liberation of moksha, the extinction of nirvana, and so forth. It has no other way. Someone here or there may indeed obtain this featureless liberation, but what is the gain? The Spirit, the Self, the Divine is always there. What the Divine wants is for man to embody Him here, in the individual and in the collectivity – to realise God in life. The old system of yoga could not synthesise or unify the Spirit and life; it dismissed the world as an illusion or a transient play of God. The result has been a diminution of the power of life and the decline of India. The Gita says: *utsādeyurime lokā na kuryān karma cedabam**, “These peoples would crumble to pieces if I did not do actions.” Verily “these peoples” of India have gone down to ruin. What kind of spiritual perfection is it if a few ascetics, renunciates, holymen and realised beings attain liberation, if a few devotees dance in a frenzy of love, god-intoxication and bliss, and an entire race, devoid of life and intelligence, sinks to the depths of darkness and inertia? First one must have all sorts of partial experience on the mental level, flooding the mind with spiritual delight and illuminating

* *The Gita* (3.24)

it with spiritual light; afterwards one climbs upwards. Unless one makes this upward climb, this climb to the supramental level, it is not possible to know the ultimate secret of world-existence; the riddle of the world is not solved. There, the cosmic Ignorance which consists of the duality of Self and world, Spirit and life, is abolished. Then one need no longer look on the world as an illusion: the world is an eternal play of God, the perpetual manifestation of the Self. Then is it possible fully to know and realise God – *samagramāṁ māṁ jñātum praviṣṭum*, “to know and enter into Me completely”, as the Gita says. The physical body, life, mind and reason, Supermind, the Bliss-existence – these are the Spirit’s five levels. The higher we climb, the nearer comes a state of highest perfection of man’s spiritual evolution. When we rise to the Supermind, it becomes easy to rise to the Bliss. The status of indivisible and infinite Bliss becomes firmly established – not only in the timeless Supreme Reality, but in the body, in the world, in life. Integral existence, integral consciousness, integral bliss blossom out and take form in life. This endeavour is the central clue of my yogic path, its fundamental idea.

But it is not an easy thing. After fifteen years I am only now rising into the lowest of the three levels of the Supermind and trying to draw up into it all the lower activities. But when the process is complete, there is not the least doubt that God through me will give this supramental perfection to others with less difficulty. Then my real work will begin. I am not impatient for the fulfilment of my work. What is to happen will happen in God’s appointed time. I am not disposed to run like a madman and plunge into the field of action on the strength of my little ego. Even if my work were not fulfilled, I would not be disturbed. This work is not mine, it is God’s. I

listen to no one else's call. When I am moved by God, I will move." (360-62)

"To look upon the body as a corpse is a sign of asceticism, the path of nirvana. The worldly life does not go along with this idea. There must be delight in everything, in the body as much as in the spirit. The body is made of consciousness, the body is a form of God. I see God in everything in the world. *Sarvam idam brahma, vāsudevah sarvamiti* ("All this here is the Brahman", "Vasudeva, the Divine, is all") – this vision brings the universal delight. Concrete waves of this bliss flow even through the body. In this condition, filled with spiritual feeling, one can live the worldly life, get married or do anything else. In every activity one finds a blissful self-expression of the divine. I have for a long time been transforming on the mental level all the objects and experiences of the mind and senses into delight. Now they are all taking the form of supramental delight." (367)

"I have already spoken about the real meaning of the divine community. No one is a god, but each man has a god within him. To manifest him is the aim of the divine life. That everyone can do. I admit that certain individuals have greater or lesser capacities. I do not, however, accept as accurate your description of yourself. But whatever the capacity, if once God places his finger upon the man and his spirit awakes, greater or lesser and all the rest make little difference. The difficulties may be more, it may take more time, what is manifested may not be the same – but even this is not certain. The god within takes no account of all these difficulties and deficiencies; he forces his way out. Were there few defects in

my mind and heart and life and body? Few difficulties? Did it not take time? Did God hammer at me sparingly – day after day, moment after moment? Whether I have become a god or something else I do not know. But I have become or am becoming something – whatever God desired. This is sufficient. And it is the same with everybody; not by our own strength but by God’s strength is this yoga done.” (368)

“It is my belief that the main cause of India’s weakness is not subjection, nor poverty, nor a lack of spirituality or religion, but a diminution of the power of thought, the spread of ignorance in the birthplace of knowledge. Everywhere I see an inability or unwillingness to think – incapacity of thought or “thoughtphobia”. This may have been all right in the mediaeval period, but now this attitude is the sign of a great decline. The mediaeval period was a night, the day of victory for the man of ignorance; in the modern world it is the time of victory for the man of knowledge. He who can delve into and learn the truth about the world by thinking more, searching more, labouring more, gains more power.” (369-70)

“We have abandoned the yoga of divine power and so the divine power has abandoned us. We practise the yoga of love, but where there is no knowledge or power, love does not stay. Narrowness and littleness come in. In a narrow and small mind, life and heart, love finds no room. Where is there love in Bengal? Nowhere else even in this division-ridden India is there so much quarrelling, strained relations, jealousy, hatred and factionalism as in Bengal.

In the noble heroic age of the Aryan people there was not so much shouting and gesticulation, but the endeavour they set in motion lasted many centuries. The Bengali’s

endeavour lasts for a day or two. You say what is needed is emotional excitement, to fill the country with enthusiasm. We did all that in the political field during the Swadeshi period; everything we did has fallen in the dust. Will there be a more auspicious outcome in the spiritual field? I don't say there has been no result. There has been; every movement produces some result. But it is mostly in an increase of possibilities. This is not the right way to steadily actualise the thing. Therefore I do not wish to make emotional excitement, feeling and mental enthusiasm the base any longer. I want to make a vast and strong equality the foundation of my yoga; in all the activities of the being, which will be based on that equality, I want a complete, firm and unshakable power; over that ocean of power I want the radiation of the sun of Knowledge and in that luminous vastness an established ecstasy of infinite love and bliss and oneness. I do not want tens of thousands of disciples. It will be enough if I can get as instruments of God one hundred complete men free from petty egoism. I have no confidence in guruhood of the usual type. I do not want to be a guru. What I want is for someone, awakened by my touch or by that of another, to manifest from within his sleeping divinity and to realise the divine life. Such men will uplift this country." (372-73)

"I laughed when I read the prophecies of those saints and holymen – but not a laugh of scorn or disbelief. I do not know about the distant future. The light God sometimes gives me falls one step ahead of me; I move forward in that light. But I wonder what these people need me for. Where is my place in their great assembly? I am afraid they would be disappointed to see me. And as for me, would I not be a fish out of the water? I am not an

ascetic, not a saint, not a holyman – not even a religious man. I have no religion, no code of conduct, no morality. Deeply engrossed in the worldly life, I enjoy luxury, eat meat, drink wine, use obscene language, do whatever I please – a Tantrik of the left-hand path. Among all these great men and incarnations of God am I a great man or an incarnation? If they saw me they might think I was the incarnation of the Iron Age, or of the titanic and demoniac form of the goddess Kali – what the Christians call the Antichrist. I see a misconception about me has been spread. If people get disappointed, it is not my fault. The meaning of this extraordinarily long letter is that I too am tying up my bundle. But I believe this bundle is like the net of Saint Peter, teeming with the catch of the Infinite. I am not going to open the bundle just now. If it is opened too soon, the catch may escape. Nor am I going back to Bengal just now – not because Bengal is not ready, but because I am not ready. If the unripe goes amid the unripe, what can he accomplish?

Your Sejdada** (373-74)

3. Letters to N. and S.*

(a) *Obstacles and Difficulties**

“The vital does not like the state of vastness where there is no movement of thought. It wants movement, any movement whether of knowledge or of ignorance. A serene condition without any restlessness seems dry to it.

*

* *

*Elder brother.

Nobody can ever progress in sadhana through pain, despair, and lack of enthusiasm. It is better not to have them.

*

* *

Not only the experience of the higher but also the transformation of the lower nature is necessary. Pleasure, sadness, despair and sorrow are the ordinary play of the vital, impediments to progress – one has to go beyond them and bring down the vast unity and equality from above into the vital and in all the being.

*

* *

As long as desire and subjection to the mercy of any whim, demand and imagination are strong, the vital will dominate. All this is nourishment to the vital, and when you give nourishment why should it not become huge and powerful?” (376)

“If you entertain a desire, become impatient for the fruits of sadhana, then how will you remain peaceful and silent? A great work like the transformation of human nature, can it be done in a moment? Remain quiet, let the force of the Mother work in you, then in time everything will be accomplished.

If you remain peaceful within, in a state of surrender, then obstacles and difficulties will not be able to disturb you. Unhappiness and anxiety and “Why is this not happening? When will it happen?”, if you allow these feelings to enter into you, then obstacles and difficulties will find strength. Why do you pay so much attention to them? Concentrate on the Mother. Remain peaceful and surrendered within. The petty defects of the lower nature cannot be got rid of so easily. It is

useless to be agitated over them. When the Mother's Force fully occupies the entire being down to the subconscious, they will go. The length of time necessary for that does not matter. The complete transformation requires time." (377)

"Difficulties matter little. They are nothing but what exists in the outer nature of human beings. Gradually they will be driven out by the Force of the Mother. So there is no cause for anxiety or depression." (384)

"All difficulties are not the products of hostile forces – they are the products of ordinary impure nature which exists in everybody." (387)

"Always one has to keep absolute faith in the Mother that one is in her hands, that everything will be done through her power. And therefore the obstacle can create no sorrow and despair." (388)

(b) *Dependence on the Mother**

"It is true that the Mother is in everybody and we should have a relationship with her there. But that is no human or personal relationship; it is oneness with her vast unity." (413)

"Who will go away? Those who have no sincerity, no faith and trust in the Mother; those who look upon their own imagination as something greater than the will of the Mother, they might go away. But he who seeks the Truth, who has faith and confidence, who wants the Mother, has nothing to be afraid of; even if there are a thousand difficulties, he will surmount them; if he has numerous defects in his nature, he will rectify them; even if he falls, he will rise again and finally one day he will reach the goal of his sadhana." (414)

(c) Devotion – Faith – Reliance*

“Don’t forget what I have said many times. Do your sadhana in a calm and quiet manner without getting agitated. Then everything will slowly come right. Crying aloud is no good. Call upon the Mother calmly. Open yourself to Her. The more quiet becomes the vital the more steadily goes on the sadhana without swerving.” (424)

(d) The Psychic Being*

“That place is the place of the psychic being in the middle of the spine. What you have described are all the signs of the psychic being.

*

* *

Yes, the centre of man’s consciousness is in the heart and there is the seat of the *psychic being*.” (427)

(e) Pride – Impurity – Grief – Despair*

“Always one has to keep this condition, this true knowledge. One should see men and things with a spiritual sense, with the vision of the psychic and not in the pride of knowledge.” (431)

(f) Planes of Consciousness*

“When the consciousness descends into the physical, it does not mean that the results of all sadhana have gone, they really remain behind the veil. One has to bring down the consciousness, the light and the power of the Mother into the obscure physical. When these are established the former state will not recur. But if you are perturbed, depressed and think

that nothing can be done in this life and that to die is preferable and so on, then it becomes an obstacle for the consciousness, the power and the light to descend. That is why these wrong feelings have to be rejected and you should depend on the Mother and silently aspire to Her.” (432)

IV. Poetry*

1. The Mother Awakes*

“It is midnight; the world is asleep in silence,
The Earth is asleep in the lap of darkness;
Asleep are the heavens, breathless the wrathful winds;
The stars twinkle not in the dense blackness of the clouds.
The birds wrap their eyes with their wings
And rest self-absorbed in their nests;
Animals wander not, nor are footsteps heard.
Then the Mother awakes;
The Mother awakes with a terrible cry.
The Mother awakes; opens Her frightful eyes,
As though a pair of suns.

The Mother awakes, not a leaf moves;
The still flame of the lamp is dying in the room:
In the lonely paths of the city, in the fields and the
woodlands and the hills

Plunges in sleep all life.
The surges of the sea-waters
Break not in laughter upon the shores:
Utterly still, unmoving, the ocean is voiceless.
Why then does the Mother awake?
Who can tell what has She heard and is awake?
In the night whose is the silent prayer that has awakened the
Mother
To rise with a terrible cry?

When the Mother fell asleep, who ever hoped
 That even in the midst of blind darkness She will awake?
 Sunk in the night, void of hope, the heart broken for good in
sorrow

Even in sleep is startled to hear the fall of a leaf.
 The royal Fortune of the mighty Asura,
 Proud and cunning and overpowering,
 Has besieged the earth.
 Suddenly a terrible cry is heard, the cry of the Mother;
 Suddenly like the roar of hundreds of oceans is heard the
voice of the Mother;
 To awaken Her sons called aloud the Mother
Like a thunder-clap.

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.

A raucous laughter spurts out of Her mouth, a lightning flash
gleams in Her eyes;
 Frightful is the blood-red flower of Her anger,

In wrath She swings in Her hands the heads of two titans.
The Mother rises and sends out a grim invocation.

Who art thou at this dead of night swinging the titan heads in
Thy hands?

Thou sprayest rain of blood over the land.

The two eyes are like hearths of fire; fearful is the Mother,
Shaking the earth She roams about.

With a loud roar “Arise! Arise!”

Thy voice rises to chase

All sweet indolence.

It is our Mother!

She comes, on Her forehead burns Her eye of death.

Dancing to the rhythm of the clanging of Her necklace of
human skulls,

Lo! the Mother comes.

“Arise, arise,” a violent voice calls

Gods and titans and men, all,

A cruel roar here, a high cry of joy there.

It is my Mother!

With burning eye of death upon Her forehead comes our
Mother.

Our Mother comes, the human skulls of Her garland dance
to tune.

In the midst of storm and battle, sword crashes against
sword, body to body resounding;
Fire rains and rushes about in the fight, the skies are
deafened

With all the fierce noises, the ears burst, the earth sways,
Blood flows and flows free as though flowing streams.
When, oh when shall we know the Mother?
When Her call goes out like the ocean roar
Wiping off with Her mighty breath the whole kingdom of
the titans and the violent goddess comes smiling
Then shall we know the Mother.
The Mother, when She dances bathing in the stream of
flowing blood
Then surely we know, it is the Mother awakened at last.” (435-37)

2. Living Matter*

“... In my hopelessness
I see as though the whole world is a prison.
All on a sudden a sweet voice sounded within me:
“Look back, understand the hope of Prakriti,
Understand the dead prison-house is a mother’s heart,
The hidden significance understand that is in this game.”
I lifted my burning eyes, I saw afar
In the wasteland human figures. A boy and a girl
Embracing each other in mad delight in this expanse of matter,
In this inert dreamland two living beings are there free
With no fetters, rapt in trance in each other’s delight.
They disappeared from the sight. And that living matter
With no hope in it, it is bound in its own mood as always.
But my mind freed out of the matter’s touch,
I recognised the intent of the veiled conscious Being,
I captured in my spirit Nature’s hidden desire.
My eyes capturing the whole landscape, consoled I returned
To the earthly sphere.” (441)

3. A Poetic Fragment*

“Who says our Mother is a beggar-woman,
the whole universe is her foothold,
Her sons are the armies of Sikhs, Jats and Rajputs.
The song of Vande Mataram infuses strength into Bengal.
Even till today the glory of Shivaji is awake in Maharashtra.
Each mountain-rib of hers embodies millions of her
invincible sons,
The band of the Bhils, Gonds and Kharwar and free Nepal,
Malias and Khesias and Garos – how to enumerate all –
The Mughals, Pathans and Nagas – the sands of the beach.
There is no end to the treasure that is Mother’s children,
Sindhu and Ganges and their sisters – the Mother clad in
paddy green.
Even today Riks and Samas resound in the Vindhya and
Himalayas,
Till this day our Mother remains unreachable to us in the
high hills and spring-heads.” (453)

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